

EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

A PICTURE IS WORTH 1,000 WORDS
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTISTRY IN CANADA

Examine the art, history, and practical application behind a universal medium through ACI's newest educational resource exploring Canadian photography



LEARN ABOUT

PHOTOGRAPHY
through explorations of
HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN CANADA

It is difficult to imagine what life would be like without photography. This is especially true for high school students, most of whom are navigating an image-saturated world with the prevalence of smartphones and social media. But when photography first arrived in Canada nearly two centuries ago, a great deal of its potential remained to be discovered. Its historical development into the artistic and practical tool it is today happened slowly, driven by its versatility as a storytelling form. In Canada, Minna Keene (1861–1943) explored the tool's potential as an artform in the early twentieth century, while Peter Pitseolak (1902–1973) used the camera to tell his community's stories in the mid-twentieth century, and contemporary artist Jeff Wall (b.1946) brought lens-based practices into the realm of Conceptual art starting in the late 1970s. Inspired by the work of these three masters of the medium, ACI's newest educational resource looks at the artistic advances of photography over generations, exploring portraiture, documentary genres, and more.

[Download our newest Teacher Resource Guide](#)

— The Art Canada Institute Education Team

AVENUES TO EXPLORE

Pictorialist Portraits



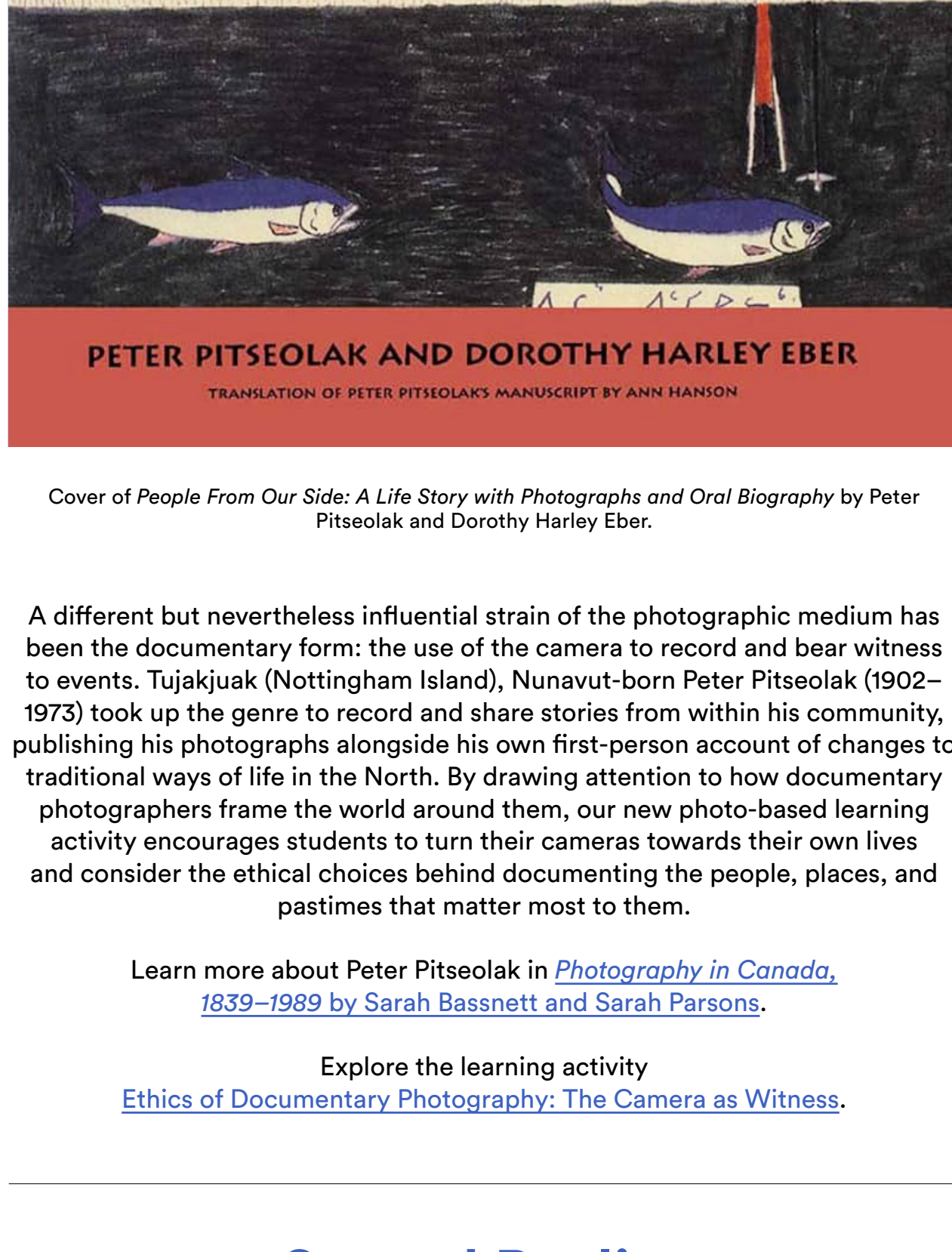
Minna Keene, *Pomegranates*, c.1910.

