

# The top 10 artworks of 2020: the most stunning and startling exhibitions at Canadian galleries and online this year

Kate Taylor picks the top 10 most beautiful, surprising or impressive things she saw in galleries, museums and online art exhibitions this year – in no particular order

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**KATE TAYLOR >**

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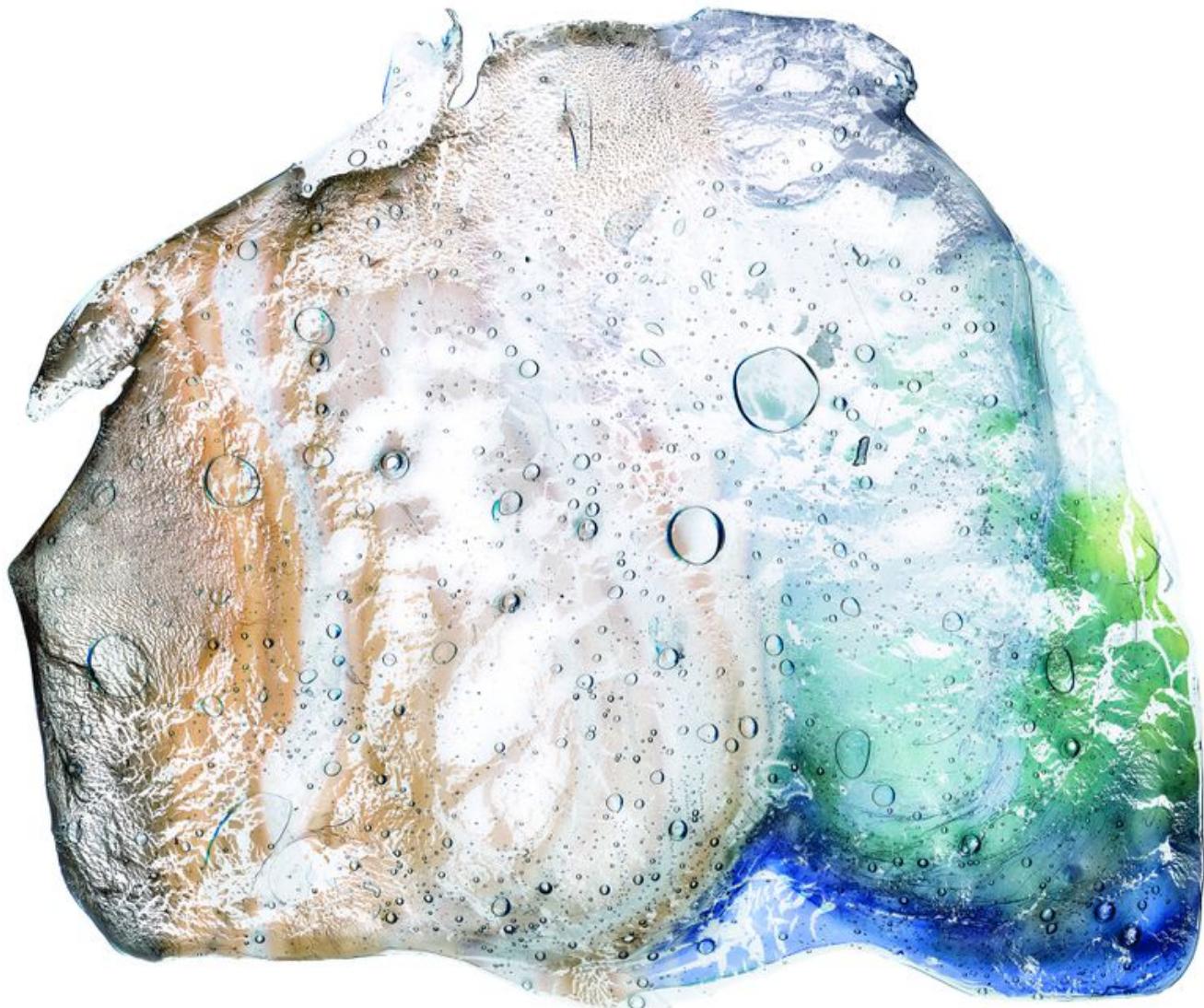
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*Koita Morimoto's Garden of Light showed at the Nicholas Metivier*

daughter, *Julie Playing a Violin*. In this restrained yet heartfelt consideration of art and motherhood, the girl's plain black dress anchors her figure in the bourgeois setting provided by her cultured family.

