ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

OCTOBER 2, 2026

ART, TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

Gerald McMaster's landmark publication on Indigenous testimony in the aftermath of Canada's residential schools.

Gerald McMaster

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released ninety-four Calls to Action, profoundly reshaping the national conversation about the legacy of Canada's residential school system. But no comprehensive work has examined how Indigenous artists have responded to this history—until now.

The Art Canada Institute proudly announces our newest release, *Art, Truth & Reconciliation: Indigenous Testimony in the Aftermath of Canada's Residential Schools* by nêhiyaw (Plains Cree) curator and scholar and citizen of the Siksika Nation Gerald McMaster. Spanning generations and exploring the experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children who attended residential schools, the book brings together the work of more than seventy Indigenous artists, including drawings made by children in the schools, works by artists who experienced the schools first-hand, and pieces by contemporary creators reckoning with this history today. Contributors include Carl Beam, Christi Belcourt, Rebecca Belmore, Kent Monkman, Allen Sapp, Adrian Stimson, and many more.

McMaster's book went live on our website—in a paywall free, open-access format, available in English and French—on Tuesday to mark Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The groundbreaking publication reveals how art can bear witness to histories of dispossession. In the context of Canada's ongoing work on this topic, *Art, Truth & Reconciliation* presents a powerful folio of creativity that speaks to one of the country's most profound and pressing issues. It allows us to both reflect upon a history shaped by unequal systems of knowledge and move towards a more equitable and just future.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

Children at Kamloops Indian Residential School, 1937, photographer unknown, Archives Deschâtelets-NDC, Fonds Deschâtelets.

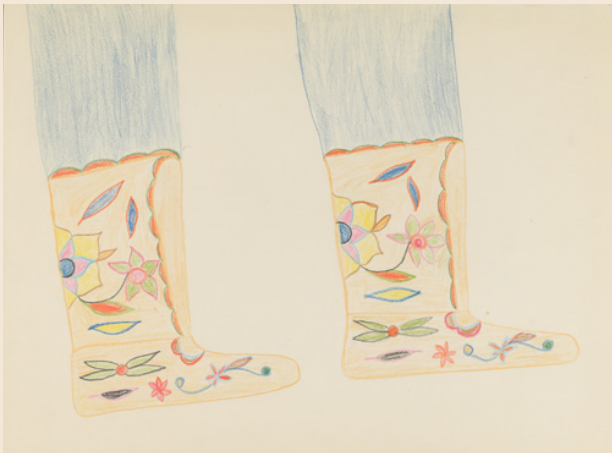
Canada's residential school system, a central instrument of the state's broader policies of assimilation, was intended to separate Indigenous children from their families and communities and suppress their languages, cultures, and identities. For more than a century, generations of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in 130 institutions across the country as part of this assimilation policy. Photographs and other archival records of the residential school system must therefore be examined critically, with attention to who created them, what they were intended to document, and who is left unseen.

Learn more

DRAWINGS, N.D.

by once-known Stoney Nakoda children

Once-known Stoney Nakoda child at Morley Residential School, untitled drawing, n.d., Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.



Once-known Stoney Nakoda child at Morley Residential School, untitled drawing, n.d., Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Despite the suppression of Indigenous languages and creative practices, children at residential schools still found ways to express their experiences, memories, observations, and imaginations through art. These works are important historical records and forms of testimony that can complicate or counter institutional records, preserving perspectives that might otherwise be absent—even when identifying information about their creators has been lost.

Learn more

RECESS AT ONION LAKE SCHOOL, 1988

by Allen Sapp

Allen Sapp, *Recess at Onion Lake School*, 1988, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina.

In *Recess at Onion Lake School*, 1988, Plains Cree artist Allen Sapp (1928–2015) depicts an ordinary moment of children playing at recess. As McMaster observes, "His representation of thin arms and block facades reads less as topographic fact than as sensation: how a child's body felt inside an overlarge, ordered space." Sapp's work preserves an Indigenous perspective that is largely absent from official institutional records. In doing so, it offers a view of lived experience that differs from the official history those records were created to document.

Learn more

SICK AND TIRED, 2006

by Adrian Stimson

Adrian Stimson, *Sick and Tired*, 2006, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina.

Girls praying on their beds at Old Sun Residential School, 1952, photographer unknown, Anglican Church of Canada.

Interdisciplinary artist Adrian Stimson (b.1964) incorporates windows and an infirmary bed from his former residential school into *Sick and Tired*, 2006. In this way, he brings Old Sun Residential School's material history into the present. Shown alongside a 1952 photograph of girls praying in the Old Sun dormitory, the work connects the routines imposed on children to the institutional spaces in which they lived, learned, and were disciplined. *Sick and Tired* transforms materials from the school into a work of memory, testimony, and reclamation.

Learn more

FORCED IDEAS IN SCHOOL DAYS, 1991

by Carl Beam

Carl Beam, *Forced Ideas in School Days*, 1991, Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.

In *Forced Ideas in School Days*, 1991, Anishinaabe artist Carl Beam (1943–2005) uses photographic and archival imagery to question whose version of history is preserved and treated as authoritative. The title points to assimilation as a process through which Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of understanding the world were displaced. Beam, who attended Garnier School, a Jesuit residential school in Spanish, Ontario, juxtaposes colonial religious imagery with a photograph of Indigenous children, adding handwritten annotations that challenge the authority of the archival material by inserting his own voice. In this way, he prompts viewers to question how Indigenous people and knowledge have been represented in educational institutions.

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SISTERS, 1993

by Faye HeavyShield

Faye HeavyShield, *Sisters*, 1993, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

A circle of shoes evokes absence while also suggesting memory, loss, and family bonds. Without depicting residential school violence literally, Faye HeavyShield (b.1953) shifts attention from the institution itself to the ways the separation of Indigenous children from their families disrupted those relationships. As McMaster writes, “Because the shoes face outward, the ring reads as watchful; the sisters guard one another against forces that once entered the circle to harm: church, state, and assimilation.” HeavyShield, who attended St. Mary’s Residential School in Cardston, Alberta, uses repetition and absence to create a powerful form of collective remembrance and reflect on the enduring intergenerational consequences of that separation.

Learn more

APPARITION, 2013

by Rebecca Belmore

Rebecca Belmore, *Apparition*, 2013, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Duct tape covers the mouth of Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore (b.1960) in *Apparition*, 2013, creating a powerful image of silence in the face of colonial violence. By placing her own body before the viewer, Belmore transforms silence into testimony, suggesting that what has been suppressed does not disappear but remains embodied and demands to be witnessed. This video performance becomes an act of resistance, bringing experiences excluded from dominant Canadian narratives into public view and asserting the continued presence of Indigenous voices.

Learn more

HIS FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL AND HER FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, 2013

by Dionne Paul

Dionne Paul, *His First Day of School*, 2013, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Dionne Paul, *Her First Day of School*, 2013, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Dionne Paul uses photographs of her own children to bring residential school history into the present generation in *His First Day of School* and *Her First Day*

of School, both 2013. The emotional milestone of a child's first school day is placed in conflict with the visual associations between the children's clothing and the historical photographs of Indigenous children taken at residential schools. This deliberate collapse of past and present asks viewers to consider what has been lost to and inherited across generations.

Learn more

NATIONAL PASTIMES, 1991

by Jim Logan

Jim Logan, *National Pastimes*, 1991, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Gatineau.

In *National Pastimes*, 1991, Métis painter Jim Logan (b.1955)—one of the first contemporary artists to produce work about the residential school system—depicts a lively winter hockey game set against the ominous presence of an imposing red school building. The familiar scene of hockey as a Canadian pastime is unsettled by the cross-capped school at the edge of the image, bringing national tradition into the same frame as the colonial policies that profoundly impacted Indigenous families. The bright colours and graphic imagery challenge a simplified national narrative by making residential schools part of Canada's story.

Learn more

THE SCREAM, 2017

by Kent Monkman

Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2017, Denver Art Museum.

In *The Scream*, 2017, Cree artist Kent Monkman (b.1965) depicts the forced removal of Indigenous children, evoking residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and other colonial policies that separated children from their families and cultural heritage. The title references Edvard Munch's iconic 1893 painting, but while Munch's figure responds to an undefined terror, Monkman makes the source of the anguish unmistakable. Drawing on European history painting, Monkman gives Indigenous experiences emotional weight and monumental scale while placing colonial authorities under scrutiny.

Learn more

RECONCILIATION POLE: HONOURING A TIME BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CANADA'S INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, 2015–17

by 7IDANsuu James Hart

7IDANsuu James Hart, *Reconciliation Pole: Honouring a Time Before, During and After Canada's Indian Residential Schools*, 2015–17, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Reconciliation Pole: Honouring a Time Before, During and After Canada's Residential Schools, 2015–17, by Haida artist 7IDANsuu James Hart (b.1946), honours the children and families affected by the residential school system while situating that history within a much longer continuum of Haida culture, knowledge, and survival. By naming a time before residential schools, the pole affirms that Indigenous histories and cultures cannot be defined by colonialism alone. The pole emphasizes that reconciliation must begin with acknowledging what happened and recognizing that it is not a completed historical event but an ongoing responsibility.

Learn more

About the Author of *Art, Truth & Reconciliation*

Gerald McMaster

Gerald McMaster is a curator, artist, author, and scholar with more than four decades of international experience in contemporary art, critical theory, museology, and Indigenous aesthetics. McMaster has played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual and curatorial landscape of contemporary Indigenous art through his sustained advocacy for Indigenous representation. He has curated numerous landmark exhibitions, including *Indigena* (1992), *First American Art* (2004), *Inuit Modern* (2010), *Postcommodity* (2021), and *Arctic/Amazon: Networks of Global Indigeneity* (2022). His international leadership includes serving as curator of the Canada Pavilion at the 1995 Venice Biennale, artistic director of the 2012 Biennale of Sydney, and curator of the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. A citizen of the Siksika Nation and of Plains Cree heritage, he has dedicated his career to advancing Indigenous art and thought on a global stage.

