



# WILLIAM KURELEK

Life & Work by Andrew Kear

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Credits

A black and white photograph of a man, William Kurelek, sitting at a desk and painting on a tilted easel. He is wearing a plaid shirt and is focused on his work, holding a paintbrush in his right hand. The background is slightly blurred, showing a doorway and some papers on the desk.

# Biography

PART I

The art of William Kurelek (1927–1977) navigated the unsentimental reality of Depression-era farm life and plumbed the sources of the artist's debilitating mental suffering. By the time of his death, he was one of the most commercially successful artists in Canada. Forty years after Kurelek's premature death, his paintings remain coveted by collectors. They represent an unconventional, unsettling, and controversial record of global anxiety in the twentieth century. Like no other artist, Kurelek twins the nostalgic and apocalyptic, his oeuvre a simultaneous vision of Eden and Hell.

## Fathers and Sons

William Kurelek was born on a grain farm north of Willingdon, Alberta, to Mary (née Huculak) and Dmytro Kurelek in 1927. Mary's parents had arrived in the region east of Edmonton around the turn of the century, in the first wave of Ukrainian immigration to Canada. These farming families, from what is known today as the Western Ukraine, transformed Canada's harsh western prairie into a flourishing agricultural region and created an important market for the eastern manufacturing industry. The Huculaks established a homestead near Whitford Lake, then part of the Northwest Territories, in a larger Ukrainian settlement.

Dmytro arrived in Canada in 1923 with the second major wave of Ukrainian immigration. The families of Dmytro and Mary originated in the village of Borovsti and the surrounding region of Bukovyna. The Huculaks sponsored Dmytro's voyage to Canada and put him to work on their farm when he arrived. Dmytro married Mary in 1925. Two years later, on March 3 William was born and then baptized at St. Mary's Russo-Greek Orthodox Church in Shandro. In 1934 the family abandoned Alberta for Manitoba suddenly and settled on a farm near the town of Stonewall, forty kilometres north of Winnipeg. Dropping grain prices that accompanied the Great Depression likely precipitated the move, as well as a fire that destroyed their house in the early 1930s. When the family's wheat farming in Manitoba produced meagre results, Dmytro turned to raising dairy cattle.

The eldest of seven children, William spoke little English and was a cultural outsider to the community's dominant Anglo-Protestant heritage, as was the case for his siblings closest in age, John and Winnie.<sup>1</sup> The move to Manitoba coincided with the commencement of Kurelek's formal education. He attended the one-room Victoria Public School, a mile's walk from the family farm. A timid child, Kurelek's formative years were deeply affected by the contests of the schoolyard, trials he vividly captured in later paintings such as *King of the Castle*, 1958–59. Kurelek floundered as a youth. Anxious, withdrawn, and prone to horrifying "hallucinations," he developed a reputation among the family as physically inept, an impractical "dreamer."<sup>2</sup> Mental anguish and a fraught relationship with his parents, especially his father, defined Kurelek's journey into adulthood.



William Kurelek's father, Dmytro (Metro) Kurelek (far right), as a young man, c. 1923. After immigrating to Canada, Dmytro worked on the farm of Vasyl Huculak, his sponsor.



William Kurelek's father and mother, Dmytro and Mary Kurelek (née Huculak), c. 1925.





William Kurelek, *King of the Castle*, 1958–59, gouache and watercolour on Masonite, 53.9 x 45.7 cm, private collection.



Dmytro's values and attitudes had been shaped by the brutality of the First World War and the struggles of subsistence farming.<sup>3</sup> In the hardscrabble 1930s, Dmytro's demand for practical solutions, mechanical proficiency, and physical stamina from his children, especially his eldest, was unwavering. Although his brother John flourished under paternal expectations, Kurelek mastered few of the virtues his father valued and he bore the brunt of Dmytro's impatience; the patriarch's exasperation only grew as the agricultural economy worsened through the decade.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Kurelek sought other ways of earning his father's respect, chiefly through academic achievement: "It was obvious to me that, except for my good standing at school, I was in no way fulfilling his concept of what a son should be."<sup>5</sup>

Despite the hardships of his childhood, by grade one Kurelek discovered his talent for drawing. He covered his bedroom walls with drawings of "priests and angels, nurses, snakes, and tigers," images culled from "radio melodrama, comics, Westerns, Jehovah's Witnesses literature, dreams and hallucinations," to the confounded disapproval of his parents.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, Kurelek's classmates praised his drawing skills and the often lurid and violent visual stories they told.<sup>7</sup>

## Culture and Community

In 1943 Kurelek and his brother John were sent to Winnipeg to attend Isaac Newton High School. For the first two years in the city, they lived in boarding houses. When Kurelek entered grade eleven, Dmytro purchased a house on Burrows Avenue for his three eldest children while they pursued their educations. Winnipeg was among the most cosmopolitan cities in the country, with a large population of Eastern Europeans and nearly forty thousand Ukrainians, who made it the "pulsating centre" of their culture in Canada.<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian war veterans, labourers, entrepreneurs, and professionals, all adhered to a diverse range of political and religious outlooks. Kurelek found himself immersed in a vibrant and literate community that published newspapers, established language and heritage courses, and founded educational, religious, and cultural organizations.

Kurelek attended Ukrainian cultural classes at St. Mary the Protectress, the looming Ukrainian Orthodox cathedral directly across the street from his north-end home. The classes were led by Father Peter Mayevsky, who, in addition to inspiring enthusiasm for "the history of Ukraine, of her natural richness, her cultural beauty," became the first adult to encourage Kurelek's artistic bent.<sup>9</sup>



LEFT: Father Peter Mayevsky, c. 1937. RIGHT: Ukrainian Orthodox cathedral of St. Mary the Protectress, Winnipeg, 2011, photograph by Andrew Kear.



In 1946 Kurelek began attending the University of Manitoba, where he majored in Latin, English, and history. He also took classes in psychology and art history, but literature was his central interest. The writings of James Joyce, and specifically *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), were to prove particularly significant for Kurelek's budding creative streak. "That book," he writes, "had a more profound influence on me than any other single volume in my three years of higher learning. ... [It] convinced me to rebel finally and completely against my family and become what I'd always half-wanted to be—an artist."<sup>10</sup>

During this period many of the psycho-physical conditions that would shape his adult life manifested. Kurelek was wracked by physical exhaustion, insomnia, inexplicable eye pain, social anxiety, and feelings of general malaise, depression, and low self-esteem—what he later identified as "depersonalization." For the most part, Kurelek's symptoms remained professionally undiagnosed.<sup>11</sup>



LEFT: William Kurelek, *Lumber Camp Sauna*, 1961, watercolour, ink, and graphite on Masonite, 41.2 x 46 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: William Kurelek, *Lumberjack's Breakfast*, 1973, mixed media on Masonite, 58.5 x 80.8 cm, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

Summer employment took Kurelek east of Manitoba for the first time. He worked construction in Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay) and laboured at a Northern Ontario lumber camp, which he later depicted in works such as *Lumber Camp Sauna*, 1961, and *Lumberjack's Breakfast*, 1973. Though these experiences buttressed Kurelek's confidence, his emotional and mental suffering continued. Moreover, his relationship with his family, especially his father, did not improve.



## Unsettled and Unsatisfied

In 1948 Kurelek's family relocated from Stonewall to a farm in Vinemount near Hamilton, Ontario.<sup>12</sup> In fall 1949, he began studying at the Ontario College of Art (OCA) under the pretence that it would facilitate a career in commercial advertising. His instructors included John Martin (1904–1965), Carl Schaefer (1903–1995), Frederick Hagan (1918–2003), and Eric Freifeld (1919–1984). Though Kurelek's artistic interests were largely limited to figurative painting, they ranged from historical to contemporary images and were inspired by works from Northern Renaissance artists such as Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569) and Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) to Mexican muralists Diego Rivera (1886–1957), José Orozco (1883–1949), and David Siqueiros (1896–1974).<sup>13</sup>

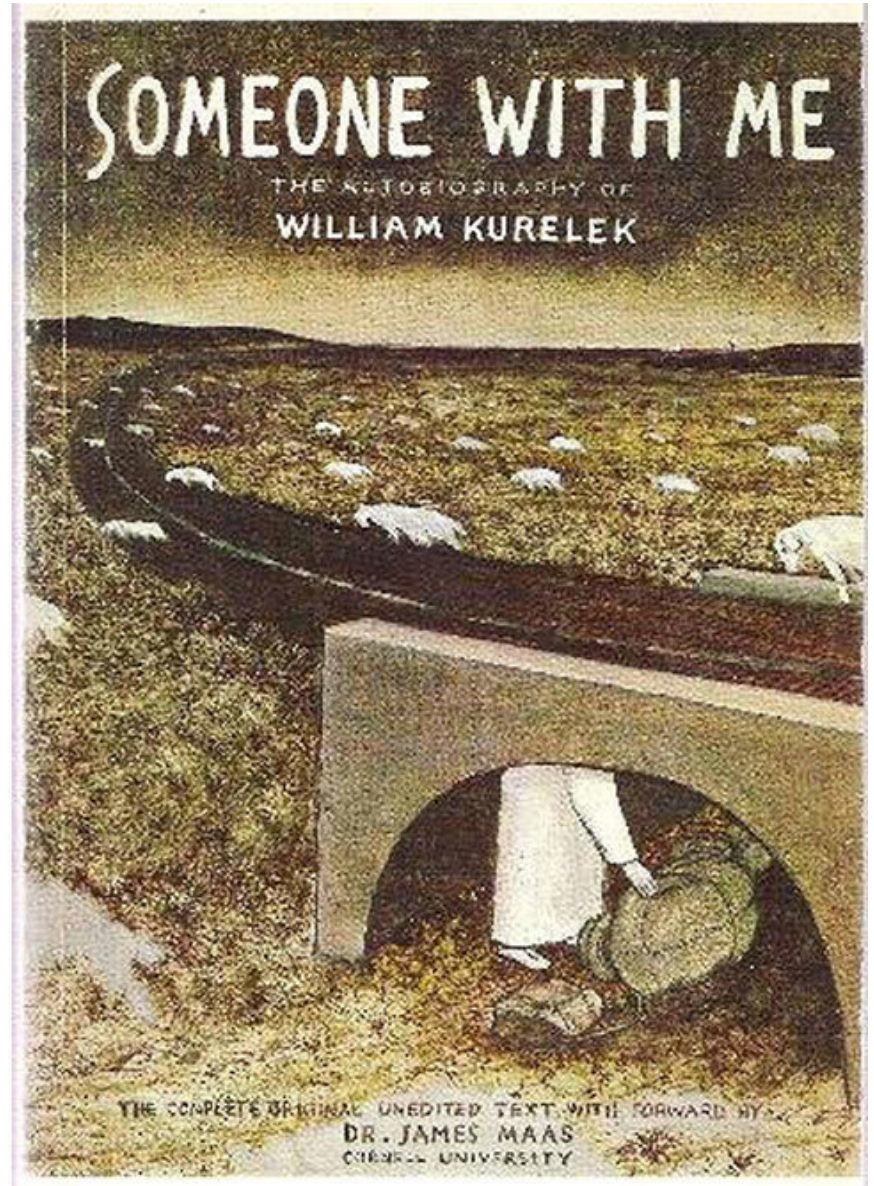
Although older than most of his fellow students, Kurelek made friends among classmates who included Graham Coughtry (1931–1999) and Rosemary Kilbourn (b. 1931). Several of his closest colleagues were committed socialists, and through them Kurelek was introduced to peace activist James Endicott. Despite being immersed in a stimulating intellectual environment, Kurelek was dissatisfied with what he perceived as an overemphasis on grades and competition at the OCA.<sup>14</sup> He resolved to study with Siqueiros at San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. To pay for the trip, he spent the summer and fall of 1950 working odd jobs in Edmonton, temporarily living with an uncle before renting his own lodgings. At this time Kurelek painted his first masterpiece, *The Romantic*, a Joycean self-portrait he subsequently retitled *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1950.<sup>15</sup>

In fall 1950, Kurelek hitchhiked to Mexico. On his way, in the Arizona desert he had his first mystical experience, a dream in which after falling asleep beneath a bridge, he envisioned a figure in a white robe who urged him to “get up” and “look after the sheep, or you will freeze to death.” He pursued the sheep only to see them melt into mist and the robed figure “somehow blended into me and was gone.”<sup>16</sup> Later Kurelek described the dream in his autobiography, *Someone With Me* (1973, 1980) and used it as inspiration for the cover art of the first edition.



