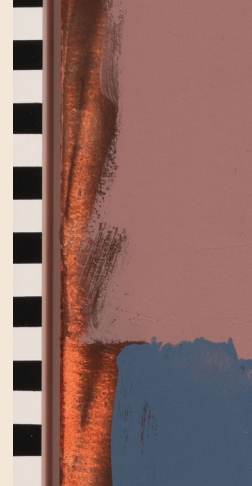


AUGUST 11, 2023

NEW ABSTRACT ART IN CANADA
10 CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

Sixty-eight years ago this month, in August 1955, the legendary *Emma Lake Artists' Workshops* were first held in northern Saskatchewan, where avant-garde figures spearheaded the development of modernist abstraction in Canada. To honour this moment in history, we're looking at ten painters who are following their legacy.

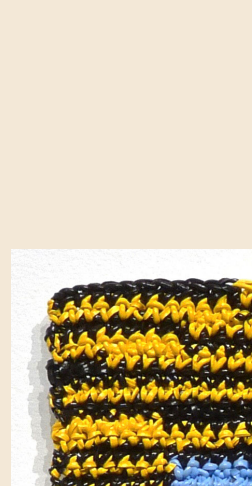


In a bid to represent what doesn't exist in objective reality, abstract artists use colour, shape, line, texture, and form to create works that comment on the creative process or evoke subjective feeling. In Canada, the most celebrated historical members of this artistic movement were the [Regina Five](#), a group of painters who met at the [Emma Lake Artists' Workshops](#), an annual gathering held in Murray Point, Saskatchewan, that ran for four decades. Next Tuesday, August 15, marks the sixty-eighth anniversary of the first workshop, which played a big part in the critical success of high-modernist abstraction and Minimalism across the country. By choosing ten Canadian artists working in abstraction today, we're paying tribute to the progenitors of the movement and celebrating those who continue to push the limits of what is possible.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

BACK CHANNELS

by Julia Dault

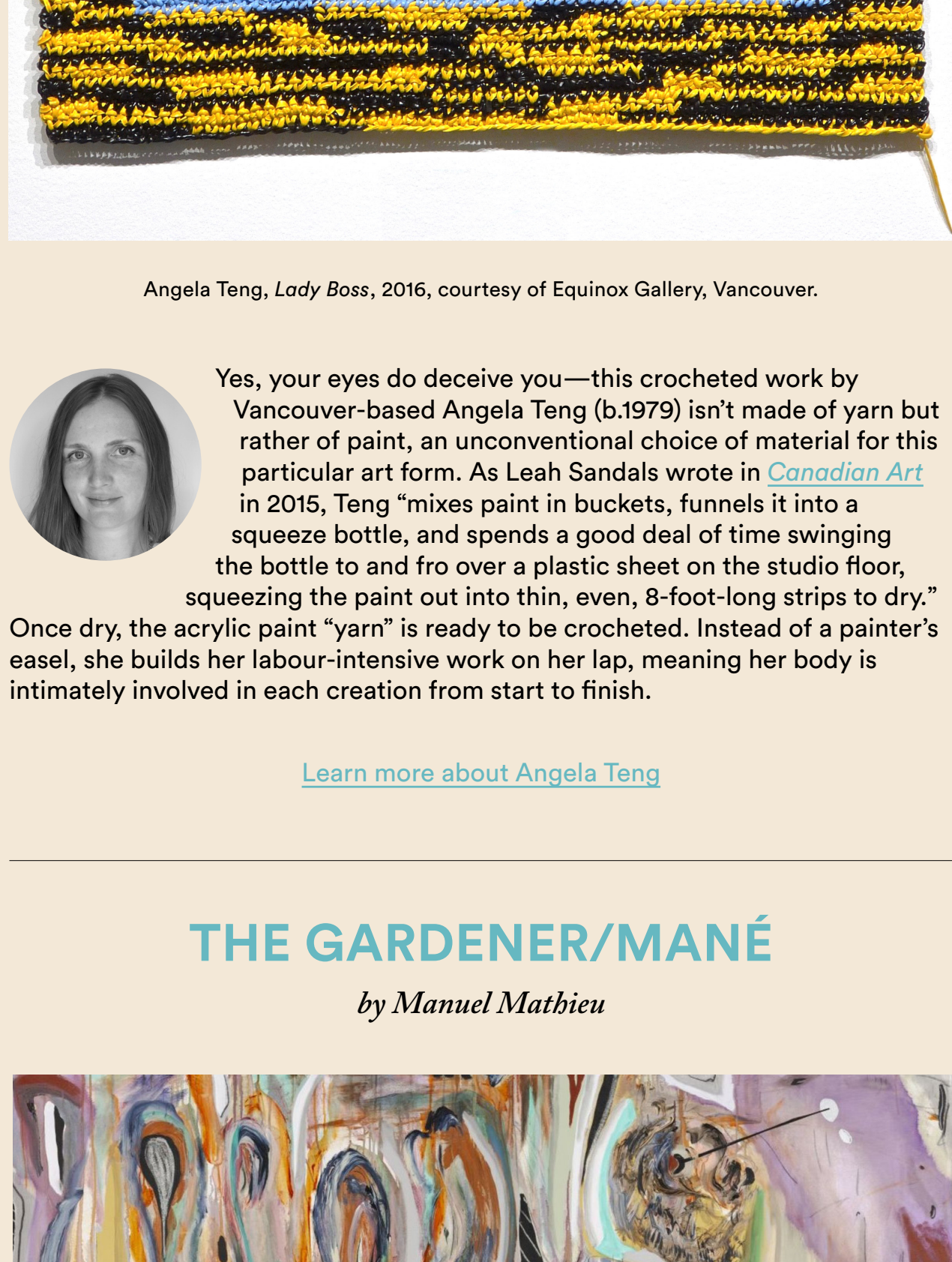
Julia Dault, *Back Channels*, 2022, courtesy of Bradley Ertaskiran, Montreal.

