

The background of the entire cover is an abstract, textured composition of various shades of blue and white, resembling a close-up of a rough surface or a microscopic view of a material. The texture is dense and organic, with many small, irregular shapes and lines.

# KAZUO NAKAMURA

Life & Work

By John G. Hatch

ART  
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A black and white portrait of Kazuo Nakamura, an elderly man with glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a light-colored wall with some dark, geometric shapes on the left side.

# BIOGRAPHY

Kazuo Nakamura (1926–2002) produced one of the most varied, consistently original bodies of work of his generation. Born in Vancouver, interned as an “enemy alien” during the Second World War, and resettled in Ontario, he created paintings and sculptures over a career that spanned more than forty years. Inspired by his colleagues in Painters Eleven, he moved constantly between figuration and abstraction, experimenting with different styles and techniques as he sought to reveal the universal laws of nature found in science and mathematics. During his lifetime, Nakamura achieved a level of success that was virtually unprecedented for any Japanese Canadian artist. He opened doors for a new generation of artists today.

## THE EARLY YEARS

Kazuo Nakamura was born on October 13, 1926. He was a second-generation Japanese Canadian (*nisei*). His father, Toichi Nakamura, had moved to Canada from Hiroshima in February 1911 at the age of fifteen, accompanying his own father who had made the trip at least a couple of times before. Although the elder Nakamura returned to Japan after a few years, Toichi settled in Vancouver in the neighbourhood known as Japantown or Little Tokyo, which was at the time a largely self-sufficient community where many immigrants from Japan lived.



LEFT: Japanese women and girls in traditional clothes taking part in a parade down Powell Street, Vancouver, 1937, photograph by Karl Haspel, City of Vancouver Archives. RIGHT: The unveiling of the Japanese Memorial in Stanley Park, Vancouver, April 9, 1920, photograph by Stuart Thompson, City of Vancouver Archives. The memorial, a tribute to Japanese Canadians who enlisted and fought during the First World War, was designed by James Benzie.



Like so many of his compatriots, Kazuo's father was seeking a better life in North America. Rapid urbanization in Japan in the late 1800s had deepened economic problems there. Many Canadians, however, saw the influx of Asian immigrants into Canada, and specifically into British Columbia, as an economic and social threat. By September 1907 underlying anti-immigration and racist attitudes against Asians by whites reached a boil, and riots broke out in Vancouver's Chinatown and Japantown. Several government agreements subsequently restricted the number of Japanese immigrants permitted into Canada between 1908 and 1928.

Toichi Nakamura worked at a variety of jobs until he and his brother opened a restaurant in Japantown. In 1923 he travelled back to Hiroshima to marry Yoshiyo Uyemoto; he returned to Vancouver with his bride that same year. In 1925 the first of five children (three sons and two daughters) was born; Kazuo was the second child. The Depression forced the family to close the restaurant in 1935, and they moved out of Little Tokyo, heading south to 23rd and Main Street. There they opened a dry-cleaning and dressmaking shop, living in cramped quarters behind it, and integrated quickly into what was a relatively diverse community.<sup>1</sup>





Kazuo Nakamura, *Back Alley, Vancouver*, 1942, watercolour on paper, 22.4 x 30.0 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

As a youth Kazuo Nakamura appears to have savoured life in the city. His earliest paintings depict landmarks like the Army & Navy discount department store on East Hastings Street, which appears in *First Frost*, 1941, as well as the Cambie Street Bridge and views of Main Street.

Nakamura received his first art training after he completed grade school in 1939. At Vancouver Technical Secondary School, he enrolled in the applied arts program, where he studied drafting, mechanical drawing, and design. Noted modern artist Jock Macdonald (1897–1960) was teaching at the school, and it is believed that Macdonald taught Nakamura design and tutored him at least once a week in drawing and painting in 1940 and early 1941, and possibly into 1942.<sup>2</sup> The young artist also perused the art books of his uncle Shusaku Nakamura, who was an amateur painter. Of particular interest to Kazuo were the reproductions of French Impressionist paintings, as well as works illustrated in the Japanese art magazines his uncle subscribed to.<sup>3</sup> Nakamura obtained his art supplies by way of the Simpson's and Eaton's mail-order catalogues.<sup>4</sup>



Early work by Nakamura depicts its subject matter in a matter-of-fact, measured way, rarely displaying any flourishes that might be mistaken for self-expression. This may be because Nakamura was learning the craft or because of his unconventional training for an artist. Yet this detached quality is found in much of his subsequent work. People rarely appear in his art. In only a handful of early examples do we find figures, and they seem incidental to the scene.

Nakamura often claimed to have been a self-taught artist, possibly because his formal training was in drafting and design.<sup>5</sup> The city

landmarks that appear among his first works likely provided the settings Nakamura needed to practise linear perspective. He related that his younger brother, Yukio, was learning the technique in art class at John Oliver High School and taught him the rudiments of using gridlines and lines converging at a vanishing point to create depth on a flat surface.<sup>6</sup> Nakamura eventually translated these lessons to his landscape paintings, which he began to make as an adolescent and continued for the rest of his career. For example, he uses the rows of strawberries in *Strawberry Farm*, c.1941, as parallel lines (orthogonals) that establish the perspective. The draftsman's grid (or net) and linear perspective likely piqued his interest in geometry as a tool for representing and understanding nature.

When or how Nakamura was first drawn to the sciences that played such a pivotal role throughout his life is difficult to determine. Some have suggested that Jock Macdonald may have inspired Nakamura, since Macdonald was interested in exploring science to understand the underlying principles of nature.<sup>7</sup> However, Nakamura did not seem to share an interest in the spiritual dimension that informed Macdonald's *Etheric Form*, 1936 (dated 1934), and other works. Perhaps Nakamura chose the applied arts over a fine arts education because he saw it as an ideal compromise between art and science. On this subject, Nakamura noted in a 1993 interview, "Because of the war, and being interned, I lost time, and decided not to become a professional scientist, but to go into art."<sup>8</sup>



Kazuo Nakamura, *Strawberry Farm*, c.1941, watercolour on paper, 22.3 x 30.3 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.



## THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE INTERNMENT OF JAPANESE CANADIANS

Kazuo Nakamura's life was changed with Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and its invasion of Britain's Hong Kong colony on December 7, 1941. Canada's Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, declared war on Japan that same evening. The official proclamation came the next day. These events reignited the festering anti-East Asian racism in British Columbia, a feeling that the Liberal MP for Vancouver Centre

Ian Alistair Mackenzie captured succinctly when he said in April 1942: "Let our slogan be for British Columbia: 'No Japs from the Rockies to the seas.'"<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie played a key role in driving King's response to what was referred to as "the Japanese problem."<sup>10</sup> On December 16 the Canadian government, under considerable pressure from the provincial government of British Columbia, required all people of Japanese descent to register with the Registrar of Enemy Aliens.



LEFT: Japanese Canadians being relocated to camps in the interior of British Columbia, 1942, photograph by Tak Toyota, Department of Labour Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Relocation of Japanese Canadians to camps in the interior of British Columbia, 1942-46, photograph by Tak Toyota, Department of Labour Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.



LEFT: Notice of Japanese Canadian forced relocation published in Vancouver-area newspapers signed by Austin C. Taylor, Chairman of the British Columbia Security Commission, June 19, 1942, newspaper clipping, 1942, Kishizo Kimura fonds, Nikkei National Museum, Burnaby. RIGHT: View of Lemon Creek Camp, c.1940-49, photographer unknown, Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections.



In January 1942 King invoked the War Measures Act to require “persons of Japanese racial origin” living on the west coast to relocate to a “protected area” 160 kilometres inland.<sup>11</sup> Until the internment camps could be built, many Japanese Canadians were held in the livestock barns on the Pacific National Exhibition grounds in Hastings Park, where the sanitary conditions were terrible and there was little if any privacy. Most were moved to camps within a few months (where in some instances Japanese Canadians were required to build their own shelters), but it took up to eighteen months before all people of Japanese origin were transported to the eight internment camps in B.C. and the labour camps scattered across the country, where many adult men were separated from their families and sent to work.<sup>12</sup>

Nakamura’s family did not suffer the indignity of the livestock barns, likely because they were not living in Japantown where the high concentration of Japanese Canadians was perceived as a threat. The Nakamuras were subject to a curfew, but they remained in their home until October 15, 1942, when they were relocated to the camp in Tashme, a small community twenty-two kilometres east of Hope, a town in the Fraser Valley at the confluence of the Fraser and Coquihalla Rivers.<sup>13</sup> Among the last to arrive in Tashme, Nakamura and his family were assigned to a cabin on the last of the ten rows of avenues at the camp.

In total, around 22,000 Japanese Canadians were forcibly removed from their homes to the camps, which were known as “ghost towns.”<sup>14</sup> The land and property they left behind was confiscated and later sold at auction by the Canadian government without the owners’ consent, purportedly to pay for the construction and maintenance of the camps. The housing provided was flimsy at best, without plumbing or electricity, and wholly inadequate for the winter months. In many cases the internees had to repair and heat their shelters with timber from the surrounding forests. And unlike in the United States, the Canadian government supplied no food or clothing, so families were left to farm their own food and acquire any other supplies they needed using their savings and charitable donations.



LEFT: Nakamura family in Tashme internment camp, c.1943, photographer unknown, Collection of the Nakamura family. From left to right: top row, Kazuo, his brother Mikio, father Toichi; middle row, mother Yoshiyo, brother Yukio; and bottom row, sisters Tomiko and Masako. RIGHT: Group photo of Japanese Canadian men assigned to woodcutting work detail at Tashme internment camp, n.d., photographer unknown, Collection of the Nakamura family. Nakamura is on the right of the top row.



At Tashme, Nakamura worked during the day, mostly cutting lumber and clearing brush. In the evenings he attended high school classes given by Christian groups, because the Canadian government provided only elementary schooling in the camps. He continued with his art practice, purchasing his art supplies through the Simpson’s and Eaton’s catalogues and dedicating every free moment to sketching and painting. He even managed to acquire art books, most notably *World Famous Paintings*, the 1939 book by Rockwell Kent (1882–1971), and was particularly struck by the works of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906),

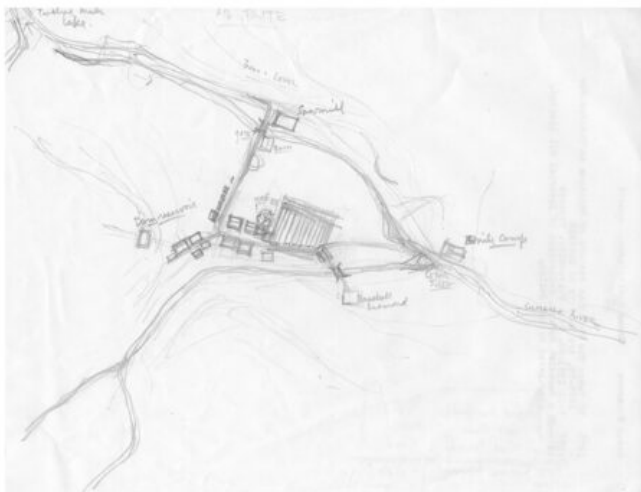


Grant Wood (1891–1942), and Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847–1917).<sup>15</sup> Art was an essential escape from the hardships of the camp, and he painted Vancouver street scenes from memory to hold on to the hope of returning home. As he said years later, “We thought we would go back.”<sup>16</sup>



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Night Class*, 1944, watercolour and graphite on paper, 22 x 30 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Tashme at Dusk, July/August 1944*, 1944, oil on board, 34.6 x 53 cm, private collection.

Nakamura said little publicly about what he was thinking or feeling, and it is hard to tell from his paintings. *Tashme at Dusk, July/August 1944*, 1944, appears to be a straightforward depiction of the landscape. He painted mostly nighttime scenes, which is unsurprising given that he had free time only in the evenings. Although the camp buildings gave Nakamura some reference points for his study of perspective, the nearby forests, mountains, and lakes offered new subject matter and challenges. The open areas in *Twelve Mile Lake*, 1944, provide few sightlines to construct the space; when this is combined with the dense screen of the forest and the high horizon line, applying linear perspective becomes onerous. Few scenes painted at this time include people, except *Night Class*, 1944, which may be one of the last paintings he completed at Tashme.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Drawing of Tashme Camp*, c.1986, graphite on paper, 21.6 x 28 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Tashme*, July 2, 1943, gouache on paper, 35.8 x 55.8 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

Nakamura's paintings from Tashme laid the foundation for his mature work. Here lie the roots of the landscapes and patterns that characterize all of his work. When asked later about his internment, Nakamura claimed: “It didn't affect me much.”<sup>17</sup> Yet the dates his family arrived and left the camp were indelibly seared into his memory.<sup>18</sup> He attended the fiftieth anniversary reunion of the



opening of the internment camp, held in Toronto. And in his papers at the time of his death was a sketch of the layout of the camp. Tashme and the works he produced there likely launched Nakamura on his search for meaning in the universe and the underlying order of nature. Maybe it is not surprising that the meaning he found excluded human nature.

### HEADING EAST: NEW BEGINNINGS AND EARLY SUCCESS

During the latter half of 1943 and the beginning of 1944, a growing sentiment in favour of the interned Japanese Canadians emerged in King's cabinet, fuelled by legal protection south of the border for the rights of Japanese Americans and changing public opinion in Canada. Even so, strong anti-Japanese feelings continued in British Columbia. On August 4, 1944, the federal and provincial governments reached a compromise, and the process of releasing Japanese Canadians from the camps soon started in earnest.<sup>19</sup> The Canadian government gave internees two options: to be deported to Japan at the conclusion of the war or to relocate east of the Rocky Mountains. Going back to the homes they had left behind in British Columbia was not a choice. Instead, many families were forcibly sent to Japan, where they found a country badly ravaged by the war. Returning to Japan was never an option the Nakamuras considered, however, as they were Canadians.<sup>20</sup>



Repatriation – Down the stairs to the bus logging operations [Tashme Camp], May 31, 1946, photographer unknown, Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver. This photograph is believed to depict a moment wherein Japanese Canadians began their journeys to Eastern provinces in Canada or to Japan during their forced dispersal undertaken by the Federal Government.

A slow trickle of Japanese Canadians had begun to leave the camps as early as 1942 to supplement the Canadian labour force supporting the war effort.<sup>21</sup> Kazuo Nakamura's older brother, Mikio, left Tashme in the spring of 1944 for Toronto, where he settled and found a job. Kazuo and his father intended to join Mikio there, with the rest of the family following when the men had found accommodations and earned some money. Accordingly, Kazuo left Tashme with his father on November 25, 1944. But they found that Toronto had met its government-assigned quota of Japanese Canadians. They settled in nearby Hamilton instead, and the remaining members of the family joined them in March 1945.<sup>22</sup>

Just four months later, on August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, levelling the city, immediately killing around 75,000 people and injuring another 70,000. The radiation from the bomb would lead to further deaths over time from cancer. Among those killed when the bomb detonated were some of Nakamura's relatives. A second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, killing an estimated 40,000 more people and injuring 25,000 others. On August 10, the Emperor of Japan saw there was no choice



but to surrender to the Allies. He made the official announcement on August 15. In an interview late in his career, Nakamura was asked how the bombing affected him. He responded: "The good thing is it made the Japanese surrender."<sup>23</sup> He did not speak publicly about this time, but an article from the *Toronto Star* of August 6, 1995, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima was found among his papers at the time of his death.<sup>24</sup>

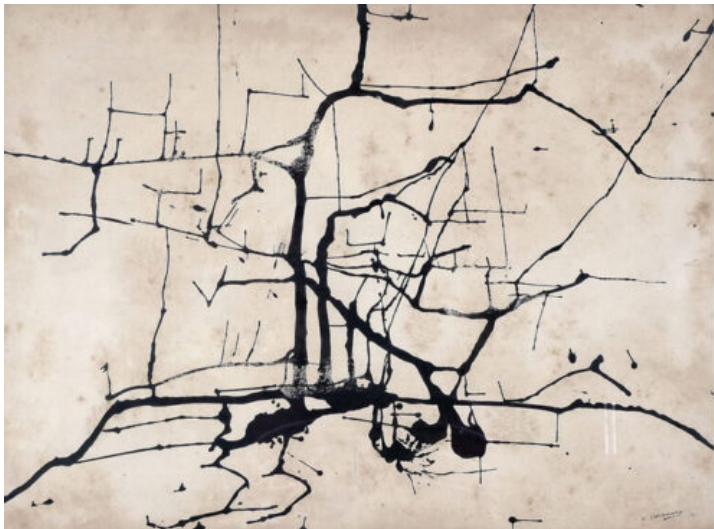
Once settled in Hamilton, nineteen-year-old Nakamura found a job as a semi-skilled labourer at Kraft Containers Ltd., a box factory. He continued to paint in his spare time, producing works like *Nightfall, Hamilton*, 1945, and later recalled that the first book he bought in Hamilton was a volume on Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890).<sup>25</sup> He enrolled in a painting class in the evening at the Hamilton Technical School, and around this time he decided on a career in commercial art.<sup>26</sup> To that end, he moved to Toronto in August 1947 and worked for a year at a sheet-metal shop. But soon, as Nakamura put it, "I decided there were easier ways of making a living."<sup>27</sup>

Nakamura began his formal art training in Toronto in 1948, enrolling as a student in the Art Department of Central Technical School (CTS). The vocational high school was well regarded for its excellent adult education programs and its art department, which had graduated four members of the Group of Seven.<sup>28</sup> Among its faculty at the time Nakamura joined was Doris McCarthy (1910-2010), who was his landscape painting instructor.<sup>29</sup> When asked what he learned at CTS, Nakamura related to art historian Joan Murray: "As far as the school goes it's a case of learning to draw. I think that was the main thing . . . drawing from a still life or from a life study."<sup>30</sup>

He also acknowledged that the director of the art department, Peter Haworth (1889-1986), had made an impression on him.<sup>31</sup> Given Haworth's enthusiasm for the Bauhaus and its combination of crafts and fine arts, he may have shared some of its leading principles and ideas with Nakamura.<sup>32</sup> An English translation of *New Vision* by the Bauhaus master László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) had just been published in 1947, followed by a new work, *Vision in Motion*, which expanded on the ideas in the first book. Moholy-Nagy's emphasis on the importance of modern technology, the need for art and science to work in harmony, and his discussions of the work of Paul Cézanne and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) would have caught Nakamura's attention.<sup>33</sup>



Kazuo Nakamura, *Hamilton*, December 28, 1944, watercolour on paper, 30 x 22 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled*, 1951, watercolour on paper, 37 x 50 cm, private collection. RIGHT: Piet Mondrian, *Gray Tree*, 1911, oil on canvas, 78.5 x 107.5 cm, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Netherlands.

Also of interest was the work of British painters Ben Nicholson (1894–1982), Matthew Smith (1879–1959), and Paul Nash (1889–1946). A good number of the CTS instructors were British or educated within a British tradition.<sup>34</sup> As well, major Canadian art galleries of the 1940s and 1950s were collecting art by British painters, and thus this art was frequently exhibited and written about.<sup>35</sup> For his part, Nakamura appreciated Nicholson for his skill in design, Smith for colour, and Nash for his draftsmanship.<sup>36</sup>

Nakamura's own work from this period continued in the vein of the cityscapes he had painted in Vancouver and from memory in Tashme. Many were done at night, such as *Evening Shadow*, 1949. His colours were more varied and a little richer, likely reflecting his ability to purchase more supplies than he could afford at Tashme. Landscapes, though, predominate, with numerous pictures of the open spaces north of Toronto, as can be seen in *Winter, Don River*, 1949.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Winter, Don River*, 1949, graphite and watercolour, 38.1 x 56.8 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

In addition to his formal studies, Nakamura took night classes taught by Albert Franck (1899–1973), who touted him as an aspiring artist and invited him to join the legendary gatherings of artists that he and his wife, Florence Vale, hosted in their Gerrard Street Village home.<sup>37</sup> It was during those evenings that Nakamura first met Oscar Cahén (1916–1956), Harold Town (1924–1990), Walter Yarwood (1917–1996), and Ray Mead (1921–1998), all future members of Painters Eleven. They, in turn, initiated him into the Toronto art scene.





Kazuo Nakamura, *Landscape*, 1952, watercolour and ink on paper, 37.8 x 52.4 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

Nakamura's new friends inspired him to begin experimenting with his art.<sup>38</sup> Some of his city views and landscapes began to take on a more ethereal, atmospheric look, with *Composition 10-51*, 1951, showing a series of bridges and electrical power lines as a network of lines emerging through a fog or morning mist. In *Landscape*, 1952, the horizontal format and concentration of forms and lines in the lower half are, with the title, the only hints of a landscape as the subject of this work. In both works Nakamura begins to seriously toy with abstraction.

Franck, with R.F. Valkenberg, also organized the first public show in which Nakamura's work appeared. In 1950 two of Nakamura's paintings, *Noon Shadows*, c.1950, and *Red Stools*, c.1950, were shown at the inaugural Unaffiliated Artists show at Eaton's College Street store alongside works by Town and Cahén.<sup>39</sup> Nakamura showed again at Unaffiliated Artists the following year. His work *Beach Statue*, n.d., was then included in the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour exhibition, and he joined that society shortly after—an opportunity that likely came about through Jock Macdonald, who became the president of the society in 1952.<sup>40</sup> It was also in 1951 that Nakamura graduated from Central Technical School.

In 1952 Nakamura showed two new works, *Distant Valley*, 1952, and *Swamp Land*, 1952, in an exhibition hosted by the Canadian Society of Graphic Art. However, the highlight of that year was Nakamura's first solo exhibition, held November 1-14 at the Picture Loan Society. Douglas Duncan (1902-1968), the founder and director of the society, started to show an interest in the emerging

artists of the Toronto art scene in the early 1950s and hosted the first solo exhibitions for Nakamura, Harold Town, and Alexandra Luke (1901–1967).<sup>41</sup> The Picture Loan Society exhibition was an impressive achievement for an artist who was just one year out of school. And just a year later, Hart House at the University of Toronto hosted Nakamura's second solo exhibition, which may have been secured by Macdonald.



LEFT: Exhibition advertisement for *Drawings and Paintings by Kazuo Nakamura* at the Picture Loan Society in Toronto, 1952, Collection of Jane Nakamura. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Reflections*, 1952, graphite and ink on paper, 38 x 55.9 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

In less than ten years, then, Nakamura had gone from “enemy alien” to celebrated emerging artist. Franck’s backing as well as Macdonald’s support and the resulting friendships opened many doors for the young artist. And he arrived in Toronto as a generation of artists was breaking down barriers in art, gender, and race. In particular, details were emerging about the harsh treatment and human rights violations that Japanese Canadians had endured during the Second World War. Social and political changes were creating new opportunities, and the postwar Toronto art scene nurtured Nakamura’s talent and the talent of many young Japanese Canadian artists and architects, including Stan Shikatani (b.1928), Aiko Suzuki (1937–2005), Takao Tanabe (b.1926), and Raymond Moriyama (b.1929).

### PAINTERS ELEVEN AND CRITICAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The 1950s elevated Kazuo Nakamura to one of Canada’s elite artists, or at the very least one of its most innovative. The successes he accrued shortly after graduating from Central Technical School continued, and he gradually ascended to national and then international attention by the end of the decade.



In October 1953, Nakamura participated in the *Abstracts at Home* exhibition organized by William Ronald (1926–1998) and Carry Cardell and held in the furniture department at Simpson's in Toronto.<sup>42</sup> It featured the work of seven artists—Ronald, Alexandra Luke, Oscar Cahén, Jack Bush (1907–1977), Tom Hodgson (1924–2006), Ray Mead, and Nakamura—whose works were shown in different home-like settings.<sup>43</sup>

Ronald had worked as a designer for Simpson's, and the idea of showing radical art in a department store perfectly embodied "making the complacent living rooms of Toronto safe for abstract art"—a goal that would be critical to Painters Eleven, the group these artists would soon establish.<sup>44</sup> Cardell, a Dutch artist trained in Bauhaus-influenced institutions in Amsterdam and The Hague, was friends with Jock Macdonald from when they were both teaching in Calgary, and she had a hand in the furniture settings.

Although the exhibition was titled *Abstracts at Home*, the four pieces Nakamura contributed were landscapes. *Morning Landscape*, 1953, for example, was likely included in the show because it bordered on the abstract like some of his other figurative work at the time. Nakamura's display for the exhibition included three paintings, one above the other, against a "grass wallpaper," with a low and wide coffee table below and two cushions on the ground. It was clearly meant to suggest an "Oriental" setting.<sup>45</sup> To further suggest the works' fit in the modern home, an advertisement for *Abstracts at Home* in the *Globe and Mail* listed each room's contents with their associated prices.

Unfortunately, the reception of *Abstracts at Home* did not match expectations. The idea that showing contemporary art in a "home" setting in a department store might appeal to the middle-class consumer did not translate into sales. As Nakamura succinctly noted, "It didn't communicate to the average person."<sup>46</sup> Nor did the exhibition draw any critical attention—there is no record of any reviews. Nevertheless, the seven artists got together for publicity shots and then met up again at Ronald's studio, where they decided to form a group that would exhibit their abstract art for Toronto audiences.



LEFT: Publicity photo taken to advertise *Abstracts at Home* exhibition, October 1953, photograph by Everett Roseborough, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. RIGHT: Advertisement for *Abstracts at Home* exhibition in 1953 published in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.



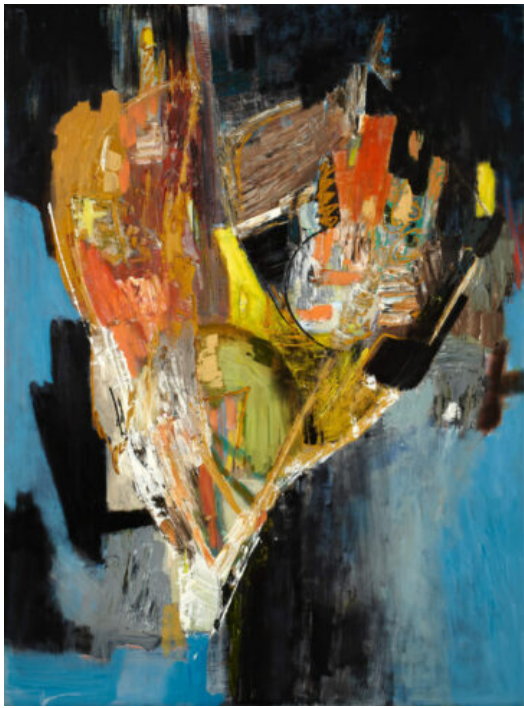


Kazuo Nakamura, *Morning Landscape*, 1953, ink wash on paper, 38.1 x 56.1 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

An expanded group met at Luke's cottage in Oshawa a few weeks later and at this meeting formed Painters Eleven. Ronald brought Macdonald, Mead asked Hortense Gordon (1886-1961), and Cahén invited two of his advertising friends, Walter Yarwood and Harold Town. The name of the group simply reflected the number of members and their artistic medium. Although their first show, which featured the work of Jack Bush and opened in February 1954 at Toronto's Roberts Gallery, drew large audiences, there were few sales. This outcome was not atypical for any groundbreaking exhibition.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the public was officially introduced to "the first rat pack of Toronto modernism."<sup>48</sup>

For the longest time, Nakamura was known largely for his membership in Painters Eleven, though his work is far more subdued than the stylistic brashness of his colleagues. Compare Nakamura's *Summer Brilliance*, 1955, for example, with Alexandra Luke's *Blue Dynasty*, c.1955, or Harold Town's *Tumult for a King*, 1954, and one wonders why Nakamura joined the group. Yet without Painters Eleven, Nakamura's name might have long been forgotten. His participation opened doors for him and, ironically, because his work was so different from that of the rest of the group, it tended to stand out. He was a happy and willing participant despite his shyness, and he remained fond of his colleagues and followed news of their activities—even showing up at their art openings—long after the group had disbanded.





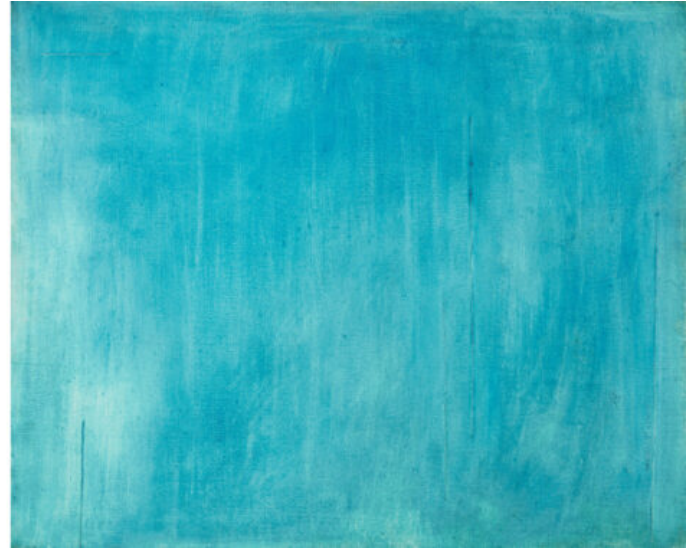
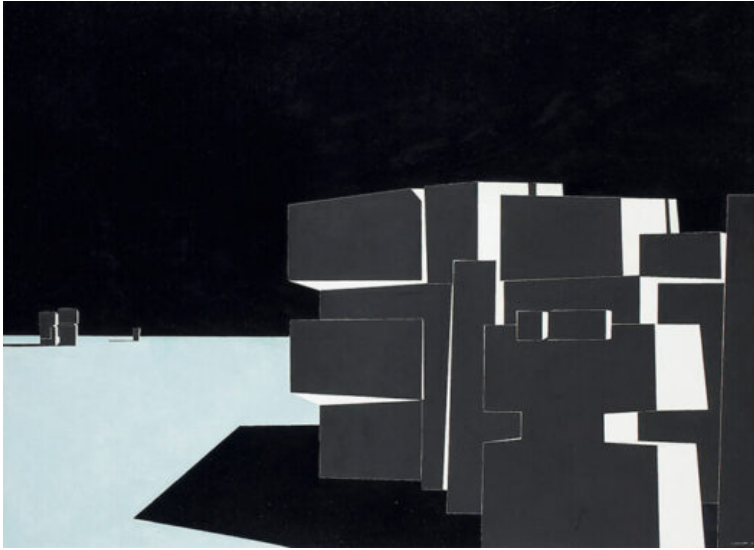
LEFT: Alexandra Luke, *Blue Dynasty*, c.1955, oil on canvas, 181.9 x 135.8 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Summer Brilliance*, 1955, oil on Masonite, 35.6 x 45.8 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

Nakamura's involvement with Painters Eleven came as he was evolving an abstract style, as seen with *Morning Landscape* and *Summer Brilliance*; however, he continued to produce images with recognizable subject matter, as in *Untitled*, 1955. The other members of the group, who were all committed to abstraction, did not seem to see Nakamura's figurative work as a concern. And only once, when Ronald was organizing Painters Eleven's participation as guest artists of the 20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists (AAA) held at the Riverside Museum in New York in 1956, did it become an issue. The AAA instructed Ronald that all the works shown had to be abstract, a point he reiterated in a letter to Bush: "No watercolours and all abstract. No landscape to the extent of Nak's [Nakamura's] stuff in our last show."<sup>49</sup> Ironically, one of the two works that Nakamura submitted and exhibited was *White Landscape*, 1953.

The group's early success had landed them the invitation to the Riverside Museum exhibition, and it was an important moment in all of their careers. Though the reviews for the show were underwhelming, the fact of being shown in New York alongside works by Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and Franz Kline (1910-1962) further propelled their reputation in Canada.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, on the heels of this international exposure, Cahén was killed in a car accident in November 1956, and Ronald resigned from the group a year later. The remaining members continued to exhibit together, with some important shows in Toronto and Montreal, for another four years. In October 1960 the group disbanded.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled*, 1955, oil on canvas, 60.9 x 81.2 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

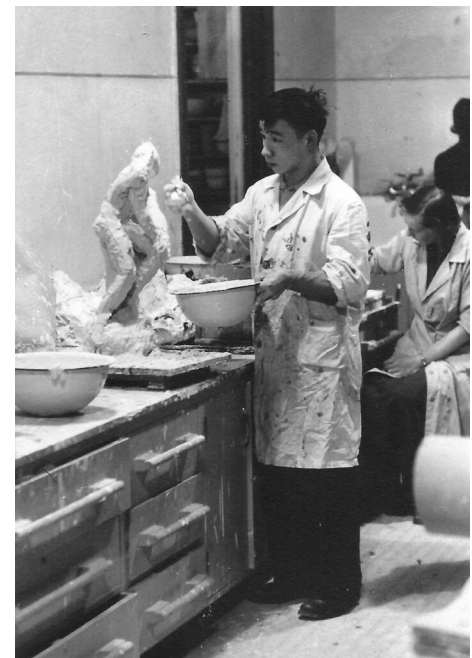


LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Fortress*, 1956, oil and graphite on tempered hardboard, 88.3 x 121.6 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Into Space*, 1954, oil and string on canvas, 55.9 x 68.8 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

In the time the group was together, Painters Eleven did not have an ideology beyond wanting to expose Toronto audiences to some exciting new abstract art. The artists felt they would have far better opportunities to exhibit as a group than individually, which they had, and would gain more attention together, which they did. The group members were allowed to take their art in the direction they wanted to. As Tom Hodgson mentioned in a 1990 interview with Joan Murray, "It was their business what they did and no one ever said anything about anybody else's work."<sup>51</sup> Nakamura, inspired by the work of his colleagues, boldly decided to try new things in his own.

The period of Painters Eleven was a time of great experimentation for Nakamura. Although he started out predominantly painting landscapes like *Farm*, 1954, he then produced abstract works like *Inner View*, 1954, and *Inner Structure*, 1956. Alongside these, he painted eerie, imaginary open spaces populated by block-like forms, such as *Fortress*, 1956, which culminated in his 1966 public commission, *Two Horizons* (installed 1968). These Block paintings were widely exhibited in the mid-1950s. Then there were the String works, probably Nakamura's most radical and innovative paintings, of which *Infinite Waves*, 1957, is one of the best-known examples.

The explosion of creativity also expressed itself occasionally in sculpture. A photograph taken at Central Technical School shows that Nakamura did some sculpting as a student, and he made a bevy of small sculptures—most no taller than 50 centimetres—out of wire and Hydrocal throughout the 1950s. He only appears to have exhibited a few of them in 1958, and it is unclear what motivated him to do this and why he kept his sculpting mostly to himself. Regardless, it seems almost certain that being with members of Painters Eleven helped Nakamura work out his ideas and gave him the confidence to better articulate them. His interest in science, for example, began to manifest itself more overtly during this period.



Kazuo Nakamura in the sculpture studio in the original Central Technical School building, c.1950, photographer unknown, Collection of the Nakamura family.

