

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Three Canadian Women Artists Explore Nature, Migration, and Environmental Stewardship This Summer at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection

KLEINBURG, ON - This summer, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection is proud to present a trio of exhibitions that centre the vision and voices of Canadian women artists. Through drawing, gel transfer, sculpture, and documentary photography, Sandra Brewster, Iris Häussler, and Rita Leistner invite viewers to engage deeply with landscapes—whether through the symbolic waters of Guyana’s Essequibo River, the forested grounds surrounding the McMichael, or the clear-cut terrain of British Columbia.

Together, these projects explore urgent and interwoven themes of environmental stewardship, migration, and our relationship with the natural world—underscoring how art can bear witness, honour resilience, and reimagine our responsibilities to the land and to one another.



Exhibition view: *FISH* (2025), acrylic, drawing and photo-based gel transfer on wall. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, April 12, 2025–January 2026. Photo credit: Toni Hafkenscheid

[Sandra Brewster: *FISH*](#)

April 12, 2025 – January 31, 2026

Now on view at the McMichael, *FISH* is a new site-specific installation by Canadian artist Sandra Brewster, created during her three-week residency in April 2025. This evocative work explores the dynamic relationship between identity and environment through the lens of migration, memory, and ancestral connections.

Using drawing and her signature gel transfer technique, Brewster renders the Essequibo River in Guyana—along with its many distinctive fish species—as a fluid, living metaphor for migration and

transformation. The textured and layered surfaces of the work mirror the movement of water and reflect the dynamic, ever-evolving nature of diasporic experience.

FISH is accompanied by a [behind-the-scenes short film](#) by award-winning Canadian documentary filmmaker David Hartman, offering insight into Brewster's creative process and the themes that inform her work.

Sandra Brewster: FISH is presented in partnership with the [CONTACT Photography Festival](#).



Iris Häussler at work in the Tom Thomson Shack at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

Photo credit: McMichael Canadian Art Collection

Iris Häussler: Divided Heavens

June – September 2025

This summer, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection welcomes a new immersive installation by Toronto-based conceptual artist Iris Häussler, developed during her June residency in the historic Tom Thomson Shack. Known for her site-specific, narrative-driven installations that blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, Häussler often transforms unconventional spaces into poignant explorations of memory, identity, and our human relationship to nature.

Her latest work, *Divided Heavens*, invites visitors into the imagined world of Kurt and Carl Pfister—German-born twin brothers separated in early childhood following the Second World War. Unaware of each other's existence, both brothers developed an intense, parallel fascination with the lives of

migratory birds. The installation unfolds across both sides of the shack, where their intertwined stories are revealed through delicately engraved mirrors and glass etched with bird silhouettes and the traces of bird-window collisions.

Other evocative elements include a mobile of paper birds cut from Kurt's personal ornithology books, a pair of glowing globes marked with the paths of global bird migrations, and a selection of intimate belongings—each artifact a window into the brothers' shared yet divided inner worlds.

Divided Heavens will be open to the public on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 12 to 3 pm, July through September.

[Artmaking Workshop | August 10](#): Every year in Canada more than 25 million migrating birds are killed in bird-glass collisions. In collaboration with landscape architect Victoria Taylor, Häussler will lead a hands-on workshop focused on making windows bird-safe. This session will explore how birds navigate both natural and built environments—and what creative, practical steps we can take to prevent bird strikes in our communities.



Rita Leistner (b. 1964), *Jennifer Veitch*, 2017, 101.6 x 137.2 cm, pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Silk Baryta Paper flush mounted to Aluminum Composite Panel, Courtesy of Rita Leistner / Stephen Bulger Gallery. © Rita Leistner

Rita Leistner: The Tree Planters

July 5, 2025 – January 5, 2026

The Tree Planters is a striking photographic series by award-winning Canadian photographer Rita Leistner. In her large-scale portraits captured in real-time, Leistner documents the grueling and heroic labour of professional tree planters in British Columbia. Her work explores themes of human endurance, environmental stewardship, and Canada's evolving relationship with its forests.

