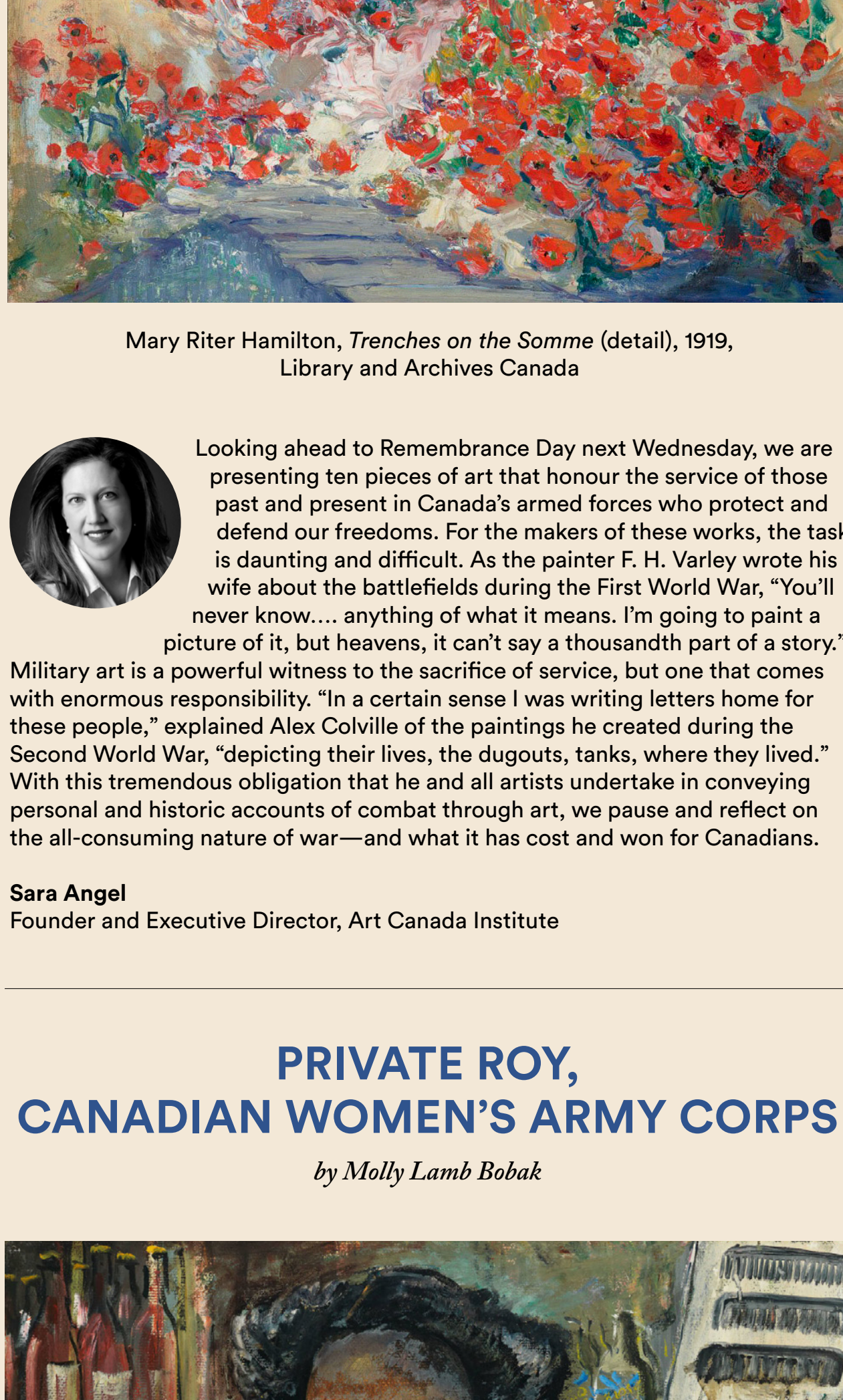
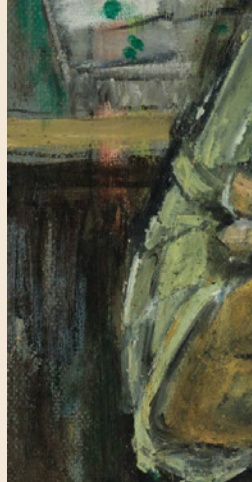


