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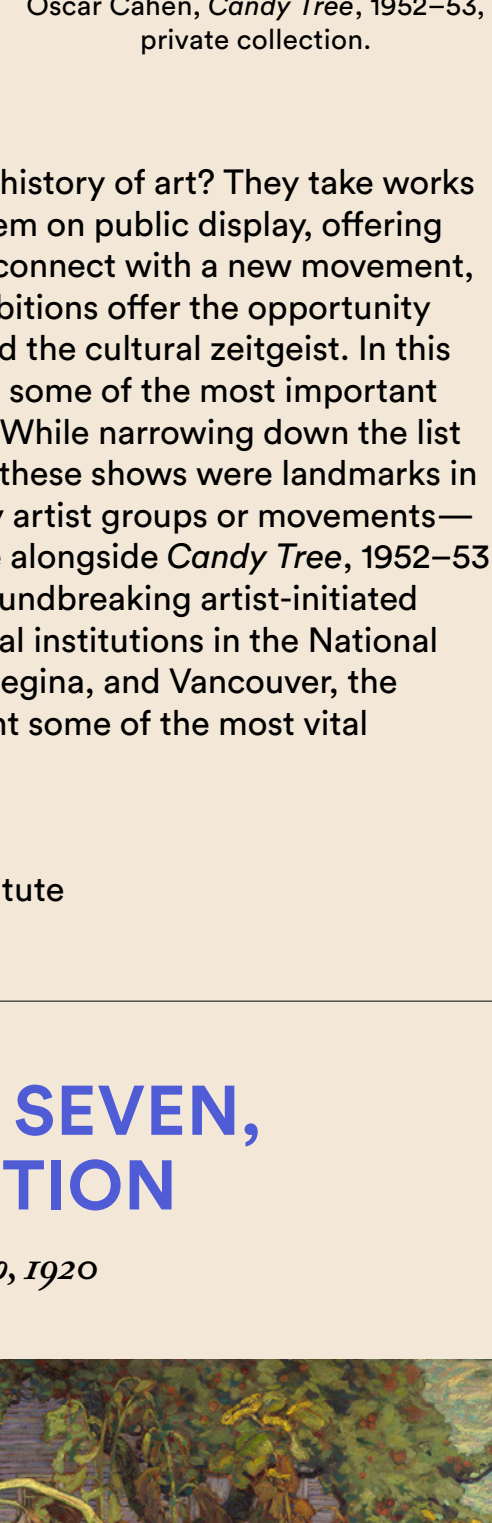
OCTOBER 11, 2024

MAKING HISTORY LANDMARK EXHIBITIONS THAT CHANGED ART IN CANADA

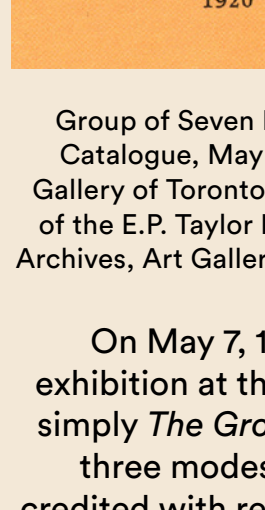
A century of shows that made the country look twice.



Publicity photo taken to advertise the *Abstracts at Home* exhibition, October 1953, photograph by Everett Roseborough.



Oscar Cahén, *Candy Tree*, 1952–53, private collection.

