



# PUNCTURED LANDSCAPE

CURATOR  
**KEGAN MCFADDEN**



**Kegan McFadden** is a Winnipeg-based writer, curator, and artist whose projects blur the line between cultural research and storytelling. McFadden has organized exhibitions for artist-run, university, and public galleries throughout Canada over the last decade, employing a curatorial method that is purposely subjective, in order to reposition received narratives and highlight alternative approaches to discourse.

Photo : Chlôe Chafe

## FEATURED ARTISTS

**ACE + ADRIAN + AYOT + BEAM + BELMORE +  
DAVIS + FABO + GOULD + HLYNSKY + HOULE +  
LAKE + MACLAURIN + NEEL + OH + STEWART +  
TOD + TOURBIN**

## What do you remember from History class?

When do events in our social consciousness pass from news to something that will be taught to future generations of students? Who decides what merits remembrance? What factors must be present for issues to be indoctrinated? What role has trauma played in shaping Canada's history? What we learn and the way we learn are not mutually exclusive. We need different ways to talk about our histories; we need more voices, more discussion and interpretation, and if art can be a foil to prompt these conversations, then we need more art, too.

Audiences encountering contemporary art in any given exhibition may expect to learn about the pieces on display. However **Punctured Landscape** presents an abridged history lesson. Living memory and place

are the common denominators linking these artworks, more so than ideas of categorization, canonization, or even the fact that they are all from the collection of the Canada Council Art Bank. As such, this is not meant as a comprehensive overview of struggles experienced by Canadians, nor of milestones in the last 60 years; it is a subjective approach to discourse. The artworks in this exhibit are incorporated as punctures in the larger national historical narrative – something that memory leaks through if it is not addressed explicitly. To reposition history as a sieve, through which the dominant narrative is filtered, allows for the conversation of memory to gain another kind of traction. It asks us to reconsider what we think we know, so that we may question how we learn, and so we may adjust our perceptions towards an understanding of experiences.

Can an artist's rendition of a prairie dust storm evoke the hardship felt by David Milgaard who was wrongfully convicted of

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murder and served nearly 30 years for a crime he did not commit? What about the image of a tornado looming large on the horizon as a metaphor for the AIDS pandemic ravaging a community? When does a house cease to represent a home and instead become a signal of confinement? How can the trauma and shame of abuse in organized sport (or other socially sanctioned aspects of life) be represented as anything other than loneliness? The largest mass murder in recorded Canadian history is considered to be the Air India bombing; Can that be represented with a dizzying array of model aircrafts? Is there such a thing as an apolitical landscape?

When looking at an artwork, we are subsumed with the idea of passing knowledge from the artist's hand through the medium to our brain. But what happens when those works are considered as stand-ins for other ideas? Within this selection exists direct references to cultural milestones, such as the October Crisis and the Meech Lake Accord. However, more often than not the exhibition presents curatorial liberties that have been taken so that we may further contemplate social inequities or cultural uprisings, such as the passing of Bill C-150 or the turbulent histories concerning Japanese Canadian Internment or the horrendous treatment by the city of Halifax towards the citizens of Africville.

Whether it is land claims, marginalization, or systemic racism and abuse, the reality of colonization as faced by Canada's Indigenous people plays a significant role in this exhibition. Five works in particular are brought together to spur dialogue concerning the Oka Crisis, the legacy of residential schools, and the racism faced by First Nations and Indigenous people that resulted in them being the final group of citizens given the right to vote as late as 1969 and which cultivated a culture where Indigenous men and women are, respectively, seven and four times more likely to experience violent deaths.

An image of a woman alone in an institutional setting, with her back turned to the viewer, might stand in for misogyny and its fallout throughout history. To be certain, the punctures outlined in this research suggest larger social inequities and some successes as understood in our cultural landscape. There are, however, also personal stories within these struggles, including the more recently publicized accounts of childhood sexual abuse in sport. Alternately, there is the representation of a daydream of what "Canada" could mean to a newcomer, depicting a paper route as the average after school activity for every kid. **Punctured Landscape** begins with a single image – a map of Canada. This is both an accurate representation of the land and a metaphoric "adjustment" meant to signal political and social lines with far-reaching implications.

The year 2017 brings the notion of past, present and futures to mind as we prepare to mark our country's sesquicentennial. **Punctured Landscape** illustrates this milestone by transforming *Âjagemô* into a continuous topography. This is a curatorial gesture inspired by the federal government's recent commitment to welcome Syrian refugees to Canada in addition to the ongoing efforts at decolonizing our society. It recognizes the breadth of this land and its parallel histories. These histories include Indigenous sovereignty and asylum seekers from afar – histories that are marred by strife, but buoyed by the persistence of the land and the diverse stories that make up Canada's cultural landscape and inform who we are as a nation. This exhibition illustrates how the land, a witness to colonization and violence of various kinds, perseveres.

**Punctured Landscape** is a meditation on the Canadian social landscape of living memory. The artworks annotate the struggles present along the journey. Here, certain artworks stand-in for larger social inequities and moments of unrest amid the landscape.

These works, and the moments in our collective, living memory that they represent, are to be understood as punctures. The 17 artworks brought together here ask the viewer to (re)consider their interpretation of history, legacy, and possible outcomes for the future.

K.M.

## Featured artists

Barry Ace  
Robert Adrian  
Pierre Ayot  
Carl Beam  
Rebecca Belmore  
Shane (Mini) Davis  
Andy Fabo  
Trevor Gould  
David Hlynsky  
Robert Houle  
Suzy Lake  
Ruth MacLaurin  
David Neel  
Julie Oh  
Carl Stewart  
Joanne Tod  
Dennis Tourbin

