

Canada through My Eyes



The 2026

**Canadian
Art Inspiration**

**Student
Challenge**

**Art Examples
and Ideas to
Spark Student
Creativity**

The 2026 Canadian Art Inspiration Student Challenge

About the Canadian Art Inspiration Student Challenge

The Canadian Art Inspiration Student Challenge is a national art competition inviting students in grades 7 through 12 to create original works of art that pay homage to this country's greatest historical and contemporary artists. This year's theme is "Canada Through My Eyes": A chance to celebrate the uniqueness of our country, and get inspired by some of its most visionary artists.

In order to participate in this year's challenge, students must create original works of art that respond to one of the five themes included in this resource.

How It Works

1. Students Get Inspired

Create an original artwork that is inspired by a historical or contemporary Canadian artist. Students must choose from one of the five themes in this resource, and can select a work of art from this booklet, or from the hundreds of [examples of Canadian art](#) on our website. Student applicants are encouraged to submit works in any medium.

The Art Inspiration



The Student Creation



2024 student winner Muying Deng (Grade 9) holds her work inspired by the art of Helen McNicoll (left).

For more information about the Canadian Art Inspiration Student Challenge, contact our education team at education@aci-iac.ca



2. Students Submit Their Work

All submissions must be received online before April 30, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. (EDT). Visit the [Art Canada Institute](https://www.artcanadainstitute.ca) website for submission guidelines, rules & regulations, and details on how to apply.



3. Judges Recognize Excellence

Student submissions are adjudicated by art education experts and renowned figures in the Canadian art world. The judges this year are:



Sarah Milroy

Executive Director and Chief Curator, McMichael Canadian Art Collection



Emma Hassencahl-Perley

Visual Artist and Curator of Indigenous Art, Beaverbrook Art Gallery



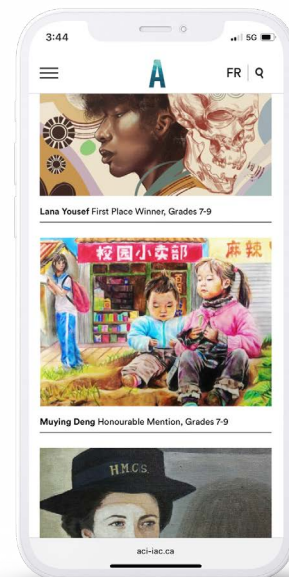
Ken Lum

Visual Artist and Marilyn Jordan Taylor Penn Presidential Professor, University of Pennsylvania

4. Prizes Awarded and Students Celebrated at Art Toronto

Student winners will be informed in June and have the chance to show their work on the national stage at Art Toronto from October 29 to November 1, 2026. All student winners receive cash prizes in two different age categories: grades 7–9 and grades 10–12. The prizes are \$500 for first prize winners and \$250 for honourable mentions. Student winners will also have their work featured in an online exhibition that lives permanently on the Art Canada Institute website.

Be a featured artist!



The images in this resource appear in existing Art Canada Institute published programming. Permission to reproduce additional images has been obtained.

Theme 1

Symbols of Canada

Create Your Own Canadian Symbol

From the Canadian flag to the national anthem, artists across the country have found creative ways to capture, represent, and challenge the characteristics of our country. Use their work as inspiration to create your own symbol of Canada.

See more examples online!

aci-ica.ca

Art Inspiration

O Canada, 1970 by Joyce Wieland



Joyce Wieland, *O Canada*, 1970

How Joyce Wieland Recreated the National Anthem

Canadian printmaker, filmmaker, and textile artist Joyce Wieland was known for exploring questions of politics and national identity in her art, transforming recognizable symbols into bold visual statements. In *O Canada*, Wieland created an interactive artwork by pressing her lipstick-covered mouth onto a lithograph stone while singing the patriotic tune, which became the country's national anthem in 1967. Make your own visual response to "O Canada," using this creative approach as inspiration. Consider the anthem's words and rhythm, or reflect on the emotions or personal memories the song evokes.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide on Joyce Wieland](#)