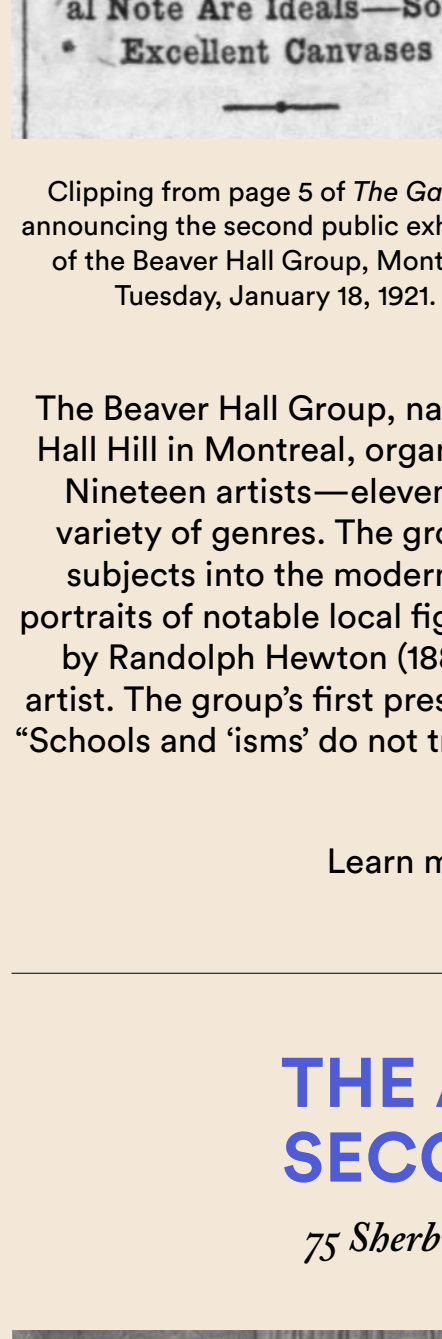


Sara Angel

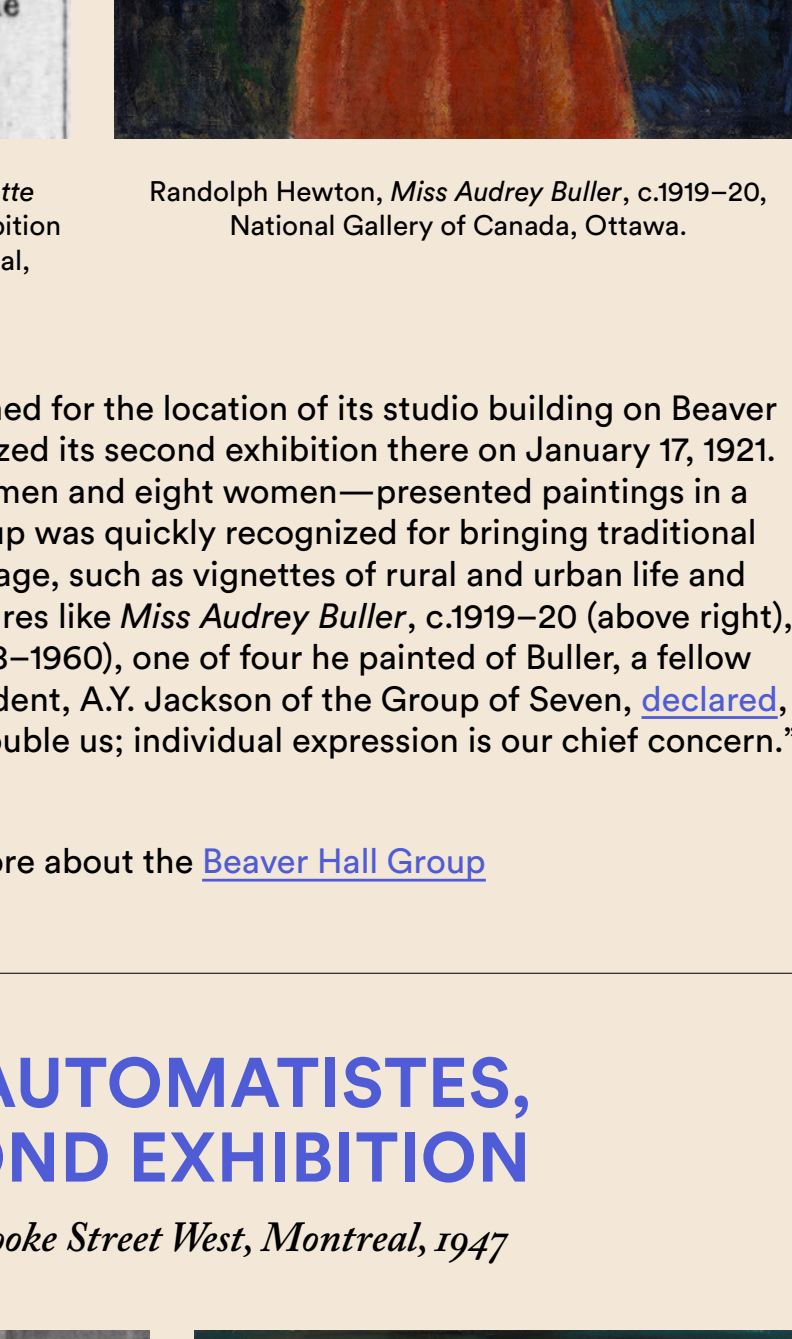
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

THE GROUP OF SEVEN, FIRST EXHIBITION

Art Gallery of Toronto, 1920



Group of Seven Exhibition Catalogue, May 1920, Art Gallery of Toronto, Collection of the E.P. Taylor Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.



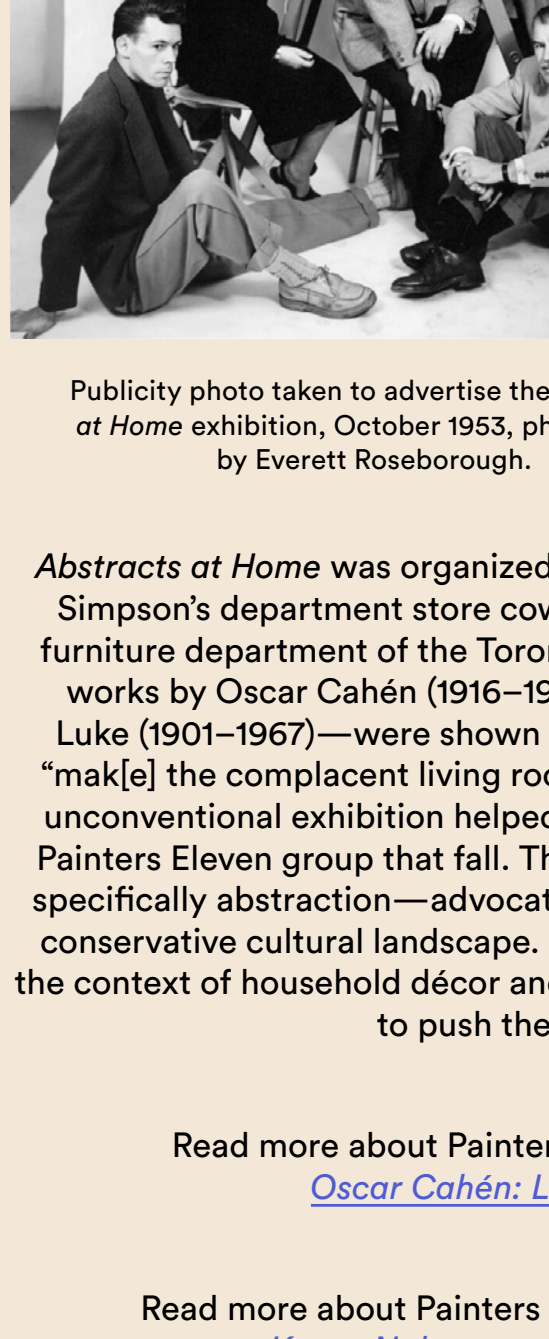
J.E.H. Macdonald, *The Tangled Garden*, 1916, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

On May 7, 1920, seven Toronto-based painters opened their first formal exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario). Titled simply *The Group of Seven*, it included more than 120 works in the institution's three modest spaces, most of them landscapes—the genre this setlist is credited with reimagining. Most importantly, this was the first time that Franklin Carmichael (1890–1945), Lawren Harris (1885–1970), A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Franz Johnston (1888–1949), Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), J.E.H. Macdonald (1873–1932), and F.H. Varley (1881–1969) were on view together, under a banner that soon became a symbol of national identity. Their vision of a distinctive subject matter and style inspired by the country's dramatic terrain would prove to be so influential that it still resonates profoundly today.

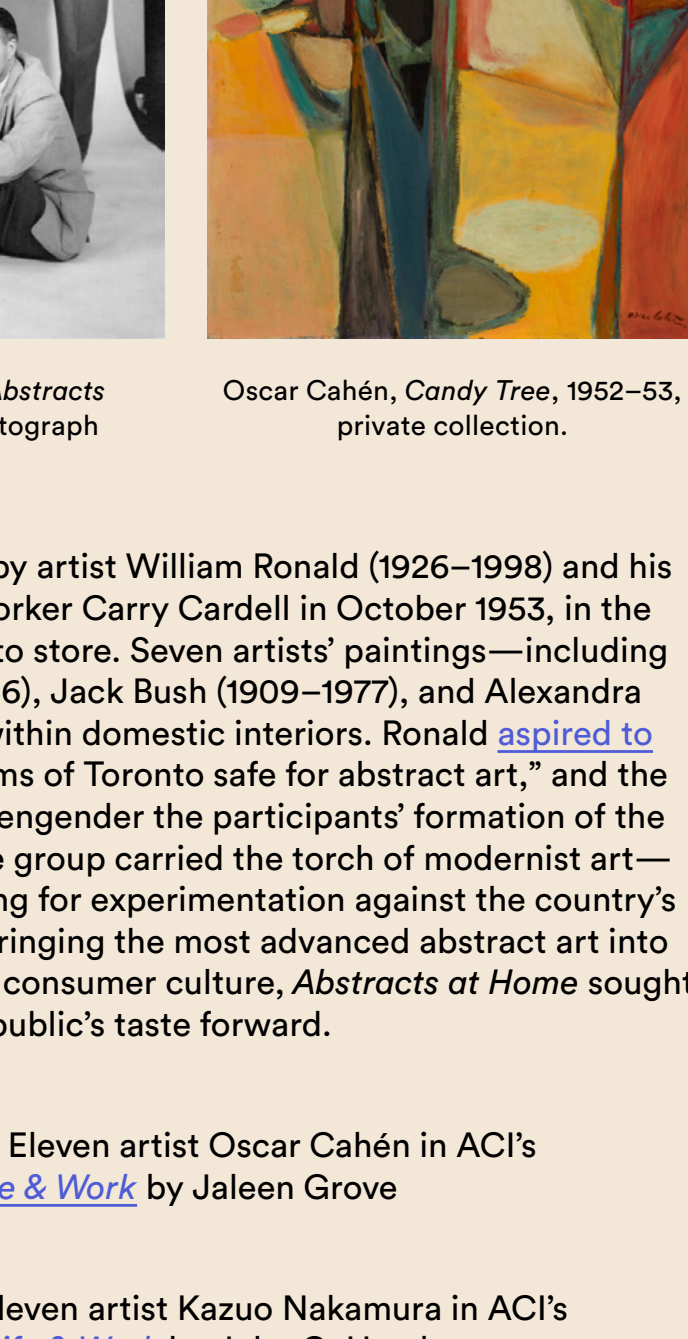
Learn more about the exhibition [The Group of Seven](#)

