ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

OCTOBER 9, 2026

ANNOUNCING THE WINNERS OF THE 2026 CANADIAN ART INSPIRATION STUDENT CHALLENGE COMING SOON TO ART TORONTO

Here are the winning works from Canada's leading art contest for students. Come see them for yourself at our booth at the Art Toronto fair from October 30 to November 1.

What does Canada look like to you? Which landscapes, memories, traditions, symbols, and communities shape your sense of belonging? For the sixth annual Canadian Art Inspiration Student Challenge, we invited students across the country to answer these questions in response to this year's theme, "Canada through My Eyes." In this newsletter, we're featuring the winners and runners-up and sharing their unique perspectives on this country.

Since 2020, the Art Canada Institute has asked students to create original artworks inspired by this nation's greatest artists. Their incredible creations take their cues from works featured in ACI's Canadian Online Art Book Project and K–12 Art Education Program. This year, we received almost five hundred submissions from students in grades 7 through 12 across the country. With remarkable imagination and insight, they created works responding to the art of William Kurelek, Zachari Logan, Meryl McMaster, Norval Morrisseau, Annie Pootoogook, and others. Their submissions celebrate family traditions, cultural diversity, and the beauty of Canada's landscapes while also engaging with contemporary concerns ranging from environmental change to emerging technologies.

The students' entries were adjudicated by curators Emma Hassencahl-Perley (Beaverbrook Art Gallery) and Sarah Milroy (McMichael Canadian Art Collection) and artist Ken Lum. At the end of the month, we will bring these works to Art Toronto, Canada's largest art fair, where they will be exhibited alongside the pieces that inspired them.

We hope you enjoy the art below, which offers a vivid portrait of Canada seen through the eyes of a new generation, and we hope you'll join us at Art Toronto to celebrate the students and their creativity.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

View our online exhibition
to see all of the winning works

Judges of the 2026 Canadian Art Inspiration Student Challenge

Emma Hassencahl-Perley

Sarah Milroy

Ken Lum

First-Place Winner, Grades 7–9

TOMBSTONE MOUNTAINS

by Farrow MacDougall

Inspiration

Annie Pootoogook, *Family Camping on the Land*, 2001–2, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

Student Artwork

Farrow MacDougall, *Tombstone Mountains*, 2026, watercolour and pencil crayon on paper, 60.9 x 45.7 cm.

"My piece is a pencil-and-watercolour painting of the Tombstone Mountains in the Yukon. The colours I chose are more exaggerated than real life, making the landscape pop. In the bottom corner, I drew a bear because I think it fits the solitary and calm atmosphere of the scene. I was inspired by Annie Pootoogook's *Family Camping on the Land*. The layering behind the tent and the soft pencil colouring informed my technique. I created similar layers in my work and used pencil edging to make the base paint coat stand out."

—Farrow MacDougall (Grade 9, Robert Service School, Dawson City, Yukon)

Born in Kinngait (Cape Dorset), artist Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) depicted her northern community in unprecedented ways, creating works that earned her national and international recognition.

Learn more in ACI's *Annie Pootoogook: Life & Work*

Honourable Mention, Grades 7–9

THE TASTE OF CANADA

by Sarah Mao

Inspiration

Student Artwork

Mary Pratt, *Another Province of Canada*, 1978, The Rooms, St. John's.

Sarah Mao, *The Taste of Canada*, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 41 x 30 cm.

"In my piece, I explore a Canadian activity: making and enjoying maple syrup. I chose to represent this tradition through a more personal lens by depicting a younger version of myself sharing the experience with a friend. Like Pratt, I pay close attention to small details, such as the texture and shine of the syrup candy. I show its translucency and how light reflects off its glossy surface to make it resemble glass. My artwork shows how traditions like making maple syrup are more than just a Canadian pastime. They are memories and experiences that bring people of different cultures together."

—Sarah Mao (Grade 9, St. Theresa of Lisieux Catholic High School, Vaughan, Ontario)

Painter Mary Pratt (1935–2018) was a virtuoso observer of the everyday, depicting domestic scenes, often featuring friends and family members, with near-photographic detail and compelling complexity.

