Engagement Guide

Earthwork September 4– December 20, 2025



Works by

Alex Jacobs-Blum, Art Hunter, BUSH Gallery, Edward Poitras, Faye HeavyShield, Lisa Myers, Michael Belmore, Mike MacDonald, Protect the Tract Collective

Curated by

Mikinaak Migwans

Our Supporters

This exhibition is made possible with generous support from Partners in Art. Exhibition programming is supported by Toronto Arts Council Strategic Funding and the Mounds and Memory Project, University of Toronto, funded by SSHRC.

The Art Museum gratefully acknowledges operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Government of Ontario, and the Toronto Arts Council.

Developed in partnership with the Mounds and Memory Project.

Cover: Faye HeavyShield, *Clan*, 2019. Performance documentation, courtesy of Blaine Campbell.





The Earthwork exhibition

Using this engagement guide

Welcome to *Earthwork*! Kigapiindigemin (Let's go inside!)

The exhibition *Earthwork* is about the work that we do with and for the earth. By thinking about the labour that goes into land-based relations, communications, and formations, we can start to see beyond land as a resource and beyond earthworks as monuments. Instead, we can think of ourselves as participants in a relationship that takes work from both sides.

This exhibition invites you to consider the idea of "earthwork" in a new way, exploring the concept through a variety of cultural practices, activist interventions, and contemporary artworks. First, Art Hunter introduces us to the Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung ancestral mounds site, shifting our attention from the mounds themselves to the work of maintaining the site's rare prairie oak ecology through controlled burns and cultural engagement.

The land defenders at 1492 Land Back Lane offer a different kind of "earthwork," a road blockade erected against development on the Haldimand Tract. Like the controlled burns at Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung, looking beyond the physical monument takes us behind the blockade, where the life-giving

work of land defense has been happening on the Haldimand Tract for generations.

The contemporary artists in this exhibition use sculpture, video, photography, and installation to explore overlaps between human and environment. Faye HeavyShield's video installation shows her family members marking out their traditional territory with flags before picking the flags back up and making their departure. HeavyShield's marking flags, like the canvas of the tents in the works by the BUSH Gallery and Mike MacDonald, are a kind of non-permanent architecture that is an everyday part of Indigenous land relations into the present day. As you explore these works today, allow them to reorient you in your world. As you look around yourself, ask: who is standing beside you in the work of living?

This exhibition is curated by Mikinaak Migwans, Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History and Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. This Engagement Guide invites Art Museum visitors to interact creatively and intentionally with seven highlighted artworks in the exhibition. On your own or with a group, plan to spend around 10 minutes with each work—looking, reading, answering questions, exchanging ideas, sketching, sitting, and reflecting. Overall, we want you to consider:

- How do the pieces align with your worldview?
- How do they challenge it?
- What meaning are you taking away?

When looking at these works, you will be asked to consider their formal characteristics, the contexts of their making, clues to their underlying messages, the background and biases you bring, and the artists' intended impact on the audience and society at large. Finally, you will be asked to form your own interpretations and opinions of the pieces.

If you have more time to visit the museum today, you will find additional questions at the end of this Guide that you can use to engage with the

remaining artworks. Further activities and engagement materials can also be found in the Reading Room at the back of the exhibition.

Please contact the Art Museum at artmuseum@utoronto.ca to book a time for your class visit.

This guide was prepared by Dr. Angela Nardozi, Co-Director of Indigenous-Italian-Canadian Connections and Lecturer at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

1. BUSH Gallery "Plants as (are) Monuments," 2021



Image courtesy of the artists and MOMENTA Biennale, photo by Jean-Michael Seminaro.

First, let's look at the work closely.

What shapes do you see? What colours? What materials? How do you think those shapes were made?

Next, let's engage with its message: "PLANTS AS MONUMENTS."

When you think of the word "monument," what does it evoke for you? What are some examples of monuments that you know, and where are they located? How is a plant different from a monument?

The title "plants as monuments" is a quote from the Tuscarora artist and art scholar Jolene Rickard, speaking about the importance of seeds and planting cycles in building Indigenous nationhood. Tania Willard explains that the ecologies of Turtle Island are not random, but the products of generations of careful cultivation.

"(These are) not wildflowers, we planted them. They're our food and medicines."

- Tania Willard

The year this piece was created, 2021, was significant in Secwepemc territory because of the massive impact of forest fires and the confirmation of 215 unmarked children's graves at the Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc Residential School. Fireweed is so named as it is the first plant to emerge after a forest fire. In this piece, fireweed leaves were used to make solar exposures on pieces of canvas from BUSH Gallery's first land-based studio space – a tipi in the bush. With this information in mind, think back to your answers to the questions above. What kind of monument is a plant? A tipi?

2. BUSH Gallery BUSH MANIFESTO, 2014-ongoing

BUSH Gallery is a project led by artists
Tania Willard, Peter Morin and Gabrielle
L'Hirondelle Hill – an experiment in
making and experiencing art on the
land, outside the frame of the gallery.

Try the following activity if you are visiting with a group today:



Photo courtesy of the artists.

Take a copy of the manifesto in the language most familiar to you. Stand in a circle facing one another. Choose someone to read the first line, then go around the circle, each person reading one line out loud. Afterward, ask these questions of the group:

Which line resonated with you the most?		
hich line made you think of art in a different way?		
hich line had an impact on the way that you think about land?		

Dive Deeper

Read a special issue of *C Magazine* guest edited by BUSH Gallery, available online at <u>cmagazine.com/issues/136</u>.

Watch Jolene Rickard talk with Tania Willard about plants, historical markers, and her work at <u>youtube.com/</u> watch?v=LumZltjp_Hc, 1 hr 47 mins.

3. Art Hunter *Untitled* (Controlled burn by mounds at Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung), 2023



Image courtesy of the artist.

"Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung, the place of the long rapids, it means — it helps me identify with who I am and where I come from, and it's a very special place to me. It's a very spiritual place, where I can come and think back and reflect on my forefathers, my grandmothers, my grandfathers, and how they lived."

- Art Hunter

Stand close to the image so that it fills your view. Slowly move your eyes from water to land and imagine standing next to Hunter as he captures the scene. Using the prompts below, expand this view into your other senses.

Sight	Sound	Smell
How would you describe the colour and quality of the light?	Listen to the audio from the nearby video. What sounds do you hear?	What does the air smell like? How do your clothes smell after you leave?
Touch	Taste	
What temperature do you feel? How does the air feel on your face?	When you breathe in, how does the air taste?	

This photo was taken at the ancestral Manitou Mounds at Rainy River First Nation. You can see the Manitou Rapids at right, one of the mounds at left, and, between them, some of the special fire-resistant prairie oaks and bluestem grasses. This ecology has been cultivated through fire by Indigenous people for thousands of years, making an open but protected space where certain partner plants, animals and insects can thrive. Today, the fire is a responsibility taken up by the community. The ancestral burials in the mounds are part of what drives that responsibility. But the "work" of maintaining good relations involves a commitment to the site's environment as a whole.

Next, explore more documentation of the controlled burn by viewing Art Hunter, *Untitled* (video compilation of controlled burn by mounds at the Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung), 2022–23, and watch the interview with Art Hunter on land stewardship (2023), recorded by Pamela Klassen, to understand how community members relate to the mounds and medicines. Finally, take in the three photographs by Art Hunter on the wall to the left to view the growth that comes after the fires.

Did you know that a controlled burn at a rare Oak Savannah happens 6 km away from here each year at High Park?

Dive Deeper

You can learn more about exploring art with your senses by visiting The Thinking Museum (thinkingmuseum. com/2020/02/11/tips-tools-sensory-experiences-on-guided-tours/) and the Multisensory Met (metmuseum.org/perspectives/multisensory-met).

Visit the Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Medicinal Plant Guide at manitoumounds.com/nature/medicinal-plant-guide/.

Read more about the history of the Manitou Mounds at <u>storynations.utoronto.ca</u> as part of the Mounds & Memory Project.

4. Michael Belmore Turbulent Air / Turbulent Water, 2025



Michael Belmore, drift. 2025. Steel, wood, 2.43 m x 9 m x 4.5 m. Photo courtesy of the artist.

