

The History of Industrial Photography in Canada

“Oh the song of the future has been sung / All the battles have been won
On the mountain tops we stand / All the world at our command
We have opened up her soil / With our teardrops and our toil”

— *Gordon Lightfoot, “Canadian Railroad Trilogy”*



[Image information](#)

(TORONTO – August 17, 2011) A new exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario traces the history of Canada’s changing industrial landscape through the lens of some of the country’s most extraordinary photographers from the past 150 years. [Songs of the Future: Canadian Industrial Photographs, 1858 to Today](#) opens August 20 and includes more than 100 photographs by such artists as Alexander Henderson, William Notman, John Vanderpant, E. Haanel Cassidy, Ralph Greenhill, George Hunter and Edward Burtynsky.

Depicting railway and bridge building, quarries and mines, and the lumber, pulp and paper, and concrete industries in Canada, *Songs of the Future* traces the shifting perspectives on industry and the Canadian landscape from the Industrial Revolution to today. The exhibition highlights the ways in which the photographers' perspectives on industry have shifted along

with those of society at large, as celebratory images of human domination over nature give way to more critical views of industrial impact.

The exhibition is curated by Sophie Hackett, the AGO's assistant curator of photography, who integrates works from various periods into thematic concentrations, including images featuring: the construction of the Victoria Bridge over the St. Lawrence River in the late 1850s; the building of the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company, a pulp-and-paper mill located in Grand Falls, Newfoundland, in 1912; and the development of the railroad in Canada.

"The exhibition explores the history of Canadian photography through the topic of industrial imagery," says Hackett. "Featuring sites from the Maritimes to the west coast, and rooted in the fundamentally Canadian genre of landscape, the photographs bear witness to the various aesthetic techniques and styles emphasized by Canadian photographers over the past 150 years."

The exhibition, on view through April 29, 2012, comprises chiefly works from the AGO collection, augmented by a selection of key loans — marking the first time that the Gallery has displayed its vast collection of Canadian industrial photographs.

Songs of the Future: Canadian Industrial Photographs, 1858 to Today is organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario. The AGO is deeply grateful for the late Mira Godard's support of the Gallery's photography collection from 2007 to 2011.

ABOUT THE AGO

With a permanent collection of more than 80,000 works of art, the Art Gallery of Ontario is among the most distinguished art museums in North America. In 2008, with a stunning new design by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry, the AGO opened its doors to the public amid international acclaim. Highlights include Galleria Italia, a gleaming showcase made of wood and glass running the length of an entire city block along the Gallery's façade; and the feature staircase, spiraling up through the roof of Walker Court and into the new contemporary galleries above. From the extensive Group of Seven collection to the dramatic African art gallery; from the cutting-edge works in the contemporary tower to Peter Paul Rubens' masterpiece *The Massacre of The Innocents*, a highlight of the celebrated Thomson Collection, there is truly something for everyone at the AGO.

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