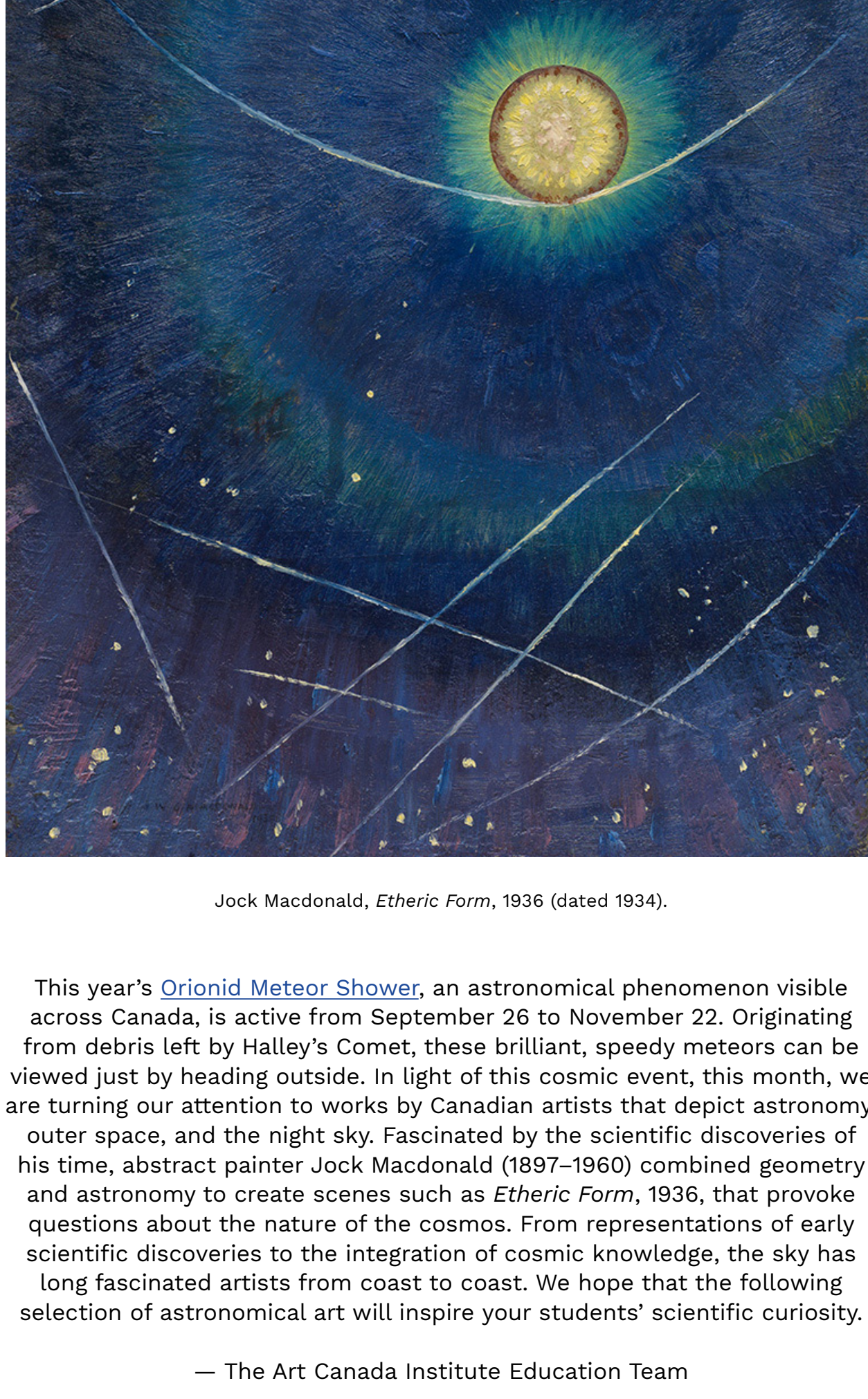


# INSPIRED BY THE COSMOS

## STEM LEARNING THROUGH ART

*This month, we're stepping outside the classroom to look up and learn about astronomy, scientific knowledge, and the Canadian art that represents it.*



