

Canadian art galleries to explore new ideas from their own vaults

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If life gives you lemons, make a virtue of necessity and sew a silk purse from a sow's ear. Both COVID and climate considerations have called into question the wisdom of flying crates of expensive art around the globe – or trucking them across the continent. Instead of relying on international touring shows or high-level loans, many Canadian art museums are busy making lemonade with their permanent collections, finding new shows and new ideas right there in their own vaults.

The Art Gallery of Alberta is the leader here, with 100th anniversary programming that relies entirely on the work of Albertan artists drawn from the permanent collection. Curators are mounting a string of exhibitions loosely linked by themes of time, the first three currently showing at the Edmonton gallery.

Act 1: Earth to Eternity (to Nov. 3) considers how local artists have segued from landscape to abstraction, both Albertan specialties. Ranging from the celebratory to the denunciatory, Act 2: Landscape to Land Use (to Jan. 19) zeroes in on Albertans' use of nature. Meanwhile, A Lasting

Legacy (to Jan. 5) is a more classic offering, a look at the 1975 gift of 90 Canadian paintings from the Ernest E. Poole Foundation, which forms the core of the gallery's historical collection.

At the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the approach is revisionist: Curators are examining the permanent collection to reveal how categorization can mean colonialization in artworks that depict local flora. Entitled Backyard Florilegium, the show takes a provocative approach to a seemingly innocuous category – landscapes and flower art. With some loans from the University of Manitoba and the St. Boniface Museum, it combines classic botanical art with works by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, and continues to spring 2025.

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection owns a suite of 54 illustrations that artist Clarence Gagnon painted for the 1933 edition of the classic Quebec novel *Maria Chapdelaine*. They are delicate charmers that can only be shown every few years owing to conservation concerns and will be brought out of storage from Nov. 23 through Jan. 26.

Bucking the stay-at-home trend, the McMichael has also been increasingly touring its shows across North America. *Early Days: Indigenous Art* from the McMichael has just concluded a tour of the U.S., and is now moving to Quebec City's Musée National des Beaux Arts, running Oct. 17 to April 21.

The National Gallery of Canada has an impressive collection of historical prints and drawings, dating from the 15th to the 20th century, but you don't often see it: These fragile artworks can't be exposed to light for long. *Gathered Leaves: Discoveries from the Drawings Vault* promises works by Gustav Klimt, Théodore Géricault and Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, among others, and runs from Dec. 6 to April 13.



It's a busy fall on the contemporary art scene, led off by the third instalment of the Toronto Biennial. Taking the title *Precarious Joys* to cover a grab-bag of political and social themes, the 2024 edition will feature a new hub on Lisgar Street in the Queen Street West neighbourhood, as well as 10 other venues. Look for interesting connections between local and international artists. From Sept. 21 to Dec. 1.

The Biennial's new commissions include work from Charles Campbell, a Jamaican-Canadian living in Victoria. For a show at the Power Plant at Harbourfront, he has created what promises to be the largest art work in the Biennial: *How many colours has the sea* is a multimedia installation evoking the Atlantic Ocean and the souls who perished there during the Middle Passage of the slave trade.

Power Plant's fall programming also features a first Canadian show for Swedish artist Lap-See Lam. *Floating Sea Palace* is a film about the exoticization of Chiniserie and other themes of the Cantonese diaspora shot in the ruins of a real floating restaurant. From Sept. 21 to March 2.

Camille Turner's major solo show at the University of Toronto Art Centre also considers Canadian connections to the Atlantic slave trade with film and installation work. From Sept. 4 to March 22.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto has already opened its fall shows. On the ground floor, there is newly commissioned work from Vancouver's Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, the artist who invented the Haida manga genre, creating comics in the Japanese style that feature Northwest Coast stories and imagery. Upstairs, Venezuelan American artist Alex Da Corte repurposes pop-culture imagery, including the Pink Panther, Mr. Rogers and Robin Hood, to surreal effect in a series of 57 short films. Tishan Hsu, a New York artist with a background in computing, considers the relationship between the digital and our bodies, wrapping parts of the MOCA building in a screen-based vinyl wallpaper. To Jan. 26.

There is also lots of activity across the country.

Paola Pivi, an Italian artist who lives in Hawaii, has filled walls with bright new shoes, put cartoon masks on a Statue of Liberty and created life-size dancing polar bears with feathered coats in hot colours. For a show entitled *Come Check It Out* at Contemporary Calgary, the artist will be creating five new Canadian-made bears using turkey feathers. Their cheerful fur and acrobatic postures are intended as testament to the species' resilience in the face of climate change. From Oct. 3 to March 2.

The Remail Modern's show devoted to the work of the French artist Laure Prouvost tours to the Phi Foundation in Montreal where she will adapt it to a new space, spreading it across seven galleries. The artist specializes in surreal and often messy assemblages of the organic, the crafted and the found object. This time, she is celebrating her ancestors and intellectual forebearers. Nov. 1 to March 9.

And, this month offers the last chance to catch *Rogue Planet*, by the duo known as Hedda Roman, at the Oakville Galleries, closing Sept. 28. Hedda Schattanik and Roman Szczesny are German artists deeply engaged with AI, training it to create a lush, fantastical and sometimes grotesque mix of still and moving digital images. Some are mounted like paintings on the wall; others play on screens inserted into textile hangings. The imagery, continually morphing faces

and hybridized bodies, riffs on classical sculpture and architecture, lush landscapes and perpetual conflagrations, raise probing questions about both identity and art in the AI age.