HONOUR AND SACRIFICE THE ART OF REMEMBRANCE

Explore artists' images of war with works that pay homage to our country's armed forces and all those who served



Mary Riter Hamilton, *Trenches on the Somme* (detail), 1919, Library and Archives Canada

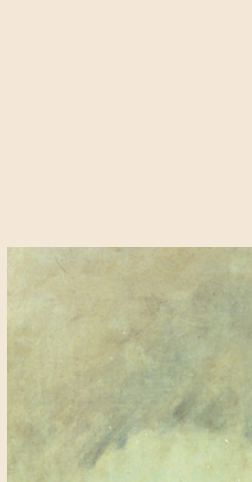


Looking ahead to Remembrance Day next Wednesday, we are presenting ten pieces of art that honour the service of those past and present in Canada's armed forces who protect and defend our freedoms. For the makers of these works, the task is daunting and difficult. As the painter F. H. Varley wrote his wife about the battlefields during the First World War, "You'll never know.... anything of what it means. I'm going to paint a picture of it, but heavens, it can't say a thousandth part of a story."

Military art is a powerful witness to the sacrifice of service, but one that comes with enormous responsibility. "In a certain sense I was writing letters home for these people," explained Alex Colville of the paintings he created during the Second World War, "depicting their lives, the dugouts, tanks, where they lived." With this tremendous obligation that he and all artists undertake in conveying personal and historic accounts of combat through art, we pause and reflect on the all-consuming nature of war—and what it has cost and won for Canadians.

Sara Angel

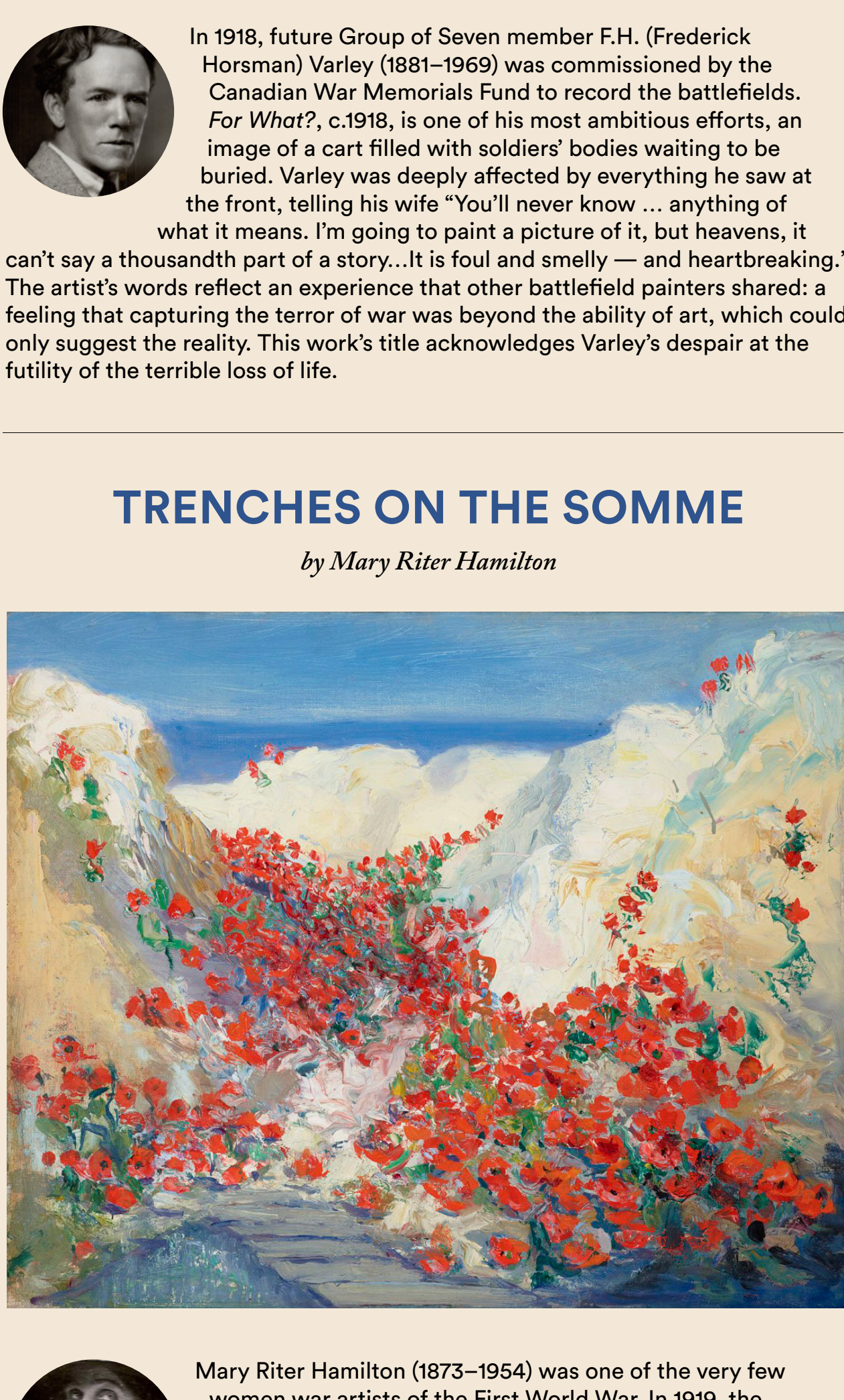
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute



British Columbia-born Molly Lamb Bobak (1920–2014) joined the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) in 1942, a year after her graduation from the Vancouver School of Art. In 1945, she became an official war artist, the only woman to be distinguished as such. In this famous painting of 29-year-old Eva May Roy, the artist represents her subject as a resolute but lonely-looking woman whose downcast gaze and folded arms emphasize what the art historian Charmaine A. Nelson has identified as Private Roy's sense of alienation. Bobak rarely created individual portraits, and as Art Canada Institute author Michelle Gewurtz explains in [her book on the artist](#), "It is significant that [she] chose to represent a figure whose racial group was largely absent from CWAC publicity."

FOR WHAT?

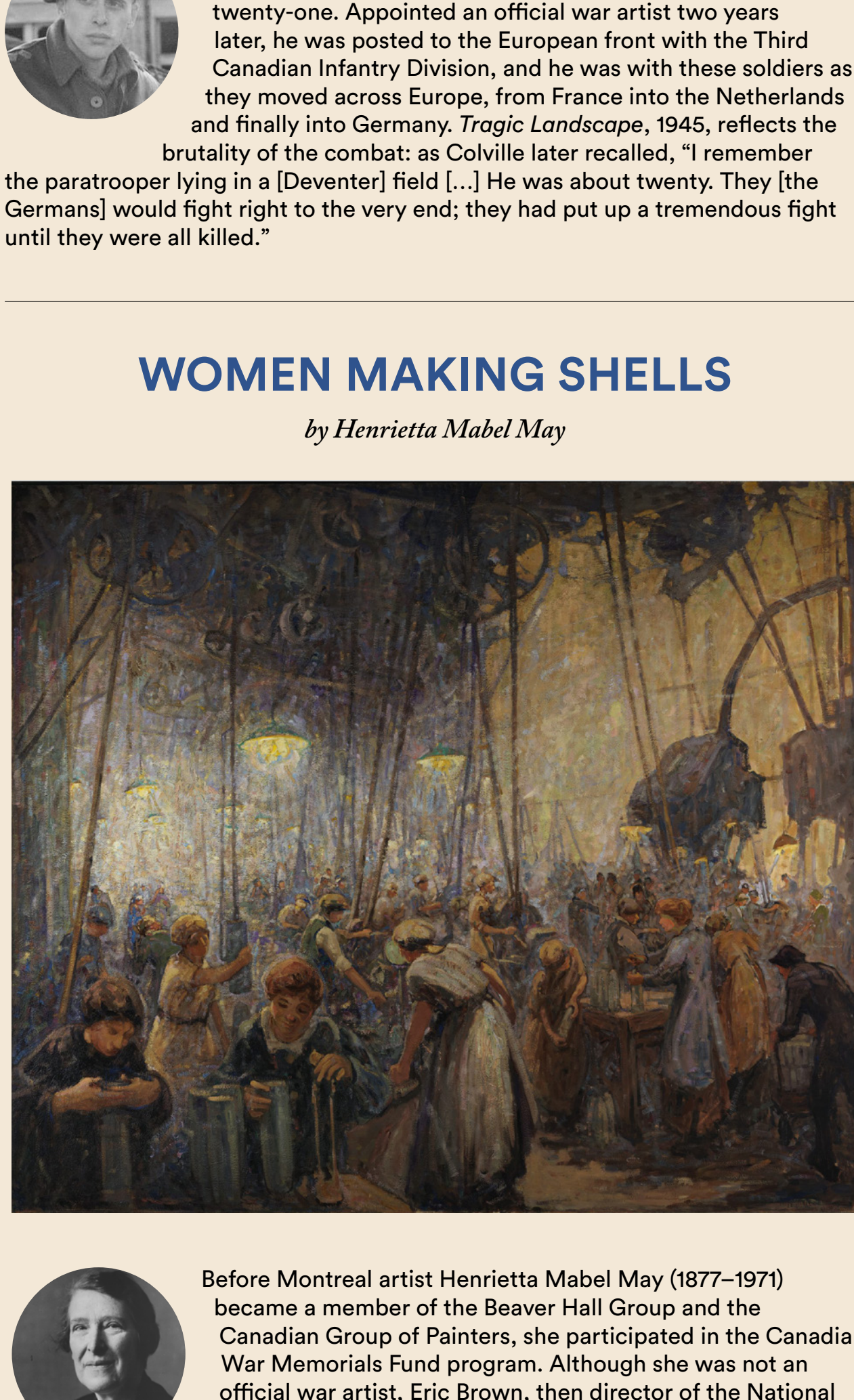
by F. H. Varley



In 1918, future Group of Seven member F.H. (Frederick Horsman) Varley (1881–1969) was commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund to record the battlefields. *For What?*, c.1918, is one of his most ambitious efforts, an image of a cart filled with soldiers' bodies waiting to be buried. Varley was deeply affected by everything he saw at the front, telling his wife "You'll never know ... anything of what it means. I'm going to paint a picture of it, but heavens, it can't say a thousandth part of a story...It is foul and smelly — and heartbreaking." The artist's words reflect an experience that other battlefield painters shared: a feeling that capturing the terror of war was beyond the ability of art, which could only suggest the reality. This work's title acknowledges Varley's despair at the futility of the terrible loss of life.

