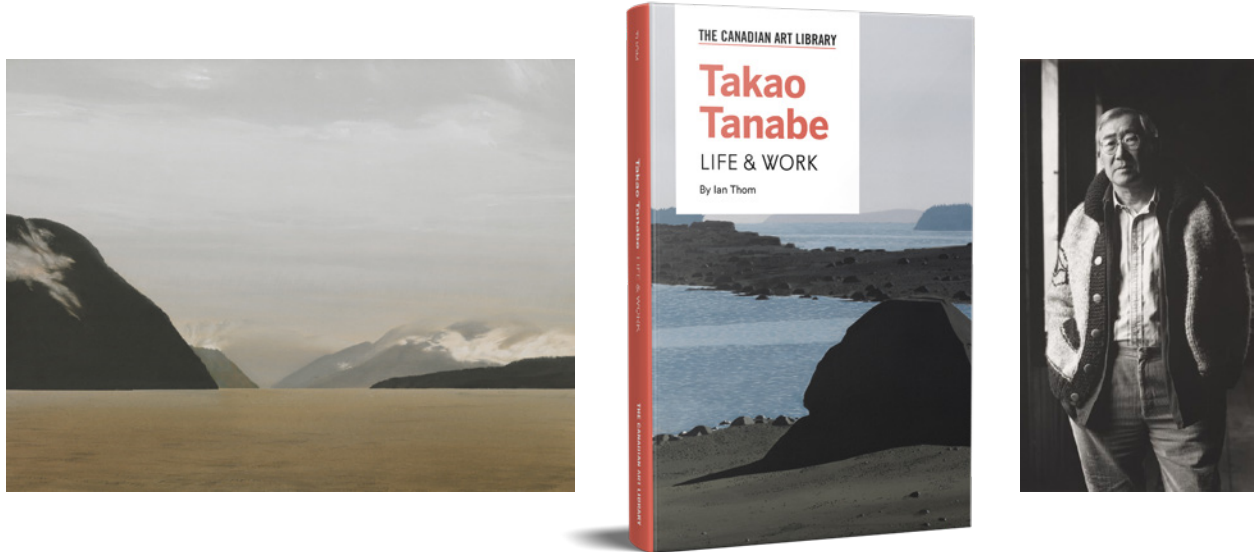


The Iconic and Epic Vision of Takao Tanabe: A new book on the 97-year-old groundbreaking Canadian artist explores his singular career and enduring legacy

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



Left: Takao Tanabe, *Strait of Georgia 1/90: Raza Pass*, 1990. Centre: Cover of *Takao Tanabe: Life & Work*. Right: Takao Tanabe, 1987.

April 24, 2024, Toronto—The Art Canada Institute is celebrating one of the country’s most enduring and intriguing artists with the book *Takao Tanabe: Life & Work* by Ian Thom. The beautiful volume delves into the Canadian artistic legend’s extraordinary life story and prolific career as a painter, printmaker, educator, and creative visionary. It is also available as an [open-access online book](#).

While Tanabe’s early life made his artistic ascent somewhat unlikely—he grew up in a remote fishing village in British Columbia before being forcibly relocated during the Second World War to an internment camp for Japanese Canadians—his talent was recognized as soon as he enrolled at the Winnipeg School of Art after the war. The young artist explored a range of mediums, including watercolour, acrylic, and oil painting. Relentlessly curious, Tanabe advanced his technique through visits to places such as New York, Europe, and Japan, becoming one of the most respected abstract artists working in North America.

Innovation and national renown

Although a focus on abstraction characterized his early years, Tanabe went on to produce paintings that changed the way Canadians viewed the Prairies and the Pacific Coast, gaining national acclaim. His prairie paintings, largely created while living in Alberta, distilled vast expanses of land into evocative images that blurred the lines between representation and abstraction. A move back to B.C. in the 1980s led him to reconceive the coastal landscapes of his childhood, creating majestic, misty, rain-obscured vistas of the West Coast. Like his prairie paintings, these dramatic works are devoid of human presence and appear effortless, with no brush strokes or sense of the energy of the hand that had applied the paint, rendering striking, technically impeccable paintings that reward long contemplation.

“Takao Tanabe is one of the country’s foremost landscape painters, and his work holds deep resonance for anyone who connects with the landscapes of Canada,” said Sara Angel, Founder and Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute.