## 7. Specimens, Megan Moore

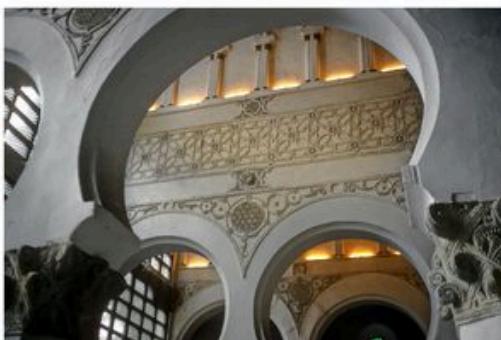


Megan Moore's View from a window in Rosemere, May 2003, part of her Specimens series.

MEGAN MOORE

To create her *Specimens* series, Montreal artist Megan Moore chemically alters her own photographs to partially dissolve their surfaces then rescans them. Serving as a metaphor for the instability of memory itself, the process produces intriguingly unidentifiable aquatic blobs. The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ont., presented a collection of them last spring, but the borderless photographs are also well suited for an online exhibition, which was how I saw them during May's Contact photography festival.

## 8. Credo series, Jennifer Dickson



Jennifer Dickson's Credo: Ninteen, left, Credo: Twenty, centre, and Credo: Twenty-one, right, were part of a February exhibition at the Ottawa Art Gallery.

JENNIFER DICKSON/JENNIFER DICKSON

Ottawa photographer Jennifer Dickson finds beauty and calm in ecclesiastical architecture. Her February exhibition at the

REVIEW

# Toronto's Contact festival goes virtual, laying bare the value of experiencing art in person

Take a stroll through the online exhibitions on Contact's website: Lots of powerful imagery emerges, but it also becomes clear that some photography needs to be seen in the flesh

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**KATE TAYLOR >**

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Spa Duchamp Fountain by Lynne Cohen.

LYNNE COHEN

What is a photograph but a collection of pixels? It's an array of grey or coloured dots, a configuration as easily viewed on a computer screen as printed on a piece of paper and hung on a wall. Couldn't we just move every photography exhibition in the world online?

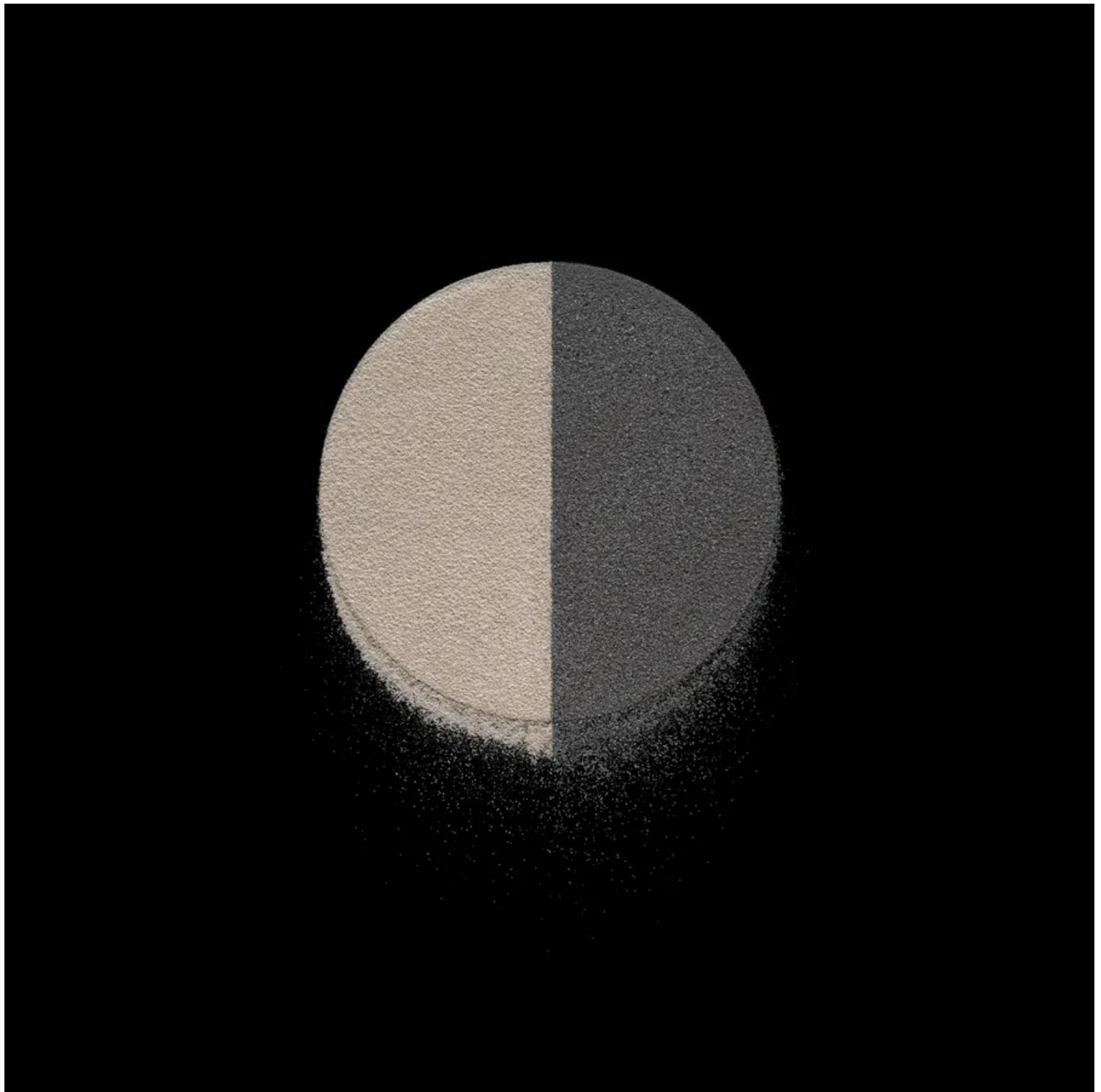
As Toronto's Contact festival, that Maytime firehose of photo shows, shifts from offering an actual event to a virtual one, the answer is ... well, no, actually. Take a stroll through the online exhibitions on Contact's website: Lots of powerful imagery emerges, but it also becomes clear that some photography needs to be seen in the flesh.