For Toronto artist Julia Dault (b.1977), "abstraction is never purely about process, but also about discovery through action." Put another way, it's about "finding beauty in the fugly," according to the [description](#) of her winter 2023 solo exhibition, *Never Odd or Even*, at Bradley Ertaskiran in Montreal. In a painting from that show, *Back Channels*, an orderly black and white frame borders a riot of colourful smudges and stripes placed at haphazard angles. Dault's work often scrutinizes handmade versus machine-assisted techniques of production, with results that are perfectly imperfect.

[Learn more about Julia Dault](#)

INTERIOR REVISITED

by Norman Kiyomitsu Takeuchi

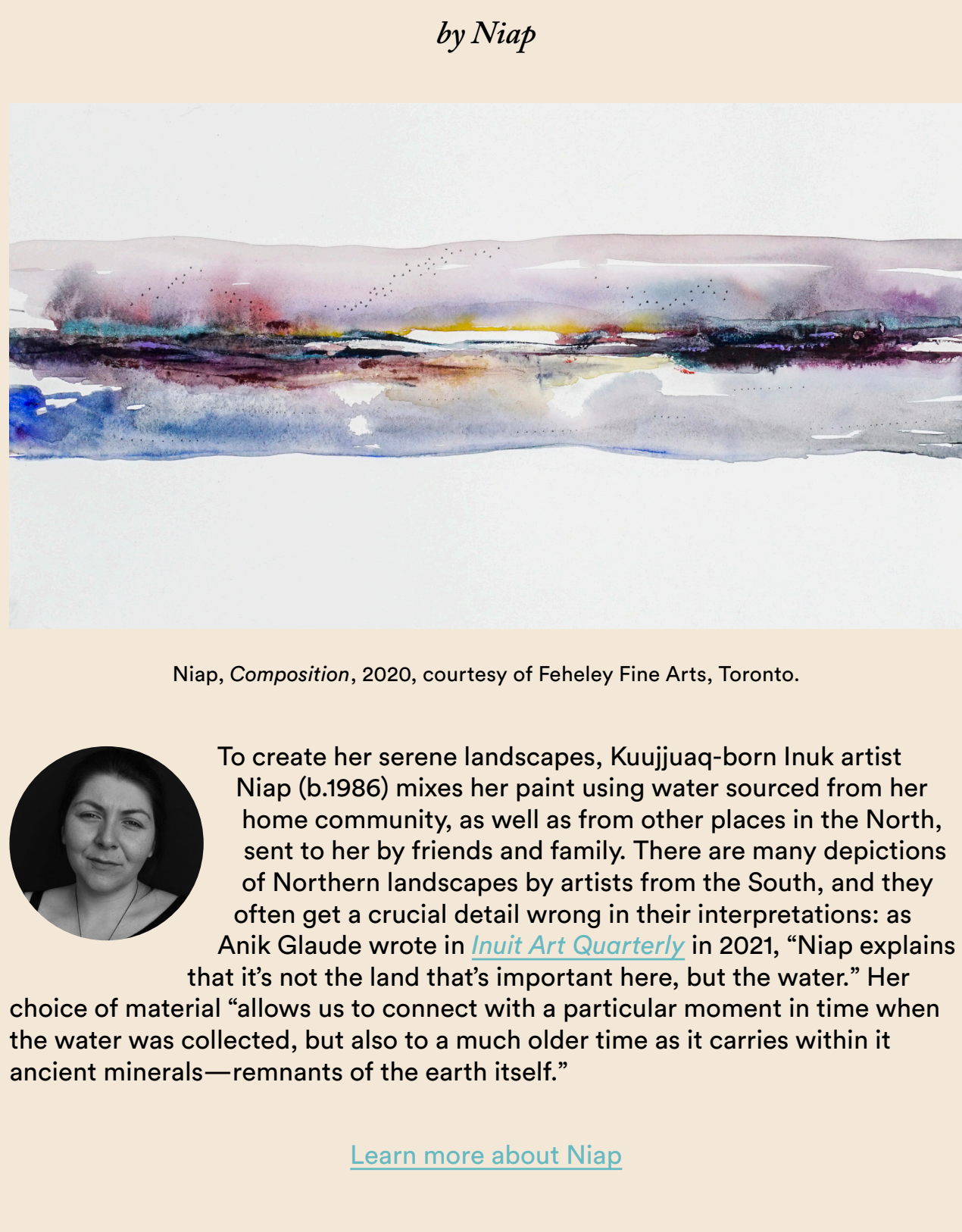
Norman Kiyomitsu Takeuchi, *Interior Revisited*, 2012–17, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Japanese Canadian artist Norman Kiyomitsu Takeuchi (b.1937) was only five years old when his family was forcibly relocated from Vancouver to a settlement in the British Columbia Interior. They were among 22,000 Canadians of Japanese descent whose rights and freedoms were suspended under the War Measures Act during the Second World War. In this painting, a man from an internment camp and two women dressed in kimonos from a historical ukiyo-e print are segregated, as Takeuchi wrote for [ROM Magazine](#) in 2021, by "ambivalent shapes that express my disorientation of where I fit in the world." These heightened ambiguities have become a metaphor for my attempt to come to terms with that traumatic period, giving rise to constantly shifting moments of interior reflection."

Learn more about Norman Kiyomitsu Takeuchi in ACI's [Ottawa Art & Artists: An Illustrated History](#) by Jim Burant

LADY BOSS

by Angela Teng

Angela Teng, *Lady Boss*, 2016, courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver.