“*Takao Tanabe: Life & Work* explores his extraordinary body of work through a contemporary lens. While we offer this book and many others in digital editions, we know there is something special and intimate about holding a book in your hands, delighting in new discoveries with each turn of the page. At the Art Canada Institute we are delighted to be able to bring that experience to Canadians and to art lovers around the world.”

Tanabe’s legacy

“Tanabe’s legacy is far-reaching, and as I wrote this book, my admiration for him continued to grow,” said author Ian Thom. “My organization of a major exhibition of his work, *Takao Tanabe*, in 2005, was a pivotal point for me in understanding his enormous range and power. I quickly realized that he is an artist of both exceptional originality and remarkable skill. It has been an honour to revisit Tanabe’s work and re-examine his enormous contribution to Canadian visual culture, and I am grateful to the Art Canada Institute for making *Takao Tanabe: Life & Work* available in this beautiful print edition.”

Numerous Canadian institutions and top prizes have recognized Tanabe; he has received honours that include the Order of British Columbia, the Order of Canada, a Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts, the Paul D. Fleck Fellowship at the Banff Centre, and the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts. Tanabe has three honorary doctorates—from the University of Lethbridge, the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, and Vancouver Island University. He was a pivotal figure in arts education as Program Head of Visual Arts at the Banff Centre, and he continues to be a proponent for emerging Canadian artists. He currently lives and works on rural Vancouver Island.

ACI’s multi-platform offerings

This latest book from the ACI joins a growing list of titles that are redefining Canadian art in a contemporary context. A key mission of the ACI is the creation of an open-access digital art library, the [Canadian Online Art Book Project](#), which is available in English and French, free of charge. Recognizing that we live in a multi-platform world where readers seek content in different formats and that there continues to be passionate support for printed books, in 2019 the ACI created the Canadian Art Library, an imprint of ACI that publishes up to four books annually. Books currently available for purchase and forthcoming titles can be ordered [here](#). Free online books, including *Takao Tanabe: Life & Work*, can be downloaded [here](#).

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

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About author Ian Thom

Ian Thom is a respected historian, author, and senior curator who has contributed greatly to the understanding and appreciation of Canadian art. As a scholar, notably of the works of Emily Carr, he has promoted the artistic heritage of British Columbia and its artists. He has organized hundreds of temporary and travelling exhibits and has published extensively on prominent Canadian artists. As a senior curator to institutions such as the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, and the Vancouver Art Gallery, he made numerous acquisitions that have provided a lasting legacy for all Canadians.

Over the more than thirty years that Thom was at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the collection doubled in size, from 6,000 to 12,000 works, many by the Group of Seven and Emily Carr (with the gallery

acquiring 165 of her works). In 2008, he was appointed to the Order of Canada for his contributions to Canadian art. Thom curated Takao Tanabe's first major retrospective, *Takao Tanabe*, in 2005, and he organized the exhibition *Takao Tanabe: Printmaker* for the Kelowna Art Gallery in 2023. He currently works as an independent curator, consultant, and writer.

