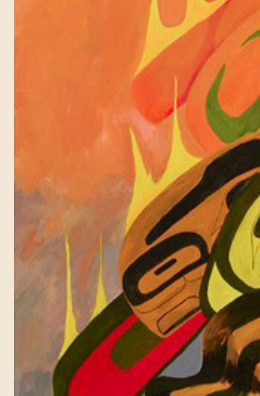


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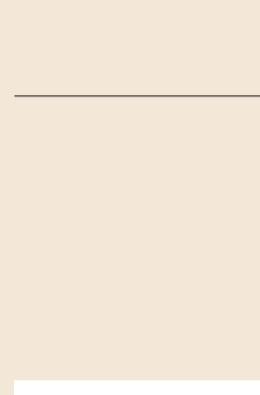
SMOKE SIGNALS FOR A CHARRED EARTH  
LANDSCAPES OF FIRE IN CANADIAN ART*Scorched forest landscapes are not new to Canadian art, but today they are depicting a new and devastating reality.*Tom Thomson, *Burned Over Land*, 1916, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

The frequency and intensity of wildfires in Canada are both a harsh spring ritual and a harrowing reminder of climate change. There are now more than 130 active wildfires across the country, half of which are considered out of control. This past week, on Monday night, Swan Hills, Alberta, saw a major blaze that forced its 1,200 residents to flee their homes. On Wednesday, 17,000 people in Manitoba were evacuated. While scorched forest landscapes are not new to Canadian art—see *Burned Over Land*, 1916, by Tom Thomson, above—the wildfires depicted by artists today are about a new and devastating reality, one that serves as a stark reminder of the delicate balance between natural forces and human impact. Through artistic depictions like the ones presented in this week's newsletter, wildfires are transformed into symbols of destruction and renewal, prompting us to reconsider our connection to the earth and our role in its preservation.

**Sara Angel**

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

## FIRE LANDSCAPE PAINTING, 2023

*by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun*Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun *Lets'otsteltun, Fire Landscape Painting*, 2023, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

Coast Salish and Okanagan artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (b.1957) is known for his vivid portrayals of Indigenous perspectives on the environment and politics. *Fire Landscape Painting*, 2023, exemplifies his commitment to addressing the escalating threat of wildfires intensified by climate change. In this work, Yuxweluptun blends traditional Northwest Coast formline design with surreal elements to depict a landscape engulfed in flames. Through *Fire Landscape Painting*, he critiques colonial land practices and emphasizes the urgent need for environmental stewardship, reflecting his broader artistic mission to advocate for Indigenous rights and ecological preservation.

[Learn more about Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun](#)