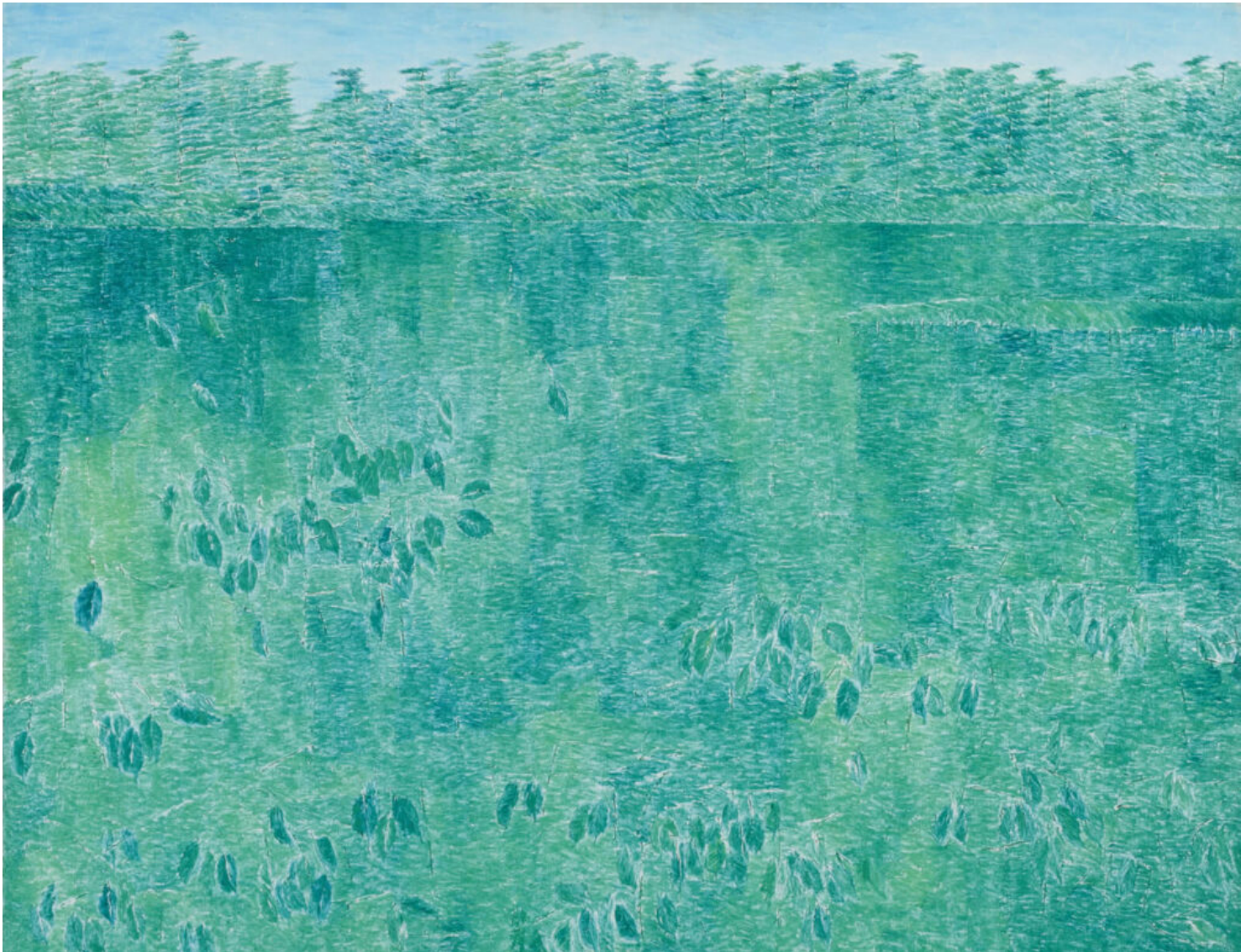
Nakamura's involvement with Painters Eleven also likely helped him achieve successes outside the group. In 1955 his work was selected for the First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting at the National Gallery of Canada.<sup>52</sup> In early



1956 Nakamura received a prize from the International Exhibition of Drawings and Engravings in Lugano, Switzerland, for an ink drawing titled *Four Bridges*, 1954. The work was inspired by the view on a train trip he made to visit some old friends and colleagues at Kraft Containers in Hamilton.<sup>53</sup> That same year the Smithsonian Institution featured his work in the Canadian Abstract Painting exhibition, which was organized by the National Gallery. And between 1957 and 1959 he showed his work in twelve international exhibitions.<sup>54</sup> This individual success may have had Nakamura questioning the value of remaining with Painters Eleven.<sup>55</sup>

### REFLECTIONS ON ART AND LIFE

By 1960 Kazuo Nakamura was at the height of his artistic career, both widely exhibited and collected. The beginning of the decade saw the emergence of his most popular works, his blue/green landscapes. *Lakeside, Summer Morning*, 1961, is an excellent example. These became so popular that even when he started to make his Number Structure paintings in the 1970s, he continued to produce the occasional landscape in this style because they sold quickly. And when art dealer Jerrold Morris added him to his stable of artists in 1962, Nakamura acquired a measure of financial security.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Lakeside, Summer Morning*, 1961, oil on canvas, 60 x 77.5 cm, Museum London.

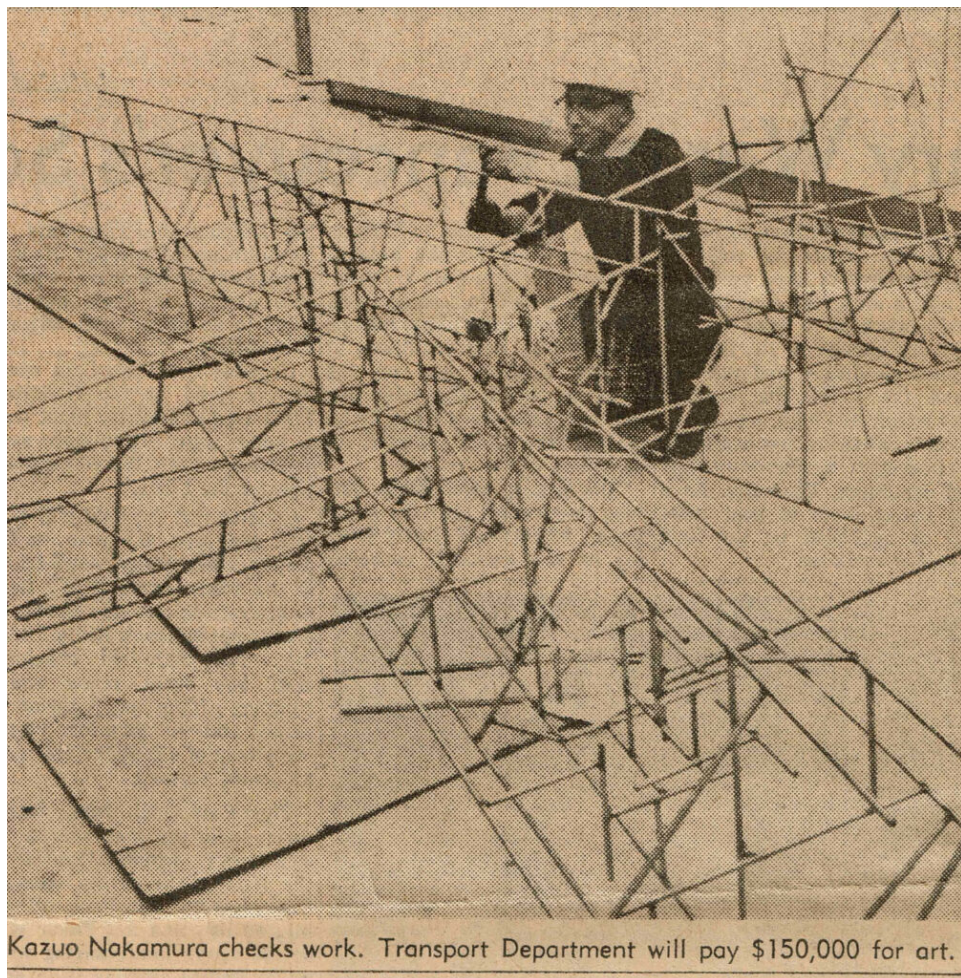


Nakamura's international success continued throughout the decade. In 1961 Alfred Barr acquired *Inner Core 2*, 1960-61, for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and purchased a couple of Nakamura's other works for private American collectors. Barr, who collected the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935) for MoMA, likely saw Nakamura's work as a continuation of the abstract tradition that Malevich helped originate. MoMA's director was probably also aware of Nakamura's String paintings, which he may have considered part of a broader resurgence of monochromatic abstraction represented by the work of Agnes Martin (1912-2004), Robert Ryman (1930-2019), and Piero Manzoni (1933-1963), to name a few.

In the mid-1960s Nakamura participated in two public commissions: a sculpture for Toronto International Airport (now Toronto Pearson International Airport) that was installed in early 1964, and a painting for the Ontario legislature at Queen's Park in 1968. Both pieces were uncharacteristically large. *Galaxies*, Nakamura's nod to early aviation, was notable for two reasons. First, the sculpture recalls the Wright brothers' plane and flagged Nakamura's deeper commitment to science and geometric forms. Second, the installation caused an uproar because of the amount of taxpayer money being spent to acquire and build it. A headline in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* read, "Airport Art Will Cost \$150,000," and the *Toronto Daily Star* proclaimed, "Now YOU Are Canada's Biggest Art Patron."<sup>56</sup>

Neither article complained about the work that was being commissioned. A committee that included the directors of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario), and the National Gallery of Canada had made the final selections, and the quality of all the works made for the airport was remarkable. *Two Horizons*, 1968, the painting for Queen's Park, was installed without controversy.

Throughout the 1960s Nakamura also devoted time as a volunteer for the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, both as an adviser before the building was completed in 1963 and in a variety of roles afterward. It is difficult to say why suddenly Nakamura immersed himself in the Japanese community in Toronto. His brother Mikio, who served as the centre's president for a time, may have encouraged him.<sup>57</sup> Or the community may have reached out to him as a result of his artistic success. Perhaps he felt he owed something to other Japanese Canadians. By that time he certainly was one of their cultural stars—at least until

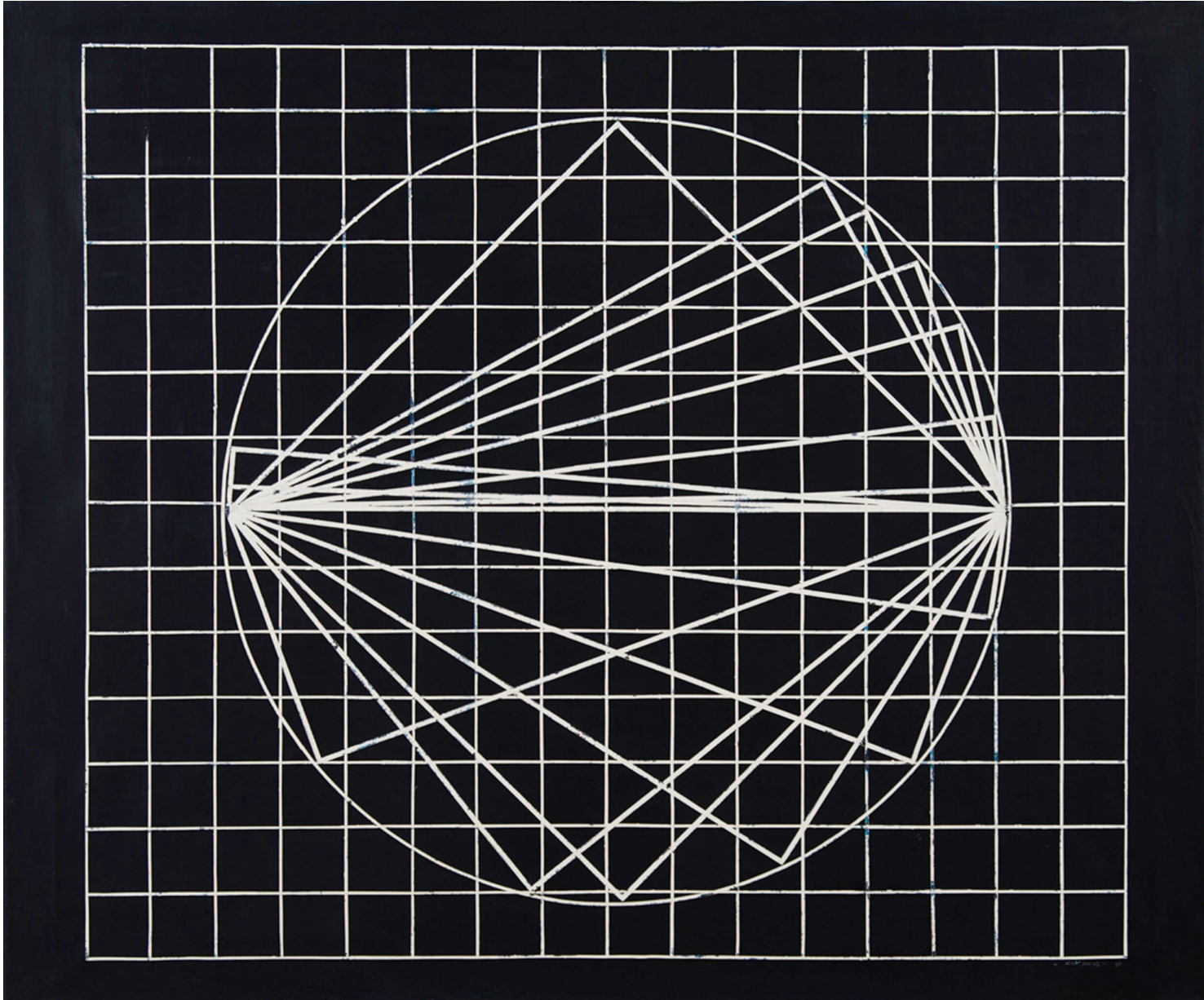


Kazuo Nakamura working on his public installation *Galaxies*, commissioned for Toronto International Airport, published in the *Globe and Mail*, November 28, 1963.



an interview in *Tora* in 1972 in which he stated that through intermarriage “Japanese blood—and the Japanese tradition—will disappear.”<sup>58</sup>

Nakamura himself married in 1967, at the age of forty. He and his wife, Lillian Yuriko Kobayakawa, would have two children, a daughter born in 1968 and a son in 1975. By all accounts, Lillian became the bedrock of Nakamura’s life. She afforded him further peace of mind, which permitted him to focus on his growing passion for geometry and mathematics.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Geometric Suspension*, 1969, oil on canvas, 78.7 x 94 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

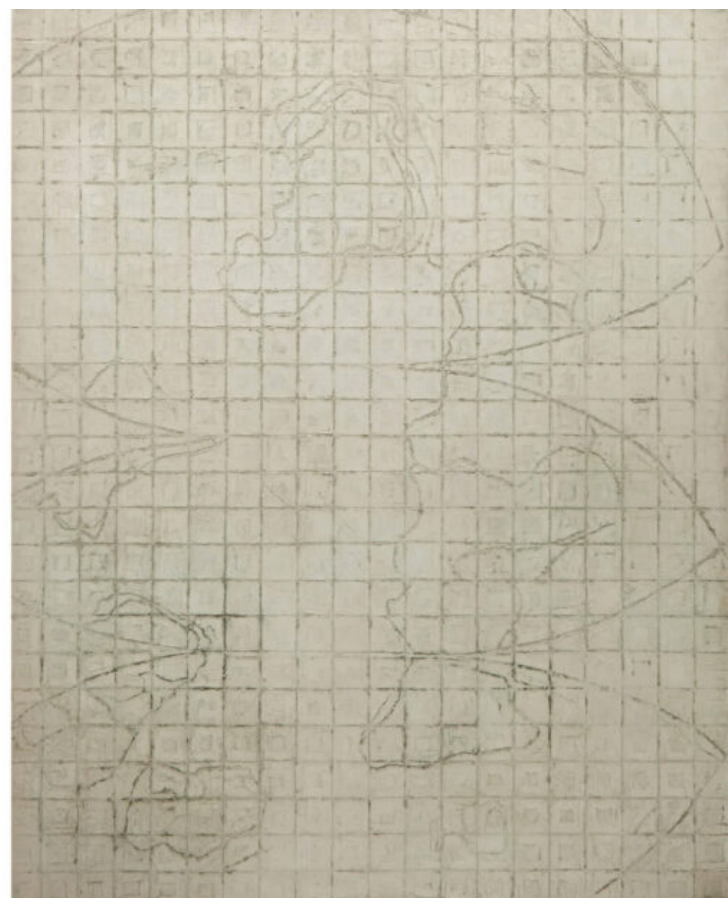
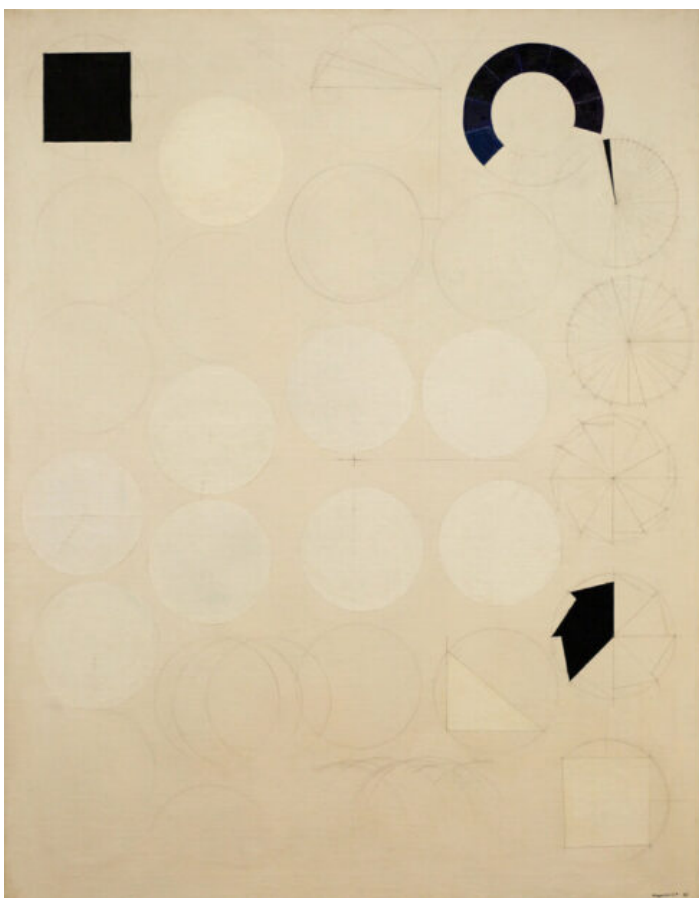
By the late 1960s and the 1970s, Nakamura’s career was firmly established. The geometric forms and grids, as in *Geometric Suspension*, 1969, were a natural progression in the evolution of his art, a point he illustrated explicitly in *Spatial Concept/Evolution*, 1970. Then he was honoured with two retrospective exhibitions. The first was held at the University of Toronto’s Hart House in 1970. The second important retrospective of his work took place just four years later at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery. In the catalogue for that show, Nakamura published his first and only major statement on his work, outside of interviews. He writes:

To analyze art is as complex as science analyzing universal structure and evolution which are based on certain logic and order.

Art is not just emotional vision but more of man's concept or equation of his environment and thoughts.

In the history of art, all civilization and its developing period must be relative to the universal scientific and philosophic concept of its time (or the scientific and philosophic concept may be relative to art).

Every developing phase and facet of science must produce some form of art.<sup>59</sup>



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Spatial Concept*, 1965, graphite and oil on canvas, 109.2 x 86.4 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Conic Structure*, 1962, oil on canvas, 127 x 102 cm, private collection.

Here Nakamura outlines the *modus operandi* for his work to come. He had been preparing the ground for it in the preceding years, but he undertook the journey in earnest after 1974.

### PAINT BY NUMBERS OR NUMBERS TO PAINT BY

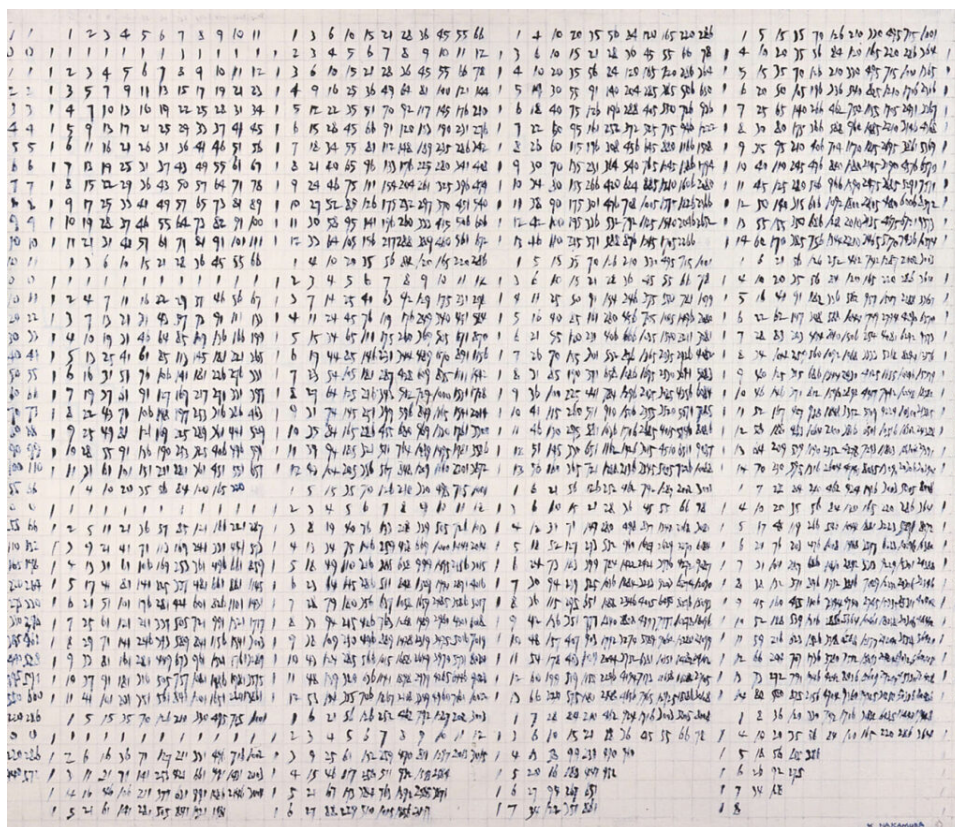
The Number Structure works were, in Kazuo Nakamura's mind, his most important body of work, the culmination of his career. They involve the meticulous calculating and writing out on paper and canvas of numerical sequences in a variety of grid patterns. It was the ability of numbers and sequences to describe universal patterns in nature—such as the rate of growth of the rabbit population, the arrangement of scales on a pine cone or petals on a field daisy—that drew Nakamura to them, and in the Number Structure works he would paint/write out a variety of these, including Fibonacci numbers, Pascal's triangle, Catalan numbers, and fractals.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, these works



disappointed many collectors who associated Nakamura with the paintings he had produced with Painters Eleven. Yet he held that the patterns and themes he was exploring in the Number Structure series lay at the core of all his earlier work.

For a decade after the McLaughlin retrospective, Nakamura stepped back from the art world to focus on the number paintings. He exhibited those works in a major show at the Moore Gallery in Hamilton in 1984. And then, as art dealer Christopher Cutts acknowledged, Nakamura almost entirely stopped contributing new works to exhibitions.<sup>61</sup> He was criticized for becoming something of a hermit, to which he responded: "I'm not really a recluse, I just don't have any small talk."<sup>62</sup>

By the mid-1980s Nakamura finally began to translate some of the numerical series or patterns he had been recording on reams of squared paper. As he stated in a 1993 interview, "I was always interested in internal structures, the law of order that lies in everything.... But I'm doing my most important work now."<sup>63</sup> On occasion he produced a representational painting, usually a landscape—*Reflections*, 1983, and *Untitled*, 1986, are examples. These always sold well. They were also reminders of the visual manifestations the numerical patterns generated. As he put it: "It takes energy to do abstract work. Every once in a while I do landscapes, to do what's on top."<sup>64</sup>



Kazuo Nakamura, *Number Structure No. 5*, 1983, oil on canvas, 55 x 55 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

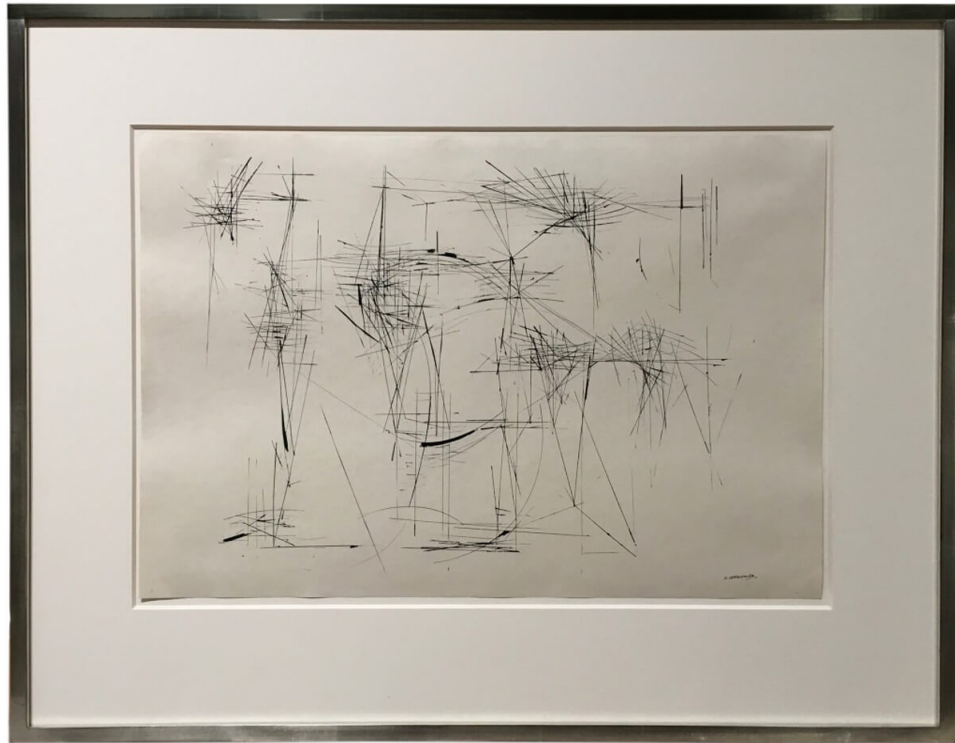


LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Reflections*, 1983, oil on canvas, 46 x 58.5 cm, private collection. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled*, 1986, oil on Masonite, 40.6 x 49.5 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



In 1986 Nakamura returned to Tashme for the first time since the war. He and Lillian visited Vancouver and Expo 86, then drove with Lillian's brother to Hope to visit the "old camp," as Lillian called it in a letter to artist Brian Grison.<sup>65</sup> There is no record of Nakamura's response to this visit, though he drew a sketch of the camp around this time, either during the visit or sometime before the fiftieth anniversary reunion held in Toronto in 1992.

With Nakamura attending fewer events and his art dealer, Jerrold Morris, unenthusiastic about the Number Structure works, the artist might have slipped from view. However, in 1987 Nakamura met Christopher Cutts, who showed a keen interest in the number series. Cutts spent a great deal of time visiting Nakamura, who clearly appreciated the interest and explained the number series to him. The result was one of the better and more accessible texts mapping out the various sequences and their rationale in Nakamura's work.<sup>66</sup> Cutts became Nakamura's new dealer and ensured he would remain in the public eye.

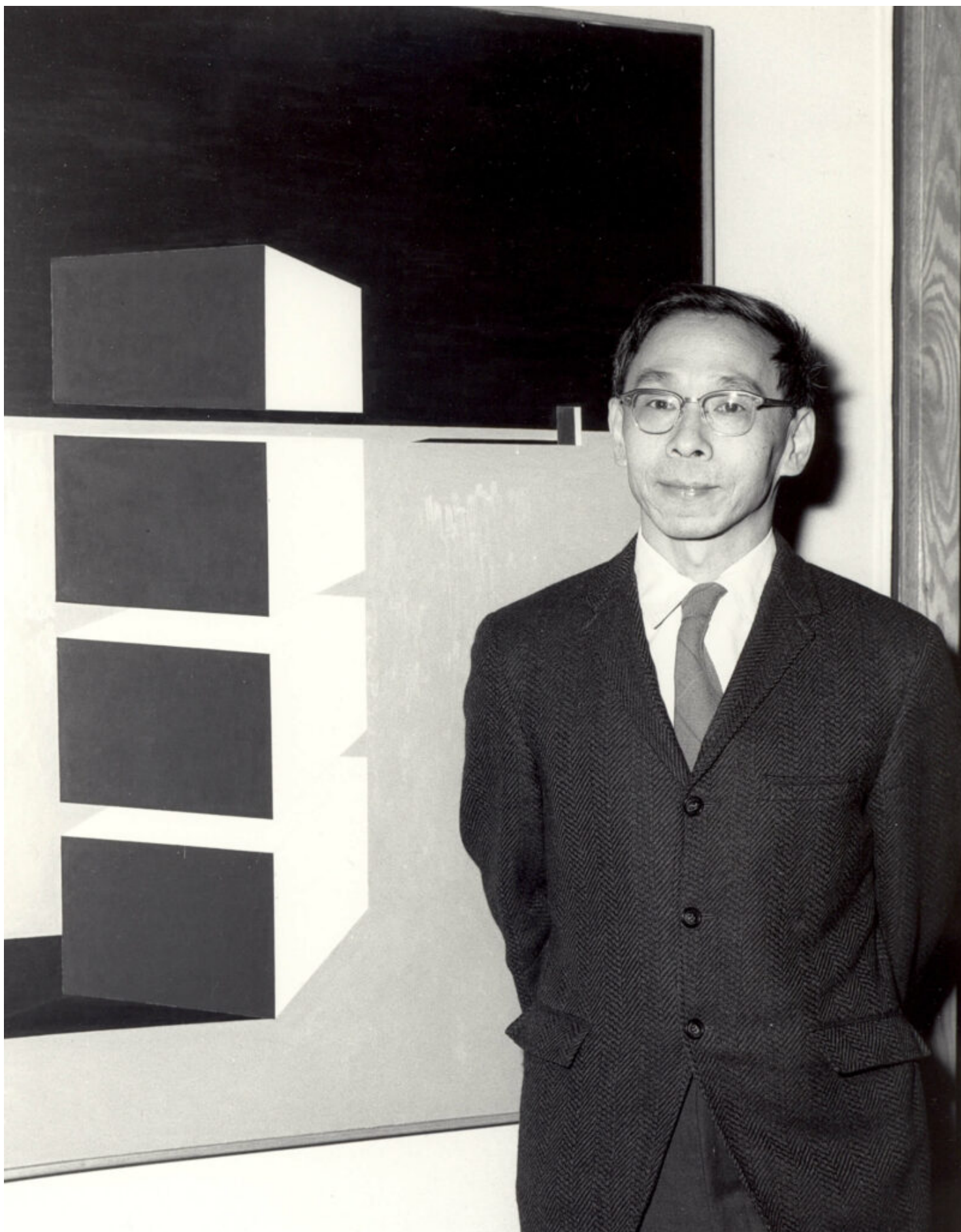


Kazuo Nakamura, *Construction with Lines*, 1958, ink on paper, 37 x 56 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

In the following years, Nakamura continued his work on numbers while cheering on his favourite baseball team, the Toronto Blue Jays. He sold two drawings—*Vertical Lines*, 1953, and *Evening No. 2*, 1964—to the British Museum in 1993, and was named an honorary fellow of the Ontario College of Art and Design (now OCAD University). However, sometime in the late 1990s Nakamura began to develop symptoms of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's disease, and eventually was no longer able to draw. His health quickly deteriorated at the time his work was coming back into prominence nationally, and he died on April 9, 2002, at the age of seventy-five.

Nakamura lived long enough, though, to see two more important exhibitions of his work. In 2001 the Gendai Gallery of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre held an exhibition of the Tashme works, which had rarely been shown. That same year, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery put together a major retrospective that toured the country, framed by stops in Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan. Nakamura was also aware that the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in Toronto was planning a major exhibition of his works. And in 2004, the AGO honoured him with the retrospective exhibition *Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure*. These three shows were a fitting tribute to the life of one of the great lights of modern art in Canada.





Kazuo Nakamura with his work *Suspension*, October 30, 1979, photographer unknown, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. This photograph was taken by a staff photographer at the vernissage for the exhibition *Painters Eleven In Retrospective* at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.





# KEY WORKS

The stunning variety of works in Kazuo Nakamura's oeuvre reflects an intensely curious, experimental mind that sought to dissect nature, intent on understanding its underlying structure. At first he painted cityscapes of Vancouver, then the wilderness of the British Columbia interior where his family was interned during the Second World War. After he settled in Toronto, his works explored the nature of time and space, oscillating between figuration and abstraction. Drawing on mathematics, science, philosophy, and art history, and blending Eastern and Western influences, Nakamura created art that gradually peeled away the layers of the visible world to expose the beauty of its numerical structure.



## FIRST FROST 1941



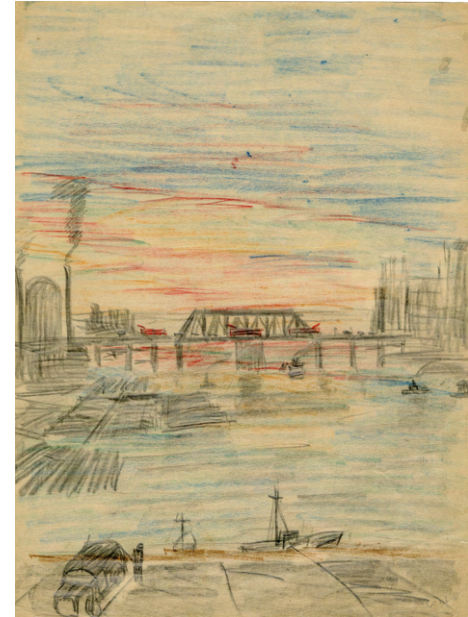
Kazuo Nakamura, *First Frost*, 1941  
Watercolour and graphite on paper, 22.3 x 30.3 cm  
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa

Kazuo Nakamura was only fifteen when he created this watercolour painting, which is one of his earliest surviving pieces. *First Frost* shows a street scene with houses and shops in early fall on East Hastings Street. The leafless trees and preponderance of grey and earth colours capture the barrenness of the season.

*First Frost* introduces pictorial concerns that dominate Nakamura's mature work. Here he grapples with linear perspective, which his brother Yukio was learning at school and passing on to Kazuo. There is also a strong emphasis on line and outline, an early indication, as artist and historian Brian Grison argues, of Nakamura's life-long use of the grid as a structuring element in his drawings and paintings.<sup>1</sup> At the very least, the lines suggest possible visual patterns, anticipating Nakamura's use of line in his abstracting works of the early 1950s.

The colour palette is limited, perhaps intentionally or maybe because Nakamura lacked confidence working with colours—or both. Many of his later works also use a limited colour palette, which suggests the choice here was deliberate. The result is an overall tonal quality that pulls the elements of the painting together. There is an air of detachment, or “sobriety,” as Bryce Kanbara put it, an objectivity that goes beyond the mere absence of people in the scene.<sup>2</sup> Strangely enough, this detachment does not preclude a certain warmth emanating from the work. *First Frost* demonstrates the emergence of a precocious talent.

Although Nakamura painted many urban scenes during his time in Vancouver, the presence of built structures is faint in his work after 1944. Possibly because he was forcibly uprooted from the city to the internment camp at Tashme a year after he painted *First Frost*, his focus turned to landscapes. Even when he relocated to Hamilton and then Toronto after the war, he spent his time painting areas yet to be developed north and east of the city.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Vancouver, Old Cambie Street Bridge*, 1942, coloured pencil on paper, 30.1 x 22.4 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.



## TWELVE MILE LAKE 1944



Kazuo Nakamura, *Twelve Mile Lake*, 1944  
Watercolour, pen, and ink on paper, 19.3 x 24.4 cm  
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa

*Twelve Mile Lake* is one of the works Kazuo Nakamura painted at Tashme, where he and his family were interned as “enemy aliens” from 1942 to 1944, shortly after Canada declared war on Japan. The scene depicts a lake ringed by forest and mountains, whose reflections appear in the still waters. Like most of the watercolours he did at Tashme, the colours are dark because Nakamura painted at dusk or at night, in the few moments of free time he had between cutting wood all day and attending his high school night classes.