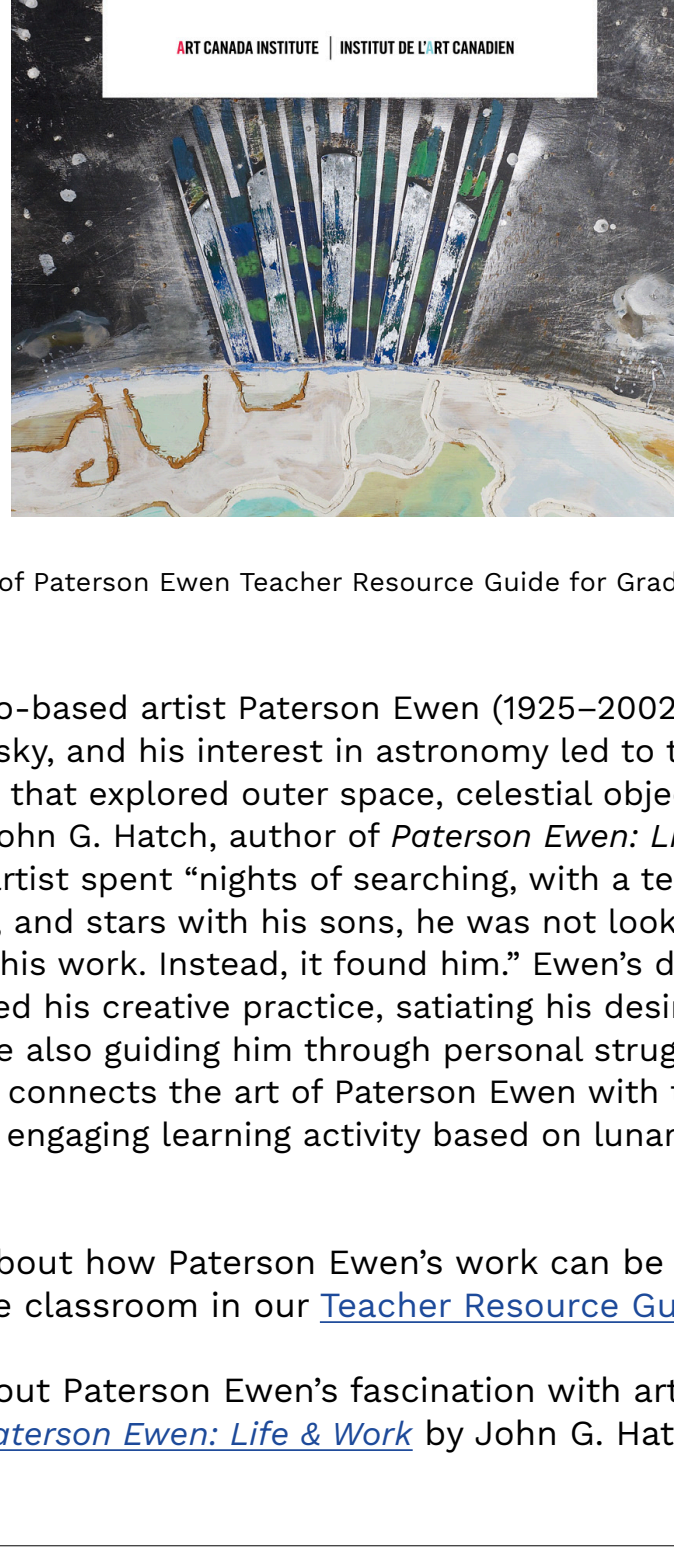
Jock Macdonald, *Etheric Form*, 1936 (dated 1934).

This year's [Orionid Meteor Shower](#), an astronomical phenomenon visible across Canada, is active from September 26 to November 22. Originating from debris left by Halley's Comet, these brilliant, speedy meteors can be viewed just by heading outside. In light of this cosmic event, this month, we are turning our attention to works by Canadian artists that depict astronomy, outer space, and the night sky. Fascinated by the scientific discoveries of his time, abstract painter Jock Macdonald (1897–1960) combined geometry and astronomy to create scenes such as *Etheric Form*, 1936, that provoke questions about the nature of the cosmos. From representations of early scientific discoveries to the integration of cosmic knowledge, the sky has long fascinated artists from coast to coast. We hope that the following selection of astronomical art will inspire your students' scientific curiosity.