TRENCHES ON THE SOMME

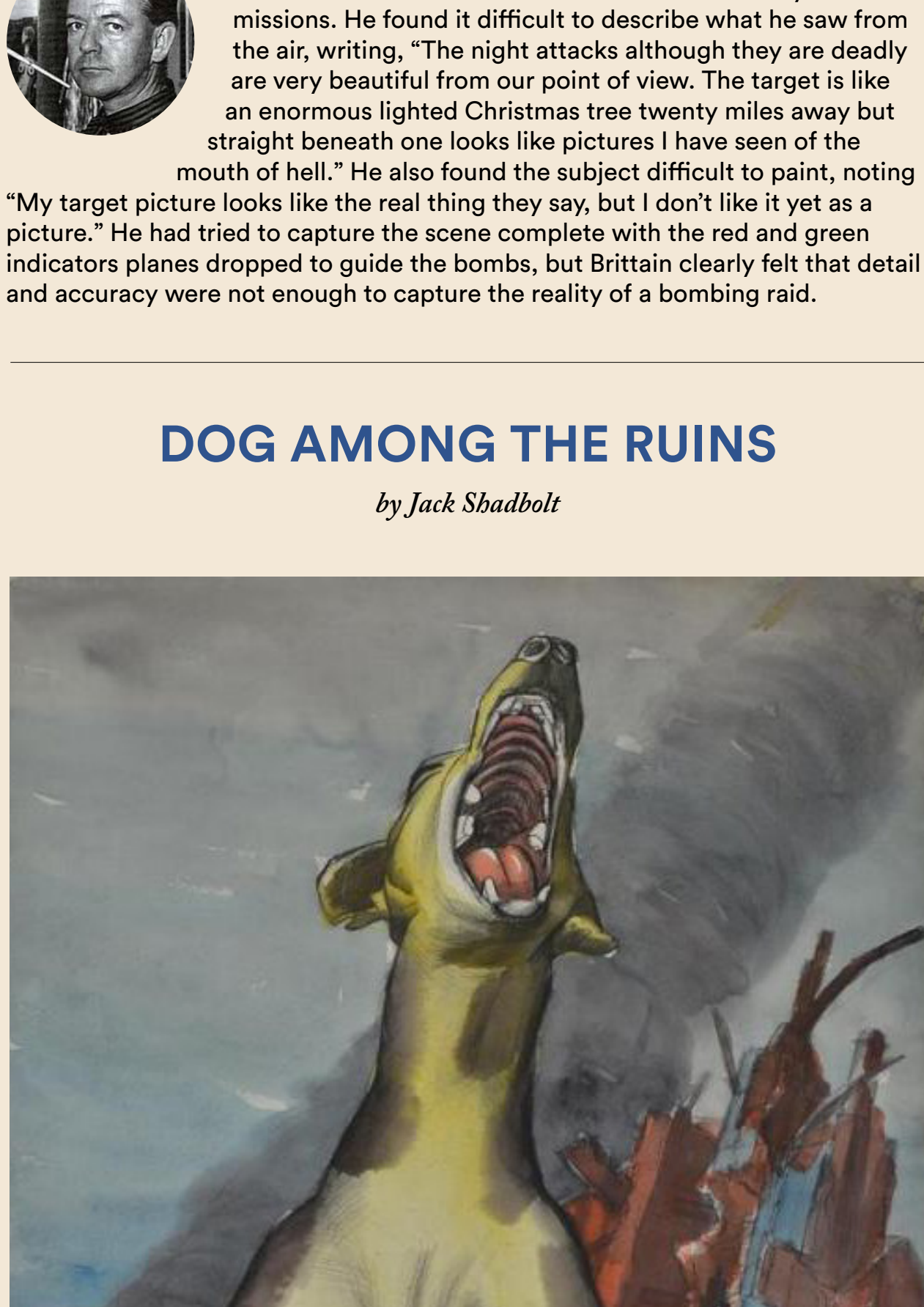
by Mary Riter Hamilton



Mary Riter Hamilton (1873–1954) was one of the very few women war artists of the First World War. In 1919, the Amputation Club of British Columbia commissioned her to paint battlefields in Europe, where she spent six years and created over 300 paintings. *Trenches on the Somme*, 1919, presents the site of one of the largest and deadliest battles of the war, covered in poppies, which were widespread by the time Hamilton arrived in Europe. Already these flowers were indelibly associated with sacrifice and loss—something that the artist felt deeply. "If ... there is something of the suffering and heroism of the war in my pictures," she said, "it is because at that moment the spirit of those who fought and died seemed to linger in the air. ... To have been able to preserve some memory of what this consecrated corner of the world looked like after the storm is a great privilege."

TRAGIC LANDSCAPE

by Alex Colville



Nova Scotia painter [Alex Colville](#) (1920–2013) enlisted in the Canadian army in the spring of 1942, when he was only twenty-one. Appointed an official war artist two years later, he was posted to the European front with the Third Canadian Infantry Division, and he was with these soldiers as they moved across Europe, from France into the Netherlands and finally into Germany. *Tragic Landscape*, 1945, reflects the brutality of the combat: as Colville later recalled, "I remember the paratrooper lying in a [Deventer] field [...]. He was about twenty. They [the Germans] would fight right to the very end; they had put up a tremendous fight until they were all killed."