Learn more in ACI's *Mary Pratt: Life & Work*

Honourable Mention, Grades 7–9

FROM NORTH TO NEW HORIZONS

by Tiara Naka-Reynolds

Inspiration

Christopher Pratt, *On Water Street—Sunlit*, 1988, The Rooms, St. John's, Newfoundland.

Student Artwork

Tiara Naka-Reynolds, *From North to New Horizons*, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm.

"My painting shows a Canadian symbol, the moose, in an imagined quiet seaside train station. It stands out in this Japanese setting, creating a slightly unexpected yet peaceful scene. I was inspired by Christopher Pratt's *On Water Street—Sunlit*. The stillness and simplicity of his work reminded me of a train platform. I also used soft sunlight to create a calm and quiet environment. The ocean in the background represents how different places are connected, reflecting cultural diversity, an important part of Canada's identity. I have both Japanese and Canadian roots and live in Newfoundland. This artwork reflects who I am and my interests in combining different elements from my cultural background into one scene."

—Tiara Naka-Reynolds (Grade 9, St. Paul's Junior High School, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador)

Christopher Pratt (1935–2022) was a prolific painter and printmaker known for his meticulously designed and carefully rendered depictions of landscapes, architecture, and everyday life in Newfoundland and Labrador.

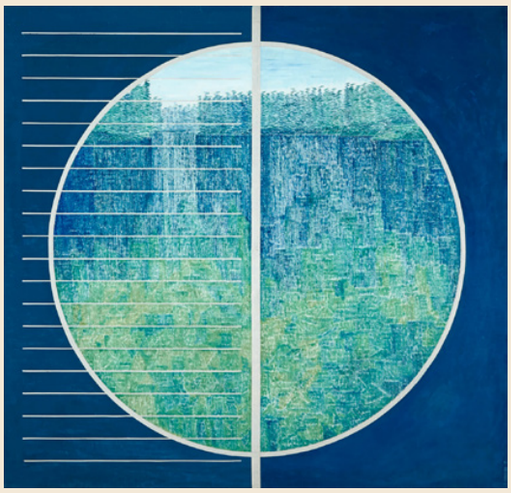
Learn more in ACI's *Christopher Pratt: Life & Work*

Honourable Mention, Grades 7–9

NYCHTHEMERON MOUNTAINS

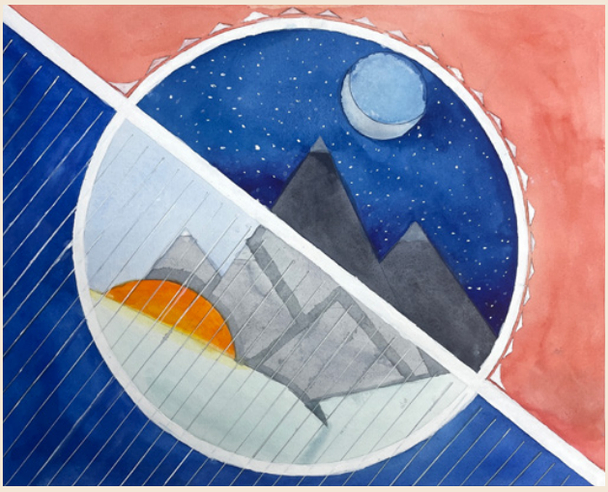
by Ziyu Wang

Inspiration



Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspended Landscape*, 1969, private collection.

Student Artwork



Ziyu Wang, *Nychthemeron Mountains*, 2026, watercolor on paper, 40.6 x 50.8 cm.

"My artwork is about Canada and how different elements of nature come together in one drawing. Inspired by Kazuo Nakamura's *Suspended Landscape*, I used a circle divided into two parts to represent the beauty of Canada's natural landscapes in both the day and the night, which is why I titled my piece *Nychthemeron Mountains*."

—Ziyu Wang (Grade 7, Dadi Studios, Montreal, Quebec)

Kazuo Nakamura (1926–2002) was a Japanese Canadian painter and sculptor and a co-founder of Painters Eleven, an influential collective of abstract artists. Nakamura created minimalist landscapes and introspective abstract compositions inspired by science, math, and nature.