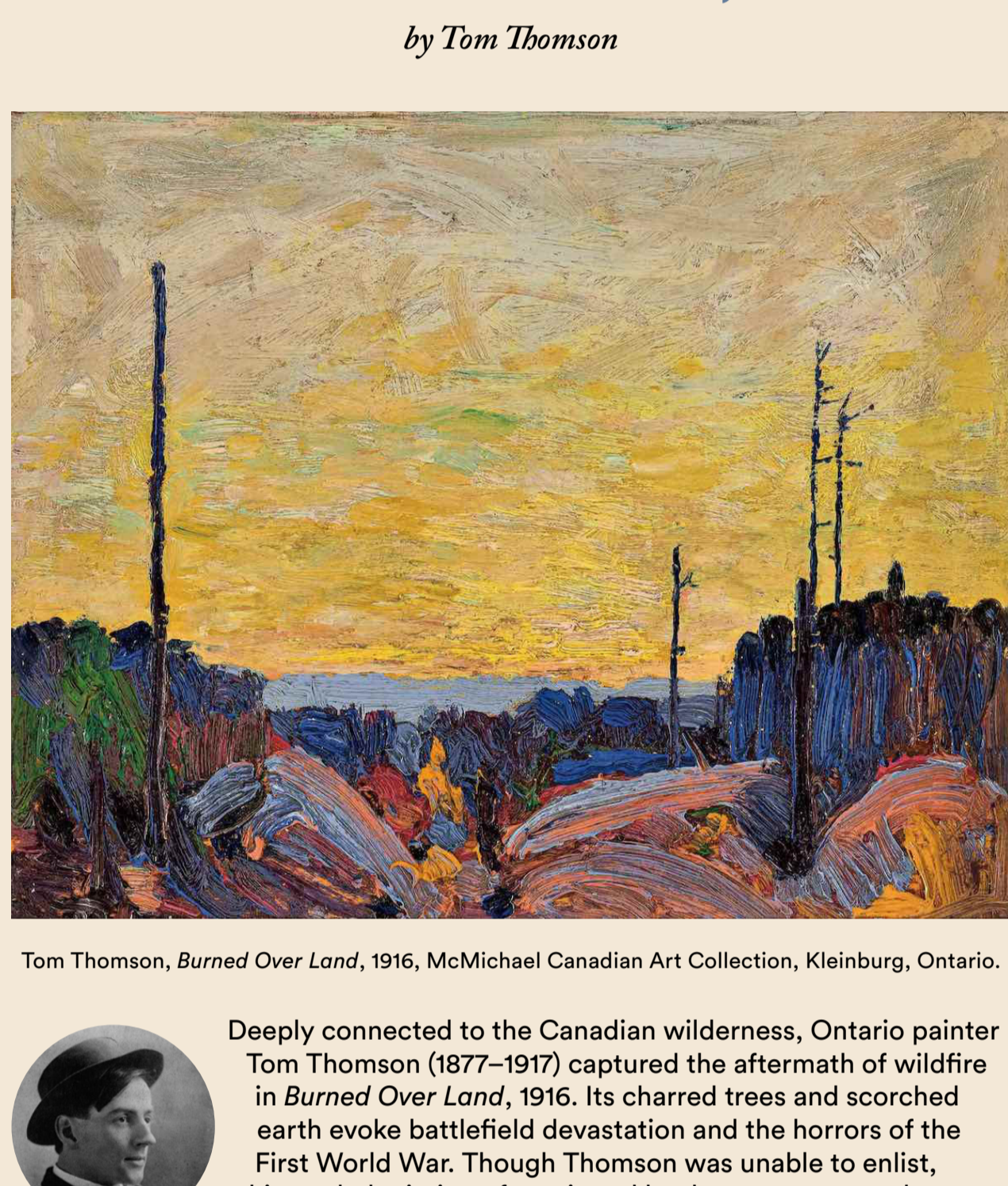
## FIREWEED, ROCK CREEK FIRE, 2021

*by Andreas Rutkauskas*Andreas Rutkauskas, *Fireweed, Rock Creek Fire* (fire occurred in 2015, photographed in 2018), 2021, courtesy of the artist.

Winnipeg-born photographer Andreas Rutkauskas (b.1980) explores themes of landscape, memory, and environmental change, focusing on how spaces transform and bear the marks of human intervention or natural disasters. *Fireweed, Rock Creek Fire*, 2021, captures the aftermath of the 2015 Rock Creek Fire in British Columbia. By photographing the scene years later, Rutkauskas emphasizes the passage of time and the landscape's gradual recovery. His work addresses both the fire's immediate impact and its long-term effects, which are shaped by larger ecological processes and the delicate balance between devastation and regeneration.

[Learn more about Andreas Rutkauskas](#)

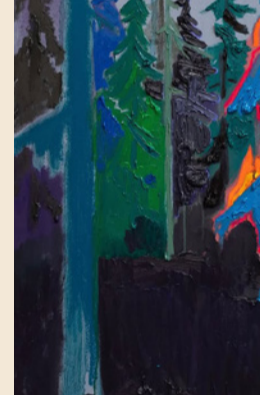
## WILDFIRE, 2024

*by Leslie Hossack*Leslie Hossack, *Wildfire*, 2024, courtesy of de Montigny Contemporary, Ottawa.

Ottawa-based sculptor Leslie Hossack (b.1947) created *Wildfire*, 2024, as part of the *Earth, Air, Fire, and Water* collection of her ongoing series entitled *INFERNO*. The series highlights measurable aspects of climate change, with *Wildfire* focusing on the alarming rise of wildfires. The sculpture consists of twenty-five distinct bars, each varying in height, representing the amount of area burned by the twenty-five most severe fires in Canada over the past forty years. The tallest bar is for 2023, when wildfires consumed more than double the area of any other fire since 1983. Through this abstract yet data-driven form, Hossack powerfully highlights the increasing intensity and frequency of wildfires.

[Learn more about Leslie Hossack](#)

## BURNED OVER LAND, 1916

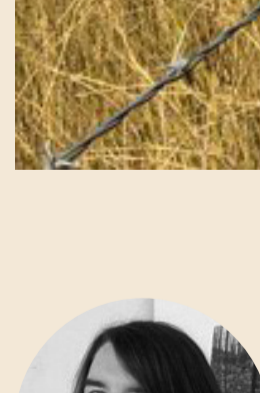
*by Tom Thomson*Tom Thomson, *Burned Over Land*, 1916, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

Deeply connected to the Canadian wilderness, Ontario painter Tom Thomson (1877–1917) captured the aftermath of wildfire in *Burned Over Land*, 1916. Its charred trees and scorched earth evoke battlefield devastation and the horrors of the First World War. Though Thomson was unable to enlist, his stark depiction of a stripped landscape suggests the era's widespread loss. This parallel adds another layer of significance to the painting, linking natural cycles of fire and regrowth to the broader historical moment of destruction and the hope for renewal in both nature and human society.

