

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Meticulously crafted, Kurelek's paintings range from whimsical, charming scenes inspired by his life in the Prairies to turbulent expressions of his inner mind and his personal, religious, and cultural concerns.

The Art Canada Institute announces the publication of its free online art book about the singular artist William Kurelek.



LEFT: William Kurelek, *Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968, mixed media on hardboard, 125.1 x 149.5 cm, the Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto Arts. **RIGHT:** William Kurelek posing before his paintings *Lest We Repent...*, 1964 (top left), and *This Is the Nemesis*, 1965 (bottom left).

TORONTO, ON – Born and raised on the Prairies, William Kurelek (1927–1977) created meticulously crafted paintings that predominantly explore his Roman Catholic religion and his Ukrainian-Canadian cultural roots, confronting viewers with the stark challenges faced by immigrants. For Kurelek, style and technical skill were meaningless; he wanted to express emotions in an idiosyncratic and deeply personal manner. He developed a

distinct approach to painting, using ballpoint pens and texturing with coloured pencils then scrubbing and scratching at the resulting image. From didactic writings about his work sprang a number of children's books, for which he also became well known in Canada.

One of Kurelek's most famous paintings, *The Maze*, 1953, provides a privileged glimpse "inside my skull," as put by the artist, who struggled throughout his life with depression and schizophrenia. A dark, hypnotically dense composition in gouache, the work shows Kurelek's personal, religious, and cultural concerns in tiny, impossibly detailed vignettes crammed into dollhouse-like rooms inside a structure resembling a bisected cranium. In a strikingly literal sense, the painting urges viewers to go inside the mind of this troubled, brilliant soul. With *William Kurelek: Life & Work*, Andrew Kear demonstrates why, more than a quarter-century after Kurelek's death, Kurelek's work stands as an enduring commentary on multiculturalism and mental illness in Canada.

For images from *William Kurelek: Life & Work*:

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About Andrew Kear:

Andrew Kear is curator of Historical Canadian Art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery and a sessional lecturer in Canadian art at the University of Winnipeg. He has written and curated exhibitions on a diverse range of Canadian artists, from L.L. FitzGerald to William Kurelek and most recently Karel Funk. Kear's writing has been published in the magazines *Canadian Art*, *Border Crossings*, and *Sculpture*, and he was a juror for the 2015 Canadian Art Foundation Writing Prize.

About the Art Canada Institute:

Based at Massey College, University of Toronto, the Art Canada Institute is a non-profit research organization dedicated to Canadian art history, research, education and promotion.

About the Canadian Online Art Book Project

The Canadian Online Art Book Project publishes six free art eBooks a year, available for free in both French and English, written by the country's art experts in an accessible voice, to promote the study of Canada and its art history to a broad public audience, both domestically and abroad.

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