

APRIL 17, 2026

DOWN-TO-EARTH ART CANADIAN CREATORS WORKING WITH NATURE

This Earth Day, we turn to nine Canadian artists inspired by the outdoors.



Rebecca Belmore, *Wave Sound*, 2017, as presented at Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador.



Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

When Rebecca Belmore created *Wave Sound*, 2017, she said the work was about “taking a moment to sit on the Earth itself. That’s really what I’m after in terms of the idea that as human beings we are connected to the Earth.” With Earth Day approaching on Wednesday, April 22, we are inspired to take a closer look at Belmore’s poignant sculpture, as well as pieces by other Canadian artists who explore our relationship with the environment—and the choices that shape its future. Since the 1960s, artists have moved beyond the gallery to engage directly with the land, using soil, stone, water, and other elemental substances and ephemeral processes to highlight human interdependence with the natural world. Here are pieces by Canadian creators who work with organic and sustainable materials, situating their practices within a longer history of earthworks and land art. From beekeepers to basket weavers to sculptors, they draw directly from their surroundings, creating art from charred branches, animal remains, woven grasses, and even the frozen surface of the Arctic Ocean. Their work invites closer attention—to the intelligence of materials and to the possibility of cultivating a greater sensitivity to the living earth with curiosity, care, and humility.

ARRIVAL, 2008

by *Aganetha Dyck*



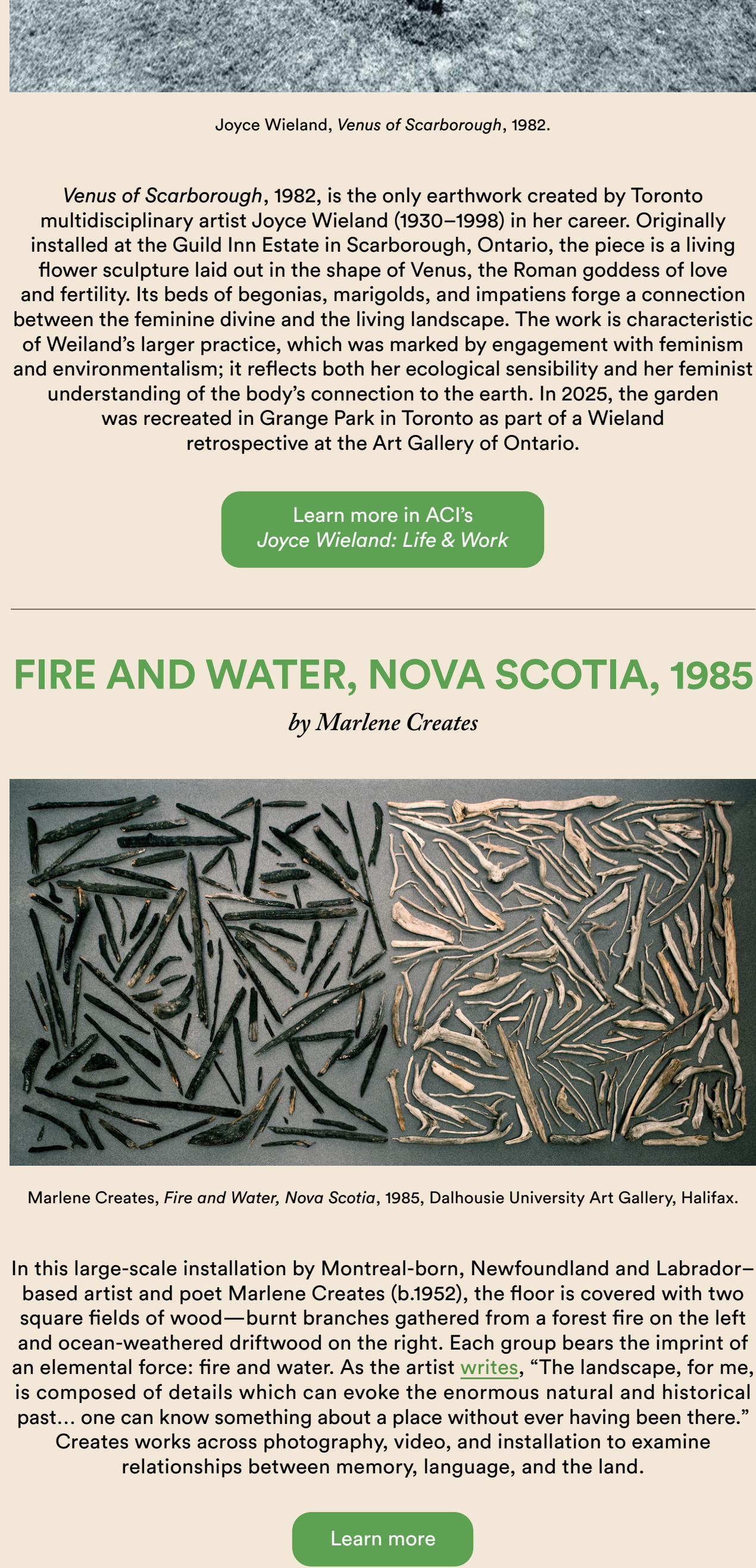
Aganetha Dyck, *Arrival*, 2008, courtesy Michael Gibson Gallery, London, ON.

In the sculpture *Arrival*, 2008, Winnipeg-based artist Aganetha Dyck (1937–2025) invited bees to serve as her co-creators. The work is part of her Masked Ball series, in which Dyck coated porcelain figurines with pheromones and fragrances to attract bees. They gradually encrusted the small sculptures in honeycombs, turning conventional decorative objects into uncanny hybrid creatures. Throughout her career, Dyck was most closely associated with bee collaboration, and her practice consistently engaged with environmental concerns. “When you’re so close to a creature that’s so important to the world,” she once [noted](#), “and you know how quickly they could disappear, and what that would do to humanity, that’s a relationship that’s pretty precious.”

[Learn more](#)

VENUS OF SCARBOROUGH, 1982

by *Joyce Wieland*



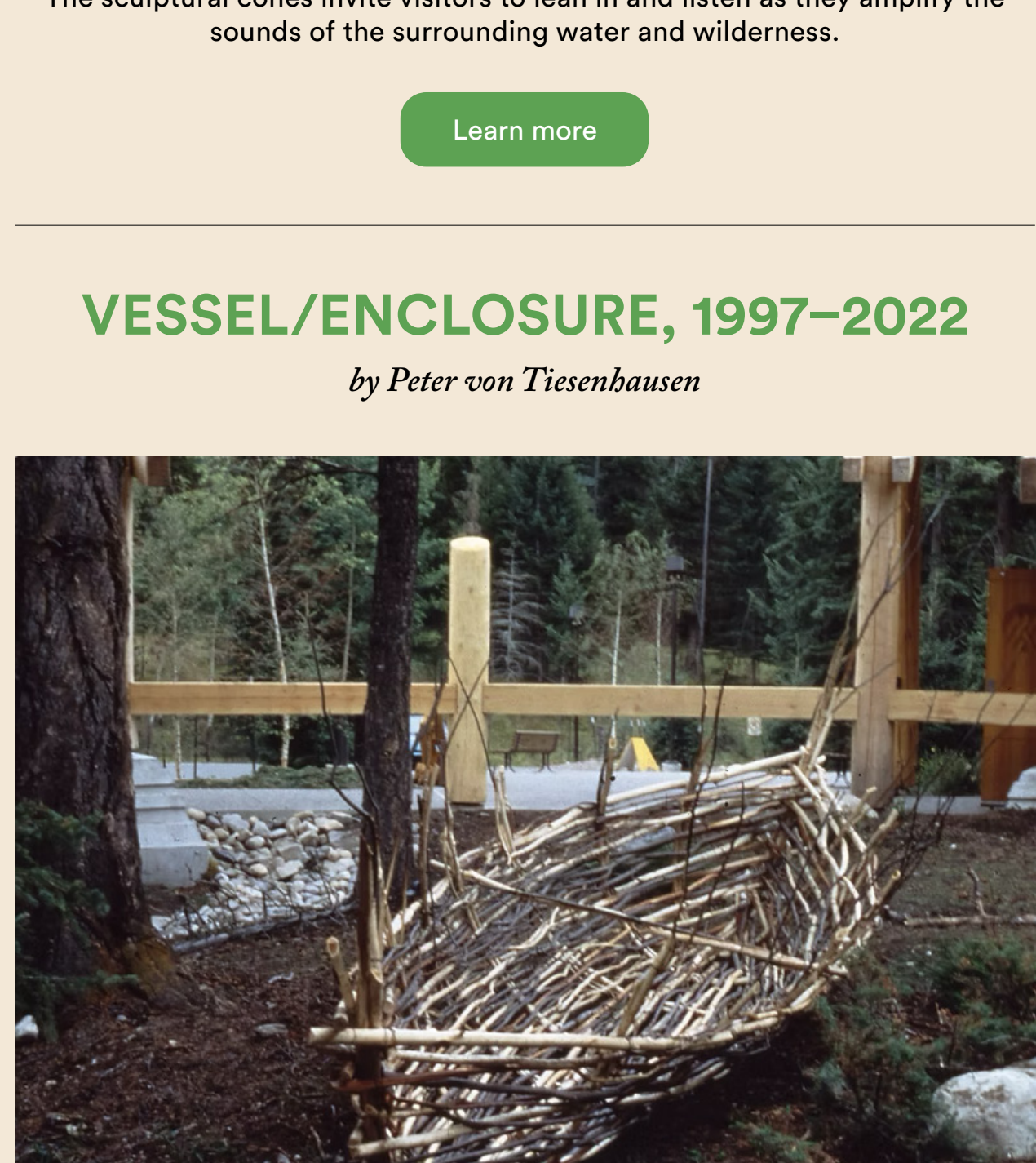
Joyce Wieland, *Venus of Scarborough*, 1982.