Yes, your eyes do deceive you—this crocheted work by Vancouver-based Angela Teng (b.1979) isn't made of yarn but rather of paint, an unconventional choice of material for this particular art form. As Leah Sandals wrote in [Canadian Art](#) in 2015, Teng "mixes paint in buckets, funnels it into a squeeze bottle, and spends a good deal of time swinging the bottle and to fro over a plastic sheet on the studio floor, squeezing the paint out into thin, even, 8-foot-long strips to dry." Once dry, the acrylic paint "yarn" is ready to be crocheted. Instead of a painter's easel, she builds her labour-intensive work on her lap, meaning her body is intimately involved in each creation from start to finish.

[Learn more about Angela Teng](#)

THE GARDENER/MANÉ

by Manuel Mathieu

Manuel Mathieu, *The Gardener/Mané*, 2019, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City.

Akin to looking into an open wound, the abstract paintings of 2020 Sobey Art Award winner Manuel Mathieu (b.1986) elicit visceral responses. Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and based in Montreal, the artist creates work that contends with the violence of his history—his mother's family included a colonel in Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier's tyrannical regime while his father's side mourned members executed by that same government. The colourful forms of *The Gardener/Mané*, 2019, "veer toward illusory renderings of disembodied figures in vibrant flesh tones," wrote James D. Campbell for [Criez](#) in 2021. There is evidence of healing energy too, however. Mathieu's art is "a powerful act of memorialization," says Campbell, "that reifies ... symbols of hope and regeneration."

[Learn more about Manuel Mathieu](#)

COMPOSITION

by Niap

Niap, *Composition*, 2020, courtesy of Feleley Fine Arts, Toronto.

