

Once, in summer

MONICA TAP



July 25 - September 5, 2026



Monica Tap, *But a few leaves*, 2026, oil on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist and MKG127. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid.

Front, Monica Tap, *Listening to the wind*, 2026, oil on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist and MKG127. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid.

Once, in summer

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What would it be like to see the world through the eyes of all the painters you know and adore? For Monica Tap, an encounter with soft evening light on a distant hill echoes the serene brushwork of Corot. An exuberantly flowering rhododendron garden suddenly transports her into a Bonnard canvas. Closer to home, a hike through the Canadian wilderness conjures a kaleidoscope of associations, colours, and painterly gestures—Dodd, McCarthy, Milne. After years of dedication to the discipline of painting and studying art history, Tap sees the world through the lens of painting.

To Tap, every painting is a container of time that reverberates with the artist's own experiences in front of the canvas, each mark recalling and rippling out into the broad and deep ocean of painting's history. Each painting in *Once, in summer* is a convergence of multiple spaces, perspectives, and moments—a walk through a particular wilderness in the company of other painters.

Just Northeast of Georgian Bay on the Pickerel River is a site to which Tap has returned for over twenty years, a friend's off-grid cabin perched in a landscape straight out of a Group of Seven painting. A quick hike over a granite ridge leads to the site at the heart of this exhibition, Sucker Creek, a humble spot inaccessible by road or motorboat. The only industry in this remote, intact wilderness is that of the resident beavers whose efforts continuously alter the terrain; a broad shallow lake surrounded by junipers, blueberries, jack pines and aspens, dotted with ferns, lichens and mosses. For Tap, it is a living collage, and for years she has wanted to paint it.

To understand these paintings in depth, it is helpful to know about the location, but it is equally important to be aware of Tap's process. During her excursions to Sucker Creek, Tap photographs spaces and scenes that catch her eye—often drawn to layered and complex arrangements of shape, texture, value, and colour. Back in her studio, Tap prints these photographs and weeds through them, looking for images that will make interesting subjects or pose unique compositional challenges. For many painters, this is where it would end: choose a reference photograph and start painting. Tap, however, adds another

layer of process and, with it, she opens a world of new meanings and associations.

Tap's studio is home to her collection of catalogues from Canadian art auctions, which include high-quality reproductions of the paintings being sold, some by the heroes of Canadian art history—Thomson, Riopelle, Nakamura, Carr—some by less familiar artists who have fallen out of fashion. No matter the painting's status, Tap cuts the reproductions out of the catalogues and sorts them by their dominant colour, each cutting going into a box with dozens of other reproductions of a similar palette.

Tap integrates the catalogue clippings into collages that loosely reimagine her photographs of Sucker Creek—cutting and combining bits of paintings from a range of time periods and styles. Tap's collage process creates a flattened version of her subject, rendered in a constellation of voices, wherein no single voice or perspective is in charge. These collages become the models for her large-scale studio paintings. The process is an extension of her philosophy of painting, which has developed and been reinvented throughout her career.

Born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, Tap's access to paintings was limited primarily to art books and slides. It comes as no surprise then, that the reproduction and circulation of images are embedded within her relationship to the medium of painting. In the 80s and 90s, as an art student interested in painting when many of her contemporaries were adopting photography, installation and video, Tap felt the need to find a way around the popular notion that "painting was dead." In the more

avant-garde, academic circles of the artworld, painting (especially for female artists) was perceived as a poor choice of medium, considering its historical associations to hyper-masculinity, misogyny, colonialism, and capitalism. In response, Tap developed a strategy that would acknowledge and critique that history and re-frame painting as a medium that still has something to say in the contemporary world.

Visual artists, at this time, were picking up cues from hip-hop artists who were sampling and layering music from other genres to create something new. Likewise, Tap began to experiment with quotation from art history. To establish a decidedly feminist voice for contemporary painting, Tap began to sample the 17th century Dutch floral paintings of Rachel Ruysch, (a female forebear, given Tap's own Dutch heritage as a first-generation Canadian). This began a practice based on "thrifting art history" that has taken on many forms and adaptations over the last 30 years.

In the most recent iteration of this practice, Tap uses collage as a rough map into her paintings, considering and inhabiting the mark-making of the artists that she is quoting. Sure, it's her hand holding the brush, but Tap is quick to say that it's not just her. She didn't make the paint. She didn't assemble the brush. She didn't create the land that is her subject, nor did she create the works or reproductions that are part of her process. She recognizes and emphasizes her position as an intermediary—a role that is informed by her status as a settler in relation to the Indigenous land where she lives and works. Tap rejects the notion of any kind of dominion over her subject. Her goal is to be a