Learn more in ACI's *Kazuo Nakamura: Life & Work*

Honourable Mention, Grades 7–9

THE BEAUTY OF CANADA

by Hyeyul Kim

Inspiration

Tom Thomson, *The Pointers*, 1916–17, Hart House Permanent Collection, University of Toronto.

Student Artwork

Hyeyul Kim, *The Beauty of Canada*, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 35.6 x 27.9 cm.

"This painting is set in Bon Echo, a famous camping location that my family has visited. To remember those special trips, I made a painting of my dad, my brother, and me in a kayak. It shows us on a calm lake surrounded by nature. The forest stretches across the landscape, and my family in the boat is admiring the view. I believe part of what makes Canada special is its natural beauty. Each of us was either born in Canada or came from another country, and we are here together, forming a community. My artwork was inspired by Tom Thomson because he painted Canadian landscapes and used colours to help highlight how beautiful Canada really is."

—Hyeyul Kim (Grade 7, Ana Vatres Studio, Kitchener, Ontario)

Though his promising career was cut short, Tom Thomson (1877–1917) left an indelible mark on Canada's landscape tradition. His bold, expressive paintings of Ontario's Algonquin Park have come to define a visual identity widely considered distinctly Canadian.

Learn more in Art Canada's *Tom Thomson: Life & Work*

First-Place Winner, Grades 10–12

THE QUIET OBSERVER

by Clementine Sweet Pea Beaulieu

Inspiration

Student Artwork

Meryl McMaster, *Anima*, 2012.

Clementine Sweet Pea Beaulieu, *The Quiet Observer*, 2026, acrylic and coloured pencils on wood panel, 50.8 x 50.8 cm.

"This self-portrait explores identity through an ethereal, dreamlike lens. I reference my Métis and Polish heritage through the woven border and the beaded earrings, which reflect the colours of the Métis sash and Polish folk art. As I begin to understand these parts of myself, the painting becomes an act of both inward reflection and outward observation. The luna moth covering one eye symbolizes subtle personal inner growth, while the other eye engages the viewer, suggesting awareness of the world beyond. This work expresses my belief that being Canadian means embracing and exploring multiple heritages, allowing me to better understand who I am becoming."

—Clementine Sweet Pea Beaulieu (Grade 11, Newtonville, Ontario)

Meryl McMaster (b.1988) is an acclaimed photo-based artist whose works often explore constructions of identity in relation to the land and the more-than-human world. Using elaborate props, garments, and performative elements, McMaster creates richly staged self-portraits that blur boundaries between reality and imagination.

Learn more

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Honourable Mention, Grades 10–12

WINTERS OF YESTERDAY

by Luca Bourdos

Inspiration

William Kurelek, *Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Student Artwork

Luca Bourdos, *Winters of Yesterday*, 2026, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 40.6 cm.

"Inspired by William Kurelek's *Reminiscences of Youth*, a unique nostalgic image in which he shows himself observing the reconstruction of his own memories, *Winters of Yesterday* depicts my own childhood reminiscence of my favourite Canadian winter pastime: tobogganing in the snow. Featuring my childhood self at school on a snowy December day, the painting presents my dreamlike point of view, projecting this nostalgic memory onto a screen at the front of a classroom. With this piece, I showcase that the way Canadian children enjoy the winter season has not changed and resonates in the hearts of many Canadians."

—Luca Bourdos (Grade 10, St. Basil-the-Great College School, Toronto, Ontario)

Ukrainian Canadian artist William Kurelek (1927–1977) created numerous paintings inspired by his childhood and early adulthood in Alberta and Manitoba. His memory paintings are arguably his best-known body of work.

Learn more in ACI's *William Kurelek: Life & Work*

Honourable Mention, Grades 10–12

WATER WAYS

by Qing Yang (Olivia) Cheng

Inspiration

Student Artwork

Zachari Logan, *Leshy No. 2*, 2016, private collection.

Qing Yang (Olivia) Cheng, *Water Ways*, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 30.5 x 40.6 cm.

"Zachari Logan's *Leshy No. 2* weaves together flesh and nature to communicate how identity, particularly queer identity, transcends binary boundaries. Inspired by this hybridity and metaphor, I painted a reflective self-portrait that expresses youth as an ambiguous period of self-discovery. The figure's human qualities are fused with native plants and waters, producing an allegorical entity whose elemental diversity mirrors the complexity of identity formation. The figure's wild, water-like core represents the uncertainty and inner turmoil that accompany self-discovery. In visualizing the fluidity of self-discovery, I invite viewers to see their reflections in the liminal waters and consider how place-based Canadian identities are created."