WOMEN MAKING SHELLS

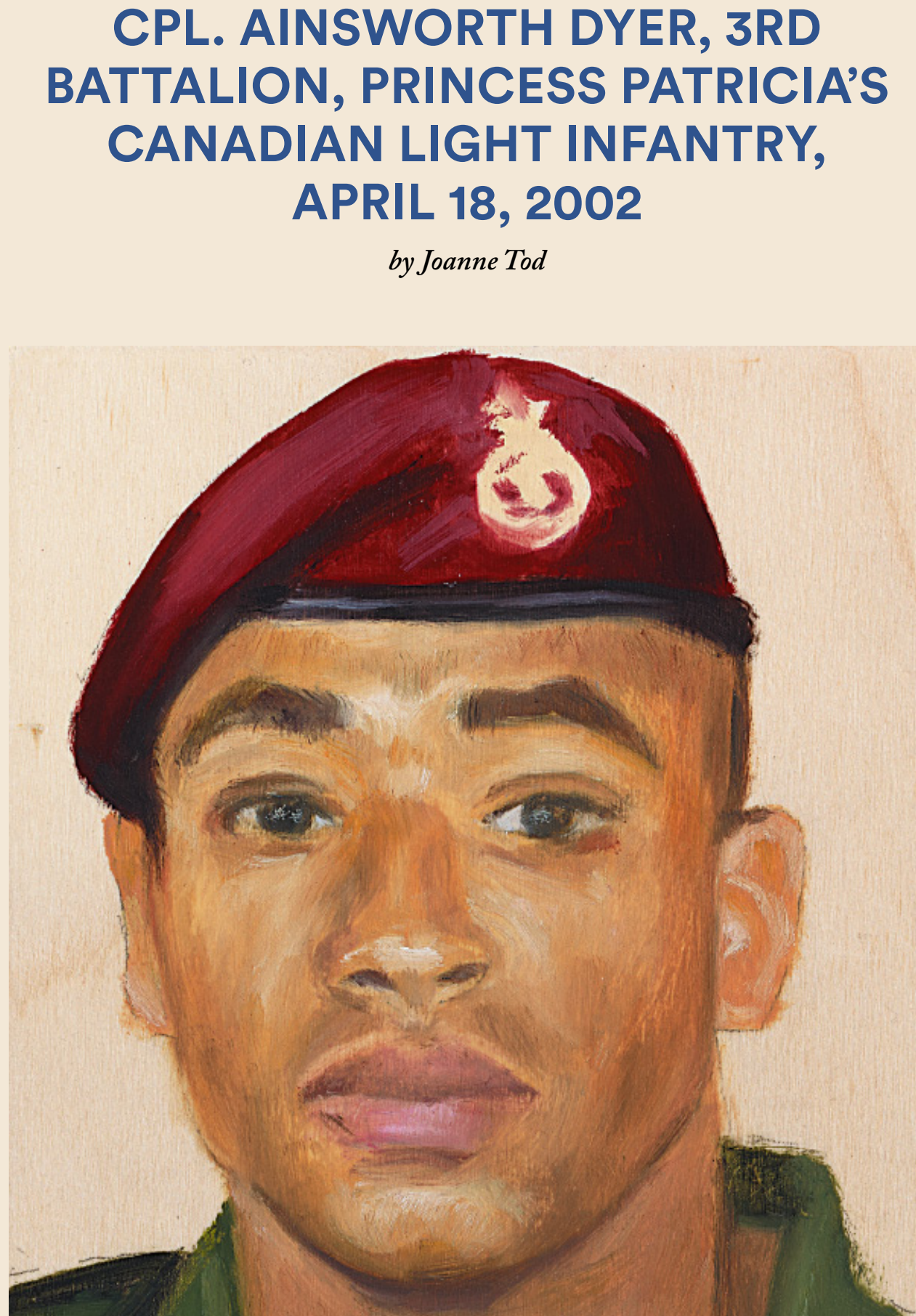
by Henrietta Mabel May



Before Montreal artist Henrietta Mabel May (1877–1971) became a member of the Beaver Hall Group and the Canadian Group of Painters, she participated in the Canadian War Memorials Fund program. Although she was not an official war artist, Eric Brown, then director of the National Gallery, felt the importance of documenting Canadian home-front efforts and wrote to May inquiring, "I have wondered whether you have seen anything of a woman's work in munition factories or aeroplane works that has struck you as a good subject for a picture." In response, May visited an arms factory in September 1918 where she witnessed a powerful scene of female industriousness. A year later she created this dramatic masterpiece that pays tribute to women at work in contribution to the massive national war effort.

NIGHT TARGET, GERMANY

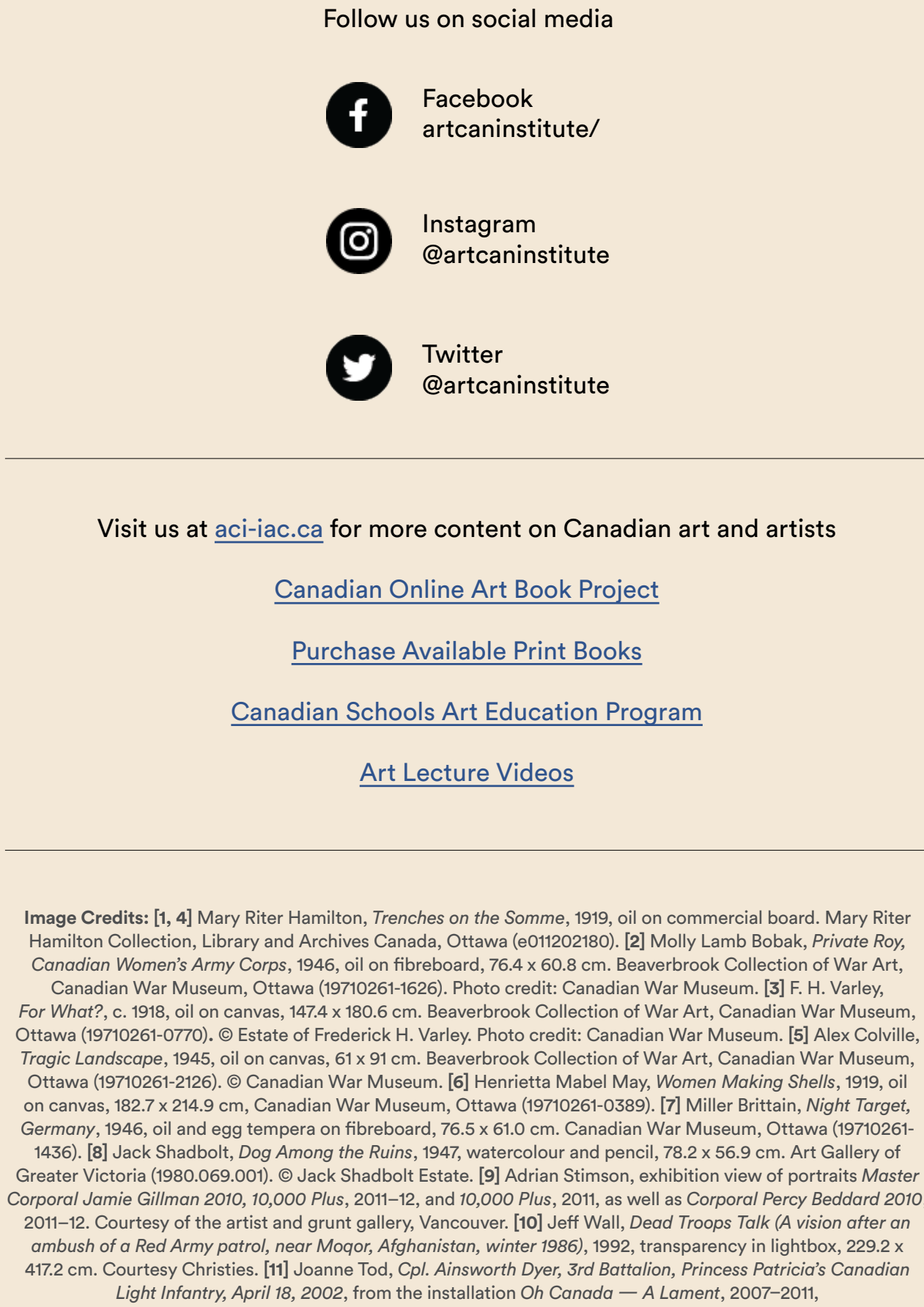
by Miller Brittain



New Brunswick artist Miller Brittain (1912–1968) enlisted in the Canadian Air Force in 1936 and he flew in thirty-seven missions. He found it difficult to describe what he saw from the air, writing, "The night attacks although they are deadly are very beautiful from a dramatic point of view. The target is like an enormous lighted Christmas tree twenty miles away but straight beneath one looks like pictures I have seen of the mouth of hell." He also found the subject difficult to paint, noting "My target picture looks like the real thing they say, but I don't like it yet as a picture." He had tried to capture the scene complete with the red and green indicators planes dropped to guide the bombs, but Brittain clearly felt that detail and accuracy were not enough to capture the reality of a bombing raid.

DOG AMONG THE RUINS

by Jack Shadbolt



While serving at the Canadian Military Headquarters in London, England, the responsibilities of Jack Shadbolt (1909–1998) included cataloguing photographs taken by the Army Signal Corps at the Nazi concentration camps of Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald. The effect of this horrific exposure emerged in a series of gut-wrenching paintings beginning in 1946 after the artist's return to Vancouver. In his dramatic composition, a dog turns its head upward to unleash a heart-rending howl as it stands alone amidst ruins. Smoke billowing over the site indicates that its destruction has just occurred. Positioned in proximity to the viewer, the pained animal powerfully communicates the emotional devastation of loss. One of Canada's most innovative and important painters, Shadbolt found his wartime experiences strongly influenced his subsequent work, which explored the human condition and the disturbing aspects of our modern age.

MASTER CORPORAL JAMIE GILLMAN, 2010 | 10,000 PLUS | CORPORAL PERCY BEDDARD, 2010

(from left to right)

by Adrian Stimson

This installation view of the 2011 exhibition *Holding Our Breath* by the Siksika Nation artist Adrian Stimson (b.1964) shows two portraits of First Nations soldiers separated by four monochromatic wooden planks presenting the four elements of tobacco, sweatgrass, sage, and cedar on tiny shelves. Here Stimson juxtaposes the small offerings of the four sacred Canadian soldiers who died during the Afghanistan mission (2001–14)—the longest military operation in Canadian history—displayed in a grid that is punctuated with red and white panels evoking a fragmented Canadian flag. With this project Tod sought to capture the individuality of each soldier, an objective partly inspired by her uncle, James Tod, who served and died in the Second World War. As she explains, "He was an unknown soldier to me, and it's the same thing with the people I'm painting now. I've never met them, but when I see their photographs, I feel as if I've known them a little bit."

DEAD TROOPS TALK

by Jeff Wall

This monumental tableau of dead Russian soldiers on a battlefield rising up and speaking to each other during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989) is one of Vancouver-based artist Jeff Wall's (b.1946) best known works. Displaying terrible injuries ranging from dismembered limbs to disfigured and bloody faces, the soldiers react to their condition with dismay and bewilderment. Created over the course of six years by digitally assembling individual images of actors in a studio, this work was influenced by both the harsh realism of war photography and the dramatic battles portrayed in his paintings. In commenting on the work, Wall observed "In a sense, war pictures cannot really be 'anti-war.' They can, however, repudiate military glamour, the glamorization of combat and strategy, and focus on suffering."

CPL. AINSWORTH DYER, 3RD BATTALION, PRINCESS PATRICIA'S CANADIAN LIGHT INFANTRY, APRIL 18, 2002

by Joanne Tod

A highly personal painting, this work is part of Toronto-based artist Joanne Tod's (b.1953) installation *Oh, Canada – A Lament*, 2007–11, which consists of 159 portraits of Canadian soldiers who died during the Afghanistan mission (2001–14). Tod's work is a grid that is punctuated with red and white panels evoking a fragmented Canadian flag. With this project Tod sought to capture the individuality of each soldier, an objective partly inspired by her uncle, James Tod, who served and died in the Second World War. As she explains, "He was an unknown soldier to me, and it's the same thing with the people I'm painting now. I've never met them, but when I see their photographs, I feel as if I've known them a little bit."

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