

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

THE DAY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

CANADIAN ARTISTS REMEMBER 9/11

Tomorrow marks the twentieth anniversary of the September 11 attacks—unprecedented events that left the world reeling. These artists reflect on the wide-ranging impacts of this day on America, our country, and humanity as a whole.



Twenty years ago tomorrow, on September 11, 2001, four American passenger planes were hijacked. Two aircrafts, steered into the World Trade Center towers, left 2,753 people dead. The third crashed into the Pentagon and killed 184 individuals; the fourth, which came down in a Pennsylvania field, saw 40 onboard murdered. Despite the thousands of cameras that documented history as it unfolded, “images were suddenly powerless to help us understand what had happened,” said Françoise Mouly, art director of the *New Yorker* magazine. Her words explain why, in confronting the unthinkable, art has played a key role in depicting the terror over the last two decades. It has offered an approach to addressing the attacks that defined a generation of conflict and continue to reverberate with the horrific events unfolding in Afghanistan. The following selection of works by Canadian artists—including several who lived in the United States in 2001—is meaningful in its remembrance of our anger, in its commemoration of incredible heroism, and as a witness to the grief for all those we lost on 9/11 and in the days and years that followed.

Sara Angel

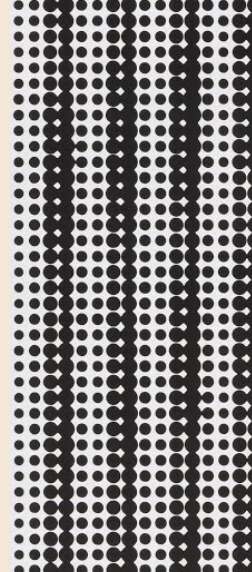
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

GHOST TOWER

by Susanna Heller



Susanna Heller, *Ghost Tower*, 2003, Oakville Galleries.