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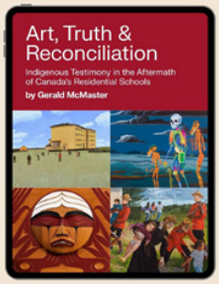

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Image Credits: [Lead images] *Top left:* Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun Lets'lo:steltun*, Indian Residential School, Leaving the Shallow Graves and Going Home*, 2022, private collection. *Top right:* Allen Sapp, *Recess at Onion Lake School*, 1988. Bottom right: Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2017. *Bottom left:* Luke Marston, *Bentwood Box*, 2009, wood (red cedar) shell, 67.3 x 96.5 x 50.8 cm, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. **[1]** Children at Kamloops Indian Residential School, 1937. Photographer unknown. Collection of Archives Deschâtelets-NDC, Richelieu, Fonds Deschâtelets. Courtesy of National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. **[2]** Once-known Stoney Nakoda child at Morley Residential School, untitled drawing, n.d., pencil crayon on paper, 23 x 19 cm. Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (537/19 g). Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology. Photo credit: Jessica Bushey. **[3]** Once-known Stoney Nakoda child at Morley Residential School, untitled drawing, n.d., pencil crayon on paper, 31 x 23 cm. Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (537/19 g). Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology. Photo credit: Jessica Bushey. **[4]** Allen Sapp, *Recess at Onion Lake School*, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 76.2 cm. Collection of MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina (2018-002). Courtesy of MacKenzie Art Gallery. © Estate of Allen Sapp. Photo credit: Don Hall. **[5]** Adrian Stimson, *Sick and Tired*, 2006, windows and infirmary bed from Old Sun Residential School, feathers, fluorescent lights, bison robe, dimensions variable. Installation view in the exhibition *Adrian Stimson: Maanipokaa'iini*, 2022, Remai Modern, Saskatoon. Collection of MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina. Courtesy of Adrian Stimson. © Adrian Stimson. Photo credit: Blain Campbell. **[6]** Girls praying on their beds at Old Sun Residential School, 1952. Photographer unknown. Collection of General Synod Archives, Toronto, Anglican Church of Canada (P8471-11). Courtesy of General Synod Archives. **[7]** Carl Beam, *Forced Ideas in School Days*, 1991, photo emulsion and ink on paper, 94 x 74 cm. Collection of Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa. Courtesy of Canada Council Art Bank. © Estate of Carl and Ann Beam / CARCC Ottawa 2026. Photo credit: Brandon Clarida Image Services. **[8]** Faye HeavyShield, *Sisters*, 1993, shoes altered with plaster, gesso, and acrylic paint, outside diameter installed: 105 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, purchase 1995 (1995.2.A-.L). Courtesy of McMichael Canadian Art Collection. © Faye HeavyShield. **[9]** Rebecca Belmore, *Apparition*, 2013, video installation on painted wall, 2 min. 50 sec. Collection of Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, gift of the artist, 2016. Courtesy of Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. © Rebecca Belmore. Photo credit: Michael R. Barrick. **[10]** Dionne Paul, *His First Day of School*, 2013, photograph on paper, 91.7 x 61 cm. Collection of Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (3043/1). Courtesy of Dionne Paul. © Dionne Paul. **[10]** Dionne Paul, *Her First Day of School*, 2013, photograph on paper, 91.7 x 61 cm. Collection of Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (3043/2). Courtesy of Dionne Paul. © Dionne Paul. **[12]** Jim Logan, *National Pastimes*, 1991, acrylic on canvas, 122 x 183.2 cm. Collection of Indigenous Art Centre, Crown–Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Gatineau. Courtesy of Indigenous Art Centre, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. © Jim Logan. **[13]** Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 213.4 x 335.3 cm. Collection of Denver Art Museum, Native Arts acquisition funds, purchased with funds from Loren G. Lipson, M.D. (2017.93). Courtesy of Kent Monkman Studio. © Kent Monkman. Photo credit: Kent Monkman Studio. **[14]** 7IDANsuu James Hart, *Reconciliation Pole: Honouring a Time Before, During and After Canada's Indian Residential Schools*, 2015–17, red and yellow cedar, paint, copper, abalone, 1516 x 147 x 147 cm; (*base*) Kayám̓ Richard Campbell and 7IDANsuu James Hart, *θəʔit (Truth),* 2023, bronze, 485 x 485 cm. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, commissioned with support from the Audain Foundation and UBC's Infrastructure Impact Charges. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography.