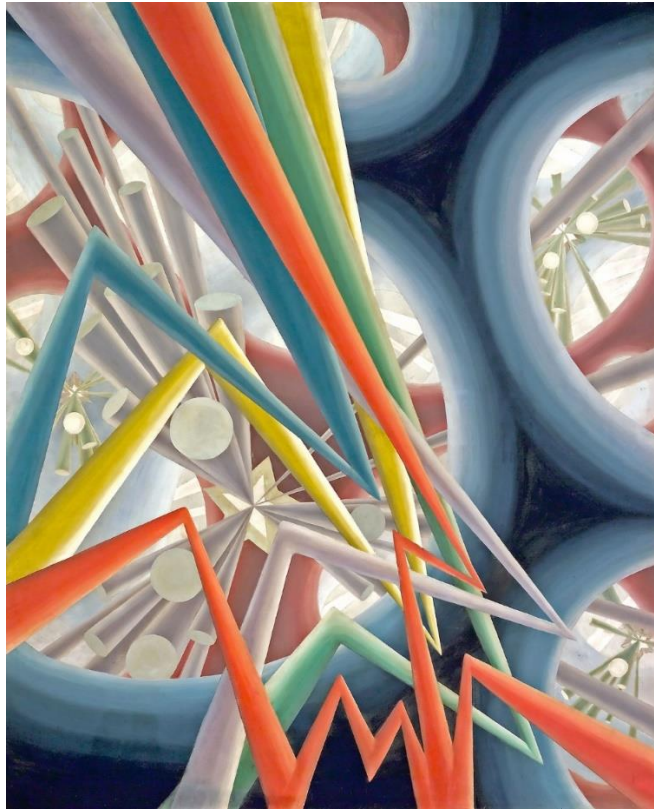


McMichael Canadian Art Collection  
Opens Bertram Brooker: When We Awake!



Left: Bertram Brooker (1888–1955), *Sounds Assembling*, 1928, oil on canvas, 112.3 x 91.7 cm, collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, L-80. Photo: Ernest Mayer, courtesy of WAG-Qaumajuq;

**February 7, 2024. Kleinburg, ON**—The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is pleased to announce the opening of *Bertram Brooker: When We Awake!* on February 10, 2024, the first comprehensive retrospective of the pioneering Canadian artist in half a century. Guest curated by art historian Michael Parke-Taylor, the exhibition explores the career of **Bertram Brooker** (1888–1955) and includes a work thought lost to history, as well as a curated selection of paintings and drawings by one of Canada’s pioneering artists.

The multi-talented Brooker was an advertising executive, painter, poet, graphic artist, novelist, and screenwriter. His trailblazing 1927 solo exhibition, which was mounted at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto with the support of Group of Seven members Lawren Harris and Arthur Lismer, is considered to be the first exhibition of abstract painting in Canada. Brooker described the pictures as stemming from a deeply personal response to music.

“One of Brooker’s ambitions was to create a visual equivalent to the ineffability of music. His masterpiece, *Sounds Assembling*, 1928, marries his conception of music and the cosmos,” said Parke-Taylor. “The suggestion of an infinite space beyond the boundaries of the frame evokes the experience of spiritual transport to distant galaxies.”



Bertram Brooker, *Figures in Landscape*, 1931, oil on canvas, 60.9 x 76.2 cm, private collection. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

In 1931, Brooker submitted an oil painting entitled *Figures in Landscape* to an exhibition by the Ontario Society of Artists at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario), only to have it removed before the opening by the organizers under the premise that its depiction of nudity would be inappropriate for young visitors. This shocking act of censorship was much criticized in the press. Incensed by this rebuke, Brooker responded with an essay entitled “Nudes and Prudes” in which he admonished gallery officials for their parochial behaviour. Long thought to be lost to art history, McMichael is delighted to announce that *Figures in Landscape* will be included in the exhibition; the first time the work has been on public view since 1976. The painting was recently rediscovered through research by McMichael Associate Curator John Geoghegan.

The title *When We Awake!* is taken from Brooker’s introductory text to the *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada 1928–1929*. His essay encouraged Canadians to develop a national art inspired by their distinctive natural surroundings, but he also emphasized the need to awaken to “universal unity” through the mystical agency of “cosmic consciousness.” By his example, Brooker enriched the arts in Canada, particularly during the interwar period, when he challenged the Group of Seven’s focus on idealized landscapes with his belief that art rooted in mystical consciousness would cut across national boundaries and foster a global spiritual and cultural revolution.



Left: Bertram Brooker (1888–1955), *Oozles*, 1922, tempera on paper, 22.8 x 17.8 cm, collection of Agnes Etherington Art Centre, purchase, Consolidated Fund, 1976, 19-004. Top Right: Bertram Brooker (1888–1955), *Abstraction, Music*, (Detail) c. 1927, oil on card, 43 x 61 cm, collection of Museum London, F.B. Housser Memorial Collection, 1945. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid. Bottom Right: Bertram Brooker (1888–1955), *Cabbage and Pepper*, (Detail) 1937, oil on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm, purchased 1973, Collection of Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, PE, CAG 73.5

The exhibition captures the sweeping breadth of Brooker's output in style and subject matter and will include lyrical abstractions, exacting realistic nudes, Cézanne-inspired still-lives, and bold graphic illustrations. *Bertram Brooker: When We Awake!* offers a rare vantage point on a pivotal figure in Canada's art and cultural history.

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*Ces informations sont aussi disponibles en français.*

To obtain high-resolution images, request an interview, exhibition tour, or obtain a review copy of a publication, please contact Sam Cheung, Media Relations and Communications Associate at [scheung@mcmichael.com](mailto:scheung@mcmichael.com) or 905.893.1121 ext. 2210.

## **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 Sport, 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 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](http://mcmichael.com).

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