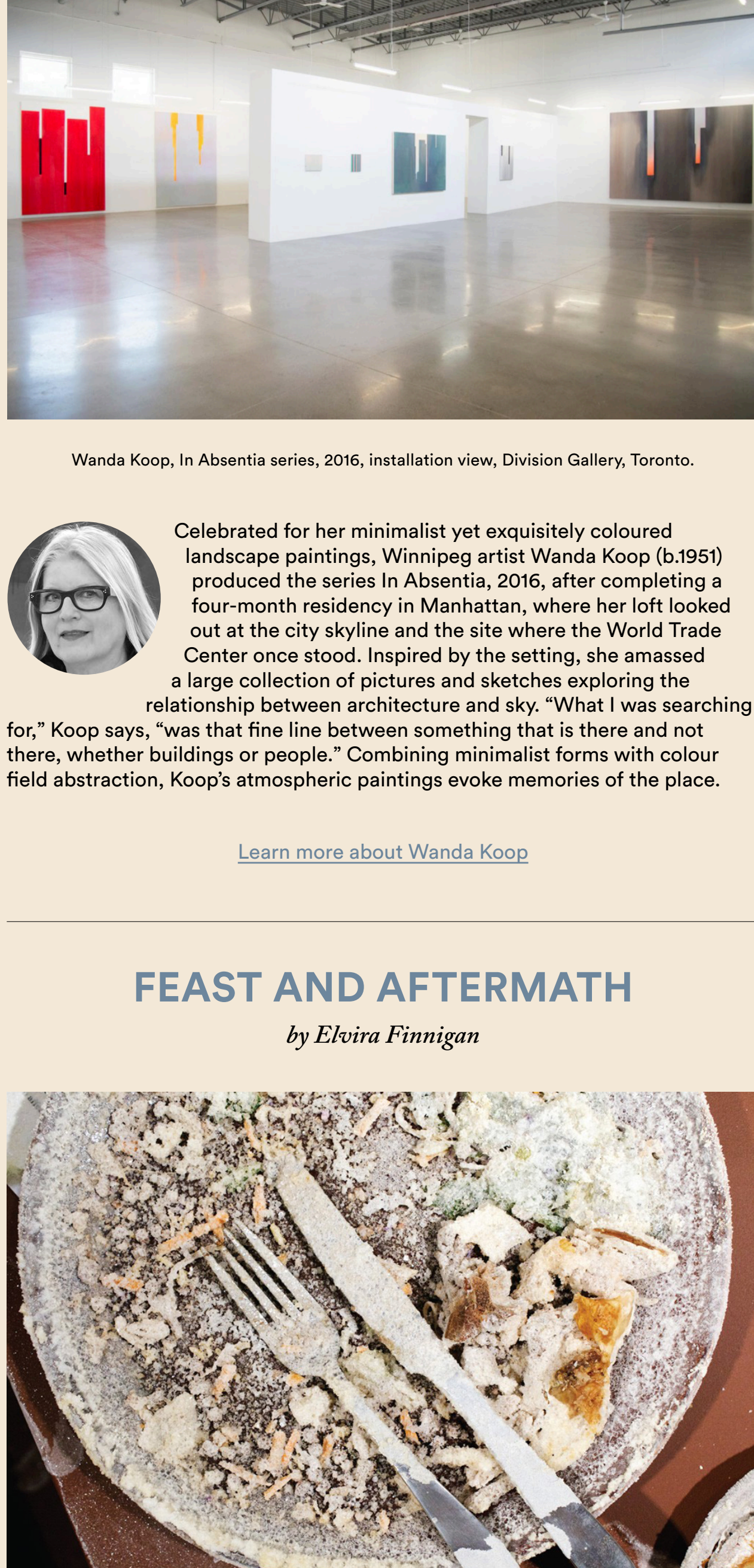
On September 11, Susanna Heller (1956–2021) saw the twin towers burning and instinctively began sketching as she walked towards them. It was a highly personal subject for the Montreal-raised, Brooklyn-based artist: from 1998 to 1999, she had a studio on the ninety-first floor of the World Trade Center as part of an artist residency program offered by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. With *Ghost Tower*,

2003, one of a series, Heller captured the chaotic aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The place where the plane crashed into the tower appears as a dripping black wound, while yellow and orange brushstrokes, combined with blue-grey plumes, evoke the raging fires. The twin towers, once the tallest in the world, are merely a spectre against a sombre sky.

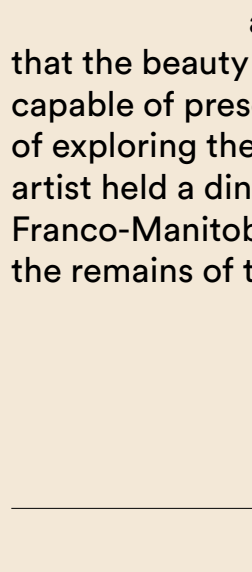
[Learn more about Susanna Heller](#)

THE LOVERS

by Douglas Coupland



Douglas Coupland, *The Lovers*, 2013, private collection, Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto.



After the events of 9/11, Vancouver artist, (b.1961), the internationally acclaimed Douglas Coupland, began collecting photographs of individuals hurtling through the air after jumping or falling out of the blazing towers—he recognized that these haunting images would be forever seared into our collective memory. *The Lovers*, 2013, uses patterns of circular black dots to create the impression of movement. When you look at the work through a smartphone camera, the exterior of the World Trade Center and a pair of falling figures appear (images not visible to the naked eye), a commentary on how our deep attachment to technology influenced the way we experience and continue to understand this tragic event.