BEAVER HALL GROUP, SECOND EXHIBITION

Beaver Hall Studio, Montreal, 1921



Clipping from page 5 of *The Gazette* announcing the second public exhibition of the Beaver Hall Group, Montreal, Tuesday, January 18, 1921.



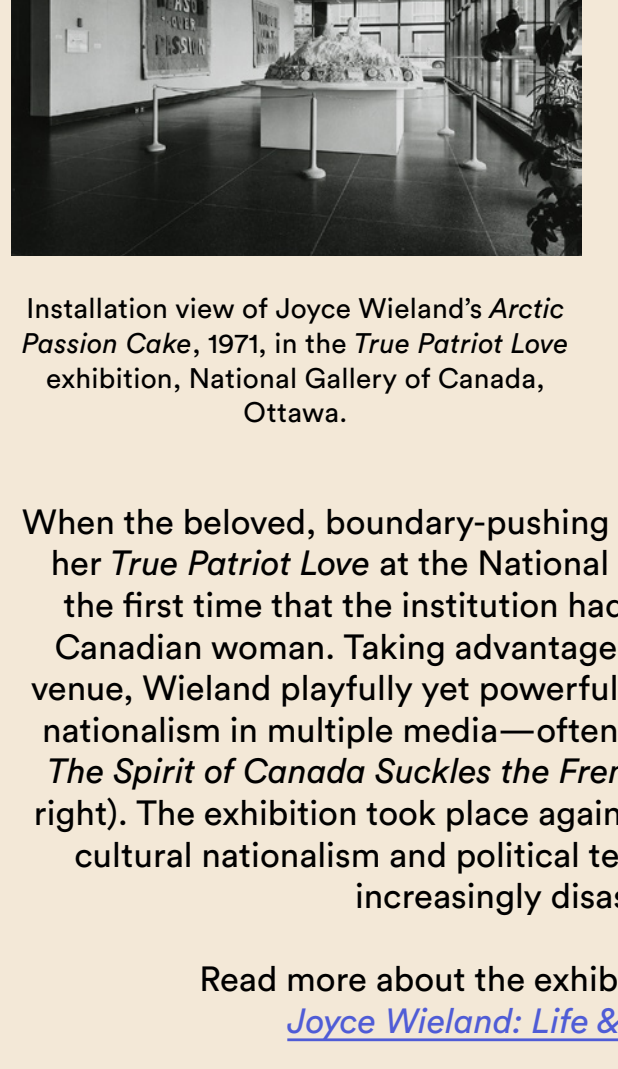
Randolph Hewton, *Miss Audrey Buller*, c.1919–20, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

The Beaver Hall Group, named for the location of its studio building on Beaver Hall Hill in Montreal, organized its second exhibition there on January 17, 1921. Nineteen artists—eleven men and eight women—presented paintings in a variety of genres. The group was quickly recognized for bringing traditional subjects into the modern age, such as vignettes of rural and urban life and portraits of notable local figures like *Miss Audrey Buller*, c.1919–20 (above right), by Randolph Hewton (1882–1960), one of four, painted of Buller, a fellow artist. The group's first exhibition, A.Y. Jackson (1903–1977), *discovered*, "Schools and 'isms' do not trouble us; individual expression is our chief concern."

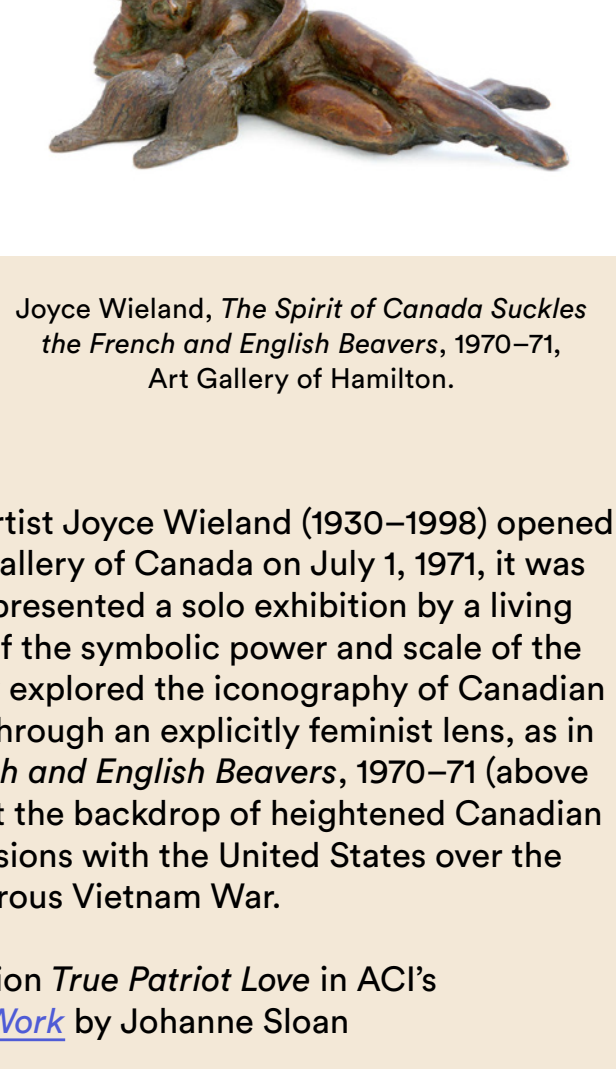
Learn more about the [Beaver Hall Group](#)

THE AUTOMATISTES, SECOND EXHIBITION

75 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, 1947



Second Automatistes exhibition at the home of the Gauthier, 75 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal (1947), photograph by Maurice Perron, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.