—Qing Yang (Olivia) Cheng (Grade 11, Havergal College, Toronto, Ontario)

Zachari Logan (b.1980) is a nationally and internationally acclaimed contemporary artist based in Regina. Working across a range of media, including drawing, ceramics, and installation, he explores themes of masculinity, identity, and belonging.

Learn more

Honourable Mention, Grades 10–12

NORVAL MORRISSEAU AT WORK

by Memoria Fiddler

Inspiration

Student Artwork

Norval Morrisseau, *Self-Portrait*, 1975, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

Memoria Fiddler, *Norval Morrisseau at Work*, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 45.7 x 60.9 cm.

"I enjoy creating portraits of people who inspire me. I chose to paint Norval Morrisseau because he is a famous Indigenous artist who has influenced not only me but many other artists too. His paintings encourage controversy and highlight Indigenous storytelling. I feel connected to him in community and culture. His paintings make me feel seen and proud of who I am."

—Memoria Fiddler (Grade 12, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, Thunder Bay, Ontario)

Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007) was celebrated as the "Picasso of the North." His paintings blended Indigenous oral traditions and iconography with vibrant, colourful modern aesthetics.

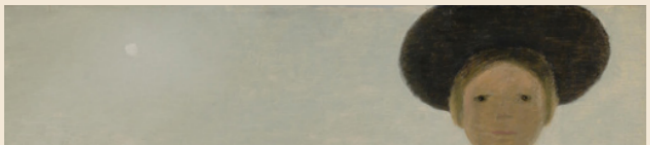
Learn more in ACI's *Norval Morrisseau: Life & Work*

Honourable Mention, Grades 10–12

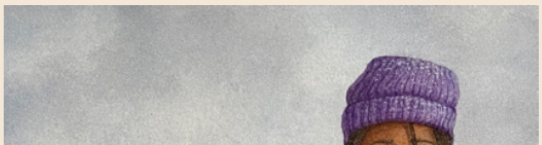
DRIVEN SNOW

by Lamias Sharshar

Inspiration



Student Artwork



Jean Paul Lemieux, *Julie and the Universe* (*Julie et l'univers*), 1965, Pierre Lassonde Collection.

Lamias Sharshar, *Driven Snow*, 2026, watercolour and pencil crayon on paper, 21.5 x 24 cm.

"As a child, my emotions were always amplified by the smallest things. My mother's refusing to play in the snow with me during a –30°C Calgary winter day caused me dejection so great that in my mind, I would never again ask her to indulge me in that way. As a Sudanese immigrant to Canada, she didn't see the snow as I did. To me, it was a canvas to project my own universes onto; to her, the snow was an obstacle nipping at her heels during her commute to work. Jean Paul Lemieux's painting, to me, represents a similar childhood melancholy and reflects the emotions a landscape—even one as simple as my own backyard—can evoke."

—Lamias Sharshar (Grade 12, Lester B. Pearson High School, Calgary, Alberta)

Considered one of the most significant artists of Canadian modernity, painter Jean Paul Lemieux (1904–1990) was known for his unembellished figurative depictions of the human condition.

Learn more in ACI's *Jean Paul Lemieux: Life & Work*

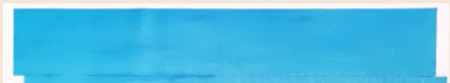
Honourable Mention, Grades 10–12

PARASITE ON THE PRAIRIES

by Wren Dreher

Inspiration

Student Artwork



David Thauberger, *Harvest Sunrise*, 2014, private collection, courtesy of Slate Fine Art Gallery, Regina.

Wren Dreher, *Parasite on the Prairies*, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 40.6 x 48.3 cm.