Venus of Scarborough, 1982, is the only earthwork created by Toronto multidisciplinary artist Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) in her career. Originally installed at the Guild Inn Estate in Scarborough, Ontario, the piece is a living flower sculpture laid out in the shape of Venus, the Roman goddess of love and fertility. Its beds of begonias, marigolds, and impatiens forge a connection between the feminine divine and the living landscape. The work is characteristic of Wieland’s larger practice, which was marked by engagement with feminism and environmentalism; it reflects both her ecological sensibility and her feminist understanding of the body’s connection to the earth. In 2025, the garden was recreated in Grange Park in Toronto as part of a Wieland retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

[Learn more in ACI's Joyce Wieland: Life & Work](#)

FIRE AND WATER, NOVA SCOTIA, 1985

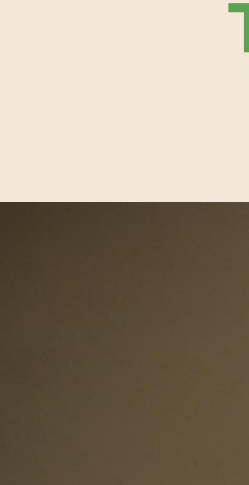
by *Marlene Creates*



Marlene Creates, *Fire and Water, Nova Scotia*, 1985, Dalhousie University Art Gallery, Halifax.

In this large-scale installation by Montreal-born, Newfoundland and Labrador-based artist and poet Marlene Creates (b.1952), the floor is covered with two square fields of wood—burnt branches gathered from a forest fire on the left and ocean-weathered driftwood on the right. Each group bears the imprint of an elemental force: fire and water. As the artist [writes](#), “The landscape, for me, is composed of details which can evoke the enormous natural and historical past... one can know something about a place without ever having been there.” Creates works across photography, video, and installation to examine relationships between memory, language, and the land.

[Learn more](#)