The Tashme landscapes presented Nakamura with new challenges. Whereas he used the streets and buildings of Vancouver to structure his urban scenes and the rows of cultivated farmlands outside that city to ground his early landscapes (*Strawberry Farm*, c.1941), the lakes, forests, and mountains of the British Columbia interior seemed to offer nothing but a chaotic mess.<sup>1</sup> Yet art allowed



Nakamura to better understand and control his new surroundings, and to escape the events that had torn him away from his life in Vancouver. Ironically, Nakamura's depictions of the camp, in paintings like *Tashme at Dusk*, *July/August 1944*, show an ordered world, in contrast to the wilds of the B.C. interior.

*Twelve Mile Lake* is arguably the most accomplished of the Tashme landscapes. The high horizon, an inevitable consequence of the mountainous region, allows Nakamura to dispense with any thoughts of applying linear perspective. But he continues to generate a dialogue between depth and surface, an effect found in the Vancouver works. The dark coloration, high horizon and mountains in the background, and the foliage of the trees that act as a screen, all serve to flatten the image. The open lake, however, draws the eye into the picture, aided by the reflections on the water.



David B. Milne, *Pink Reflections, Bishop's Pond*, 24 August 1920, watercolour over graphite on wove paper, 37.7 x 54.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

The landscape with reflections on a still lake would become a dominant theme of Nakamura's signature paintings of the late 1950s and the 1960s. *Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964, is another lake surrounded by trees and forest, the water luminous against the darker background. Even the technique in *Twelve Mile Lake*, with its spidery network of lines to describe the trees, became a key feature of later works, as can be seen in *Forest*, 1953.

There is a tantalizing parallel between *Twelve Mile Lake* and works by Canadian painter and printmaker David Milne (1882-1953), such as *Pink Reflections, Bishop's Pond*, 1920, which also has a high horizon line and uses trees to flatten the background and the overall picture plane. And in both Nakamura's and Milne's works, the reflections on the water function as a perspective device. It is difficult to establish where Nakamura might have seen Milne's work for the first time, but an invitation to a 1980 National Gallery of Canada exhibition of Milne's prints was found among Nakamura's papers at the time of his death. If Milne was not a direct influence, Nakamura certainly felt an affinity for his work.



## AUTUMN C.1950



Kazuo Nakamura, *Autumn*, c.1950  
Oil on tempered hardboard, 61.1 x 48.3 cm  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto



*Autumn* appears to be Kazuo Nakamura's first still-life painting. Created while he was a student at Central Technical School in Toronto, this work depicts a potted tree or plant sitting on a table with a view of the forest behind. Still lifes often function as bridges between the human-made and natural worlds, and here the domestic plant is juxtaposed against the wild forest.

As is the tradition of the still life, especially as it evolved in Europe in the seventeenth century, Nakamura's *Autumn* marks the passage of time and acts as a memento mori. The seasonal reference of the title and the contrast between the foliage of the evergreens in the background and the bare branches of the potted tree in the middle ground reference the cycle of life against the backdrop of a more permanent, underlying order.

In fact, an odd flip is occurring here: just as in the Tashme paintings, an apparent chaos of the natural world conceals a subtle underlying structure revealed through pattern.<sup>1</sup> Yet the still life is a far more intimate expression of this theme and reflects the changes occurring in Nakamura's life. Now settled in Toronto with his family and focusing on his chosen craft, the artist paints *Autumn* as something of a sigh of relief, a moment of peaceful reflection. However, the contrast between our manufactured reality and nature, between the illusion of perfection shattered by the war and what nature could offer, remains.



LEFT: Paul Cézanne, *House in Provence (Maison en Provence)*, c.1890, oil on canvas, 65.5 x 81.2 cm, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia.  
RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Still-Life*, 1959, oil on board, 33 x 24.1 cm, private collection.

The wooden table on which the potted fruit tree sits is drawn along perspective lines, leading the eye from the foreground to the background. This appears to be a more controlled, measured organization than the forest behind it or the randomly extending branches of the potted tree. Yet there is a pattern to the apparent chaos of the foliage, which is evident in the very structured horizontal brushstrokes Nakamura used to paint it. The potted tree gradually blends into this mass of leaves.

Stylistically, the brushwork in the background recalls Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). In a letter to fellow French artist Émile Bernard on April 15, 1904, Cézanne



suggested that he “deal with nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone”<sup>2</sup>—in other words, that he use geometry to find order in the natural world. In *Autumn*, Nakamura also adopts Cézanne’s typical play between surface and depth, flatness and space. For example, he paints objects like the fruit partly in the round and partly flat.<sup>3</sup>

*Autumn* also appears to reference the famous tree paintings of Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), whom Nakamura mentioned as an influence in an interview he gave in 1979.<sup>4</sup> Mondrian’s *Gray Tree*, 1911, for example, shows a leafless tree gradually beginning to blend with the surrounding space. This series of line works eventually led to pure abstraction in Mondrian’s Neo-Plastic compositions.

Nakamura continued to paint still lifes periodically throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s, culminating in an intriguing series of works that depict mirrored objects, such as *Reversed Images*, 1965.



## MORNING MIST 1951



Kazuo Nakamura, *Morning Mist*, 1951  
Oil on board, 78.7 x 61 cm  
Collection of John and Katia Bianchini



*Morning Mist* is one of the best early examples of Kazuo Nakamura's ongoing dialogue with figuration and abstraction. At its core, this is a dialogue between the visible world and its underlying laws, manifested largely through pattern. Here we see the outlines of a landscape or cityscape glimpsed through the blue/green mist. This painting essentially combines Nakamura's emerging drawing style, as seen in *Trees*, 1951, with his growing adoption of a blue/green palette that will dominate the balance of his painted work.

*Morning Mist* picks up where *Autumn*, c.1950, left off. We are still looking at a series of patterns, but here the focus is more on highlighting the patterns themselves. In an odd way, the mist makes these patterns clearer by obliterating the objects that produce them. As the title makes clear, the painting is also something of a metaphor for the veil of nature that conceals its underlying order.

Shortly after he arrived in Hamilton, Nakamura purchased a book about the art of Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), which may well have inspired aspects of this painting.<sup>1</sup> Van Gogh avidly collected Japanese woodblock prints and frequently borrowed elements from that tradition in his own works. Nakamura would have been familiar with these works too, from looking through his uncle's Japanese art magazines as a child. *Morning Mist* bears several hallmarks of Japanese woodblock prints, including the green, and especially the blue, colours, as well as the linear structure of feathery lines created by using sharp-edged cards or razors to apply and spread ink and paint. Takao Tanabe (b.1926), another Japanese Canadian artist, was producing similar feathery lines at the time, as seen in *Mountain Landscape*, 1952.

Some writers have noted that the grid-like system of thin lines in *Morning Mist* also brings to mind work by the Swiss artist Paul Klee (1879–1940).<sup>2</sup> Yet when Nakamura was asked many years later about Klee's influence on his work, he denied that he was familiar with Klee's work, let alone influenced by it.<sup>3</sup> As Brian Grison suggests, Klee's influence may have been indirect. The art program at Central Technical School (CTS), where Nakamura was a student, was heavily influenced by the Bauhaus, the German art institution where Klee taught. And Virginia Luz (1911–2005), who taught Nakamura illustration at CTS, employed a fine line and uniform washes of colour in her work, which may be where he learned of it.<sup>4</sup>

*Morning Mist* presages the Inner Structure works of the mid-1950s, with their uniform use of colour, mostly greens and blues, and their floating black lines unrelated to any objects. We also see a similar use of line in the wire sculptures Nakamura was making at the beginning of the 1950s. And *Untitled*, c.1950s, could easily be mistaken for the linear pattern that might be revealed in *Morning Mist* once the mist has cleared.



Katsushika Hokusai, *The Care-of-the-aged Falls in Mino Province (Mino no kuni Yôrô no taki)*, c.1832, woodblock print (*nishiki-e*), ink and colour on paper, 36 x 25.3 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



## HILLSIDE 1954



Kazuo Nakamura, *Hillside*, 1954  
Oil on Masonite, 59.8 x 78.4 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

*Hillside* was one of the first works by Kazuo Nakamura purchased by the National Gallery of Canada—it was acquired in 1955. This depiction of a dense forest along the side of a hill is yet another stylistic variant in the artist's exploration of the line between figuration and abstraction, appearance and underlying structure. *Hillside* is an interesting combination of the brushwork found in the background of *Autumn*, c.1950, which would recur in some of his contemporary landscapes, such as *Landscape, Green Hill-side*, 1954, and the spidery lines in his drawings and in *Morning Mist*, 1951.

In this painting, Nakamura seems to be trying to match up a rectilinear application of colour, likely informed by the late work of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), such as in *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, 1902–4, with line loosely enclosing the colour.<sup>1</sup> He continues to limit his palette to a very small range of colours, predominantly green in this painting, but also some blue. Like *Morning Mist*, it



has a striking similarity to the greens and blues Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) preferred late in his career. Nakamura admired van Gogh, and his palette may have inspired the yellow colour that we find in *Hillside*.<sup>2</sup>

Nakamura mentioned Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) as an important influence during the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> And perhaps coincidentally, Mondrian's *Painting No. 4*, 1913, also juggles line and colour, with the former loosely framing the latter. Both artists were very consciously evolving their art toward abstraction, and Nakamura highlights a progression of periods such as the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, as well as the Cubists.<sup>4</sup> Mondrian shared this idea, although his art was informed by the beliefs of theosophy, in which the material world would give way to an immaterial, spiritual reality. In contrast, Nakamura's art was inspired by science, which would reveal the underlying geometric and mathematical order of the universe.



LEFT: Piet Mondrian, *Tableau n° 4 (Painting No. 4) / Composition No. VIII / Composition 3*, 1913, oil on canvas, 95 x 80 cm, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Netherlands. RIGHT: William Ronald, *Untitled*, 1954, watercolour and ink on paper, 49.5 x 65 cm, private collection.

Although Nakamura is known to have been influenced by European artists at this point in his career, *Hillside* was created as Painters Eleven was born, and it is essential to consider this influence also. *Hillside* does give the appearance of an informal, gestural work, somewhat similar to what other members of the group were creating. Yet it is highly structured and controlled, and lacks the boldness and brashness Harold Town (1924–1990) infused in *Neon*, 1954–55, or even that of a more subdued work by William Ronald (1926–1998) like *Untitled*, 1954. The result, as writer Rory Hinton has aptly noted, is that

Oddly enough, this early painting proves why Nakamura is both the most and the least abstract of the Painters Eleven. He is the least abstract since his work is not about his inner psychological landscape as a painter (unlike his abstract contemporaries). And yet precisely because of this, his work is the most abstract since it seeks to accurately represent the outer physical landscape of abstract reality.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Nakamura's abstraction was directed at exploring the underlying structure of the visible world, as opposed to capturing emotional states in their raw form.



## INNER STRUCTURE 1956



Kazuo Nakamura, *Inner Structure*, 1956  
Oil on hardboard, 60.8 x 78.8 cm  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

*Inner Structure* presents a seemingly chaotic pattern of lines in a nebulous blue field. It is one of a number of works that are all similar in composition and colouring, although occasionally Kazuo Nakamura painted the lines on an orange/yellow field, as with *Inner Movement*, 1954. Collectively these works are known as the Inner Structure series. They distill the essence of what is hinted at in works like *Autumn*, c.1950, *Morning Mist*, 1951, and *Hillside*, 1954—the internal structure of nature<sup>1</sup>—which Nakamura had been exploring through a natural progression of artistic styles from figuration to abstraction. *Inner Structure* therefore represents a culmination of sorts, or at least a reflection of his investigations up to that moment.

The painting reflects Nakamura's interest in the motion of the structural foundation of the world. It is a point he made in 1993, stating, "we are living in an age where we can see a structure, a structure based on atomic structure and

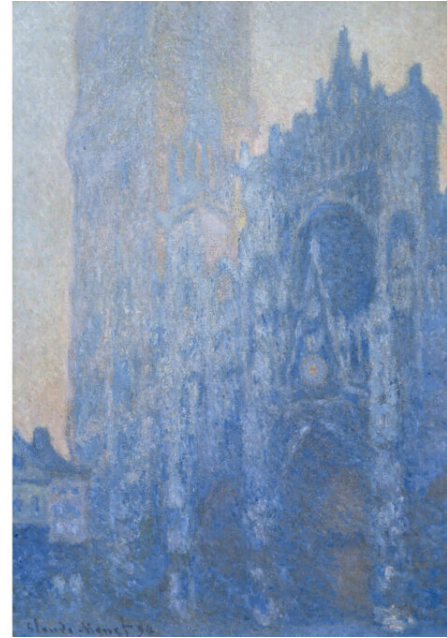


motion.”<sup>2</sup> That motion is a component of these works is made explicit in the title of *Inner Movement*. Here, abstraction allows Nakamura to obscure the surface elements and attempt to capture the underlying atoms in motion.

The riveting haziness of the colour and lines in *Inner Structure* echoes the atmospheric effects of the famous series of paintings of the facade of Rouen Cathedral by Claude Monet (1840–1926), for example, or the landscapes of Japanese painters like Kawabata Gyokushō (1842–1913). Bryce Kanbara notes that Nakamura “saved folded clippings of pictures of French Impressionist paintings of Notre Dame Cathedral and 20th-century Japanese landscape paintings.”<sup>3</sup> Both the haze of Monet’s facades and Gyokushō’s landscapes are a record of the passage of time and the effects of light on our visible world, just as Nakamura’s efforts to capture atoms in motion are also temporal.

*Inner Structure* also takes a cue from Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), who was an important influence. Mondrian’s *Composition No. II Line and Color*, 1913, shows a linear pattern that is more tightly structured than Nakamura’s.<sup>4</sup> The Dutch artist would eventually aim for a higher level of geometric clarity and simplicity, which Nakamura stressed was no longer a reality in the atomic age.

The String paintings that followed the *Inner Structure* series marked yet another stylistic departure, yet they are related to an extent and may represent a further step in Nakamura’s quest to reveal the essence of the structure underlying our visible universe. In 1961 Nakamura would produce one last *Inner Structure* painting, merging the off-white field of the String paintings with a linear structure, although more tightly organized, thus continuing the ongoing dialogue between his different styles.



LEFT: Kawabata Gyokushō, *Traveling by Moonlight*, c.1900, album leaf, ink and colour on silk, 36.8 x 27.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. RIGHT: Claude Monet, *Rouen Cathedral Façade and Tour d'Albane (Morning Effect)*, 1894, oil on canvas, 106.1 x 73.9 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



## INFINITE WAVES 1957



Kazuo Nakamura, *Infinite Waves*, 1957  
Oil over string on canvas, 94.1 x 101.7 cm  
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

*Infinite Waves* is a monochromatic dark cream-coloured surface with a series of tightly packed horizontal lines running across the canvas. Kazuo Nakamura considered this work his "most extreme painting."<sup>1</sup> Critics and historians, too, agree that this canvas and the other String paintings created between 1955 and 1965 are his most radical artistic output. Among collectors and the public, however, the landscapes that he created during this period, such as *Lakeside*, *Summer Morning*, 1961, were the most popular.



*Infinite Waves* was inspired by Nakamura's occasional use of string dipped in ink to make drawings, as can be seen in *Trees*, 1951, for example. Describing the process for *Infinite Waves*, he said: "In that painting it's a case of gluing thread on the canvas and after that painting white all over and after that dries you put a tone to it and actually that's it, I think."<sup>2</sup> Exactly how many String paintings Nakamura created is unknown; *Infinite Waves* is the most often cited and most frequently reproduced example. It appears in a well-known photograph of Nakamura in his studio.

Although the String paintings are the "most extreme" in the sense that they reduced everything to an elementary unit—in this case, lines—and adopted a near-uniform monochromatic coloration, they are nevertheless an extension of his previous work and the landscape paintings he was creating at the same time. Even the landscapes border on the monochromatic, and their colour is applied with small, uniform brushstrokes.

The meaning of the String paintings is ambiguous. Curator Dennis Reid once described them as "beautifully profound ...

expansive, infinitely subtle pictures ... without limit to their meaning."<sup>3</sup> Rory Hinton wrote as recently as 2013 that "when Kazuo Nakamura finished painting strings (like *Infinite Waves*), he started a revolution that demolished the dividing line between painting and physics."<sup>4</sup> Although a bit of an exaggeration, it is an opinion that Nakamura would likely have agreed with. Joan Murray asked Nakamura in 1979: "If you were to define your own work, would you feel that you were acting more as a scientist painter even then?" to which he replied: "I think so. I feel as a painter I might be painting in let's say the field of physics."<sup>5</sup>

Speculation about the specific sources for *Infinite Waves*, and the String paintings generally, ranges from incorporating Japanese symbolism of the colour white to responding to contemporary photographs recording the traces of subatomic particles, as reproduced in *Scientific American*. Curator and critic Ihor Holubizky relates that in a conversation with Nakamura, the artist "indicated a revelation and sense of affinity upon seeing scientific photographs of subatomic particle tracings while engaged in the string paintings—the hitherto invisible world of nature."<sup>6</sup> The use of the word "wave" in *Infinite Waves* might therefore reference the wave theory of matter in physics first proposed in 1924 by Louis de Broglie.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Trees*, 1951, ink on paper, 38.1 x 55.9 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.





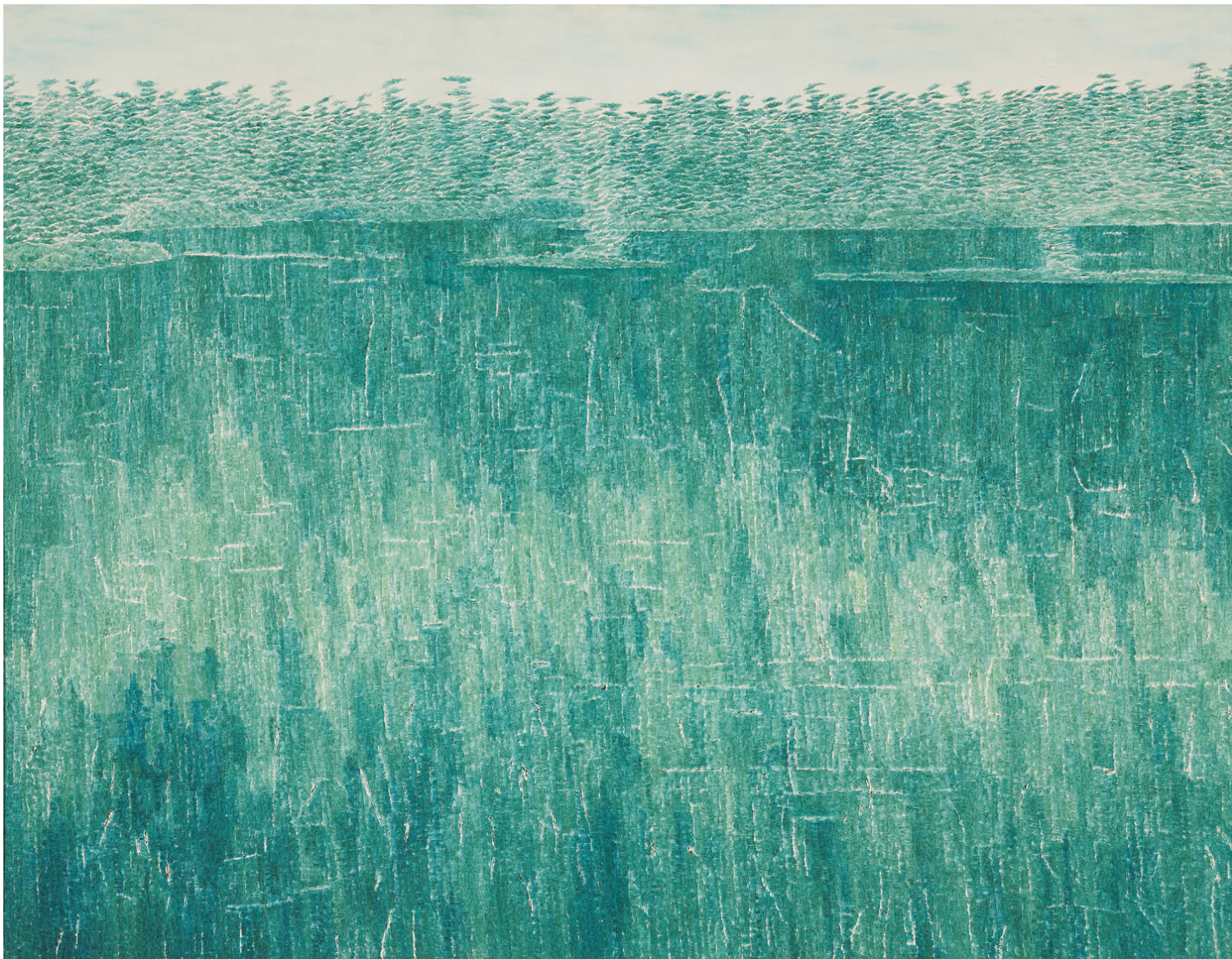
# KAZUO NAKAMURA

Life & Work by John G. Hatch

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Whatever their source, these paintings by Nakamura were at the forefront of a move toward monochromatic painting, joining the ranks of the White Paintings by Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) and the Achromes by Piero Manzoni (1933-1963).

## AUGUST, MORNING REFLECTIONS 1961



Kazuo Nakamura, *August, Morning Reflections*, 1961  
Oil on canvas, 93.7 x 121.5 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

*August, Morning Reflections* is an important example of the landscape paintings that are among Kazuo Nakamura's most recognizable and popular works. They became what Nakamura's wife, Lillian, referred to as his "bread and butter" paintings late in his career, as demand for them never waned and they always sold well.<sup>1</sup> *August, Morning Reflections* is a view across a lake to the forest on a distant shore, and its complexity stems from the delicate pattern of reflections of the trees and sky in the water. The National Gallery of Canada purchased this work the year it was painted.

For the most part, these landscapes are naturalistic rather than realistic, being painted from Nakamura's memory of sites he'd visited rather than representing a specific place.<sup>2</sup> Only on a couple of occasions, such as with *Lake, B.C.*, 1964,



is there a reference to a location, but even then there are not enough identifiable landmarks to be able to say exactly where the scene is.

Nakamura had been creating landscapes since his internment years, and this painting borrows many conventions that date from that time. The high horizon line in *August, Morning Reflections* and the use of reflections are likely inherited from Tashme landscapes like *Twelve Mile Lake*, 1944. By 1960, however, reflections on water seem to take on an increasing importance as symbols of another reality underlying our visible world. Nakamura explicitly includes the word “reflections” in the title of his landscapes, and they become a dominant theme in his subsequent still lifes and Block paintings such as *Structure, Two Horizons*, 1964.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Blue Reflections*, 1965, oil on canvas, 86.3 x 114.3 cm, Collection of Andrew Rookley, Ontario.

Here again is the artist’s signature blue/green colour, which combines the lush green of the foliage with the blue of the water and ultimately the sky. This palette is typical of the group of landscapes *August, Morning Reflections* belongs to.<sup>3</sup> Some, like this one, tend more toward green, whereas blue is more prominent in others, such as *Blue Reflections*, 1965. The result tends to be almost monochromatic, a quality Nakamura ascribed to Japanese art.<sup>4</sup> Nakamura’s technique—the feathery application of short strokes of colour—combines with bare areas of primed canvas to produce remarkable variations in the colour.

The light in these landscapes is entirely generated by the patches of exposed canvas. Although unique in style, the work does suggest an admixture of French Impressionistic technique with the colour symbolism of Japanese art. Blue represents purity, calm, and serenity, and green symbolizes vitality, growth, and energy, as well as eternity. The use of blue and green together may relate to the fact that the words for these colours are often used interchangeably in Japanese. Nakamura may also have been thinking of the *aizuri-e*, Japanese woodcut prints such as those made by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), which are made using predominantly blue ink, specifically Prussian blue imported from Europe. The white of the sky may reference purity.



## GALAXIES 1964

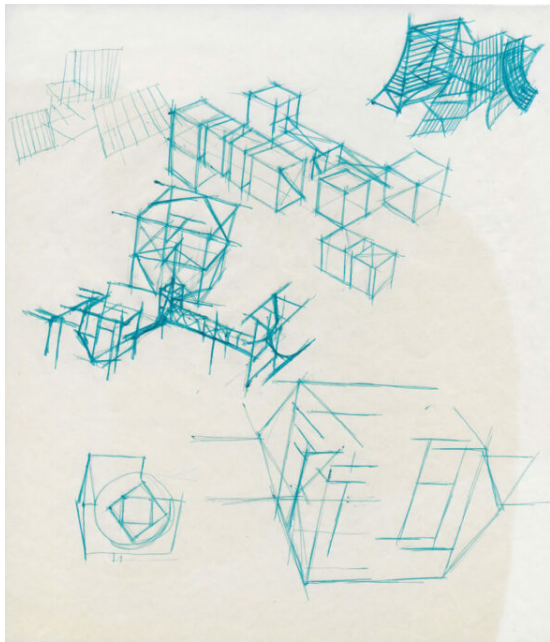


Kazuo Nakamura, *Galaxies*, 1964  
Stainless Steel, 305 x 305 x 305 cm  
Toronto Pearson International Airport



Commissioned by Toronto International Airport (now Toronto Pearson International Airport), *Galaxies* is Kazuo Nakamura's first of two public projects and a rare public display of his sculpture. It involves two linear-gridded open metal structures, each with a central core and a series of arms extending from it, hung from the ceiling. The work was initially described as including a floor illumination to generate shadows on the ceiling, but the ceiling in its original location did not lend itself to such an installation. The two galaxies are mirrors of each other, just like the lake reflections found in the landscapes he started to paint a few years before.

Nakamura had been sculpting consistently since the early 1950s, but sculptures such as *Untitled*, c.1950s, were infrequently exhibited. He produced two types: one made of wire on a Hydrocal base, the other a series of stacked blocks made from Hydrocal. For Nakamura to accept a public commission and on a much larger scale than usual must have been flattering but daunting.<sup>1</sup> What he settled on was a scaled-up version of the wired sculptures, which could be translated to metal tubes that he cut in his studio and later welded together on-site. What he did not anticipate was the controversy that eventually surrounded the commission as a whole, when questions were raised about the wisdom of investing so much taxpayer money to decorate an airport.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Sketches for Galaxies*, c.1963, pen and ink on paper, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled*, c.1950s, steel rods, 27.2 x 12 x 10.5 cm, private collection.

The sources for *Galaxies* are varied and intriguing. To begin with, the sculpture appears as a three-dimensional version of the Inner Structure paintings, as suggested by some of the sketches he produced for the piece. It may also have taken inspiration from bridge scaffolding—Nakamura did make a number of drawings of bridges in the 1950s, such as *Bridges Winter*, 1953. Similarly, Nakamura drew on the metal lattices of radio telescopes, about which newspaper clippings were found in his papers at the time of his death. *Galaxies* is, as Nakamura described it, "a spiral stellar system with central nuclei and emerging arms in the vastness of space."<sup>2</sup> As some observers noted when it was installed, this sculpture also bears "a resemblance to the framework of an ancient plane of Wright brothers' vintage."<sup>3</sup> Sadly, *Galaxies* is not currently on display at Pearson International.

## REVERSED IMAGES 1965



Kazuo Nakamura, *Reversed Images*, 1965  
Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 86.4 cm  
Private collection

*Reversed Images* portends Kazuo Nakamura's late abstract works, which are marked by an exclusive use of geometry and mathematics. In this image of two green pears and three green apples laid out in a row against a dark blue background and mirrored immediately below, the artist is at a threshold pictorially. He looks retrospectively to his earlier landscapes and still lifes through works like *Untitled*, 1964, which duplicates and mirrors the potted tree in *Autumn*, c.1950. Here, the barrenness of the background with its deep blue coloration, the basic symmetry, the isolation of the figurative elements, and the



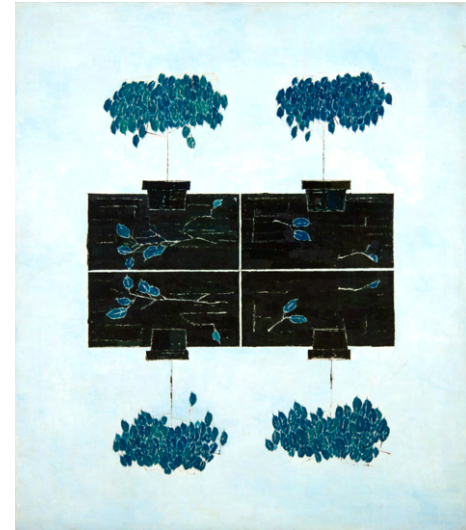
patterned layout of the fruit distill what is to come in such works as *Suspension 5*, 1968, *Spatial Concept, Geometry*, 1968, and the Number Structure series.

Many of Nakamura's pieces have a mirroring element to them, whether in reflections off the water or in a doubling, as found in this painting. In nature, mirrors often distort; for example, the surface of water—most often when the water is still—can lengthen and bend reflections. The image we see is not real. Moreover, the water itself conceals. Nakamura's lake views, which tend to be dominated by the water itself, suggest that he is reading the reflections this way. We are seeing but an imperfect glimpse of the underlying order of nature beneath the surface. Paintings like *Reversed Images*, where the focus is entirely on the mirroring that occurs, seem to confirm this. Here, he is peeling back the veil of nature to begin to expose its underpinnings.

What realities do Nakamura's paintings hide? *Reversed Images* shows nature laid bare in the form of pears and apples, perhaps a nod to Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), who famously painted these fruits. Yet the painting conceals its mystery in the dark blue background. This blue screen can be read as either water or the night sky descending at dusk or lifting at dawn—or both, as the doubling of the fruit may suggest. We see the fruits of nature more clearly, but we do not yet see the patterns and progressions that gave rise to them.

In Japanese culture, mirrors symbolize the gods, most often Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun and the universe. Despite Nakamura's lack of interest in spiritualism, he could not have been oblivious to that fact. More generally, the mirror in Japan is a symbol of truth and wisdom.

Mirrors are also a popular theme in science fiction, especially the notion of mirror universes or parallel universes. Nakamura may be referencing such an idea. He may also be touching on Noether's theorem. In 1915 German mathematician Emmy Noether formalized a proof to show that the universe is composed of a series of fundamental symmetries in physics. For example, an action performed in one part of space will yield the same result in another part of space, a concept known as spatial translation. The pages of *Scientific American*, of which Nakamura was a voracious reader, were replete with mentions of symmetry in the 1950s and 1960s. Significantly, Nakamura saved an article from this magazine about the discovery of twin subatomic particles.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled*, 1964, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 61 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

## TOWER STRUCTURES 1967



Kazuo Nakamura, *Tower Structures*, 1967  
Concrete, 77.5 x 19.1 x 19.1 cm  
Unlocated

*Tower Structures* is a group of concrete pillars made of squat square blocks stacked vertically with some recessed intervals and a few small symmetrical protrusions on some of the blocks. The work is an extension of Kazuo Nakamura's Block paintings that date back to the early 1950s, of which *Block Structure*, 1956, is a typical example, and also part of a series of stacked sculptures begun at least in the mid-1950s. *Tower Structures* is one of the last such sculptures.

Nakamura gave only one contemporary interview concerning his sculpture, in 1967. In a very rare moment of talking about a specific work, he said about *Tower Structures*:

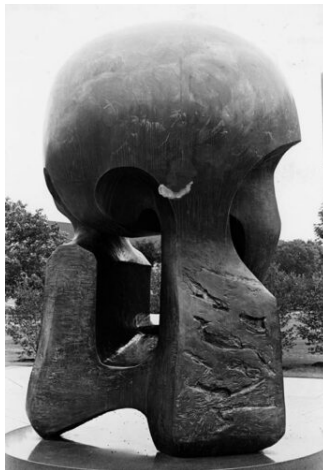
My concern in sculpture, as in my structural painting, is with the atomic particle moving perpetually in space. Where unnatural perfection is static, natural imperfection implies motion. My tower-structures are imperfect. Their surfaces of natural concrete retain the imperfections (and hence, the



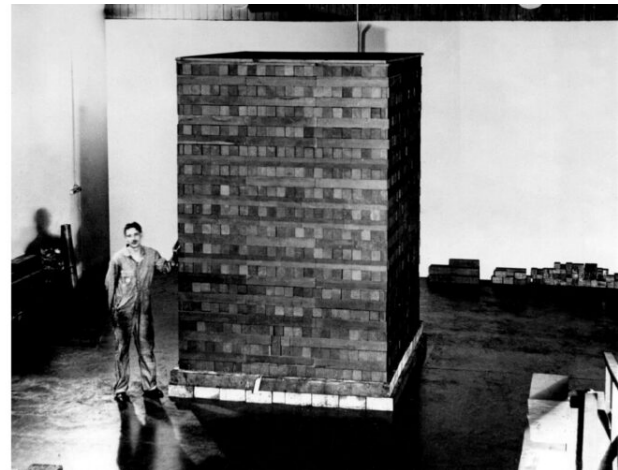
motion) of the medium itself, which polishing would destroy. They move in space with the rhythm of slight asymmetry, like a constant, subtle shifting of the component strips or blocks. Such simple geometric forms, bare of all “period” decoration, are always timeless in essence. Although for me these structures seem to project our own time toward a future of stacked-tower environments, for other people they may well evoke relics of an ancient past. In either case, I am obviously working with structural echoes of architecture. Since 1958, I have alternated angular open-cage forms with blocky constructions: even in painting I use a block stroke. And though I work “small,” I try to achieve, through correct proportion, an architectural command of space.<sup>1</sup>

Here, in his usual succinctness, Nakamura offers up multiple, complementary readings of *Tower Structures*.

This sculpture may reference nuclear piles, the most famous being the one constructed in Chicago in 1942 that generated the first human-made, self-sustained chain reaction necessary to produce nuclear power on December 2 of that year. Nakamura made this sculpture in 1967, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the test. He was likely aware of Henry Moore’s sculpture *Nuclear Energy*, 1964–66, which was installed on the site to commemorate that day and a model of which is housed in Hiroshima. *Tower Structures* also has an eerily surreal quality that brings to mind the devastated landscapes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with their few remaining structures standing after the atomic blasts of August 1945.