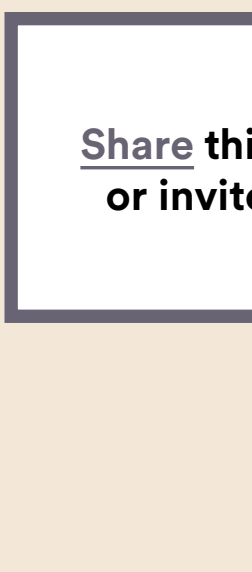
[Learn more about Douglas Coupland](#)

IN ABSENTIA

by Wanda Koop



Wanda Koop, *In Absentia* series, 2016, installation view, Division Gallery, Toronto.



Celebrated for her minimalist yet exquisitely coloured landscape paintings, Winnipeg artist Wanda Koop (b.1951) produced the series *In Absentia*, 2016, after completing a four-month residency in Manhattan, where her loft looked out at the city skyline and the site where the World Trade Center once stood. Inspired by the setting, she amassed a large collection of pictures and sketches exploring the relationship between architecture and sky. “What I was searching for,” Koop says, “was that fine line between something that is there and not there, whether buildings or people.” Combining evocative forms with colour field abstraction, Koop’s atmospheric paintings invoke memories of the place.

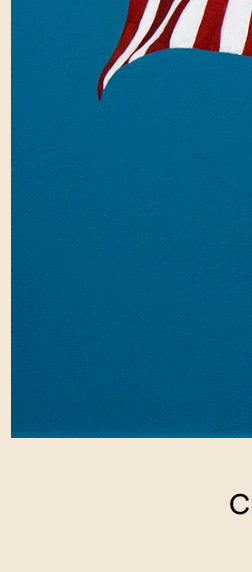
[Learn more about Wanda Koop](#)

FEAST AND AFTERMATH

by Elvira Finnigan



Elvira Finnigan, *Feast and Aftermath*, installation view, La Gallery, Centre culturel franco-manitobain, Winnipeg, 2012–13.