Contact's core exhibitions at public galleries and in public spaces – a billboard project by New York photographer Kim Hoeckele at Dovercourt and Dupont, an installation by the Italian artist Alberto Giuliani at Brookfield Place, the Diane Arbus show at the Art Gallery of Ontario – are postponed or closed until further notice. Instead, the festival has organized some digital alternatives on its website, including a new video by Hoeckele and Giuliani's photographs of Italian doctors and nurses, their faces furrowed and reddened by the masks they have removed for these end-of-shift portraits. And Contact is pointing viewers to online versions of its many featured exhibitions, the shows mainly provided by the city's commercial art galleries. Turns out, these online experiences are both illuminating and frustrating, just like the times.

Take, as the most rewarding example, the retrospective dedicated to the late Lynne Cohen that is showing on the website of the Olga Korper Gallery. For those acquainted with Cohen's pristine images of eerily empty industrial, medical and social spaces – an antiseptic spa, a puzzling military warehouse, a futuristic lobby – the show will be a welcome reminder of the way the photographer, who died in 2014, could fascinate and unsettle. And for those unacquainted, it will take but moments to click your way to an unusual new experience. Cohen's places are full of signs of human purpose yet sinisterly devoid of any actual people, and they take on a darker realism in the current crisis as the dystopic becomes actual.

There's no doubt that the white walls and high ceiling of Korper's postindustrial space in the city's west end would be a strong setting for these works, but you don't actually miss the gallery as you view the photos online. On the other hand, Spring Hurlbut's Dyadic Circles 2019-2020 series seems unanchored, losing some evocative power when viewed outside an art shrine, in this case Georgia Scherman Projects, which recently closed down its

Tecumseth Street gallery. Hurlbut has taken the ashes of cremated humans and animals and shaped them into perfect discs, using two different tones of ash for each side, so that the left is lighter than the right or vice versa. (The difference in colour depends on the heat of the fire; sometimes the two are from one body, sometimes they represent two different beings.)



Dyadic Circles: Barley and Cujo 1, 2019, by Spring Hurlbut.