To create her serene landscapes, Kuujuaq-born Inuk artist Niap (b.1986) mixes her paint using water sourced from her home community, as well as from other places in the North, sent to her by friends and family. There are many depictions of Northern landscapes by artists from the South, and they often get a crucial detail wrong in their interpretations: "Anik Claude wrote in [Inuit Art Quarterly](#) in 2021, "Niap explains that it's not the land that's important here, but the water." Her choice of material "allows us to connect with a particular moment in time when the water was collected, but also to a much older time as it carries within it ancient minerals—remnants of the earth itself."

[Learn more about Niap](#)

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THE CATCH

by Katharine Harvey

Katharine Harvey, *The Catch*, 2018, Canada Council Art Bank Collection, Ottawa.

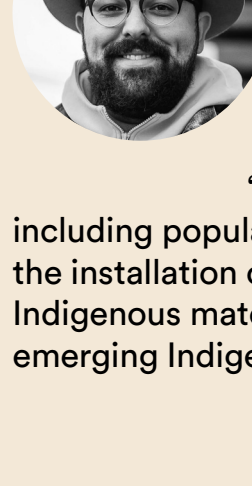
Ontario painter Katharine Harvey (b.1963) is interested in "the sensation of ephemeral, fleeting moments." Visually representing memories, which by their very nature blur and degrade each time they are recalled, is one of her foremost concerns. Harvey starts each painting in a representational style, then applies layer upon layer of gel and paint to completely transform her image. This piece, wrote the [Canada Council for the Arts Art Bank](#), "is based on a photograph of Harvey's father showing off a fish he caught at the Lake of Bays in Ontario." It's as if we are viewing the scene through a foggy window obscured by light-reflecting rain or electrical sparks—an apt metaphor for how the world is seen through the mind's eye.

[Learn more about Katharine Harvey](#)

[Learn more about Harvey's newest series Turning in the Light](#)

AWAKENING

by Hanny Al Khoury

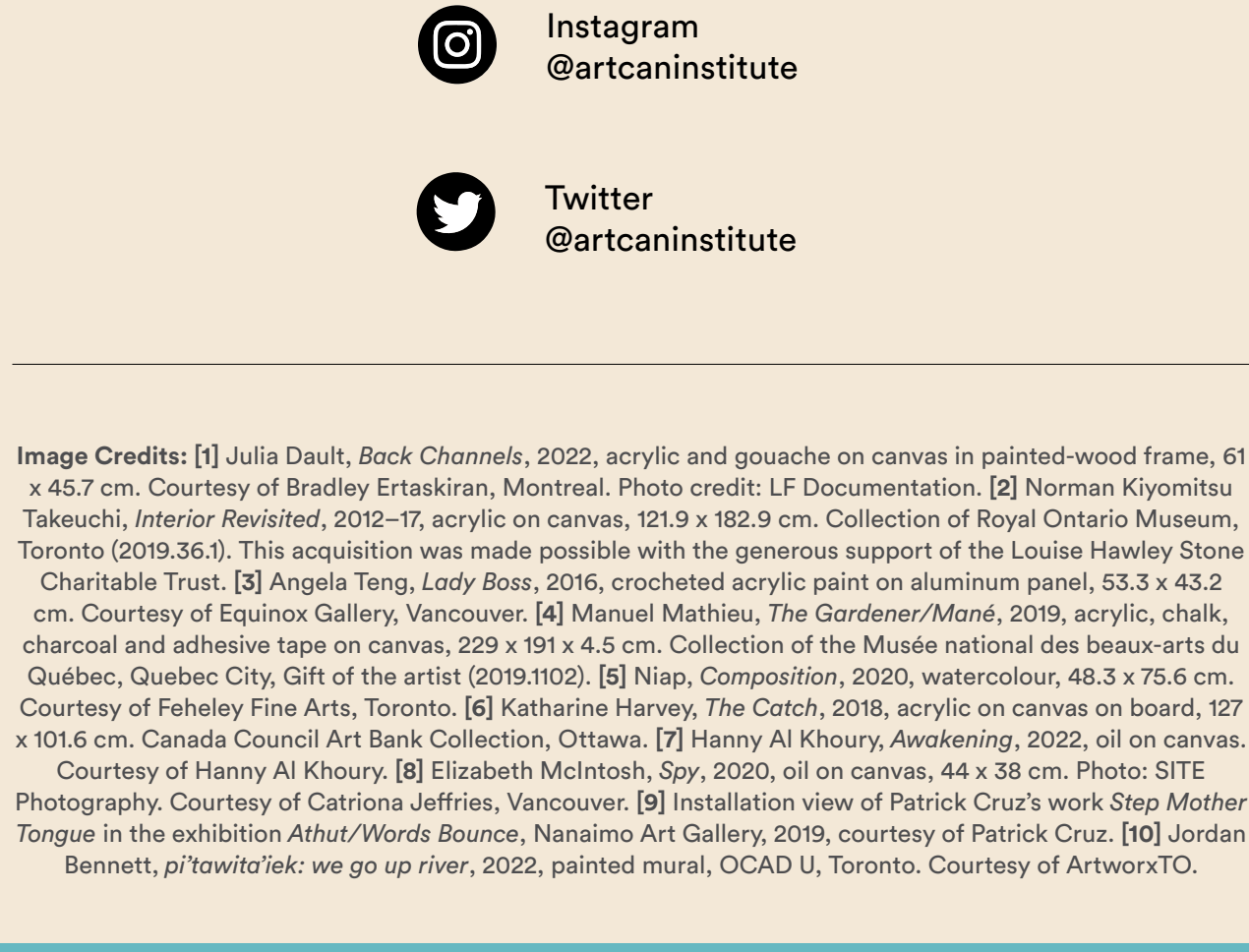
Hanny Al Khoury, *Awakening*, 2022, courtesy of Hanny Al Khoury.

