

Imago Mundi — Great and North

More than 750 contemporary artists
from across Canada, including Inuit and
Indigenous artists from North America



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Imago Mundi — Great and North

02

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Imago Mundi is a unique, global artistic endeavour – a democratic, collective map-in-the-making of human cultures. This groundbreaking project was conceived by Luciano Benetton – founder, along with his siblings, of the leading fashion brand – and realized by 110 curators worldwide. I am delighted to be the project’s curator for Central and Eastern Canada, and lead curator of the Canadian premiere of the exhibition entitled Imago Mundi – Great and North at Onsite Gallery, OCAD University, Toronto. This exhibition groups the four Imago Mundi projects completed in Canada.

My participation was preceded by the work of my colleague, Jennifer Karch Verzè, starting in 2013, when she undertook the monumental task of curating contemporary artists from Western Canada, Inuit artists, and Indigenous artists from Canada and the United States. Karch Verzè’s mission of assembling a collection of traditional and contemporary Inuit artists from northern Labrador to Cape Dorset on Baffin Island was made possible thanks to the collaboration of the Inuit Art Foundation. The work realized by this initiative is an outstanding example of how traditional forms and contemporary modes of expression create a rich and provocative synergy. In Western Canada, Verzè’s selection shows a preference for the figurative, depicting trees, birds, clouds and the imprints of animals, sharing a great closeness to nature and a reverence for magnificent landscapes ranging from the boundless plains to the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. These artists from the western provinces and the North seem to establish an almost sacred bond with the spirit of the land.

■ **Francesca Valente**, Lead Curator

03

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Out of the Bush Garden

Contemporary Artists from Central-Eastern Canada



Andrew Jones, *Sitting Room*, 2015, wood and scaled figures, 10 x 12 cm.

In *Out of the Bush Garden*, my goal has been to present Central and Eastern Canada as an artistic laboratory, highlighting its internationally acknowledged protagonists and at the same time giving a platform to emerging artists. With the insightful and encouraging support of scholar and art critic Peggy Gale, along with other respected critics and curators, my intention was to portray an experimental milieu where disciplines overlap and enrich each other in an intergenerational drive. Participants include visual artists, architects, designers, musicians, filmmakers and writers including Rebecca Belmore, Edward Burtynsky, David Blackwood, Robert Houle, An Te Liu, Joanne Tod, Andrew Jones, Douglas Cardinal, Jack Diamond, Moshe Safdie, Christopher Pratt, Mary Pratt, Michael Snow and Margaret Atwood.

Although Canada's cultural identity is still evolving with a strong and constant influx of immigrants, the country rejected the American "melting pot" model. Northrop Frye, one of the great minds of the twentieth century, suggested in his introduction to *Italy in Canada* – an interdisciplinary festival organized in the 90's by the Italian Cultural Institute– that "the Confederation of 1867 was a romantic and imperialistic conception in biculturalism: English and French. It is now time for the creation of a Reconfederation based on the transfusion of energy from every cultural component." Canada's diversity is its outstanding social feature, and the struggle to achieve meaningful recognition of the varied and often problematic forms of our heritage is key to artistic expression.

Homogeneity, whether cultural or ethnic, is no longer an option in the third millennium, and Canada is one of the chief exemplars of this reality.

In order to capture the cross-cultural fabric of Canada, it was essential to adopt a cross-disciplinary approach. At a time when disciplinary boundaries between various creative practices are dissolving, my intention from the very beginning has been to offer a diversified portrait of the national fabric as experienced through the work of artists active in every possible field. Decorative arts, often under-appreciated, have also been highlighted. In fact, some of the most remarkable and dynamic pieces that give weight to this collection feature such media as ceramics, copper, glass, lead, as well as hand-woven and embroidered textiles. Unorthodox materials such as gold and silver leaf, plant seeds, tree bark, deer hide, sand, porcupine quills and even human hair result in particularly vibrant pieces. All of the artists have been encouraged to capture the spirit of place, either through geographic location or cultural heritage.

