UP TO SNOW GOOD
THE NGC'S WINTER COUNT

A look at the National Gallery of Canada exhibition Winter Count: Embracing the Cold, marking the profound visual impact of Jeff de Catanzaro's show.

Sarah Robertson, The Blue Sleigh, c.1924, Jessie Richardson, Winter Sleigh, 1924, Marie-Hélène Bernard, CC-Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 Canada.

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A cold temperature grip much of the country, and is taking hold of Canadian art. Winter Count: Embracing the Cold, a show at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, by Jeff de Catanzaro, is the exhibition's title drawn on the tradition of the Lakota people of the Great Plains, who used a pictorial calendar to mark the passage of time. Curated by Jessica Bradley, the show includes about 100 works by 50 artists, including winter iconic bonfires on visual memory, tracking years through events, and marking the passage of time. Its 2024 opening, marking the centenary of the NGC, and its subsequent tour to Montreal, Quebec, Canada, and Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, underscores the profound impact Indigenous, European, and Canadian art has had, dialogue, exploring how the country's landscape has shaped its culture, and how its culture has shaped its landscape. Winter is a defining experience in the Canadian consciousness, a cultural touchstone that has shaped our art, our literature, our collective memory. Collectively, the exhibition's 160 works from around the world record beauty in the cold, the ice, the snow, the wind, the sun, the moon, the stars, the northern lights, the aurora borealis, and unusual cloud formations, and the ways people have adapted to, and survived in, the cold. Bradley's curatorial vision underscores how Winter Count's selection of works by Canadian artists included in the memorable show.

Sean Ingel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

CROSSING THE ICE WITH THE ROYAL MAIL, QUÉBEC, C.1862

by Cornelius Krieghoff

Cornelius Krieghoff, Crossing the Ice with the Royal Mail, Quebec, c.1862, private collection.

Best known for his genre paintings that playfully depict everyday life in nineteenth-century rural Quebec, Dutch-born painter Cornelius Krieghoff (1815–1872) also produced a few dramatic winter scenes. This one, from the St. Lawrence River between Quebec City and Lévis is showing the ice with people and horses and sleighs, and a dog, and a flag. The Royal Mail carriage, the mail that the rural and passengers, were driven by man was dressed with a bright red coat, and a bright red hat, and a bright red flag, and a bright red carriage, and a bright red horse, and a bright red dog, highlighting both the necessity of this journey, and the resilience of Canadians.

Learn more in ACI's Québec City Art & Artists: An Illustrated History •

A NORTHERN NIGHT, 1917

by Frances Johnston

Frans Johnston, A Northern Night, 1917, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

A Toronto painter, Frans Johnston (1888–1949) was a member of the Group of Seven painters, and a member of the Canadian Group of Painters (1933–1939). Although the group officially formed, the work already reflected the transitional youth in Canadian art, and the ways in which it was moving away from the nineteenth-century principles North of Lambs artists, Stone, and Lawson, among, phrenologist Alexander Lawson, who had taught Johnston at the Ontario College of Art. Johnston's work captures the allure of the North even as it contributes to the group's broader, and sometimes problematic, mythmaking about Canadian Indigenous peoples.

Learn more in ACI's Ottawa: An Illustrated History •

SKATER, 1964

by Alex Colville

Alex Colville, Skater, 1964, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Winter becomes a charged space where order and danger meet in equal measure. Alex Colville's Skater (1964) shows a figure in motion against a frozen landscape. Figure sliders across it from an unseen, poised between control and physical risk. The work's precision, typical of Colville, gives the moment a clarity that feels almost beyond reach of falling. By fixing the skater in a moment of suspension, Colville turns a winter pastime into a study of balance, attention, and the quiet confidence, becoming a space where stability is protected and endurance is skills and endurance exercise.

Learn more in ACI's Art Basics: Colville's Life & Work •

CHARGED PARTICLES IN MOTION, 2007

by Brian Fakenham

Brian Fakenham, Charged Particles in Motion, 2007, courtesy Art Gallery of Ontario.

In Charged Particles in Motion, 2007, Cree multidisciplinary artist Brian Fakenham (1951–1997) uses a wide range of materials to explore the nature of matter. Fakenham (1951–1997) frequently used his artistic practice to explore the nature of matter, and the ways in which it shapes, and is shaped by, the world around us. Fakenham's work was also prolifically and prestigious, and was widely exhibited and available for the asking. Whichever subjects the artist chose, he was able to make them his own. Fakenham's work, like that of Ojibway/Cree Painter, who was through his art a strong ally, and a strong ally, and a strong ally, and