COURTESY GEORGIA SCHERMAN PROJECTS

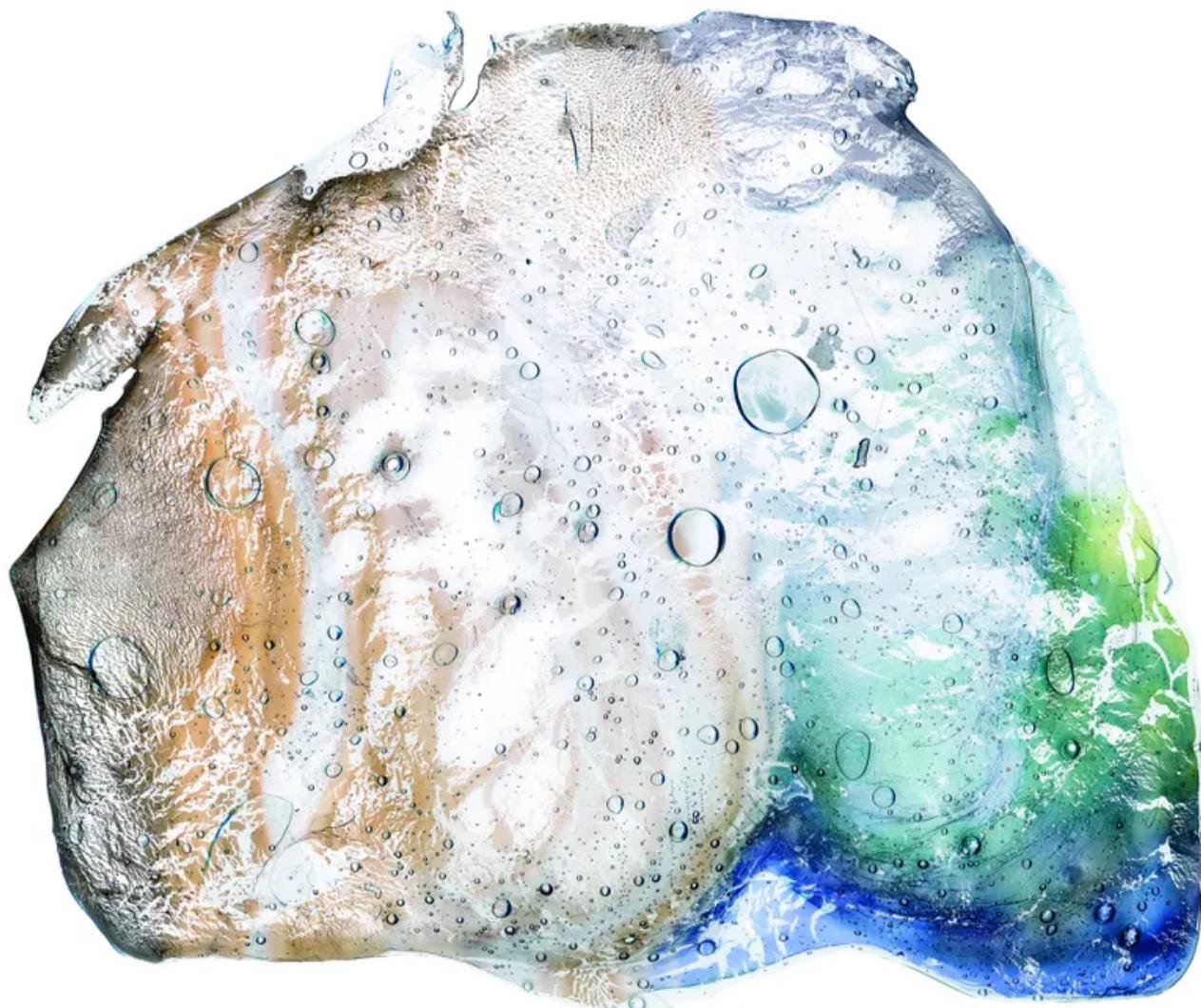
The tension between the pristine abstract aesthetic and the grim materials, between art and death, order and chaos, should be exquisite – and I can only imagine it would be if one saw these photographs in a quietly echoing space. Yet without being a body standing in a gallery, without being able to relate one’s own physical presence to the art, the works seen reduced to an exercise that is intellectual rather than visceral or poetic. It’s a sobering reminder, as the market speeds up its already rapid move to online sales, that art still needs to be seen in person. And that basic observation can apply to a reproductive medium such as photography as much as it does to sculpture or painting.