Since the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, portraiture has remained one of the most iconic types of image-making and has played an important role in the development of both the artistic and social functions of the photograph. The genre was popularized by Pictorialists like Minna Keene (1861–1943), who experimented with formal elements—such as framing, focus, lighting, and contrast—to achieve artistic effects, advancing the idea that photography could be used as an artistic tool rather than solely for scientific documentation. In *Pomegranates*, c.1910, Keene's use of costume, hints of natural light, and careful framing shine through as unique components of this visionary treatment of the medium.

Read more about Minna Keene in [Photography in Canada, 1839–1989](#) by Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons.

Explore the learning activity [Bringing into Focus: Examining the Art of Portraiture](#).

Capturing Community



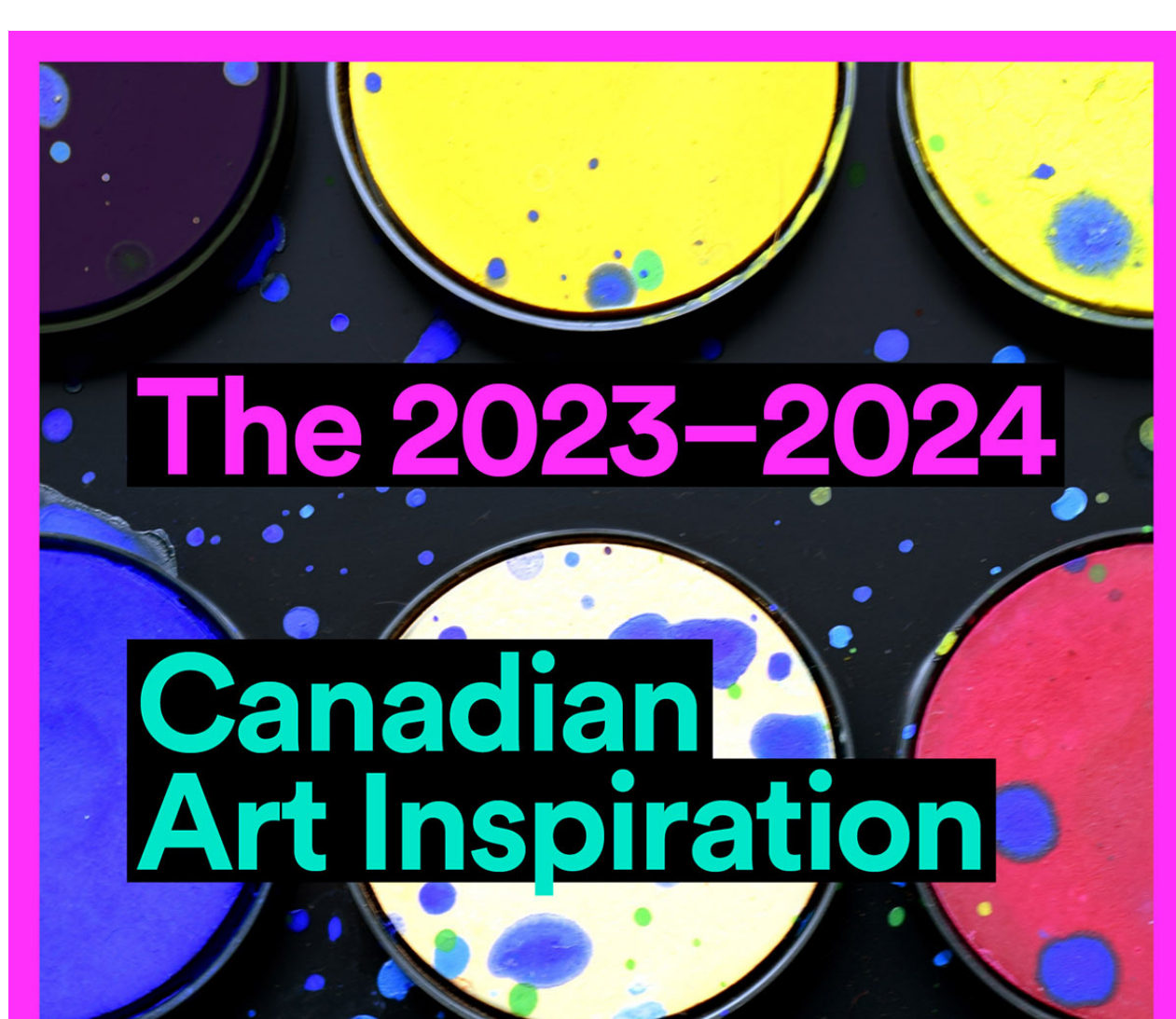
Cover of *People From Our Side: A Life Story with Photographs and Oral Biography* by Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber.

