

APRIL 24, 2026

CONVERSATIONS IN CANADIAN ART  
FRESH AIR OPENS AT THE MCMICHAEL*Curator John Geoghegan pairs contemporary and historic works, connecting the past and present.*J.E.H. MacDonald, *Sunflower Garden*, c.1915, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Stephen Waddell, *Sunflowers*, 2018, printed 2021, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

John Geoghegan

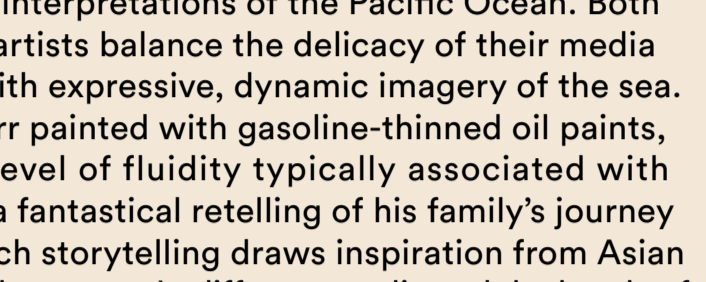
Do you ever wonder who the great Canadian artists of the future are? Who are the artistic heirs of such famed talents as Emily Carr, Jean Paul Riopelle, and the Group of Seven? In the newly opened exhibition *Fresh Air: New Acquisitions in Context*, on now at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, curator John Geoghegan asks these questions. He skilfully brings recent acquisitions of works by contemporary Canadian artists into conversation with long-standing McMichael collection highlights. By pairing current artists with historical figures, the exhibition showcases a wide range of voices, revealing new perspectives and reinterpretations that carry forward central themes in this country's art. Geoghegan describes the show as "an invitation to see the McMichael's collection anew, and to imagine its future as one that reflects the full richness of the country's artistic landscape." This week's newsletter, guest-edited by Geoghegan, takes a closer look at *Fresh Air*, spotlighting select pairings and exploring the deep dialogues that unfold between them.

Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

Learn more about the exhibition

## EMILY CARR AND HOWIE TSUI

Emily Carr, *Strait of Juan de Fuca*, c.1936, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Howie Tsui, *Dead Sea* (detail), 2009, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

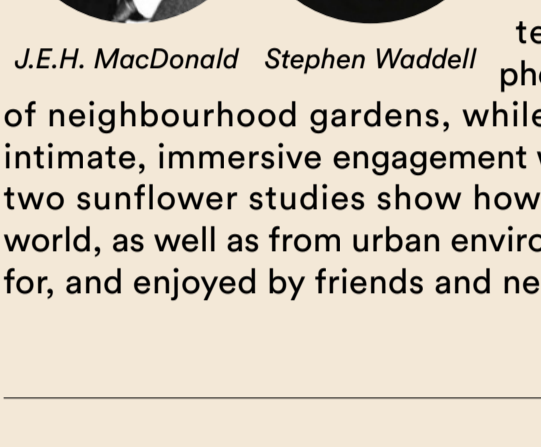
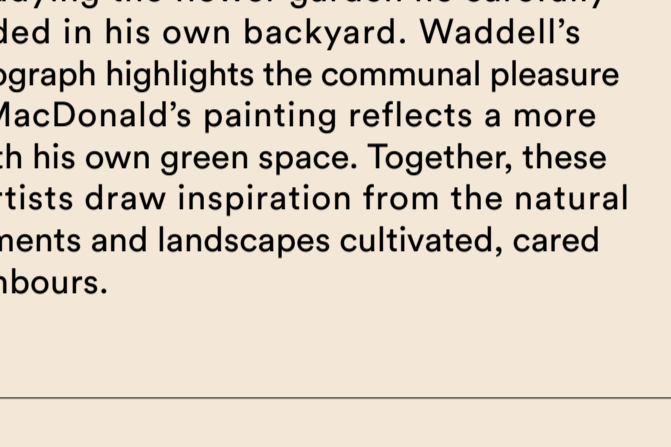
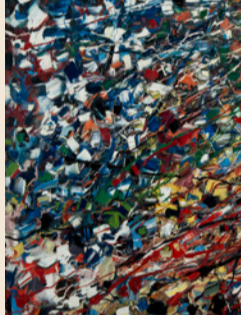
Emily Carr