**LEFT:** David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Echo of a Scream*, 1937, pyroxylin enamel on wood, 121.9 x 91.4 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York. **RIGHT:** Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (detail), 1490–1500, oil on panel, overall: 220 x 389 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.





**LEFT:** William Kurelek in Toronto during his days as a student at the Ontario College of Art, c. 1949. **RIGHT:** William Kurelek, *Someone With Me*, 1974, mixed media on board, 28.8 x 21.9 cm. Featured on the first edition of Kurelek's autobiography, *Someone with Me* (1973).

Kurelek's wish to study "under a master painter" was thwarted because he arrived at San Miguel de Allende after Siqueiros's sudden departure from the school. American expatriate artist Sterling Dickinson (1909–1998) then oversaw the establishment of a more formal Instituto Allende. Kurelek acknowledged that his time in Mexico proved "a great growing-up experience." It broadened his artistic awareness and attuned him to social issues, such as the developing world's grinding poverty, that would inform his mature beliefs system.<sup>17</sup> *A Poor Mexican Courtyard*, 1976, suggests the lasting influence of his experiences.





William Kurelek, *A Poor Mexican Courtyard*, 1976, mixed media, 30.5 x 38.1 cm, Mayberry Fine Art, Toronto.

Kurelek returned to Canada in spring 1951. However, he did not stay home for long. His “overriding yearning” was for professional diagnosis and help with what he called his mounting “depression and depersonalization” outside of the Canadian medical profession, an establishment Kurelek had come to regard as inept and money-driven.<sup>18</sup> Although it is not clear whether Kurelek was aware of the growing interest in art therapy among British physicians, it is clear that he had contacted Maudsley, a London psychiatric hospital, before leaving Canada.<sup>19</sup> After making the money for his passage to England by working as a lumberjack in Northern Ontario and Quebec throughout the summer and fall of 1951, Kurelek went to Montreal and boarded a cargo ship bound for England.<sup>20</sup>



## Crisis and Conversion

Kurelek arrived in England in spring 1952, and was formally admitted for psychiatric treatment at London's Maudsley Hospital in late June.<sup>21</sup> An internationally renowned institution, Maudsley treated many patients who were Second World War veterans suffering from what is now called post-traumatic stress disorder.

Professionals at Maudsley quickly recognized the gravity of Kurelek's suffering, although the precise nature of his illness remains unknown. (The artist's medical records detailing his specific diagnoses at Maudsley, and later at Netherne Hospital, remain inaccessible to the public until 2029.) The staff also acknowledged his artistic talent.<sup>22</sup> As his recovery was believed to be dependent on his creative outlet, he was encouraged to continue painting. Kurelek demonstrated enough improvement that he was discharged from Maudsley in August. Soon after his release, he left England for a three-week tour of the major art collections in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Austria, where he viewed works by his Northern Renaissance paragons Bruegel, Bosch, and Jan van Eyck (1390–1441).<sup>23</sup>



William Kurelek, *I Spit on Life*, c. 1953–54, watercolour on board, 63.5 x 94 cm, Adamson Collection, Wellcome Library, University College London, U.K.

When he returned to London, Kurelek found postwar reconstruction work with the Transit Commission and continued visiting Maudsley as an outpatient throughout the winter of 1952–53. His condition continued to deteriorate and he was readmitted to Maudsley in May 1953. Assigned to the case in June, Dr. Morris Carstairs encouraged



Kurelek to paint from memory, no matter how painful. Works such as *The Maze*, 1953, and *I Spit on Life*, c. 1953–54, illustrate how grim his outlook had become.<sup>24</sup>

In these darkest hours Kurelek befriended Margaret Smith, an occupational therapist and a devout Roman Catholic. Empathetic to Kurelek's plight, Smith also shared his love for English literature and poetry. Their time together at Maudsley was brief, but their platonic companionship was extremely significant for Kurelek. They continued to correspond after he returned to Canada. Years later, in 1975, Kurelek mailed Smith a copy of his book *The Passion of Christ According to St. Matthew*, in which he inscribed: "With my heartfelt thanks for making this all possible."<sup>25</sup>

In late 1953 Kurelek was transferred to Netherne Hospital in Surrey, an institution at the cutting edge of the art therapy movement in England. Netherne's program was led by Edward Adamson, an artist who, along with the hospital's physician superintendent, Dr. R.K. Freudenberg, "held that there was significant therapeutic benefit to patients if they could create in a positive and safe environment."<sup>26</sup>

Kurelek received psychiatric treatment and made art, but his state worsened. In August 1954, he overdosed on sleeping pills and cut his face and arms in what he later described as a "half-measure" attempt at suicide.<sup>27</sup> He willingly submitted himself to a dozen rounds of electroconvulsive therapy over three months, and his condition began to improve. Adamson encouraged Kurelek to break from his introspective tendencies and concentrate on the objective study of simple objects. During this time he executed several highly accomplished *trompe l'oeil* paintings of stamps, coins, and fabric fragments. Several of these paintings, including *The Airman's Prayer*, c. 1959, were displayed at Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions.



Kurelek and his paintings at Maudsley Hospital, London, c. 1953.



Occupational therapist Margaret Smith, c. 1953–59.





William Kurelek, *The Airman's Prayer*, c. 1959, gouache on paper, 15.2 x 30.5 cm, private collection.

By January 1955 Kurelek was discharged from Netherne and he returned to London, where his luck began to turn. In late 1956 he found work at F.A. Pollak Ltd., one of the city's most renowned art-framing and frame-restoration studios. He eventually became a master finisher. Kurelek also took classes in framing, cabinet making, and book design at the Hammersmith School of Building and Arts and Crafts.<sup>28</sup>

An avowed atheist since university, by 1954 Kurelek's mental illness had driven him into an existential crisis that spurred him to reconsider the existence of God. In his autobiography, Kurelek says his friend Margaret Smith largely precipitated his spiritual renewal. His 1955 watercolour *Lord That I May See* gives tangible witness to the spiritual questions he was grappling with. He began taking Catholic correspondence courses, joined the Guild of Catholic Artists and Craftsmen, and received instruction from a number of clergy, including the theologian Edward Holloway.

Kurelek made his first pilgrimage to Lourdes in France in March 1956 (he revisited the site in 1958). He returned to Canada over the summer to attempt reconciliation with his family, specifically with his father, a gesture that bore mixed fruit. Although the family welcomed him, Kurelek's newfound religious commitments and his zealousness confounded them. In February 1957, several months after returning to England, Kurelek formally entered the Roman Catholic Church.



William Kurelek, *Lord That I May See*, 1955, watercolour and gouache on cardboard, 119.4 x 74.9 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts



He remained in England for more than a year, working at Pollak and saving money, which allowed him to travel through Europe to the Middle East for nearly ten months beginning in the summer of 1958, a trip intimately connected to his art practice and new faith. Travelling via Central and Eastern Europe through Turkey and Syria, Kurelek made his way to Jordan and Israel for a more sustained visit. He hoped to gain a “working knowledge of the area in which Christ had lived and died.”<sup>29</sup> He spent much of his time in the region drawing and taking photographs that he used as reference for the Passion series he completed between 1960 and 1963.

## Reborn in Toronto

By June 1959 Kurelek had returned to Canada permanently, and for a brief period he lived with his parents on their farm in Vinemount, Ontario. Eventually he moved to a boarding house on Huron Street in Toronto, where he continued to paint. He also began pursuing teaching certification, but his psychological history prompted the Ontario College of Education to deem him unfit for the work, a rejection that must have felt particularly bitter following his years of treatment in England.

Kurelek’s situation showed signs of hope in fall 1959. He met Avrom Isaacs, the man who launched Kurelek’s career and provided him with stable employment. The owner of one of Toronto’s first postwar contemporary art galleries, Isaacs was introduced to Kurelek and his art through a mutual friend of his wife.<sup>30</sup> Greatly impressed, he offered Kurelek a job in the gallery’s frame shop and his first solo exhibition at Isaacs Gallery in late March 1960.

In the 1960s Isaacs Gallery represented some of the country’s most avant-garde contemporary artists, including Michael Snow (b. 1928), Joyce Wieland (1930–1998), and Greg Curnoe (1936–1992). Kurelek felt himself to be, and was viewed by many, as the art world’s “odd man out.”<sup>31</sup> His work was representational, narrative-driven, and often religious in a climate in which Toronto artists, galvanized by dominant New York Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), faced off against a growing contingent of irreverent Neo-Dada artists inspired by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968).



Illustration in William Kurelek, *Someone With Me* (1973), 497. The artist depicts himself as somewhat bewildered by his newfound success at his inaugural solo exhibition at Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.



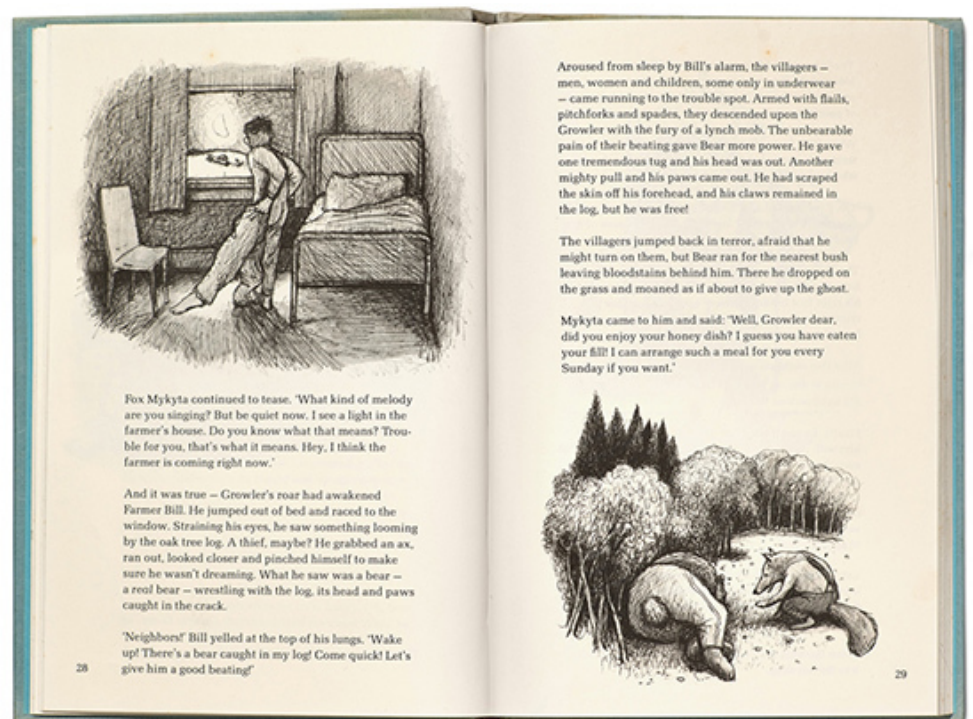
Nonetheless, Kurelek's first solo show broke Isaacs's previous exhibition attendance records. This exhibition, largely of work from his time in England, included *trompe l'oeil* paintings, *Behold Man Without God*, 1955, and his post-conversion *Self-Portrait*, 1957. Kurelek's second exhibition, *Memories of Farm and Bush Life*, took place at Isaacs Gallery in 1962. Public response was even more positive as the works featured, such as *Farm Boy's Dreams*, 1961, introduced audiences to what became another, immensely popular facet of Kurelek's creative output: the nostalgic visual recollections of Kurelek's youthful experiences in Alberta, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, and Quebec.



William Kurelek, *Farm Boy's Dreams*, 1961, watercolour and ink on board, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Kurelek continued to exhibit his work commercially, primarily at Isaacs Gallery but also at La Galerie Agnès Lefort in Montreal and Mira Godard Gallery in Toronto, among other venues across the country. Over the ensuing decade he had major exhibitions at several public institutions, including the Winnipeg Art Gallery (1966), Hart House at the University of Toronto (1969), Edmonton Art Gallery (1970), Burnaby Art Gallery (1973), and Art Gallery of Windsor (1974). During this period Kurelek illustrated a number of highly successful books, including W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1976) and Ivan Franko and Bohdan Melnyk's *Fox Mykyta* (1978), as well as two he wrote himself, *A Prairie Boy's Winter* (1973) and *A Prairie Boy's Summer* (1975).