[Read more in ACI's Tom Thomson: Life & Work by David. P. Silcox](#)Our Friday Newsletters  
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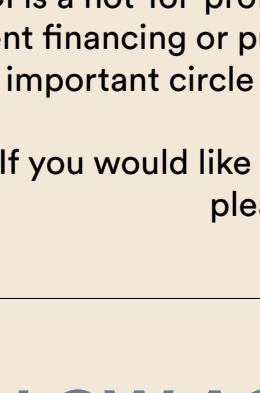
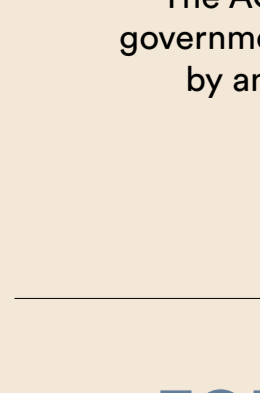
## A PRAIRIE ON FIRE, C.1849–56

*by Paul Kane*Paul Kane, *A Prairie on Fire*, c.1849–56, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

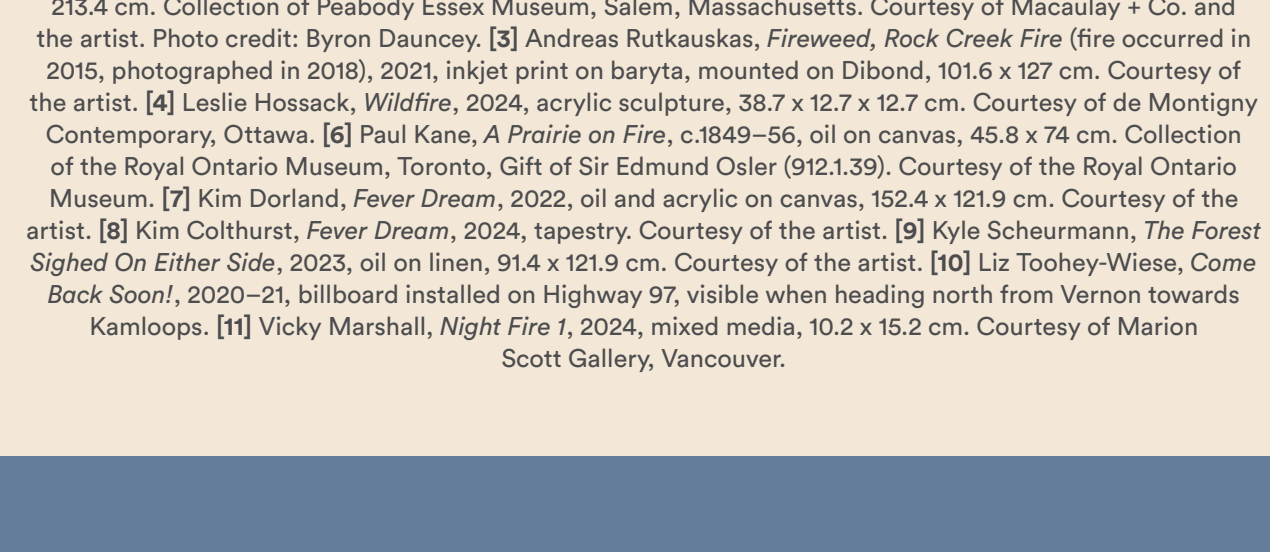
Irish-born painter Paul Kane (1810–1871) travelled extensively across North America to document Indigenous peoples and landscapes. *A Prairie on Fire*, c.1849–56, exemplifies his role as both an artist and a colonial ethnographic recorder, shaping settler perspectives on the Canadian West during the nineteenth century. The painting captures a scene of Indigenous people fleeing a prairie fire whose deep oranges and reds engulf the horizon. The dramatic lighting and composition, emphasizing the fire's size and intensity, enhance the sense of urgency and the threat of the conflagration.

[Read more in ACI's Paul Kane: Life & Work by Arlene Gehmacher](#)

## FEVER DREAM, 2022/24

*by Kim Dorland and Kim Colthurst*Kim Dorland, *Fever Dream*, 2022, courtesy of the artist.Kim Colthurst, *Fever Dream*, 2024, courtesy of the artist.