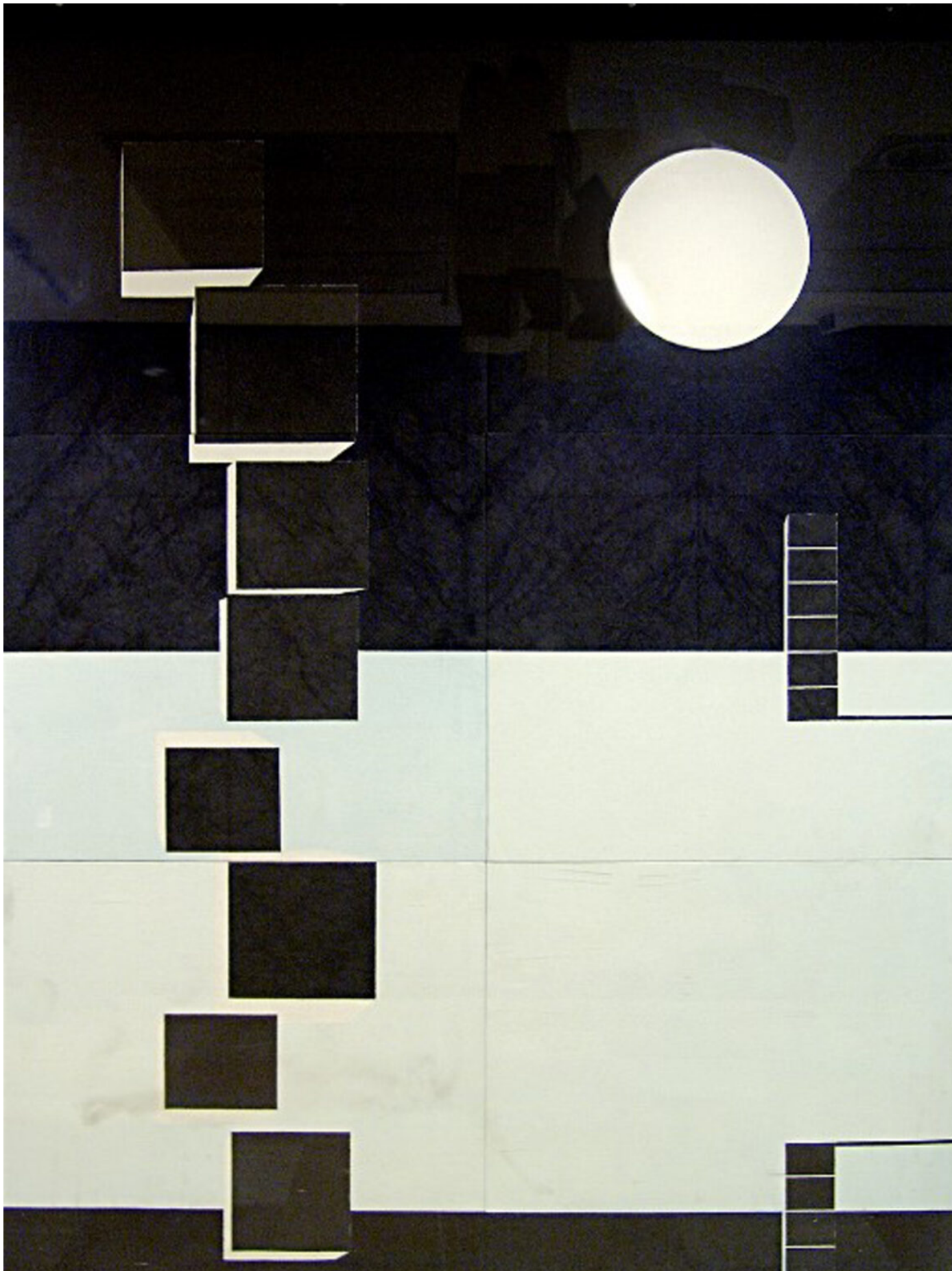
LEFT: Henry Moore, *Nuclear Energy*, 1964–66, bronze and stone, 121 x 243 cm, University of Chicago. RIGHT: Chicago Pile-1 (Graphite Lattice), 1942, United States Department of Energy.



The surfaces of Nakamura’s sculpture are intentionally imperfect and unpolished, possibly inspired by the Neoplatonic idea of the physical world as an imperfect reflection of the world of ideal forms. Jerrold Morris, Nakamura’s dealer, stated in 1965 that his client’s art “continues the quest begun by the Greek philosophers for the shifting ground between spirit and matter.”<sup>2</sup> It may also embody the Japanese aesthetic of transience and imperfection, famously articulated by the novelist Jun’ichirō Tanizaki in his essay *In Praise of Shadows* (1933).<sup>3</sup> All of these readings ultimately relate to the human condition, and so it certainly would not have been lost on Nakamura how these towers also have an anthropomorphic quality.

Perhaps Nakamura was becoming more aware of the passage of time and softening his critical stance on human nature. He may have come to accept human imperfections as a necessary stage to seeking out perfection—the human connection to the universal, an idea he would express by hand-painting numbers and their grids in the Number Structure series.

## TWO HORIZONS 1968



Kazuo Nakamura, *Two Horizons*, 1968  
Oil on canvas, 261.6 x 196.9 cm  
Government of Ontario Art Collection, Toronto



*Two Horizons* is Kazuo Nakamura's second public commission (the first being *Galaxies*, 1964), sponsored by the Ontario government in 1966 and installed in the Macdonald Block at Queen's Park in Toronto in 1968, where it can still be seen today.<sup>1</sup> The work is divided roughly into two halves, a dark marine blue portion at the top and a white one at the bottom. Along the left side are large cubes and squares that appear to be falling on the white background and floating upward on the blue, while the right side has two sets of smaller, neatly stacked squares. A white circle appears at the top right.

*Two Horizons* is the last and largest of the Block paintings and sculptures that date back as early as 1953 (an earlier example is *Prairie Towers*, 1956). Metaphysical paintings created by Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) in the 1910s are often cited as a source.<sup>2</sup> However, Nakamura's blocks are more likely inspired by the work of Ben Nicholson (1894–1982) and Paul Nash (1889–1946), two artists whom Nakamura learned about at Toronto's Central Technical School, where he was taught mainly by British-trained artists. Nakamura liked Nicholson's work, and one sees the Englishman's clean, abstract works as akin to Nakamura's Block works.<sup>3</sup> Everything is slightly off, imperfect: geometric forms are drawn with lines that are not exactly straight or curves that are not quite regular. In Nash's paintings of the late 1920s and the 1930s, one sees the unreal environs also suggested in Nakamura's Block paintings.

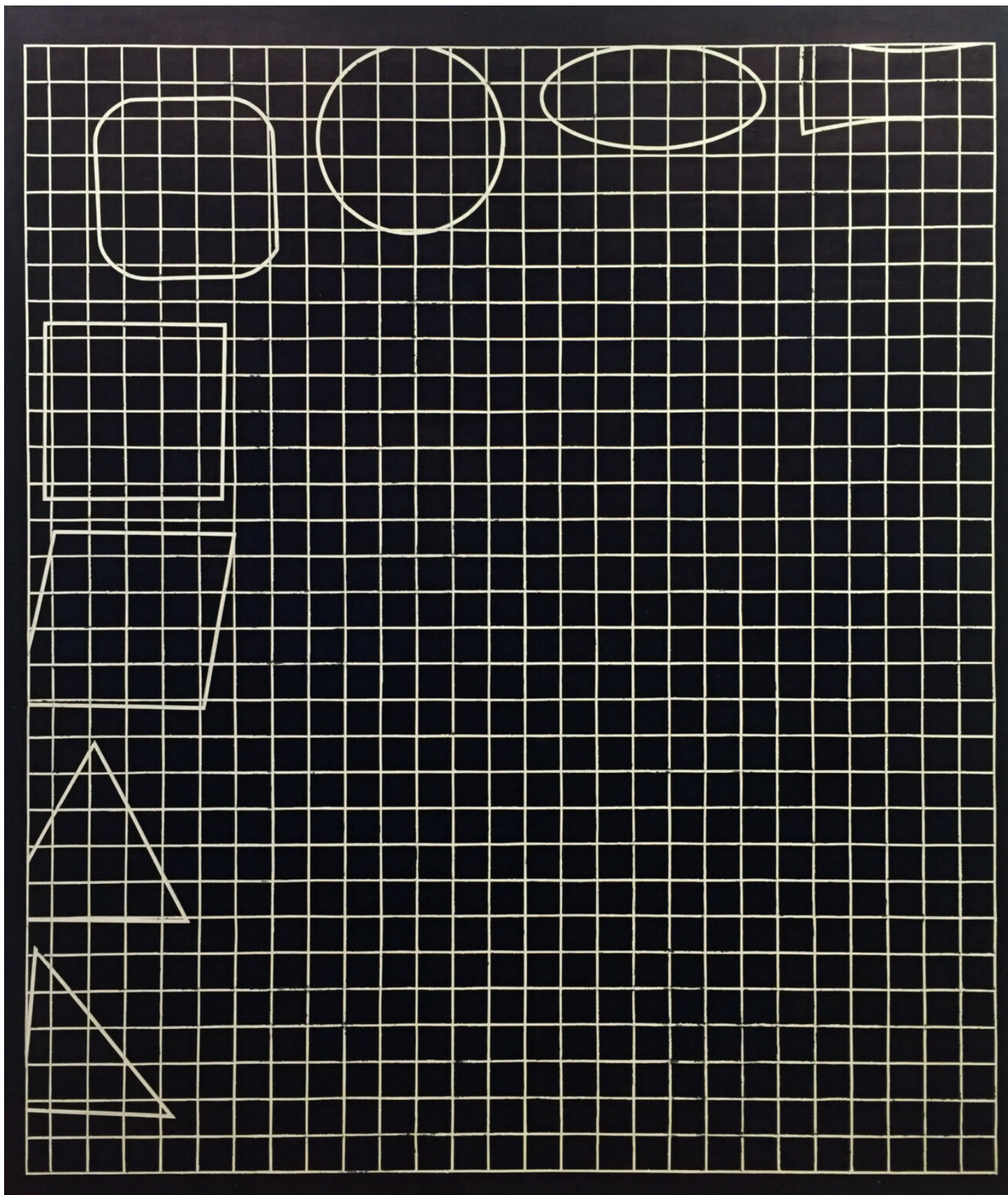


Kazuo Nakamura, *Prairie Towers*, 1956, oil on Masonite, 86.5 x 122.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

What *Two Horizons* presents us with—and what is generally true for all the Block paintings—is the visual world we know, but with nature removed so that all that remains are our assumptions and conceptions about it. These, Nakamura tells us, are not absolutely correct; sometimes they are even contradictory. He captured this idea in 1959, when he described *Prairie Towers* as “a transformed landscape scene of abstract structures based on today's external form of orderliness and concept of function and purpose to house the complex mechanisms brought about by man's expanding observation and application of various sciences.”<sup>4</sup>

The use of mirroring in *Two Horizons* turns the world upside down, as if to make the point that on the macro- and microscopic levels there is no up or down. In a rather intriguing way, Nakamura tells us that we live in a world of multiple dimensions, of which our three exist among many, a world “brought about by man's expanding observation of space.”<sup>5</sup> This idea would have resonated widely at the time, with newspapers and journals reporting on the first spacewalk in 1965, and the Apollo missions leading up to putting the first human on the moon in 1969.

## SPATIAL CONCEPT, GEOMETRY 1968

Kazuo Nakamura, *Spatial Concept, Geometry*, 1968

Oil on linen, 127 x 106.7 cm

Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto



*Spatial Concept, Geometry* captures the philosophy of both Kazuo Nakamura's art and science. The painting is a white grid outlined against a black background. Starting at the bottom left corner and moving along the left edge and across the top toward the right side of the painting are two-dimensional geometric shapes (some cropped) that range from triangles through squares to circles. The white grid references Nakamura's interest in the grid as a critical device in art and science, and the geometric forms illustrate his interpretation of the history of art from the Renaissance to modern times.<sup>1</sup> Painted in 1968, this iconic work hung in Nakamura's living room for the remaining years of his life.

In 1972, an interviewer commented about *Spatial Concept, Geometry*: "This looks almost like a graph of the forms that western art has taken, isn't it?" Nakamura responded: "It's not only that but also what happened in science; How they went back to basics which were based on the forms of geometry."<sup>2</sup> He explained that the geometric shapes in their ascent represent our gradual move away from our three-dimensional, earthbound perception of the world, first defined by the Renaissance and represented by the triangle. That is followed by a rhombus, the tilted square, which is the moment of Impressionism combined with the influence of Japanese art, followed by the square referencing Cubism. Then humanity turns a corner (literally in the painting), with the octagon and the circle, which are associated with the arrival of abstract art. In science these forms mark humanity's gradual escape from gravity, as people discovered that everything in the universe is circular. Nakamura identified the moon landing as the moment we reach the ellipse, and then our journey continues, beyond the frame, and beyond the confines of our corner of the universe.<sup>3</sup>



Kazuo Nakamura, *Spatial Concept/Evolution*, 1970, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

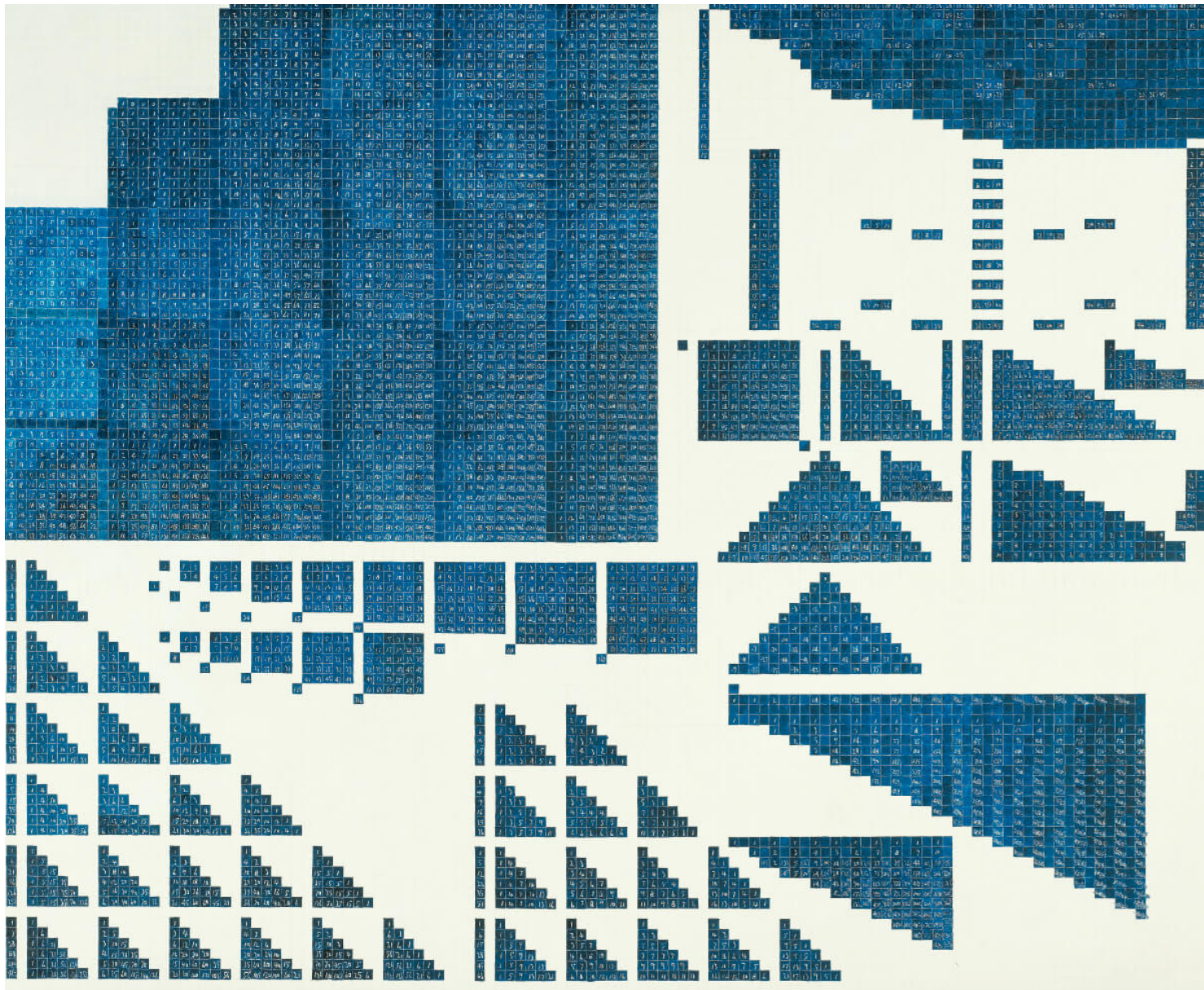
A sister work of sorts to *Spatial Concept, Geometry* is *Spatial Concept/Evolution*, 1970, which rephrases Nakamura's reading of the evolution of art in terms of his own personal visual progression paralleled by geometric shapes. That work is marked by a grid pattern with a diagonal running from the bottom left to the top right. The manner in which the grid is created, with its individual squares circumscribed by waves, may be Nakamura's ingenious way of presenting the quantum wave-particle duality, the scientific parallel to the evolution of Nakamura's own work.

Nakamura's art has always been about the atomic world in some form or fashion, at least since the mid-1950s, and this interpretation makes sense in that context. Why the two sides would meet along the diagonal can be read as the

evolution of human thought on one side meeting up or coming closer and closer to the reality it is seeking to describe. Of further note is the uncanny resemblance between the grid and its colour in Nakamura's painting and images of the core of nuclear reactors. The bluish green hue so frequently photographed is due to the electromagnetic radiation known as Cherenkov radiation, which in the reactors is generated when a charged particle from a spent fuel rod moves through water in the cooling tanks faster than light does. Nakamura would have known about Cherenkov radiation from *Scientific American*, where numerous articles over the years have referenced it.



## NUMBER STRUCTURE II 1984

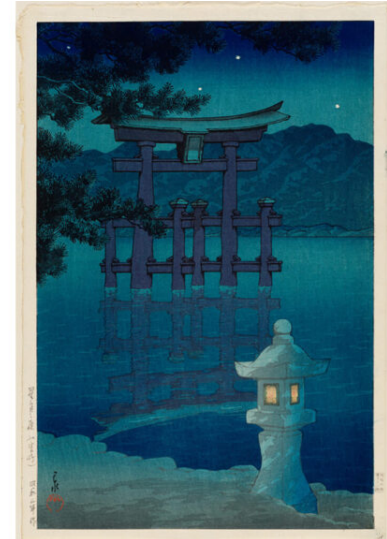


Kazuo Nakamura, *Number Structure II*, 1984  
Oil and graphite on canvas, 127 x 152.3 cm  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Kazuo Nakamura dedicated the last decade of his career to studying number progressions and patterns, the foundation that underlies the universe and all of nature. *Number Structure II* is the acme of that work. The painting is made up of minute blue squares—most inscribed with numbers—arranged in patterns on an ivory ground. The specific mathematical functions referenced in this painting include Sierpinski triangles, Pascal's triangles, Catalan numbers, and magic squares.<sup>1</sup> It is likely the last painting he made, except for a few variants of the early 1960s landscapes that were popular with collectors and sold well.

*Number Structure II* is part of a series of works that illustrate numerical progressions such as Fibonacci numbers,<sup>2</sup> or more generally numerical combinations like magic squares, as illustrated in *Untitled (Magic Squares)*,

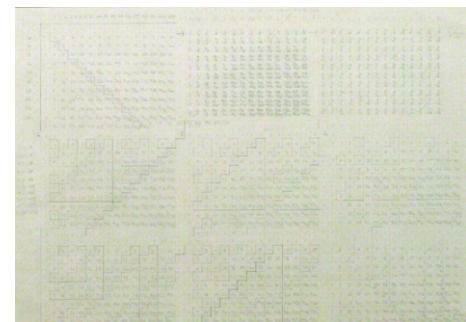
c.1975–85. They are hand-painted, most often using blue and white, which recalls yet again the *aizuri-e*, Japanese woodcut prints. The use of mathematics and the grid patterns they generate contrast with the numbers, all written out by hand and echoing the hand-drawn lines in the Minimalist works of Agnes Martin (1912–2004).<sup>3</sup> The paintings are yet another encounter between the human mind, expressed by the handwriting, and the universe the mind seeks to describe, expressed by numbers. Here that dialogue is reduced to something of its essence through numerical patterns that exist in nature.



LEFT: Agnes Martin, *The Tree*, 1964, oil and pencil on canvas, 182.8 x 182.8 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York. RIGHT: Kawase Hasui, *Starlit Night Miyajima Shrine*, 1928, woodblock print, ink and colour on paper, 38 x 26 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

What is interesting in Nakamura's study of these numerical sequences is that they focus on patterns as opposed to theorems, which describe the behaviours of natural phenomena. The distinction between the two is not necessarily huge, but patterns have an aesthetic quality that would attract the eye of an artist. Nakamura was certainly thinking more broadly. He said, "I was always interested in internal structures, the law of order that lies in everything,"<sup>4</sup> but ultimately he focused single-mindedly on numerical patterns.

What triggered this fascination—some would say obsession—may have been the "discovery" of fractals by Benoit Mandelbrot. In 1975, the mathematician published a paper in which he coined the term "fractal" to describe a form of geometric repetition in which a rough shape can be divided into parts, each of which is a progressively smaller copy of the same overall pattern—think of ferns or snowflakes. Nakamura started working out numerical progressions on reams and reams of graph paper around the same time. It became, as he stated in 1993, "my most important work now."<sup>5</sup> And art dealer Christopher Cutts noted after Nakamura's death in 2002 that "Kaz was looking for the Grand Theory.... This search was his holy grail, his chalice. He felt number-structure works constituted his legacy."<sup>6</sup>



Kazuo Nakamura, *Number Structure Sketch*, n.d., graphite on paper, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

Although his work with number sequences never ended, as testified by the bundles of progressions on paper Nakamura produced up until his death, he did abandon painting with *Number Structure II*. As he stated in an interview: "I'd like to push myself as far as I can into the realm of the theoretical. When I work like this, I'm always discovering something new. Whereas painting is just translation." He concluded: "I hope to go back to painting."<sup>7</sup> Ironically, when one could claim that Nakamura had reached the most abstract form of expression possible, he himself felt the contrary: he was exposing great universal truths. He declared, "You might just say that I am actually a realist."<sup>8</sup>



A painting of several purple irises with green leaves, set against a dark blue, textured background. The irises are rendered with visible brushstrokes, giving them a painterly quality. One large iris is on the left, another is in the center-right, and a smaller one is on the far right. The title text is overlaid on the central part of the painting.

# SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

Kazuo Nakamura defied convention as an artist and yet found critical success. He worked across figurative and abstract traditions, straddled art and science, experimented continuously in a wide variety of styles and techniques, and was the only member of Painters Eleven—one of the most important groups in Canadian art history—who was Asian Canadian. Throughout his career, he followed his own interests and drew little attention to himself or his work, but his art struck a chord. His experience of internment led him to explore themes of identity and belonging, and universal truths such as the laws of nature found in mathematics and science. With patience and single-mindedness, he



produced a rich body of work that has laid the groundwork for a new generation of artists and a more inclusive art history.

#### IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Like many Japanese Canadians who were interned during the Second World War, Kazuo Nakamura appears to have struggled with racism, his identity as both Japanese and Canadian, and his sense of his place within the Japanese Canadian community and broader Canadian society. This feeling of confusion was compounded by the bombing of Hiroshima, where his parents were born and many relatives still lived. These experiences may have generated a slight distrust of other people: there is a near-total absence of human figures in the paintings he made after leaving the Tashme internment camp.



Kazuo Nakamura, *March 18, March 18, 1944*, gouache on card, 28 x 35.5 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

Nakamura did not necessarily shy away from social events, but he was perceived as polite yet reserved, something of an introvert. Art writer Iris Nowell described Nakamura in the company of his colleagues in Painters Eleven: "The non-drinking, non-smoking, non-carousing, apple-loving Kazuo regularly attended art openings and parties in support of his colleagues. An opening, after all, was a celebration. Nakamura could always be seen at the host gallery walking up and down, seriously studying the work of his friends and colleagues, unlike many others whose principal interest at openings was the location of the bar."<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to know how much of this reserve was Nakamura's innate temperament and how much might have been shaped by social and cultural experiences. Nakamura's colleagues in Painters Eleven—all of whom were white and of European descent—would not have understood what it was like to be singled out for the colour of their skin, and in the 1950s Nakamura would not have encountered many other artists who shared his experience of internment and the unspoken shame it brought on many families.

Being something of an outsider put him in the ideal position as an artist who could observe and try to understand and reveal the larger problems of humanity's place in the universe. Yet he longed to belong, as evidenced by his participation in Painters Eleven and his loyalty to its members even after the group disbanded, as well as his work for the Japanese community in Toronto, specifically the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre.



Paintings like those from the Suspension series or Reflection works appear to touch on issues of identity and belonging. The fruit and plants in *Suspension 5*, 1968—separate from each other and bounded from the background by heavy lines—suggest isolation and loneliness, despite their being the products of the elemental forces that shape our lives. Their rootlessness and seclusion evoke melancholy and sadness; these life forms seem to be in need of a place, a context to truly exist. That context simply will not appear, there is no sign of it, and the forms seem destined to be swallowed up by the black firmament.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspension 5*, 1968, oil on canvas, 61 x 55.9 cm, Collection of Andrew Rookley, Ontario. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Lake, B.C.*, 1964, oil on canvas, 121.6 x 93 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

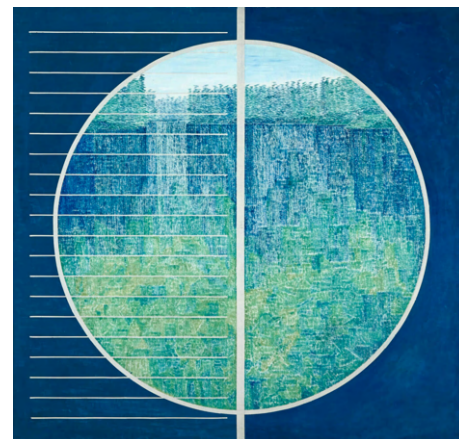
Similarly, in the Reflection works, in paintings like *August, Morning Reflections*, 1961, places are depicted but they feel lost and isolated—they are beautiful, but lacking, in being unoccupied or not providing any sign of being occupied. An exception is *Lake, B.C.*, 1964, in which one spies at the horizon a very small boat casting a long shadow on the water. The boat appears to be departing, as if soon to leave the viewer, the artist, alone again, isolated in the most beautiful of places.

*Suspended Landscape*, 1969, effectively combines both of these types of works. We peer through a circular opening at a landscape, an outsider looking in on a scene. A vertical white line splits the canvas in half, and on the left side are horizontal lines stacked like an open blind. We seem to be invited into the lush lake setting at the same time that we are held back from entering it, a metaphor for the feeling of wanting to belong but not being able to, as Nakamura may have experienced it. At the same time, he may be underscoring humanity's relatively small stature and isolation when measured against the immensity of the universe.

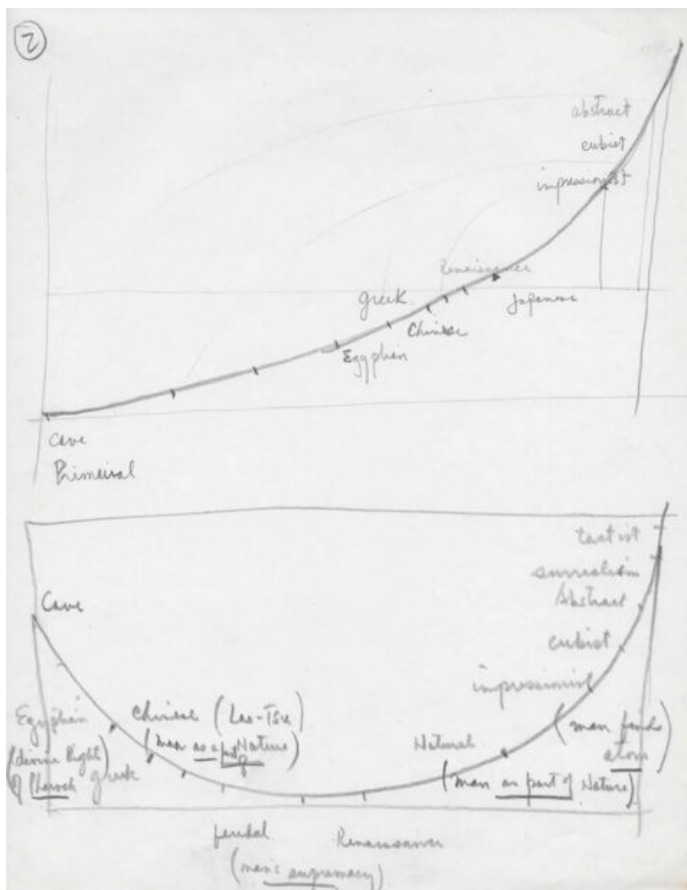
Modernism's conception of avant-garde artists as visionaries who struggled to belong because they were ahead of their time seems to have resonated with Nakamura. Though part of society, the avant-garde artist possesses a deeper knowledge, an insight into how society will progress. In a taped interview from 1967, Nakamura revealed:

The contribution of the artist is to extend visual knowledge as a way of understanding our universe. I, as an artist, am never wholly isolated from anyone else, from the labourer or the scientist. We are all, each in his own way, making a new society, or a part of that society. On the other hand, since some perception and foresight beyond the norm is a necessary attribute of the functioning artist, I must admit to a certain sense of unavoidable "apartness."

In any period of art there is always an accepted mainstream and an outer fringe, not yet accepted, that tries new ideas. And then, in time, that outer fringe becomes the influence of another mainstream. Although I am as much concerned with the future, with what is going to happen, as with the present, when I am actually painting or making sculpture, I just try to work out my own ideas, with no conscious thought of a breakthrough. If I am truly inventive, I will inevitably work on that outer fringe, where every real artist yearns to be ... although most of us today are not quite sure just how we should place ourselves!<sup>2</sup>



Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspended Landscape*, 1969, oil on canvas, 109.2 x 114.3 cm, private collection.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Charts of the Evolution of Art*, c.1980s, graphite on paper, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Floating Still Life*, 1967, oil on canvas, 70 x 50.8 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

It is fascinating to see how the events of Nakamura's early life and the ideas he explored in his art informed the work he produced and reflected his self-image as an artist throughout his career. As early as 1941 with *First Frost*, one senses the excitement with which he registers his love for the city; however, once he



was barred from returning to Vancouver after the Second World War, he struggled to find his place. Here he began his quest to find the forces that make our world, in the hope of understanding our place in it. It is unclear whether he ever found an answer to either question. Nakamura's *Charts of the Evolution of Art*, c.1980s, hints at reconciliation: he records the moment when Japanese art is integrated with Western art. And yet, his statement in a 1972 interview that Japanese Canadians would lose their Japanese identity through intermarriage suggests that he saw belonging—as both Japanese and Canadian—as impossible.

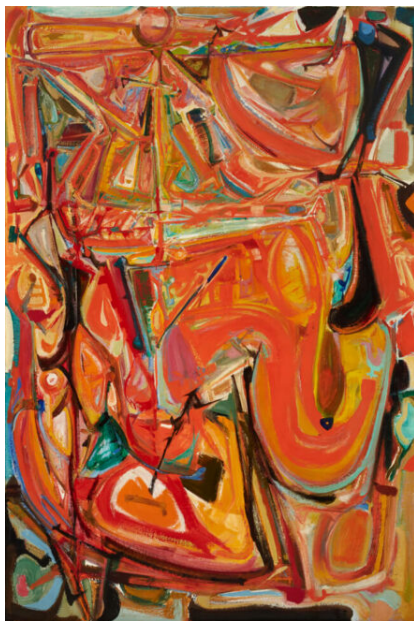
## REVISITING PAINTERS ELEVEN

Painters Eleven is central to any account of Kazuo Nakamura's career: he was a founding member of the Toronto-based group of abstract painters and participated in many of its exhibitions. Yet he was surprisingly ambivalent about the group's value to his career and those of his colleagues. In a 1979 interview with Joan Murray, Nakamura said, "For exhibition purposes it was helpful. Of course as a painter possibly we matured more after we left or Painters Eleven split, especially Jack Bush and Bill Ronald on their own became much better painters."<sup>3</sup>

This was a view shared by Harold Town (1924–1990), who noted: "History perverts the progress of Painters Eleven, attempting to make us into a movement with a philosophy. We were simply a mechanism for exhibiting."<sup>4</sup> Ray Mead (1921–1998) felt that participation in Painters Eleven had strengthened all the members.<sup>5</sup>

Nakamura was not entirely wrong in what he had to say to Murray about Painters Eleven. The group was created mainly to better its members' chances in finding exhibiting venues, especially given that their art looked radically new to Toronto audiences. They offered full-blown abstraction, largely gestural, like Mead's *Blue Horizon*, c.1957, for instance, which followed from the work of the American Abstract Expressionists and the Automatistes in Montreal.

Nakamura must have seen the value of allying himself with other more established artists. By this time, for example, Jock Macdonald (1897–1960), his former art teacher (and soon-to-be colleague in Painters Eleven), had already opened many doors for Nakamura. The result was that between his last year at Central Technical School in 1951 and 1954, when Painters Eleven first exhibited under that name at Toronto's Roberts Gallery, Nakamura's exhibiting record was exceptional, to say the least.



LEFT: Harold Town, *Tumult for a King*, 1954, oil on Masonite, 140.7 x 95.8 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. RIGHT: Ray Mead, *Blue Horizon*, c.1957, oil on canvas, 50.6 x 40.7 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

Painters Eleven may have had no driving ideology, no *modus operandi* that the members had to adhere to, yet the group still had a vision. In a brochure for the group's 1955 show, one finds the following statement: "There is no manifesto here for the times. There is no jury but time. By now there is little harmony in the noticeable disagreement. But there is a profound regard for the consequences of our complete freedom."<sup>6</sup> In other words, there is no grand scheme, no concordance between the works presented, no unifying script the artists are adhering to. The works are simply an open and free expression aimed at protecting that freedom. Tom Hodgson (1924–2006) asserted in a 1990 interview with Joan Murray, "It was their business what they did and no one ever said anything about anybody else's work."<sup>7</sup> And Nakamura likely joined the other ten artists precisely because it left him free to continue along the artistic paths he was already taking.

Painters Eleven members might not have influenced each other's work overtly, but it is probable that, even if Nakamura did not recognize its impact, seeing his colleagues' art gave him the courage to experiment. It may even have accelerated his progress in the path he was on. The 1950s was one of the most creative periods of Nakamura's career. Not only did his landscape paintings grow more abstract, but he also created the Block paintings, like *Prairie Towers*, 1956; the Inner Structure works; and the radical String paintings. Visually, Nakamura's paintings did remain quite distinct from the others. But to expect that the members' work changed or improved as a result of Painters Eleven might be seen as something of a fallacy. That was not the point.

Not to be overlooked, though, were the camaraderie and respect among the artists of Painters Eleven. Nakamura forged friendships with the other members at a critical moment in his life. He had moved many times in the previous decade and been barred from returning to communities in his hometown and home province: he was isolated literally and figuratively. To find a coterie of individuals who so welcomed and accepted people for who they were must have been a godsend for Nakamura. In turn, he remained loyal to his colleagues, attending many of



Kazuo Nakamura, *Inner Structure No. 3*, 1959, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm, private collection, Ontario.



their openings throughout the rest of his life, and clipping and saving exhibition reviews of their work.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Block Structure*, 1956, oil on Masonite, 123.2 x 97.8 cm, private collection.

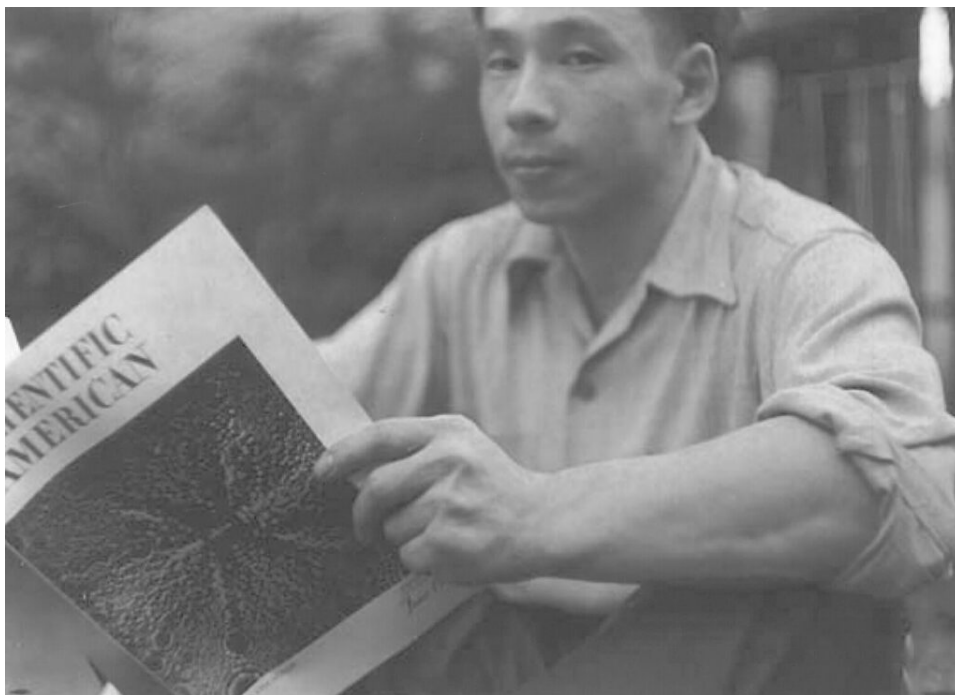
## ART AND SCIENCE

Kazuo Nakamura's Number Structure works from 1975 on epitomize his interest in science. So too does a well-known photograph from 1957 in which he is holding open a copy of *Scientific American*, one of his favourite publications. It is difficult to establish exactly when his curiosity about science first emerged, though he said that having been interned, he felt he had lost the time required for the study he would have needed to become a professional scientist, and decided to go into art instead.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that he may have been considering a career in science as early as his teenage years.

Even in his earliest statements about his art, Nakamura spoke of seeking out and striving to reveal an underlying structure in the world. For example, journalist Robert Fulford reported in 1956:

Nakamura picked up a microscopic photograph of the nerve plexus of the human intestine and placed it beside a print of a religious painting by the 14th century Sienese painter Duccio. Then he pointed out the relationship between the two. "They have the same basic pattern," he said. "Rhythms are the same.

In fact, I think there's a sort of fundamental universal pattern in all art and nature. Painters are learning a lot from the physical sciences now. In a sense, scientists and artists are doing the same thing. This world of pattern is the world we are discovering together."<sup>9</sup>



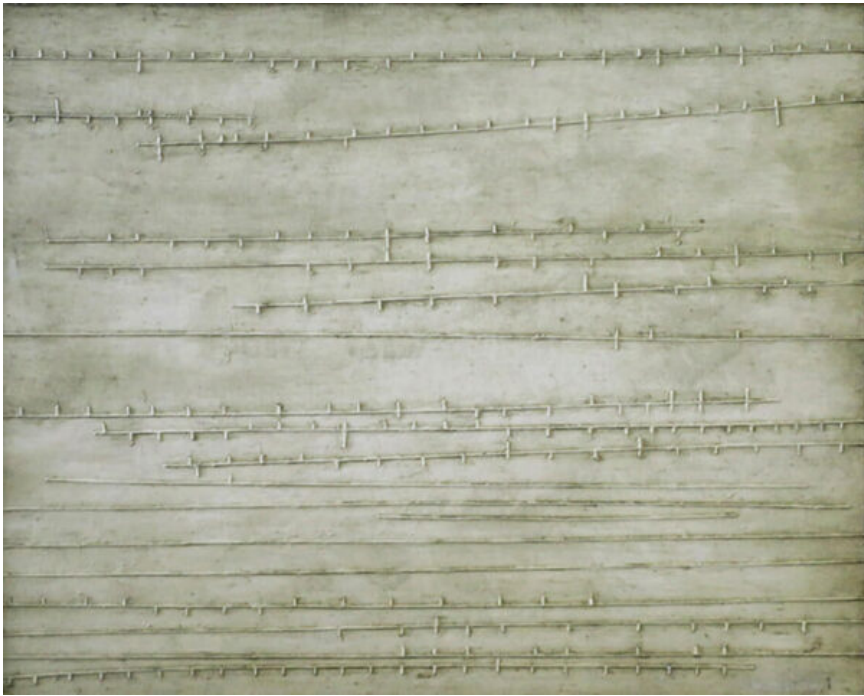
Kazuo Nakamura, 1957, photographer unknown, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

We know little specific detail about Nakamura's studies, but Jock Macdonald, who taught him in Vancouver and was later a member of Painters Eleven, could have been an influence. Macdonald's interest in science and mathematics dated back to at least the 1930s, as seen in works like *Departing Day*, 1939, although it was mediated through the mystic philosophies of theosophy and anthroposophy. Nakamura, however, was adamant on the point that Macdonald had little impact when it came to his interest in science, and that it was he who had suggested that Macdonald read *Scientific American*.<sup>10</sup> Nakamura revealed that he also read books by artists such as László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), who embraced science and modern technology with far less of a mystical inclination than Macdonald.

Nakamura's interest in science emerged in earnest in 1957. The fact that he encouraged Macdonald to read *Scientific American* when they were members of Painters Eleven, rather than when they were at Vancouver Technical Secondary School together, suggests that Nakamura discovered the magazine only around this time. From that moment on, Nakamura's statements regarding



science increased exponentially and he began to take cues about his art from science. The String paintings, such as *Untitled (Strings Removed)*, c.1957, were the first such works, inspired by the traces of subatomic particles. It is no coincidence that when he was pictured with *Scientific American*, Nakamura held the June 1957 issue, whose theme was Atoms Visualized.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *String Painting*, 1957, oil and string on tempered hardboard, 35.6 x 43.2 cm, Collection of Paul and Janice Sabourin. Photo by Kalamán + Demetriadou (K+D). RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled (Strings Removed)*, c.1957, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 81 cm, private collection.

Nakamura's attraction to science, beyond his youthful desire to be a scientist, may also have been related to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although he rarely discussed these events, they appear to have prompted an interest in the physics behind the atom bomb. Relativity theory and quantum physics are not easy fields for a layperson to grasp, but *Scientific American* offered an accessible entry point. These fields became hugely popular in the 1950s and 1960s, even covered in daily newspapers, with the beginning of the space race. Nakamura himself preserved many of these newspaper stories, from the discovery of a new type of neutrino and anti-neutrino to the moon landing and radio telescopes. He took copious notes on evolutionary theory, astronomy, and quantum theory, and produced many drawings using surprisingly sophisticated geometry, such as *Geometric Projections*, n.d.<sup>11</sup>

By the 1960s Nakamura was comparing the development of science with the development of the arts. He even noted the parallels between the struggle for acceptance that new ideas in science had experienced and abstract art's struggle to find an audience:

The science of art is at its most interesting stage. Through history, in man's search of knowledge, new thoughts such as Copernicus' theory of solar system, Darwin's theory of evolution, etc., have caused controversy. Art and its theory at present is a very controversial dilemma due to the lack of adequate basic theory.<sup>12</sup>

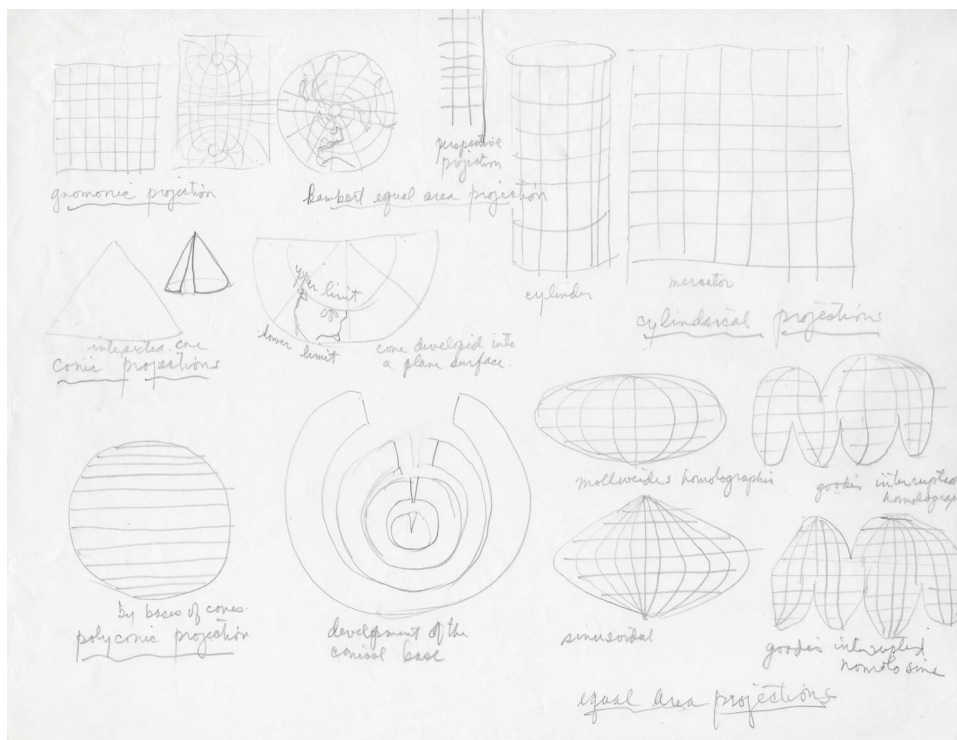
Significantly, Nakamura refers to "the science of art" in this passage. He did see his approach to art as simply a different form of scientific inquiry, since he held that art and science were part of the same historical zeitgeist. He added:

In the history of art, all civilization and its developing period must be relative to the universal scientific and philosophic concept of its time (or the scientific and philosophic concept may be relative to art). Every developing phase and facet of science must produce some form of art. atomic/ molecular/ cellular/ inorganic and organic/ mental and mechanical/ planetary/ solar system/ galaxial/ the universe.<sup>13</sup>

More importantly, for Nakamura art was the linchpin to understanding what science has to say. In a 1972 interview he explained:

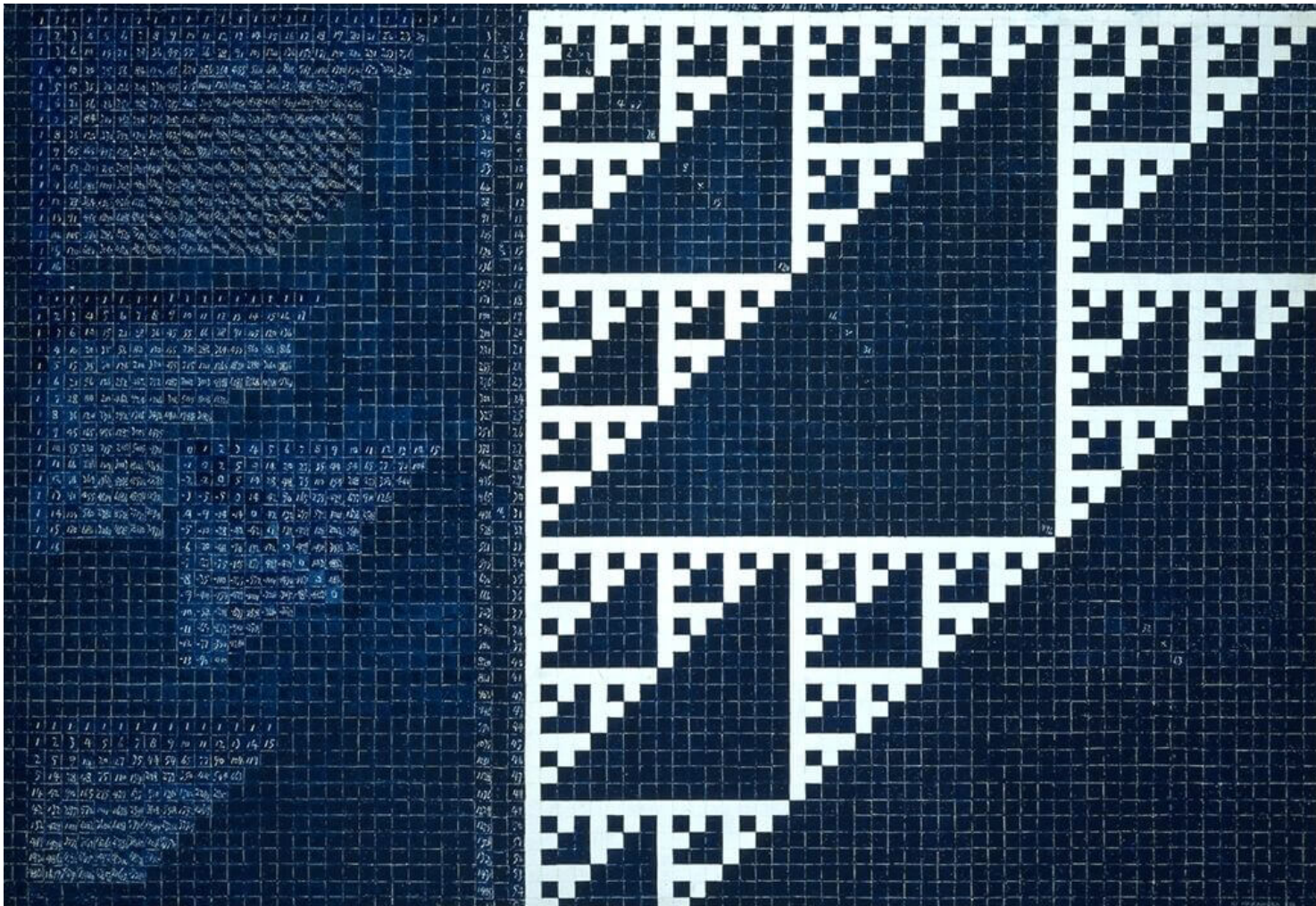
Through understanding culture, man will understand himself and his universe. The physical and natural sciences will get quite close to this understanding but won't know the whole evolution of the universe. Through culture—which will be part of science—man will understand man and the universe.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, art provides, in a sense, the rationale to understand our place in the universe: without it, science lacks purpose and meaning. It is with works like *Number Structure and Fractals*, 1983, where the artist visualizes the world of numbers whose structure shapes our visible world, that Nakamura finally achieved what he believed was the perfect marriage between art and science.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Geometric Projections*, n.d., Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.





Kazuo Nakamura, *Number Structure and Fractals*, 1983, oil on canvas, 71 x 101.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

### ALTERNATING CURRENTS: REPRESENTATION AND ABSTRACTION

Although some artists are unequivocal about working in a representational or abstract style, and feel that adopting one excludes the other, Kazuo Nakamura had no qualms about oscillating between the two throughout most of his career. For him, both styles were simply different ways of expressing the same thing, namely the underlying structure of the universe and its visible manifestations. This expression could make use of the language of figurative art, or geometry, or mathematics. It is not clear if Nakamura felt that one style was necessarily superior to another; they were likely just different lenses offering up their own unique perspective on the world.

Critics were quick to note this unusual characteristic of Nakamura's work. Robert Fulford was one of the earliest, commenting in 1956:

He seems ... to alternate between construction of tensely two-dimensional lines and imaginative spatial essays that show an unorthodox vision of perspective. It is as if he were a Bach one day and a Beethoven the next. When this was written Nakamura was painting powerful three-dimensional cubes that looked like hollowed out cement buildings. They vaguely suggested a combination of Salvador Dali and Piet Mondrian.<sup>15</sup>

Harry Malcolmson raised the issue of Nakamura's alternating styles again almost a decade later:

Most artists adopt a painting style, work it through, then go on to some new style. Not Nakamura. At all times he maintains a minimum of three styles, each of which he develops simultaneously. Every time he opens a show, as he has this past week at the Morris Gallery, each of his styles will be pushed forward along parallel paths.... It doesn't tell me anything to be told by a collector he likes Nakamura. It's necessary to go on and find which Nakamura it is they mean.<sup>16</sup>

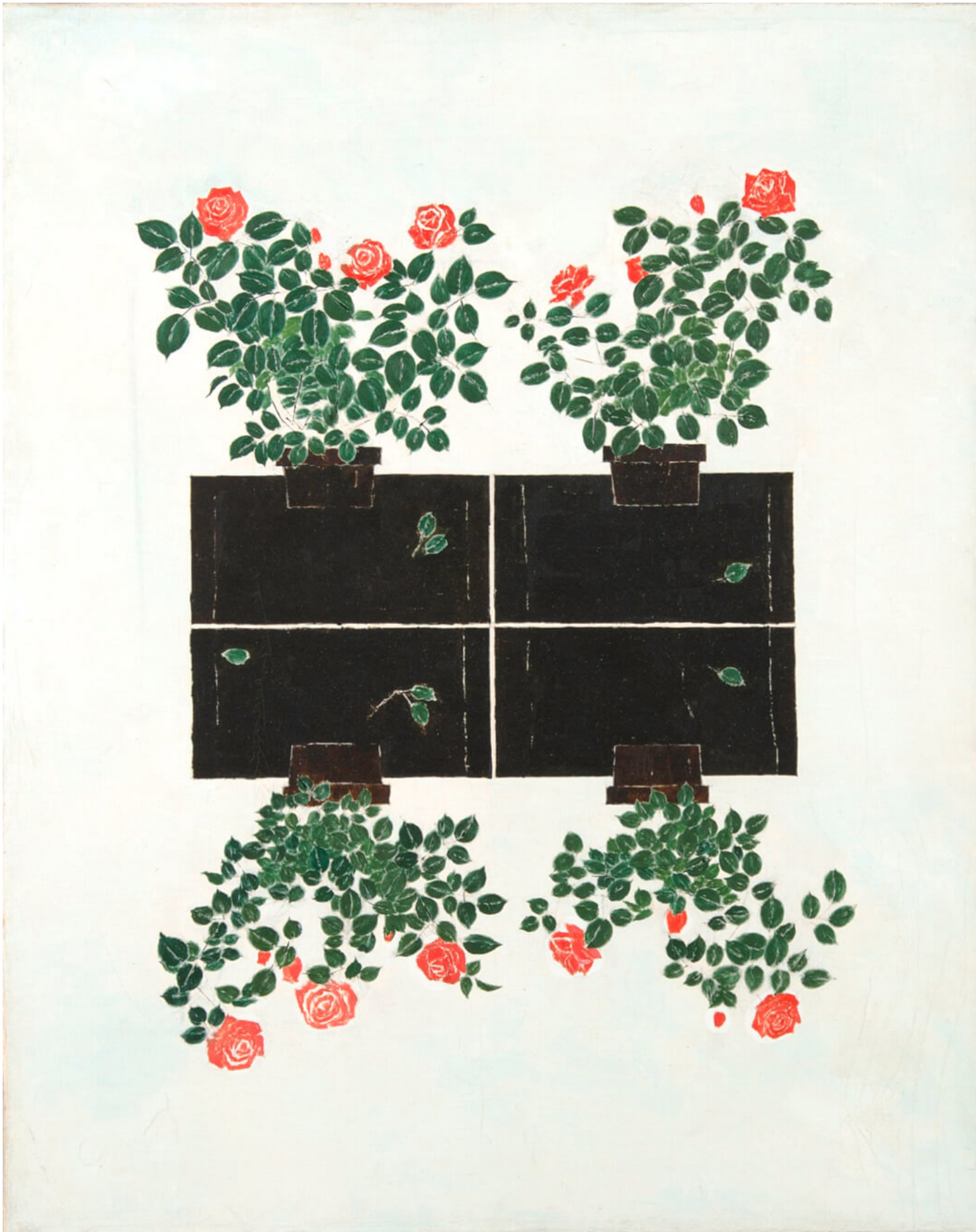
In the Morris Gallery show of 1965, for example, Malcolmson might have encountered works as different as *Lake, B.C.*, 1964; *Untitled*, 1964; and *Structure, Two Horizons*, 1964.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Ages Past*, 1953, oil on board, 68.6 x 96.5 cm, private collection, Quebec.

Another writer, Paul Gladu, opined in 1967 that fundamental similarities exist between the diverse styles in Nakamura's oeuvre: "Their oscillation between realism and abstraction never fails to express the same sense of solitude and emptiness together with a certain gentleness and refinement usually associated, in our mind, with the philosophies of the East."<sup>17</sup> Although Gladu appeared to read a bit too much into the works, he nevertheless recognized that fundamentally the different styles are similar.





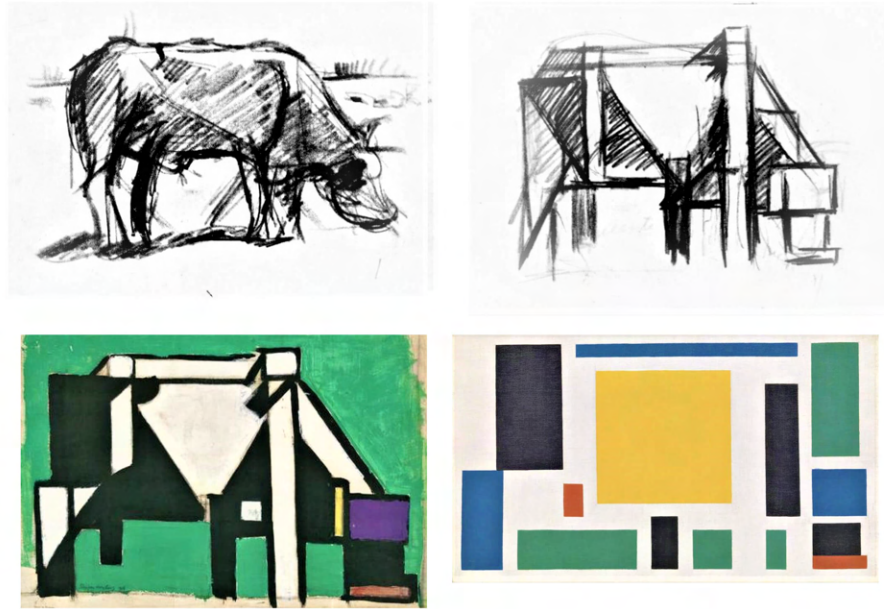
Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled*, 1964, oil on canvas, 62.9 x 50.2 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

Abstraction in art dates to the beginning of the twentieth century and has two main forms. The first abstracts from nature. The artist observes the seen world and distills it into its essence, as illustrated famously by the Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931) in *Composition VIII (The Cow) [4 Stages of Abstraction]*, c.1917. A subset of this first form of abstraction copies nature but at a more fundamental level that captures its underlying laws. Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935) painted this way. The second form is pure expression. The artist manifests the unseen—music, spiritualism, emotions, for example

—and renders its elements using non-descriptive forms such as line and colour.

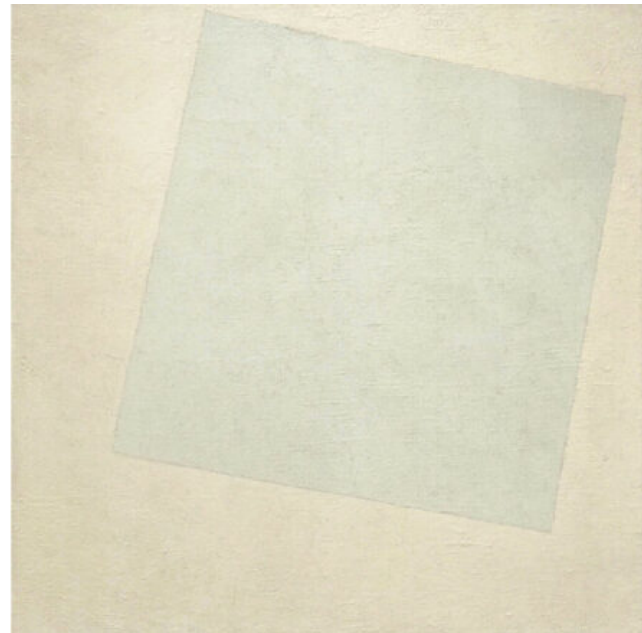
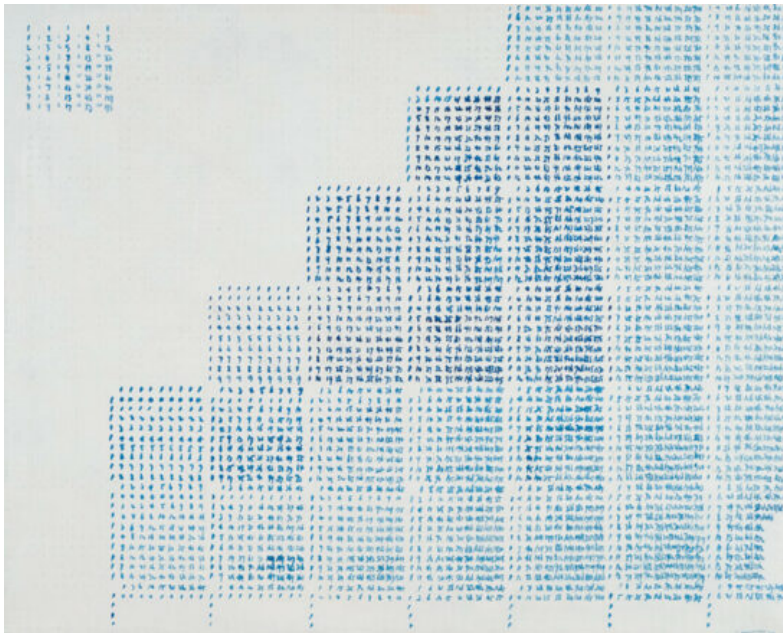
The work of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) is an example, as are most of Painters Eleven. Nakamura does not fit neatly into any of these groups, except maybe in arriving at a solution with his Number Structure paintings that was akin to what Malevich arrived at with his White on White paintings. Both created an ultimate abstract painting.

Yet the problem Nakamura tackled in all of his works was basically the same need to understand the world. He just chose to tackle it from different angles, using different tools and different stylistic approaches. In this respect he was much like Paul Klee (1879–1940), with whom he is often compared, though he denied any influence.<sup>18</sup> Nakamura was nevertheless systematic in his experimentation, as the various styles appear to peel back distinct layers of our world, from the visible to the elemental, until he settled on the Number Structures. As *Number Structure No. 9*, 1984, illustrates, he revealed through numbers, and the sequences they can generate, the essence of the natural world and its underlying laws. Even then he never gave up figurative work entirely. Nakamura continued to paint the occasional landscape, which sold well and where he could focus on the surface rather than the more demanding underlying patterns and processes.



Theo van Doesburg, *Composition VIII (The Cow) [4 Stages of Abstraction]*, c.1917, pencil, gouache, oil on canvas, various sizes, Museum of Modern Art, New York.





LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Number Structure No. 9*, 1984, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 101.5 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto. RIGHT: Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918, oil on canvas, 79.4 x 79.4 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

## INFLUENCE AND LEGACY

Kazuo Nakamura has not had the exposure of some of his Painters Eleven peers like Jack Bush (1909-1977) or Harold Town. Despite how innovative he was, his works do not draw attention to themselves, being small in scale and equable in subject matter, and the uniqueness of his style and its variety somewhat inimitable. To Canadians generally, Nakamura's name and work are not well known.

He has, however, drawn the attention of composers, animators, and architects. Polish-born Canadian composer Harry Freedman (1922-2005) wrote *Images* (1958), musical impressions inspired by Lawren S. Harris (1885-1970), Jean Paul Riopelle (1923-2002), and Nakamura. In 2018, a jazz quartet helmed by Nakamura's son-in-law, Jay Boehmer, performed *The Kazuo Nakamura Project* at the Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto. Most recently, Toronto musician Heraclitus Akimbo (Joe Strutt) wrote and recorded "Inner Structure (for Kazuo Nakamura)" on his album *Catastrophic Forgetting* (2020). As part of the Eleven in Motion:

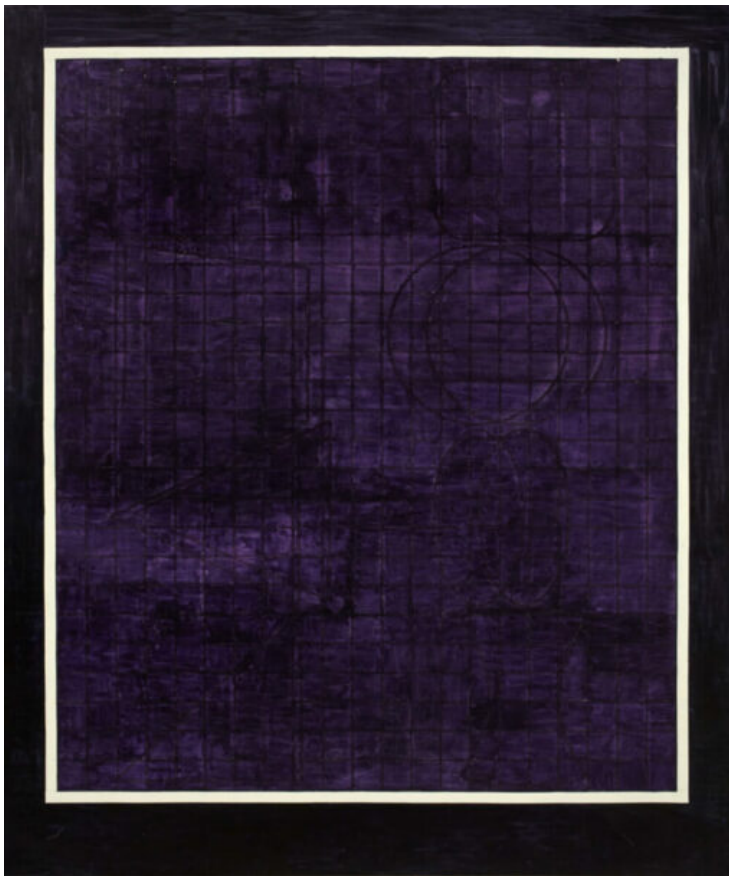


Kazuo Nakamura, *Inner View*, 1954, oil on Masonite, 48.2 x 61 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

Abstract Expressions in Animation project inspired by Painters Eleven, artist and filmmaker Patrick Jenkins created *Inner View*, a short animation based on Nakamura's work. And for his master's thesis in 2008, architecture student Kevin James proposed an award-winning memorial for Japanese Canadians interned during the Second World War that was substantially informed by Nakamura's abstract paintings.<sup>19</sup>



A few painters, such as Alex Cameron (b.1947), admire Nakamura greatly even if he has not directly influenced their work. However, Nakamura's success—like that of peers like Takao Tanabe (b.1926) and Roy Kiyooka (1926–2004)—has laid the groundwork for younger generations of Japanese Canadian artists, including Louise Noguchi (b.1958), Heather Yamada (b.1951), Warren Hoyano (b.1954), and their successors such as Emma Nishimura (b.1982) and Cindy Mochizuki (b.1976), whose achievements have been well chronicled over the years by artist and curator Bryce Kanbara (b.1947). As Louise Noguchi stated: "Kaz's presence on the Canadian artscene made it feasible to imagine that other Nikkei artists could become recognized in both the Japanese Canadian community and in mainstream Canadian society. Kaz validated the idea of being an artist in the community. Perhaps it wasn't such a crazy endeavour."<sup>20</sup>



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Geometrical Suspension No.2*, 1967, canvas, oil, masking tape, graphite, 152.3 x 126.8 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura with his work *Infinite Waves*, October 30, 1979, photographer unknown, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. This photograph was taken by a staff photographer at the vernissage for the exhibition *Painters Eleven In Retrospective* at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.





# STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Kazuo Nakamura was constantly experimenting with different styles, taking inspiration from Japanese woodcuts through Impressionism to the ideas of the Bauhaus. Although he was well known for his signature blue/green landscapes, those works were but one expression of his interest in nature. Ultimately, Nakamura was seeking a deeper truth in the numerical patterns and progressions that give structure to our universe. All of his art—whether figurative or abstract paintings, or sculptural works—was a means to a deeper understanding of the physical world we live in.



### THE INSPIRATION OF JAPANESE ART

Early critics writing about Kazuo Nakamura's work often commented, in passing, on its "Oriental" sensibility, as if that quality were self-evident. They referred to the delicate touch and sense of repose found in some of his paintings, and to their emphasis on nature. For the most part, these comments reflect a stereotypical and, at times, insensitive view that because Nakamura was of Japanese descent, by extension he would produce "Japanese art."

George Elliott, writing about Nakamura's work in 1954, was one of the first critics to draw the connection between the artist and Japanese art at length, stating: "He

has two recognizable sources of subject-matter. One is what might be called a racial instinct for landscape. The traditional Japanese fragility, precision, simplicity, also a certain airy romance in landscape painting is in his work, although it is not especially Japanese in appearance."<sup>1</sup> Even the noted American critic Clement Greenberg, who was invited by Jock Macdonald (1897–1960) in 1957 to visit the studios of Painters Eleven, observed after seeing Nakamura's work that the artist was "just a bit too captured by oriental 'taste.'"<sup>2</sup> This was not a compliment on Greenberg's part, as he was notoriously anti-"Oriental" when it came to art.

Nakamura himself struggled with characterizations that his art reflected influences from Japanese culture. In a 1979 interview, Joan Murray posed the question:

Everyone notes that your work has something Japanese about it or Oriental at least. Were you actually thinking of Oriental art when you were working?

K.N. No.

J.M. Was it ingrown?

K.N. I think it must have been ingrown.<sup>3</sup>

Only once did Nakamura explicitly acknowledge that a quality of his work might be directly related to a Japanese artistic sensibility. When asked about the well-known critic J. Russell Harper's comment that a certain "Eastern Feeling" existed in Nakamura's paintings, the artist replied: "If there is any Eastern feeling in my work, it may be my use of mono colour, which is also quite common now in many contemporary painters."<sup>4</sup> Works ranging from the Inner Structure paintings to the 1960s landscapes, such as *Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964, as well as the String paintings, all show Nakamura's use of single dominant colour hues.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Solitude 7*, 1973, oil on linen, 61 x 76 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.





Kazuo Nakamura, *Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964, oil on canvas, 127 x 160 cm, MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie.

Nakamura was aware early on—through his uncle and the Japanese art magazines he subscribed to—of the art being made in Japan. Yet his formal art education at Central Technical School and in the Toronto art scene exposed him to Western art, predominantly British. He may also simply have picked up on certain stylistic elements common to Japanese art through Western artists like Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), who admired and emulated nineteenth-century Japanese woodcuts.

In the broadest of terms, it might be argued that Nakamura embraced the notion of immersion in nature because of his exposure to this idea in Japanese art and culture. Art historian Richard Hill quotes this statement made by Nakamura: “Man is never above nature. Man is with nature (Universal Evolution).” That said, similar broad statements can be found in a number of sources, including the most obvious derived from science.<sup>5</sup>



Setting aside the question of themes, one can easily apply to Nakamura's work terms such as "refinement," "harmony," "stillness," "precision," "irregularity," or "untutored beauty" (*wabi-sabi*), which have a long history in the art and aesthetics of Japanese culture.<sup>6</sup> Some of Nakamura's sculptures, like *Tower Structures*, 1967, can be characterized as unrefined, unfinished, and thus linked specifically to the Japanese aesthetic of imperfection. Then again, they can also be related to the Neoplatonic idea of the imperfection of earthly forms, as Jerrold Morris asserted when he spoke of Nakamura taking on the project of the Greek philosophers.<sup>7</sup>

Some might argue that stylistic traits such as the high horizon lines and predominant blues in landscapes like *August, Morning Reflections*, 1961, can be attributed to Japanese influences.<sup>8</sup> However, the high horizon is also a feature of the mountainous landscape around Tashme, British Columbia, where Nakamura was interned between 1942 and 1944, and consequently is seen in western Canadian landscape art too. Certainly there are traces of an influence, but they are incidental, picked up here and there, some more consistently applied than others.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled*, 1955, Hydrocal plaster sculpture, 59 x 20.3 x 17.8 cm, private collection. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Morning*, 1962, oil on canvas, 106 x 94 cm, Collection of Rudy de Jonge.



In fact, Nakamura's fullest statement about Japanese culture suggests why unravelling these influences is so difficult. In an interview with David Fujino, he was asked about Japanese culture and its survival in Canada. He said he felt that with intermarrying it would be diluted to the point that it would disappear in fifty years. He explained:

We think in terms of a Japanese population bringing its culture; but whatever is the strongest cultural influence will influence the rest of the general culture. At a certain point, you see, there's a certain culture that fits into the evolution of the universal culture. It's the strongest influence, so really it doesn't have to be pushed or forced.... If you look at European culture you'll notice that different cultures move into each other; for example, Greek became Roman culture.<sup>9</sup>

Nakamura reflects this idea in his description of the evolution of art: in the charts he uses to outline the process, Japanese art is absorbed in favour of progress toward a more universal art.

Perhaps because of this belief in a universal art, Nakamura was not interested in highlighting which elements in his work were Japanese and which were not. As Richard Hill has astutely recognized, Nakamura's ongoing use of Prussian blue, as in *Number Structure and Fractals*, 1983, was a



Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspended Landscape*, 1967, oil on canvas, 127.3 x 107.1 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.



nod to Japanese indigo. However, to Nakamura this feature was not so much Japanese as it was universal: its origin may have been Japanese, but it had been folded into the universal culture for all to use. And as he strove to create more universal works with his Number Structure series, it became important not to show any discernable cultural influence. His concern, therefore, was not with the origin of an idea, style, or technique—Japanese or otherwise—but with applying it to our understanding of universal truths.

### IMPRESSIONISM AND POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Both Impressionism and Post-Impressionism fascinated Kazuo Nakamura throughout his life, particularly the work of Claude Monet (1840–1926), Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). Cézanne appears to have influenced Nakamura's paintings from the early 1950s, such as *Forest*, 1953. That painting's broken brushwork, a technique adapted from the Impressionists, brings to mind the French artist's early depictions of Mont Sainte-Victoire, which Nakamura saw in the February 25, 1952, issue of *Life* magazine. Along with a text on Cézanne's work by Winthrop Sargeant is a pictorial essay that includes a Mont Sainte-Victoire painting dating from 1902–

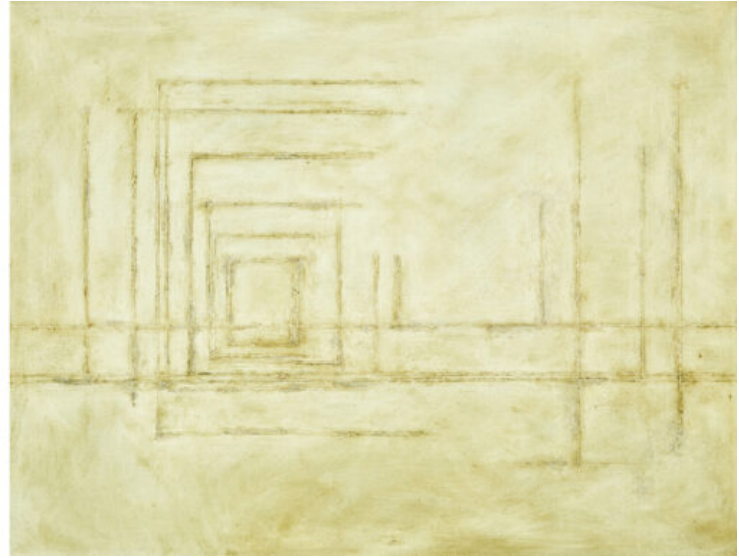
4. Another painting reproduced in the same article, *The Little Bridge*, 1879, depicts a lush forest with a bridge in the middle ground, all of which is reflected in the pool of water below. It bears a number of hallmarks also seen in Nakamura's evolving style, including the high or absent horizon line, the broken brushwork, and the use of reflections. Additionally, Cézanne rarely used outlines to demarcate objects in his work, constructing his forms through colour, a practice Nakamura also employed.

Nakamura acknowledged Cézanne's influence, pointing to a reproduction of *Chestnut Trees at Jas de Bouffan*, c.1885–86, in *World Famous Paintings* (1939) by Rockwell Kent (1882–1971), which was the first art book he purchased while interned at Tashme.<sup>10</sup> The broken brushwork describing the ground beneath the trees and the network of lines created by the branches in that painting are features found in Nakamura's work too. He also referenced Cézanne's famous advice about dealing with nature through geometry, and then professed his desire to go a step further: "Cézanne broke nature down into cones, spheres. But we are living in an age where we can see a structure, a structure based on atomic structure and motion."<sup>11</sup> Nakamura's Inner Structure works, which take up the themes of the atomic age, followed soon.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Forest*, 1953, oil on Masonite, 48 x 60.9 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.





LEFT: Paul Cézanne, *Chestnut Trees at Jas de Bouffan*, c.1885-86, oil on canvas, 71.12 x 90.17 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Inner Structure*, 1961, oil on canvas, 61 x 79.4 cm, private collection.

The mature style of paintings like *Inner Structure*, 1956, and *Inner View*, 1954, is indebted to Monet. It is a striking feature of these Inner Structure works that they appear somewhat hazy and out of focus, much like the atmospheric quality of Monet's paintings of the Rouen Cathedral facade. It is Nakamura's way of intentionally giving us but a glimpse of the underlying structure and patterns of the world. In his 1966 painting *Green Landscape*, a work that, uncharacteristically for his landscapes, includes a few red flowers—roses, to be exact—Nakamura appears to pay tribute to Monet's *Poppies*, 1873, which he owned as a small reproduction. But generally, it was Monet's later works—culminating with the Water Lilies series and their absence or near-absence of horizon lines, broken brushwork, and tantalizing play of light created through the use of white—that appealed to Nakamura.

Shortly after his nod to Monet with *Green Landscape*—and perhaps not coincidentally—Nakamura also paid tribute to van Gogh's famous painting of irises in *In Space, Blue Irises*, 1967. Nakamura had a marked preference for blues and greens, two colours that predominate in van Gogh's late oeuvre. As a collector of Japanese prints, in which green and blue are prominent, especially indigo in woodblock prints (*aizuri-e*), van Gogh may have been inspired to use these colours more frequently in his own work. Van Gogh also famously described the Japanese artist's immersion in nature:



LEFT: Claude Monet, *Poppies*, 1873, oil on canvas, 50 x 65.3 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Green Landscape*, 1966, oil on canvas, 93.7 x 121.3 cm, private collection.

If we study Japanese art, we see a man who is undoubtedly wise, philosophic and intelligent, who spends his time doing what? In studying the distance between the earth and the moon? No. In studying Bismarck's policy? No. He studies a single blade of grass.

But this blade of grass leads him to draw every plant and then the seasons, the wide aspects of the countryside, then animals, then the human figure.



So he passes his life, and life is too short to do the whole.

Come now, isn't it almost a true religion which these simple Japanese teach us, who live in nature as though they themselves were flowers?<sup>12</sup>

Nakamura's explicit tributes to Monet and van Gogh in the years 1966 and 1967 suggest he was looking at the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists at that time.

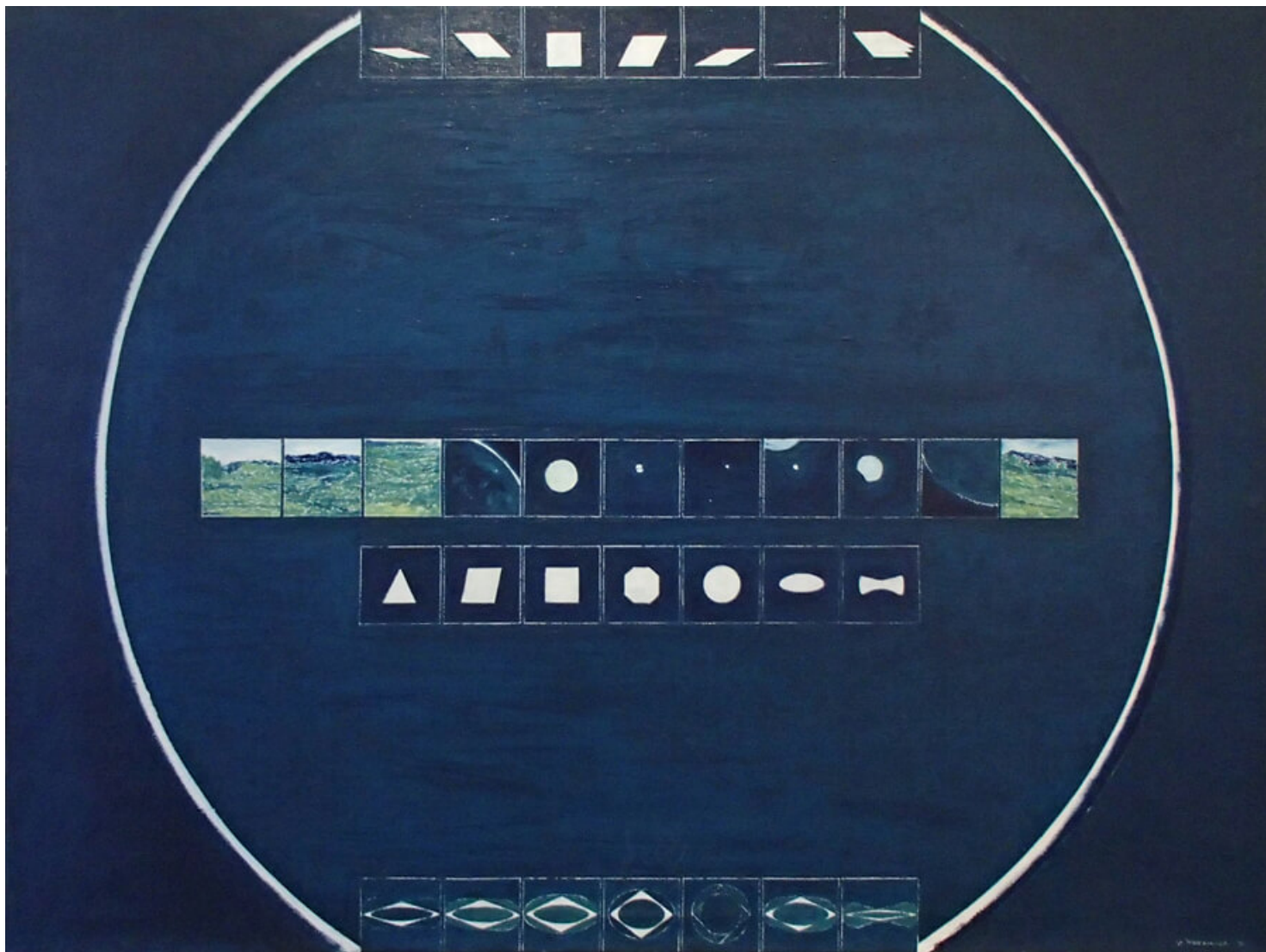


LEFT: Vincent van Gogh, *Iris*, 1890, oil on cardboard, later thinned and mounted on canvas, 62.2 x 48.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *In Space, Blue Irises*, 1967, oil on linen, 121.9 x 94 cm, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

As he mapped out his theory of the evolution of art, Nakamura noted in an interview how it paralleled science's development:

Around 1900 man started to understand about atoms; also then, the Impressionists appeared.... Until then, most art forms were quite lineal. But there's no such thing as a line when you begin to understand atoms, and their motion. That's one way you could say Impressionism came up. Then Einstein's relativity theory is based on motion—and so is Abstract art and its forms.<sup>13</sup>

*Spatial Concept, Geometry* of 1968 traces that evolution from the Renaissance to modern times with Impressionism and Post-Impressionism as the crux of a fundamental change. Reflecting that crux in his own work, Nakamura's brushwork became looser, emphasizing an element of temporality related to motion, and he adopted a palette of blue/green hues that bordered on the monochromatic. And yet these were just two stylistic waypoints in his ongoing artistic evolution.



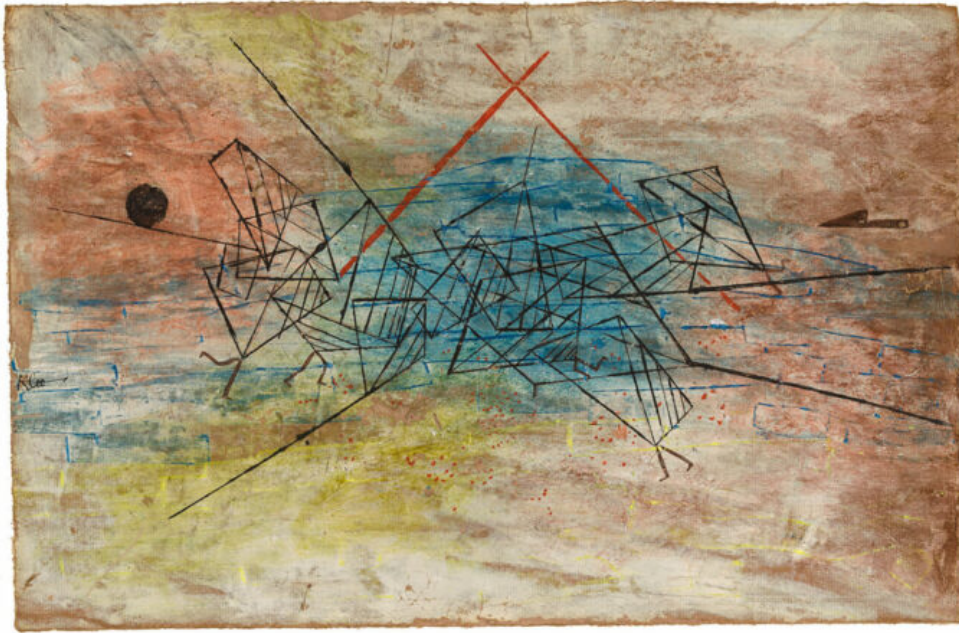
Kazuo Nakamura, *Spatial Concept #3*, 1970, oil on canvas, 91.44 x 121.9 cm, Collection of Paul and Janice Sabourin. Photo by Kalaman + Demetriou (K+D).

### BAUHAUS AND MODERNISM

The fingerprints of the Bauhaus and modernism generally are all over Kazuo Nakamura's body of work. Jock Macdonald, who tutored Nakamura as a teenager in Vancouver and was also a member of Painters Eleven, would have introduced these ideas initially, and Central Technical School of Toronto, whose curriculum and teachings owed a considerable debt to the Bauhaus, would have reinforced them.<sup>14</sup>

Macdonald likely drew Nakamura's attention to the writings of László Moholy-Nagy, which address extensively the relationship between art, society, and science, and possibly also to the work and writings of Paul Klee, whose *Pedagogical Sketchbook* is replete with examples of scientific concepts informing his art.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to gauge the extent of Moholy-Nagy's influence beyond the broad program that art's progress must proceed hand in hand with that of science. His focus was more on technology and art, whereas Nakamura was more interested in the physical sciences. Klee's writings deal with topics ranging from gravity to the motion of atoms, which Nakamura was equally interested in, but evidence of Nakamura having read Klee is scant. Occasionally, Klee's use of colour washes and networks of spidery lines, as seen in *Battle*, 1930, are echoed in Nakamura's work—*Composition 10-51*, 1951, for example.





LEFT: Paul Klee, *Gefecht (Battle)*, 1930, gouache on cardboard, 36.2 cm x 47.8 cm, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine.  
RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Composition 10-51*, 1951.

The Bauhaus's greatest influence on Nakamura was through its Bauhaus book series, edited by Moholy-Nagy, as well as its lectures. Through these sources, the school promulgated the modernist view of art by sharing the ideas of visiting artists and teachers to an audience beyond the school itself. Piet Mondrian's collection of five essays, and particularly his "methodical evolution" from figurative painting to abstraction, clearly drew Nakamura's attention. Not only was the initial work of both artists rooted in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, but Mondrian and Nakamura also evolved a style that broke down our visible world into basic visual elements that were largely geometric. For example, Nakamura's early use of trees and the way their branches evolve into an abstract network of lines that eventually merge with the space surrounding them, as in *Hillside*, 1954, matches closely the process Mondrian undertook in his famous tree series between 1908 and 1912. However, whereas Mondrian settled on a geometric simplicity heavily influenced by spiritualism, Nakamura pushed his abstraction further by embracing the mathematical devoid of any spiritual inflection. The Number Structure paintings are a clear example.

The notion of progress in the arts that Nakamura charted in *Spatial Concept, Geometry*, 1968, and described in various notes and short texts, was not new to the Bauhaus, but the school and many of the artists linked to it perpetuated the idea. Mondrian embraced the concept of art and society evolving toward a utopian goal, which in art meant greater visual simplification. It is an idea echoed in the writings and paintings of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), whom Nakamura was familiar with, and Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935), whose work he would have encountered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The geometric formulation of that evolutionary model, though, was more closely related to the Russian artist El Lissitzky (1890–1941), who famously paralleled the development of art with the history of mathematics in "A. and Pangeometry" of 1925. Lissitzky equated the two-dimensional, flat representation found in Egyptian art, for example, with a simple numerical progression of 1, 2, 3,..., and lines and planes in geometry. He cited mathematical equivalents for the introduction of overlapping forms and the use



of fractions, and so on, until he reached the present (that is, 1925), where the art was equivalent to the emergence of imaginary numbers and non-Euclidean geometry.<sup>16</sup> Nakamura's reading is eerily similar, though it could have developed independently. In the 1974 publication for his Robert McLaughlin Gallery retrospective, Nakamura wrote:

1st tier: two dimensional perception concept—flat, ladder period (to about 1400 A.D.)  
 2nd tier: three dimensional perception concept—perspective and isometric period (1400–1870 A.D.)  
 3rd tier: four dimensional perception concept—cabinet, flat, octagonal, circle, concave-convex, mobius and wave period (1870 to present).<sup>17</sup>

Broadly speaking, Nakamura saw art prior to 1400 as dominated by a two-dimensional conception of the world, then arriving with linear perspective at the Renaissance, and with Impressionism he saw a visual parallel to the world of the fourth dimension that includes non-Euclidean geometry.

The Bauhaus's emphasis on the social function of art and its relationship to science and technology was critical for Nakamura both thematically and stylistically. By the 1960s he was experimenting with various forms of abstraction, especially geometric, in an attempt to capture and reveal motion not only in time, but also in space. That idea would guide his art for the rest of his life.

### A LANDSCAPE ARTIST?

It is curious that in all the studies of Kazuo Nakamura, rarely is he identified and discussed as a landscape artist. Yet outside of his more abstract paintings, his sculptures, and the occasional still life, he produced nothing but landscapes. So why has he not found his place in the revered tradition of the landscape in Canadian art?



Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled (Magic Squares)*, c.1975–85, oil and graphite on Masonite, 43.2 x 34.3 cm, private collection.



To start, Nakamura did not land on landscape painting by choice. His earliest paintings were of various locations around Vancouver, and it is only once he and his family were interned at Tashme that Nakamura started to draw and paint landscapes in earnest. In fact, some of the typical features of his landscapes, like the high horizon line, date back to his time at Tashme, as they were a feature of the geography of the area. It has also been suggested that

Nakamura may have turned to landscape painting because he was never taught to draw the human figure when he studied commercial art. However, given his propensity to experiment, it seems more likely that Nakamura chose not to depict the human figure. People rarely appear in his paintings after 1945. And even in his sculptures, a medium that lends itself to portraiture, he stuck with abstract subject matter.

The question remains: Why is Nakamura so infrequently discussed in terms of the landscape genre? Most likely it is because he did not end up a landscape painter, but rather a painter of numerical sequences, an identity that he proudly accepted. Also, he never did settle on a single style. Tom Thomson (1877-1917) had a unique style, as did Paterson Ewen (1925-2002), when it came to landscapes: you cannot mistake their works as being by anyone else. Nakamura, in contrast, came to be identified with the exquisite blue/green landscapes he painted in the late 1950s and early 1960s, of which *Lakeside, Summer Morning*, 1961, is an excellent example. However, he produced those landscapes alongside abstruse works like *Landscape 67*, 1967. Moreover, the majority of his landscapes are naturalistic rather than realistic. In other words, they are not of an identifiable location, nor painted *en plein air*. For Nakamura, a landscape was an entry point to reveal more universal ideas.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Forest*, 1972, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 81.3 cm, Collection of Paul and Janice Sabourin. Photo by Kalamani + Demetriou (K+D). RIGHT: Tashme camp with mountains in the background, c.1940-49, photographer unknown, Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections.



LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Solitude*, 1973, oil on canvas, 61 x 76.2 cm, private collection. RIGHT: Kazuo Nakamura, *Grey Morning*, 1961, watercolour on paper, 38.2 x 53.5 cm, Museum London.



Nakamura liked to create landscapes depicting vast open spaces, lakes, and dense forests. Pictorially they mostly assert the flatness of the surface upon which the line and colours are applied, as he was keenly interested in pattern. Symbolically, the dense forests found in works like *Hemlocks*, 1957, provide a screen on which he creates intricate patterns with the branches and foliage, which reveal the order underlying the apparent chaos of nature. The open fields, as in *Autumn Morning*, 1958, show the vastness of the spaces we inhabit, ungraspable, which every now and then are concealed by fog or mist, making what lies beyond inaccessible as well. The lakes and their surfaces in *Lakeside*, *Summer Morning* contrast the physical world with their reflections, paralleling our own reflection of the world on the painted surface. Lastly, works like *Landscape*, 1953, border tantalizingly on abstraction, the end game of Nakamura's career.

Perhaps most importantly, it is doubtful that Nakamura ever considered himself a landscape artist. He painted landscapes, but his purpose was never to represent the visible world. His goals were loftier. Every scene—whether tree, lake, mountain, or a mix—was an opportunity to experiment with a new way of seeing, to transcend the surface and find a new way to understand the structure that lay beneath.



Kazuo Nakamura, *Hemlocks*, 1957, oil on tempered hardboard (Masonite), 84 x 108 cm, Collection of Jane Nakamura.





The works of Kazuo Nakamura are held in public and private collections in Canada and internationally. Although the following institutions hold the works listed below, they may not always be on view. This list contains only the works in public collections discussed and illustrated in this book.

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## ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
416-979-6648  
ago.ca



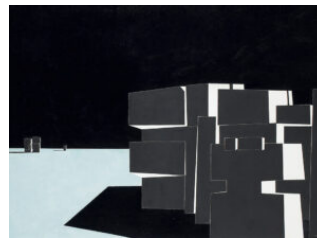
**Kazuo Nakamura,**  
*Winter, Don River, 1949*  
Graphite and  
watercolour on paper  
38.1 x 56.8 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura,**  
*Autumn, c.1950*  
Oil on untampered  
hardboard  
61.1 x 48.3 cm

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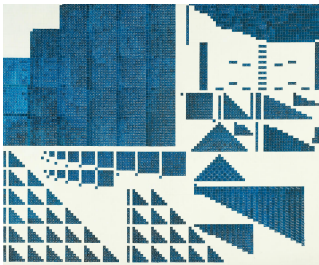
**Kazuo Nakamura,**  
*Fortress, 1956*  
Oil and graphite on  
Masonite  
88.3 x 121.6 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Inner Structure, 1956***  
Oil on hardboard  
60.8 x 78.8 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura,**  
*Number Structure II, 1984*  
Oil on canvas  
127 x 152.3 cm

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## CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

1 Vimy Place  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
819-776-7000  
warmuseum.ca



**Kazuo Nakamura, *First Frost*, 1941**  
Watercolour and  
graphite on paper  
22.3 x 30.3 cm

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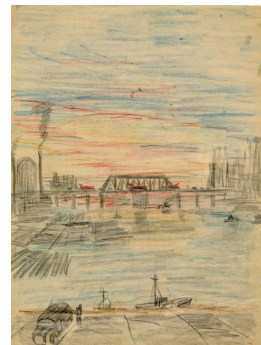
**Kazuo Nakamura, *Strawberry Farm*, c.1941**  
Watercolour on paper  
22.3 x 30.3 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Back Alley, Vancouver*, 1942**  
Watercolour on paper  
22.4 x 30 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Vancouver, Old Cambie Street Bridge*, 1942**  
Coloured pencil on  
paper  
30.1 x 22.4 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Tashme, July 2*, 1943**  
Gouache on paper  
35.8 x 55.8 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Torch Parade, February 25*, 1944**  
Watercolour on paper  
23 x 30.6 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *March 18, March 18*, 1944**  
Gouache on card  
28 x 35.5 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Hamilton, December 28*, 1944**  
Watercolour on paper  
30 x 22 cm

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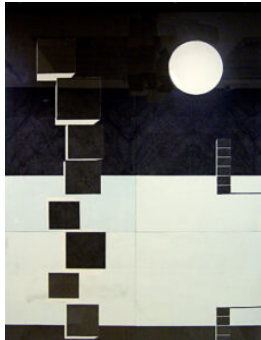


**Kazuo Nakamura, *Twelve Mile Lake*, 1944**  
Watercolour, pen, and  
ink on paper  
19.3 x 24.4 cm

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## GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO ART COLLECTION

The Archives of Ontario  
134 Ian Macdonald Boulevard  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
[archives.gov.on.ca/en/goac/index.aspx](http://archives.gov.on.ca/en/goac/index.aspx)



**Kazuo Nakamura, *Two Horizons*, 1968**

Oil on canvas  
261.6 x 196.9 cm

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## MACLAREN ART CENTRE

37 Mulcaster Street  
Barrie, Ontario, Canada  
705-721-9696  
[maclarenart.com](http://maclarenart.com)



**Kazuo Nakamura, *Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964**

Oil on canvas  
127 x 160 cm

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## MUSEUM LONDON

421 Ridout Street North  
London, Ontario, Canada  
519-661-0333  
museumlondon.ca



**Kazuo Nakamura, *Grey Morning*, 1961**

Watercolour on paper  
38.2 x 53.5 cm



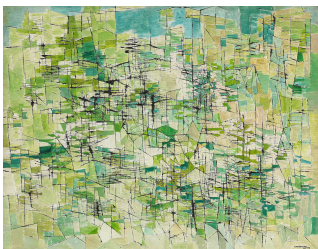
**Kazuo Nakamura, *Lakeside, Summer Morning*, 1961**

Oil on canvas  
60 x 77.5 cm

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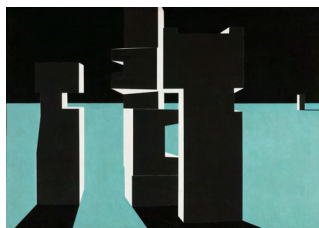
## NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
613-990-1985  
gallery.ca



**Kazuo Nakamura, *Hillside*, 1954**

Oil on Masonite  
59.8 x 78.4 cm



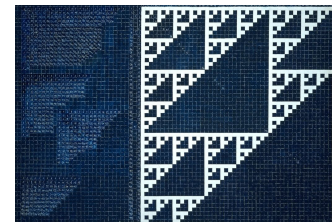
**Kazuo Nakamura, *Prairie Towers*, 1956**

Oil on Masonite  
86.5 x 122.4 cm



**Kazuo Nakamura, *August, Morning Reflections*, 1961**

Oil on canvas  
93.7 x 121.5 cm



**Kazuo Nakamura, *Number Structure and Fractals*, 1983**

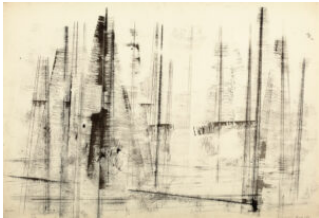
Oil on canvas  
71 x 101.7 cm

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**THE ROBERT MCLAUGHLIN GALLERY**

72 Queen Street  
Civic Centre  
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada  
905-576-3000  
rmg.on.ca



**Kazuo Nakamura, *Trees*, 1951**

Ink on paper  
38.1 x 55.9 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Landscape*, 1952**

Watercolour and ink on paper  
37.8 x 52.4 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Reflections*, 1952**

Graphite and ink on paper  
38 x 55.9 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Forest*, 1953**

Oil on Masonite  
48 x 60.9 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Morning Landscape*, 1953**

Ink wash on paper  
38.1 x 56.1 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Inner View*, 1954**

Oil on Masonite  
48.2 x 61 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Into Space*, 1954**

Oil and string on canvas  
55.9 x 68.8 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Infinite Waves*, 1957**

Oil over string on canvas  
94.1 x 101.7 cm

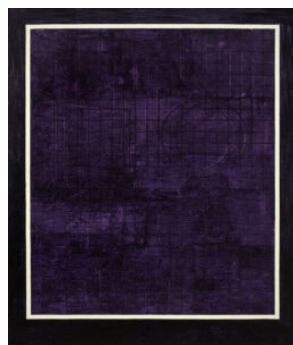
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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Lake, B.C.*, 1964**

Oil on canvas  
121.6 x 93 cm

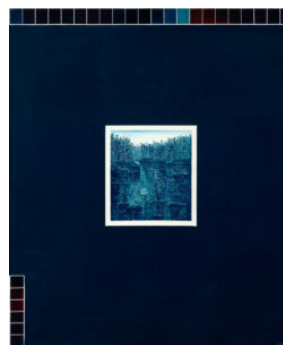
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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Geometrical Suspension No.2*, 1967**

Oil, masking tape, graphite on canvas  
152.3 x 126.8 cm

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**Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspended Landscape*, 1967**

Oil on canvas  
127.3 x 107.1 cm

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## TORONTO PEARSON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

6301 Silver Dart Drive

Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

[torontopearson.com/en/while-you-are-here/art-and-culture/past-art/galaxies](https://torontopearson.com/en/while-you-are-here/art-and-culture/past-art/galaxies)



**Kazuo Nakamura, *Galaxies*, 1964**

Stainless steel

305 x 305 x 305 cm

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## NOTES

## BIOGRAPHY

1. Details of Nakamura's early life draw from the author's correspondence with Jane Nakamura, and from Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), 34.
2. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 34-35; Iris Nowell, *Painters Eleven: The Wild Ones of Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011), 297. Joan Murray records that Macdonald taught Nakamura in Grades 9 and 10 for one hour a week between 1940 and 1942. See Joan Murray, Notes of a phone conversation with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, late 1970s, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa).
3. Sakura Torizuka, "Kazuo Nakamura, a Living Treasure of Canadian Art: Gendai Gallery Presents *Tashme<sup>2</sup>, Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura*," *New Canadian* 65, no. 14 (2001): E1-E2.
4. Bryce Kanbara, "Tashme Squared," *Tashme<sup>2</sup>: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura* (Don Mills, ON: Gendai Gallery, 2001), 1. Beginning in the nineteenth century, millions of Canadian families regularly received the thick catalogues put out by rival department store chains Eaton's and Simpson's. For decades these catalogues were an important source of home consumer products for Canadians.
5. Kanbara, "Tashme Squared," 1.
6. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 34.
7. See Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: Life & Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2016), 31, 55. Grison mentions Nakamura's teenage ambition of pursuing science, although he speculates that this ambition may have been suggested by Macdonald. See Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 117-18n7.
8. Nancy Baele, "Nakamura Uncovers the Inner Structure in Life," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 25, 1993, B6.
9. This statement reads more fully as: "It is the government's plan to get these people out of B.C. as fast as possible. It is my personal intention, as long as I remain in public life, to see they never come back here. Let our slogan be for British Columbia: 'No Japs from the Rockies to the seas.'" Quoted in *Vancouver Daily Province*, April 4, 1942.
10. Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*, 3rd ed. (Burnaby, BC: Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, 2020), chap. 5.



11. Over 90 per cent of Japanese Canadians, all residents of British Columbia, were sent to internment camps or assigned to labour camps. See Greg Robinson and Andrew McIntosh, "Internment of Japanese Canadians," *Canadian Encyclopedia* (February 15, 2017 / update June 11, 2020), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/internment-of-japanese-canadians>.
12. Accounts of registering Japanese Canadians as "enemy aliens" and the subsequent internments can be found in Pamela Hickman and Masako Fukawa, *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Japanese Canadian Internment in the Second World War* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2011), 72-123, and in Sunahara, *Politics*.
13. Tashme is now a holiday resort known as Sunshine Valley; a memorial to the internment camp has been preserved.
14. This number represents well above 90 per cent of the Japanese Canadian population at the time, which was registered at 23,450 by the Census Bureau of Canada in 1941. See Sunahara, *Politics*, table 1. Japanese Canadian internees coined the term "ghost town," which referenced the fact that many internment camps were abandoned mining towns.
15. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 41-44.
16. Quoted in Kanbara, "Tashme Squared," 3.
17. Torizuka, "Kazuo Nakamura," n.p.
18. Kanbara, "Tashme Squared," 2.
19. Sunahara, *Politics*, chap. 6.
20. Author's correspondence with Jane Nakamura, June 2020.
21. Department of Labour, "Report on the Administration of Japanese Affairs in Canada 1942-1944" (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1945). Reproduced at Tashme Historical Project, <http://tashme.ca/overview/building-community-in-tashme/the-administration-of-japanese-affairs-in-canada-1942-1944/>.
22. Author's correspondence with Jane Nakamura, June 2020.
23. Sarah Milroy, "Adding and Abstracting with Nakamura," *Globe and Mail*, November 24, 2001, R5.
24. The title of the article by James Kindall was "The Day the Devil Smiled."
25. Murray, Notes of a phone conversation.
26. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 46.

27. Andrew Bell, "The Art of Kazuo Nakamura," *Canadian Art* 16, no. 3 (August 1959): 168.
28. Nowell, *Painters Eleven*, 300; Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 47–55.
29. Dustin Ian Garnet, "A Storied History of Art Education: The Art Department at the Central Technical School, 1892–2014" (PhD dissertation, Concordia University, 2015), 115–16.
30. Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," appendix 2, 248.
31. Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries 1930–1970* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972), 45.
32. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 46–49.
33. László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1947), 31–32, 113–16, 141–42. Ken Carpenter has claimed that Jock Macdonald introduced Nakamura to Moholy-Nagy's work, although it is unclear whether this occurred when Nakamura was a student of Macdonald's in Vancouver or when they reunited as members of Painters Eleven; consequently, Haworth either reinforced Nakamura's interest or introduced him to the Hungarian artist. Ken Carpenter, "Kazuo Nakamura," *Canadian Encyclopedia* (May 25, 2008 / update July 15, 2015), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/kazuo-nakamura>. Joan Murray highlights that the Bauhaus influence was widespread among the Painters Eleven generally. See Murray, *Origins of Abstraction in Ontario: The Abstracts at Home Show, 1953* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1992), 7–8.
34. Garnet, "Storied History," 233.
35. Roald Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2008), 97–98.hi
36. Murray, Notes of a phone conversation.
37. Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting*, 92–93.
38. Nowell, *Painters Eleven*, 300.
39. Jessica Poon, "'Harmonious Disagreement': Painters Eleven, Abstraction, and the Construction of Canadian Modernism in the 1950s" (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2018), 76–77. What works specifically were included is not known.
40. Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour, <https://cspwc.ca/past-presidents/>.



41. Nowell, *Painters Eleven*, 271.
42. William Ronald, "Abstracts at Home," *Canadian Art* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1954): 51-52; Graham Broad, "Painters Eleven: The Shock of the New," *Beaver* 84, no. 1 (February/March 2004): 22; Murray, *Origins of Abstraction*.
43. Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting*, 95. Macdonald, who taught Ronald at the Ontario College of Art, likely suggested some of the artists for the exhibition; Ronald had invited Macdonald to be part of *Abstracts at Home* but he was unable to participate. See Murray, *Origins of Abstraction*, 4.
44. Gary Michael Dault, "Kazuo Nakamura: An Appreciation—Artist Was 'Looking for the Grand Theory,'" *Globe and Mail*, April 26, 2002, R13.
45. Murray, *Origins of Abstraction*, 7.
46. Torizuka, "Kazuo Nakamura."
47. Broad, "Painters Eleven," 23-24.
48. Gary Michael Dault, "Kazuo Nakamura's Lucky Numbers," *Globe and Mail*, May 15, 1999, E2.
49. Quoted in Poon, "'Harmonious Disagreement,'" 115.
50. Jessica Poon supplies the best and most complete account of Painters Eleven's participation in the exhibition. Poon, "'Harmonious Disagreement,'" chap. 3.
51. Quoted in Poon, "'Harmonious Disagreement,'" 126.
52. There is no record of this work today.
53. "View from Train Wins Artist Famous Trophy," *Toronto Daily Star*, April 24, 1956.
54. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 272-74.
55. Nowell, *Painters Eleven*, 302.
56. *Globe and Mail*, November 28, 1963, 27; *Toronto Daily Star*, February 26, 1964, 37.
57. Torizuka, "Kazuo Nakamura."
58. David Fujino, "The World of Kazuo Nakamura," *Tora* 1, no. 2 (1972): 5.
59. Kathryn Reid Woods, *Kazuo Nakamura* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1974).