Between 2016 and 2019, Leistner embedded herself off-grid with planting crews, living for months at a time in remote camps. Immersed in the physically demanding world of seasonal tree planting, she documented workers as they planted thousands of saplings each day across the rugged, clear-cut terrain. Her photographs reveal both the intensity of the labour and the resilience of the planters, transforming them into luminous, almost mythic figures.

Using dramatic lighting and dynamic compositions, Leistner elevates scenes of physical toil into compelling visual tributes—portraits that highlight the planters' deep, often spiritual connection to the land. Having planted more than half a million trees herself, Leistner brings a rare, firsthand understanding and deep reverence to her subject.

The Tree Planters stands as a tribute to the generations of Canadians who have reshaped the nation's geography and contributed to its cultural identity—one tree at a time.

About the Artists

Sandra Brewster

Sandra Brewster is a Toronto-based artist working in drawing, video, photo-based works, and installation. Her themes focus on identity and representation, and movement in the depiction of gesture resulting in a reconsideration of the portrait genre. She uses specific landscapes as metaphors and manipulates old photographs to centre the people within them. Born to Guyanese parentage, her work often refers to the migration of Caribbean people from the region, suggesting a formation of identity that encompasses multiple geographies and temporalities, and a sense of identity that exists within the diaspora. Recent exhibitions include the Musée d'art Rouyn-Noranda (2023), the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2022-23), The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto (2022), Les Rencontres d'Arles (2022), Hartnett Gallery, Rochester (2022), Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2018–2022), and Or Gallery, Vancouver (2019).

Iris Häussler

Iris Häussler has a long history of exhibiting her installations in non-traditional museum spaces. Her first site-specific art installation was in the women's restrooms at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich in 1984. Since then, she has exhibited in basements, trailers, garages, apartments, churches, chapels, hotel-rooms,

stores, industrial buildings, monasteries, and historic houses. Häussler is well known for her immersive installations that often revolve around fictitious personae and their artistic legacies.

Born in Germany and trained as a conceptual artist and sculptor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Häussler's work has been exhibited internationally. She has been the recipient of the Kunstfonds, Bonn, and won the Karl Hofer Prize (1999) in Berlin. In 2010, she was invited on the Cape Farewell (UK) High Arctic Expedition. Since her immigration to Canada, she has been awarded grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Chalmers Arts Foundation, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.

Rita Leistner

Canadian photographer Rita Leistner creates portraits of communities in extreme conditions—including soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, female patients at psychiatric hospitals in wartime, women wrestlers in the United States, and loggers and tree planters in Canada—exploring themes of purpose, struggle, and belonging.

Leistner holds an MA in comparative literature, was an adjunct professor of the history of photojournalism at the University of Toronto and has planted over 500,000 trees in Canada. Her work is held in many major national art collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian War Museum, The Image Centre at Toronto Metropolitan University, and the TD Bank Art Collection. She is represented by the Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto.

Ces informations sont aussi disponibles en français.

Media wishing to request interviews, media tours, obtain high-resolution images or review copies of publications are asked to contact Sadie Evans at sevans@mcmichael.com or 905.893.1121 ext. 2290.

ABOUT THE McMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is an agency of the Government of Ontario and acknowledges the support of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, and the McMichael Canadian Art Foundation. It is the only major museum in the country devoted exclusively to Canadian art. In addition to touring exhibitions, the McMichael houses a permanent collection of more than 7,000 works by historic and contemporary Canadian artists, including Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven and their contemporaries, Indigenous artists, and artists from the many diasporic communities. The gallery is located on 100 acres of forested landscape and hiking trails at 10365 Islington Avenue, Kleinburg, north of Major Mackenzie Drive in the City of Vaughan. For more information, please visit mcmichael.com.

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