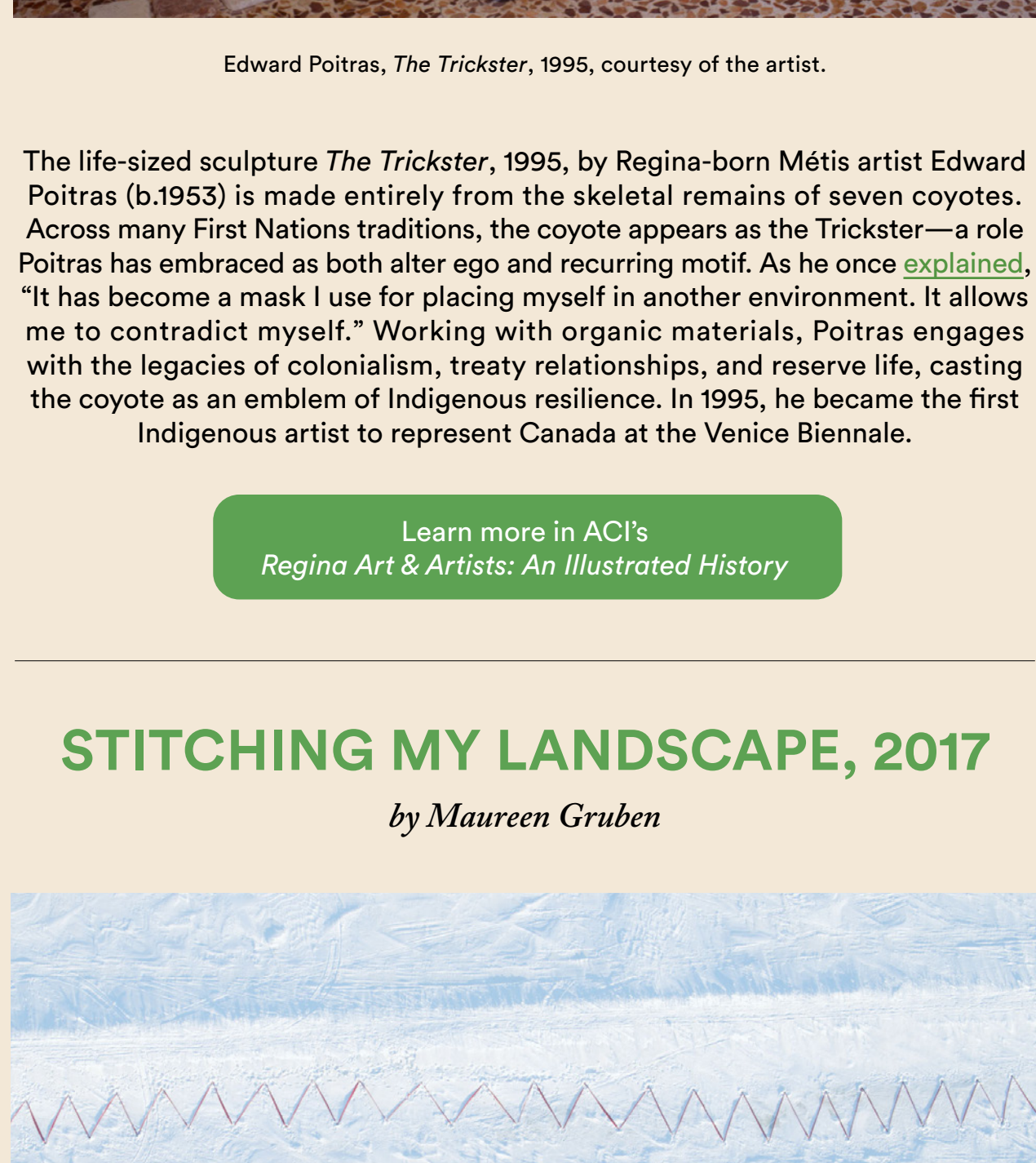


**Our Friday Newsletters
Are Supported By You.**

The Art Canada Institute is donor-funded. If you like our work, please consider helping us by making a donation.

WAVE SOUND, 2017

by *Rebecca Belmore*



Rebecca Belmore, *Wave Sound*, 2017, as presented at Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Wave Sound, 2017, by Anishinaabe multidisciplinary artist Rebecca Belmore (b.1960) is a series of sculptures spread across four national parks—Banff, Alberta; Pukaskwa, Ontario; Georgian Bay Islands, Ontario; and Gros Morne, Newfoundland and Labrador. Mirroring the texture of the local rock, the cast-aluminum pieces are shaped by and responsive to their specific environments. The sculptural cones invite visitors to lean in and listen as they amplify the sounds of the surrounding water and wilderness.

[Learn more](#)

VESSEL/ENCLOSURE, 1997–2022

by *Peter von Tiesenhausen*



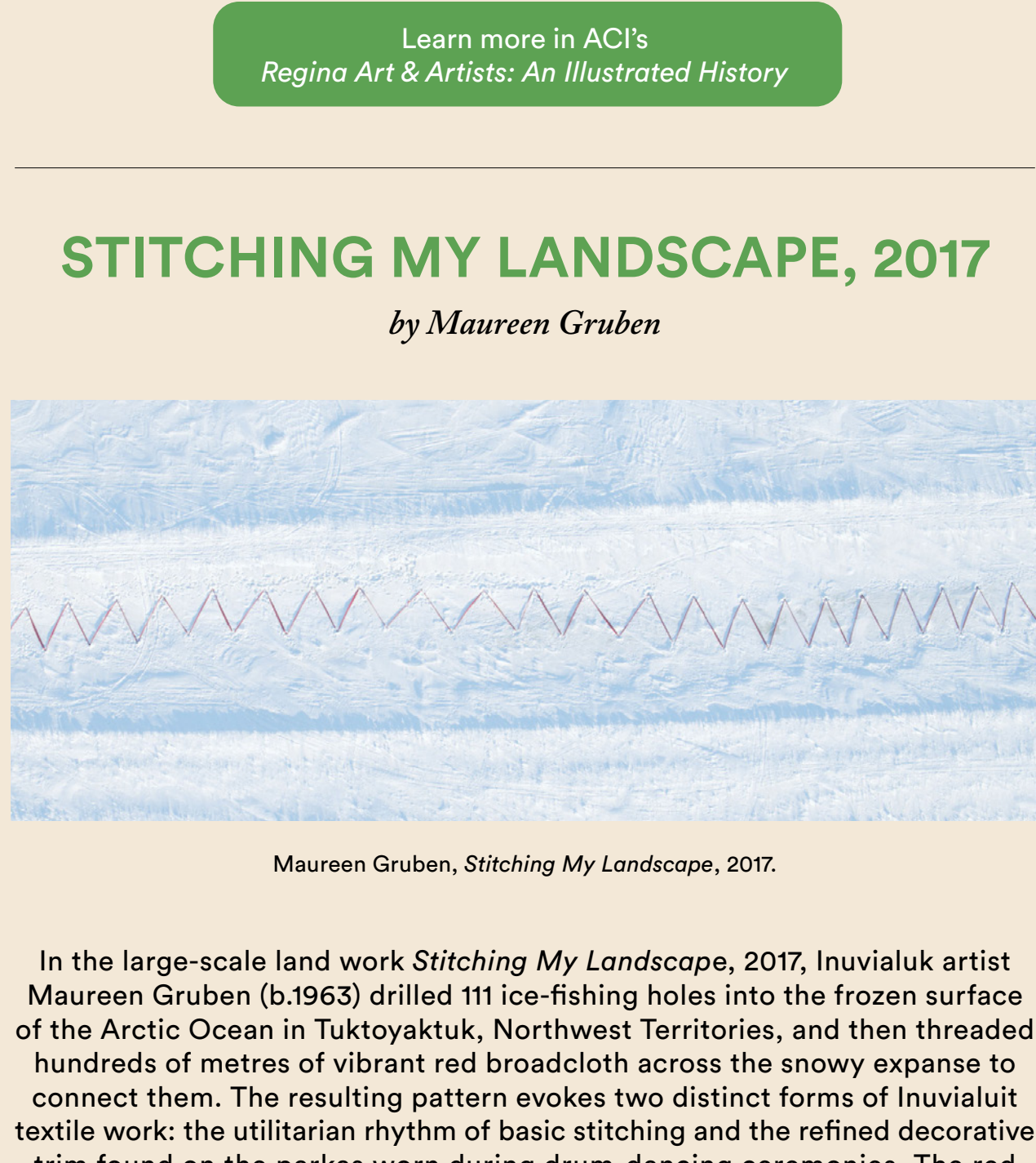
Peter von Tiesenhausen, *Vessel/Enclosure*, 1997–2022, courtesy of the artist.

In *Vessel/Enclosure*, 1997–2022, a willow boat woven by Alberta artist Peter von Tiesenhausen (b.1959) was set outdoors and left to decay over a span of twenty-five years. Each year, the artist photographed the structure from the same vantage point; the resulting series, later exhibited at the Brick Centre for Arts and Creativity, is emblematic of von Tiesenhausen’s broader engagement with land art, time, and ecological processes. In surrendering the work to gradual decomposition, he turns attention toward the transience of human-made forms amid the steady, cyclical rhythms of nature.

[Learn more](#)

THE TRICKSTER, 1995

by *Edward Poitras*



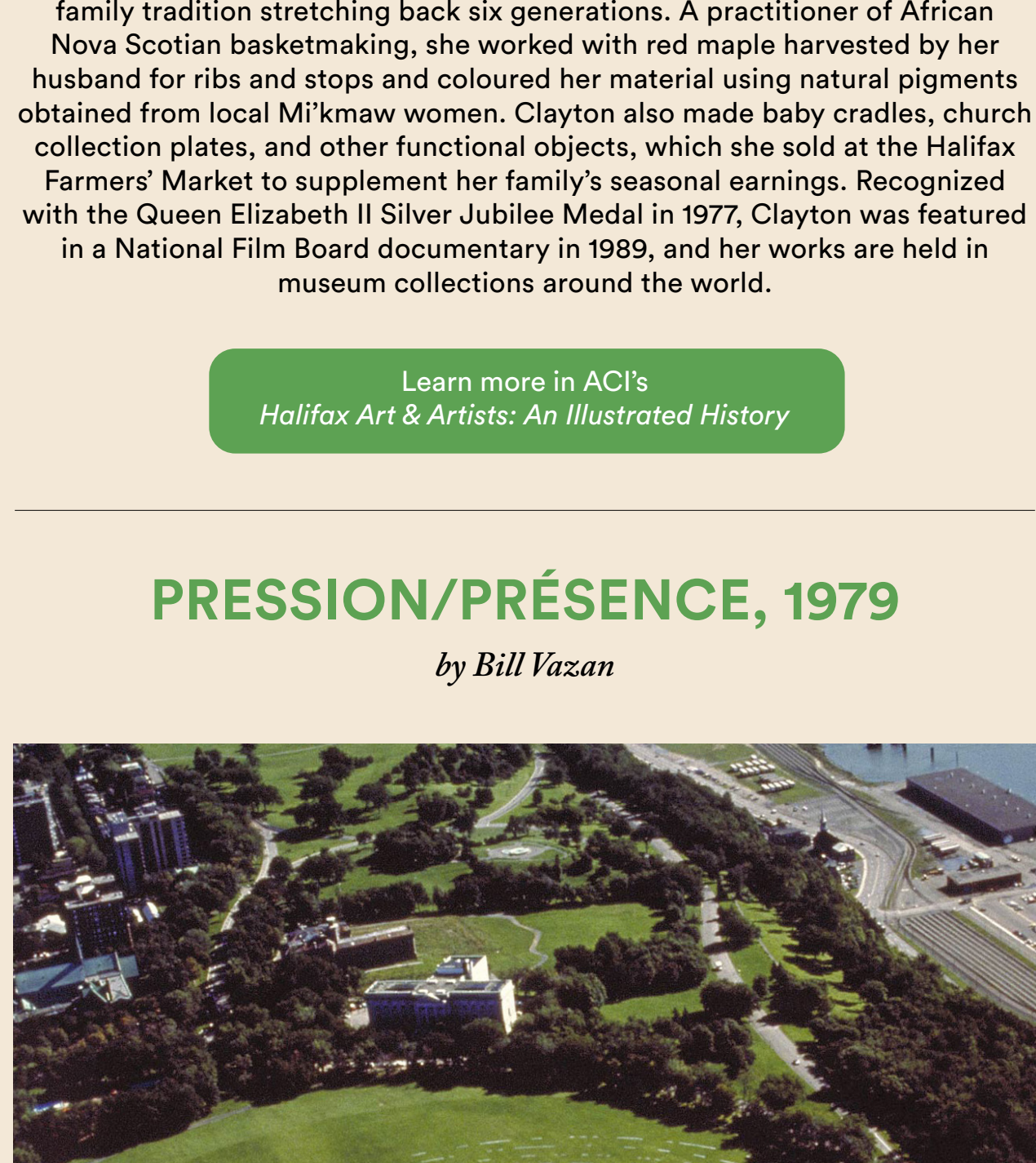
Edward Poitras, *The Trickster*, 1995, courtesy of the artist.

The life-sized sculpture *The Trickster*, 1995, by Regina-born Métis artist Edward Poitras (b.1953) is made entirely from the skeletal remains of seven coyotes. Across many First Nations traditions, the coyote appears as the Trickster—a role Poitras has embraced as both alter ego and recurring motif. As he once [explained](#), “It has become a mask I use for placing myself in another environment. It allows me to contradict myself.” Working with organic materials, Poitras engages with the legacies of colonialism, treaty relationships, and reserve life, casting the coyote as an emblem of Indigenous resilience. In 1995, he became the first Indigenous artist to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale.

[Learn more in ACI's Regina Art & Artists: An Illustrated History](#)

