

New book on award-winning contemporary artist Tim Whiten, released in advance of his solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario

Tim Whiten: Life & Work is a new art book published by the Art Canada Institute, available online now in English and French, and in print on March 14, 2025. In this monograph, author Carolyn Bell Farrell chronicles the formative years and decades-long career of revered Toronto-based artist and educator Tim Whiten. As Bell Farrell writes, “For more than five decades, he has drawn from his ancestral heritage, mysticism, and philosophy to produce powerfully evocative cultural objects and ritual performances that explore the nature of the human condition. Endowed with symbolic and visceral impact, they ignite the mythic imagination, transcending time and place.” *Tim Whiten: Life & Work* is a testament to the influence of a creative luminary who has inspired generations of artists.

A selection of press images is available through the link at the end of this release.



LEFT: Cover of *Tim Whiten: Life & Work*. CENTRE: Tim Whiten, 2001. RIGHT: Tim Whiten, *After Phaeton*, 2013.

March 5, 2025, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—*Tim Whiten: Life & Work* traces the distinguished fifty-year career of Toronto-based artist Tim Whiten (b.1941) and his lifelong commitment to investigating the human condition. Whiten’s extraordinary body of two- and three-dimensional works have been exhibited nationally and internationally since the 1970s. His work is also held in numerous collections, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and the National Gallery of Canada. Whiten is represented by Olga Korper Gallery in Toronto. An award-winning artist, he received the Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the AGO in 2022 and a Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts for Artistic Achievement in 2023.

Carolyn Bell Farrell, author of *Tim Whiten: Life & Work*, joins Tim Whiten in conversation, moderated by Julian Cox, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), on Sunday, April 13, 2025, at 2 pm, in the AGO’s Baillie Court. This **public talk** is scheduled in conjunction with the exhibition *Tim Whiten: A Little Bit of Light*, which opens at the AGO on March 26, 2025.

Early Life in Michigan

Born in Inkster, a Black suburb of Detroit, Whiten learned early in life the value of education, craftsmanship, and spirituality—values that have continued to inform his artistic practice. Supported by his parents, he attended Central Michigan University, where he was encouraged to take courses in art to further his understanding of human experience, followed by graduate studies at the University of Oregon. In 1968, Whiten moved to Toronto to join the faculty at York University. For the next four decades, teaching would go hand-in-hand with his creative practice.

Innovations in Drawing

Drawing has been part of Whiten’s daily artistic practice since the early 1970s. Rather than a preparatory stage in the production of an artwork, drawing offers him a way to access a world beyond the physical. Whiten’s mark-making comprises a range of gestural notations in graphite as well as everyday materials such as lemon juice, coffee, and spices. For Whiten, drawing is a tool to explore consciousness rather than produce illustrations.

Material Transformations

In the late 1970s, Whiten’s growing interest in African culture, materiality, and his own heritage dovetailed with his investigations of myth, alchemy, and religious traditions. This led to a series of installations and ritual performances, often incorporating natural materials such as animal hides, tree branches, bones, and hair. Whiten’s landmark ritual performance work, *Metamorphosis*, 1978–89, unfolded in multiple stages over the course of a decade, and featured the artist being sewn into a bear pelt and struggling to escape its material confines.

A Legacy of Mentorship

As *Tim Whiten: Life & Work* reveals, Whiten has carried forth a legacy of mentorship, inspired by his professors Oscar Oppenheimer, Katherine Ux, Virginia Seitz, and Jan Zach. Passionate about teaching, Whiten was a founding member of York University’s Faculty of Fine Arts, where he taught many of Canada’s leading contemporary artists, and twice served as department chair. Whiten was recipient of the Faculty of Fine Arts Dean’s Teaching Award in 2000. On his retirement in 2007, he was appointed Professor Emeritus.

“Whiten is one of Canada’s most revered contemporary image-makers, with a tremendous body of work that is provocative, exquisitely crafted, and rich in historical, cultural, and symbolic references,” says Sara Angel, Founder and Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute. “*Tim Whiten: Life & Work* offers valuable insight into an artist who has earned the highest accolades in the Canadian art world and inspired generations of contemporaries, colleagues, and students.”

Tim Whiten: Life & Work advances the Art Canada Institute’s mission to create a central digital resource to share Canada’s most important artists, and their works, with the world. To date, ACI has published sixty-six expert-authored digital books that are available online free of charge. As well, ACI develops Canada’s only comprehensive art education guides for teachers and students from kindergarten to grade 12—content that is free and available online and serves over 700,000 educators.

To explore the Art Canada Institute’s open-access digital book *Tim Whiten: Life & Work* by Carolyn Bell Farrell, please visit: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/tim-whiten/>.

For **media requests** or for an **interview** with **Sara Angel**, Executive Director, Art Canada Institute, please contact: media@aci-iac.ca.