This project developed organically over a period of two years, identifying the artists and evaluating their work in the context of the only Imago Mundi requirement: that all work be presented on a 10 x 12 cm canvas. In previous international exhibitions, the Maritimes have been typically restricted to one or two artists per province. Impelled by curiosity and a desire to delve deeper into this boundless country, I became a voyageur and cartographer, testing received wisdom and in the process, adding to the artistic map of Central and Eastern Canada, in particular those eastern-most provinces that are so often overlooked. My guides in this journey of cultural scouting and reconnaissance were museum curators such as Jonathan Shaughnessy, Pan Wendt, Sarah Fillmore, Mireille Eagan, Gemey Kelly, and Patricia Grattan, plus countless gallerists and the artists themselves, who gave me invaluable guidance on the research trail.

I am proud that there is a strong representation from each of the provinces that I was asked to include: from Ontario, the most populated, through Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island to



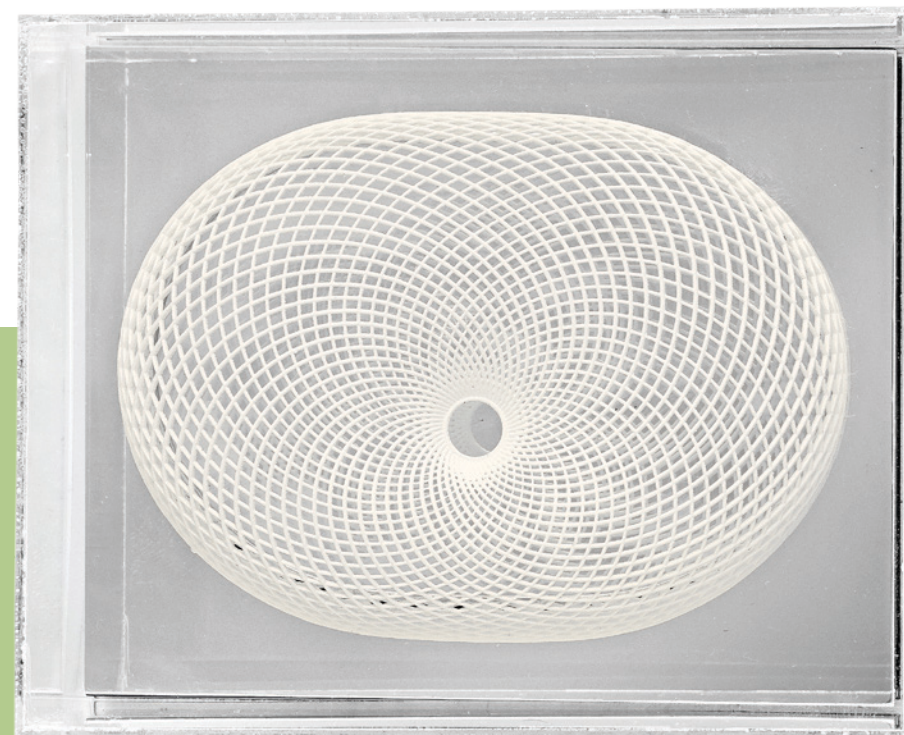
Erin Loree, *Passage*, 2016, oil on canvas, 10 x 12 cm.

Newfoundland and Labrador. Conceptual art is the forte of this area, extending as far as the Atlantic provinces, which, in spite of being at the country's eastern margin, prove to be far from marginal to Canadian and international art.

Painting is usually a two-dimensional art but in the context of Imago Mundi, some works have embraced the expressive potential of the tactile and three-dimensional. Some artists have challenged the tyranny of the canvas with one or more slashes or even by burning it, some by a playful or subtly devious use of perspective, others by excavating the surface or by building a sculptural object. Others proceed by painting both sides and/or treating objets trouvés with great vitality and immediacy. Some works have turned into sculpture and painting at the same time, highly conducive to a 360-degree appreciation of each artwork on the Imago Mundi website. In many cases, the small canvas has become a unique micro universe evoking multiple levels of sensory space, as suggested in Marshall McLuhan's *Through the Vanishing Point*. Some of the works are figurative, exquisitely classic in technique, while others are abstract, setting the artist free from the onus of representation.