60. Walter Klepac, "Kazuo Nakamura: Number Structure Works," in *Kazuo Nakamura: The Method of Nature* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2001), 49n1.

61. Author's conversation with Christopher Cutts, August 5, 2020.

62. Dault, "Kazuo Nakamura's Lucky Numbers," E2.

63. Quoted in Richard William Hill, "Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure," *Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2004), 7.

64. Quoted in Hill, "Kazuo Nakamura," 13.

65. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 276.

66. Christopher Cutts, "Kazuo Nakamura's Number Structure," in *Kazuo Nakamura: The Method of Nature* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2001), 61-75.

#### KEY WORKS: FIRST FROST

1. Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), 36-37.

2. Bryce Kanbara, "Tashme Squared," in *Tashme<sup>2</sup>: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura* (Don Mills, ON: Gendai Gallery, 2001), n.p.

#### KEY WORKS: TWELVE MILE LAKE

1. Brian Grison, "Kazuo Nakamura," *Artichoke* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 13-14.

#### KEY WORKS: AUTUMN

1. Robert Fulford, "The New World of Pattern," *Mayfair* 30, no. 2 (February 1956): 46-47.

2. John Rewald, ed., *Paul Cézanne, Letters* (New York: Hacker Books, 1976), 301.

3. Richard William Hill, "Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure," *Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2004), 8.

4. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 249.

#### KEY WORKS: MORNING MIST

1. In her notes of a phone interview with Nakamura from around 1979, Joan Murray records that "After he came east to Hamilton the first book he bought was on Vincent Van Gogh." A copy of these unpublished notes can be found in the archives of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario.



2. Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), chap. 3; and Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," appendix 2, 249.

3. Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura, 249.

4. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 49-50.

#### KEY WORKS: HILLSIDE

1. Amongst the papers Nakamura deposited at the archives of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in 1992 is a copy of Winthrop Sargeant's 1952 *Life* magazine article (February 25), "Cézanne: The Great Paintings of a Frustrated Recluse Changed the Whole Course of Modern Art."

2. In her notes of a phone interview with Nakamura from around 1979, Joan Murray records that "After he came east to Hamilton the first book he bought was on Vincent Van Gogh." A copy of these unpublished notes can be found in the archives of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario.

3. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 249.

4. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nakamura started working on a model of the evolution of art first outlined in the catalogue for the 1974 McLaughlin retrospective. See Kathryn Reid Woods, *Kazuo Nakamura* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1974). In Nakamura's papers at the time of his death, currently held at the Christopher Cutts Gallery, there are a couple of graphs where he spells out the major movements leading up to the present day, with the last four being Japanese, Impressionism, Cubism, and Abstract.

5. Rory A.A. Hinton, "Odd Man Out," <http://artishinton.blogspot.com/2013/06/odd-man-out.html>.

#### KEY WORKS: INNER STRUCTURE

1. Sakura Torizuka, "Kazuo Nakamura, a Living Treasure of Canadian Art: Gendai Gallery Presents *Tashme<sup>2</sup>, Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura*," *New Canadian* 65, no. 14 (2001): E1-E2.

2. Nancy Baele, "Nakamura Uncovers the Inner Structure in Life," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 25, 1993, B6.

3. Bryce Kanbara, "Tashme Squared," *Tashme<sup>2</sup>: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura* (Don Mills, ON: Gendai Gallery, 2001), 1. In the papers archived at the Christopher Cutts Gallery, there are a number of reproductions of Impressionist paintings, though the one of Monet is his *Poppies* of 1873.

4. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 249.

#### KEY WORKS: INFINITE WAVES

1. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 250.

2. Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura, 250. It should be noted that not all of the String works use actual string; in some cases Nakamura simply uses acrylic painting in building up the lines; in others, the string is removed as the paint dries.

3. Gary Michael Dault, "Kazuo Nakamura: An Appreciation—Artist Was 'Looking for the Grand Theory,'" *Globe and Mail*, April 26, 2002, R13.

4. Rory A.A. Hinton, "Odd Man Out," <http://artishinton.blogspot.com/2013/06/odd-man-out.html>.

5. Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura, 251.

6. Ihor Holubizky, "Nakamura: The Method of Nature," *Kazuo Nakamura: The Method of Nature* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2001), 6.

#### KEY WORKS: AUGUST, MORNING REFLECTIONS

1. Sakura Torizuka, "Kazuo Nakamura, a Living Treasure of Canadian Art: Gendai Gallery Presents *Tashme*<sup>2</sup>, *Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura*," *New Canadian* 65, no. 14 (2001): E1-E2.

2. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 249.

3. Torizuka, "Kazuo Nakamura," E1-E2.

4. Leonard Schlichting, Letter interview with Kazuo Nakamura, March 20, 1978 (currently held in the archives of the Winnipeg Art Gallery), reproduced in Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," appendix 2, 245.

#### KEY WORKS: GALAXIES

1. The artists were recommended by an advisory panel that included the directors of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario), and the National Gallery of Canada; see *Globe and Mail*, November 28, 1963, 27.

2. *Toronto Daily Star*, February 26, 1964, 37.



3. *Toronto Daily Star*, February 26, 1964, 37.

#### KEY WORKS: TOWER STRUCTURES

1. Kazuo Nakamura, "Taped Interview," August 15, 1967, [http://ccca.concordia.ca/history/dorothy\\_cameron/english/nakamura.html](http://ccca.concordia.ca/history/dorothy_cameron/english/nakamura.html)

2. Harry Malcolmson, "Review," *Telegram* (Toronto), October 9, 1965.

3. See Yuriko Saito, "The Japanese Aesthetics of Imperfection and Insufficiency," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 4 (Autumn 1997).

#### KEY WORKS: TWO HORIZONS

1. Invitations went out to artists living in Canada, and seven hundred submissions were received. From those, a committee headed by three members of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts selected thirty works by twenty-nine artists. See *Art at Queen's Park / L'Art à Queen's Park* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 1988).

2. Richard William Hill, "Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure," *Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2004), 13.

3. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 249.

4. Quoted in Ihor Holubizky, "Nakamura: The Method of Nature," *Kazuo Nakamura: The Method of Nature* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2001), 18.

5. Nakamura, quoted in Iris Nowell, *Painters Eleven: The Wild Ones of Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011), 304.

#### KEY WORKS: SPATIAL CONCEPT, GEOMETRY

1. Nakamura's interpretation parallels the description of the evolution of art using the number line by Russian artist El Lissitzky. Lissitzky was published by the Bauhaus and was friends with the Hungarian Bauhaus teacher László Moholy-Nagy, whose work Nakamura was familiar with. See El Lissitzky, "A. and Pangeometry" (1925), reproduced in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 352-57.

2. David Fujino, "The World of Kazuo Nakamura," *Tora* 1, no. 2 (1972): 5.

3. Nakamura explained it as follows in the 1972 interview (quoted in Fujino, "The World," 5-6): "The triangle is the Renaissance where they found perspective: 2 lines meeting at a point. Then moving up to the Impressionist period—and its isometric shape—we find [sic] that Japanese art, with its isometric perspective, was influencing Western art.... Here we have more of a flat view which goes into the Cubist period, then in the Abstract period there's a breaking point—a flat view becomes octagonal, then spherical.... Just like science, art and life developed a faster pace, so from here to the spherical period, that's when man escaped the earth's gravitation, seeing the earth from outer space he saw there is no such thing as a top or bottom. When you're on earth you see the horizon, and what's above is the top, and what is below is the bottom; but from a great distance everything is seen as really being circular. This is the greatest breaking-point in man's concepts."

#### KEY WORKS: NUMBER STRUCTURE II

1. A Sierpinski triangle is a fractal pattern in which an equilateral triangle can be subdivided into smaller equilateral triangles infinitely. Pascal's triangle is a never-ending equilateral triangle of numbers formed by adding the two numbers above it to get the number below. Catalan numbers describe the possible ways that a sequence of discrete numbers can be grouped, ordered, or assigned to satisfy specific conditions. They are used in computational geometry and especially cryptography. A magic square is a grid in which each number is used once, and the sum of each row, column, and diagonal is the same.

2. Fibonacci numbers are an infinite sequence of numbers formalized in 1202 by the Italian mathematician Fibonacci, also known as Leonardo of Pisa. Each number is the sum of the previous two, starting with 0 and 1. So you have 0, 1, then 1 (the sum of 0 + 1), then 2 (the sum of 1 + 1), then 3 (1 + 2), and the sequence continues with 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, and so on. They are applied in fields from economics to computing, but in nature they describe the arrangement of scales on a pine cone or petals on a field daisy.

3. Nancy Baele, "Nakamura Uncovers the Inner Structure in Life," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 25, 1993, B6.

4. Baele, "Nakamura," B6.

5. Baele, "Nakamura," B6.

6. Gary Michael Dault, "Kazuo Nakamura: An Appreciation—Artist Was 'Looking for the Grand Theory,'" *Globe and Mail*, April 26, 2002, R13.

7. Gary Michael Dault, "Kazuo Nakamura's Lucky Numbers," *Globe and Mail*, May 15, 1999, E2.

8. Dault, "Kazuo Nakamura: An Appreciation," R13.

#### SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Iris Nowell, *Painters Eleven: The Wild Ones of Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011), 302.



2. Kazuo Nakamura, "Taped Interview," August 15, 1967,  
[http://ccca.concordia.ca/history/dorothy\\_cameron/english/nakamura.html](http://ccca.concordia.ca/history/dorothy_cameron/english/nakamura.html).
3. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 252.
4. Gary Michael Dault, "Painters Eleven Made Abstract Art Legitimate," *Toronto Star*, November 4, 1979, B4.
5. Murray, Interview, 252.
6. Kathryn Reid Woods, *A History of the Painters Eleven* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1970).
7. Quoted in Jessica Poon, "'Harmonious Disagreement': Painters Eleven, Abstraction, and the Construction of Canadian Modernism in the 1950s" (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2018), 126.
8. Nancy Baele, "Nakamura Uncovers the Inner Structure in Life," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 25, 1993, B6.
9. Robert Fulford, "The New World of Pattern," *Mayfair* 30, no. 2 (February 1956): 46.
10. Murray, Interview, 251.
11. Much of this material is currently held at the Christopher Cutts Gallery in Toronto.
12. Kathryn Reid Woods, *Kazuo Nakamura* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1974).
13. Woods, *Kazuo Nakamura*.
14. David Fujino, "The World of Kazuo Nakamura," *Tora* 1, no. 2 (1972): 5.
15. Fulford, "The New World of Pattern," 46.
16. Harry Malcolmson, *Telegram*, October 9, 1965, 26.
17. Paul Gladu, "Kazuo Nakamura: An Artist Solves a Problem," *Gazette* (Montreal), April 22, 1967, 24.
18. Klee taught at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1931 and published his influential Bauhaus book *Pedagogical Sketchbook* in 1925. There, Klee maps out how art needs to be informed by science.

19. Kevin James, "Seeking Specificity in the Universal: A Memorial for the Japanese Canadians Interned during the Second World War" (master's thesis, Dalhousie University, 2008).

20. Quoted in *Tashme<sup>2</sup>: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura* (Don Mills, ON: Gendai Gallery, 2001).

## STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. George Elliott, "Nakamura—Painter on the Threshold," *Canadian Art* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1954): 139. The second source was Nakamura's way of looking at "man-made devices."

2. Richard William Hill, "Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure," *Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2004), 10.

3. Joan Murray, Interview with Kazuo Nakamura (unpublished manuscript, June 12, 1979, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery archives, Oshawa), reproduced in Brian Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence: The Iconography of Kazuo Nakamura's Grids" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2003), appendix 2, 248.

4. Leonard Schlichting, Letter interview with Kazuo Nakamura, March 20, 1978 (currently held in the archives of the Winnipeg Art Gallery), reproduced in Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," appendix 2, 245.

5. Hill, "Kazuo Nakamura," 10; also see Arne Kalland and Pamela J. Asquith, "Japanese Perceptions of Nature: Ideals and Illusions," in Pamela J. Asquith and Arne Kalland, eds., *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives* (London: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1997), 1-35.

6. See Donald Keene, "Japanese Aesthetics," in Nancy G. Hume, ed., *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 27-41.

7. Harry Malcolmson, *Telegram* (Toronto), October 9, 1965, 26.

8. Hill, "Kazuo Nakamura," 13.

9. David Fujino, "The World of Kazuo Nakamura," *Tora* 1, no. 2 (1972): 5.

10. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 41-44.

11. Nancy Baele, "Nakamura Uncovers the Inner Structure in Life," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 25, 1993, B6.

12. Vincent van Gogh, Letter to Theo, c. September 1888, quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 38-39.

13. Fujino, "World of Kazuo Nakamura," 8.

14. Grison, "Oppression and Transcendence," 35-36, 46-48.



15. See Oliver A.I. Botar, "László Moholy-Nagy's New Vision and the Aestheticization of Scientific Photography in Weimar Germany," *Science in Context* 17, no. 4 (December 2004): 525-56, and Sara Lynn Henry, "Paul Klee's Pictorial Mechanics, from Physics to Picture Plane," *Pantheon* 47 (1989): 147-65.

16. El Lissitzky, "A. and Pangeometry" (1925), reproduced in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 352-57.

17. Kathryn Reid Woods, *Kazuo Nakamura* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1974).

## GLOSSARY

### **abstract art**

Also called nonfigurative or nonrepresentational art, abstract art uses form, colour, line, and gestural marks in compositions that do not attempt to represent images of real things. It may interpret reality in an altered form, or depart from it entirely.

### **Abstract Expressionism**

A style that flourished in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, Abstract Expressionism is defined by its combination of formal abstraction and self-conscious expression. The term describes a wide variety of work; among the most famous Abstract Expressionists are Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Willem de Kooning.

### **Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO)**

Founded in 1900 as the Art Museum of Toronto, later the Art Gallery of Toronto, the Art Gallery of Ontario is a major collecting institution in Toronto, Ontario, holding close to 95,000 works by Canadian and international artists.

### **Automatistes**

A Montreal-based artists' group interested in Surrealism and the Surrealist technique of automatism. Centred on the artist, teacher, and theorist Paul-Émile Borduas, the Automatistes exhibited regularly between 1946 and 1954, making Montreal a locus of mid-century avant-garde art. Members included Marcel Barbeau, Marcelle Ferron, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean Paul Riopelle, Fernand Leduc, and Françoise Sullivan.

### **Bauhaus**

Open from 1919 to 1933 in Germany, the Bauhaus revolutionized twentieth-century visual arts education by integrating the fine arts, crafts, industrial design, and architecture. Teachers included Josef Albers, Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and László Moholy-Nagy.

### **Bush, Jack (Canadian, 1909–1977)**

A member of Painters Eleven, formed in 1953, Bush found his real voice only after critic Clement Greenberg visited his studio in 1957 and focused on his watercolours. Out of these Bush developed the shapes and broad colour planes that would come to characterize a personal colour-field style, parallel to the work of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. With them, Bush participated in Greenberg's 1964 exhibition *Post Painterly Abstraction*.

### **Cahén, Oscar (Danish/Canadian, 1916–1956)**

Born in Copenhagen, Cahén attended the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts and taught design, illustration, and painting at Prague's Rotter School of Graphic Arts before his family's anti-Nazi activities forced him to flee to England. He was deported to Canada as an enemy alien and settled in Montreal before moving to Toronto in 1943; he was one of the founders of Painters Eleven in 1953. (See *Oscar Cahén: Life & Work* by Jaleen Grove.)



**Cameron, Alex (Canadian, b.1947)**

A student of the New School of Art in Toronto in the 1960s, Alex Cameron developed a style of painting that featured boldly textured pigment and dynamic use of colour. Influenced by Painters Eleven member Jack Bush, for whom he worked as an assistant, Cameron's work moved from abstract, conceptual canvases in the 1970s to abstracted landscapes that draw on the Canadian landscape tradition of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven.

**Canadian Society of Graphic Art**

Founded in Toronto in 1904 as the Society of Graphic Art and chartered in 1933 as the Canadian Society of Graphic Art, the society was an organization of artists interested in printmaking, illustration, and drawing. From 1924 to 1963 it hosted annual exhibitions, producing *The Canadian Graphic Art Year Book* in 1931. Notable members included Bruno Bobak and Charles Comfort. Once among the largest artists' organizations in Canada, the society disbanded in 1974.

**Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour**

An organization launched in 1925 to promote work in watercolour. Founding members included influential figures in the history of Canadian art, such as Franklin Carmichael and C.W. Jefferys. A prestigious group with links to major Canadian art institutions in its early days, it currently manages, along with five other societies, its own gallery in downtown Toronto.

**Central Technical School**

The Central Technical School is a composite high school in Toronto that was founded in 1915 to prepare students for the skilled workforce of the modern age. It was the largest school to be built in Canada at the time, reflecting the great demand for technical education. Renowned artists who studied and taught there include Lawren Harris, Arthur Lismer, and Elizabeth Wyn Wood.

**Cézanne, Paul (French, 1839–1906)**

A painter of arguably unparalleled influence on the development of modern art, associated with the Post-Impressionist school and known for his technical experiments with colour and form and his interest in multiple-point perspective. In his maturity Cézanne had several preferred subjects, including his wife, still life, and Provençal landscapes.

**Chirico, Giorgio de (Italian, 1888–1978)**

Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico influenced the development of Surrealism with his metaphysical paintings of largely deserted squares and buildings casting long shadows under bright sunlight. Completed between 1909 and 1919, these dreamlike scenes were groundbreaking for their representation of how the mind perceives reality. To the dismay of the Surrealists, de Chirico later abandoned his metaphysical works in favour of Neoclassical and Neo-Baroque painting.

**Cubism**

A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, Cubism is defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

**Dalí, Salvador (Spanish, 1904–1989)**

The star of the Surrealists and one of his era's most exuberant personalities, Dalí is best known for his naturalistically rendered dreamscapes. *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, with its melting clock faces, remains one of the twentieth century's most parodied artworks.

**Duncan, Douglas (Canadian, 1902–1968)**

An early advocate of Canadian art, Duncan was a bookbinder, art dealer, and collector. He was a founder and became director of Toronto's Picture Loan Society, which was the first gallery in Canada to facilitate the purchase of art by making works available for lease.

**en plein air**

French for "in the open air," *en plein air* is used to describe the practice of painting or sketching outdoors to observe nature, and in particular the changing effects of weather, atmosphere, and light.

**Ewen, Paterson (Canadian, 1925–2002)**

Born in Montreal and later settling in London, Ontario, Ewen was involved with the Automatistes, the Plasticiens, and the London Regionalists, although he was never fully identified with a single movement. His mature works embraced experimentation with colour combinations and textures, and the use of gouged plywood as a painting surface. These invoked landscape and natural elements through abstract and geometric gestures. (See *Paterson Ewen: Life & Work* by John Hatch.)

**fourth dimension**

The concept of a higher spatial dimension beyond our immediate perception influenced major movements in early twentieth-century modern art, including Cubism, Futurism, and Suprematism. In Cubism, the fourth dimension is visualized through the simultaneous representation of three-dimensional objects from different viewpoints. Kazimir Malevich, the founder of Suprematism, articulated this higher dimension by painting geometric planes moving through infinite space.

**Franck, Albert (Dutch/Canadian, 1899–1973)**

Born in the Netherlands, Franck immigrated to Canada following the First World War. He is known for his watercolours and oil paintings of Toronto streets and houses. Franck was an important influence on Painters Eleven.

**Gordon, Hortense (Canadian, 1886–1961)**

A founding member of Painters Eleven, Gordon was known for her bold abstract paintings. She taught at Hamilton Technical School and was appointed principal in 1934.



**Greenberg, Clement (American, 1909–1994)**

A highly influential art critic and essayist known primarily for his formalist approach and his contentious concept of modernism, which he first outlined in his 1961 article “Modernist Painting.” Greenberg was, notably, an early champion of Abstract Expressionists, including Jackson Pollock and the sculptor David Smith.

**Harris, Lawren S. (Canadian, 1885–1970)**

A founding member of the Group of Seven in Toronto in 1920, Harris was widely considered its unofficial leader. Unlike other members of the group, Harris moved away from painting representational landscapes, first to abstracted landscapes and then to pure abstraction. The Group of Seven broke up in 1933, and when the Canadian Group of Painters was formed in 1933, Harris was elected its first president.

**Haworth, Peter (Canadian, 1889–1986)**

Born in Lancaster, England, Peter Haworth immigrated to Canada in 1923 and became director of art at the Central Technical School in Toronto. He is known for his stained-glass work and his painted landscapes and coastal views. During the Second World War, Haworth and his wife, Bobs Cogill Haworth, were commissioned by the Canadian government to document the activities of the armed forces in British Columbia.

**Hodgson, Tom (Canadian, 1924–2006)**

An Abstract Expressionist painter, advertising art director, respected art teacher, and champion athlete raised on Centre Island, in Toronto Harbour. Hodgson was a member of Painters Eleven; he trained with Arthur Lismer at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto, and made action paintings that were often immense in scale.

**Hokusai, Katsushika (Japanese, 1760–1849)**

One of the most prolific and influential artists of Edo Japan, who created some 30,000 drawings and illustrated 500 books during seventy years of artistic production. Hokusai’s output includes paintings, prints, and drawings that range from landscapes to erotica and draw from Chinese, Japanese, and Western traditions.

**Hydrocal**

Hydrocal is a mixture of plaster and a small amount of cement that stays malleable and sets gradually.

**Impressionism**

A highly influential art movement that originated in France in the 1860s, Impressionism is associated with the emergence of modern urban European society. Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and other Impressionists rejected the subjects and formal rigours of academic art in favour of scenes of nature and daily life and the careful rendering of atmospheric effects. They often painted outdoors.

**Kandinsky, Wassily (Russian, 1866–1944)**

An artist, teacher, and philosopher who settled in Germany and later in France, Kandinsky was central to the development of abstract art. Much of his work conveys his interest in the relationships between colour, sound, and emotion. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), his famous treatise on abstraction, draws on mysticism and theories of divinity.

**Kent, Rockwell (American, 1882–1971)**

An illustrator as well as a landscape painter specializing in remote and stark environments including the New England coast, Alaska, and Greenland, Kent was also a labour-rights activist. His woodcut illustrations for periodicals and books, including two editions of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, recall the style of English Romantics like William Hogarth and William Blake.

**Kiyooka, Roy (Canadian, 1926–2004)**

Born and raised in the Prairies, Japanese Canadian artist Roy Kiyooka studied under Jock Macdonald at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (now Alberta College of Art and Design) in Calgary from 1946 to 1949. A regular presence at the Emma Lake Artists' Workshops, the avant-garde painter developed a hard-edge abstract style. In the 1960s, Kiyooka experimented with a wide range of media and was a central figure in the Vancouver art scene.

**Klee, Paul (Swiss-German, 1879–1940)**

Primarily known as a painter of prodigious energy and imagination—his output comprises an estimated nine thousand artworks—Klee was also a printmaker, art writer, and beloved teacher, first at the Bauhaus and later at the Düsseldorf Academy.

**Kline, Franz (American, 1910–1962)**

An Abstract Expressionist painter and draftsman whose gestural works drew inspiration from contemporaries such as Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning. From the late 1940s Kline's paintings were largely black and white, but in the last years of his career he returned to a full-colour palette.

**linear perspective**

A visual strategy for depicting three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, linear perspective uses lines converging on a vanishing point or series of vanishing points to create an illusion of depth on a flat surface. One-, two-, and three-point perspective are different forms of linear perspective.

**Lissitzky, El (Russian, 1890–1941)**

A pioneer of early twentieth-century nonrepresentational art, Russian artist El Lissitzky is associated with Suprematism and Constructivism. His paintings and poster designs often combine the basic geometric shapes and limited colour palette of Suprematist art with typography. An influential figure in the field of graphic design, Lissitzky is recognized for his innovative contributions to typography, advertising, and exhibition design.



**Luke, Alexandra (Canadian, 1901–1967)**

An Abstract Expressionist who trained under Jock Macdonald and Hans Hofmann, Alexandra Luke organized the Canadian Abstract Exhibition in 1952, which led to the formation, in 1953, of the group Painters Eleven. Known as a colourist, Luke showed as a member of Painters Eleven until the group disbanded in 1960.

**Macdonald, Jock (British/Canadian, 1897–1960)**

A painter, printmaker, illustrator, teacher, and a pioneer in the development of abstract art in Canada. Macdonald began as a landscape painter but became interested in abstraction in the 1940s, influenced by Hans Hofmann and Jean Dubuffet. Macdonald was one of the founders of Painters Eleven in 1953. (See *Jock Macdonald: Life & Work* by Joyce Zemans.)

**Malevich, Kazimir (Russian, 1879–1935)**

An important figure in the development of geometric abstraction, whose religious and mystical proclivities deeply influenced his wish to abandon, as an artist, the representation of the visible world. His radically austere Suprematist works were first shown in Moscow in 1915. Malevich resumed figure painting in the late 1920s.

**Manzoni, Piero (Italian, 1933–1963)**

A pre-Conceptual artist who took an ironic attitude to avant-garde art, questioning the nature of the art object itself and critiquing mass production and consumption in Italy after the Second World War. Manzoni was inspired by Yves Klein, the collective conscious, and materials considered too dirty for art. His most famous work is *Merda d'artista* (*Artist's Shit*), 1961, in which he sealed what was presumably his own excrement in an edition of ninety cans and sold them at the market value of gold.

**Martin, Agnes (American/Canadian, 1912–2004)**

An abstract painter known for her restrained canvases featuring grids and stripes in serene hues, Martin worked between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, adopting the latter's formal language without emptying it of emotional resonance. Martin immigrated to the United States in 1931 and developed her artistic style in the creative circles of New Mexico and New York City. (See *Agnes Martin: Life & Work* by Christopher Réginbal).

**McCarthy, Doris (Canadian, 1910–2010)**

Trained by members of the Group of Seven, McCarthy went on to produce hundreds of landscape and abstract paintings and educate generations of students over the course of her remarkable eighty-year career. She was the first female president of the Ontario Society of Artists.

**Mead, Ray (British/Canadian, 1921–1998)**

A founding member of Painters Eleven, Mead was an Abstract Expressionist painter whose work, characterized by bold planes of colour, black and white shapes, and sophisticated composition, was inspired by his internal reflections on memories.

***memento mori***

A Latin phrase meaning “remember you will die,” in art a *memento mori* is a work, often a painting, that contains a reference to death. This may be a skull, hourglass, rotten fruit, or other symbol of decay or the passage of time. Along with the related genre of the *vanitas* still life, the *memento mori* became popular in Western art in the seventeenth century, when it often carried religious overtones. More recent artists have used the form to explore the relationship between life and death in various contexts.

**Milne, David (Canadian, 1882–1953)**

A painter, printmaker, and illustrator whose work—principally landscapes—displays the tonal brilliance and concern with process of his Impressionist and Post-Impressionist influences. Milne lived in New York early in his career, where he trained at the Art Students League and participated in the Armory Show in 1913.

**Minimalism**

A branch of abstract art characterized by extreme restraint in form, Minimalism was most popular among American artists from the 1950s to 1970s. Although Minimalism can be expressed in any medium, it is most commonly associated with sculpture; principal Minimalists include Carl Andre, Donald Judd, and Tony Smith. Among the Minimalist painters were Agnes Martin, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, and Frank Stella.

**modernism**

A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Modernist movements in the visual arts have included Gustave Courbet’s Realism, and later Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

**Moholy-Nagy, László (Hungarian, 1895–1946)**

Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy was a professor in the famed Bauhaus school (1923–28) in Germany. Influenced by Constructivism, he explored the integration of life, art, and technology in his radically experimental and wide-ranging practice. Moholy-Nagy is best known for his innovations in photography, notably his camera-less photographs, known as photograms. He led the New Bauhaus in Chicago from 1937 until his death.

**Mondrian, Piet (Dutch, 1872–1944)**

A leading figure in abstract art, known for his geometric “grid” paintings of straight black lines and brightly coloured squares, whose influence on contemporary visual culture has been called the most far-reaching of any artist. Mondrian saw his highly restrictive and rigorous style, dubbed Neo-Plasticism, as expressive of universal truths.



**Monet, Claude (French, 1840–1926)**

A founder of the Impressionist movement in France, Monet created landscapes and seascapes that are among the canonical works of Western art. Introduced to *plein air* painting as a teenager, Monet returned to it throughout his life as a means of exploring the atmospheric effects and perceptual phenomena that so interested him as an artist.

**Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**

Founded in 1860 as the Art Association of Montreal, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has an encyclopedic collection of artworks and artifacts dating from antiquity to the present day. From its beginnings as a private museum and exhibition space to its current status as a public institution spread over four buildings on Sherbrooke Street, the museum has accumulated a collection of more than 43,000 works and hosts historical, modern, and contemporary exhibitions.

**Moriyama, Raymond (Canadian, b.1929)**

One of Canada's foremost architects, Raymond Moriyama has designed such prominent buildings as the Japanese Canadian Culture Centre, Ontario Science Centre, and Canadian War Museum. A graduate of the University of Toronto and McGill University, Moriyama began working as an architect in 1958 and launched the firm Moriyama & Teshima in 1970. Some of his designs have been influenced by his childhood experiences in the Slocan internment camp during the Second World War.

**Museum of Modern Art**

Created by three patrons of the arts—Mary Quinn Sullivan, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, and Lillie P. Bliss—along with a larger board of trustees, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) opened in New York City in 1929. An alternative to traditional museum models, MoMA offered public access to contemporary art. The museum's first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., shaped its influential place in the American art world and the way that American art history is constructed through exhibitions of contemporary works of art. MoMA moved to its present location on 53rd Street in Manhattan in 1939.

**Nash, Paul (British, 1889–1946)**

Nash was a landscape painter whose semi-abstract scenes drew on the work of Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico and the Surrealists. He founded the British art group Unit One in 1933 to promote modernist art, architecture, and design in England and was one of the organizers of the International Surrealist Exhibition in London, U.K., in 1936. Nash was an official British war artist in both world wars.

**National Gallery of Canada**

Established in 1880, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa holds the most extensive collection of Canadian art in the country as well as works by prominent international artists. Spearheaded by the governor general, the Marquis of Lorne, the gallery was created to strengthen a specifically Canadian brand of artistic culture and identity and to build a national collection of art that would match the level of other British Empire institutions. Since 1988 the gallery has been located on Sussex Drive in a building designed by Moshe Safdie.

**Neo-Plasticism**

Piet Mondrian's term for his highly reduced mode of abstract art, characterized by black grid structures organizing tautly balanced flat planes of colour, using only the three primary colours, as well as white. Neo-Plasticism profoundly influenced the advancement of geometric art throughout Europe and spread to the United States, where Mondrian moved in 1940. It later inspired the Montreal Plasticiens.

**Nicholson, Ben (British, 1894–1982)**

Ben Nicholson was a British painter and sculptor whose geometric abstract paintings were a major influence on the development of British abstract art. Nicholson's abstractions developed out of a concern with formal structure that was inspired by his visits to the studios of Georges Braque, Constantin Brancusi, and Piet Mondrian—all leading figures in abstract modern art—in the early 1930s.

**Noguchi, Louise (Canadian, b.1958)**

Working in photography, sculpture, video, and other media since the 1980s, Toronto-based artist Louise Noguchi examines the role of the artist as witness in contemporary society and questions notions of identity, perception, and reality. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University) in Toronto, Noguchi is a professor in the Art and Art History program at Sheridan College and the University of Toronto Mississauga.

**Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University)**

The name given in 1912 to what had previously been the Ontario School of Art (founded 1876), and what would become the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1996. In 2010 the institution was renamed OCAD University, to reflect its new status. OCAD University is located in Toronto and is the oldest and largest art school in Canada.

**Painters Eleven**

An artists' group active from 1953 to 1960, formed by eleven Abstract Expressionist Toronto-area painters, including Harold Town, Jack Bush, and William Ronald. They joined together in an effort to increase their exposure, given the limited interest in abstract art in Ontario at the time.

**Picture Loan Society**

Established by Douglas Duncan and others in 1936, this Toronto gallery was the first in Canada to lease art to prospective clients in a system of low-cost rental fees. The Picture Loan Society also provided affordable exhibition space for artists. Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, Paul-Émile Borduas, Harold Town, Isabel McLaughlin, and Bertram Brooker were among the many artists who were affiliated with the gallery.

**Pollock, Jackson (American, 1912–1956)**

Leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement, best known for his drip paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. Pollock is also closely associated with action painting, in which the act of painting is gestural and the artist approaches the canvas with little notion of what he or she will create.



**Post-Impressionism**

A term coined by the British art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe painting produced originally in France between about 1880 and 1905 in response to Impressionism's artistic advances and limitations. Central figures include Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh.

**Rauschenberg, Robert (American, 1925–2008)**

A significant figure in twentieth-century American art whose paintings, sculptures, prints, photographs, collages, and installations span styles and movements from Abstract Expressionism to Pop art. Together with Jasper Johns he led a revival of interest in Dada. Among Rauschenberg's best-known works is *Bed*, 1955, one of his first "combines," or paintings that incorporate found objects.

**Renaissance**

The term used since the nineteenth century to refer to the Western art historical period from approximately 1400 to 1600. The Renaissance is associated with the return to classical style in art and architecture, following the medieval period.

**representational**

A term used to describe art that is derived from references to real objects and images that are recognizable as depictions of what exists in the real world. A representational work may not be entirely realistic.

**Riopelle, Jean Paul (Canadian, 1923–2002)**

A towering figure in Québécois modern art who, like the other members of the Automatistes, was interested in Surrealism and abstract art. Riopelle moved to Paris in 1947, where he participated in the last major exhibition of the Parisian Surrealists, organized by Marcel Duchamp and André Breton. (See *Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work* by François-Marc Gagnon.)

**Ronald, William (Canadian, 1926–1998)**

An Abstract Expressionist and member of Painters Eleven, which sprang from the Toronto group exhibition that he organized in 1953, *Abstracts at Home*. Ronald lived in New York from 1955 to 1965. His work is held both by New York institutions—including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Guggenheim Museum, and Museum of Modern Art—and by numerous Canadian museums.

**Ryder, Albert Pinkham (American, 1847–1917)**

A painter of allegorical seascapes, Ryder is most recognized for his mature works which feature dim lighting, enigmatic subjects, windswept compositions, and undefined shapes within a larger landscape or marine scene. In his works, Ryder often referenced classical mythology, poetry, and Wagnerian opera.

**Shikatani, Stan (Canadian, b.1928)**

Prince Rupert, British Columbia-born Stan Shikatani moved to Toronto in 1946, where he studied at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University) and eventually became an instructor at Sheridan College School of Art and Design. Remaining there until his retirement in 1996, Shikatani played a key role in developing the graphic design curriculum and elevated the reputation of the program as a source of professional training.

**still life**

The still life is an important genre in Western art and includes depictions of both natural and manufactured objects. Often used to emphasize the ephemerality of human life in the *vanitas* and *memento mori* paintings of the seventeenth century, the still life was at the bottom of the hierarchy of styles established by the French Academy.

**Suzuki, Aiko (Canadian, 1937–2005)**

Initially working as a painter, Aiko Suzuki became a free-form set designer at the Toronto Dance Theatre in the late 1960s—an experience that inspired her to begin making dramatic and expressive abstract fibre sculptures. A frequent collaborator with Toronto Dance Theatre co-founder and choreographer Patricia Beatty, Suzuki was also an arts educator in Toronto for more than twenty-five years.

**Tanabe, Takao (Canadian, b. 1926)**

Tanabe is a prominent British Columbia painter. Interned along with his family and the majority of Japanese Canadians under government policy during the Second World War, he went on to study art in Canada, the United States, England, and Japan. Tanabe's early work was influenced by Japanese aesthetics and by the hard-edged style he was exposed to in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s. After he returned to Vancouver in 1980, he turned from abstraction to landscape painting.