[Read more about Joyce Wieland in an Online Art Book](#)

[See an Online Exhibition of Joyce Wieland's work](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Joyce Wieland
1930–1998

Place of birth:
Toronto, Ontario

Best known for:
Critically examining issues related to the environment, war, nationalism, and women's rights across a number of media

Art Inspiration

Canadian Native Flag, 2011 by Curtis Wilson

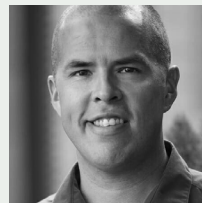


Curtis Wilson, *Canadian Native Flag*, 2011

How Curtis Wilson Reimagined the Canadian Flag

Kwakwaka'wakw artist Curtis Wilson (Mulidzas) designed an alternative version of the Canadian flag in 2011, embedding Northwest Coast Indigenous icons into the familiar composition. The maple leaf is filled with an orca's head, and the side panels depict K'utala salmon. Wilson highlights these figures as symbols of protection, resilience, family, and community, reflecting his vision of a country united across cultural differences. Create your own artistic interpretations of a Canadian flag, drawing inspiration from Wilson's reimagining of national emblems to reflect diverse Canadian identities, histories, and voices.

[Read more about Curtis Wilson and national symbols](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Curtis Wilson
1980–2019

Place of birth:
Campbell River,
British Columbia

Best known for:
The reimagined design
for the Canadian flag
(*Canadian Native
Flag*), which is widely
circulated in the country's
visual culture

Art Inspiration

Bay Watch, 2011 by Charles Pachter



Charles Pachter, *Bay Watch*, 2011.

How Charles Pachter Explores Canadiana

The moose, the Queen, the Hudson's Bay blanket, the Canadian flag: These are the symbols that contemporary Canadian artist Charles Pachter has come back to time and again in his work. Known for his playful Pop Art style, Pachter's work engages with the icons and symbols that have come to define "Canadiana", a term that refers to images, tropes, objects, and cultural exports that are interpreted as quintessentially Canadian. Using his unique combination of humour and critical insight, combine your own symbols of Canada to explore how the nation is represented in popular culture.

[See more work by Charles Pachter](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Charles Pachter
b.1942

Place of birth:
Toronto, Ontario

Best known for:
Paintings and prints
created in the Pop
Art style that probe
questions of national
identity in playful and
surprising ways.

Theme 2

Landscapes in Canada

Create a Work Inspired by Where You Live, or Somewhere in Canada You Have Visited

Landscapes across Canada are visualized in dramatically different ways, from the vast expanse of the Prairies to the mountains and ocean vistas of the West Coast. Artists throughout history have adapted the landscape genre to capture their own milieus, and to pay tribute to places they have visited. Take their lead in creating a work representing a corner of Canada that you love most.

See more examples online!

aci-ica.ca



Art Inspiration

The Ukrainian Pioneer, 1971-76 by William Kurelek



William Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971-76

How William Kurelek Captured the Vast Prairie Landscape

William Kurelek was a Ukrainian Canadian artist whose narrative paintings detailed his Eastern European roots and the daily life and cultural traditions of Ukrainian immigrants in rural Canada. This is exemplified in *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, part of a six-panel composition depicting the journey of a Ukrainian immigrant to Canada. In his painting, Kurelek celebrates prosperity, hard work, and a connection to the land, while on the horizon an atomic cloud alludes to the challenges of immigrant life on the prairies. Draw on Kurelek's deep personal connections to the Prairie landscape to explore your own personal, local, or cultural connections to a place in Canada that is meaningful to you.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide about William Kurelek](#)

[Read more about William Kurelek in an Online Art Book](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

William Kurelek
1927–1977

Place of birth:
Willingdon, Alberta

Best known for:
Narrative paintings exploring life on the prairies, immigrant experiences, and the nostalgia of childhood

Art Inspiration

Suspended Landscape, 1969 by Kazuo Nakamura



Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspended Landscape*, 1969

How Kazuo Nakamura Painted Abstract Landscapes

Kazuo Nakamura was a Japanese Canadian artist and a member of the famous Painters Eleven group. He worked in both abstraction and representational painting, drawing on a variety of styles and techniques, from Japanese woodcuts to French Impressionism. In *Suspended Landscape*, Nakamura presents an image of terrain framed beneath bold geometric forms, creating a sense of distance and isolation that evokes questions of place and belonging. Experiment with line, pattern, shape, colour, and texture to design your own unique landscape compositions, taking inspiration from this visionary work to capture the physical character or emotional atmosphere of a place in Canada that you know well.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide about Kazuo Nakamura](#)

[Read more about Kazuo Nakamura in an Online Art Book](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Kazuo Nakamura
1926–2002

Place of birth:
Vancouver,
British Columbia

Best known for:
Abstract compositions
and landscape paintings
informed by science,
mathematics, and the
natural world

Art Inspiration

In the Northland, 1915 by Tom Thomson



Tom Thomson, *In the Northland, 1915-16*

How Tom Thomson Captured the Natural World

Tom Thomson is one of Canada's most famous artists, and his landscape paintings of northern Ontario have become iconic artworks. He drew inspiration from his visits to Algonquin Park, and became deeply committed to painting landscapes there. *In the Northland* is based on a sketch the artist made in Algonquin Park in 1915, just two years before his mysterious drowning there. The painting demonstrates his keen eye for surprising perspectives and vantage points, and his mastery of the landscape genre. Use Thomson's work as inspiration to create a landscape of your own that experiments with perspective, and represents a natural environment in Canada that captures your imagination.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide about Tom Thomson](#)

[Read an Online Art Book about Tom Thomson](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Tom Thomson
1877-1917

Place of birth:
Claremont, Ontario

Best known for:
Modernist landscape
paintings of northern
Ontario, and especially
his depictions of
Algonquin Park.

Theme 3

Canadian Pastimes

Create a Work Inspired by Your Favourite Canadian Things to Do

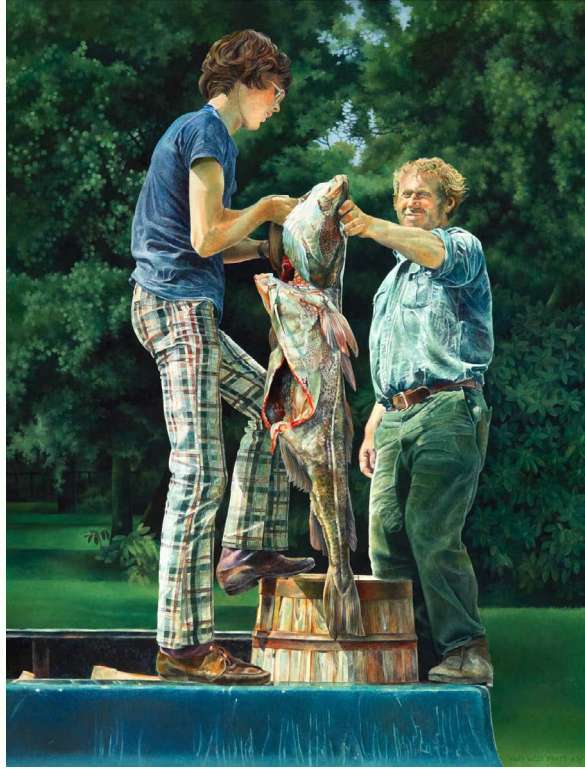
Fishing, skating, berry picking, gathering maple syrup: These are just a few of the ritual traditions Canadians are known to love. Artists have long celebrated their provincial traditions in works that bring to life the recreational pastimes they hold near and dear. Create your own work dedicated to your favourite, quintessentially Canadian hobby.