Edmonton's Hanny Al Khoury (b.1990) grew up Catholic in occupied Palestine and creates "dreamscapes free of the traumas caused by the complexities of this intersectional identity," according to the [Art Gallery of Alberta](#). The images and forms he creates in his paintings hold personal significance—there is a crucifix shape in *Awakening* that could carry Christian connotations, or maybe it's the crosshatched head of a screw—but the artist hopes viewers will extract meaning that applies to their own life experiences. Her earthy tones, however, are unambiguous: they are meant to convey the calm, balance, and groundedness of a safe place from which to confront harrowing ordeals of the past.

[Learn more about Hanny Al Khoury](#)

SPY

by Elizabeth McIntosh

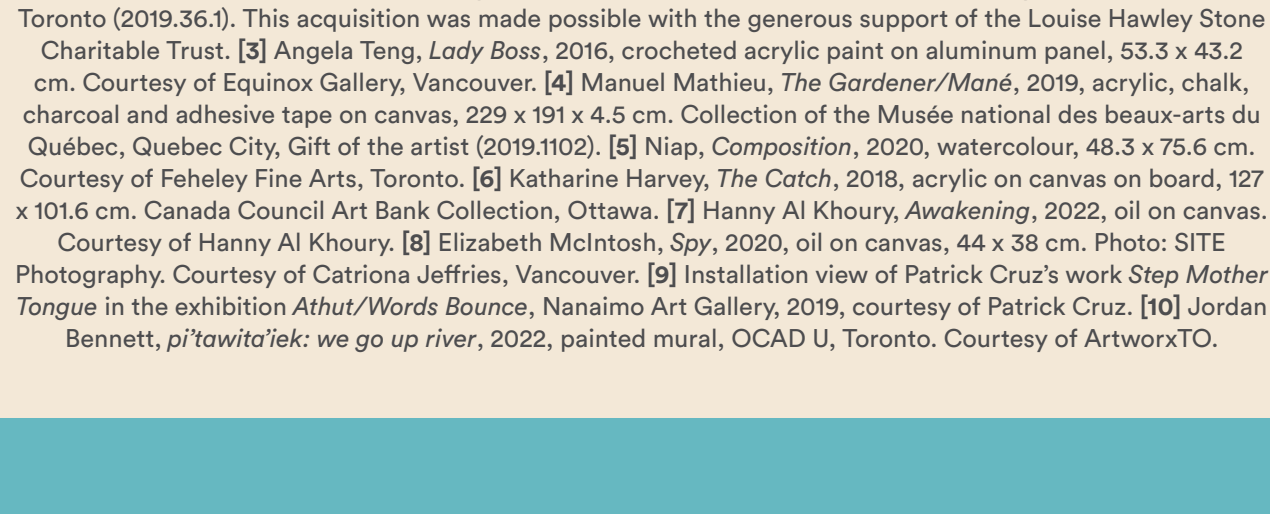
Elizabeth McIntosh, *Spy*, 2020, courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

In paintings by Vancouver-based Elizabeth McIntosh (b.1967), "signifiers remain familiar, but are so loosened from their sources that they are barely recognizable" and "viewers are left on the lookout, to revel in the unknown," as [Oakville Galleries](#) wrote about McIntosh's 2020 exhibition *Show Up*. She takes cues from the history of modern painting, such as "the stripes from the subject's shirt in a Picasso painting, for example, or some detail from a work by Matisse," that Chris Hampton notes in the [National Gallery of Canada](#) magazine. Forever experimenting, McIntosh creates abstract compositions that exude creative freedom.

[Learn more about Elizabeth McIntosh](#)

STEP MOTHER TONGUE

by Patrick Cruz

Installation view of Patrick Cruz's work *Step Mother Tongue* in the exhibition *Athut/Words Bounce*, Nanaimo Art Gallery, 2019, courtesy of Patrick Cruz.

You can find your own meaning in the dripping hieroglyphics that make up the floor-to-ceiling mural *Step Mother Tongue*, but Filipino Canadian artist Patrick Cruz (b.1987) is clear on his inspiration. When Spain colonized the Philippines in the 1500s, it made Spanish the official language—and even issued a decree for people to adopt Spanish surnames. "And then when Americans came and took out Spanish, replaced it with English, that also became another stepmother tongue," Cruz, winner of the 2015 RBC Canadian Painting Competition, told the [Nanaimo Bulletin](#) in 2019. "So in a way it's kind of about that narrative of replacing languages and hybridizing them ... where the translation is lost but there's some familiarity with it."

[Learn more about Patrick Cruz](#)

PI'TAWITATIEK: WE GO UP RIVER

by Jordan Bennett

Jordan Bennett, *pi'tawitatiek: we go up river*, 2022, OCAD U, Toronto.

This large-scale mural installed on the OCAD University building in Toronto is by Mi'kmaw artist Jordan Bennett (b.1986), one of the 2020 winners of the Sobey Art Award. "Although my paintings are often viewed as abstract, they are rooted in a deep history of porcupine quillwork, which is rich in pattern through shape, colour, and composition," Bennett wrote in his [artist statement](#) published on the OCAD University website. "I take inspiration from various aspects of historical art and culture, including popular culture, community and art history." According to the university, the installation of this artwork in 2022 was intended to "ground the space in Indigenous material culture," with mentorship and work-study opportunities for emerging Indigenous artists included as part of the programming.

[Learn more about Jordan Bennett](#)

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Image Credits: [1] Julia Dault, *Back Channels*, 2022, acrylic and gouache on canvas in painted-wood frame, 61 x 45.7 cm. Courtesy of Bradley Ertaskiran, Montreal. Photo credit: LF Documentation. [2] Norman Kiyomitsu Takeuchi, *Interior Revisited*, 2012–17, acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 182.9 cm. Collection of Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (2019.36.3). This acquisition was made possible with the generous support of the Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust. [3] Angela Teng, *Lady Boss*, 2016, crocheted acrylic paint on aluminum panel, 53.5 x 43.2 cm. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. [4] Manuel Mathieu, *The Gardener/Mané*, 2019, acrylic, chalk, charcoal and adhesive tape on canvas, 229 x 191 x 4.5 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City. Gift of the artist (2019.1910). [5] Niap, *Composition*, 2020, watercolour, 48.3 x 76.6 cm. Courtesy of Feleley Fine Arts, Toronto. [6] Katharine Harvey, *The Catch*, 2018, acrylic on canvas on board, 127 x 101.6 cm. Canada Council Art Bank Collection, Ottawa. [7] Hanny Al Khoury, *Awakening*, 2022, oil on canvas. Courtesy of Hanny Al Khoury. [8] Elizabeth McIntosh, *Spy*, 2020, oil on canvas, 44 x 38 cm. Photo: SITE Photography. Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. [9] Installation view of Patrick Cruz's work *Step Mother Tongue* in the exhibition *Athut/Words Bounce*, Nanaimo Art Gallery, 2019, courtesy of Patrick Cruz. [10] Jordan Bennett, *pi'tawitatiek: we go up river*, 2022, painted mural, OCAD U, Toronto. Courtesy of ArtworkX10.