Monica Tap, *So wide and so deep*, 2026, oil on canvas.
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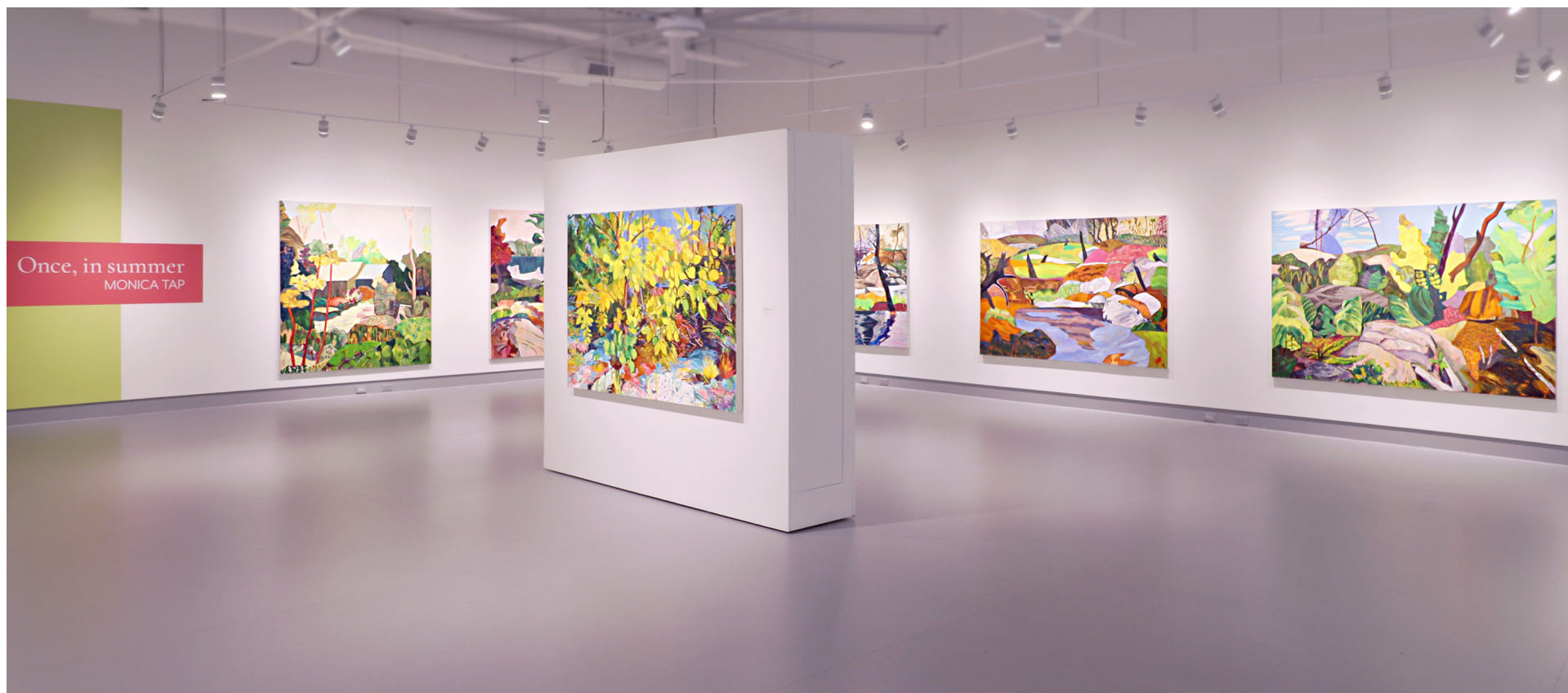


Monica Tap, *Once, in summer*, 2026, oil on canvas.
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thoughtful steward to the land and to her art form. Rather than seeing her paintings as free-standing products of her own imagination, Tap has adopted an ecological view wherein every painting is an “ecology of images” and every painter is part of a broader community of artists, past and present. As such, Tap’s activity in front of the canvas becomes a conversation between her and the artists that she is incorporating into these compositions.

The ecological associations aren’t only conceptual. Tap is deeply concerned with the consequences of climate change and its corresponding, destructive worldview that perceives the natural world as a commodity—a narrative that was helped along, unintentionally, by painters such as the Group of Seven. Their work put forth a vision of vast untouched wilderness that provided Canadians with an identity which, in its beauty, blinded their audience to the realities of colonialism and capitalism that would destabilize Indigenous ties to the land for generations and transform something sacred into a commodity through forestry, agriculture, mining, and tourism. Tap is increasingly engaged as a quiet activist, recently co-organizing plein air paint-ins at Ontario Place to raise awareness of the planned destruction of hundreds of trees and to document those environments before they were levelled.

To embody her critique of the abuse of nature, Tap’s paintings don’t behave as seamless, consumable landscapes. As such, each piece is a representation of the ruptured state of the natural world as much as they are multi-perspectival representations of the history, community, and ecosystem of artists. Like the current reality of the Canadian



Installation view of *Once, in summer*: Monica Tap.

wilderness, Tap's paintings are not unified spaces. As human development and industry encroach upon natural spaces, their edges become more apparent, their nature more compressed. Just open Google Maps, and you can see it; the sectioning of land by highways, railroads, and municipal and provincial boundaries. The sharply delineated edges that border each shape in Tap's compositions echo these realities, a gesture of resistance against further romanticising the Canadian landscape.