See more examples online!

aci-ica.ca

Art Inspiration

Another Province of Canada, 1978 by Mary Pratt



Mary Pratt, *Another Province of Canada*, 1978

How Mary Pratt Vividly Portrayed Fishing

Mary Pratt is often described as one of Canada's foremost realist painters. She transformed everyday objects and simple, mundane moments and spaces into captivating and meaningful subject matter, evoking personal or shared memories. Though Pratt was born in New Brunswick, her painting *Another Province of Canada* is inspired by her life in Newfoundland. The salmon, a staple food of her East Coast home, communicates a sense of pride in place and a beloved cultural tradition. Explore a ritual that your province is famed for, following Pratt's example to create a visual representation drawn from observation or memory.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide on Mary Pratt](#)

[Read an Online Art Book about Mary Pratt](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Mary Pratt
1935–2018

Place of birth:
Fredericton, New Brunswick

Best known for:
Luminous, hyperrealistic depictions of everyday life and objects, especially food and domestic scenes

Art Inspiration

Self-Portrait on Sled in 1959, 1998 by Oviloo Tunnillie



Oviloo Tunnillie, *Self-Portrait on Sled in 1959, 1998*

How Oviloo Tunnillie Carved Winter's Wonders in Stone

Oviloo Tunnillie was an Inuit sculptor who worked primarily in stone carving. She had an exceptional ability to transcend the stiffness of her material, creating expressive pieces rooted in real life. Drawing on her personal memories of sledding in her community, *Self-Portrait on Sled in 1959* captures the freedom, motion, and joy of a childhood pastime. Explore the outdoor activities that you most cherish, using Tunnillie's interest in personal and community life as a starting point to visually represent seasonal hobbies in all their splendour and joy.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide featuring Oviloo Tunnillie](#)

[Read more about Oviloo Tunnillie in an Online Art Book](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Oviloo Tunnillie
1949–2014

Place of birth:
Kangia, Baffin Island,
Nunavut

Best known for:
Stone carvings that
reflect contemporary
personal and community
life in Nunavut

Art Inspiration

Cherry Basket, c.1969 by Gathie Falk



Gathie Falk, *Cherry Basket*, c.1969.

How Gathie Falk Made Art Works About Fruit Picking

Manitoba-born artist Gathie Falk is celebrated for her ceramic and sculptural works of everyday objects that she imbues with a sense of beauty and awe. A key thread in her work is her elevation of the everyday through the extraordinary treatment of ordinary objects, as in this glazed clay work depicting a cherry basket. Berry picking is a beloved seasonal activity across Canada, and Falk's enticing representation of the popular fruit grown in her eventual home of British Columbia brings a sense of brilliance to otherwise routine subject matter. Use her veneration of the simple things in life to explore a food-related pastime or hobby native to your province.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide about Gathie Falk](#)

[Read about Gathie Falk in an Online Art Book](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Gathie Falk
1928-2025

Place of birth:
Alexander, Manitoba

Best known for:
Her veneration of the everyday in glistening ceramic works depicting fruit, clothing, and other objects.

Theme 4

Canadian Teams

**Create a Work About Your Favourite
Canadian Sport, Team, Athlete,
or Sporting Moment**

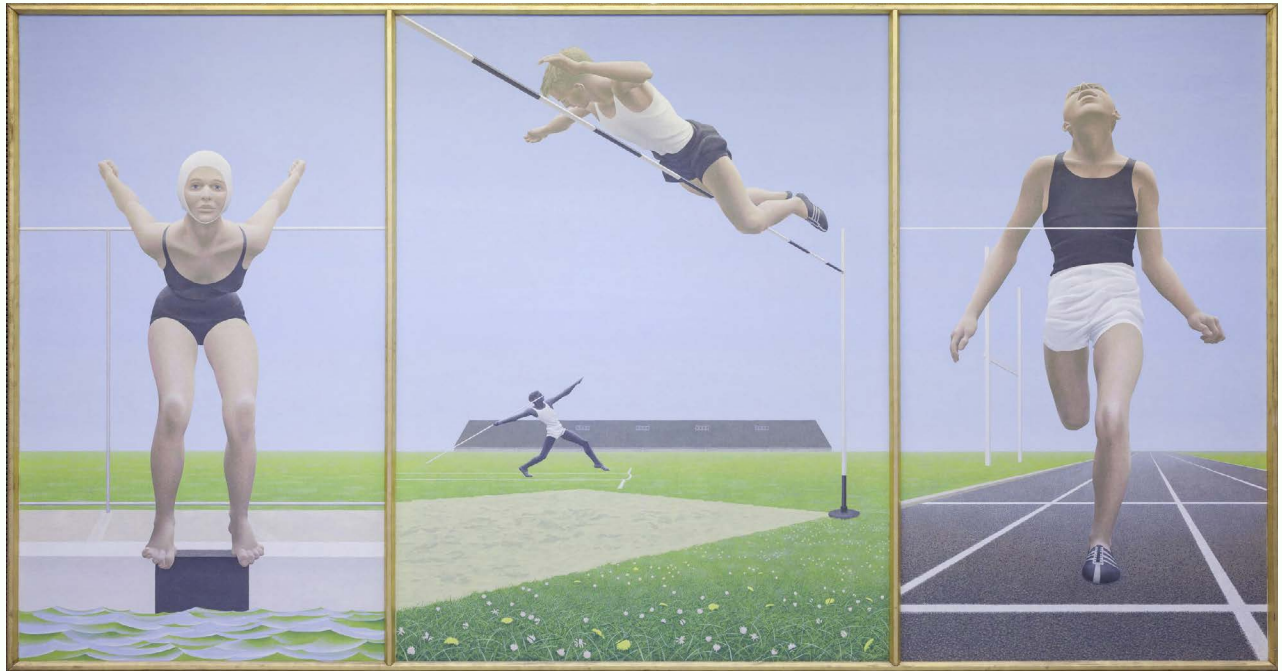
From the Toronto Raptors to the Montreal Canadiens, Canada is home to iconic sports teams who make us proud on the international stage. As well, Canadian athletes represent our country in championships, Olympic games, and tournaments that bring the country together. Inspired by artistic tributes to homegrown athletic talent, create your own work inspired by national sports.

See more examples online!

aci-ica.ca 

Art Inspiration

Athletes, 1960 by Alex Colville



Alex Colville, *Athletes*, 1960

How Alex Colville Captured Athletic Skill

Alex Colville was a painter whose representational work was grounded in close observations of the world, as reflected in his contributions to Atlantic Realism. His mural *Athletes*, commissioned for the exterior of Mount Allison University's athletic building, captures figures in action, drawing particular attention to the competitors' focus and the physical demands of each sport. In this work, he offers a prime example of how to use form, gestures, posture, and the surrounding environment to represent the qualities or skills that make a meaningful figure. Following Colville's lead, create a work dedicated to athletic excellence, inspired by a Canadian sports figure you admire.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide on Alex Colville](#)

[Read more about Alex Colville in an Online Art Book](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Alex Colville
1920–2013

Place of birth:
Toronto, Ontario

Best known for:
Clean, meticulous compositions, subdued colour palettes, and thoughtful observations of everyday life

Art Inspiration

Dryden, 1975 by Serge Lemoyne



Serge Lemoyne, *Dryden*, 1975

How Serge Lemoyne Memorialized an Iconic Canadian Team

Working in performance, painting, and printmaking, Québécois pop artist Serge Lemoyne was a central figure in the province's art scene in the 1960s. His blue, white, and red phase defined much of his career, and his work often featured hockey imagery inspired by the famed Montreal Canadiens, an iconic team in his home province. *Dryden* depicts legendary goaltender Ken Dryden and is typical of this artistic period. Create a work about your favourite Canadian team, building on Lemoyne's use of colours, symbols, logos, or other visual elements to express pride and team spirit.

[Read more about Serge Lemoyne](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Serge Lemoyne
1941–1998

Place of birth:
Acton Vale, Quebec

Best known for:
Pop art, avant-garde performances, and his long running hockey-themed series

Theme 5

Portraits of Canadians

Create a Work About Yourself or Someone Else in a Canadian Setting

Portraiture is one of the most popular and storied genres of Canadian art. From coded symbols to elaborate settings, portraits and self-portraits have the power to tell stories that reach far beyond a simple likeness, as well as to further conversations tied to national identity and belonging. Taking inspiration from the diversity of styles and approaches that Canadian artists have experimented with, create your own portrait or self-portrait in a Canadian setting.

See more examples online!

aci-ica.ca



Art Inspiration

Julie and the Universe, 1965 by Jean Paul Lemieux



Jean Paul Lemieux, *Julie and the Universe*, 1965.

How Jean Paul Lemieux Represented Youth

Jean Paul Lemieux was one of the most innovative and important painters in twentieth-century Canada. Lemieux was born and died in Quebec City, and many of his works represent locations across the province and country. In *Julie and the Universe*, Lemieux invokes the quintessentially Canadian snowy landscape as an extended representation of "the universe" with his main figure, Julie, an emblem of childhood and youth. Use his work as inspiration to create a portrait about your own childhood and a place in Canada you associate it with.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide about Jean Paul Lemieux](#)

[Read an Online Art Book about Jean Paul Lemieux](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Jean Paul Lemieux
1904-1990

Place of birth:
Quebec City, Quebec

Best known for:
His unembellished depictions of the human condition, and his significant contributions to Canadian modernism.

Art Inspiration

Untitled (Self-Portrait), 1984-85 Denyse Thomasos



Denyse Thomasos, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1984-85

How Denyse Thomasos Represented Her Artistic Self

For Trinidadian Canadian painter Denyse Thomasos, becoming a successful artist was her greatest career ambition. While she is best known for her monumental semi-abstract paintings and wall works, early in her studies, she created representational art. This painting is a rare self-portrait. While the setting is ambiguous, we know that she painted it while she was in her 20s and attending art school in Toronto, just as she began her journey to fulfilling her artistic dreams. Create your own artist self-portrait that expresses your aspirations and ambitions, using Thomasos's powerful painting as inspiration.

[Learn more about Denyse Thomasos](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Denyse Thomasos
1964-2012

Place of birth:
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Best known for:
Monumental semi-abstract paintings exploring architecture and social history

Art Inspiration

Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise), 1991 by Jin-me Yoon



Jin-me Yoon, *Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise)*, 1991.

How Jin-me Yoon Explores Representation and Agency

As a child in 1968, Jin-me Yoon emigrated from South Korea to Canada, an experience that has informed her art practice. Yoon was a graduate student at Concordia University when she created *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991, a set of six postcard-like images in which she poses at different tourist sites in Banff, Alberta, including the Banff Springs Hotel, a memorial for Chinese railway workers, and Lake Louise (the image shown above). In *Souvenirs of the Self*, Yoon draws on visual contrasts, juxtaposing her body with iconic Canadian landscapes and landmarks. In doing so, she questions how ideas of national identity are created and how we fit within them.

[Download a Teacher Resource Guide about Jin-me Yoon](#)

[Read an Online Art Book about Jin-me Yoon](#)



Get to Know the Artist:

Jin-me Yoon
b.1960

Place of birth:
Seoul, Korea

Best known for:
Photography, video, performance, and installation that explores representation, and the entanglements between lived experiences and official histories.