Some artists have rewritten parts of Canadian history through the Imago Mundi canvas. Mario Doucette has demystified the romantic vision of the Canadian collective memory for a more accurate interpretation of the Acadians' fate. Architect Jack Diamond has highlighted a little-known page of Canadian history, the Battle of the Atlantic, a turning point in the Second World War when Canadians crucially changed the course of history.

Art forms that were unattainable a few years ago are now featured, including the 3D printed sculptures by Edward Burtynsky, Moshe Safdie and nichola feldman-kiss. In addition to being visually striking, they stand for technological innovation in many fields. Burtynsky's piece in 3D printed gypsum against a backdrop of gold leaf has a strong ethical, ecological message while the work by Catherine Richards, a trailblazing pioneer in art and science, is an image of her unique 1991 Virtual Reality art project. It shows the interior of a VR headset, the first project of its kind in Canada.



Above: Moshe Safdie; *Jewel: Hanging Garden*; 2015; 3D printed acrylic, painted, on mirrored wood base; 10 x 12 cm.

Left: Douglas Cardinal, *Unconcealing the Museum*, 2018, felt-tip pen on vellum, 10 x 12 cm.

Exploring this Imago Mundi collection is like peering into a kaleidoscope filled with precious fragments of text and image in continuous movement. It records traces left by artists of different generations brought, to the same page thanks to the installation by Italian architect Tobia Scarpa. His powerful grid creates similarity in diversity, affirming the democratization of artistic experience and the integration of the most varied traditions of this culturally complex continent. The blank Imago Mundi canvas, photographed by revered conceptual artist Michael Snow, represents an infinite number of possible artistic experiences. It is the perfect metaphor for an empty page to be inscribed, a void that is not a space where nothing exists, but rather the fullness of undefined potential, a doorway to unlimited freedom of expression, present and future.

Francesca Valente, Lead Curator

Imago Mundi – Great and North
Onsite Gallery, OCAD University

Francesca Valente is a cultural mediator, international art curator and translator who has served with distinction as director of several Italian Cultural Institutes in North America for over thirty years. www.francescavalente.com

Above right: An Te Liu, *Obverse Fragment*,
2016, cast bronze, 12 x 10 cm.



Documentary Film – Out of the Bush Garden

*On view at Onsite Gallery as part of Imago Mundi –
Great and North*

Out of the Bush Garden, a documentary directed by Toronto filmmaker Laurie Kwasnik, highlights the artistic map of Central and Eastern Canada. The film follows curator Francesca Valente as she meets various artists at their studios and includes interviews with Michael Snow, Edward Burtynsky, Peter Mettler, Charles Pachter, Suzy Lake, Vera Frenkel, and many others. The works of 220 Canadian artists are presented in a kaleidoscope of painting, mixed media, photography and sculpture as well as architecture, design, literature, cinema and music.



Margaret Atwood; *Author Portrait*; 2016; watercolour crayons, collage materials, stickers, and tape decorated with ants; 10 x 12 cm.



Edward Burtynsky; *El Dorado-Africa*; 2015; 3D printed gypsum, masonite, gold-leaf, metal; 10 x 12 cm.



Rebecca Belmore; *To Leonard*; 2015, collage, 10 x 12 cm.



Jack Diamond; *Battle of the Atlantic 1941-1945*, a 3D Print of Corvette K 181 "Sackville", 2015, 3D print, 10 x 12 cm.

Land of Arctic Ice

Contemporary Inuit Artists

Land of Arctic Ice started in 2013 with an idea by Luciano Benetton, which took more than three years of research, collaborating with the foremost organizations of Inuit art in Canada. This culminated in an extraordinary journey to the Canadian Arctic, where I lived closely with the Inuit people in Baker Lake and Rankin Inlet. Their sculptural and graphic works bear witness to a unique culture in the world.



