

## PRESS RELEASE

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### ***A History of Photography in Canada, Volume 1* by Martha Langford, Honoured with the 2026 Melva J. Dwyer Award**

WESTFORD, Massachusetts – *A History of Photography in Canada, Volume 1*, an exhaustive, essential reference work for Canadian art and photography, was presented with the 35th annual Melva J. Dwyer Award by the Canada Chapter of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA). Written by Martha Langford, the book was published in 2025 by McGill-Queens University Press. The Dwyer jurors selected *A History of Photography in Canada, Volume 1* out of 22 publications on art, architecture, and museum studies from across Canada.

*Emphasizing technological readiness and cultural eagerness for the medium, Martha Langford shows how photography served ideals of progress and improvement as Canada's settler society looked to master the world by seizing its visible traces. The imposition of these programs on Indigenous Peoples and indentured labourers is confronted throughout this volume, which offers both narratives and counternarratives of subjectification. Reproducing images of people, places, events, and objects from the unceded territories of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, from British North America, and from the Dominion of Canada and the Dominion of Newfoundland, Langford asks where and when photographs were taken, why, and by whom. How did the making and preservation of a photograph alter the circumstances in which it was produced, and how did this affect individual and collective consciousness? Alongside accomplished portraits, landscapes, still lifes, and their vernacular counterparts, the book draws glimmers of photographic experience from treatises and doggerel, official reports and personal diaries, newspapers, magazines, letters, and travelogues. – A History of Photography in Canada, Volume 1, McGill-Queens University Press website*

“This history deals with the photographs we have, seeking to convey the broader contexts and particular arrangements that allowed them to be made, circulated, and preserved. These three photographic acts – making, circulating, and preserving – can never be separated. They

constitute a chain of decisions involving different actors at every stage, including a historian who writes about this period – 1839 to 1918 – from a great historical distance that is not shortened by photography alone, but depends on contemporaneous responses, contemporary research, and overarching theory that support cultural investigation.” writes Langford (p. 10).

Drawing extensively on primary sources and a wide range of images, it establishes a new standard reference for Canadian photographic and art history while remaining accessible to a broad readership. The book situates photography within both national and transnational frameworks, revealing how images construct, complicate, and preserve narratives of identity, including difficult and often overlooked histories. Praised by the jury as an exhaustive and essential work for Canadian libraries, the volume stands out for its interdisciplinary reach, its engagement with issues of representation and colonial context, and its significance as the first in a landmark multi-volume series that will shape the field for years to come.

Martha Langford is a Distinguished Professor Emeriti in the Department of Art History, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University. From 2012 to 2025, she served as Research Chair and Director of the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art. She was also editor-in-chief of *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien*. She currently serves as co-editor, with Dr. Erin Silver, of the Beaverbrook Foundation Series on Canadian Art History of McGill-Queen's University Press. She is also a member of the editorial board of *History of Photography*. In 2018, she became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. A long-time member of the Universities Art Association of Canada, she received the UAAC-AAUC Recognition Award in 2020.

### **Honorable mentions**

Many of the 22 books nominated for this year's Melva J. Dwyer Award fill a gap in our knowledge of underrepresented cultures and art practices and, for their exemplary research, the jury awarded honorable mentions to:

Landry, Pierre B., *Jean Paul Riopelle en Mouvement (1923-2002)*, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec [CC2.1]and 5 Continents Editions, 2024.

MacLaren, I.S., *Paul Kane's Travels in Indigenous North America: Writings and Art, Life and Times*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024.

Cathryn Copper, ARLIS/NA Canadian Liaison, was the 2026 ARLIS/NA Melva J. Dwyer Award



Sub-Committee Chair. Jury members were David Greene, Rebecca Young, and Sara Ellis.

The Melva J. Dwyer Award was established in recognition of the contribution made to the field of art librarianship by Melva Dwyer, former head of the Fine Arts Library, University of British Columbia. It is given to the creators of exceptional reference or research tools relating to Canadian art and architecture. Dwyer was a champion of the arts and of art librarianship who mentored a generation of ARLIS/NA colleagues.

### **About Melva J. Dwyer (October 29, 1919 - November 13, 2017)**

With a diploma in piano and a master's degree in history, Dwyer joined the University of British Columbia Library after completing her MLIS at the University of Toronto. Dwyer quickly set to work building the first major art library in western Canada, relying on her expertise and helped considerably by a large monetary donation. In 1967, she became the first chair of CARLIS, the Canadian Art Libraries Section of the Canadian Association of Special Libraries and Information Services Division. This group later migrated to ARLIS/NA to become the Canadian Chapter. Throughout her career, Dwyer was active in ARLIS and IFLA, and traveled extensively to further develop connections with colleagues and book dealers. She retired from the University of British Columbia in 1984.

### **About the Art Libraries Society of North America**

Founded in 1972, the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) is a dynamic, international organization of close to 1,000 individuals devoted to fostering excellence in art and design librarianship and image management in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The membership includes architecture and art librarians, visual resources professionals, artists, curators, educators, publishers, students, and others interested in visual arts information. To serve this diverse constituency, the Society provides a wide range of programs and services within an organizational structure that encourages participation at every level.

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