**LEFT:** William Kurelek, untitled illustration, 1975, mixed media, 42.5 x 36.8 cm, Power Corporation of Canada Art Collection / Collection Power Corporation du Canada. Used as an illustration in W.O. Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1976), 267. **RIGHT:** Illustrations by William Kurelek in Ivan Franko and Bohdan Melnyk's *Fox Mykyta* (1978), 28–29, c. 1977.

## Happy Canadian, Dark Prophet

Kurelek's growing success emboldened him and helped him settle into his skin. By the early 1960s he had met Russian émigré Catherine de Hueck Doherty, the founder of the apostolic Roman Catholic training centre Madonna House located northeast of Toronto, who, like Kurelek, had been born into the Orthodox Church. Kurelek's painting *The Hope of the World*, 1965, was in part inspired by Doherty's efforts to "blend ... Eastern and Western [Christian] spirituality" at Madonna House.<sup>32</sup>

In 1962 Kurelek married Jean Andrews, whom he had met at Toronto's Catholic Information Centre. By 1965 the artist's first two children had been born and a third was expected. The family relocated from an apartment near High Park to Balsam Avenue, in the city's Beaches area. Domestic stability did not spell the end of creative complexity, however. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s Kurelek's work became more polarizing.<sup>33</sup>

By the mid-1960s Kurelek was rekindling his love for his Canadian prairie birthplace. He was spurred to make recurring sketching trips throughout Western Canada and the Maritimes, Arctic, and Pacific Coast in subsequent years. This joyous, inspired nationalism emanates from *The Painter*, 1974, a late self-portrait in which Kurelek sets himself *en plein air*, in the red Volkswagen Beetle that served as transport, motel room, and painting studio during many of his sketching expeditions.<sup>34</sup> These cross-country voyages witnessed the reintroduction of photography as an artistic aid, a medium Kurelek first integrated in his creative practice when travelling through the Middle East in 1959.



William Kurelek, *The Hope of the World*, 1965, oil on Masonite, 69.2 x 76.8 cm, private collection.



At the same time Kurelek produced exhibitions containing what critic Harry Malcolmson called “fire and brimstone” work, including *Experiments in Didactic Art*, 1963; *Glory to Man in the Highest*, 1966; *The Burning Barn*, 1969; and *Last Days*, 1971.<sup>35</sup> These series gave voice to Kurelek’s personal exhortations against the political fallout of secular morality. The artist blamed the Cold War and environmental degradation on the amorality of secular and scientific humanism. Concurrently, the raw anxiety and apocalyptic foreboding that Kurelek’s imagery reveals were shared by a growing number of people, especially following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

Kurelek’s apocalyptic anxiety led him to action. He began planning to construct a fallout shelter in the basement of his Balsam Avenue house. His scheme became public knowledge in 1967 and was met with resistance. Family and friends found his morbid pursuit of self-preservation distasteful and questioned whether it squared with the artist’s Christian ethics, while neighbours and City officials faulted the shelter’s structural technicalities.<sup>36</sup> By the early 1970s Kurelek had retired his plans to transform his workspace into a bomb shelter; thus, the room continued to serve as his studio until his death.

Kurelek travelled to Ukraine for the first time in 1970. He briefly visited his family’s ancestral village of Borovsti, despite being under close surveillance by Soviet authorities. The trip inspired the monumental *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971, 1976. With the advent of multiculturalism, Kurelek’s interests expanded to include other language, ethnic, and religious groups in Canada. Before his death he completed series about the Inuit, as well as Jewish-, French-, Polish-, and Irish-Canadians.

Kurelek was admitted to Toronto’s St. Michael’s Hospital soon after returning from a second trip to Ukraine in fall 1977. He succumbed to cancer on November 3. A year earlier he was made a Member of the Order of Canada. Avrom Isaacs estimates Kurelek had produced “well over 2,000 paintings and drawings” at the time of his death.<sup>37</sup>



William Kurelek, *The Rock*, 1962, mixed media on hardboard, 124.7 x 122.4 cm, The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. *The Rock* was included in the exhibition *Experiments in Didactic Art*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto, 1962.





William Kurelek with a painting in the Isaacs Gallery framing workshop, date unknown.





William Kurelek created between an estimated 2,000 and 4,000 works of art in less than thirty years. Prolific and driven, he created easel paintings, massive murals, singular tableaux, and narrative series with multiple works. His was a diverse, even divided, oeuvre that oscillated between the nostalgic and the nightmarish. Although his early paintings are inward-looking, precise, and claustrophobic, Kurelek's mature work is marked by more general visual propositions about the fluctuating world around him and the common struggles that divide and bind the human family.



**Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man 1950**



William Kurelek, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1950  
Oil on plywood, 65.5 x 59.6 cm  
Loch Gallery, Calgary



*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is Kurelek's first mature work, created immediately following his sudden departure from the Ontario College of Art. It marks Kurelek's decision to pursue his artistic talents professionally and reveals his early identification with Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist in James Joyce's 1916 novel of the same title.<sup>1</sup> Later Kurelek explained that he initially titled the self-portrait *The Romantic*, "because I represented myself as a dreamer: the Joycean artist about to burst into beautiful bloom, but not quite there yet."<sup>2</sup>

Teeming with symbolism and perceptual layers, the self-portrait is a painting within a painting. It shows the artist before an imposing canvas depicting an "imaginary temple" containing murals representing "different incidents in my life" in Stonewall and Winnipeg.<sup>3</sup> These include a vignette of the artist at the University of Manitoba, clothed in a brown corduroy jacket, "the cheapest I was able to buy," with a hand clasped over his face to alleviate the eye pain he was experiencing.<sup>4</sup>

The painting contains fantastical, nightmarish scenes, including a monstrous Samson or Herculean superman wielding a bone and a man emerging from an egg resembling the scene in *Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man*, 1943, the allegorical painting by Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) about the dawn of the nuclear age. A copy of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* leans conspicuously behind a loaf of bread in the right foreground. This play had been reclaimed by twentieth-century writers and artists celebrating its unwavering acceptance of a universe without inherent meaning.

Kurelek completed the painting over "four consecutive days," working maniacally, his state enhanced by the metabolic medication he had been taking since university for an underactive thyroid. At the time he was living in Edmonton, working as a labourer, and saving money for a journey to Mexico.

Kurelek stated that the painting reflects the influence of painters such as Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779) and Hans Holbein (1497–1543) and the Pre-Raphaelites and Mexican muralists. He had become familiar with these artists while attending the Ontario College of Art in Toronto and reacquainted himself with them in reference books at Edmonton's Central Library.<sup>5</sup> The work also shares an affinity with the paintings of Kurelek's close confidant at the University of Manitoba, fine art student Zenon Pohorecky (1928–1998).<sup>6</sup>

Curator Mary Jo Hughes has speculated that the self-portrait is compositionally indebted to *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1943–44, by Ivan Albright (1897–1993), which appears in the 1945 Hollywood adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel. Although Kurelek never mentions the film, his interest in popular cinema, Victorian literature, and self-portraiture make it difficult to believe he was unaware of it.<sup>7</sup>



Still from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, directed by Albert Lewin, 1945, featuring Ivan Albright's painting *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1943–44.



## Zaporozhian Cossacks 1952



**William Kurelek, *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1952**

**Oil on Masonite, 102 x 152 cm**

**Winnipeg Art Gallery**

This is Kurelek's earliest attempt to articulate the deep ambivalence he felt toward his father, Dmytro. A heroic but terrifying tribute, the painting symbolically represents Dmytro as a Cossack leader capable of arbitrating the ultimate judgment that will determine the fates of those around him.

Created upon Kurelek's return to Canada from Mexico, this painting was influenced by mural painting by artists such as Diego Rivera (1886–1957), José Orozco (1883–1949), and David Siqueiros (1896–1974). The work's subject matter also drew inspiration from two sources that reflected the artist's lineage to the Cossacks, warrior-traders who emerged in the late 1400s and settled in the grasslands of what is today southern Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> To date they are "one of the main symbols of Ukrainian historical identity."<sup>2</sup>



The painting pays homage to *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1880–91, by Russian artist Ilya Repin (1844–1930). Kurelek had saved a black and white image of the painting in a scrapbook, and his own painting exaggerates the animated expressions of the figures in Repin's original.<sup>3</sup> The work's second major reference is *Taras Bulba* (1835) by Russian-Ukrainian author Nikolai Gogol. The historical epic tells the story of the eponymous Ukrainian patriarch and his relationship with his two sons: the adventurous favourite, Ostap, and the romantic introvert, Andriy. Taras Bulba eventually kills Andriy when he discovers that the latter was prompted by a woman's love to aid the Polish enemy.

Gogol's novel has been interpreted as a celebration of Ukrainian nationalism. It also places a premium on chauvinism, physical prowess, and male bonding, values Kurelek associated with his father and that filled him with a sense of inadequacy as a child. One of the Cossacks thronging around the Hetman in Kurelek's painting bears some resemblance to the youthful Kurelek.

Painted over four weeks in December 1951, soon after Kurelek had returned from working in the lumber camps in Northern Ontario and Quebec to live at his parents' farm in Vinemount, Ontario, *Zaporozhian Cossacks* was presented by Kurelek to his father as a parting gift before the artist left for Europe.



Ilya Repin, *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1880–91, oil on canvas, 203.2 cm x 358.1 cm, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.



## The Maze 1953



**William Kurelek, *The Maze*, 1953**

**Gouache on board, 91 x 121 cm**

**Bethlem Museum of the Mind, Beckenham, U.K.**

*The Maze* remains Kurelek's most recognizable image. Its place within popular culture was firmly established after the American rock band Van Halen featured it on the cover of its 1981 album *Fair Warning*. The work's notoriety comes from its highly graphic portrayal of Kurelek's battle with mental illness. He painted the macabre scene in England in 1953 while a patient at London's Maudsley Hospital. Effectively a self-portrait, *The Maze* portrays the artist lying on his side in a wheat field in Manitoba.<sup>1</sup>



The painting's central image is the inside of Kurelek's skull, split front from back, and opened up to reveal seventeen cranial compartments, each containing either a vignette that recounts an episode from his youth or visual allegory that express his tortured state of mind and bleak outlook on science, sexuality, and world politics. Together they embody "a kind of pictorial package of all my emotional problems."<sup>2</sup>

Kurelek devised the painting to gain the attention he believed his condition deserved. It was a "half-conscious" strategy to "impress" his caregivers, and to "prove" himself "a psychologically interesting artist."<sup>3</sup> The lifeless white lab rat curled in the central compartment summarizes how Kurelek viewed himself: as someone craving liberation from the torture of his own mind while desperately presenting himself as a sacrificial specimen for psychiatric experimentation.

Other compartments include an image of the artist flaying his own arm, a murder of crows tormenting a lizard that has been pinned to the earth, a peasant child being viciously kicked from the open door of his house to its snowy stoop, and a "Museum of Hopelessness" that speaks to the futility of moral and intellectual virtue. Outside the skull is a corresponding wasteland. Viewed through the empty eye sockets and nasal cavities are glimpses of a world of blazing heat and stench, populated by insects and dung, with revered works of art, music, and poetry discarded in the dust.

In 1969 American film director Robert M. Young released a documentary, also titled *The Maze*, exploring Kurelek's life and his struggle with his father and mental illness. Young had encountered Kurelek's art through Dr. James Maas, a psychologist at Cornell University, who had invited the filmmaker to create an educational documentary on art and psychosis. When he encountered a slide of *The Maze*, Young convinced Maas to shift the film's exclusive focus to Kurelek. In 1971 Kurelek painted a second version of his painting, *The Maas Maze*, to thank the psychologist. An extended version of the film was released in 2011.



William Kurelek, *The Maze* (detail), 1953, gouache on board, 91 x 121 cm, Bethlem Museum of the Mind, Beckenham, U.K.



**Behold Man Without God 1955**





**William Kurelek, *Behold Man Without God*, 1955**

**Watercolour on paperboard, 108.5 x 72.5 cm**

**Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto**

*Behold Man Without God* incorporates elements found in Kurelek's pre-conversion period in England and his post-conversion practice in Canada. The work, which received its title after the artist's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1957, represents Kurelek's first didactic, emphatically religious painting. Its congested structure and sadistic imagery also display an affinity with earlier pieces such as *The Maze*, 1953, and *I Spit on Life*, c. 1953–54. The melée of monstrous figures swarming throughout a shared landscape also reflects Kurelek's direct encounter with the imagery of Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516), Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569), and other Northern Renaissance artists during his European trip in 1952.

At the top of the painting, two armies, birthed from either a subterranean ant colony or a giant hive, are pitted against each other in an unceasing war. In the middle ground, a crowd—standing lively and upright on the left but laid low by the weight of burdensome sacks on the right—gazes on an orchestra of pigs. Conducted by a monkey, the pigs are performing Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. Friedrich Schiller's lyrics to this hymn to universal human kinship are spelled out on a giant tablet and stand in marked contrast to the acts of aggression that make up *Behold Man Without God*.

The painting's nightmarish foreground contains more concrete and allegorized personal moments from Kurelek's youth. These include several scenes in which the artist's father, Dmytro, makes an appearance as a sadistic taskmaster. In one he wields a barbed tongue. In another he stamps his boot into the back of a little boy before a tortuous merry-go-round of manacled children.

Kurelek also makes multiple appearances throughout the bottom third of the painting. In the right corner he wrestles the serpent of the Freudian libido and is also depicted as the lone pathetic actor in "The William Kurelek Theatre." In the darkened foreground he appears as an abandoned infant and an engorged rat carcass. The rat lies supine beneath a page torn from the second act of *Hamlet*, in which the main protagonist describes human beings as "this quintessence of dust."

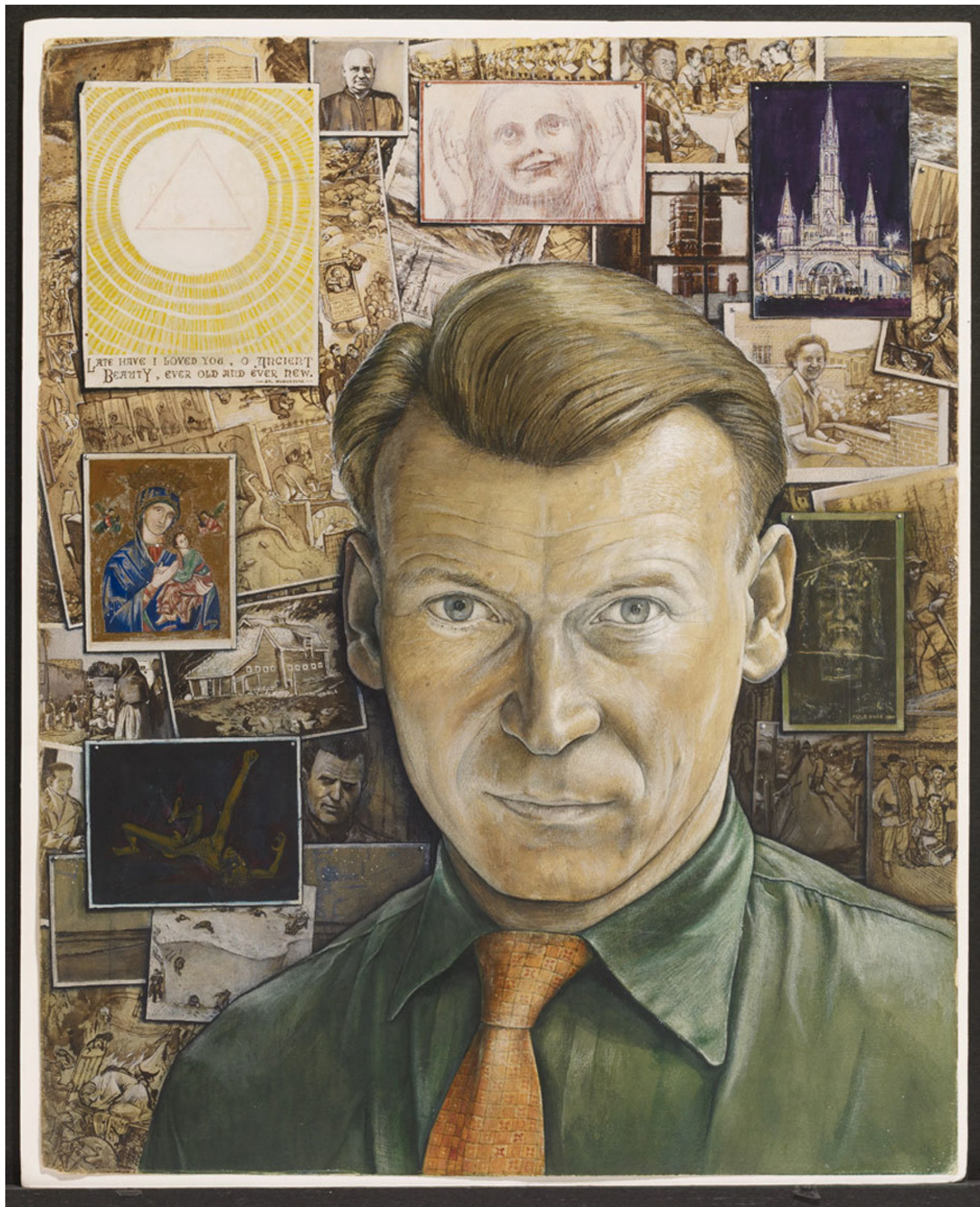
As he would with *The Maze* and a number of other later works, Kurelek went on to complete at least four subsequent versions of *Behold Man Without God*.



William Kurelek, *Behold Man Without God #4*, 1973, oil on board, 95.9 x 59.1 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.



**Self-Portrait 1957**



**William Kurelek, *Self-Portrait*, 1957**



**Watercolour, gouache, and ink on paper, 47.5 x 38 cm**  
**The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto**

This is the first significant work Kurelek painted after formally converting to Roman Catholicism. It was completed amid a flurry of activity. F.A. Pollak Ltd. in London, where Kurelek was employed, had closed over August for its customary summer respite. Kurelek used the time to paint, and he wrote a hundred pages of his autobiography, *Someone With Me* (1973, 1980). He also spent a week in Ireland in the company of Father Thomas Lynch, the Catholic priest who had coached him through his conversion.

The painting announces the artist's new outlook through a thick overlay of imagery. Like his 1950 self-portrait, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, this work imparts the story of his life by staging multiple narratives. However, whereas the 1950 self-portrait highlights the artist's mastery of visual depth, the 1957 version showcases Kurelek's immense skill at *trompe l'oeil*. Squared with the picture plane, Kurelek's face, noticeably older and wiser, confronts and looks beyond the viewer. Kurelek's body language and expression do not invite us to enter his inner world but ask us to bear witness to all he has overcome.

The personal overlaps the universal in an impenetrable wall of images that litter the shallow background. These images range from a reproduction of Kurelek's *Behold Man Without God*, 1955, to a postcard containing an excerpt from St. Augustine's *Confessions*. A drawing of a damned soul is mingled with photographs of Father Lynch, Kurelek's father, and Margaret Smith, Kurelek's occupational therapist at Maudsley. Images of Christ's face on the Shroud of Turin, the Rosary Basilica, and St. Bernadette Soubirous confirm Kurelek's earliest Catholic pilgrimages to Lourdes in 1956 and later in 1958.

More subdued in colour than the first self-portrait, the 1957 painting is also intended to be read as a statement of selfless humility and a pictorial vow against his earlier foray into the dark fantasies as characterized by *The Maze*, 1953, and *Behold Man Without God*, 1955. Beginning in the 1960s, Kurelek's imagery would oscillate between that which celebrated the beauty of creation and those that relentlessly mined images of apocalyptic horror.



William Kurelek, *Trompe l'oeil with a Fisherman's Fly*, 1955, mixed media on paper on board, 17.1 x 19 cm, Loch Gallery, Calgary.



**And, While They Were at Table ... 1960–63**



AND , WHILE THEY WERE AT TABLE , HE SAID , BELIEVE  
ME , ONE OF YOU IS TO BETRAY ME .

William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ (And, While They Were at Table, He Said, Believe Me, One of You Is to Betray Me)*, 1960–63

Gouache on paper, 57 x 49.5 cm

Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum



*And, While They Were at Table ...* captures a decisive moment during the Last Supper when Jesus prophesies his betrayal and fate. One of 160 works illustrating St. Matthew's account of the days leading up to and following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, this painting contains equal parts drama and historical detail. Here, Jesus is poised in stoic resignation while the disciple John, holding a goblet of red wine, gazes up in disbelief. In the Gospel of Matthew, Kurelek's point of reference for this work, the Last Supper is also a Seder, a ritual meal marking the Jewish Passover. As such, Jesus and his disciples eat their meal prone, supported by the left elbow. This work is the fifth painting in *The Passion of Christ*, 1960–63, the first of Kurelek's multi-image series.

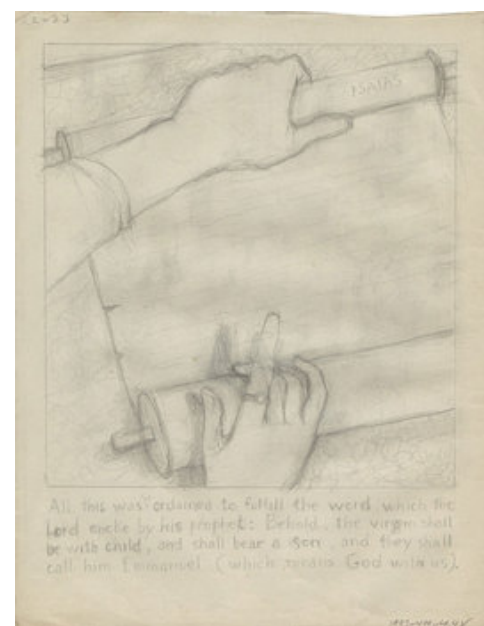
Kurelek conceived his Passion series while living in England, one year before he officially entered the Roman Catholic Church. The project reflected Kurelek's exposure to the work of James Tissot (1836–1902) in 1956, in particular his reproductions of 350 gouache paintings illustrating the life of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Kurelek's initial vision was to illustrate the entire Gospel of St. Matthew line by line, and he produced rough pencil sketches illustrating verses throughout the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> He soon realized the overwhelming immensity of this plan and limited his focus to the Passion narrative.<sup>3</sup> He began sourcing imagery for the series in 1959 when he visited Jordan and Israel for several weeks to photograph the region's landscape, architecture, and people. He believed this material would lend authenticity and accuracy to the later gouache paintings. The lion's share of the studio work was done in Toronto between 1960 and 1963.<sup>4</sup>

From the outset, Kurelek saw the series as a didactic tool for dispersing the central message of the Gospels and conceived the paintings as closely tied to contemporary mass media. To reach the widest possible audience, Kurelek ensured his images accommodated the dimensions of the television screen aspect ratio of 4:3 of the time.<sup>5</sup> His goal was to see the paintings "one day produced on film," a feat that was accomplished in 1981, and again in 2009, after his death.<sup>6</sup> Although he had no technical knowledge of filmmaking, Kurelek's Passion paintings are "camera-conscious" and reveal his intuitive appreciation for *mise en scène*.<sup>7</sup> The series is effectively a collection of detailed cinematic storyboards that reveal the central narrative with dramatic effect.

*And, While They Were at Table ...* underscores the heightened sense of dramatic timing that became a defining feature of Kurelek's later imagery. It was exhibited along with the series in 1970 at St. Vladimir Institute in Toronto. Olha and Mykola Kolankiwsky subsequently purchased the entire series and placed it on permanent display at the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.



William Kurelek, *But Jesus Said to Them...*, c. 1959–65. pencil on wove paper, 28.2 x 22 cm, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.



William Kurelek, *And This Was So Ordained...*, c. 1959–65. pencil on wove paper, 28.2 x 22 cm, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.



**Hailstorm in Alberta 1961**





**William Kurelek, *Hailstorm in Alberta*, 1961**

**Oil on composition board, 69.3 x 48.2 cm**

**Museum of Modern Art, New York**

In 1961 the volunteer Women's Committee of the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) invited Alfred H. Barr Jr. to select a painting by a contemporary Canadian artist for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) permanent collection. The expectation was that Barr, MoMA's director of collections and an internationally recognized authority on Cubism and Post-Impressionism, would choose a work by one of Toronto's growing number of modern abstract artists, such as Harold Town (1924–1990), Gordon Rayner (1935–2010), or Kurelek's former Ontario College of Art classmate Graham Coughtry (1931–1999). Instead, Barr selected Kurelek's *Hailstorm in Alberta*, and Kurelek provided MoMA with this description of his work: "A personal memory drawn from my father's account. I was a child hiding in the house with my mother when that particular hailstorm came and can just remember her putting pillows in all the windows, and admiring the sizes of the stones outside after the sun came out."<sup>1</sup>

Unbeknownst to Kurelek, his dealer, Avrom Isaacs, had submitted the painting for consideration. MoMA's acquisition buoyed Kurelek's self-confidence, which had already begun to improve following the success of his first solo exhibition at Isaacs Gallery less than a year earlier.<sup>2</sup>

The painting is also a notable early example of Kurelek's ability to create imagery resistant to reductive interpretations of his work as representing quaint, humorous childhood memories of Western Canada. Whether in representations of flood or fire, blizzard or drought, the ambivalence of the natural world toward the affairs and values of humans would become a crucial theme in Kurelek's later work. Although he was inspired by environmental beauty, he often emphasized its impersonality so that his work could not be read as a celebration of pantheism. Kurelek's Roman Catholic God was creator of the natural world, not a manifestation of it.

In this regard *Hailstorm in Alberta* follows in the footsteps of Northern Renaissance artists for whom local settings underlined God's immanence in the lived world. It shows particular

debt to Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569), whose work Kurelek had seen during his 1952 travels to art museums in Europe. In what Kurelek described as "the naïve, earthy, unclassical, almost brutal aspect" of his painting style, and the sprawling central figure, vulnerable and misshapen on the miserable black earth, we recognize at once Bruegel's harsh and sympathetic view of flawed humanity.<sup>3</sup>



Pieter Bruegel, *The Harvesters*, 1565, oil on wood, 119 x 162 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



## In the Autumn of Life 1964



**William Kurelek, *In the Autumn of Life*, 1964**  
**Oil on tempered hardboard, 59.1 x 120.3 cm**  
**Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto**

This is the final canvas in the series *An Immigrant Farms in Canada*, twenty paintings Kurelek exhibited at Isaacs Gallery, Toronto, in September 1964. Completed in part as a reaction to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the painting also represents the first example of the artist incorporating an exploding atom bomb within an otherwise bucolic pastoral landscape. Kurelek repeated this juxtaposition in a number of notable later works as well, including *Material Success*, 1967, and the final panel of *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971, 1976.

The series, which included works such as *Despondency*, 1963, and *Manitoba Party*, 1964, details the journey of farming families from Ukraine to Western Canada and eventually their arrival in Southern Ontario. It recounts a progressive story from struggle to survival to economic security—a rational reconstruction of the immigrant narrative that at least one critic disparaged.<sup>1</sup>

As the culminating work in the series, *In the Autumn of Life* presents an elevated view of Kurelek's parents' farm in Vinemount, Ontario. The agrarian setting plays backdrop to a family reunion, and the artist's extended family are shown gathered for a group photograph. Kurelek appears in the family grouping, fifth from the right. Although he employs some artistic licence, the painting was largely plotted and composed using photographs that recorded a Kurelek family gathering of a year earlier and shots documenting the property's architectural and topographical features.<sup>2</sup>

Closer study of the painting reveals several disquieting elements that undermine the painting's function as a sincere celebration of social mobility. A Christ figure appears



William Kurelek, *Despondency*, 1963, oil on Masonite, 120.2 x 78.5 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.



in the bottom-left foreground, crucified on a dead tree and surrounded by ravenous dogs that clamour over the spilled blood. The dogs, Kurelek later wrote, “are supernatural” ones, referring to the enemies of Christ mentioned in the Book of Psalms. More foreboding still is the giant mushroom cloud that Kurelek uses as the iconic symbol of nuclear war and a reminder that technological advancement does not necessarily make for peace and harmony.



**This Is the Nemesis 1965**



William Kurelek, *This Is the Nemesis*, 1965  
Mixed media on Masonite, 114.8 x 115.6 cm  
Art Gallery of Hamilton

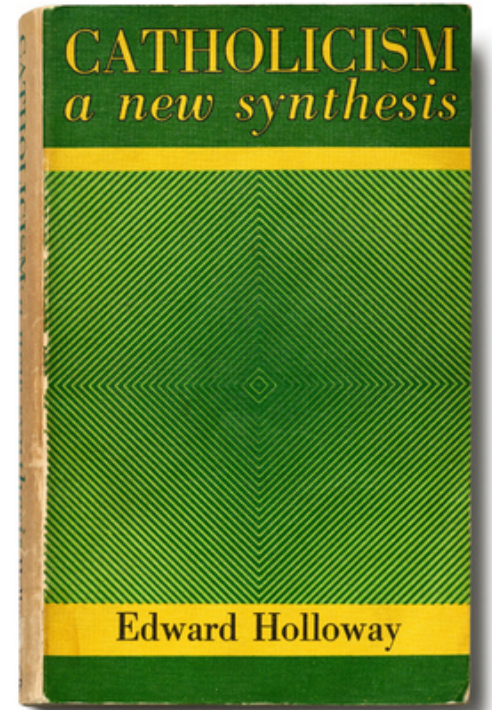


*This Is the Nemesis* was part of Kurelek's second series of moral message works, *Glory to Man in the Highest*. Billed as a "socio-religious satire," the twenty paintings explore a scattershot of themes, from urban crime to scientific advancement, from economic disparity to the secularization of religious holidays. The scene imagines the fictional destruction of Hamilton, Ontario, by a nuclear bomb. Atomic conflagration dominates the painting, dragging the viewer headlong into a fully enacted orgy of death. Another cloud of cataclysmic energy billowing on the distant horizon announces Toronto's shared fate. The painting's frame is a collage of the television schedule published in the *Globe and Mail*.

This and the other works in the series were first exhibited at Isaacs Gallery in Toronto in 1966. The imagery found in the paintings, their titles, and the artist's notes accompanying the exhibition give voice to the influence of the conservative English Roman Catholic theologian Edward Holloway. *This Is the Nemesis* is a visual elaboration of the moralizing and apocalyptic tone of Holloway, whose 1969 book *Catholicism: A New Synthesis* includes chapter titles such as "Whom do you say Man is?" and "Nemesis."<sup>1</sup>

The series shocked and polarized critics. Kay Kritzwisser praised Kurelek's indictment of consumerism, while Harry Malcolmson compared the exhibition to "a fire and brimstone sermon exhorting us to right conduct," adding: "Kurelek says his new work is satirical, but satire generally implies making a point by indirection. There is about as much indirection in Kurelek's sledgehammer attack as in the Ten Commandments."<sup>2</sup>

While unsympathetic, Malcolmson's review underlines the depth of Kurelek's artistic achievement. Although religious vehemence would have disqualified a lesser artist from serious consideration by the largely secular art world, it confirmed his sincerity and creative singularity. People could disagree with Kurelek, but they remained captivated by his painting.



Cover of Edward Holloway, *Catholicism: A New Synthesis* (1969).



## Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine, 1939 1968



**William Kurelek, *Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine, 1939, 1968***

Ballpoint pen, ink, house paint, wood, oil, and graphite on Masonite, 57.5 x 76 cm

Winnipeg Art Gallery

This work was first displayed publicly at the University of Toronto's Hart House in March 1969 as part of the sixteen-work *Burning Barn* series. The painting visualizes political atrocities committed by Soviet authorities throughout Ukraine during the 1930s. An indictment of Soviet oppression, the painting represents the artist's more positive attempt to celebrate a "new collective conscience about [the] plight of his less fortunate fellow man abroad as well as at home" as a consequence of "the new 'global village.'"<sup>1</sup>



William Kurelek with the sign he created for his exhibition *The Burning Barn: 16 Paintings by William Kurelek*, held at Hart House Art Gallery, University of Toronto, March 11–29, 1969.



Through prison bars, the viewer witnesses the aftermath of the Vinnitsia Massacre, in which nearly ten thousand citizens, mostly ethnic Ukrainians, were executed by Stalin's secret police during the Great Purge of 1937–38. Above the grave, people gather in a park cluttered with Communist propaganda. *Cross Section* is underpinned by Kurelek's sensitivity to the complexity of Ukrainian history, a narrative that was often reduced to images of Cossacks and agrarian labourers.

The 1969 Burning Barn series was the artist's third "socio-religious comment series," after Experiments in Didactic Art, 1963, and Glory to Man in the Highest, 1966. Kurelek originally assigned the exhibition of the Burning Barn a more cryptic title, "Health." He derived the final designation from an Edmonton art critic, who, in 1967, quoted the artist as stating that people today are "like children playing in a burning barn," oblivious to the close proximity of their destruction.<sup>2</sup>



## Reminiscences of Youth 1968



**William Kurelek, *Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968**

**Mixed media on hardboard, 125.1 x 149.5 cm**

**The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto**

Kurelek completed countless paintings of his childhood and early adulthood in Alberta and Manitoba. His memory paintings arguably remain his best-known and most popular body of work. *Reminiscences of Youth* is unique, however, for its self-reflexivity. In this unconventional self-portrait, Kurelek does not merely offer up a nostalgic scene but paints himself engaged in the act of constructing a reminiscence. The artist appears as he did in his formative years, lying on a bed in what is likely the Winnipeg house he lived in while attending high school and university in the city.



The central image is a representation of a painting on a bedroom wall. The image of children playing on a snow-covered pile of hay contains tableaux of lightheartedness and cruelty and recalls motifs Kurelek began perfecting in the early 1950s in such works as *Farm Children's Games in Western Canada*, 1952. The central image occupies an autonomous space, both metaphorically and literally. It "glows like a movie screen" and forms an emanation of memory itself. It stands apart from the surrounding interior scene, which is not part of the central painting but of its extended frame.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1940s, the period represented by the central image, Kurelek's appreciation for his parents' culture was expanding. This is highlighted by the presence of the hastily scrawled words to the Ukrainian folk song "There Stands a High Mountain," written by the nineteenth-century Romantic lyric poet Leonid Hlibov, on the table in the right foreground. The words and music, which we imagine Kurelek listening to through his record player, highlight the painting's bittersweet tone: "Spring time will return anew / This it is that brings sadness and pain / For youth will never come back / It will not ever return again."



William Kurelek, *Farm Children's Games in Western Canada*, 1952, mixed media on Masonite, 61 x 76.2 cm, private collection.



**The Ukrainian Pioneer** 1971, 1976





**William Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971, 1976**

**Acrylic, graphite, and coloured pencil (gouache and watercolour?) on Masonite, each hexptych panel, 152.5 x 121.5 cm**

**National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa**

William Kurelek made the first of two trips to Ukraine in the spring of 1970. He travelled with Olha and Mykola Kolankiwsky, art collectors and patrons who shared Kurelek's Western Ukrainian heritage. The experience inspired Kurelek's *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, which he began in October 1971. It was completed and installed at the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum in late November.



William Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, No. 1–No. 6, 1971, 1976, acrylic, graphite, and coloured pencil (gouache and watercolour?) on Masonite, each 152.5 x 121.5 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

The episodic six-panelled composition retells the story of Ukrainian immigration to Canada in the early twentieth century. Kurelek paints a progressive narrative, beginning with a scene of a Ukrainian peasant child “running barefoot into the snow to beg for victuals from more well-to-do neighbours”<sup>1</sup> and culminating with an image of his “wheat king” father, waist-deep in a field of golden grain. As with *In the Autumn of Life*, 1964, the celebration of “land, comfort and wealth” is undercut in the last painting by a distant atomic cloud on the horizon that all six panels share.<sup>2</sup> With permission from the Kolankiwskeys, Kurelek and several studio assistants made minor changes to the paintings in spring 1976.<sup>3</sup> *The Ukrainian Pioneer* was acquired from the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum by the Canadian government and displayed in the House of Commons in 1983 and then transferred to the National Gallery of Canada in 1990.



## Glimmering Tapers 'round the Day's Dead Sanctities 1970



**William Kurelek, *Glimmering Tapers 'round the Day's Dead Sanctities*, 1970**

**Mixed media on hardboard, 120.5 x 243.3 cm**

**Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton**

This work presents the artist's recollection of the northern lights during harvest season in Alberta. "In those Fall days," Kurelek wrote, "when threshing would go on after dark there might come a year or two in which the Northern Lights would put on an awesome and entertaining show."<sup>1</sup> Although blue, sunlit sky features prominently in many of Kurelek's paintings of the prairie landscape, *Glimmering* brings the dark sublimity of the vast night sky into rare focus. The representation of landscape at night creates a particularly spiritual setting for Kurelek to reflect on the intersection of immanent mortal existence and divine transcendence.