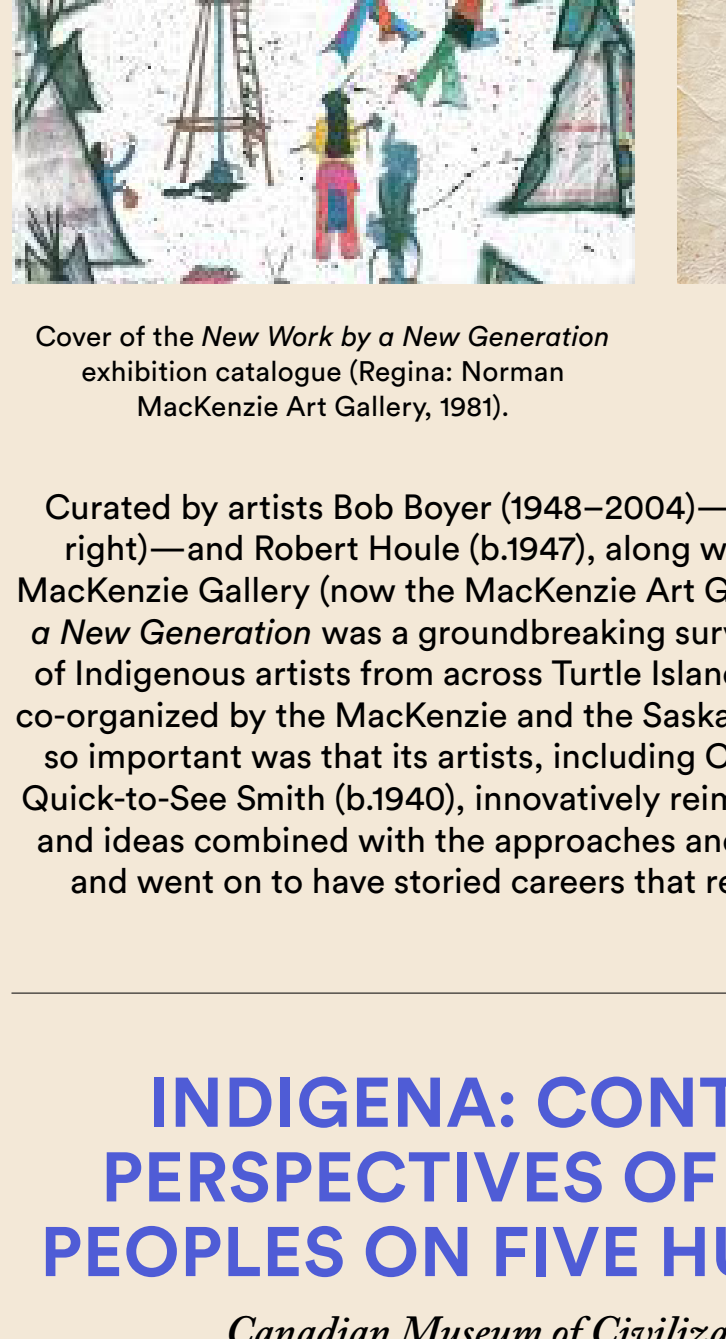
Paul-Émile Borduas, *Leeward of the Island* (1.47), 1947, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / CARCO Ottawa 2024.

The avant-garde Automatistes were Canada's first artists to experiment with gestural abstraction. The politically engaged group of painters came together in early 1940s Montreal at the studio of the great Paul-Émile Borduas (1905–1960), who was committed to instituting had created a solo exhibition by a living Canadian woman. Taking advantage of the symbolic power and scale of the venue, Wieland playfully yet powerfully explored the iconography of Canadian nationalism in multiple media—often through an explicitly feminist lens, as in *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers*, 1970–71 (above right). The exhibition took place against the backdrop of heightened Canadian cultural nationalism and political tensions with the United States over the increasingly disastrous Vietnam War.

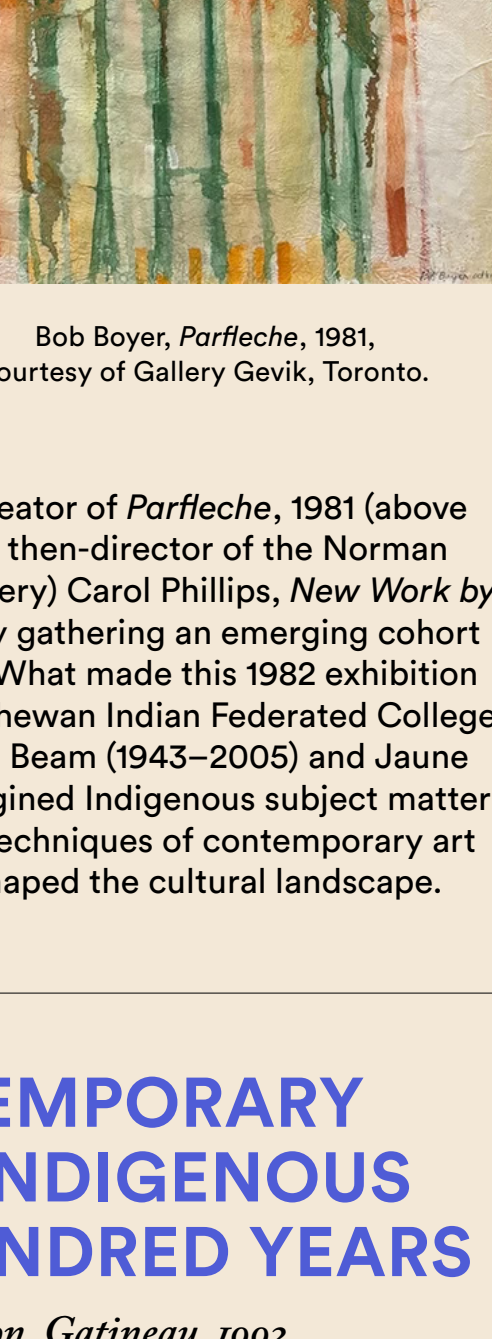
Read more about the Automatistes in ACI's [Paul-Émile Borduas: Life & Work](#) by François-Marc Gagnon

PAINTERS ELEVEN, ABSTRACTS AT HOME

Simpson's Department Store, Toronto, 1953



Publicity photo taken to advertise the *Abstracts at Home* exhibition, October 1953, photograph by Everett Roseborough.



Oscar Cahén, *Candy Tree*, 1952–53, private collection.

