NOVEMBER 11, 2021

LEST WE FORGET
ART OF REMEMBRANCE

On this Remembrance Day the Art Canada Institute proudly publishes War Art in Canada: A Critical History *by Laura Brandon. As well, tonight we are hosting an ACI Art Talk (details below) to launch the book and explore how war artists have shaped our nation's history and honoured those who bravely and selflessly served their country.*

On Remembrance Day we honour all those who have served and sacrificed for Canada, from the World Wars fought by our parents and grandparents to the recent combat in Afghanistan. For generations, people have remembered through art, and in *War Art in Canada: A Critical History*, which the Art Canada Institute publishes today, esteemed author and curator Laura Brandon explores how the exceptionally diverse range of works created from conflicts dating back hundreds of years reflects our cultural, military, political, and social evolution. War art can be made by anyone and in virtually any material, including painting, sculpture, graphics, film, photography, craft, textiles, and carving. The excerpts below, all drawn from Brandon's comprehensive account, illustrate what unites war artists: Their shared commitment is to creating art that bears witness to victory, loss, service, and sacrifice. With their astonishing works, they invite us to pause, give thanks, and remember.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

Join us tonight for ACI's Remembrance Day Art Talk (Zoom) at 5 PM, EST
featuring author Laura Brandon and internationally renowned war artists Edward Burtynsky, Gertrude Kearns, Adrian Stimson, and Althea Thauberger. Click here to attend the event.

SA GA YEATH QUA PIETH TOW, KING OF THE MAQUAS

by John Verelst

John Verelst, *Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow, King of the Maquas*, 1710,
Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

The history of war art in this country predates European settlement, and critical early works were made during the colonial period. This captivating portrait represents Sagayeathquapiethtow, who in 1710 was part of a delegation of Indigenous leaders that travelled to London with British military officers seeking support against competing French interests in North America. There, they met Queen Anne, who commissioned portraits of them from the London-based Dutch artist John Verelst (c.1675–1734). The painting is notable for its inclusion of Sagayeathquapiethtow's tattoos, the precise meaning of which is unclear. Haudenosaunee tattoos commemorated personal achievements in battle but also connections to family, society, and place, as well as more abstract concepts relating to Indigenous worldviews.

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KILLED IN ACTION

by Marion Long

Marion Long, *Killed in Action*, 1915, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

In this heart-wrenching image from the First World War, a woman stands silhouetted against a window, her head bowed into her hands, with a telegram bearing tragic news lying at her feet. *Killed in Action*, 1915, is one of three drawings that Toronto artist Marion Long (1882–1970) created for *The Canadian Magazine* that provide a fresh interpretation of the war from a woman's point of view. Her work resonated with women readers who empathized more with the impact of the conflict on the domestic sphere than with events occurring on foreign battlefields far from their own experience.

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FOR WHAT?

by Frederick Varley

Frederick Varley, *For What?*, 1918, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

In 1918, future Group of Seven member F.H. (Frederick Horsman) Varley (1881–1969) was commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund—the official war art program of the First World War—to record the battlefields. *For What?*, 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, 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.

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DROWNING SAILOR

by Jack Nichols

Jack Nichols, *Drowning Sailor*, 1946, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

Montreal-born Jack Nichols (1921–2009) was an official war artist with the Canadian Navy during the Second World War, and he saw a man drown while he was on board HMCS *Iroquois* during the attempted evacuation of Brest, France, by the Germans in August 1944. The image seared itself on his memory, inspiring *Drowning Sailor*, 1946. In the painting, a terrified German mariner clutches uselessly at the water as he is pulled down into its depths. His eyes bulge, his mouth opens in a scream, and his face convulses in terror. He represents a universal emotion: fear in the face of death. Describing this painting in 1998, Nichols commented, “When you are drowning, you lose your nationality, don’t you?”

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NIGHT TARGET, GERMANY

by Miller Brittain

Miller Brittain, *Night Target, Germany*, 1946, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

A bomb aimer in the Canadian Air Force in the Second World War, New Brunswick artist Miller Brittain (1912–1968) found it difficult to describe what he saw from the air, writing, “The night attacks although they are deadly are very beautiful from our 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 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 convey the reality of a bombing raid.