A different but nevertheless influential strain of the photographic medium has been the documentary form: the use of the camera to record and bear witness to events. Tujakjuak (Nottingham Island), Nunavut-born Peter Pitseolak (1902–1973) took up the genre to record and share stories from within his community, publishing his photographs alongside his own first-person account of changes to traditional ways of life in the North. By drawing attention to how documentary photographers frame the world around them, our new photo-based learning activity encourages students to turn their cameras towards their own lives and consider the ethical choices behind documenting the people, places, and pastimes that matter most to them.

Learn more about Peter Pitseolak in [Photography in Canada, 1839–1989](#) by Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons.

Explore the learning activity [Ethics of Documentary Photography: The Camera as Witness](#).

Staged Reality



Jeff Wall, *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)*, 1993.

The nature of photography as an art form shifted from the 1960s to the 1980s as galleries began to build collections of contemporary photography. Increasingly, photographers focused on producing artworks that expressed novel ideas using surprising visual strategies. Creators such as Jeff Wall (b.1946) began making images that critiqued the very nature of lens-based representation, presenting moments that appeared spontaneous but were in fact carefully staged and framed. *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)*, 1993, pictured here, is a famed example of Wall's creative commentary on the "accidental" nature of the medium—and a fantastic springboard for teaching the fundamentals of Conceptual photography.

Learn more about Jeff Wall in [Photography in Canada, 1839–1989](#) by Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons.

Explore the learning activity [The Decisive Moment: Staging Reality](#).

SUBMISSIONS NOW OPEN



Looking for more ways to integrate the story of Canadian photography into your classroom? Consider encouraging your students to enter the 2023–2024 edition of ACI's annual student challenge. Students from Grade 7 through Grade 12 are eligible to participate. Submissions are open now, and the final deadline to participate is March 29, 2024.

Learn more about how to submit your students' work to the [Canadian Art Inspiration Student Challenge](#).

For project ideas, consult our free-to-download [Student Creativity Booklet](#).

As a bilingual organization, we are proud to offer our materials in both French and English, including this newsletter. Use the sign up links below to receive emails in your preferred language.

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About the Art Canada Institute

Launched in 2013, the Art Canada Institute is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, in both English and French, within Canada and internationally. The ACI works with more than fifty of Canada's leading art historians, curators, and visual culture experts who are dedicated to the creation of authoritative original content on the people, themes, and topics that have defined Canadian art history.

We are creating a central digital resource to tell the world about Canada's most important works of art and where they are located. By functioning as an online art museum, a [digital library](#), and an interactive Canadian art encyclopedia, the ACI is an indispensable resource on Canada's visual heritage.

Visit us at [aci-iac.ca](#)

Thank You to Our Benefactors

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Image Credits: [1] Minna Keene, *Pomegranates*, c. 1910, carbon print, 49.6 x 33.9 cm. Courtesy of the Estate of Minna Keene. © Estate of Minna Keene. [2] Cover of Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber, *People from Our Side: A Life Story with Photographs and Oral Biography* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993). Courtesy of McGill-Queen's University Press. [3] Jeff Wall, *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)*, 1993, transparency on lightbox, 229 x 377 cm. Courtesy of the artist. © Jeff Wall.