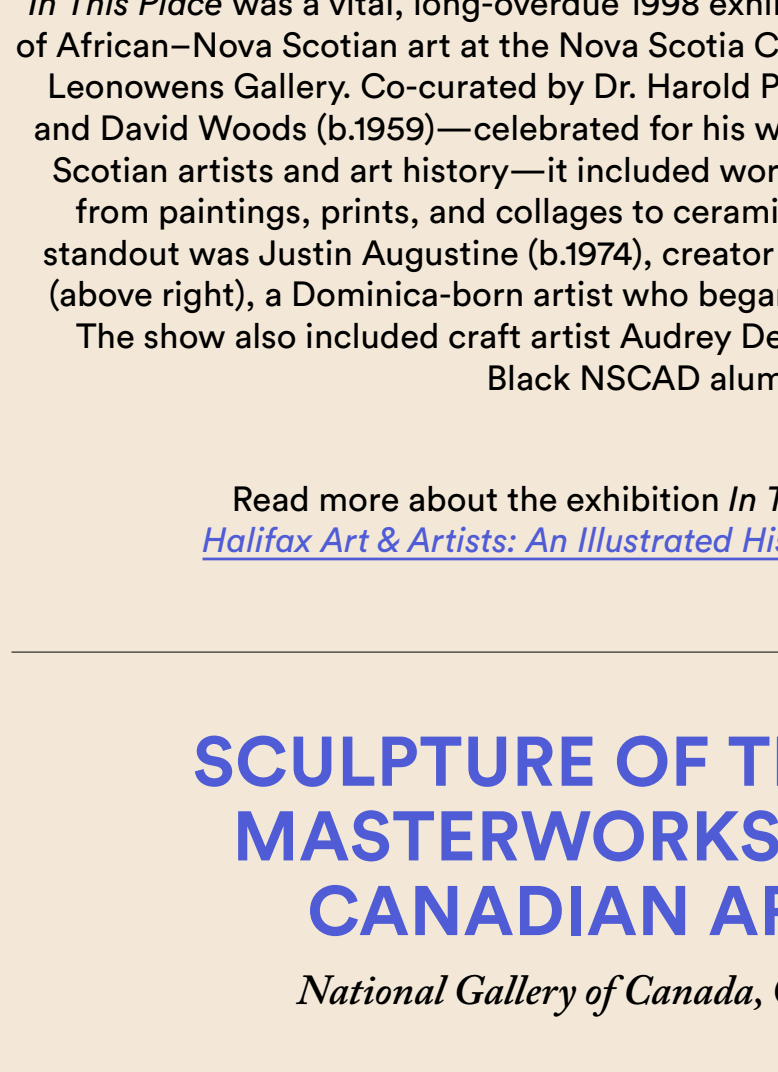
Abstracts at Home was organized by artist William Ronald (1926–1998) and his Simpson's department store coworker Carry Cardell in October 1953, in the furniture department of the Toronto store. Seven artists' paintings—including works by Oscar Cahén (1916–1956), Jack Bush (1909–1977), and Alexandra Luke (1901–1967)—were shown within domestic interiors. Ronald [aspired to](#) "mak[e] the complacent living rooms of Toronto safe for abstract art," and the unconventional exhibition helped engender the participants' formation of the Painters Eleven group that fall. The group carried the torch of modernist art—specifically abstraction—advocating for experimentation against the country's conservative cultural landscape. Bringing the most advanced abstract art into the context of household décor and consumer culture, *Abstracts at Home* sought to push the public's taste forward.

Read more about [Painters Eleven](#) and [Oscar Cahén](#) in ACI's [Oscar Cahén: Life & Work](#) by Jaleen Grove

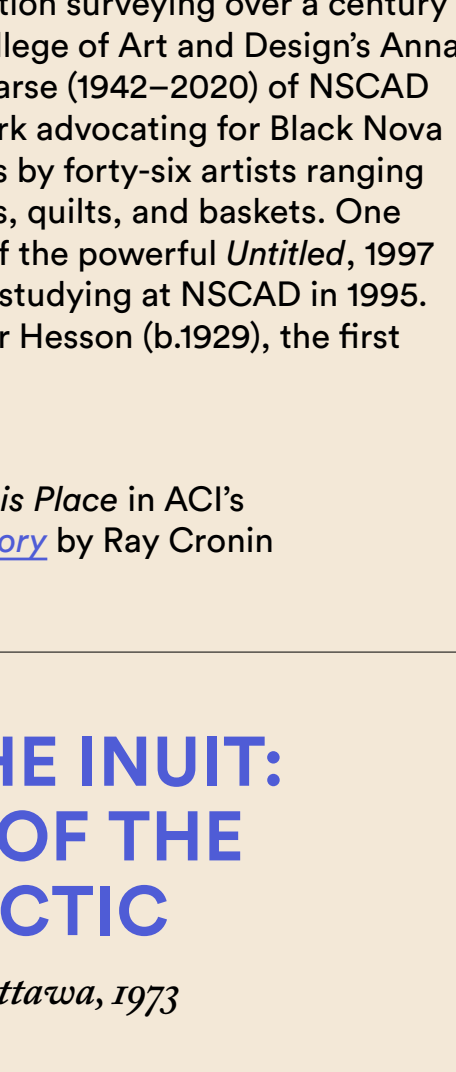
Read more about [Painters Eleven](#) and [Kazuo Nakamura](#) in ACI's [Kazuo Nakamura: Life & Work](#) by John G. Hatch

NORVAL MORRISSEAU, FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION

The Pollock Gallery, Toronto, 1962



Invitation to Norval Morrisseau's first solo exhibition, The Pollock Gallery, Toronto, 1962.



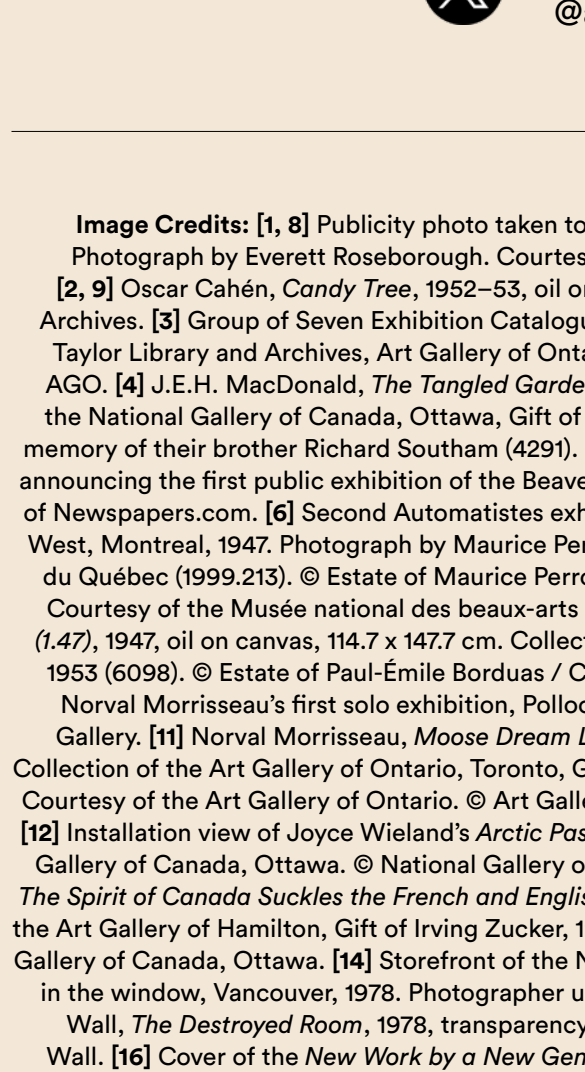
Norval Morrisseau, *Moose Dream Legend*, 1962, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007) became the first Indigenous artist to exhibit his work in a contemporary Canadian gallery when his solo show opened at The Pollock Gallery in Toronto on September 14, 1962. As Carmen Robertson, author of *Norval Morrisseau: Life & Work*, [wrote](#) in 2024: "At a time when most Canadian artists were experimenting with the techniques of modern abstraction, Norval Morrisseau rejected those contemporary artistic trends in favour of a visual aesthetic that drew most directly from Anishinaabe cultural sources. In doing so, he created a style that was all his own." The exhibition was a huge success, selling out on opening day and launching Morrisseau as an international art world celebrity.

