

*People of the Watershed: Photographs by John Macfie*  
Opens May 11 at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection

*Exhibition of rarely seen photographs depicting Indigenous life in the 1950s and 60s  
curated by nîpisîhkopâwiyiniw (Willow Cree) author Paul Seesequasis*



Left: John Macfie, *Henry Kechebra calling a moose, Mattigami Reserve, 1959*, photograph, John Macfie fonds, C330-14-0-0-22, Archives of Ontario. Right: John Macfie, *Child in a tikinagun, Lansdowne House, 1956*, photograph, John Macfie fonds, C330-14-0-0-63, Archives of Ontario.

**May 6, 2024. Kleinburg, ON**—The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is pleased to announce *People of the Watershed: Photographs by John Macfie*, opening May 11 – an exhibition that will offer a candid and intimate portrait of life in Indigenous communities in the Hudson’s Bay watershed of the 1950s and 1960s. Guest curated by nîpisîhkopâwiyiniw (Willow Cree) writer, journalist, and cultural advocate **Paul Seesequasis**, this will be the first museum exhibition of John Macfie’s photographs of Indigenous life during a period of intense and rapid change.

**John Macfie** (1925–2018) was a settler trapline manager and photographer who worked in Northern Ontario in the 1950s and 1960s, recording life in Anishinaabe, Cree, and Anisininew communities from Sandy Lake to Fort Severn to Moose Lake and as far south as Mattagami. Employed by the Ontario Department of Land and Forests, Macfie spent more than a decade traveling across lakes, rivers, forests, and tundra, becoming familiar with both the land and the Indigenous communities of the region, and capturing with his camera the activities, warmth, and resilience of the people he met.

More than 60 years later, John Macfie’s portfolio was rediscovered by Seesequasis in the Archives of Ontario, selections of which will be on view at the McMichael through November 17, 2024.

"I was fortunate to come across John Macfie's incredible collection of photographs a number of years ago at the Archives of Ontario, and later managed to track John Macfie down, then in his 90s, and found that his memories of this incredible decade he spent in northwestern Ontario were razor sharp," says Seesequasis. "There is a serendipity in timing, talent, and vocation that coalesced to enable Macfie, with his considerable gifts as a photographer, to create this powerful visual tribute to the Anishinaabe, Cree and Anisiniew of the vast region and to remind us that this land has never been terra nullius but rather a homeland."

*People of the Watershed: Photographs by John Macfie* will present a carefully curated selection of Macfie's work and centers the lives of the Indigenous people represented, many of whom have been identified by Macfie and Seesequasis.

"The striking thing about this archive is the extraordinary care Macfie took in recording people and places across the watershed — not just in his photographs but also through his careful note taking, and his fastidious labelling of his slides," says Sarah Milroy, Executive Director and Chief Curator of the McMichael. "The archive he has left expresses great care and by extension, great respect for what he was privileged to be a part of in these communities."

**Paul Seesequasis** is a nîpîsîhkopâwiyiniw (Willow Cree) curator, writer, journalist, cultural advocate, and commentator in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He has been active in the Indigenous arts as an artist and a policymaker since the 1990s, and since 2015 he has curated the **Indigenous Archival Photo Project**, an online and physical exhibition of archival Indigenous photographs that explores history, identity, and the process of visual reclamation. He is the author of the acclaimed 2019 book *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun*.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication, *People of the Watershed*, published by **Figure 1**. The 192-page book contains 150 photographs and is now available in the McMichael Gallery Shop and online.

*People of the Watershed: Photographs by John Macfie* is presented by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in partnership with **CONTACT Photography Festival** and will be on view from **May 11 to November 17, 2024**.

The McMichael gratefully acknowledges the Archives of Ontario's stewardship of the John Macfie fonds (C 330).

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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 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](http://mcmichael.com).

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## PEOPLE OF THE WATERSHED: PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN MACFIE

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