

Louie Palu at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection

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Louie Palu, *Snow blocks shaped into an X stained with red smoke grenades by Canadian soldiers and airmen training to signal rescue aircraft, at the Crystal City training facility in Resolute Bay, Nunavut, 2015-18*, pigment print, 20 × 24".

© Louie Palu for National Geographic. Louie Palu's work was supported by funding from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, National Geographic Magazine and Pulitzer Center

KLEINBURG

Louie Palu

MCMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION
10365 Islington Avenue
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Long understood as a harsh and placid region, the Arctic is now undergoing profound changes: As the permafrost thaws, it releases additional carbon, further warming the climate. Flora and fauna must acclimate to new seasonal patterns. But the changes are also geopolitical: Cold War–era tensions are flaring as the United States, Russia, Canada, and other countries lay claim to the top of the globe. The

increased military presence there in recent years has been masterfully documented by photojournalist [Louie Palu](#), as this exhibition of twenty-four works attests. His elegant compositions reveal both a profound sense of isolation, as with an image of a Canadian soldier sitting next to a backpack-size radio on empty tundra, and a shifting understanding of survival. Traditional means meet contemporary politics in, for example, a photograph of soldiers unloading hand-built Inuit-designed sleds from an army cargo plane.

What surprises most, however, is the underlying importance of ice. Soldiers keep safe in frozen trenches, surface through water holes, and cut ice blocks to build shelters. In this unforgiving environment, survival entails staying close to the ground. Like the work of photographer Philip Cheung, whose exhibition “Arctic Front” was on view at Toronto’s Circuit Gallery this past winter, Palu’s evocative photographs provide needed insight into a place we can no longer afford to treat as a blank spot on the map.

— Brian Sholis

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