Read more about Morrisseau's first solo exhibition in ACI's [Norval Morrisseau: Life & Work](#) by Carmen Robertson

JOYCE WIELAND, TRUE PATRIOT LOVE

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1971



Installation view of Joyce Wieland's *Arctic Passion Cakes*, 1971, in *True Patriot Love* exhibition, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Joyce Wieland, *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers*, 1970–71, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

When the beloved, boundary-pushing artist Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) opened her *True Patriot* at the National Gallery of Canada on May 1, 1971, it was the first time that the institution had presented a solo exhibition by a living Canadian woman. Taking advantage of the symbolic power and scale of the venue, Wieland playfully yet powerfully explored the iconography of Canadian nationalism in multiple media—often through an explicitly feminist lens, as in *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers*, 1970–71 (above right). The exhibition took place against the backdrop of heightened Canadian cultural nationalism and political tensions with the United States over the increasingly disastrous Vietnam War.

Read more about the exhibition *True Patriot Love* in ACI's [Joyce Wieland: Life & Work](#) by Johanne Sloan

JEFF WALL, FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION

NOVA Gallery, Vancouver, 1978

Storefront of the NOVA Gallery with Jeff Wall's *The Destroyed Room* displayed in the window, Vancouver, 1978, photographer unknown.

Jeff Wall, *The Destroyed Room*, 1978, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Jeff Wall (b.1946) is widely credited with expanding the conceptual force and narrative ambition of photography in Canada and around the world. In 1978, Wall's iconic photograph *The Destroyed Room*, 1978 (above right)—a carefully arranged composition alluding to *The Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827, by Eugène Delacroix (1789–1863)—was exhibited in the window of NOVA Gallery, a respected commercial gallery in Vancouver that specialized in photography, as part of the artist's first solo exhibition. Wall continued to approach photography with the ambition and gravitas of historical painting, creating numerous memorable images (all in critical dialogue with art history) and playing a leading role in Vancouver's globally recognized photo-conceptualism.

Read more about Jeff Wall in ACI's [Photography in Canada, 1839–1989: An Illustrated History](#) by Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons

NEW WORK BY A NEW GENERATION

Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery & Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Regina, 1982

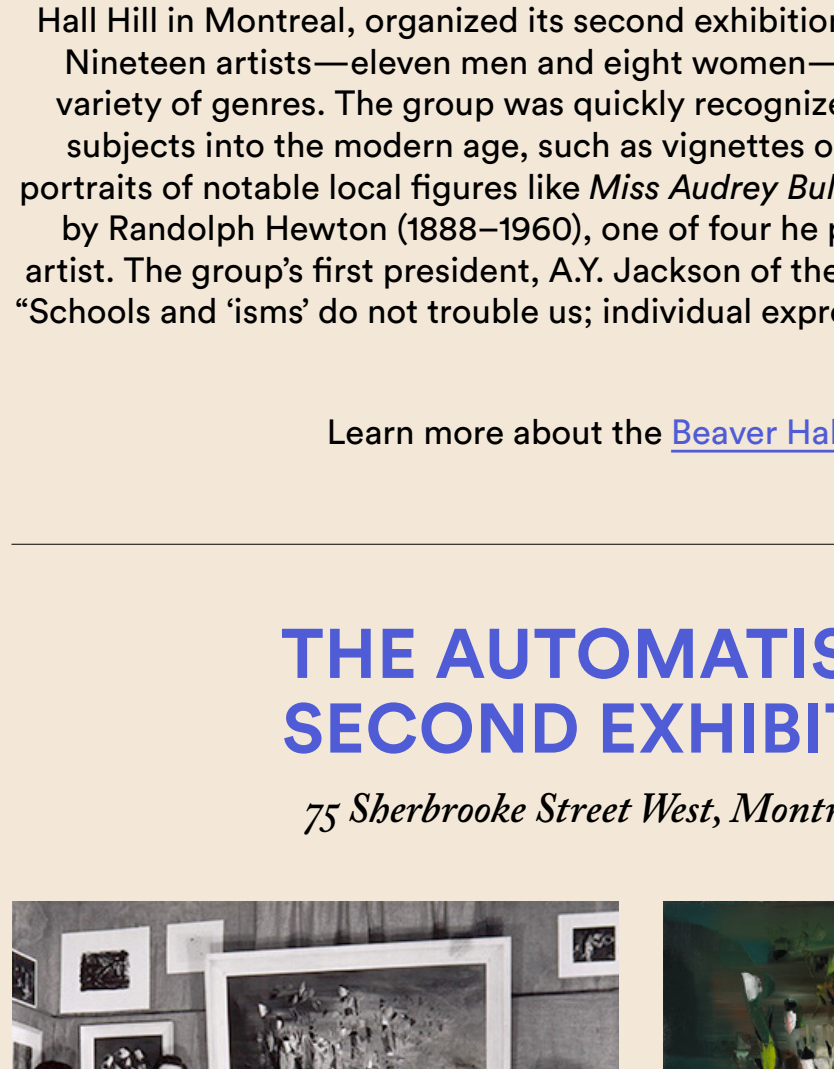
Cover of the *New Work by a New Generation* exhibition catalogue (Regina: Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, 1981).

Bob Boyer, *Parfleche*, 1981, courtesy of Gallery Gevik, Toronto.

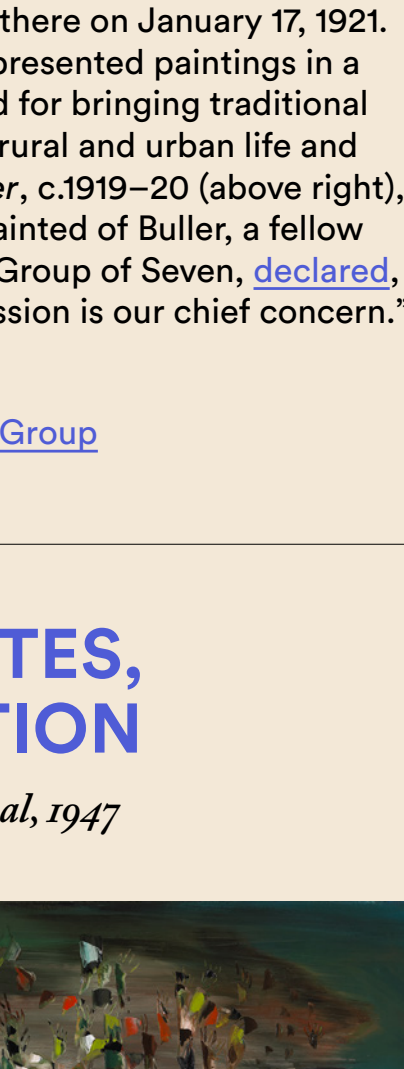
Curated by artists Bob Boyer (1948–2004)—creator of *Parfleche*, 1981 (above right)—and Robert Houle (b.1947), along with then-director of the Norman MacKenzie Gallery (now the MacKenzie Art Gallery) Carol Phillips, *New Work by a New Generation* was a groundbreaking survey gathering an emerging cohort of Indigenous artists from across Turtle Island. What made this 1982 exhibition co-organized by the MacKenzie and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College so important was that its artists, including Carl Beam (1943–2005) and Jaune Quekett (b.1940), innovatively reimagined Indigenous subject matter and ideas combined with the approaches and techniques of contemporary art and went on to have storied careers that reshaped the cultural landscape.

INDIGENA: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ON FIVE HUNDRED YEARS

Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, 1992



Jane Ash Poitras, *Shaman Never Die V: Indigena* (detail), 1989–90, Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau.



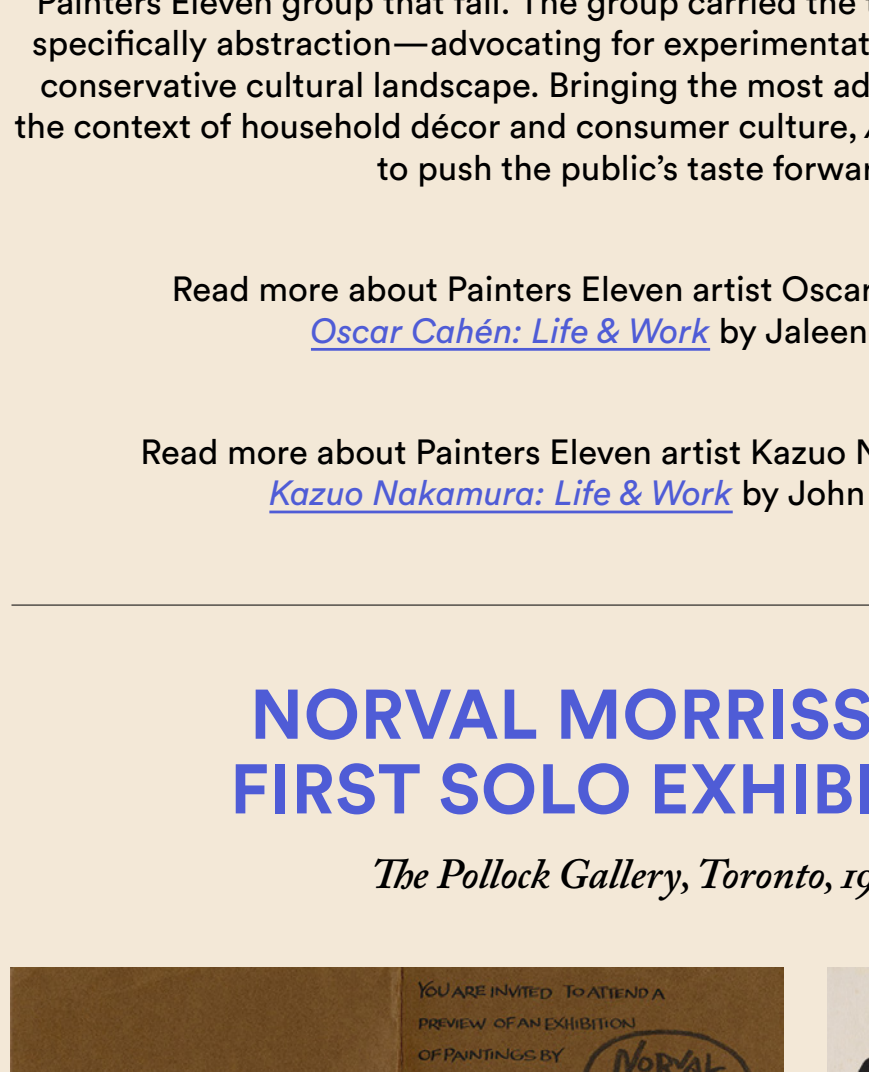
Justin Augustine, *Untitled*, 1997, collection of the artist.

This powerful large-scale triptych by Cree artist Jane Ash Poitras (b.1951), *Shaman Never Die V: Indigena*, 1989–90, captures the spirit of *INDIGENA: Contemporary Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau (now the Canadian Museum of History). Curated by Lee-Ann Martin and Gerald McMaster (b.1953), the show was one of the first large-scale surveys of contemporary Indigenous art in Canada and the first fully Indigenous-curated show. This landmark exhibition brought together Indigenous artists to offer urgent critical perspectives to counter the widespread celebrations of the centenary of Columbus's "discovery" of America that were taking place in 1992 and the ongoing violence of colonialism.

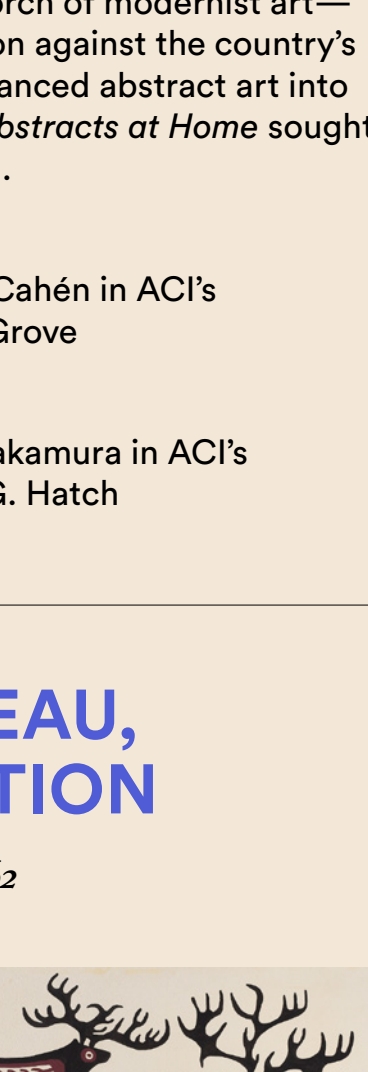
Learn more about the exhibition [INDIGENA: Contemporary Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years](#)

IN THIS PLACE: BLACK ART IN NOVA SCOTIA

Anna Leonowens Gallery, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1998



Installation view of *In This Place: Black Art in Nova Scotia*, Anna Leonowens Gallery, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1998, photographer unknown.