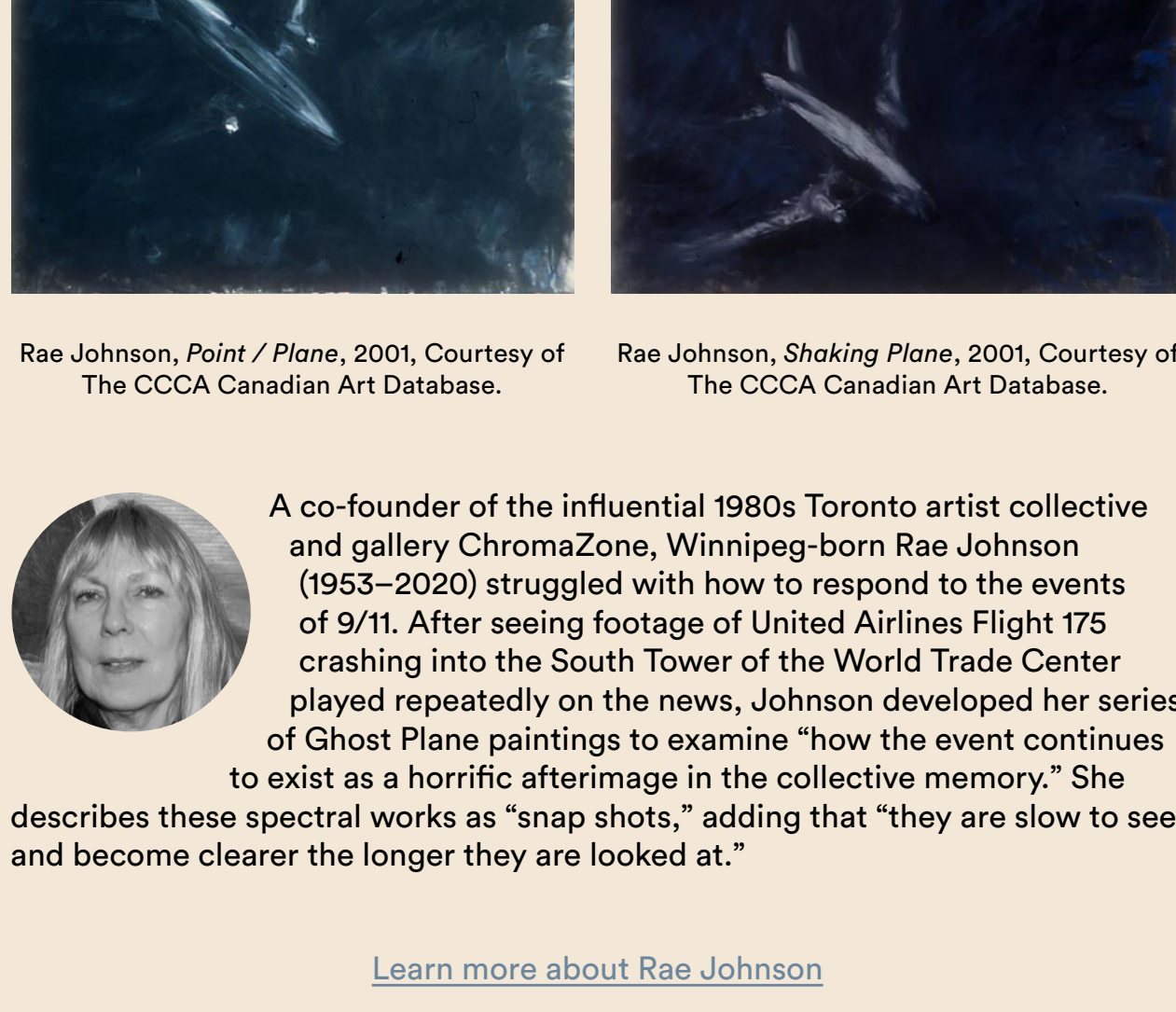


In 2001, Winnipeg-based Elvira Finnigan was living in Pittsburgh, only miles from where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed, and she soon responded to the event in her art. After encountering scenes of the fallen towers, Finnigan began experimenting with salt to create works such as *Feast and Aftermath*, 2012–13. Explaining her approach, she notes, “It was startling because the images of the dust in newspapers and on TV were quite beautiful and it was horrifying to realize that the beauty I was seeing was created through destruction.” Alternately capable of preserving or destroying objects, salt has offered Finnigan a means of exploring themes of memory, mortality, and loss. For *Feast and Aftermath*, the artist held a dinner for the Collectif Post-néo-riellistes—a group composed of Franco-Manitoban poets, writers, and playwrights—and sprinkled salt brine onto the remains of the meal, allowing them to crystallize for two months.

[Learn more about Elvira Finnigan](#)

EXTENDED BREATHING AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

by Suzy Lake



Suzy Lake, *Extended Breathing at the World Trade Center*, 2012/2014, Courtesy of the artist and Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto.



Internationally recognized for her pioneering photo-performances, Toronto artist Suzy Lake (b.1947) created her *Extended Breathing* series, 2002–14, by documenting herself standing still for an hour at locations of personal and cultural significance, including the World Trade Center, pictured here being rebuilt. Lake is the only person who is captured clearly; behind her are the blurred figures of tourists visiting the site. Although the title of the series foregrounds the act of breathing and suggests a meditative state, the artist reveals, “While I’m standing there for one hour ... what I’m thinking about is not predictable. Sometimes I’m in a meditative state, sometimes I’m responding to my body, sometimes to a memory.”

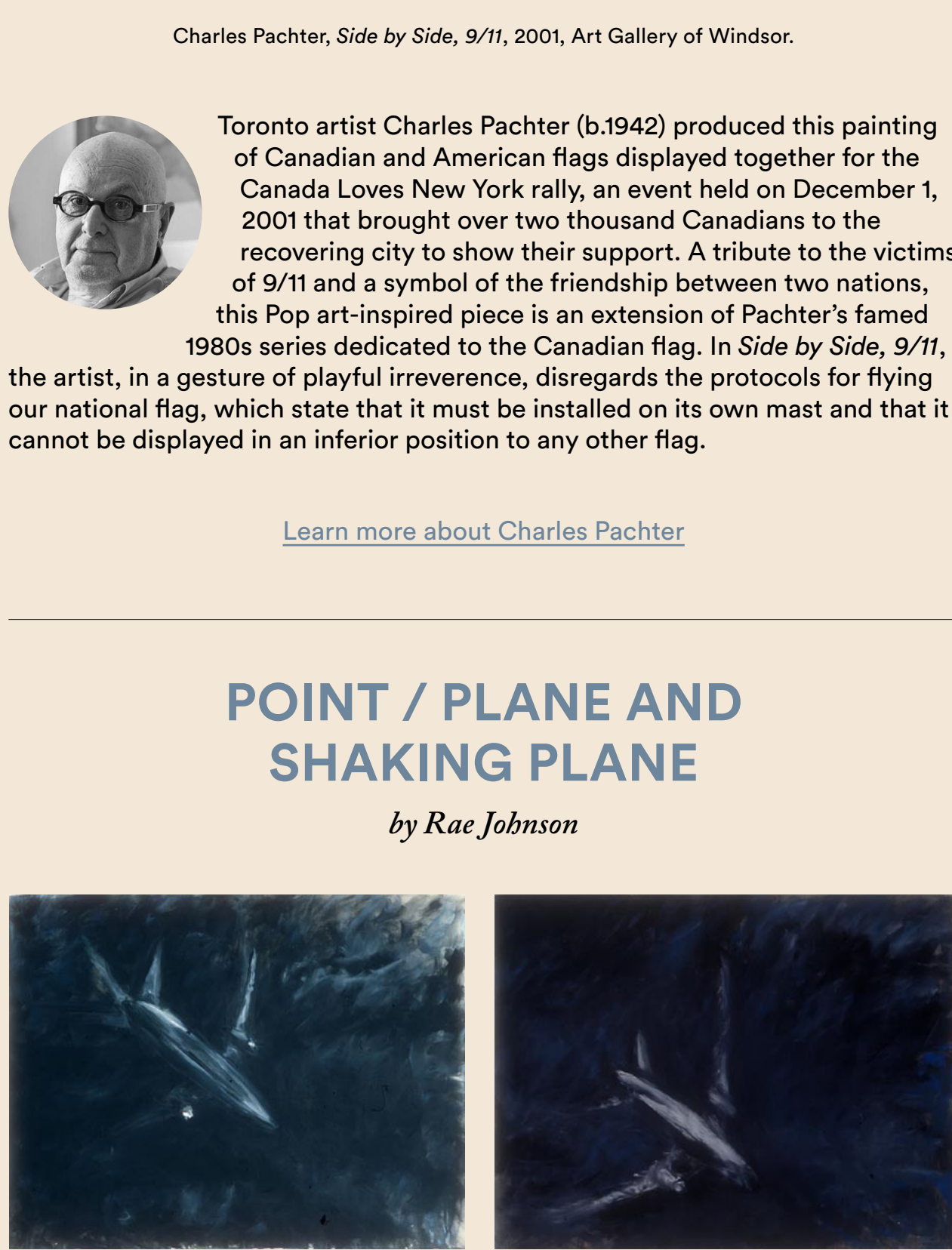
Learn more in ACI’s [Suzy Lake: Life & Work](#) by Erin Silver

This book was made possible thanks to the Title Sponsorship of Kiki and Ian Delaney.

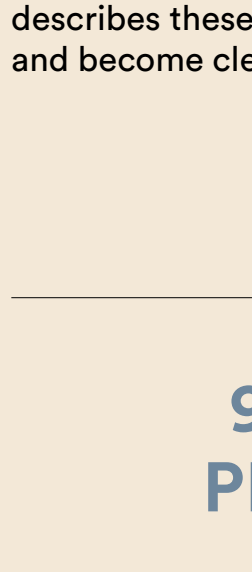
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NEW YORK CITY

by Dave Heath



Dave Heath, *New York City*, 11 September 2002, from the series *We Remember*, CMCP Collection, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

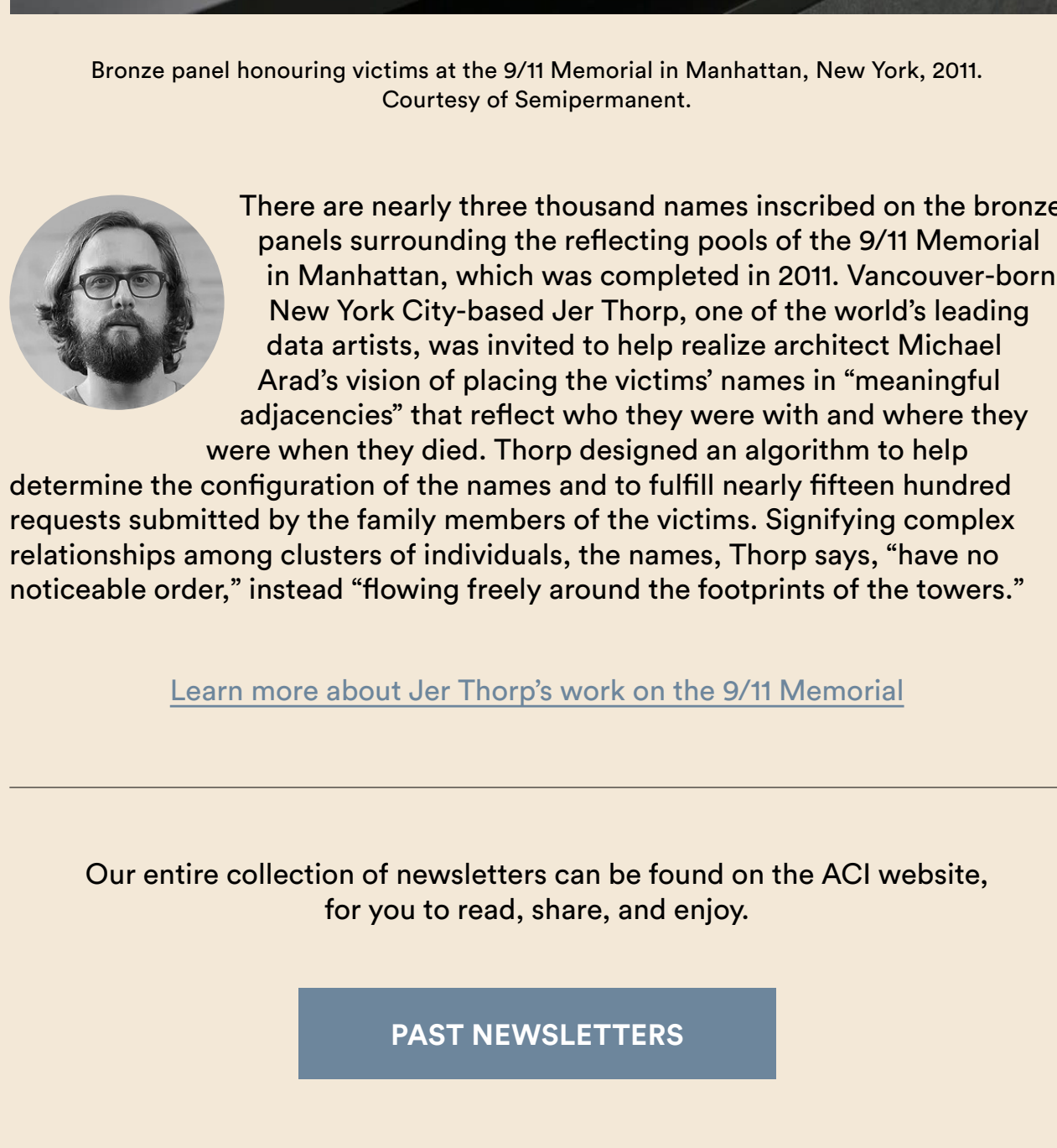


New York City, 2002, is part of Canadian American artist Dave Heath’s (1913–2016) portfolio of twenty photographs documenting the mood of the city one year after the terrorist attacks. This close-up view of a woman standing in the street captures her troubled expression as she gazes at something out of frame, absorbed in thought. Before moving to Canada in 1970, Heath—who was born in Philadelphia—studied in New York with the renowned photojournalist W. Eugene Smith (1918–1978) and was deeply influenced by his approach to narrative and human emotions. This formative experience may explain why Heath felt compelled to return to the city after 9/11 and record how people had been irrevocably changed.

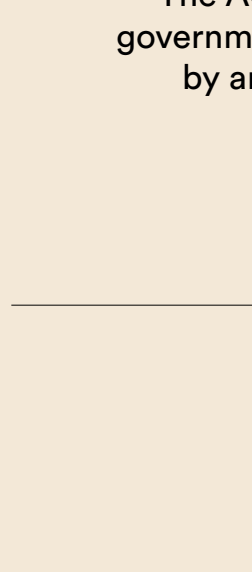
[Learn more about Dave Heath](#)

SIDE BY SIDE, 9/11

by Charles Pachter



Charles Pachter, *Side by Side, 9/11*, 2001, Art Gallery of Windsor.



Toronto artist Charles Pachter (b.1942) produced this painting of Canadian and American flags displayed together for the Canada Loves New York rally, an event held on December 1, 2001 that brought over two thousand Canadians to the victims of 9/11 and a symbol of the friendship between two nations, this Pop art-inspired piece is an extended metaphor for the artist, in a gesture of playful irreverence, disregards the protocols for flying our national flag, which state that it must be installed on its own mast and that it cannot be displayed in an inferior position to any other flag.

[Learn more about Charles Pachter](#)

POINT / PLANE AND SHAKING PLANE

by Rae Johnson



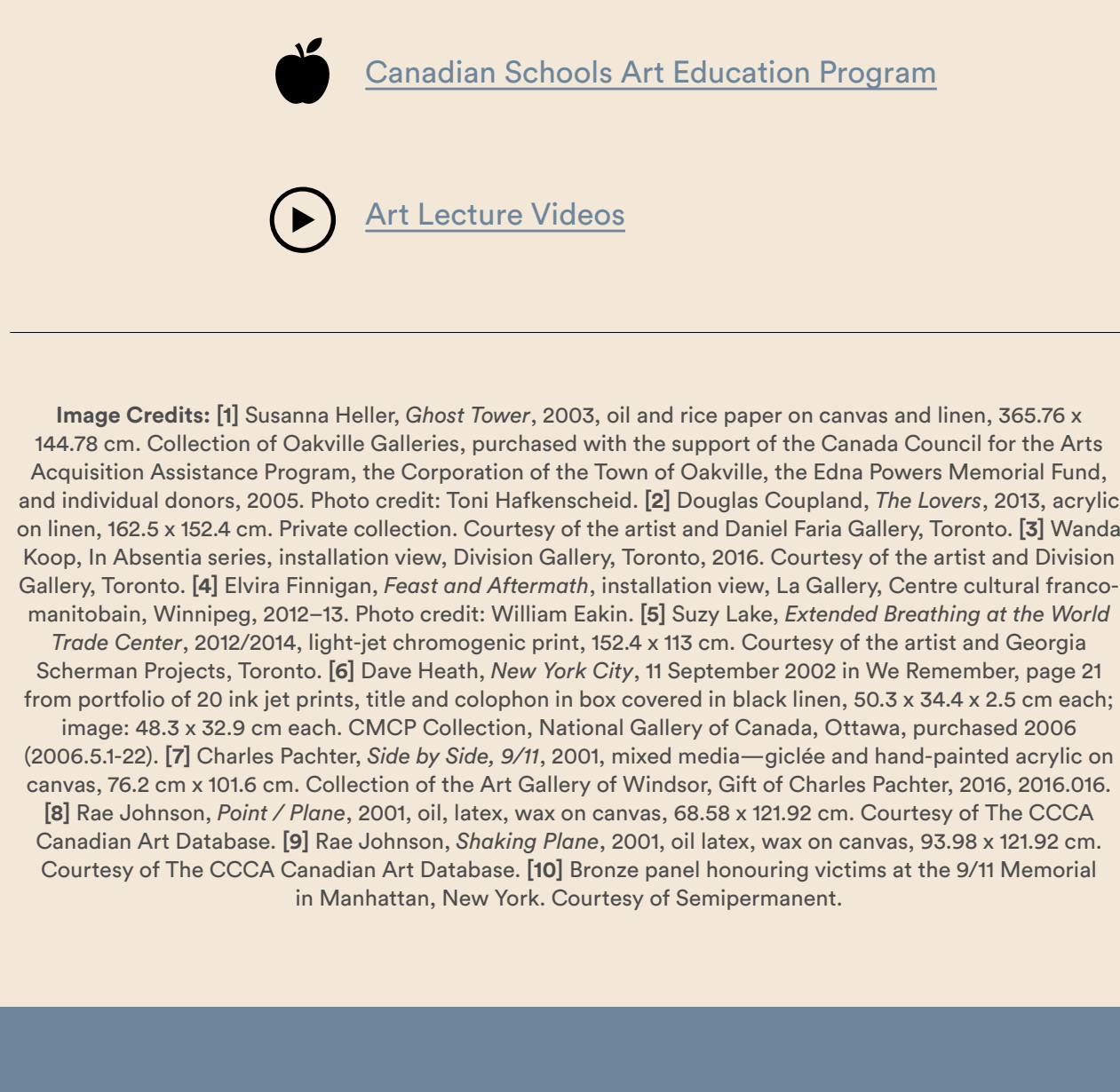
Rae Johnson, *Point / Plane*, 2001, Courtesy of The COCCA Canadian Art Database. Rae Johnson, *Shaking Plane*, 2001, Courtesy of The COCCA Canadian Art Database.

A co-founder of the influential 1980s Toronto artist collective and gallery ChromaZone, Winnipeg-born Rae Johnson (1953–2020) struggled with how to respond to the events of 9/11. After seeing footage of United Airlines Flight 75 crashing into the South Tower of the World Trade Center, she created two paintings, *Point / Plane* and *Shaking Plane*, 2001, which depict the towers in a way that suggests they are shaking and becoming clearer the longer they are looked at.”

[Learn more about Rae Johnson](#)

9/11 MEMORIAL: NAMES PLACEMENT ALGORITHM

by Jer Thorp



Bronze panel honouring victims at the 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan, New York, 2011. Courtesy of Semipermanent.

There are nearly three thousand names inscribed on the bronze panels surrounding the reflecting pools of the 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan, which was completed in 2011. Vancouver-born, New York City-based Jer Thorp, one of the world’s leading data artists, was invited to help realize architect Michael Arad’s vision of placing the victims’ names in “meaningful adjacencies” that reflect who they were with and where they were when they died. Thorp designed an algorithm to help determine the configuration of the names and to fulfill nearly fifteen hundred requests submitted by the family members of the victims. Signifying complex relationships among clusters of individuals, the names, Thorp says, “have no noticeable order,” instead “flowing freely around the footprints of the towers.”

[Learn more about Jer Thorp’s work on the 9/11 Memorial](#)

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