— The Art Canada Institute Education Team

### AVENUES TO EXPLORE

## Lunar Observations



Cover of Paterson Ewen Teacher Resource Guide for Grades 4-12.

London, Ontario-based artist Paterson Ewen (1925–2002) was fascinated by the night sky, and his interest in astronomy led to the creation of many paintings that explored outer space, celestial objects, and notably, the moon. As John G. Hatch, author of *Paterson Ewen: Life & Work* notes, although the artist spent “nights of searching, with a telescope, for the planets, moons, and stars with his sons, he was not looking to science as inspiration for his work. Instead, it found him.” Ewen's dedication to the cosmos informed his creative practice, satiating his desire to learn about astronomy, while also guiding him through personal struggles. Our Teacher Resource Guide connects the art of Paterson Ewen with the night sky and includes an engaging learning activity based on lunar observation.

Learn more about how Paterson Ewen's work can be integrated into the classroom in our [Teacher Resource Guide](#).

Read more about Paterson Ewen's fascination with art and science in [Paterson Ewen: Life & Work](#) by John G. Hatch.

## Celestial Discoveries

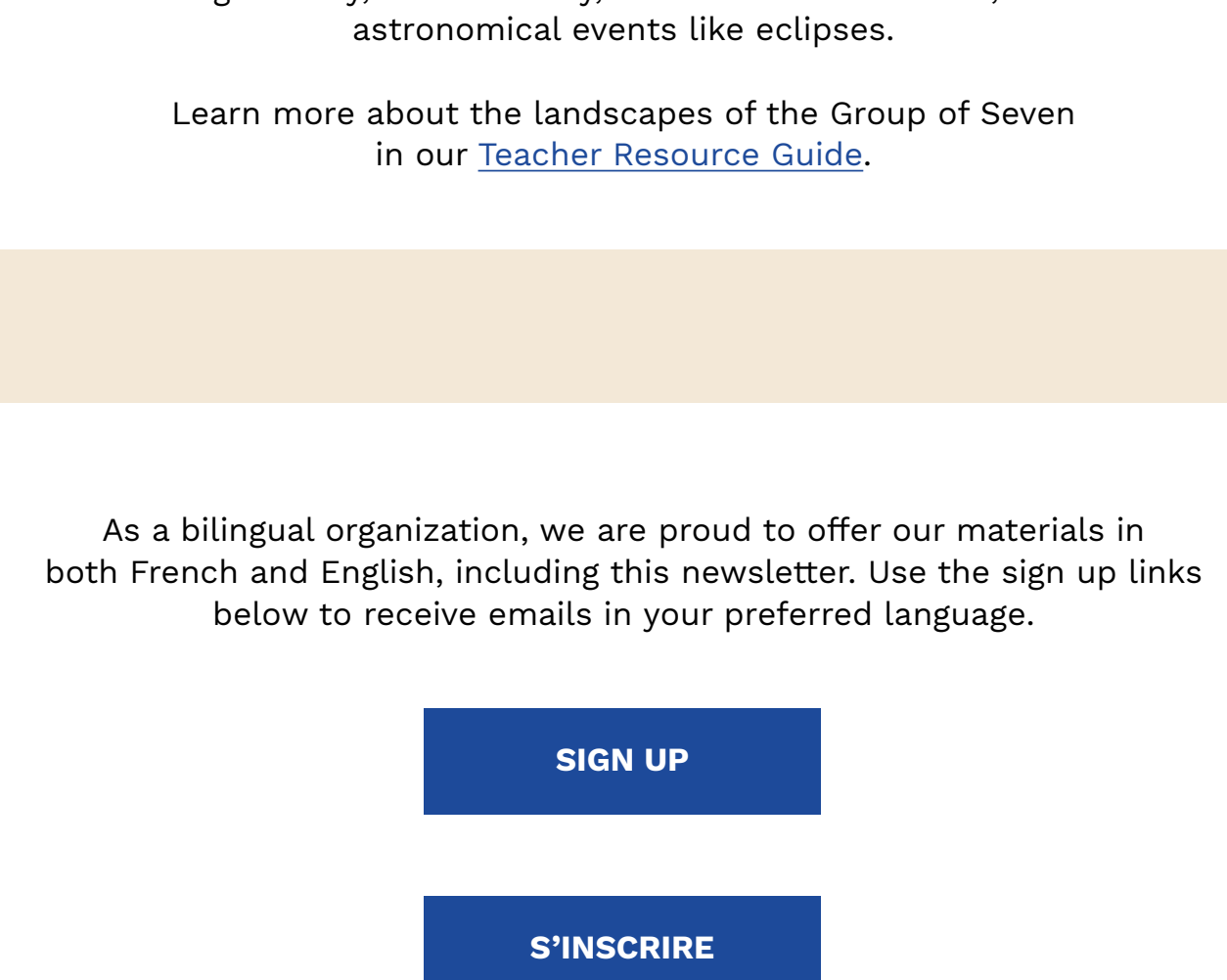


E. S. Shrapnel, *World to Come to an End, Stars Falling*, 1833, 1898.

Thomas Conant's *Upper Canada Sketches* is a fascinating account of the daily lives of settlers in Upper Canada in the early nineteenth century. The book features stunning drawings by English-born artist E.S. Shrapnel (1847–1920), including the one pictured above, which illustrates a story about Conant's father witnessing a meteor shower for the first time in 1833. The detailed scene, drawn in a charming folk style, depicts two figures in awe of the night sky as stars seemingly crash to the ground around them, causing panic. The story and illustration prompt considerations of and comparisons between historical and current understandings of scientific discovery, as well as the stories of Indigenous Peoples shared long before the arrival of European settlers.

Learn more about Shrapnel's depiction of this celestial event in an [online exhibition](#) created by the Oshawa Museum.

## Cosmic Knowledge



Germaine Arnaktauyok, *First Light*, date unknown.