Alice Akamak, *Beaded Doll*, 2015, carved stone and beads, 12 x 10 cm.

Native Art Visual Visions

Contemporary North American Indigenous Artists

Creating Native Art Visual Visions in 2014 encompassed a year of research, an adventure of 12,000 km in 45 days, through Canada and the United States visiting four geographical areas, eleven American States, two provinces of Canada and eight Indigenous reserves. I held conferences in museums and in Indigenous communities, visiting native art fairs across the continent, meeting and visiting artists in their studios. The 210 works are an outstanding demonstration of Indigenous creativity, experimentation and experience.



Janice Toulouse, *Abstract Indian*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 10 x 12 cm.

Oh West Canada!

Contemporary Artists from Western Canada

Oh West Canada! was a great journey in 2015, of spectacular landscapes through British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, to discover the art of western Canadians. Established names and emerging talents, young and old, women and men, all side by side on the same starting line, from not only the metropolitan cities but also the smaller, very vital and creative communities. More than 240 artists enthusiastically embraced the challenge of elaborating the 10 x 12 cm canvas.

Above right: Andrew Kiss, *Three Sisters*, Canmore, 2015, oil on canvas, 10 x 12 cm.



Jennifer Karch Verzè, Curator: Land of Arctic Ice, Native Art Visual Visions, and Oh West Canada!

Imago Mundi - Great and North

Canadian by birth, Italian acquired, I live and work in Verona, Italy and Toronto, as an international art curator, art educator and artist. Imago Mundi has been part of my life since 2013 with my travels to discover art around the world, culminating in six major collections: Namibia, Indigenous People of North America, Western Canada, Inuit, Nepal and Hawaii. This was not only a great honour, but also a privilege and a challenge.

Imago Mundi Public Events

**Free public events featuring many
of the artists in the exhibition**

Conversations conceived and organized by Francesca Valente

Sunday November 4—2pm

The Intergenerational Path

Moderators: Peggy Gale and Francesca Valente

Informal talks by: Miles Gertler, Erin Loree, Brendon
McNaughton, Henrjeta Mece, Andrew Owen

Wednesday November 14—7pm

Central and Eastern Canada: A Cultural Laboratory

Moderators: Murray Whyte and Francesca Valente

Bonnie Devine, nichola feldman-kiss, Vera Frenkel, Jamelie
Hassan, Graeme Patterson, Lisa Steele

Wednesday November 28—7pm

Photography in the Third Millennium

Moderators: Marc Glassman and Francesca Valente

Ljubodrag Andric, Edward Burtynsky, Geneviève Caron,
Suzy Lake, Vincenzo Pietropaolo

Tuesday December 4—7pm

The Verbal and the Visual

Moderators: Peggy Gale and Francesca Valente

Bill Burns, Barry Callaghan, Gary Michael Dault,
Leon Rooke, Francesca Vivenza

Exhibition supported by:



Luciano Benetton
Collection



With support from:

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Jennifer Bratty, Chandaria Family Foundation, Anonymous Supporters (2)

Shirley Blumberg, Helen Kabriel, Nicole Katsuras, Bruce Kuwabara,
Louise MacCallum, Don McCaw, Anastasia Oehlert, Charles Pachter,
Georgia Sievwright & J.M. Irving and Stephen & Ingi Cruise.

Onsite Gallery construction
project funded in part by:



Gallery furniture by: **nienkämper**

Special thanks to:

Filippo Cavarzan, Fernando Ciccotosto, Barbara Liverotti, Marcello Piccinini,
Alessandro Ruggera and Massimo Zambon.

(Cover image) Meryl McMaster, *Wayfinding*, 2015, mixed media, 10 x 12 cm.

All images courtesy of the Luciano Benetton Collection.

**Onsite Gallery offers powerful,
thought-provoking exhibitions of art,
design and new media to stimulate
conversations on critical issues facing
Toronto and the world.**



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Wednesday
12 to 8 p.m.

Thursday & Friday
12 to 7 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday
12 to 5 p.m.

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