"David Thauberger is known for his colourful and surreal depictions of the prairies. *Harvest Sunrise* portrays an unsettling feeling of perpetual space, the field expanding until it meets the pure blue sky. The still and artificial feeling of his work inspired me to create a piece that bridges the land of the living skies with artificial intelligence. With a new data centre being approved just outside of Regina, the threats to Canadian art and wildlife are becoming increasingly urgent. I wanted to express the fear I feel about our diminishing prairies through a landscape painting that glitches. As AI quickly advances and leaks its way into the artistic community, my work acts as a warning."

—Wren Dreher (Grade 11, Dr. Martin LeBoldus Catholic High School, Regina, Saskatchewan)

Multidisciplinary painter, printmaker, and ceramist David Thauberger (1948–2026) was celebrated for his flat, colourful landscapes depicting the iconic architecture and vast horizons of Canada's prairies.

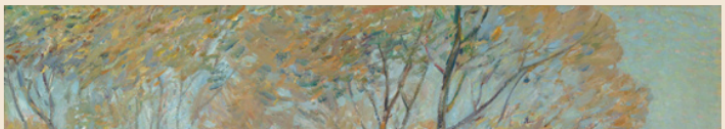
Learn more

Honourable Mention, Grades 10–12

6 DAYS—ORANGE

by Jack Wang

Inspiration



Student Artwork

Helen McNicoll, *Sunny September*, 1913, Pierre Lassonde Collection.

Jack Wang, *6 Days—Orange*, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 45.7 x 61 cm.

"This painting captures a memory from a family trip to Lake Superior in autumn. Although I was surrounded by my family, I felt lonely and directionless, thinking about how short life can be and how uncertain love often feels. While my younger sister collected stones along the shore, I walked alone on the pebbled beach with those thoughts in my mind. What I remember most is that everything was orange—the sky, the water, the light on my grandfather. That warmth did not erase my sadness, but it softened it. In that silence, my worries became quieter. I was inspired by Helen McNicoll. Her textured brushwork influenced my own use of visible strokes to create atmosphere."

—Jack Wang (Grade 10, Thomas A. Blakelock High School, Oakville, Ontario)

One of this country's most prolific artists, Helen McNicoll (1879–1915) garnered acclaim for her bright and sunny representations of rural landscapes, child subjects, and modern female figures—works that helped popularize Impressionism in Canada.

Learn more in ACI's
Helen McNicoll: Life & Work

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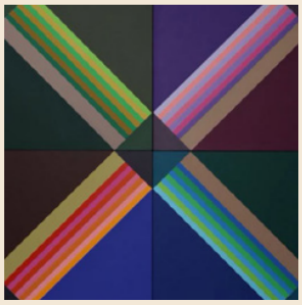

Image Credits: **[1]** Annie Pootoogook, *Family Camping on the Land*, 2001–2, coloured pencil and felt tip pen on paper, 50.8 x 66.2 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. **[2]** Mary Pratt, *Another Province of Canada*, 1978, oil on Masonite, 91.4 x 69.8 cm. Memorial University of Newfoundland Collection, The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery, St. John's. **[3]** Christopher Pratt, *On Water Street—Sunlit*, 1988, lithograph, 33.2 x 66.3 cm. The Rooms, St John's, Newfoundland. **[4]** Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspended Landscape*, 1969, oil on canvas, 109.2 x 114.3 cm. Private collection. **[5]** Tom Thomson, *The Pointers*, 1916–17, oil on canvas, 101 x 114.6 cm. Hart House Permanent Collection, University of Toronto. **[6]** Meryl McMaster, *Anima*, 2012, digital chromogenic print, 91.4 x 91.4 cm. **[7]** William Kurelek, *Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968, mixed media on hardboard, 125.1 x 149.5 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. **[8]** Zachari Logan, *Leshy No. 2*, from Natural Drag Series, 2016, pastel on black paper, 149.8 x 190.5 cm. Private collection, California. **[9]** Norval Morrisseau, *Self-Portrait*, 1975, acrylic on hardboard, 100 x 80 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg. **[10]** Jean Paul Lemieux, *Julie and the Universe* (*Julie et l'univers*), 1965, oil on canvas, 104 x 142.5 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection. **[11]** David Thauberger, *Harvest Sunrise*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm. Private collection, courtesy of Slate Fine Art Gallery, Regina. **[12]** Helen McNicoll, *Sunny September*, 1913, oil on canvas, 92 x 107.5 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection.