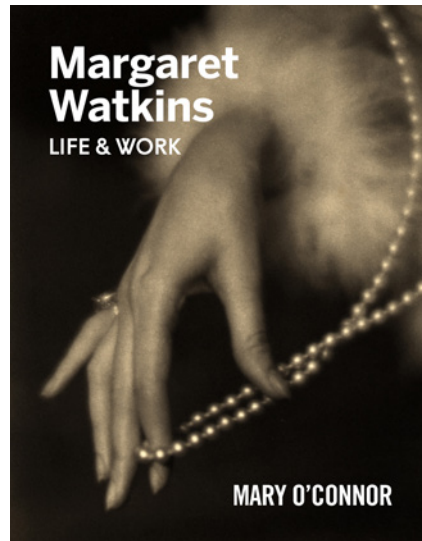
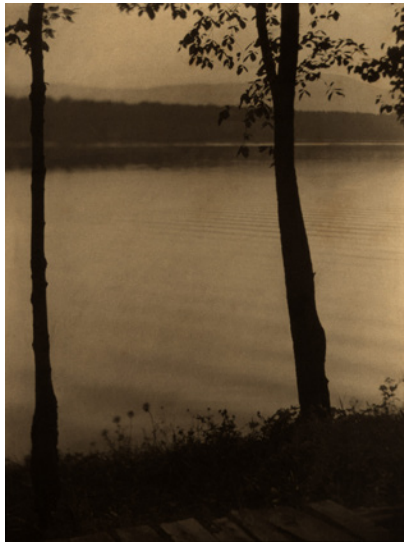


MARGARET WATKINS: LIFE & WORK AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ON FRIDAY, MARCH 8, INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Written by Mary O'Connor, the new open-access online art book celebrates one of the most influential Canadian photographers of her generation and is available from the Art Canada Institute.

A selection of press images is available through the link at the bottom of this release.

Among the first global photographers to turn their lens to the domestic world, Margaret Watkins (1884–1969) was a Canadian artistic innovator. Download this book, and the many others in the Art Canada Institute library, now at www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/.



LEFT: *Evening*, 1923. CENTRE: Cover of *Margaret Watkins: Life & Work*. RIGHT: *Self-Portrait*, 1923.

March 7, 2024—***Margaret Watkins: Life & Work*** tells the story of one of the pioneers of Canadian photography: Margaret Watkins (1884–1969). She rose to fame in the 1920s for pulling remarkable beauty from the everyday in her kitchen still-life photography, a genre of her own invention, and helping to give photographic art the legitimacy it enjoys today. The Art Canada Institute (ACI) is pleased to announce the release of ***Margaret Watkins: Life & Work*** by Mary O'Connor, a new open-access online art book available free of charge in both English and French: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/margaret-watkins/>. The book is the most recent full-length account of Watkins's unprecedented dual success as an innovative modernist artist and a highly in-demand commercial photographer. The book also delves into why, despite widespread fame in the 1920s, Watkins's legacy was lost for much of the twentieth century.

This latest book from the Art Canada Institute joins a growing list of titles that are redefining Canadian art in a contemporary context. These digital volumes, which include titles such as *Norval Morrisseau: Life & Work*, *Emily Carr: Life & Work*, and *Kazuo Nakamura: Life & Work*, give Canadians unprecedented access to the images, documents, and stories that define our visual culture.

Elevating the Ordinary to Extraordinary

Born in Hamilton, Ontario, Watkins created photographs that placed ordinary objects in dazzling modernist geometric arrangements. Their intimacy and originality was unprecedented in photography. She triumphed as an artistic photographer, winning numerous prizes, exhibiting in 21 group exhibitions internationally between 1920 and 1925, and earning comparisons in *Vanity Fair* to Brâncuși and Picasso. “Watkins took her kitchen sink, and later the structures of our cities, and made their mundane everydayness, even messiness, come alive with a new sense of balance and harmony,” says author Mary O’Connor.

Among the first women photographers hired by a major advertising agency, Watkins also forever transformed advertising photography with mysterious, provocative photos of products at a time when straightforward illustrations dominated. As a portraitist, Watkins photographed artists including pianist Sergei Rachmaninov and painter Kenneth Hayes Miller.

Commercial Success, Then a Fade to Obscurity

Watkins pursued her childhood ambition to practice art after the bankruptcy of her family’s business pushed her into adulthood. She moved to the United States in 1908 in search of her ideal medium and attended Clarence H. White’s Seguinland School of Photography in 1914. After moving to New York the next year, she found inspiration with the growing circle of Pictorialist photographers there. O’Connor writes that after rapid success in the 1920s, the artist relocated to Glasgow to care for her ailing relatives, leading soon to an early retirement.

“The revolutionary vision of the ordinary world captured in Watkins’s work has left a legacy not only in the Canadian art world, but globally in the commercial and personal photography that surrounds us every day in the twenty-first century,” says Sara Angel, Founder and Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute. “*Margaret Watkins: Life & Work* joins the ranks of Art Canada Institute books that shed an invaluable light on the underexamined careers of important Canadian women artists.”

Watkins’s career and the extent of its influence are explored comprehensively in *Margaret Watkins: Life & Work*, including the late-career era in which Watkins undertook innovative street and colour photography experiments while travelling through Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom.

For **media requests** please contact: media@aci-iac.ca

About Mary O’Connor

Mary O’Connor is Professor Emerita, Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. Her research interest in modernist culture (1890–1939) has remained constant since her doctoral work at the University of Toronto, despite the many tangents of her research life—which have included African American women’s novels, women’s life-writing of the seventeenth century, women’s health promotion, and photography. Arguably, the main thread of her research has been about everyday life across various cultural and social expressions. She has co-curated art exhibitions on women’s art at the McMaster Museum of Art (*Embodied Matter*, 2006) and on *The Archive and Everyday Life* at the Ontario Science Centre (2015).

Her research on everyday life and its objects led her to the kitchen still-life photographs of Margaret Watkins at the National Gallery of Canada. Since 1999, O’Connor’s work on Watkins has appeared in chapters in books, in exhibition catalogues, and in her co-authored monograph with Katherine Tweedie, *Seduced by Modernity: The Photography of Margaret Watkins* (2007). In 2022, she co-created with Tweedie the short film *Archive Traces: Margaret Watkins Photographer*, which showed at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

About the Art Canada Institute

The Art Canada Institute is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive, multivocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, on a digital platform, and free of charge in both English and French, across Canada and internationally. To accomplish this, ACI works with Canada's leading cultural institutions, art historians, curators, and visual culture experts, and is dedicated to the creation of authoritative original content on the people, themes, and topics that have defined Canadian art history.

To learn more about ACI and to access our free digital library, please visit us!

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IMAGE CREDITS

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2. Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Study for advertisement for Cutex nail polish]*, 1924, palladium print, 21.5 × 16.5 cm. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow (1997.S.a.2). Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.
3. Margaret Watkins, *Untitled [Construction, Glasgow]*, 1928–38, gelatin silver print, 16.8 × 12.2 cm. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of CentroCentro, Madrid. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.
4. Margaret Watkins, *The Tea Cup [advertisement for Cutex]*, 1924, palladium print, 10.3 × 15.3 cm. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.
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6. Margaret Watkins, *Still Life – Circles*, 1919, platinum print, 16.3 × 20.2 cm. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.
7. Margaret Watkins, *Self-Portrait*, 1923, gelatin silver print, 21.4 × 16 cm. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.
8. Margaret Watkins, *Still Life – Bath Tub*, 1919, platinum print, 16.5 × 20.5 cm. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.
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12. Margaret Watkins, *The Wharf*, 1922, palladium print, 20.2 × 15.1 cm. Collection of The Hidden Lane Gallery, Glasgow. Courtesy of The Hidden Lane Gallery. © Joseph Mulholland, Glasgow.
13. Mary O'Connor, author of *Margaret Watkins: Life & Work*.