The title of the exhibition, *Once, in summer*, (as is the case for several of the works in the exhibition) is derived from a poem by Mary Oliver that captures a magical fleeting moment in nature. It suggests the passage of time and the role of memory—two core themes that have spanned Tap's career. In her larger studio works, Tap presents a multiplicity of time—each masked shape behaving like a portal into the time-period and places (the studio or plein air locale) of another artist.

Tap often paints and exhibits her work in series, using seriality as a way of emphasizing the way that time is embedded in the act of looking. Tap's five Sucker Creek paintings loosely reiterate a panoramic sequence of photographs that Tap shot in 2025, while marveling at the sheer range and diversity of tree shapes, foliage, colour, and texture at one end of the beaver dam. As she recalls, "It just looked like painting after painting." The panoramic installation of the paintings invites the viewer to walk along through Tap's layered reinterpretation of the place that inspired the work, experiencing one interconnected scene after another.



Monica Tap, *For a little while*, 2026, oil on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist and MKG127. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid.

The three larger horizontal paintings on the gallery's opposite wall explore a longer duration and a more dramatic change in the landscape that hits close to home for many who have been impacted by forest fires. In the summer of 2018, a wildfire known as the Parry Sound 33 threatened the area around the cabin that Tap stays at during her time on Pickerel River. Coming within 300 meters of the cabin, the fire decimated many areas familiar to Tap. The wet, swampy ground of Sucker Creek contributed to helping firefighters control the blaze, but areas around it were dramatically transformed.

The first painting in this series of three, *Where are you?* is based on photographs Tap took during a trip to Sucker Creek not long after the 2018 fires. What she witnessed astounded her. The rocks were burned



Monica Tap, *Where are you?*, 2026, oil on canvas.
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clear of the colourful mosses that once covered them and appeared bone-white against the black of the charred tree trunks. The subsequent two paintings capture the extraordinary resiliency of the landscape to recover from such devastation. *Sleepy and amazed* is based on photographs from Tap's visits in 2019, when the area appeared as a nearly fluorescent landscape, punctuated with the intense colour of new mosses and saplings nourished by the ash leftover from the fire. *In the blueberries* from 2020 documents the dramatic regrowth of the young forest of Jack Pines, which need fire to open their seed cones, along with a wide variety of juvenile trees taking advantage of the ample sunlight and resources available without competition from the older, taller trees that had been destroyed by the fire. The seriality of this trio of paintings provides a moment of reflection to consider the impact of climate change, while marveling at the natural world's ability to heal.

Whereas Tap's studio paintings operate through juxtaposition of temporalities, her own *plein air* paintings are completed on site, in a single session. (*Plein air* painting is the practice of painting on location, in nature).

A number of Tap's *plein air* sketches are featured in the exhibition, arranged as a layered composite of images that span a decade, documenting both the changing landscape—and artist—over the years. Tap refers to these sketches as simply “evidence of looking” or “containers of attention.” For her, they function primarily as a practice of presence and of being with the landscape. Each of Tap's Sucker Creek sketches is time-stamped on the back with the location, date



Installation view of *Once, in summer*: Monica Tap.

and time where the painting was produced, marking Tap's experience of a specific place and time, emphasizing duration and the role that time and perception play in painting. Unlike a digital photograph, which also bears a timestamp (in the metadata), and measures duration in 100ths of a second, a painting is a measure of hours, days, even months of the artist labouring in front of the piece. It is easy to forget about that in a world where digital images are instant and everywhere.

Once in summer invites viewers to slow down their gaze and to consider the restorative potential that attentive engagement with the natural world can provide. As deeply considered reminders of the intertwined histories of art and the environment, Monica Tap's paintings also signal that the perception of nature as an endless resource is, in the end, irresponsible. Tap dismantles old ways of representing the natural world to forge a path that is rooted in care, reciprocity, and renewed connection.

- Jeff Nye



Monica Tap uses landscape to consider questions of time and history, technology and memory. Her paintings are arrangements assembled from fragments including outtakes from painting's history, elements from her own snapshots, colour notes, and memory, with each work operating as both an invention and a response to place.

Tap earned a BFA and MFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax. She has had solo exhibitions at MKG127, Toronto; Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York; Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina; and Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax. Her work has been featured in group exhibitions at Remai Modern, Saskatoon; the Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C.; The Painting Center, New York; Oakville Galleries; and Gallery Roy, Germany, among others.

Her work is held in public and private collections including the McMichael Collection of Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Art Gallery of Hamilton, and the Würth Collection, Germany. She is Professor Emerita at the University of Guelph and lives and works in Toronto.

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