

## Ian Dejardin steps down as McMichael gallery's executive director; curator Sarah Milroy to assume role

By: Kate Taylor

*The Globe and Mail*

September 8, 2023

Original URL: [Ian Dejardin steps down as McMichael gallery's executive director; curator Sarah Milroy to assume role - The Globe and Mail](#)



*Ian A.C. Dejardin is stepping down as executive director of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. He is pictured standing next to Tom Thomson's Byng Inlet-Georgian Bay 1914-15 at the gallery on Aug 23. FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

Canadian curator and critic Sarah Milroy will take over the leadership of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection this fall, the institution said Friday as it announced the retirement of director Ian Dejardin.

Dejardin, a British art historian who expanded fundraising and programming at the McMichael during his 6½-year tenure, is leaving Canada at the end of October. Milroy, who he hired as the McMichael's chief curator in 2018, will replace him immediately. A long-time champion of Canadian art and member of the Order of Canada, she will retain the chief curator's job title while taking on the directorship.

Dejardin came to the McMichael after 19 years as curator and then director at London's Dulwich Picture Gallery where he increased visitation with temporary exhibitions that reached out beyond its Old Masters collection.

He and Milroy have worked together on shows devoted to classic Canadian art in both Britain and Canada since they first teamed up for an Emily Carr show at the Dulwich in 2014. It was Dejardin's second venture in introducing an appreciative British public to early 20th-century Canadian art, after his *Painting Canada: Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven* in 2011. It drew record crowds at the Dulwich and toured in Norway and the Netherlands, setting Dejardin up as the rare foreign expert on Canadian art.

He was invited to lead the McMichael in 2017, taking on an institution that has often struggled to find contemporary relevance in a pluralist and multicultural society since it was established in the 1960s by collectors Robert and Signe McMichael as a museum devoted to nationalist landscape painting.

Dejardin and Milroy have increased the number of temporary exhibitions at the gallery, including more contemporary Canadian artists and shining new light on the 6,500-piece permanent collection, which includes not only classic landscape painting but also more recent Canadian art and a large number of works by Inuit and First Nations artists. Dejardin has also stressed fundraising at the McMichael to underwrite those exhibitions and launched an ambitious touring schedule with shows travelling across Canada and internationally.



*Sarah Milroy, Chief Curator with the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, is photographed at the gallery on Aug 23, 2023. FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

Milroy worked as a critic and independent curator before joining the McMichael. She served as the editor of Canadian Art Magazine in the 1990s and worked as the art critic at The Globe and Mail from 2001 to 2011. As a curator, she has collaborated with DeJardin on exhibitions devoted to Vanessa Bell, David Milne and Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald.

In an interview, she said her goal at the McMichael is to continue to build contemporary context for the permanent collection, shedding new light on the work of Thomson and the Group of Seven while expanding both the historical canon and the contemporary story of Canadian art.

“The reputation of the McMichael historically has been very pale and male,” she said. “Our founders bought the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson, happily for us, very well. We have an extraordinary collection of those artists that are, in many people’s minds, central to the narrative of Canadian art. They are the core. But what we have been doing with every ounce of energy we can muster is to create context that allows people to understand that the story of Canadian art is much more complex and layered.”

As examples, she pointed to the recent *Uninvited* show that she curated featuring the work of the Group of Seven’s female contemporaries, and which toured to the National Gallery of Canada this summer. And the catalogues for recent exhibitions devoted to Thomson and the Group have included several essays from Indigenous writers offering new perspectives on Canadian landscape art.

“*Uninvited* was a major chiropractic adjustment to the canon,” Milroy said, adding, “It’s trying to find a way to not abandon the core artists in the collection. We don’t want to put them away and not look at them anymore. We want to look at them with fresh eyes and we want to add to the story of Canadian art by bringing in new voices.”