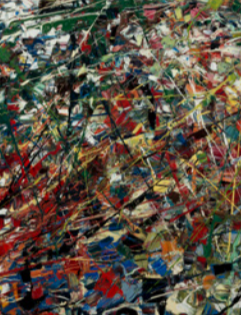
Howie Tsui

The vivid seascapes of Emily Carr (1871–1945) and Howie Tsui (b.1978) engage in cross-cultural and intergenerational dialogue through their colourful, rhythmic interpretations of the Pacific Ocean. Both artists balance the delicacy of their media with expressive, dynamic imagery of the sea. Carr painted with gasoline-thinned oil paints, rendering the landscape with a level of fluidity typically associated with watercolour. Tsui's ink painting is a fantastical retelling of his family's journey from Hong Kong to Canada. His rich storytelling draws inspiration from Asian folklore, visual culture, and personal memory. In different media and the hands of different artists, the ocean becomes a site for exploring place and imagination.

## J.E.H. MACDONALD AND STEPHEN WADDELL

J.E.H. MacDonald, *Sunflower Garden*, c.1915, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Stephen Waddell, *Sunflowers*, 2018, printed 2021, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

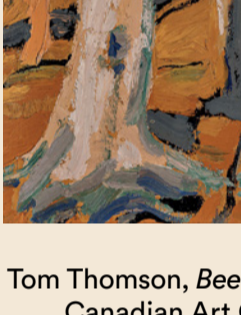
J.E.H. MacDonald



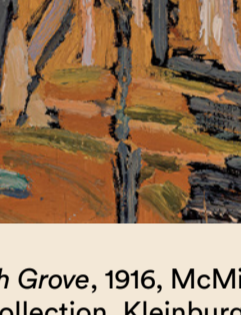
Stephen Waddell

In *Sunflowers*, 2018, Vancouver artist Stephen Waddell (b.1968) captures a thriving garden set against the backdrop of the city. More than a century earlier, J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) produced several oil paintings studying the flower garden he carefully tended in his own backyard. Waddell's photograph highlights the communal pleasure of neighbourhood gardens, while MacDonald's painting reflects a more intimate, immersive engagement with his own green space. Together, these two sunflower studies show how artists draw inspiration from the natural world, as well as from urban environments and landscapes cultivated, cared for, and enjoyed by friends and neighbours.

## JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE AND DEREK LIDDINGTON

Jean Paul Riopelle, *Untitled (Sans titre)*, 1950, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Derek Liddington, *with eyes wide, the leaves rustled in the fall breeze at dusk, I could see the goblins grip, the devils*, 2024, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

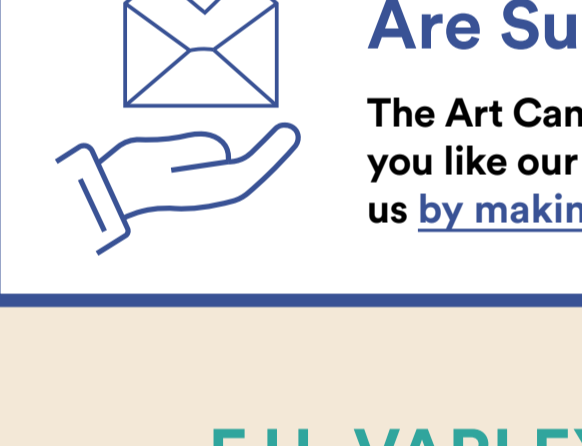
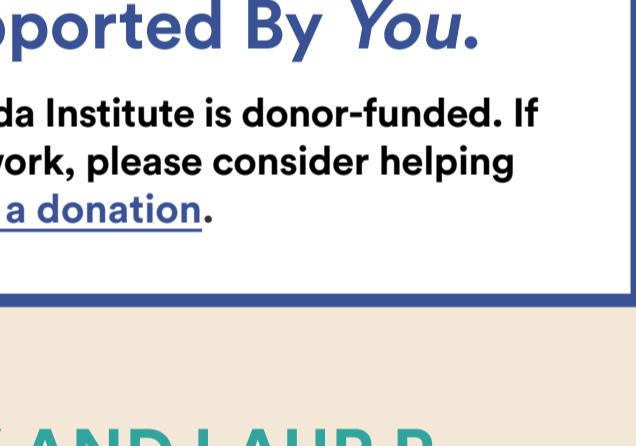
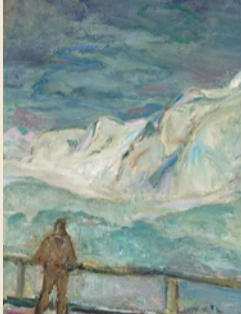
Jean Paul Riopelle



Derek Liddington

An explosion of green, yellow, and red unites the works of Jean Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) and Derek Liddington (b.1981) in this pairing. Both artists use abstraction to interpret the natural world, focusing on fine details and unexpected perspectives. Riopelle, an artist known for his expressive, nonrepresentational work, employs action-painting techniques to evoke the sensation of a blue sky breaking through a tangle of tree branches. Toronto-based Liddington draws inspiration from his time in Scotland and uses a multilayered oil-painting approach to translate the colours and textures of the autumnal Highlands into a vibrant abstract image.

## TOM THOMSON AND MARGAUX WILLIAMSON

Tom Thomson, *Beech Grove*, 1916, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Margaux Williamson, *Meeting Place*, 2021, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

Tom Thomson



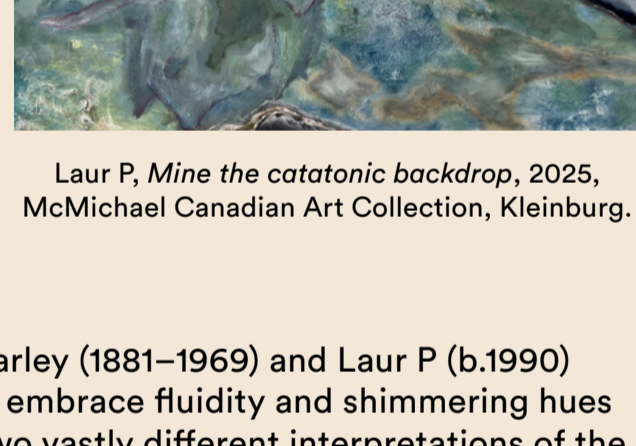
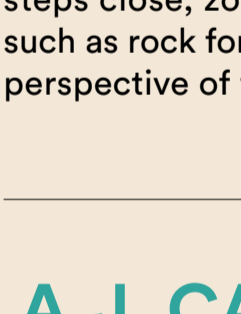
Margaux Williamson

Born nearly one hundred years apart, Tom Thomson (1877–1917) and Margaux Williamson (b.1976) are two artists with distinct approaches to painting who come together in this exhibition. Thomson was known for working *en plein air* in Algonquin Park. In *Beech Grove, 1916*, the bare trees in the dense late-autumn forest offered him the opportunity to study their structure and shadows and experiment with line and colour. Williamson also drew inspiration from the Ontario forest, including for *Meeting Place, 2021*. Working around Georgian Bay, she created paintings from memory, using notebooks filled with written observations and personal reflections to inform her work back in the studio.

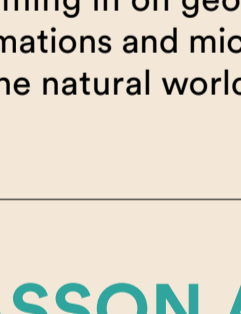
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## F.H. VARLEY AND LAUR P

F.H. Varley, *Moonlight at Lynn*, c.1934, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Laur P, *Mine the catatonic backdrop*, 2025, oil on canvas over panel, 91 x 122 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

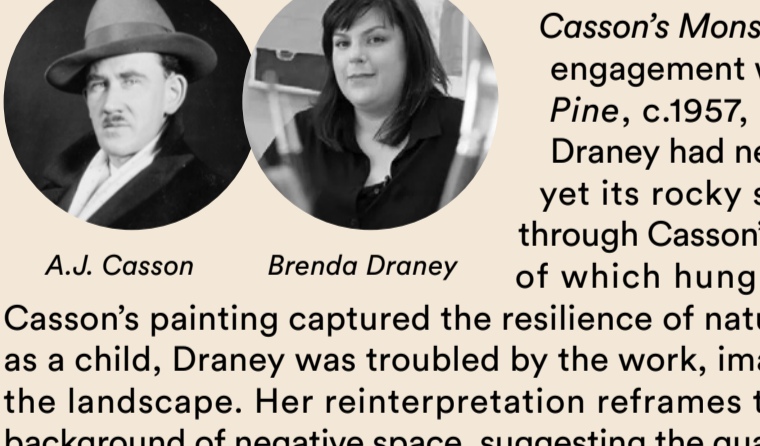
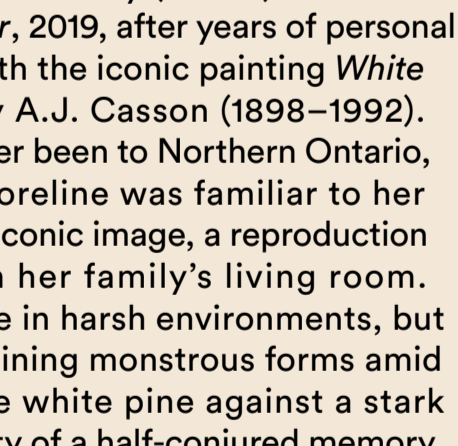
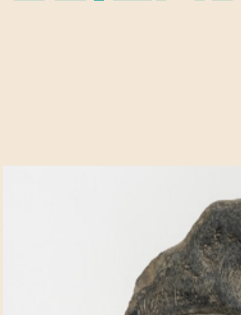
F.H. Varley



Laur P

F.H. Varley (1881–1969) and Laur P (b.1990) both embrace fluidity and shimmering hues in two vastly different interpretations of the land. In his luminous nighttime landscape, Varley, who found Vancouver's Lynn Creek to be a fertile source of inspiration, steps back to present the imposing mountains glowing under a moonlit sky. By contrast, Laur P steps close, zooming in on geological details that reveal the passage of time, such as rock formations and microscopic life, offering a more intimate, reflective perspective of the natural world.

## A.J. CASSON AND BRENDA DRANEY

A.J. Casson, *White Pine*, c.1957, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Brenda Draney, *Casson's Monster*, 2019, private collection.

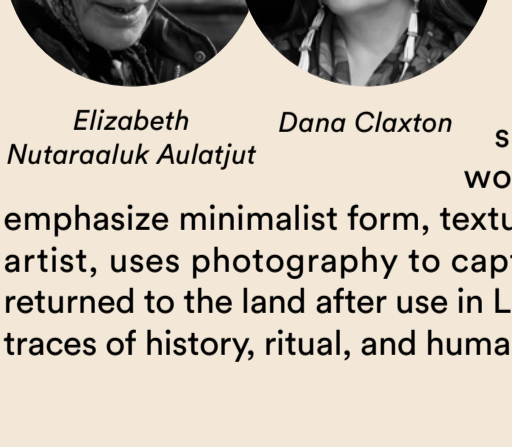
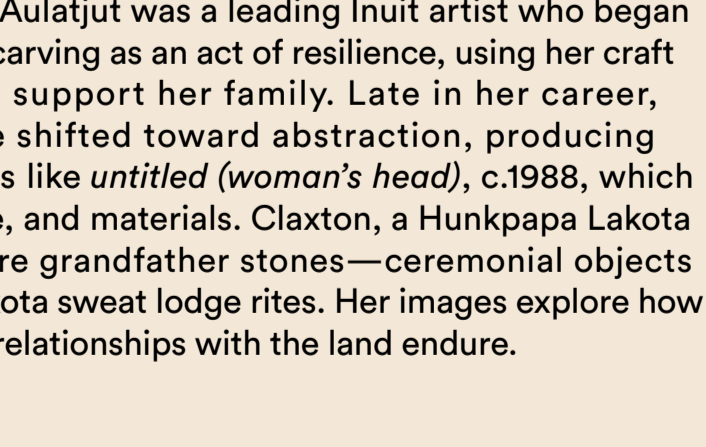
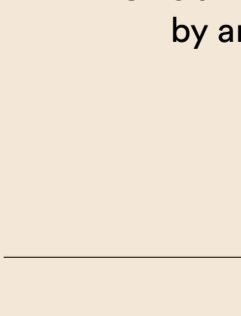
A.J. Casson



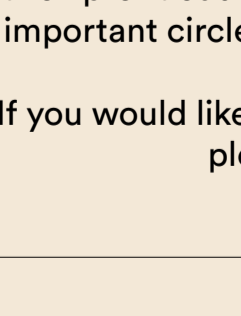
Brenda Draney

Cree artist Brenda Draney (b.1976) created *Casson's Monster*, 2019, after years of personal engagement with the iconic painting *White Pine*, c.1957, by A.J. Casson (1898–1992). Draney had never been to Northern Ontario, yet its rocky shoreline was familiar to her through Casson's iconic image, a reproduction of which hung in her family's living room. Casson's painting captured the resilience of nature in harsh environments, but as a child, Draney was troubled by the work, imagining monstrous forms amid the landscape. Her reinterpretation reframes the white pine against a stark background of negative space, suggesting the quality of a half-conjured memory.

## ELIZABETH NUTARAALUK AULATJUT AND DANA CLAXTON

Elizabeth Nutaraaluk Aulatjut, *untitled (woman's head)*, c.1988, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.Dana Claxton, *Stones 3*, 2000, printed 2021, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

Elizabeth Nutaraaluk Aulatjut



Dana Claxton

Both Elizabeth Nutaraaluk Aulatjut (1914–1998) and Dana Claxton (b.1959) use stone and other natural materials to reflect cultural memory, tradition, and human presence. Aulatjut was a leading Inuit artist who began carving as an act of resilience, using her craft to support her family. Late in her career, she shifted toward abstraction, producing works like *untitled (woman's head)*, c.1988, which emphasize minimalist form, texture, and materials. Claxton, a Hunkpapa Lakota artist, uses photography to capture grandfather stones—ceremonial objects returned to the land after use in Lakota sweat lodge rites. Her images explore how traces of history, ritual, and human relationships with the land endure.

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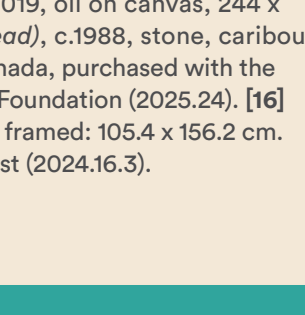
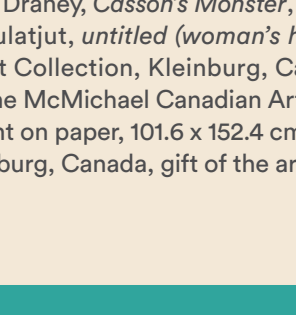
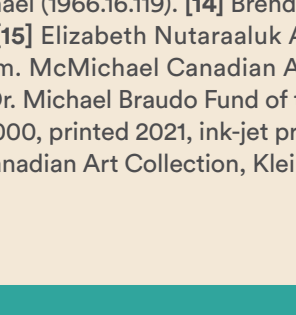


Image Credits: [1, 5] J.E.H. MacDonald, *Sunflower Garden*, c.1915, oil on paperboard, 20.3 x 25.3 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of Walter and Jane Stewart (1968.8.1). [2, 6] Stephen Waddell, *Sunflowers*, 2018, printed 2021, archival pigment print, 149.7 x 233.4 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of the artist (2021.18). [3] Emily Carr, *Strait of Juan de Fuca*, c.1936, oil on paper laid down on paperboard, 60.7 x 91.3 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of Dr. and Mrs. Max Stern, Dominion Gallery, Montreal (1974.18.2). [4] Howie Tsui, *Dead Sea*, 2009, inks and paint pigment on mulberry paper, 93 x 318 cm; mounted: 106.7 x 330.2 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, purchased with the generous support of Eleanor and Francis Shen (2021.4). [7] Jean Paul Riopelle, *Untitled (Sans titre)*, 1950, oil on canvas, 86.4 x 146.1 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of Andr e Rh eume Fitzhenry and Robert Fitzhenry. [8] Derek Liddington, *with eyes wide, the leaves rustled in the fall breeze at dusk, I could see the goblins grip, the devils*, 2024, oil on canvas, 140 x 205 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, purchased with the generous support of Hatch (2025.44). [9] Tom Thomson, *Beech Grove*, 1916, oil on wood panel adhered to plywood, 21.6 x 26.5 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of the Founders, Robert and Signe McMichael (1966.16.7). [10] Margaux Williamson, *Meeting Place*, 2021, oil on canvas, 157.5 x 228.6 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of W. Bruce C. Bailey in Honour of Katia and John Biancini (2024.7). [11] F.H. Varley, *Moonlight at Lynn*, c.1934, oil on canvas, 61 x 76.4 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, bequest of the C.S. Band Estate (1969.24.1). [12] Laur P, *Mine the catatonic backdrop*, 2025, oil on canvas over panel, 91 x 122 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, purchased with the support of the Demetriou Art Group (2025.50). [13] A.J. Casson, *White Pine*, c.1957, oil on canvas, 76 x 101.3 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of the Founders, Robert and Signe McMichael (1966.16.19). [14] Brenda Draney, *Casson's Monster*, 2019, oil on canvas, 24.4 x 15.2 cm. Private collection. [15] Elizabeth Nutaraaluk Aulatjut, *untitled (woman's head)*, c.1988, stone, caribou antler, 27.9 x 25.4 x 5.7 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, purchased with the generous support of The Dr. Michael Braudo Fund of the McMichael Canadian Art Foundation (2025.24). [16] Dana Claxton, *Stones 3*, 2000, printed 2021, ink-jet print on paper, 101.6 x 152.4 cm; framed: 105.4 x 156.2 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Canada, gift of the artist (2024.16.3).