Toronto-based painter Kim Dorland (b.1974) and fibre artist Kim Colthurst both bring a distinct approach to reimagining the Canadian landscape. Dorland, known for his expressive use of colour and texture, explores the psychological and emotional aspects of nature, as seen in *Fever Dream*, 2022. The work is a vivid, almost hallucinatory depiction of a pine tree engulfed in bright orange flames. Colthurst reinterprets *Fever Dream*, translating Dorland's dynamic brushwork into a woven medium. Her adaptation adds three-dimensionality to the flames and forest, emphasizing the relationship between people and the land.

THE FOREST SIGNED  
ON EITHER SIDE, 2023*by Kyle Scheurmann*Kyle Scheurmann, *The Forest Signed On Either Side*, 2023, courtesy of Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, and the artist.

Winnipeg-based painter Kyle Scheurmann (b.1988) focuses on environmental themes and the impact of climate change on natural landscapes. His paintings often incorporate materials sourced from the environments he portrays—he mixes ashes into his paint, for example, to create a tangible connection between medium and subject matter. In *The Forest Signed On Either Side*, 2023, figures paddle around a river bend to escape a fire, unburdened by belongings. In the middle of the scene, we can see an artist in a green canoe, his easel set up to let him bear witness to the environmental catastrophe unfolding around him. Through this act of witnessing, Scheurmann underscores the obligation to observe and protect vulnerable landscapes.

[Learn more about Kyle Scheurmann](#)

## COME BACK SOON!, 2020–21

*by Liz Toohy-Wiese*Liz Toohy-Wiese, *Come Back Soon!*, 2020–21.

Vancouver-based multimedia artist Liz Toohy-Wiese created *Come Back Soon!* in 2020–21. This public art installation was displayed on a billboard along Highway 97, north of Vernon, British Columbia. On the sign, a welcoming text is superimposed over an image of nature consumed by flames. The juxtaposition provokes reflection on the destructive power of and profound loss caused by fire, which can leave people with nowhere to live. Yet Toohy-Wiese's work suggests an opportunity for return and renewal, acknowledging the complex relationship between human activity, climate change, and the environment.

[Learn more about Liz Toohy-Wiese](#)

## NIGHT FIRE 1, 2023/24

*by Vicky Marshall*Vicky Marshall, *Night Fire 1*, 2023/24, courtesy of Marion Scott Gallery, Vancouver.

Vancouver-based mixed-media artist Vicky Marshall (b.1952) explores the forces of nature in *Night Fire 1, 2023/24*. Part of a larger series inspired by extreme weather, *Night Fire 1* speaks to Marshall's interest in the human impact on climate change. She repurposes fragments from discarded paintings, integrating fabrics, stitching, and layers of vivid colour to evoke the chaos and urgency of wildfires. The tactile, almost quilt-like surfaces contrast destruction and the act of repair, mirroring resilience in the face of loss. With the number and severity of forest fires rising around the world, Marshall's work invites reflection on ecological devastation and collective responsibility.

[Learn more about Vicky Marshall](#)

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*for more on great art in Canada*

Image Credits: [1-5] Tom Thomson, *Burned Over Land*, 1916, oil on wood panel, 21 x 26.7 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario (1956.16.66). Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. [6] Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun *Lets'otsteltun, Fire Landscape Painting*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 274.3 x 213.4 cm. Collection of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. Courtesy of Macaulay + Co. and the artist. Photo credit: Byron Dauncey. [7] Andreas Rutkauskas, *Fireweed, Rock Creek Fire* (fire occurred in 2015, photographed in 2018), 2021, inkjet print on baryta, mounted on Dibond, 101.6 x 127 cm. Courtesy of the artist. [8] Leslie Hossack, *Wildfire*, 2024, acrylic sculpture, 38.7 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist. [9] Paul Kane, *A Prairie on Fire*, c.1849–56, oil on canvas, 45.8 x 74 cm. Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Gift of Sir Edmund Osler (1921.39). Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum. [10] Kim Dorland, *Fever Dream*, 2022, oil and acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist. [11] Kim Colthurst, *Fever Dream*, 2024, tapestry. Courtesy of the artist. [12] Kyle Scheurmann, *The Forest Signed On Either Side*, 2023, oil on linen, 91.4 x 121.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist. [13] Liz Toohy-Wiese, *Come Back Soon!*, 2020–21, billboard installed on Highway 97, visible when heading north from Vernon towards Kamloops. [14] Vicky Marshall, *Night Fire 1*, 2024, mixed media, 10.2 x 15.2 cm. Courtesy of Marion Scott Gallery, Vancouver.