First exhibited in November 1970 at Isaacs Gallery in Toronto, this work is one of several night scenes, such as *Thy Young Skyey Blossoms*, 1970, and *All Things Betray Thee Who Betrayest Me*, 1970, in the Nature, Poor Stepdame series. Kurelek's deep love for the natural world developed during his childhood. His affection for the environment was subsequently informed and shaped through the Romantic nature poetry of William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, and other writers he studied at the University of Manitoba.<sup>2</sup>

Although Kurelek tended to focus his eye on the actions of particular beings—whether farmers and immigrants, biblical figures, family members or, indeed, the artist himself—the natural world was always more than a neutral backdrop. After his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1957, the natural world became the main stage upon which Kurelek's human characters encountered intimations of the divine.



William Kurelek, *All Things Betray Thee Who Betrayest Me*, 1970, mixed media on Masonite, 122 x 122 cm, Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.



All the works in the Nature, Poor Stepdame series, and the series itself, were given titles from the 1893 poem “The Hound of Heaven” by Victorian poet Francis Thompson. Thompson, like Kurelek, was a mature convert to Roman Catholicism. His poem seeks to distinguish God from nature through the latter’s ambivalence toward humanity.



**The Painter** 1974





**William Kurelek, *The Painter*, 1974**

**Mixed media on hardboard, 121.9 x 91.4 cm**

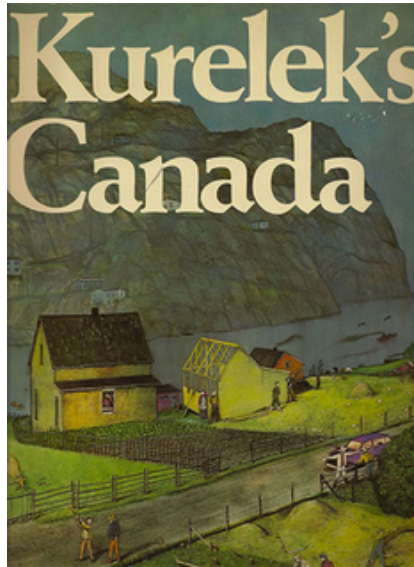
**The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto**

In this late self-portrait, completed three years before the artist's death, Kurelek documents himself painting in a red Volkswagen Beetle before an expansive swath of green and extensive prairie sky, on one of the nearly annual summer painting excursions he began making to Western Canada in 1963.<sup>1</sup> In this work, we catch a rare and fleeting glimpse of an unguarded Kurelek, immersed in his work and seemingly untroubled by the state of the world. Framed by a meandering tracery of maple leaves, *The Painter* was a signature image of the Happy Canadian series, which was published as the book *Kurelek's Canada* in 1975.

The painting is atypical for its purposeful and unabashedly naive celebration of life, art, and the natural world. Absent are qualifying vignettes that appear in many of Kurelek's otherwise joyful agrarian landscapes: the signs of nature's moral ambivalence, the grind of farm labour, the savage antics of youth, or an atom cloud perched on the horizon announcing humanity's folly.

Set in the artist's "spiritual home, aesthetically speaking"<sup>2</sup>—the Oak Hammock marsh located east of the family's former farm near Stonewall, Manitoba—the site was a place of childhood and adolescent "peace and retreat."<sup>3</sup> The painting was largely sourced from black and white photographs Kurelek had taken on his first mature sketching foray in Manitoba more than a decade earlier.

"During that trip," he recalls, "I lived, ate, slept, and worked in a Volkswagen bug. I experienced one whole ecstatic afternoon ... I photographed the skies all afternoon and when night fell worked on my paintings by the light in the car ceiling."<sup>4</sup> Though anchored in autobiography and remembrance, *The Painter* is neither. Like *Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968, *The Painter* is a meditation on nostalgia. It projects a scene from the past but also shows the artist in the act of reconstructing that scene.



**LEFT:** William Kurelek, *Kurelek's Canada* (1975). **RIGHT:** William Kurelek and his Volkswagen Beetle, c. 1963.





# Significance & Critical Issues

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## PART 3

William Kurelek produced impressions of this country, its people and landscape, that have become emblematic of postwar Canada. Religion, the immigrant experience, and the modern ideal of multiculturalism deeply informed his sense of nationhood. He touched on the pressing political and social issues of his day, from the threat of nuclear war to the mounting standoff between religious and secular values, his work inspiring copious praise and vehement critique. Yet much of Kurelek's art discloses intense vulnerability. Ambitious, prolific, and outspoken, Kurelek was also shy, insecure, and dogged by mental illness throughout his life.



## A Religious Painter

Kurelek was an eminently Roman Catholic painter whose faith was deeply personal. The sales of his work helped to fund various religious charities he supported. *Lord That I May See*, 1955, and other works Kurelek painted around the time of his conversion suggest that religious faith provided him with a sense of direction and purpose he had lacked in his anguished youth.

Although many respected and well-known Western artists of the twentieth century reference or depict Christian themes, narratives, and figures, few went as far as Kurelek did to place their work in the service of church doctrine. Titles like *Behold Man Without God*, 1955, and *He Gloats over Our Scepticism*, 1972, ring out with the moral indignation of biblical scripture. Indeed, much of Kurelek's most sermonizing imagery hints at the influence of Edward Holloway, the English theologian with whom Kurelek conferred before entering the Roman Catholic Church in 1957. The violent inflection of some of his religious paintings has earned Kurelek much infamy, but his identity as a religious painter is also expressed by more optimistic works, such as *Industry*, 1962, and *The Hope of the World*, 1965.

Many of Kurelek's religious works display a committed humanitarianism. *We Find All Kinds of Excuses*, 1964, incorporates a visual leitmotif Kurelek revisited frequently—society's abandonment of the poor. Kurelek's concern for the plight of the poor internationally attests to his association with Madonna House, a Catholic apostolic training centre in Combermere, Ontario, which was actively involved in aiding the poor globally. Kurelek visited Madonna House on a spiritual retreat in 1962–63 and found a model for religious living, one that balanced individual spiritual nourishment with a deep sense of engaged social responsibility. Throughout Kurelek's creative oeuvre, he makes a similar effort to strike a balance between the expression of spiritual mystery and a call for moral action.



William Kurelek, *He Gloats over Our Scepticism*, 1972, mixed media on Masonite, 61 x 52.1 cm, private collection.





William Kurelek, *We Find All Kinds of Excuses*, 1964, oil and graphite on tempered hardboard, 121.2 x 182.2 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

### Canada and the Cultural Mosaic

Kurelek developed what he later described as his “ethnic consciousness” during public school, around the same time his artistic identity began to emerge. His artistic confidence and ardour for his parents’ heritage was further nurtured by cultural classes he attended as an adolescent and reinforced at university through his involvement in the University of Manitoba’s Ukrainian students’ club and his friendship with Zenon Pohorecky, a fellow student (and future anthropologist of Ukrainian culture) whose art revealed a deep interest in the “interplay between creative pursuit and ethnic identity.”<sup>1</sup>

Although matters of social consciousness and the recovery from mental illness became Kurelek’s central artistic concerns during the 1950s, themes of ethnicity and cultural identity appear throughout many of his early works, from *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1952, to *The Maze*, 1953. His representation of Ukrainian culture became more prevalent in the early 1960s, especially with his 1964 series *An Immigrant Farms in Canada*. However, it was less a celebration of ethnic identity and more an attempt to honour and repair his relationship with his parents, particularly his father.



With the approach of the Canadian Centennial in 1967 and the emergence of a multicultural nationalism, Kurelek began to push the discussion of his Ukrainian heritage into one about the history of Canadian nationhood. Between 1965 and 1967 he completed a series about the roles of Ukrainian women in Canada. The timing and public function of it were significant: not only did it serve to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada and the seventy-fifth anniversary of Ukrainian immigration to Canada, but the *Ukrainian Pioneer Woman in Canada* series, composed of twenty works, including *Ukrainian Canadian Farm Picnic*, 1966, displayed at the Ukrainian Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal, was presented as a Canadian national signifier. In 1983 the federal government acquired and installed the monumental, multi-panelled *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971, 1976, on Parliament Hill, where it remained until it was transferred to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1990.

By the early 1970s Kurelek could confidently proclaim that the "days of Anglo-Saxon domination are gone."<sup>2</sup> He expanded his repertoire in the 1970s to include optimistic expressions of the postwar era's multiculturalism. He crisscrossed the country on a quest to capture the cultural diversity of the country's inhabitants and produced series and publications honouring Canadian Jewish, Polish, Irish, Francophone, and Inuit peoples. When he died suddenly in 1977, Kurelek had been planning two series, about German- and Chinese-Canadians, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Kurelek's representations of non-European and Indigenous peoples are not unproblematic. The title of his 1976 book, *The Last of the Arctic*, for instance, betrays a common misconception, namely that Inuit culture was a static set of beliefs and customs that were disappearing because of infiltrating southern institutions and technologies. Such views were not unique to Kurelek. Christopher Ondaatje, owner of the book's publishing house, Pagurian Press, had commissioned Kurelek to present a nostalgic view of Arctic life, "to paint it before it had its streetlights and Skidoos and telephone poles."<sup>4</sup>



William Kurelek, *Ukrainian Canadian Farm Picnic*, 1966, oil on panel, 70.5 x 70.5 cm, Ukrainian Museum of Canada of the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada, Saskatoon.





William Kurelek, *Hunter Awaiting Seal at Breathing Hole*, 1976, photographic lithograph, 47.9 x 40.6 cm, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. Used as an illustration in William Kurelek, *The Last of the Arctic* (1976).



William Kurelek, untitled illustration, c. 1976, photographic lithograph, approximately 47.9 x 40.6 cm. Used as an illustration in William Kurelek, *The Last of the Arctic* (1976), 90.

Kurelek described himself as an “ethnic artist” and believed his Roman Catholic faith required that he “must respect people of other origins” and “heritage.”<sup>5</sup> What began for the artist as pride for his parents’ cultural heritage had by the mid-1970s expanded to include the lives, histories, and practices of Canada’s contemporary cultural mosaic.

## Popular Outsider: Critical Reception

Kurelek began to earn media attention soon after his return to Canada from England in 1959, a decade after he had completed his first major painting—a self-portrait—in an Edmonton basement. The mainstream press exploded with accolades for the artist following his inaugural exhibition at Isaacs Gallery in Toronto in 1960. Critical credit from the media and museum professionals came in 1962 after the internationally respected director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Alfred H. Barr Jr., acquired a Kurelek painting for the institution’s collection.

That a certain facet of Kurelek’s creative output was, and remains, popular is easy to understand. His imagery, whether of Ukrainian immigrants toiling on the prairie or of Jewish family life in Montreal, as in the illustration *Yom Kippur*, 1975, confirmed a progressive view of Canadian society that was strongly resonant between the late 1960s and early 1970s. He portrayed Canada as a mosaic of diverse but harmonious cultures that thrived despite historical inequalities, a harsh environment, and a vast, unyielding geography.



William Kurelek, *Yom Kippur*, 1975, mixed media on board, 50.8 x 57.2 cm, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. Used as an illustration in William Kurelek and Abraham Arnold, *Jewish Life in Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1976), 32.



Throughout his career, however, Kurelek was never merely the naive, nostalgic, “happy Canadian” who wrote and illustrated award-winning children’s books. As a conservative Roman Catholic living with the looming threat of nuclear war in the 1960s, he believed that a manmade but divinely ordained “purgative catastrophe” was close at hand.<sup>6</sup> And yet though he “damned with terrifying fervor ... often with disturbingly gruesome images,” as critic Nancy Tousley observed, his “nostalgic side ... and the work he considered to be ‘potboilers,’” such as his illustrations for *A Prairie Boy’s Winter* (1973) and *A Prairie Boy’s Summer* (1975), supported his popularity in the public imagination.<sup>7</sup>



William Kurelek, *Skating on the Bog Ditch*, approximately 33.7 x 33.7 cm, private collection. Used as an illustration in William Kurelek, *A Prairie Boy’s Winter* (1973).



William Kurelek, *Softball*, 1974, mixed media on Masonite, approximately 33.7 x 33.7 cm, Art Gallery of Windsor, permanent loan from private collection of Hiram Walker and Sons Limited, Walkersville. Used as an illustration in *A Prairie Boy’s Summer* (1975).