"I consider my practice as being a kind of collaboration between human and materials, between human lifetime and geological time, or deep time." - Michael Belmore This piece might remind you of a fence or barrier, but this common rural item—the snow fence—is designed to shape movement rather than stop it. As wind blows through the slats it deposits snow and creates a drift. A snow fence can reshape the topography of the land around it, guiding snow to fold itself away from areas like roads. Belmore took up the snow fence as a medium because he sees it as a way that humans address the environment in its own language.

There is another layer to this installation. A code is sanded into the red stain on the wooden slats. Visually, this pattern evokes a wampum belt, an item made of shell beads and used in Indigenous diplomacy to make and recall treaties between nations. The wampum belt is not only symbolic of the treaty, but also a mnemonic aid helping carriers to recall the words of agreement. Belmore situates his art within this tradition of collective cultural memory:

"I situate my work as mnemonic. My works are vessels offering a narrative and a discourse that gives insight into our community and our collective histories." - Michael Belmore

This code does not use traditional wampum symbolism, however—it uses binary code. The result is a message written in a human language, using a medium (the snow fence) that is addressed to the snow, wind, and hills.

Use the legend below to decode the message. Each wooden slat is a letter.

а	01100001	j	01101010	S	01110011
b	01100010	k	01101011	t	01110100
С	01100011	I	01101100	u	01110101
d	01100100	m	01101101	V	01110110
е	01100101	n	01101110	W	01110111
f	01100110	0	01101111	X	01111000
g	01100111	р	01110000	У	01111001
h	01101000	q	01110001	z	01111010
i	01101001	r	01110010	space	00100000

Dive Deeper

Visit an outdoor snow fence installation on the University of Toronto's St. George campus this winter, on King's College Circle from November to March.

5. Faye HeavyShield fort belly, 1992



Collection of John Cook, © Faye HeavyShield, Pulitzer Arts Foundation and Alise O'Brien Photography.

fort belly is an important work by Faye
HeavyShield, a celebrated sculptor and
installation artist. HeavyShield began her
art career at a time when Indigenous artists
struggled to gain entry to contemporary art
spaces and were instead relegated to anthropology
museums with natural history-style didactic
labels. In an approach more characteristic of
fine art spaces, she avoids lengthy explanations
and labels, preferring that viewers experience her
art aesthetically first and develop their own ideas
before reading others' interpretations, even
her own.

For this piece, spend some time looking at the work and engaging with it through sketching and formal description, before reading more.

In the space below, take a few minutes to sketc	ch
this piece. Walk around it and take it in from	
different angles.	

Write down some descriptive words or phrases that come to you when you consider the following formal elements of the work:

Colour	Shape	Texture	Movement

Think about the words in the title. What are the purposes of forts? What forms do they take? When the word "fort" is combined with "belly," what sorts of images or associations come up for you?

Finally, read HeavyShield's own account of her references and context:

"My art is a reflection of my environment and personal history as lived in the physical geography of southern Alberta with its prairie grass, river coulees, and wind and an upbringing in the Kainai community (with a childhood stint in the Catholic residential school system). The past, present and imagined make up the vocabulary used to realize my thoughts and ideas; responses and references to the body, land, language."

What does this sculpture evoke for you? Is there anything that you've noted down that you feel differently about now?

Dive Deeper

Read more in *MAWA Magazine*'s Sept/Oct 2005 issue at yumpu.com/en/document/read/49188884/faye-heavyshield-mentoring-artists-for-womens-art.

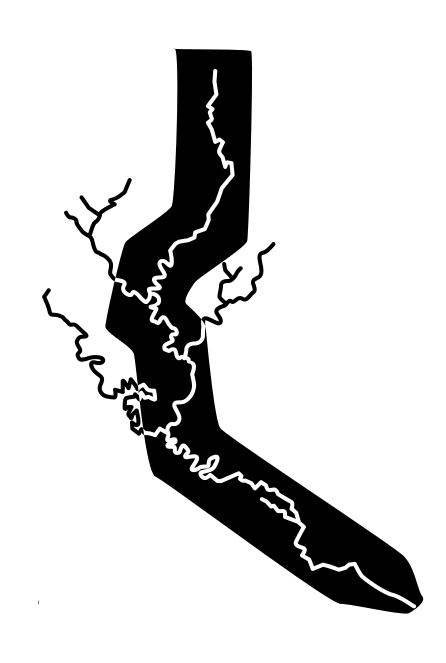
Listen to an artist talk by HeavyShield including her account of fort belly at pulitzerarts.org/art/faye-heavyshield, 55 mins.