**Thomson, Tom (Canadian, 1877–1917)**

A seminal figure in the creation of a national school of painting, Thomson is known for a bold vision of Algonquin Park—aligned stylistically with Post-Impressionism and Art Nouveau—that has come to symbolize both the Canadian landscape and Canadian landscape painting. Thomson and the members of what would in 1920 become the Group of Seven profoundly influenced one another's work. (See *Tom Thomson: Life & Work* by David P. Silcox.)

**Town, Harold (Canadian, 1924–1990)**

Town was a founding member of Painters Eleven and a leader in Toronto's art scene in the 1950s and 1960s. An internationally recognized abstract artist, he created paintings, collages, sculptures, and prints with brilliant effect and developed a unique form of monotype, "single autographic prints." (See *Harold Town: Life & Work* by Gerta Moray.)



**van Doesburg, Theo (Dutch, 1883–1931)**

Born Christian Emil Marie Küpper, van Doesburg was a painter, advocate of pure abstraction, designer, poet, and art theorist. In 1917, with Piet Mondrian and Bart van der Leek, he co-founded *De Stijl*, a publication that became an art movement, and his theories of integrating painting, architecture, and design influenced many modernist architects, including Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Van Doesburg introduced diagonals to his paintings to convey more movement, which led to a creative split from Mondrian. He later co-founded the Abstraction-Création group to counter Surrealism and promote abstraction.

**van Gogh, Vincent (Dutch, 1853–1890)**

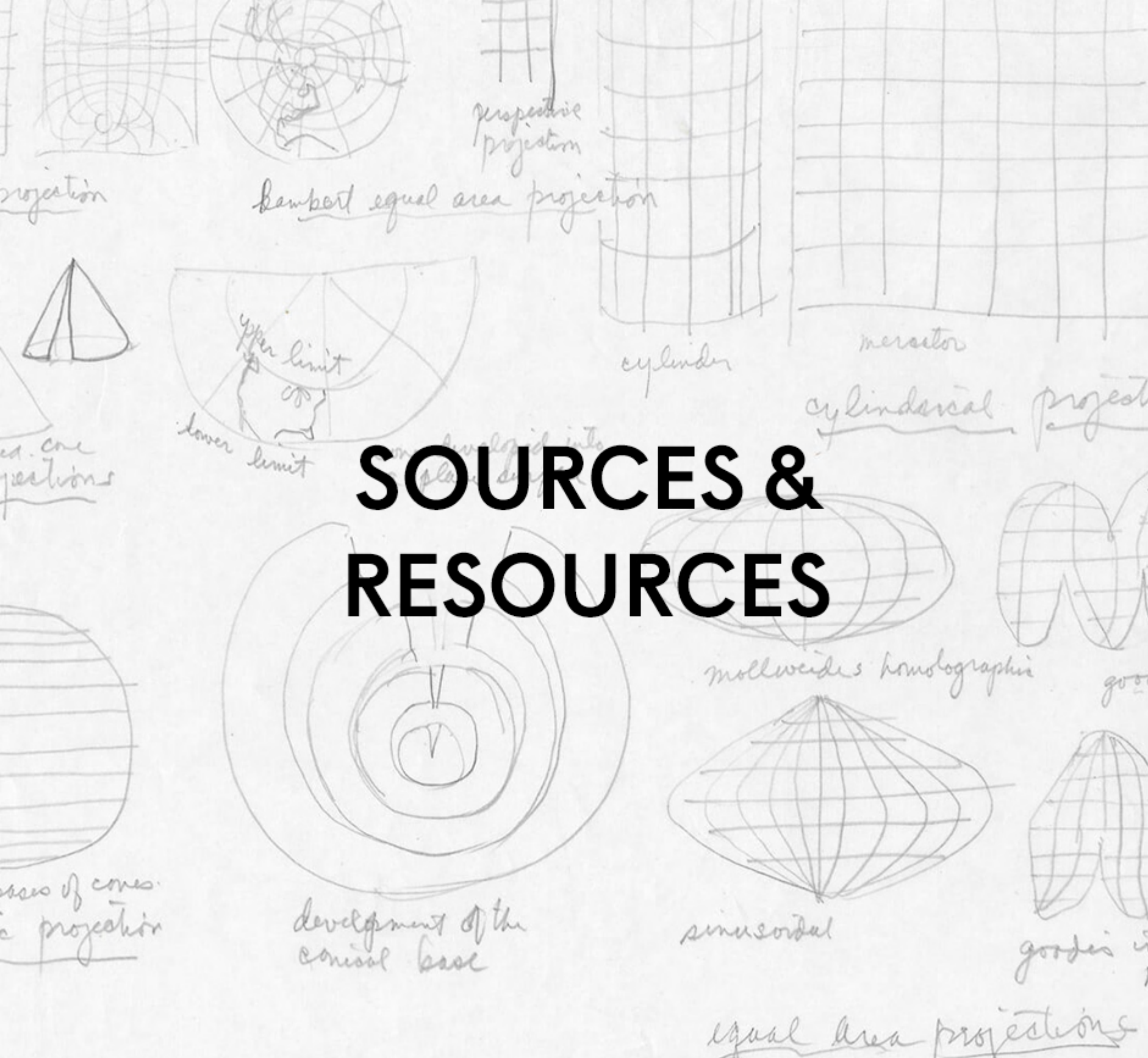
Among the most recognizable and beloved of modernist painters, van Gogh is the creator of *Starry Night* and *Vase with Sunflowers*, both from 1889. He is a nearly mythological figure in Western culture, the archetypal “tortured artist” who achieves posthumous fame after a lifetime of struggle and neglect.

**Wood, Grant (American, 1891–1942)**

An important regionalist painter of the American Midwest, best known for his endlessly reproduced and parodied double portrait *American Gothic*, 1930. His interest in Netherlandish art of the fifteenth century is evident in his work from the late 1920s on, with its hard edges, strong colours, and meticulously executed details.

**Yarwood, Walter (Canadian, 1917–1996)**

Originally a painter, Yarwood abandoned the medium for sculpture after the demise of Painters Eleven, of which he was a member. He constructed his works from such materials as cast aluminum, bronze, wood, and found objects. His public commissions can be found in Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal.



# SOURCES & RESOURCES

There is a surprising dearth of material on Nakamura and little in terms of his own statements about his work. What is published of the latter is a peppering of fragments of conversations taken from articles.

Nakamura's most substantive interview about his art, with Joan Murray in 1979, has been published only in a master's thesis. Nakamura was not the most forthcoming individual when discussing art, nor did he write much about it; this may have hindered more expansive studies, despite the fact that some excellent articles dealing with the artist have been written. Additionally, his contributions to the history of art in Canada are more often than not subsumed under the banner of the Painters Eleven.





LEFT: Kazuo Nakamura in his studio, 1957, photographer unknown. RIGHT: Painters Eleven at the Park Gallery, c.1957, photograph by Peter Croydon, 1957. © 2011 Lynda M. Shearer. All rights reserved.

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

<b>1952</b>	Picture Loan Society, Toronto.
<b>1953</b>	Hart House, University of Toronto.
<b>1955–56</b>	<i>Nakamura: Recent Works</i> , Jerrold Morris International Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1956</b>	Gallery of Contemporary Art, Toronto. Picture Loan Society, Toronto.
<b>1958</b>	Gallery of Contemporary Art, Toronto.
<b>1962</b>	Jerrold Morris International Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1965</b>	Jerrold Morris International Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1967–70</b>	Waddington Gallery, Montreal. Jerrold Morris International Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1970</b>	<i>Kazuo Nakamura: A Retrospective</i> , Hart House, University of Toronto.
<b>1974–75</b>	<i>Kazuo Nakamura: A Retrospective of 20 Years</i> , The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. Travelled to Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; London Public Library and Museum London, Ontario; Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax; Rodman Hall Art Centre, St. Catharines, Ontario; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston.
<b>1984</b>	<i>Kazuo Nakamura, 1954–1985</i> , Moore Gallery, Hamilton.
<b>1991</b>	<i>Number Structure</i> , Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

<b>1994</b>	<i>Kazuo Nakamura</i> , Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1996</b>	<i>Number Structures</i> , Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1999</b>	<i>Topology Paintings</i> , Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.
<b>2001–2</b>	<i>The Method of Nature</i> , The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. Travelled to Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston; Art Gallery of Hamilton. <i>Tashme<sup>2</sup></i> , Gendai Gallery, Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Toronto.
<b>2004</b>	<i>Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure</i> , Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
<b>2018</b>	January–February, <i>Kazuo Nakamura: Estate Works 1950's and 60's</i> , Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

#### KEY GROUP EXHIBITIONS

<b>1950</b>	Unaffiliated Artists Exhibition, Toronto.
<b>1951</b>	25th Annual Exhibition: Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour, Toronto.
<b>1952</b>	Canadian Society of Graphic Art, Toronto.
<b>1953</b>	27th Annual Exhibition: Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour, Toronto. <i>Abstracts at Home</i> , The Robert Simpson Co., Toronto.
<b>1954</b>	<i>Painters Eleven</i> , Roberts Gallery, Toronto. <i>Drawings &amp; Prints: Cahén, Nakamura &amp; Town</i> , Eglinton Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1955</b>	First Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. 20th Biennial International Watercolor Exhibition, The Brooklyn Museum. <i>Painters Eleven</i> , Roberts Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1956</b>	<i>Canadian Abstract Paintings</i> , National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. <i>Painters Eleven &amp; American Abstract Artists' Exhibition</i> , Riverside Museum, New York. Fourth International Exhibition of Drawings and Engravings, Lugano, Switzerland.



<b>1956–57</b>	<i>Canadian Abstract Art</i> , Smithsonian Museum tour, United States, various locations.
<b>1957</b>	<i>Four Man Exhibition</i> , Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. <i>Canadian Contemporary Painting</i> , Australian tour, various locations. <i>Painters Eleven</i> , Park Gallery, Toronto.
<b>1958</b>	First Inter-American Biennale, Mexico City. International Festival of Art, New York.
<b>1958–59</b>	<i>Contemporary Canadian Art</i> , Central Museum, Utrecht and Groningen Museum, Netherlands; Museum Rath, Geneva; Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.
<b>1959</b>	<i>A Canadian Portfolio</i> , Dallas Museum of Contemporary Art. <i>Canadian Graphics and Drawings</i> , Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana. 20th Biennial International Watercolor Exhibition, The Brooklyn Museum.
<b>1960</b>	<i>Canadian Art</i> , Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, S.E.P. Mexico City. <i>Canadian Prints, Drawings and Watercolors</i> , American Federation of Arts, New York, American tour, various locations. <i>Nakamura &amp; Town</i> , Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. <i>Painters Eleven</i> , Stable Gallery, Montreal, and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
<b>1961</b>	Fifth International Hallmark Art Award Exhibition, New York, and international tour. II <sup>e</sup> Biennale de Paris, Musée d'art moderne, Paris.
<b>1962</b>	<i>Canadian Painting</i> , Polish tour, various locations. <i>Canadian Contemporary Art</i> , Kenya. <i>Canadian Contemporary Art</i> , Louisville. <i>Commonwealth Painting</i> , London, U.K. <i>Recent Acquisitions</i> , Museum of Modern Art, New York. <i>International Seminar Exhibition</i> , Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, N.J.
<b>1963</b>	<i>Recent Acquisitions</i> , Museum of Modern Art, New York. <i>Contemporary Canadian Painting</i> , Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, New York. <i>Canadian Paintings</i> , London, U.K. <i>Members' Loan Gallery Acquisitions</i> , Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

<b>1964</b>	First Biennial, Drawings and Watercolours, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. <i>Four Painters/Sculptors</i> , London Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ontario. <i>World Show</i> , Washington Square Gallery, New York.
<b>1965</b>	<i>Cardiff Commonwealth Festival Exhibition</i> , U.K. <i>Art &amp; Engineering</i> , Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
<b>1967</b>	<i>Centennial Exhibition of Canadian Prints and Drawings</i> , Australian tour, various locations. <i>Sculpture '67</i> , Toronto. <i>Centennial Exhibition of Quebec and Ontario Painters</i> , Ontario tour, various locations. <i>Ontario Centennial Art</i> , Toronto.
<b>1968</b>	<i>Canadian Artists '68</i> , Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Seventh Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
<b>1970–71</b>	<i>Loeb Collection</i> , National Gallery of Canada. Travelling exhibition, various locations.
<b>1971</b>	<i>Painters Eleven–1953 to 1960</i> , The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.
<b>1972</b>	<i>Toronto Painting 1953–65</i> , National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Ontario Society of Artists 101st Exhibition, Toronto.
<b>1973</b>	Canada Art Bank Exhibition, Paris.
<b>1978–80</b>	<i>A Canadian Survey, Imperial Oil Collection</i> , circulated by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. <i>The Japanese Canadian Centennial Art Exhibition in Ontario</i> , Toronto.
<b>1979–81</b>	<i>Painters Eleven in Retrospective</i> , The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, and Canadian tour.
<b>1983–84</b>	<i>Firestone Collection European Tour</i> , Ontario Heritage Foundation. Travelled to London, Paris, Madrid.
<b>1984</b>	<i>Toronto Painters of the Sixties</i> , Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Masterpieces of the 20th Century, West Palm Beach Gallery.
<b>1987</b>	<i>Shikata Ga Nai: Contemporary Art by Japanese-Canadians</i> , Hamilton Artists Inc.



1988	<i>Inaugural Exhibition</i> , National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
1990	<i>Academicians Collect</i> , Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Academy House, Toronto.
1991	<i>New Canadian Embassy Exhibition</i> , Tokyo. <i>Group 91</i> , Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.
1992	<i>Art contemporain du Canada</i> , Ader Tajan, Espace Chapon, Paris.
1992–93	<i>The 1950s–The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada</i> , National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. <i>Achieving the Modern: Canadian Abstract Painting and Design in the 1950s</i> , Winnipeg Art Gallery.
1994	<i>Painters Eleven</i> , Mead Museum, Amherst College, M.A., and Anderson Gallery, Buffalo.
1998	Art Forum Berlin.
1999	<i>Translinear</i> , McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton.
2002–3	<i>Painters 15</i> , Shanghai and Guangdong, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto.

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Woods, Kathryn Reid. *Kazuo Nakamura*. Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1974. Exhibition catalogue.  
*In this catalogue, Nakamura published his first and only major statement on his work, outside of interviews.*

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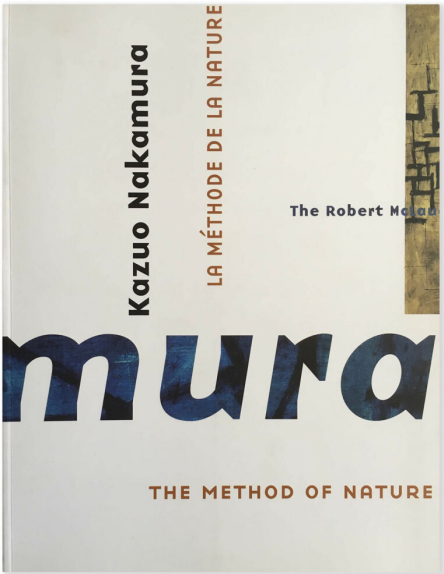
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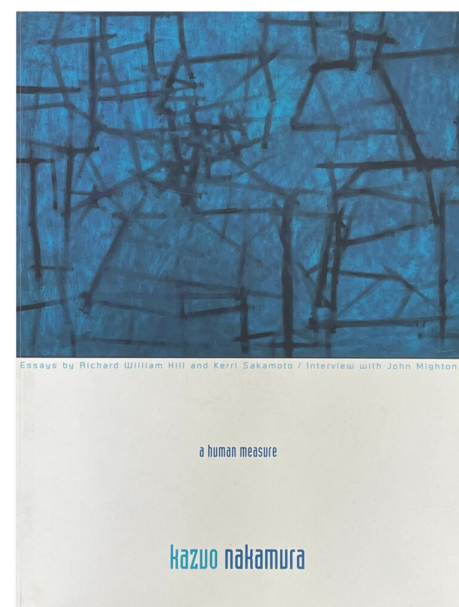
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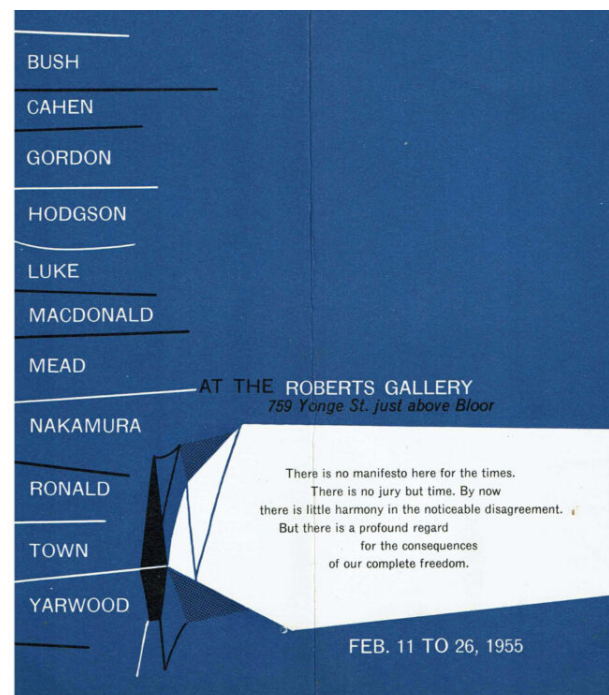
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LEFT: Cover of exhibition brochure for *Painters Eleven* at Roberts Gallery, Toronto, 1955, Collection of Jane Nakamura. RIGHT: Interior of exhibition brochure for *Painters Eleven* at Roberts Gallery, Toronto, 1955, Collection of Jane Nakamura.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### JOHN G. HATCH

John G. Hatch is an associate professor of art history at Western University in London, Ontario. He served as Chair of the Department of Visual Arts from 2016 to 2021 and as an Associate Dean for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Western from 2009 to 2015. Hatch's academic career began with a degree in economics, but after a couple of years in private industry he returned to school to study art history, which led to a PhD in art history and theory from the University of Essex, U.K. His dissertation examined the impact of the physical sciences on modern art.

Hatch's research has focused on the interstices of art and science, particularly in the twentieth century. However, his first published articles looked at geometry in Greek architecture and Keplerian astronomy and religious mysticism in the churches of the Baroque architect Francesco Borromini. This last, originally published in 2002, was reprinted in 2015 in a two-volume anthology on architecture and mathematics. His numerous articles dealing with science and modern art have ranged from the influence of wave patterns and Machian epistemology on the paintings of František Kupka to the adaptation of the relativistic theories of Henri Poincaré, Hendrik Lorentz, and Albert Einstein in the art and architecture of El Lissitzky and Theo van Doesburg. Recently Hatch's attention has turned to astronomy, publishing studies on works by Robert Smithson, Max Ernst, Anselm Kiefer, and Shi Zhiying.

Hatch's interest in art and science drew his attention to the art of Paterson Ewen and Kazuo Nakamura. He is the author of the ACI volume *Paterson Ewen: Life & Work*.



**"I vividly remember seeing Nakamura's *August, Morning Reflections* for the first time at the National Gallery of Canada. It was like finding an oasis. The enigmatic beauty and engaging simplicity of his work has sustained me ever since."**



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### From the Author

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The ACI also recognizes the additional private collectors who have given permission for their works to be published in this edition.

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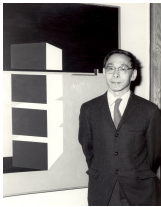




Kazuo Nakamura, *Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964. (See below for details.)

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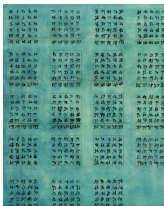
Biography: Kazuo Nakamura with his work *Suspension*, 1979. (See details below.)



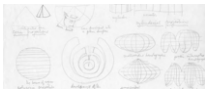
Key Works: Kazuo Nakamura, *August, Morning Reflections*, 1961. (See details below.)



Significance & Critical Issues: Kazuo Nakamura, *In Space, Blue Irises*, 1967. (See details below.)



Style & Technique: Kazuo Nakamura, *Untitled (Magic Squares)*, c.1975-85. (See details below.)



Sources & Resources: Kazuo Nakamura, *Geometric Projections*, n.d. (See details below.)



Where to See: Exhibition view of *Kazuo Nakamura: Estate Works 1950's and 1960's* at Christopher Cutts Gallery.



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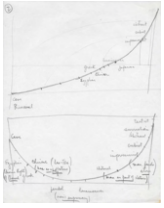


*Blue Reflections*, 1965. Collection of Andrew Rookley, Ontario. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction House.



*Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964. Collection of the MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Gift of Ron McQueen. Courtesy of the MacLaren Art Centre.





*Charts of the Evolution of Art*, c.1980s. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of the Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Composition 10-51*, 1951.



*Conic Structure*, 1962. Private collection. Courtesy of BYDealers Auction House.



*Construction with Lines*, 1958. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Drawing of Tashme Camp*, c.1986. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*First Frost*, 1941. Collection of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, purchase (20190036-002). Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum.



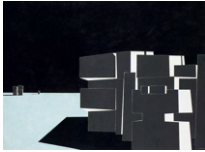
*Floating Still Life*, 1967. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



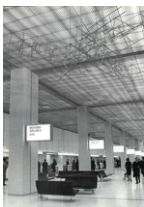
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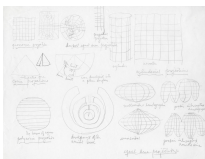
*Forest*, 1972. Courtesy of Paul and Janice Sabourin. Photo by The Kalaman Group.



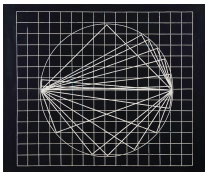
*Fortress*, 1956. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Sam and Ayala Zacks, 1970, 70/243. © Art Gallery of Ontario.



*Galaxies*, 1964. Collection of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority.



*Geometric Projections*, n.d. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Geometric Suspension*, 1969. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Geometrical Suspension No. 2*, 1967. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase (1977NK37). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*Green Landscape*, 1966. Private Collection. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction.



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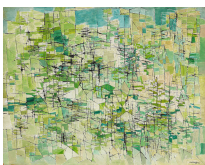




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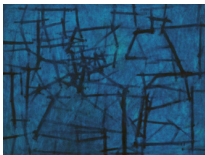
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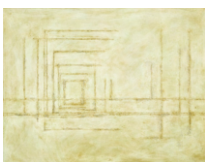
*Hillside*, 1954. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchase (6361). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. © Estate of Kazuo Nakamura.



*Infinite Waves*, 1957. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase (1971NK42). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



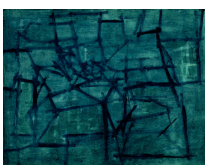
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*Inner Structure No. 3*, 1959. Private Collection, Ontario. Courtesy of Miriam Shiell Fine Art.



*Inner View*, 1954. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase (1971NK45). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*Into Space*, 1954. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase (1971NK41). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*In Space, Blue Irises*, 1967. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Lake, B.C.*, 1964. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase (1991NK111). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*Lakeside, Summer Morning*, 1961. Collection of Museum London, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Moore (78.A.126). Courtesy of Museum London.



*Landscape*, 1952. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase (1971NK40). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

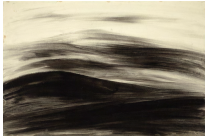


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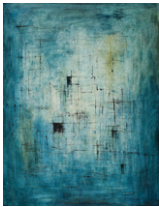


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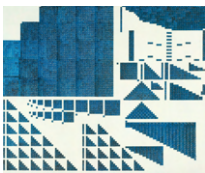
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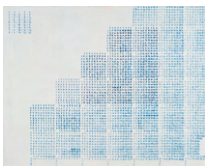
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*Number Structure No. 5*, 1983. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Number Structure No. 9*, 1984. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



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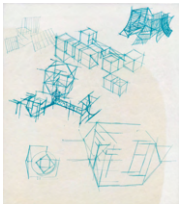
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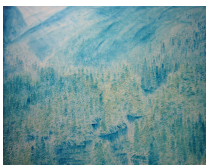
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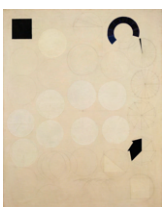
*Sketches for Galaxies*, c.1963. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Solitude*, 1973. Private Collection, Toronto. Courtesy of Cowley Abbott, Toronto.

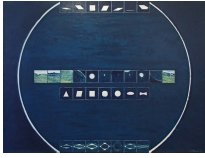


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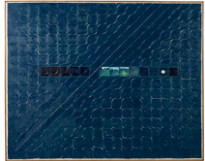


*Spatial Concept*, 1965. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.

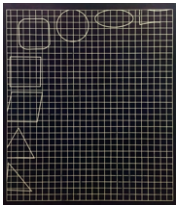




*Spatial Concept #3*, 1970. Courtesy of Paul and Janice Sabourin. Photo by The Kalaman Group.



*Spatial Concept/Evolution*, 1970. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



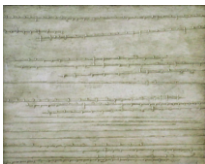
*Spatial Concept, Geometry*, 1968. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Still-Life*, 1959. Private Collection. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction House.



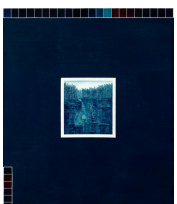
*Strawberry Farm*, c.1941. Collection of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, purchase (20190036-004). Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum.



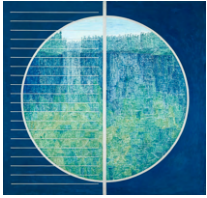
*String Painting*, 1957. Courtesy of Paul and Janice Sabourin. Photo by The Kalaman Group.



*Summer Brilliance*, 1955. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Suspended Landscape*, 1967. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Ottawa, purchase (1994NK107). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*Suspended Landscape*, 1969. Private Collection. Courtesy of Waddington's Auctioneers and Appraisers, Toronto.



*Suspension 5*, 1968. Collection of Andrew Rookley, Ontario. Courtesy of Cowley Abbott, Toronto.



*Tashme*, July 2, 1943. Collection of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, purchase (20190036-007). Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum.



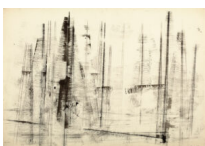
*Tashme at Dusk*, July/August 1944, 1944. Private Collection. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Torch Parade*, February 25, 1944. Collection of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, purchase (20190036-009). Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum.



*Tower Structures*, 1967.



*Trees*, 1951. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase (1991NK71). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*Twelve Mile Lake*, 1944. Collection of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, purchase (20190036-019). Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum.

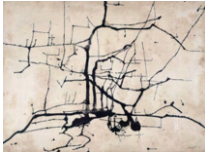




*Two Horizons*, 1968. Collection of Government of Ontario Art Collection, Toronto (619763).



*Untitled*, c.1950s.



*Untitled*, 1951. Private Collection.



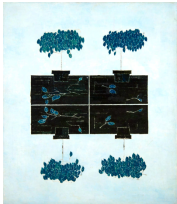
*Untitled*, 1955. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Untitled*, 1955. Private Collection. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction.



*Untitled*, 1964. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



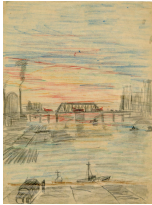
*Untitled*, 1964. Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto.



*Untitled (Magic Squares)*, c.1975-85. Private collection.



*Untitled (Strings Removed)*, c.1957. Private Collection. Courtesy of BYDealers Auction House.



*Vancouver, Old Cambie Street Bridge*, 1942. Collection of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, purchase (20190036-005). Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum.



*Winter, Don River*, 1949. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Kazuo Nakamura, Toronto, 2001, 2001/65. © Estate of Kazuo Nakamura.

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## Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists



Advertisement for *Abstracts at Home*, 1953. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*Blue Dynasty*, c.1955, by Alexandra Luke. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. E. R. S. McLaughlin (1971LA187). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*Blue Horizon*, c.1957, by Ray Mead. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Gift of M. F. Feheley (1971MR104). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



Building L, School (Formerly Winter Garden), Hastings Park, Vancouver, c.1942, photograph by Leonard Frank. Collection of the Nikkei National Museum, Burnaby, Alex Eastwood Collection (1994.69.3.23). Courtesy of the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre.





*The Care-of-the-aged Falls in Mino Province (Mino no kuni Yôrô no taki)*, c.1832, by Katsushika Hokusai. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William S. and John T. Spaulding Collection (21.669). Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



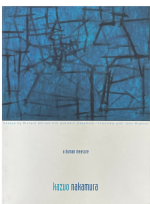
*Chestnut Trees at Jas de Bouffan*, c.1885-86, by Paul Cézanne. Collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the William Hood Dunwoody Fund (49.9). Courtesy of the Minneapolis Institute of Art.



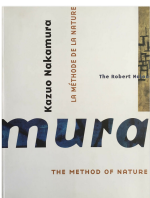
Chicago Pile-1 (Graphite Lattice), 1942, photographer unknown. Collection of the United States Department of Energy (HD.5A.024). Courtesy of the United States Department of Energy, Historian's Office.



*Composition VIII (The Cow) [4 Stages of Abstraction]*, c.1917, by Theo van Doesburg. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase (227.1948.1; 227.1948.6; 226.1948.a-b; and 225.1948).



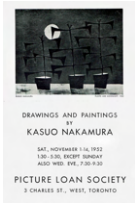
Cover of *Kazuo Nakamura: A Human Measure* exhibition catalogue, 2004.



Cover of *Kazuo Nakamura: The Method of Nature* exhibition catalogue, 2001.



Cover of exhibition brochure for *Painters Eleven at Roberts Gallery*, 1955. Collection of Jane Nakamura. Courtesy of John G. Hatch.



Exhibition advertisement for *Drawings and Paintings by Kazuo Nakamura* at the Picture Loan Society, Toronto, 1952. Collection of Jane Nakamura. Courtesy of John G. Hatch.



*Gefecht (Battle)*, 1930, by Paul Klee. Collection of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Maine, Gift (2000.25). Courtesy of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Photo credit: Luc Demers. © 2021 Estate of Paul Klee / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



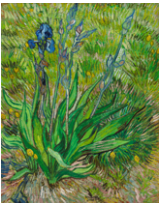
*Gray Tree*, 1911, by Piet Mondrian. Collection of the Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Netherlands (0334314). Courtesy of the Kunstmuseum Den Haag.



*House in Provence (Maison en Provence)*, c.1890, by Paul Cézanne. Collection of the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, purchase (BF41). Courtesy of the Barnes Foundation.



Interior of exhibition brochure for *Painters Eleven at Roberts Gallery*, 1955. Collection of Jane Nakamura. Courtesy of John G. Hatch.



*Iris*, 1890, by Vincent van Gogh. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchase (6294). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.



Japanese Canadians being relocated to camps in the interior of British Columbia, 1942, by Tak Toyota. Collection of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (c057250). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc.

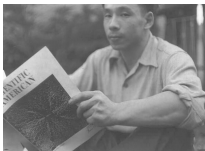




Japanese memorial in Stanley Park, April 9, 1920, by Stuart Thomson. Collection of the City of Vancouver Archives (AM1535-: CVA 99-2420). Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives.



Japanese women in traditional costume in a parade, 1937, by Karl Haspel. Collection of the City of Vancouver Archives (AM1663-: CVA300-136). Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives.



Kazuo Nakamura, 1957, photographer unknown. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



Kazuo Nakamura in his studio, 1957, photographer unknown.



Kazuo Nakamura in the sculpture studio at Central Technical School, c.1950, photographer unknown. Collection of the estate of the artist. Courtesy of the estate of the artist.



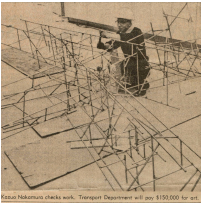
Kazuo Nakamura with his work *Infinite Waves*, October 30, 1979, photographer unknown. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



Kazuo Nakamura with his work *Suspension*, October 30, 1979, photographer unknown. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



Nakamura family in Tashme internment camp, c.1943, photographer unknown. Collection of the Estate of the artist. Courtesy of the Estate of the artist.



Newspaper clipping of Nakamura working on *Galaxies* installation, from the *Globe and Mail*, November 28, 1963.



Notice to All Japanese Persons and Persons of Japanese Racial Origin newspaper clipping, 1942. Collection of the Nikkei National Museum, Burnaby, Kishizo Kimura fonds (2010.4.4.12.36). Courtesy of the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre.



*Nuclear Energy*, 1964–66, by Henry Moore, photographer unknown. Collection of University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center (apf7-02219). Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library. © Chicago Maroon.



Painters Eleven at the Park Gallery, c.1957. Photograph by Peter Croydon, 1957. © 2011 Lynda M. Shearer. All rights reserved.



*Pink Reflections, Bishop's Pond*, 24 August 1920, by David B. Milne. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Gift from the Douglas M. Duncan Collection (16128). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. © Estate of David B. Milne.



*Poppies*, 1873, by Claude Monet. Collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris (RF 1676).





Publicity photo to advertise *Abstracts at Home* exhibition, October 1953, photograph by Everett Roseborough. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



Relocation of Japanese Canadians to camps in the interior of British Columbia, 1942-46, by Tak Toyota. Collection of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (C-047066). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc.



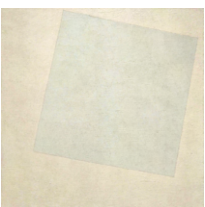
Repatriation - Down the stairs to the bus Logging operations [Tashme Camp], May 31, 1946, photographer unknown, Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver (UBC 39.1/45). Courtesy of the University of British Columbia Archives, Vancouver.



*Rouen Cathedral Façade and Tour d'Albane (Morning Effect)*, 1894, by Claude Monet. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Tompkins Collection (24.6). Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



*Starlit Night Miyajima Shrine*, 1928, by Kawase Hasui. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Miss Minnie A. MacFadden for the Lucy T. Aldrich Collection (47.1342). Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



*Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918, by Kazimir Malevich. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (817.1935).



*Tableau no. 4 (Painting No. 4) / Composition no. VIII / Composition 3*, 1913, by Piet Mondrian. Collection of the Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Netherlands (334317). Courtesy of the Kunstmuseum Den Haag.



Tashme camp, c.1940-49, photographer unknown. Collection of the Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (JCPC-08-041). Courtesy of the University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections.



Tashme camp with mountains in the background, c.1940-49, photographer unknown. Collection of the Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (JCPC-08-029). Courtesy of the University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections.



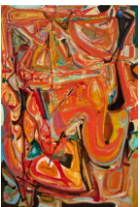
Tashme woodcutting work detail, n.d., (1942?), photographer unknown. Collection of the estate of the artist. Courtesy of the estate of the artist.



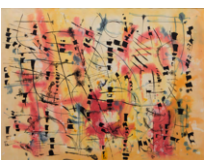
*Traveling by Moonlight*, c.1900, by Kawabata Gyokusho. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Charles Stewart Smith Collection, Gift of Mrs. Charles Stewart Smith, Charles Stewart Smith Jr., and Howard Caswell Smith in memory of Charles Stewart Smith (14.76.61.66). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



*The Tree*, 1964, by Agnes Martin. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. © Agnes Martin Foundation, New York / SOCAN, Montreal (2021).



*Tumult for a King*, 1954, by Harold Town. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Gift of the artist's estate (1994TH197). Courtesy of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery. © Estate of Harold Town.



*Untitled*, 1954, by William Ronald. Private Collection. Courtesy of BYDealers Auction House. © Estate of William Ronald.





View of Lemon Creek Camp, c.1940-49, photographer unknown. Collection of the Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (JCPC-31-010). Courtesy of the University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections.



View of Tashme Camp, c.1940-49, photographer unknown. Collection of the Japanese Canadian Research Collection, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (JCPC-30-013). Courtesy of the University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections.

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