STITCHING MY LANDSCAPE, 2017

by *Maureen Gruben*



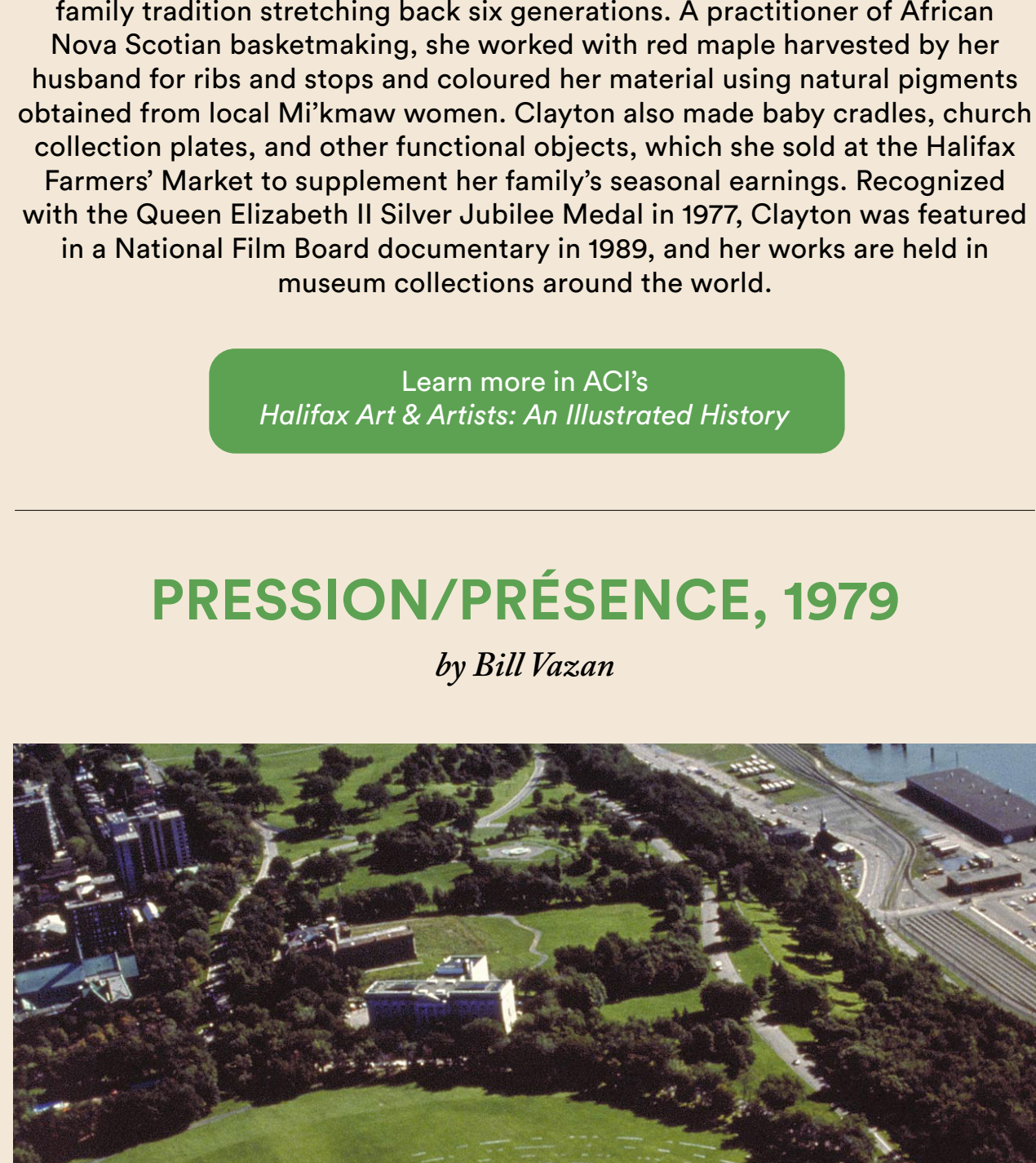
Maureen Gruben, *Stitching My Landscape*, 2017.

In the large-scale land work *Stitching My Landscape*, 2017, Inuvialuk artist Maureen Gruben (b.1963) drilled 111 ice-fishing holes into the frozen surface of the Arctic Ocean in Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, and then threaded hundreds of metres of vibrant red burlap across the snowy expanse to connect them. The resulting pattern evokes two distinct forms of Inuvialuit textile work: the utilitarian rhythm of basic stitching and the refined decorative trim found on the parkas worn during drum-dancing ceremonies. The red cloth also has a personal dimension for Gruben as a memory of her brother stretching out fresh gut during the seal harvest—binding together family, land, and living cultural tradition.

[Learn more](#)

MARKET BASKET, 1975

by *Edith Clayton*



Edith Clayton, *Market Basket*, 1975, Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax.

Nova Scotia-born basket weaver Edith Clayton (1920–1989) began making baskets at the age of eight, learning the craft from her mother as part of a family tradition stretching back six generations. A practitioner of African Nova Scotian basketmaking, she worked with red maple harvested by her husband for ribs and stops and coloured her material using natural pigments obtained from local Mi’kmaq women. Clayton also made baby cradles, church collection plates, and other functional objects, which she sold at the Halifax Farmers’ Market to supplement her family’s seasonal earnings. Recognized with the Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977, Clayton was featured in a National Film Board documentary in 1989, and her works are held in museum collections around the world.