If Toronto’s artistic and intellectual elite were “rather annoyed” by the success of this figurative painter of homely prose and agrarian subjects, as Kurelek’s dealer, Avrom Isaacs, believed,<sup>8</sup> his decision to “put God first” made many within the secular art community apoplectic.<sup>9</sup> Some argued that Kurelek’s moral didacticism interfered with the artistic integrity of his work.<sup>10</sup> Others claimed his views were fraudulent. “Where Kurelek fails miserably,” journalist Elizabeth Kilbourn wrote in 1963, “is when he attempts to paint subjects which he knows about only from dogma and not from experience, where in fact he is a theological tourist in never, never land.”<sup>11</sup> Kilbourn’s sentiments were echoed by critic Harry Malcolmson, who two years later penned what became the most infamous rebuke: “the problem with these pictures is that they flow from Kurelek’s imaginings and not from what he knows.”<sup>12</sup> Malcolmson urged Kurelek to concentrate on farm paintings that reflected his upbringing.





William Kurelek, *Harvest of Our Mere Humanism Years*, 1972, mixed media on Masonite, 122 x 244 cm, Manulife Art Collection, Toronto.

Kurelek's response to his critics was characteristically indirect. According to his wife, Jean Kurelek, "He was sensitive to criticism but never liked to confront his critics in person," and would publish a rebuttal or write them a letter.<sup>13</sup> To Malcolmson he explained the source of his conviction: "Our civilization is in crisis and I would be dishonest not to express my concern about my fellow man." And he added:

Did Hieronymus Bosch, a recognized master in representation of Hell himself go to Hell, and come back before he tackled it? No one has come back from the dead to record his experiences there and yet great classical writers like Milton and Dante waded right into it. Obviously they must draw their experience of those things partly from similar earthly experiences partly from personal or mystical intuition.<sup>14</sup>

The influence of Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) on Kurelek can be seen in works such as *Harvest of Our Mere Humanism Years*, 1972, and *I Spit on Life*, c. 1953–54. Despite the detractors, Kurelek earned immense respect from secular peers such as Dennis Burton (1933–2013) and Ivan Eyre (b. 1935), who like Barr recognized his artistic legitimacy. Though Kurelek's work was a product of his Christian world view, the "somber, menacing quality" of it aligned naturally with the social anxiety and existentialism common in the art world during the Cold War era.<sup>15</sup>





**LEFT:** William Kurelek, *I Spit on Life* (detail), c. 1953–54, watercolour on board, 63.5 x 94 cm, Adamson Collection, Wellcome Library, University College London, U.K. **RIGHT:** Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (detail), 1490–1500, oil on panel, overall: 220 cm x 389 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



## The Word Made Flesh

Kurelek was a prolific writer, whose output encompassed travel diaries and interpretations—often reproduced in brochures at Kurelek’s Isaacs Gallery exhibitions in Toronto—plus letters, speaking notes, and an autobiography. He was also a master illustrator and wrote or illustrated fourteen books in the last four years of his life, including *A Prairie Boy’s Winter* (1973) and *A Prairie Boy’s Summer* (1975), which were named among the Best Illustrated Children’s Book of the Year from the *New York Times* in 1973 and 1975.<sup>16</sup>

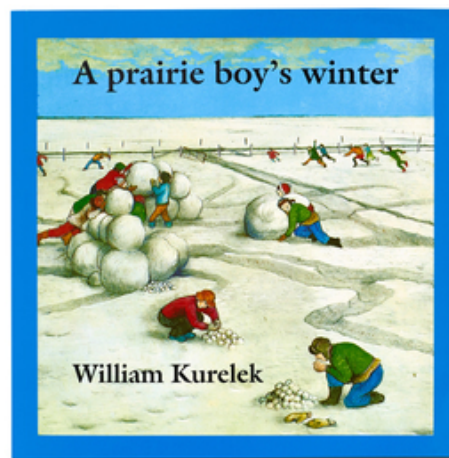
Kurelek was not a particularly concise, elegant, or balanced writer, although he could be refreshingly if “excruciatingly frank.”<sup>17</sup> His content was routinely didactic and reflected his belief that the word had greater potential “to convert people” than his visual art.<sup>18</sup> He also made sense of his artistic purpose through theatrical and literary metaphors: “[E]ach believer has his or her role to play in the drama of mankind’s salvation—some just a few lines, others whole pages.”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, Kurelek’s prose is autobiographical, a scintillating primary record of his experiences, beliefs system, thinking process, and creative motivation.

Kurelek’s first mature body of writing appeared in the late 1940s. The text, a “life story” emphasizing various mental and physical ailments Kurelek suffered, was composed for a Winnipeg neurologist.<sup>20</sup> By the early 1950s Kurelek was in England seeking psychiatric diagnosis and treatment at Maudsley and Netherne hospitals. He wrote as a means of psychotherapy, “continually writing, by a kind of free association method, all the thoughts that came into my head.”<sup>21</sup>

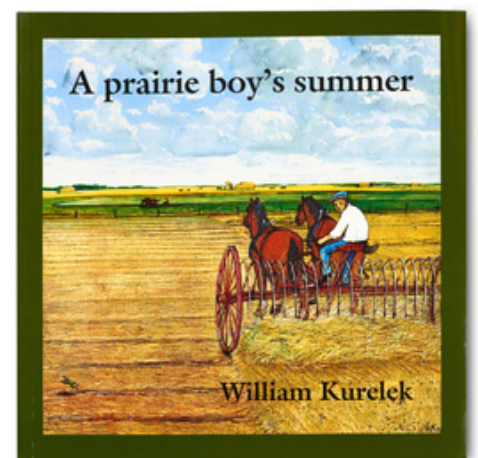
Kurelek’s most significant piece of writing remains his autobiography, *Someone With Me* (1973, 1980). The first version was published by the Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education at Cornell University. Cornell professor Dr. James Maas intended the autobiography as a primary source for his introductory psychology course. As such, the rare 1973 edition of *Someone With Me* amounts to an invaluable but rambling, unedited tome more than five hundred pages long.

The narrative recounts Kurelek’s memories of childhood and adolescence, a rational reconstruction that culminates in his mental breakdown and hospitalization in England and his “comeback to normalcy and success” through religious conversion.<sup>22</sup> A full quarter of the 1973 autobiography is a digressive exploration of theological argument, touching on Darwinism, contemporary politics, scriptural exegesis, and metaphysics. Kurelek was continually tweaking his autobiography up to his death in 1977.<sup>23</sup>

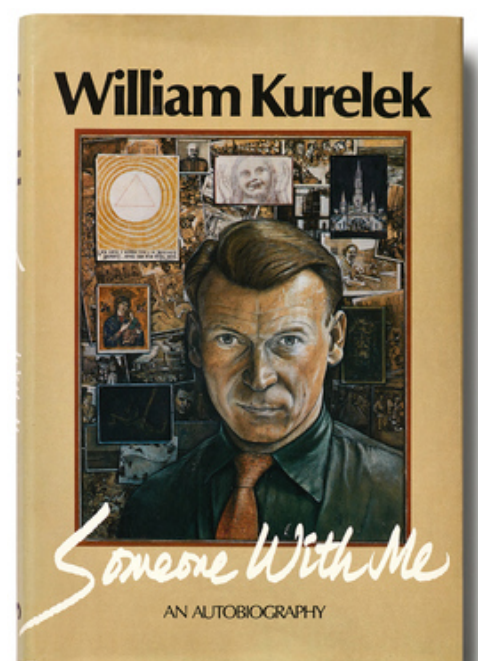
In 1980 Toronto publisher McClelland & Stewart republished *Someone With Me* posthumously. The book was significantly abridged to 176 pages and eliminated (against the author’s wishes) the original’s concluding theological meditation. Readers reacted to its frank and confessional tone. “Kurelek screams his pain,” one reviewer wrote.<sup>24</sup>



Cover of William Kurelek's *A Prairie Boy's Winter* (1973).



Cover of William Kurelek's *A Prairie Boy's Summer* (1975).



The artist's abridged autobiography, William Kurelek, *Someone With Me* (1980).



## The Maze of Mental Illness

Kurelek's autobiography, *Someone With Me* (1973, 1980), paints a vivid portrait of his battle with various undiagnosed ailments throughout his teenage years into early adulthood, including anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic eye pain. His struggle culminates in psychiatric treatment at Maudsley and Netherne hospitals in England, where Kurelek was a patient from June 1952 until January 1955. Kurelek emerges victorious at the end of the autobiography, a successful artist, aided by his treatment experience, but he was convinced that the mystery of faith had ultimately done more to heal him than the science of psychiatry.

Nonetheless, Kurelek's relationship to his own mental illness through the language of psychology and psychoanalysis inspired his great, tormented, compartmentalized paintings from the 1950s, including *The Maze*, 1953, and *Behold Man Without God*, 1955. In *The Maze* he represents himself as a rat unable to escape the proverbial behaviourist maze. In *Behold Man Without God* he wrestles a serpent, the Freudian symbol of sexual drive.

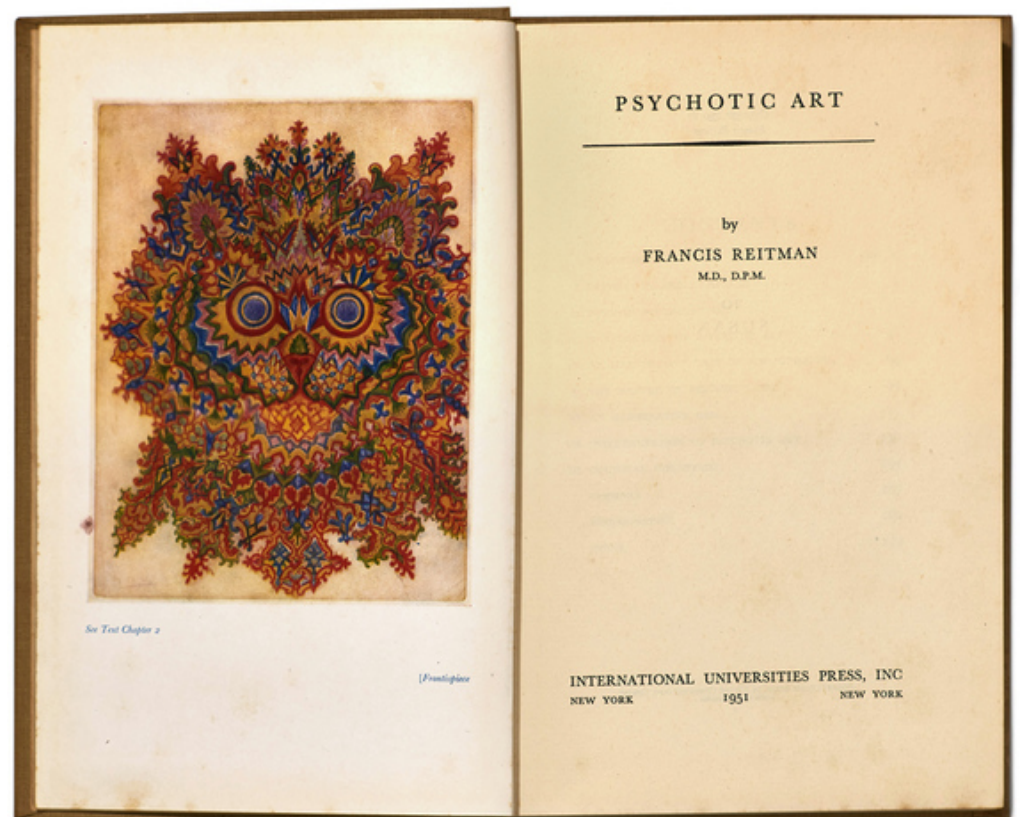
In the postwar era, the massive psychological trauma induced by the Second World War had spurred British psychiatry toward new and innovative treatment models, including art therapy.<sup>25</sup> Surrealism, an avant-garde art movement more widely appreciated, influential, and understood in Britain than in English Canada at the time, was another important catalyst in the treatment of mental illness. European Surrealist artists and writers, most notably André Breton (1896–1966), “valued the freedom of expression of the ‘insane’ and the imagery of the subconscious” and, as a result, were more inclined to conceive art in therapeutic and psychological terms.<sup>26</sup>

The first institution that Kurelek entered in 1952 was Maudsley Hospital in South London. Opened in 1907, with a focus on research and teaching, Maudsley's role was to provide diagnosis and treatment for early onset mental illness.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Francis Reitman was one of the

professionals there exploring the potential effects of artmaking on mental illness.