On the other hand, perhaps some of the more confrontational work on offer is actually enhanced by the opportunity to move straight into your home and right into your face. Jean-François Bouchard's melodramatic portraits of gun-toting Americans and their bullet-riddled targets at Arsenal Contemporary seem perfectly suited to high-definition reproduction on the computer screen. Looking at them feels no different from turning the pages of a photography book as the artist seemingly dares you not to just shrug off your distaste and walk away.



SHELLIE ZHANG

Somewhere in between these extremes of new pertinence and lost poetry sits work such as the oddly manipulated images created by Montreal artist Megan Moore. At the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, her exhibition entitled Specimens features photographs of mysterious blobs, pebbles or detritus, irregular yet vivid forms that look both natural and photographic, with surfaces that are both cracked and glistening. In fact, these unrecognizable things are enlarged photographs of previous photographs that have been altered using a gel that starts to dissolve their ink. The artist intends them as a metaphor for the instability of memory, but viewed online, these records of evaporating imagery speak to our newly fractured relationship with visual art.



View from a window in Rosemere, May 2003, 2019, by Megan Moore.

MEGAN MOORE

Contact continues through May.

The Globe has five brand-new arts and lifestyle newsletters: *Health & Wellness*, *Parenting & Relationships*, *Sightseer*, *Nestruck on Theatre* and *What to Watch*. [Sign up today](#).

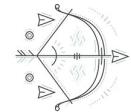
## Sign up for the Nestruck on Theatre Newsletter

Globe critic J. Kelly Nestruck writes a weekly digest of what's new on Canadian stages, plus get our latest theatre reviews.

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## Take a Break

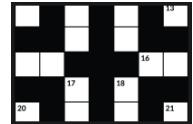
Check your horoscope to learn how the stars align for you today.



Scoop a new vibe in the numbers and do today's Daily Sudoku.

1			8	
5		6	1	
		5	3	
	9	6	1	4
2			4	8

Kick back with the Daily Universal Crossword.



# Art that goes below the surface

ART SOUTERRAIN places a wide variety of installations in the paths of those making their way through the underground city

Arts

8 Mar 2014 JOHN POHL  
john.o.pohl@gmail.com

I instead of wondering if something presented as contemporary art is “really” art, ask: “What exactly is an artwork?”

That advice and more — posted in a passageway through Centre CDP

Capital by the Regroupement des artistes en arts visuels, the organization that represents professional

artists — will serve you well as you encounter the 100-plus art installations set up in the corridors of Montreal’s underground city.

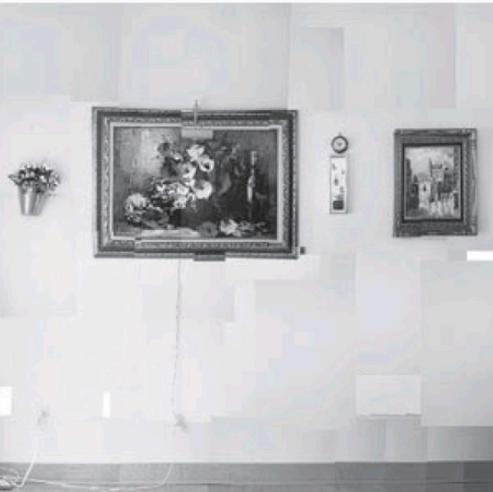
It’s the sixth edition of Art Souterrain, a festival of visual art that spreads through five downtown métro stations, 15 buildings and the



**Maison 1963-2013** is artist Megan Moore's attempt to preserve the memory of her grandfather. It is on display in the Westcliff building.

tunnels that connect them. The event is the brainchild of founder and CEO Frédéric Loury, whose stated ambition is to bring art out of the galleries and museums and into the daily lives of the citizenry.

And if your daily activities take you into the underground city core, as



dmother's home in Rosemère through pho-  
g.



**Mike Patten says his installation *Smoke Signals* “speaks of a culture going up in smoke.”**

defined by an oval formed by the Place des Arts, McGill, Bonaventure, Square Victoria and Place d’Armes métro stations, you can’t miss how more than 100 artists from Quebec, Canada and several other countries have interpreted the festival theme of Foundations.

At Place Ville Marie, Nadia Myre has curated an exhibition of meditative works by seven aboriginal artists. Mike Patten, who is of Cree and

European descent, is not in this group, nor is his work underground. In a rare sunlit corridor of Art Souterrain’s maze — in the West-cliff building — he makes a directly political statement.