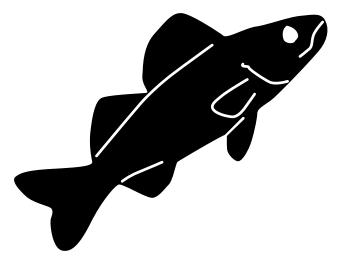
6. Protect the Tract Collective with Haudenosaunee beadwork artists Talena Atfield, Jija Jacobs, Tesha Emarthle, and Kahionwinehshon Phillips Bead the Tract, 2023-24

First, step back and note the purple-backed area. How would you describe this shape? What is the relationship between this shape and the trail of beads leading through it?

This is an outline of the Haldimand Tract, an area encompassing six miles on either side of the Grand River in Southwestern Ontario. Move closer to the piece and notice the river of beads running through the tract. This land was granted by the British to their allies the Six Nations (the Haudenosaunee) on October 25, 1784, following the American War of Independence, when the Haudenosaunee lost nearly four million acres of land. Today, the Six Nations of the Grand River reside on a fraction of this promised territory.

One way to consider this piece is through the lens of map-making. All maps are political in the way they select what to include and what to leave out. Consider how this beaded map represents land and how it differs from the maps that represent this area today. Can you locate this area on the adjacent map?





Finally, choose one of the floral designs made of clear beads. Examine it closely, noticing how it connects with other flowers and hidden figures. How do you think it was constructed?

The artists used a traditional style of raised beadwork developed in the 1800s by the Tuscarora (a member Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy) as well as antique beads from the same time period. Creating this piece was an act of reclamation and resurgence, as the artists worked with Haudenosaunee beadworkers to learn these techniques and fill in the complete area of the Tract.

Consider the history, techniques, care and intention that went into *Bead the Tract*. How might the process of beading a map connect the artists to land, community, past, and present? How do the beaded areas carry forward patterns and ideas from the hide and quill areas?

Next, choose one of the four fish at each corner of the hide. Are the fish all the same, or different?

These fish depict four different species extirpated from the Grand River waterways. They are made of tanned deer hide with porcupine quill embroidery to represent the pre-contact arts of the area. The artists explain that "the Grand River acts as the stem from which all of the flowers grow. The Grand River is a source of life as the primary water source along the tract. The tributaries extend off the map itself to represent the Grand River watershed. The flowers, animals and birds represent the tie and responsibility we have to all of creation through land stewardship."



7. Edward Poitras *Mistaseni*, 2001-02



Courtesy of the artist and the Art Gallery of Swift Current. Photo by Heather Benning.

At the centre of this work is the outline of a monumental stone ancestor. This is Mistaseni or "Buffalo Child Rock"—a boulder left by a glacier in Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle Valley (Treaty 4 territory). When rising waters from a hydroelectric dam project threatened this sacred site, local Indigenous groups and allies tried to intervene. In answer, on December 1, 1966, an administration of the federal government destroyed Mistaseni with dynamite.

In this work by Edward Poitras, an electrical cord outlines the absence of Mistaseni. It connects to and illuminates a model of the church at Lebret, where Indigenous children from across the region attended the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School from 1884 to 1998. A chair with wool and horn suggests an uncomfortable tenure.

Take a moment to close your eyes and visualize the absences referenced here.

Imagine what it was like to visit Mistaseni, generation after generation. Think of its scale next to yours. How would it feel to see this monumental presence reduced to rubble?

Next, reflect on the legacy of child removal to residential schools, and the gaps they left in their communities. If you have a smart device, visit the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's Student Memorial website (nctr.ca/residential-schools/saskatchewan/lebret-quappelle/) to see a list of students who did not return from this institution.



Elder Wilfred Tootoosis stands by the Mistaseni stone in 1966. Photo by Tim Jones, courtesy of the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society.

