

The Art of History

Historic events and famous people from our past have inspired many artists. But the work they create isn't fact — it's art.

The Death of General Wolfe 1770 Benjamin West

Painted eleven years after the British defeated the French on the Plains of Abraham, this famous work shows what some people might call Canadian history. General James Wolfe lies dying as the British gain control over Canada and les Canadiens. How does the artist want us to think of Wolfe?

Measures about 1.5 by 2 metres.

Lieut.-Col. Simon Fraser, behind the guy in green. He wasn't there when Wolfe died.

Capt. Hervey Smythe, holding Wolfe's right arm. He wasn't there either.



The man in the green jacket is a settler.

Dr. Thomas Hinde, in the dark blue jacket. Nope — he wasn't there either.

On the Plains of Abraham, First Nations fought on the side of the French, NOT the British

In reality, Wolfe had just one person with him on the battlefield when he died.

Art-lovers were shocked that West painted people with accurate clothing and weapons of the time. Most insisted he should have shown them in togas so the scene would be timeless.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, GIFT OF THE SECOND DUCHE OF WESTMINSTER TO THE CANADIAN WAR MEMORIALS, 1918. TRANSFERRED FROM THE CANADIAN WAR MEMORIALS, 1921. PHOTO: NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

Kanata 1992 Robert Houle

Houle is a Saulteaux First Nation artist from Manitoba.
How has he changed the painting's focus?

Measures about 2.3 metres by 1.8 metres



The Iroquois word *kanata*, which means village, is likely where our country got its name.

Measures about 54 by 85 centimetres

How does Suzor-Coté's painting reflect what the French were feeling after losing this all-important battle for control of Canada?



Montcalm's room almost seems like a cave.

Study for La Mort de Montcalm 1902 Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté

This painting isn't the final version — it's kind of like a practice, called a study. How does it feel different from *The Death of General Wolfe*? Notice the wounded soldier, and the Roman Catholic nun and priests who were central to life in New France.