[Learn more in ACI's Halifax Art & Artists: An Illustrated History](#)

PRESSION/PRÉSENCE, 1979

by *Bill Vazan*



Bill Vazan, *Pression/Présence (Pressure/Presence)*, 1979, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

To create *Pression/Présence*, 1979, Montreal-based artist Bill Vazan (b.1933) traced a monumental design on the grass of Battlefields Park in Quebec City using non-toxic, chalk-based paint. Commissioned in 1978 by La Chambre Blanche—Quebec City’s first artist-run centre—the massive piece interweaves spiral forms and seismographic rings to evoke the movement of celestial bodies and the rhythms of the natural world. It’s representative of Vazan’s wide-ranging practice, which spans land art, stone sculptures, videos, and site-specific installations as it examines the relationship between human existence and the cosmos.

[Learn more in ACI's Quebec City Art & Artists: An Illustrated History](#)

THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS

ACI is a not-for-profit educational charity. Our work is made possible by an important circle of [friends, patrons, and benefactors](#).

If you would like to support our important work, please see [this page](#).

FOLLOW ACI ON INSTAGRAM

for more on great art in Canada

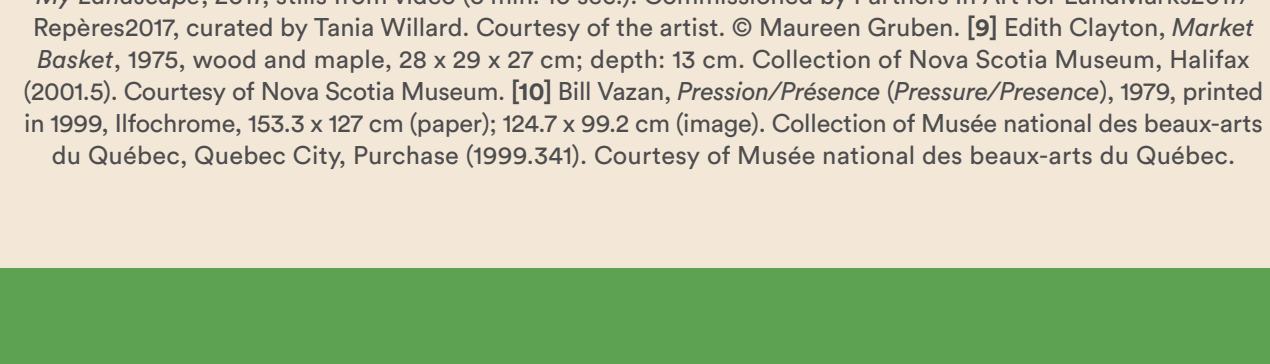


Image Credits: [1, 6] Rebecca Belmore, *Wave Sound*, 2017, cast aluminum, 274.3 cm (overall length), 104.1 x 106.7 cm (mouth), originally commissioned by Partners in Art for LandMarks2017/Repères2017. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London, ON. [2] Aganetha Dyck, *Arrival*, 2008, beework & honeycomb on figurine, 25.4 x 31.8 x 22.9 cm. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London, ON. [3] Joyce Wieland, *Venus of Scarborough* installed at the Contemporary Outdoor Sculpture exhibition at the Guild, 1982. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. © National Gallery of Canada. Photo credit: Jim Chambers. [4] Marlene Creates, *Fire and Water, Nova Scotia*, 1985, installation view, burnt wood from a forest fire area and driftwood from the Atlantic shore, 335 x 670 cm (sometimes arranged as 500 x 500 cm), Dalhousie University Art Gallery, Halifax. Gift of the Canada Council Art Bank, 2002. Courtesy of the artist. [5] Peter von Tiesenhausen, *Vessel/Enclosure*, 1997–2022, willow, aspen, 518.2 x 182.9 x 121.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist. [7] Edward Poitras, *The Trickster* (installation view), 1995, coyote bones, 71.1 x 45.7 x 78.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Edward Poitras. [8] Maureen Gruben, *Stitching My Landscape*, 2017, stills from video (6 min. 10 sec.). Commissioned by Partners in Art for LandMarks2017/Repères2017, curated by Tania Willard. Courtesy of the artist. © Maureen Gruben. [9] Edith Clayton, *Market Basket*, 1975, wood and maple, 28 x 29 x 27 cm; depth: 13 cm. Collection of Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax (2001.5). Courtesy of Nova Scotia Museum. [10] Bill Vazan, *Pression/Présence (Pressure/Presence)*, 1979, printed in 1999. Ifochrome, 153.3 x 127 cm (paper); 124.7 x 99.2 cm (image). Collection of Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City, Purchase (1999.34). Courtesy of Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.