About Carolyn Bell Farrell

Carolyn Bell Farrell is an independent curator and writer living in London, Ontario, and a PhD candidate in Art and Visual Culture at Western University. Since 1990, she has curated over sixty exhibitions of contemporary Canadian art, working with artists Isaac Applebaum, Rafael Goldchain, Lyn Carter, Ed Pien, Sarindar Dhaliwal, June Clark, Tim Whiten, Rebecca Baird, FASTWÜRMS, Blue Republic, Norman White, Lois Andison, and Cathy Daley, among others. Over the last four decades, she has worked as an educator, curator, and director in both artist-run centres and public art galleries, including Mercer Union and the Koffler Gallery in Toronto and, most recently, the MacLaren Art Centre in Barrie, where she was the Executive Director from 2007 to 2020. She gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario.

About the Art Canada Institute

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 across Canada and internationally, on a digital platform and free of charge in both English and French. To accomplish this, ACI works with Canada's leading cultural institutions, art historians, curators, and visual culture experts, and is dedicated to the creation of authoritative original content on the people, themes, and topics that have defined Canadian art history.

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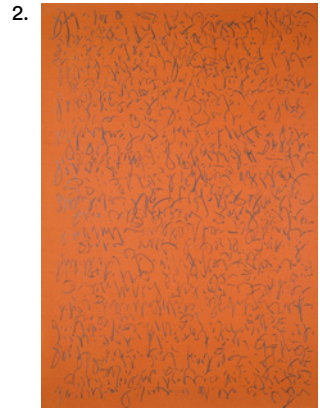
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1. Tim Whiten, *Metamorphosis (Stage I)*, 1978, documentation of the ritual process, photographs by Grant McLeod. Left: Tim Whiten, *Metamorphosis (Stage I)*, 1978, stage 1.15. Centre: Tim Whiten, *Metamorphosis (Stage I)*, 1978, stage 1.21. Right: Tim Whiten, *Metamorphosis (Stage I)*, 1978, stage 1.9. All photographs printed on Canson Baryta Photographique 310 paper, 61 x 45.7 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Purchase with assistance from the Estate of P.J. Glasser, 2016 (2016/42.5; 2016.42.6; 2016.42.3). Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: AGO.
2. Tim Whiten, *Magic Gestures: Lites and Incantations (Orange)*, 1981, graphite stick over graphite pencil on paper toned with orange synthetic polymer paint (enamel spray paint), 111.8 x 76.8 cm. Collection of the CU Art Museum, University of Colorado Boulder, Gift of Tim Whiten (2022.04.09). Courtesy of the CU Art Museum, University of Colorado Boulder. © Tim Whiten.
3. Tim Whiten, *Clycieun*, 1991, wood, bicycle wheel, and seat, 251.5 x 53.3 x 22.9 cm. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Gift of the artist, 2011–17. Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Helena Wilson.
4. Tim Whiten, *Victor*, 1993, wood and mirror, 198.1 x 86.4 x 38.1 cm. Collection of the Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario, Gift from Tim Whiten, 2015 (2015.012.003a). Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Helena Wilson.
5. Tim Whiten, *Vault*, 1993, wood, mirror, 198.1 x 243.8 x 182.9 cm. Collection of Art Windsor-Essex, Windsor, Gift of the artist, 2003 (2003.071). Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Frank Piccolo.
6. Tim Whiten, *Enigmata/Rose (3)*, 1998, coffee-stained hospital sheet, 218.4 x 198.1 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Kevin Hedley.
7. Tim Whiten, *Danse (detail of drummer)*, 1998–2000, sandblasted stone, life-size, Tree Museum, Gravenhurst, Ontario. Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Ilana Lightman.
8. Tim Whiten, *Danse (detail of the constellation of roses)*, 2000, sandblasted stone, Tree Museum, Gravenhurst, Ontario. Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Ilana Lightman.
9. Tim Whiten, *After Phaeton*, 2013, handcrafted crystal-sandblasted glass, ionized glass, brass fittings, 167.6 x 243.8 x 58.4 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of the Artist in honour of Tom and Mary E. Whiten, 2022 (2022/7). Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Michael Cullen.
10. Tim Whiten, *Search Reach Release*, 2020, crushed recycled glass, wood, glass eye, 15.2 x 88.9 x 119.4 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. © Tim Whiten. Photo credit: Toni Hafkenscheid.
11. Tim Whiten, 2001, photograph by Jaroslaw Rodycz. Courtesy of Tim Whiten.
12. Carolyn Bell Farrell, author of *Tim Whiten: Life & Work*.
13. Cover of *Tim Whiten: Life & Work*, by Carolyn Bell Farrell, featuring a detail of Tim Whiten, *Reliquaire*, 2012, handcrafted crystal-clear glass, human skull, gold leaf, 47 x 40.6 x 30.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Michael Cullen.