Smoke Signals, a teepee made of giant fake cigarettes, “speaks of a culture going up in smoke” with its Las Vegas business model, Patten said in an email. The selling of cigarettes on reserves is a shaky foundation for an economy.

Megan Moore attempts to preserve the memory of her grandmother’s home in Rosemère — her sanctuary as a child — with a collage of close-up photographs. Maison 1963-2013, her patchwork version of her grandmother’s home, is ultimately “an attempt to hold on to things

which are sure to pass,” she said in an email about her installation in the Westcliff building. Another artwork that refers to ephemerality of the material world is Mélodie Prégent’s *The Geometry of Spaces*, in the 1000 de la Gauchetière building.

Both the natural and built landscapes are constantly decomposing and being reborn, she said in an email. “Despite their apparent stability, are the landscapes we inhabit as firmly rooted as we think?”

Presenting her photographs on sculptured geometric shapes allows viewers to change their viewing angles and create their own compositions, she said.

Art Souterrain has many installations that include photographs and videos. There are examples of sound art, too, like Sonia Khenfesch and Denis Labelle’s field of noisy poppies in the Palais des congrès. *Song of Money*, Monet’s Field is a Monet painting interpreted for the digital age. There are sculptures, too. Jacques Samson’s *Vectors and Branches* is an intricate arrangement of wires that was stopping passersby in Complexe Guy-Favreau.

Art Souterrain is also about artists’ demonstrations and performances in venues that change daily through the weekends.

On Saturday, the “spotlight events” take place in Place des Arts, and on Sunday, Complexe Desjardins is the

place to be. In the festival’s final three days, Friday to March 16, the spotlight shifts to 1000 de la Gauchetière, the Palais des congrès and the Eaton Centre.

One event that follows the spotlight is Déclic, in which a photographer is at the site from noon to 6 p.m. to photograph visitors and posts the results on Facebook.

Art Souterrain continues to March 16 in an underground network of 15 downtown buildings connected by tunnels and five métro stations. For more information, visit [artsouterrain.com](http://artsouterrain.com).

With 25 galleries, the Belgo

Building is always a place to visit and explore, especially on Satur-

days, when there is likely to be a vernissage or two. Just drop in, or plan ahead by reading Bettina Forget’s Belgo Report ([thebelgore-port.com](http://thebelgore-port.com)).

At Art45, Michael Smith is showing paintings that sit on a knife edge between abstraction and representation. Smith sees his paintings as referencing the experience, not the image, of the forest landscape.

“The materiality and seductiveness of painting is the first attraction to a viewer,” he said in an interview. “Then once the viewer is pulled in, (he or she) asks: ‘What is going on?’ ”

A Smith painting is an explosion of colours and shapes. The triptych

Parallel Ground shows what is unmistakably a tree in the foreground, but as the landscape recedes, only the associations prompted by the tree trunk suggest the rocks, twigs and greenery of the forest scene.

Each painting in Parallel Ground could be of the same scene on different days, or completely different places, Smith said. His landscape paintings are fictions — mashups of forests in B.C. and Nova Scotia, where he has family and visits regularly.

Born in Britain, Smith teaches at Dawson College.

“As soon as I saw Borduas and the Automatistes, I felt at home,” Smith said of arriving in Quebec more than

30 years ago. Works by Michael Smith are on display until March 22 at Art45, 372 Ste-Catherine St. W., Suite 220. For more information, visit [art45.ca](http://art45.ca).

An open call for artists to reflect on Montreal has resulted in an exhibition of 134 paintings, drawings, photographs and collages at Beaux-Arts des Amériques. Sixty-five artists, myself included, have presented both abstract and figurative interpretations of the Montreal they love — despite the potholes — on wood panels 14 inches square.

From Jean-Achille Kouamé’s gritty view of street workers and orange cones in Rue barrée to Giuliana Montanari’s colourfully abstracted Habitat 67, the exhibition includes

many street scenes in a wide range of styles.

Montreal: Views of the City continues to March 23 at Beaux-Arts des Amériques, 3944 St-Denis St. For more information, visit [beauxartsdesameriques.com](http://beauxartsdesameriques.com).

Collecting contemporary art is the subject of a five-session course starting Wednesday at the Musée d’art contemporain. The program includes visits to an artist’s studio and to corporate and private collections. For more information, visit [macm.org](http://macm.org).



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