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, the 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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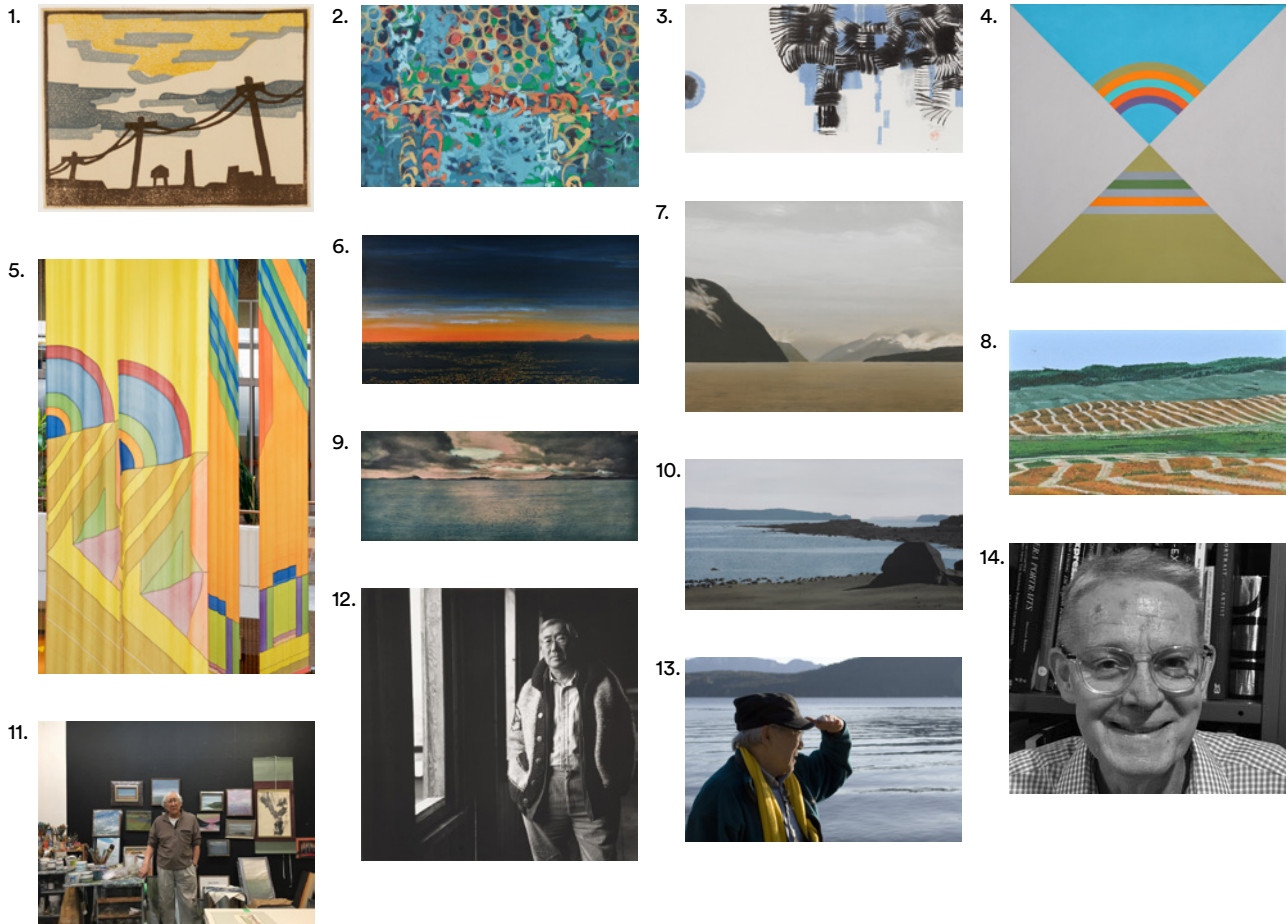


IMAGE CREDITS

1. Takao Tanabe, *Christmas Card*, c.1948, linocut on paper, 11.6 × 15.6 cm. Winnipeg Art Gallery, Acquired with funds from the Winnipeg Art Gallery Foundation Inc. (G-90-443ab). Courtesy of WAG-Qaumajuq. Photo credit: Skye Callow.
2. Takao Tanabe, *Fragment 35*, 1953, oil on canvas, 78.6 × 119 cm. Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of the artist (94.12.1). Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery.
3. Takao Tanabe, *Setting Sun*, 1960, sumi ink and watercolour on paper, 31.8 × 59 cm. Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of the artist (2002.23.11). Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery.
4. Takao Tanabe, *Kitselas*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 86 × 85.6 cm. Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Gift of the artist, Errington, British Columbia, 2005 (2005.407). Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.
5. Takao Tanabe, *Untitled (Banners)*, 1973, eight printed nylon banners and brass weights, 914.4 x 76.2 cm each. University of Regina President's Art Collection (pc.1973.2). Courtesy of the University of Regina President's Art Collection.
6. Takao Tanabe, *Sunset 4/86: Crossing the Gulf*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 113.3 × 212.7 cm. Courtesy of Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto.
7. Takao Tanabe, *Strait of Georgia 1/90: Raza Pass*, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 142.7 × 186 cm. Audain Art Museum, Whistler, Gift of Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa (2018.069). Courtesy of the Audain Art Museum. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography.
8. Takao Tanabe, *Peace River 27/99*, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 12.7 × 21.5 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto.
9. Takao Tanabe, *Malacca Strait: Dawn*, 2004, woodblock etching, 59.9 × 151.8 cm. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Gift of the artist (2019.025.004). Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.
10. Takao Tanabe, *Cormorant Island, Looking South*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 102 × 185 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.
11. Takao Tanabe in his studio, n.d. Photograph by Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery.
12. Takao Tanabe in his Vancouver Island studio, 1987. Photograph by Eliza Massey. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Topham Photography.
13. Still photograph from the documentary series *Landscape as Muse*, 2009. Photograph by Cam Koroluk. Courtesy of 291 Film Company Inc.
14. Ian Thom, author of *Takao Tanabe: Life & Work*.