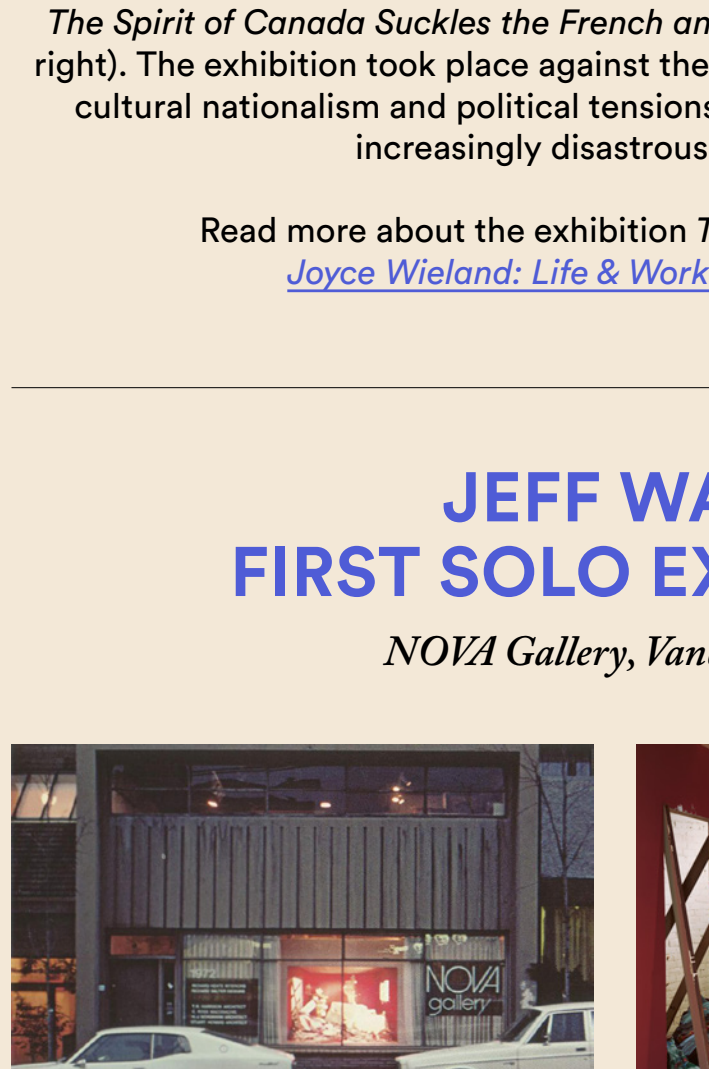
Justin Augustine, *Untitled*, 1997, collection of the artist.

In This Place was a vital, long-overdue 1998 exhibition surveying over a century of African–Nova Scotian art at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design's Anna Leonowens Gallery. Co-curated by Dr. Harold Pearce (1942–2020) of NSCAD and David Woods (b.1959)—celebrated for his work advocating for Black Nova Scotian artists and art history—it included works by forty-six artists ranging from paintings, prints, and collages to ceramics, quilts, and baskets. One standout was Justin Augustine (b.1974), creator of the powerful *Untitled*, 1997 (above right), a Dominica-born artist who began studying at NSCAD in 1995. The show also included craft artist Audrey Dear Hesson (b.1929), the first Black NSCAD alum.

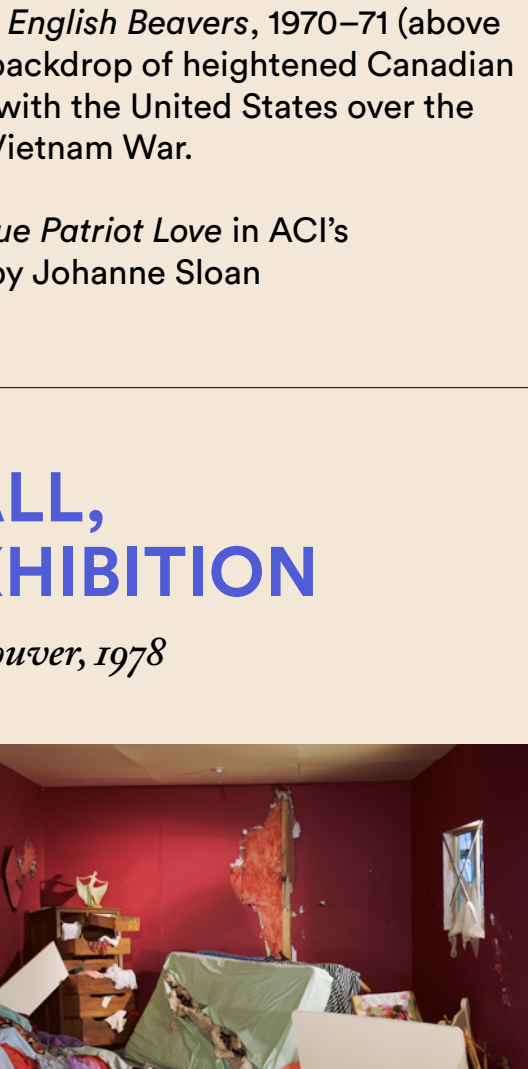
Read more about the exhibition *In This Place* in ACI's [Halifax Art & Artists: An Illustrated History](#) by Ray Cronin

SCULPTURE OF THE INUIT: MASTERWORKS OF THE CANADIAN ARCTIC

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1973



Kluqak Ashoonah, 1950, photograph by Rosemary Gilliat Eaton.



Cover of *Sculpture of the Inuit: Masterworks of the Canadian Arctic*, by the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

In 1973, *Sculpture of the Inuit* opened at the National Gallery in Ottawa before travelling to Philadelphia, Paris, Copenhagen, London, and even Moscow during the Soviet era to spread the word about the incredible sculpture tradition of the North. Tarnigajak, Nunavut-born Kluqak Ashoonah (1933–2014) (above left) ended up being the face of the no-expense-spared, globe-trotting project, as his dazzling *Howling Spirit (Tornrak)* and *Its Young*, 1962, was featured on the cover of the widely circulated catalogue (above right) that reproduces more than four hundred works from the exhibition. A sculptor as well as a printmaker, Ashoonah was an early participant in the storied art scene in Kinngait (Cape Dorset).

Learn more about [Howling Spirit \(Tornrak\)](#) and [Its Young](#)

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