Inuk artist Germaine Arnaktauyok (b.1946) is internationally revered for her delicate compositions that capture Inuit stories and experiences. Many of Arnaktauyok's works draw from traditions of storytelling, and depict creation stories, natural phenomena, and the night sky. The ink drawing above pictures an Inuk woman holding a paintbrush to the sun, a gesture that will nurture the endless glow of the celestial body. The poetic piece is a reminder that storytelling can serve as a guiding principle in creating art that contemplates the universe. Arnaktauyok's work is a powerful springboard for integrating Indigenous knowledge into classroom conversations about astronomy and science.

Learn more about the inspiration behind Arnaktauyok's work in [this video](#) featuring the artist.

## Representing the Universe



Lawren S. Harris, *Abstraction*, c.1964.

While Lawren S. Harris (1885–1970) may be known for his stark and symbolic depictions of Canadian landscapes created during his affiliation with the Group of Seven, he also explored semi-abstractness in his later artistic practice. The work pictured above is an example of Harris's interest in “universal expression”, a mode of creativity inspired by religious philosophy. Although titled *Abstraction*, the work's radial composition seems to portray an overlapping sun and moon. Depicting the interactions between science and math inherent in the study of astronomy, the piece offers an excellent starting point for classroom engagements with topics such as geometry, colour theory, and artistic abstraction, as well as astronomical events like eclipses.

Learn more about the Landscapes of the Group of Seven in our [Teacher Resource Guide](#).

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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](#)

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**Image Credits:** [1] Jock Macdonald, *Etheric Form*, 1936 (dated 1934), oil on panel, 38.1 x 30.5 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, gift from an anonymous donor (2012.52.4). Photo credit: Rachel Topham, 23 x 15.5 cm, Courtesy of the Oshawa Museum Archival Collection. [2] E. S. Shrapnel, *World to Come to an End, Stars Falling*, 1833, 1898, lithograph, 23 x 15.5 cm, Courtesy of the Oshawa Museum Archival Collection. [3] Germaine Arnaktauyok, *First Light*, date unknown, ink on paper, 57.2 x 52.1 cm, Courtesy of Inuit Art Foundation. [4] Lawren Harris, *Abstraction*, c.1964, oil on canvas, 112.5 x 137.5 cm. Private collection.