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PRIVATE ROY

by Molly Lamb Bobak

Molly Lamb Bobak, *Private Roy*, 1946, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

British Columbia-born Molly Lamb Bobak (1920–2014) joined the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) in 1942. Three years later, she became an official war artist, the only woman to be distinguished as such. In this famous painting of 29-year-old Sergeant—not Private—Eva May Roy, Bobak 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 a sense of alienation. Very few Canadian soldiers of colour were ever depicted by war artists, making this work by Bobak—who rarely created individual portraits—especially significant within our nation's art history.

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HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

by Geoff Butler

Geoff Butler, *Happy Days Are Here Again*, 1983, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

War art created in the spirit of protest was uncommon in Canada until the early 1980s, when the government's decision to support the testing of cruise missiles over Canadian soil motivated one of the largest bodies of protest art in Canada—the widely exhibited Art of War series by Nova Scotia artist Geoff Butler (b.1945). One of the compositions in the series, *Happy Days Are Here Again*, 1983, shows a massively injured community in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. Overhead, an aircraft pulls a banner inscribed with the ironic message, “We are pleased to inform you we have survived the nuclear war.” Butler worked on the painting series for eight years and, in 1990, published the images as a book, *Art of War: Painting It Out of the Picture*.

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PEACEKEEPERS

by Marc-Bernard Philippe

Marc-Bernard Philippe, *Peacekeepers*, n.d., Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

After 1945, Canada rebranded itself as a peacekeeping nation, and United Nations-sponsored missions dominated our country’s military and diplomatic activities for the next four decades. *Peacekeepers*, n.d., by Haitian-born Canadian soldier artist Marc-Bernard Philippe (b.1959), was inspired by his return to his native country as part of Operation PIVOT (1995–96). The deployment was a United Nations mission that aimed to provide security and stability to the Haitian government, and in Philippe’s vividly coloured canvas, Canadian soldiers are bringing in supplies as locals bid them a warm welcome. The Creole message in the lower left translates to “Thank you, Canada, for OP Pivot.”

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WHAT THEY GAVE

by Gertrude Kearns

Gertrude Kearns, *What They Gave*, 2006, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

Gertrude Kearns (b.1950) is the best-known war artist working in Canada today. *What They Gave*, 2006, is her personal response to the traumatic events she witnessed in 2006 in Kandahar as an embedded artist with the Canadian Army. A suicide bomber blew up the vehicle carrying Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry, with whom she had just had breakfast. Berry was killed at the scene, and three Canadian soldiers were severely injured. Kearns's access to the medical facilities to which the wounded were taken inspired a number of works, including *What They Gave*. Describing the catharsis behind this dramatic painting, the artist wrote: "I slashed this time, expressing for the first time since my return from Afghanistan the sadness and volatility of emotion I had contained for so long."

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TRENCH

by Adrian Stimson

Adrian Stimson, *Trench*, 2017, Collection of the artist.

Acclaimed interdisciplinary artist Adrian Stimson (b.1964) developed *Trench*, 2017, to commemorate the approximately 4,000 Indigenous soldiers who served in the First World War. The performance took place on land near the artist's family home in Alberta. Guided by First World War manuals and working from dawn to dusk over five days, he dug a six-foot-deep trench in the U-shape pattern, which is also the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) symbol of war, and shored it up with two hundred and fifty sandbags. Stimson's performance references Niitsitapi cultural practices that put the body under duress to enable healing, and he hoped his toil would draw attention to the incompleteness of Indigenous First World War history and make it whole and worthy of honour.