Turn now to the art installation and consider each part separately and together. Note down your thoughts on the following comparisons:

The absence of Mistaseni / the presence of the Lebret church:

The boulder shape of Mistaseni / the built structure of the Lebret church:

The idea of the sacred in a stone / the idea of the sacred in a church:

Final Questions

If you have time to visit with the rest of the pieces, you might use this space to reflect on the following questions.	Free-write journaling in the Reading Room
What ways are the artists working with and for the Earth? What messages are they communicating through that work?	Set a timer for five minutes. Think about your experience visiting <i>Earthwork</i> today. How do you feel? What did you learn? What questions do you have? Try to keep writing for the entire five minutes.
Whose perspectives and voices are centered in the pieces?	
What environmental and land injustices are ongoing in your local community? Thinking about what you've learned from this exhibition, what work needs to be done to address these injustices?	
Write down two ways you might honor the land you live on.	

Resources

Plant Relations

Sounds Like Land: Thinking with Indigenous Languages & Plant Knowledge, a seven-part podcast, findingflowers.ca/Sounds-Like-Land.

Sheila Colla, Dana Prieto, and Lisa Myers, "How Wet'suwet'en butterflies offer lessons in resilience and resistance," *The Conversation* (February 25, 2020), theconversation.com/how-wetsuweten-butterflies-offer-lessons-in-resilience-and-resistance-132418.

Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Centre, "Medicinal Plant Guide," an online plant guide with Anishinaabemowin names, manitoumounds.com/ nature/medicinal-plant-guide/.

Deborah McGregor, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge: An Anishinaabe Woman's Perspective," Atlantis 29, no. 2 (2005), atlantisjournal. ca/index.php/atlantis/article/view/1057/1014.

Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Milkweed Editions, 2013).

Mound Relations

Kiinawin Kawindomowin: Story Nations, a collaborative research project led by Professor Pamela Klassen, https://storynations.utoronto.ca/.

Walter Kenyon, *Mounds of Sacred Earth: Burial Mounds of Ontario* (Royal Ontario Museum, 1986).

Christine Morris, Marti Chaatsmith, and Glenna Wallace, "Earthworks Rising: Emerging roles within collaborations for Indigenous knowledge," in *Replanting Cultures: Community Engaged Scholarship in Indian Country*, edited by Chief Benjamin J. Barnes and Stephen Warren (State University of New York Press, 2022).

Chadwick Allen, *Earthworks Rising: Mound Building in Native Literature and Arts* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022).

Land Stewardship

A.M. Miller, "Talking about Fire: Pikangikum First Nation Elders Guiding Fire Management," *Canadian Journal of Forest Research = Revue Canadienne de Recherche Forestière* 40, no. 12 (2010): 2290–2301, https://doi.org/10.1139/X10-177.

Allan Bradbury, "Preserving nature by burning it down at Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung," Fort Frances Times, (May 17, 2023), fftimes.com/news/district-news/preserving-nature-by-burning-it-down-at-kay-nah-chi-wah-nung/.

Jon Johnson, "The Indigenous Environmental History of Toronto, 'The Meeting Place,'" in *Urban Explorations: Environmental Histories of the Toronto Region* (Wilson Institute for Canadian History, 2013), indigenouslandstewardshipto. wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/the_indigenous_environmental_history_of.pdf.

Land Defense

"Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper" (October 2019), redpaper.yellowheadinstitute.org/.

Ellen Katsi'tsakwas Gabriel, When the Pine Needles Fall: Indigenous Acts of Resistance (Between the Lines, 2024).

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin (University of Alberta Press, 2021).

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Indigenous Blockades Don't Just Decry Destruction— They Affirm Life," Yes Magazine (February 24, 2020), yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/02/24/canada-pipeline-native-resistance-wetsuweten.

Public Programs

Opening Reception: Fall 2025 Exhibitions *Wednesday, September 3, 5pm–8pm*Celebrate the opening of the Art Museum's Fall 2025 exhibitions. *Earthwork* will open with a special Grass Dance performance by Miikaans Mobile Movement Lab.

Curatorial Tour with Mikinaak Migwans Saturday, September 6, 3pm-4pm
Curator Mikinaak Migwans leads an in-depth tour of Earthwork, sharing his curatorial interest in reclaiming the Land Art concept of "earthwork" through an Indigenous lens.

Teach-In with Akni:ho'gwa:s Collective Wednesday, September 17, 10am-3pm Hart House, East Common Room 7 Hart House Circle
The Art Museum and Hart House's artists-in-

The Art Museum and Hart House's artists-in-residence, the Akni:ho'gwa:s Collective, leads several workshops that explore mapping, counter-mapping, and the impacts of recent federal and provincial legislation on Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous Peoples. The day concludes with a visit to *Earthwork*. Registration is required.

Art Bus Excursion: Plant Signals with Lisa Myers

Saturday, October 11, 12pm-4:30pm
University of Toronto Art Centre and Stong House
Artist, curator, and Associate Professor in the
Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change
at York University, Lisa Myers, along with plant
survey research collective: Lou Holloway, Ever
Palma Hernandez and Tiva Kawakami, will lead an
offsite excursion in conjunction with Earthwork.
Registration is required.

The 24th Janet E. Hutchison Lecture with Aaron Katzeman Land/Labour: Artists Working for and against Settler Colonialism Wednesday, October 15, 5pm-6pm Hart House, East Common Room 7 Hart House Circle Registration is required.

Artist Tour with Alex Jacobs-Blum *Wednesday, October 22, 6pm-7:30pm*

Alex Jacobs-Blum introduces her work in *Earthwork*, reflecting on her relationship to the land.

Mounds & Memory Symposium

Thursday, November 13 to Saturday, November 15 A three-day symposium with panels, talks, site visits, and community gatherings. Events are open to the public at the University of Toronto and by invitation only at Hiawatha First Nation. Presented in partnership with the Mounds and Memory Project and Hiawatha First Nation. Registration is required.

Launch Reception for Michael Belmore's drift More details to be announced soon

Internationally recognized GTA-based Anishinaabe artist Michael Belmore, whose new work exploring the structure of snow fencing is included in *Earthwork*, will lead an introduction to his work and interests as an artist employing materials and processes that are concerned with land, water, and the environment.

All programs are free and open to the public. For more information and to register, visit artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs.

Exhibition Tours

The Art Museum offers in-person guided exhibition tours for classes and groups. For more information or to book a tour, email artmuseum@utoronto.ca.

Art Museum Staff

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Noa Bronstein, Assistant Director
Mikinaak Migwans, Curator, Indigenous
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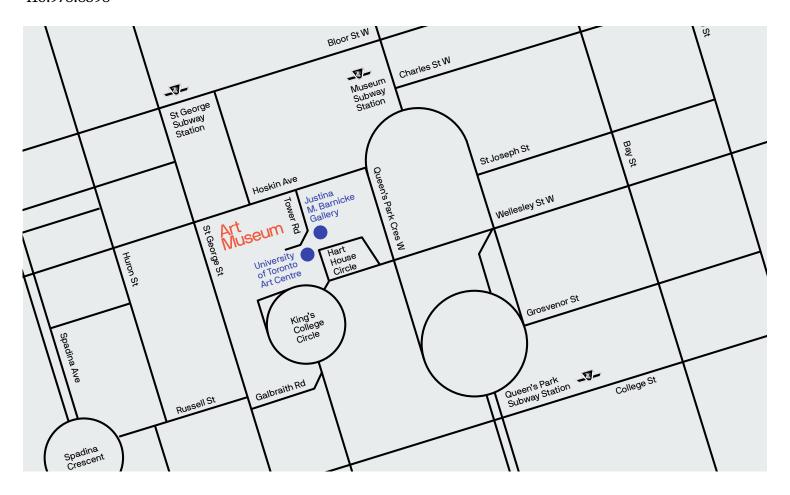
Visiting the Art Museum

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery 7 Hart House Circle Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3

University of Toronto Art Centre 15 King's College Circle Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7

Tuesday 12pm–5pm
Wednesday 12pm–5pm
Thursday 12pm–5pm
Friday 12pm–5pm
Saturday 12pm–5pm
Sunday Closed
Monday Closed

Closed on statutory holidays. Open to the public. Admission is always free.



















Art Museum University of Toronto

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