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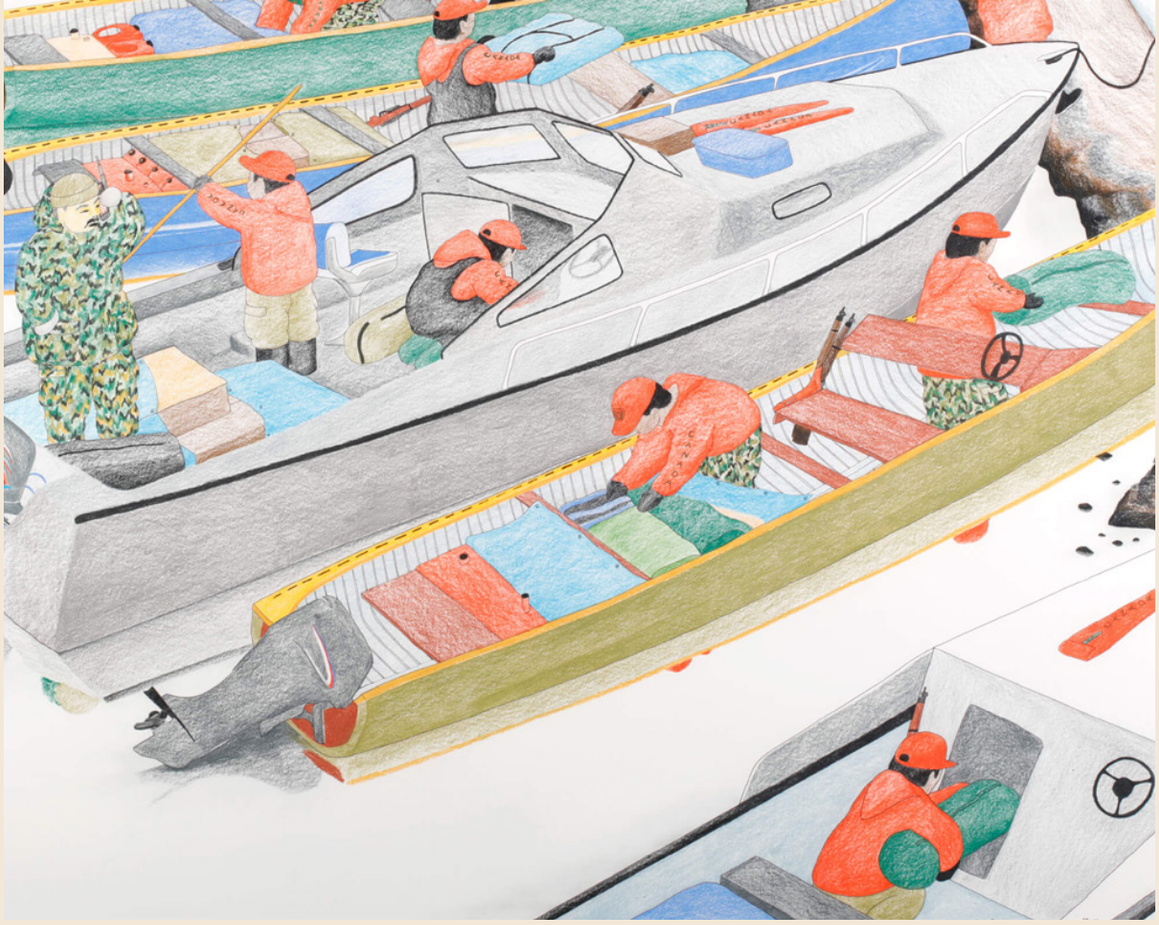
RANGERS

by Tim Pitsiulak



Tim Pitsiulak, *Rangers*, 2010, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

A special commission from the Canadian Forces Artists Program (CFAP), this dynamic drawing by Kinngait (Cape Dorset) artist Tim Pitsiulak (1967–2016) shows Canadian Rangers, of which he was a member, unloading boats. Working in remote and coastal areas of the country, Rangers support Canadian Armed Forces operations related to national security and public safety. They must possess an intimate knowledge of the local geography and climate, which Pitsiulak undoubtedly had—as an artist and hunter born and raised in the Arctic, he made everyday life in his community his subject, recording what he saw with virtuosic talent in coloured pencil.

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About the Author of *War Art In Canada*

Laura Brandon was the Historian, Art and War, at the Canadian War Museum from 1992 until 2015, and for over four decades, she has focused on war, writing and lecturing extensively on contemporary and historical Canadian and international art and artists. Explaining her commitment to the subject, Brandon recalls, “Researching Pegi Nicol MacLeod, a war artist, took me to the Canadian War Museum for the first time in 1984. In the vault, surrounded by military art, I knew at once that this was where I wanted to work. I’ve never stopped.”

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