Although Kurelek never received direct treatment from Reitman, he certainly would have had access to the psychiatrist's 1950 book *Psychotic Art*, which discusses how artmaking was being used as a form of treatment.<sup>28</sup>

Kurelek also encountered psychiatrist Dr. Bruno Cormier at Maudsley. A French-Canadian, Cormier was sympathetic to Surrealism and was a signatory to the Automatistes' 1948 *Refus global* manifesto. Though Cormier encouraged the artist to



Frontispiece of Dr. Francis Reitman's *Psychotic Art* (1950).



“relieve himself of aggressive feelings by painting them out,” Kurelek found the doctor “distant and ineffectual.”<sup>29</sup>

Kurelek painted feverishly at Maudsley, creating such memorable works as *Tramlines*, 1952, *Farm Children’s Games in Western Canada*, 1952, and *The Maze*, 1953, but it was not until he was transferred to Netherne Hospital in Surrey that he experienced a structured form of art therapy. During the 1950s the facility pioneered “the development of effective and humane treatments, including recreational activities for the mentally ill.”<sup>30</sup> He depicted the extensive art facilities in *Netherne Hospital Workshop*, 1954.



William Kurelek, *Tramlines*, 1952, gouache on board, 89 x 104.2 cm, London Transport Museum, U.K.



William Kurelek, *Netherne Hospital Workshop*, 1954, pencil, watercolour, and gouache on paper laid down on board, 50.8 x 61 cm, private collection.

Edward Adamson (1911–1996), Netherne’s art therapist since 1946, described Kurelek as “extremely withdrawn,” virtually silent, and unable to interact with other patients. Adamson did not offer technical instruction to Kurelek or the other patients.<sup>31</sup> But he ensured Kurelek had his own studio, a small room previously used as a linen closet, and sought to impart art’s therapeutic benefits by maintaining “a positive and safe environment” where patients were “free of fear of criticism.”<sup>32</sup>

A precise understanding of Kurelek’s mental condition and diagnoses at Maudsley and Netherne remains unknown. Accordingly, how we assess his claimed recovery in the late 1950s, its extent and permanence, is mere speculation, as his medical records are inaccessible to the public until 2029. Nonetheless, correspondence between the artist and the psychiatric professionals who provided treatment is accessible. Dr. Morris Carstairs, the senior registrar at Maudsley during Kurelek’s stay, offers a glimpse of Kurelek’s mental state in one letter: “[Y]ou would not want to claim that you had been psychotic, because you never were; but you could say that you have had times of severe emotional stress.”<sup>33</sup>



## Kurelek and His Contemporaries

Kurelek regarded his art as existing outside the contemporary art world. Though many artists, including Kurelek's Toronto peers at Isaacs Gallery, had long been embracing non-traditional and secular forms of creative expression, Kurelek resolutely declared his affinity for the medieval ideal of the artist-as-craftsman. He unapologetically aligned his didactic "message" paintings, such as *Dinnertime on the Prairies*, 1963, with the religious and genre art of the Northern Renaissance.



The Isaacs Gallery, 832 Yonge Street, c. 1970, photograph by Ellis Wiley.



The artist at the Isaacs Gallery framing shop, c. 1959.

However, the reality of Kurelek's place within the Toronto art scene, and his relationship to art movements nationally, is more complicated than either the artist or his detractors admit. During the 1960s and 1970s, Isaacs Gallery featured art that included a diverse range of styles, media, and subjects. Whereas painters like Gordon Rayner (1935–2010) and William Ronald (1926–1998) were devoted to lyrical abstraction, artists such as Michael Snow (b. 1928), Les Levine (b. 1935), Greg Curnoe (1936–1992), and Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) engaged several kinds of media, producing conceptual works that drew from Dada.

Moreover, Kurelek's realism, though distinctive for its practised lack of refinement, was not unusual. Toronto artists had an enduring realist tradition that lasted well into the postwar era. The social realism of the 1930s American Scene movement, whose artists emphasized the representation of contemporary rural and urban life, was popular in the city when Kurelek studied briefly at the Ontario College of Art in 1949–50.<sup>34</sup> Kurelek's former instructors Frederick Hagan (1918–2003) and Eric Freifeld (1919–1984), who were also deeply influenced by the older traditions of the Northern Renaissance, represent significant figurative realists working in this mode through the 1940s and



1950s. In the 1960s Jack Chambers (1931–1978), also a Roman Catholic convert, made films and honed photorealistic canvases of family life and the flat, semi-urban landscape of Southwestern Ontario. The works of Christiane Pflug (1936–1972) and Mark Prent (b. 1947) show deep familiarity with the German realist art movement of the 1920s New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit), a movement inspired in part by the same Northern Renaissance artists whom Kurelek celebrated, Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569) and Hieronymus Bosch.

Outside of Toronto, artists were adopting various modes of realism in the decades leading up to and during Kurelek's two-decade career. Quebec's Jean Paul Lemieux (1904–1990) practised a painterly realism that, like Kurelek's, presented lonely figures in desolate, expansive landscapes. In the west, Ernest Lindner (1897–1988) created meticulously crafted paintings of stumps, moss, and fallen trees, emphasizing the natural cycle of rot and regrowth. In the Maritimes, Alex Colville (1920–2013) represented the bottled psychological anxiety of the postwar era, and his realism conveys, as do many of Kurelek tableaux, a latent tension and even violence through otherwise tranquil domestic scenes.

Kurelek's realism and art historical debt to the Northern Renaissance do not completely distinguish the artist's work from either his older or younger contemporaries. Despite their sometimes violent overtone, many of his more didactic paintings resonate with the same Cold War anxieties that haunted his peers and the public. Nonetheless, Kurelek's work remains unmistakable. In its unexpected combinations of realism, memory, and message, a painting such as *In the Autumn of Life*, 1964, testifies to one of the most unified expressions of belief in action among twentieth-century Canadian artists.



Alex Colville, *Family and Rainstorm*, 1955, glazed tempera on Masonite, 57.1 x 74.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.





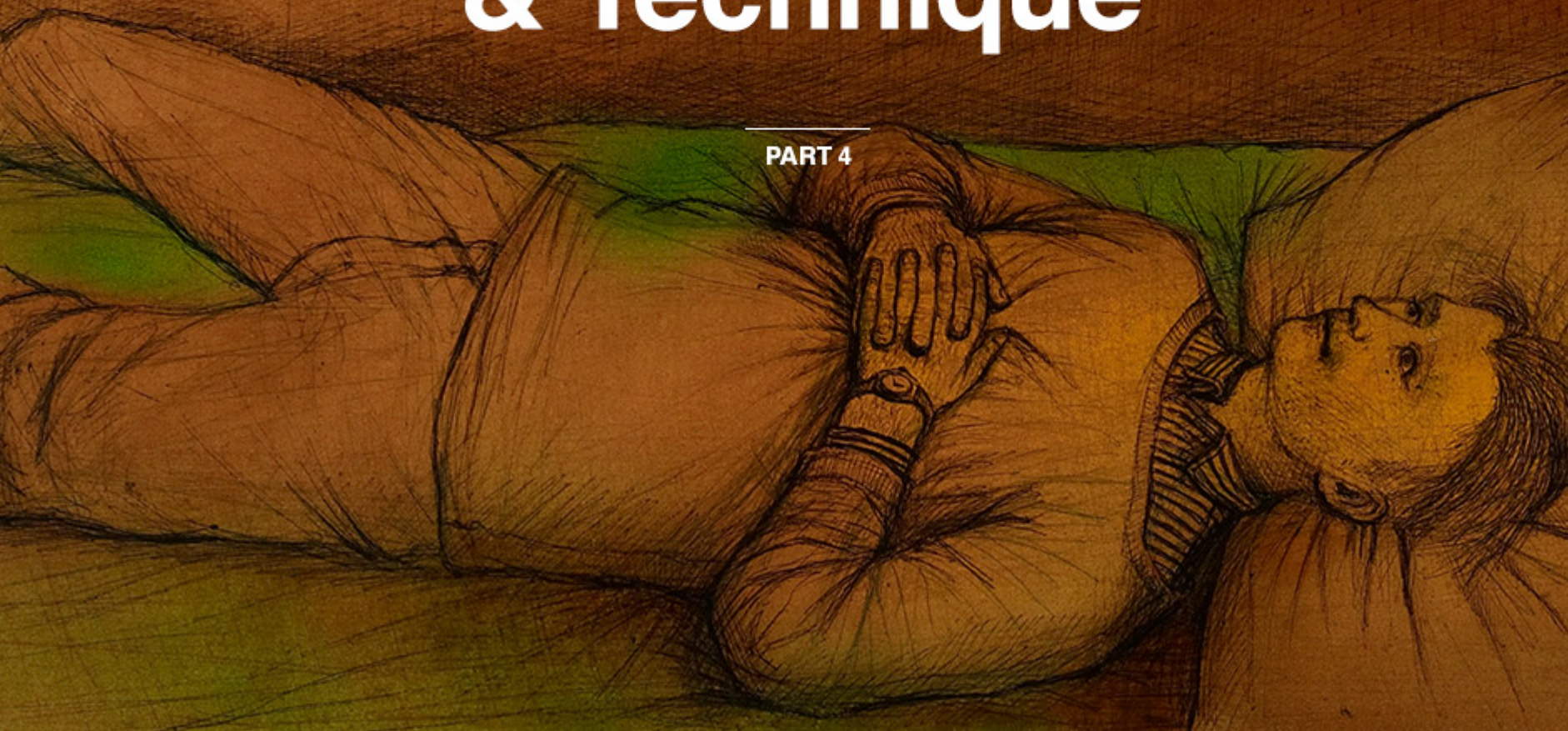
William Kurelek, *Dinnertime on the Prairies*, 1963, oil on Masonite, 44.7 x 72 cm, McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton.





# Style & Technique

PART 4



William Kurelek garnered national attention in postwar Toronto for his distinctive figurative painting and photographically influenced pictorial compositions. Working and exhibiting within a milieu of established and emerging contemporary trends ranging from abstract painting to performance art, Kurelek—as figurative painter and picture framer—projected the image of a medieval craftsman for the modern age.



## Paint Craft

Kurelek defined his creative identity in terms of a somewhat one-dimensional view of medieval art. According to Kurelek, the medieval artist “wasn’t so awfully conscious of art or of being an artist” as he was a “craftsman,” a “*picture maker*.”<sup>1</sup>

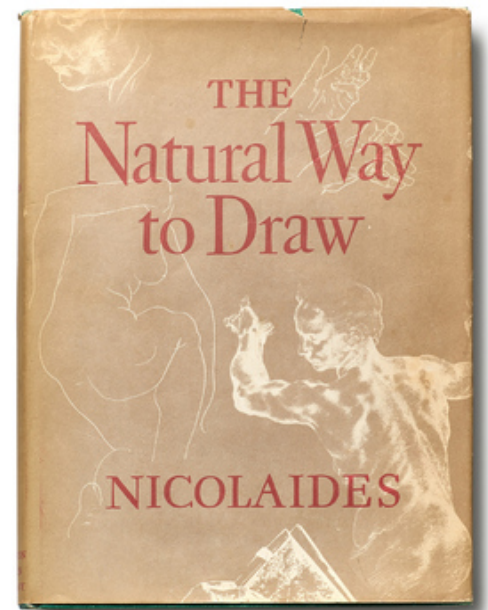
The distinction reflected a religious position: it undercut notions of artistic individuality, allowing Kurelek to claim he simply worked for the greater glory of God. Such self-identification distinguished Kurelek’s practice from Toronto modernist artists who also exhibited work at Isaacs Gallery in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Michael Snow (b. 1928), Gordon Rayner (1935–2010), Joyce Wieland (1930–1998), and Greg Curnoe (1936–1992).

Kurelek also characterized his practice as lacking formal rigour. In 1962 he wrote, “I’ve had little full dress art training; my colour, composition, method of paint application, were arrived at mostly by intuitive groping rather than by systematic scientific enquiry and practice. In a word, I would not say I am a painter’s painter.”<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, drawing and draftsmanship are the foundations of Kurelek’s practice. Kimon Nicolaïdes (1891–1938) provided the only art instruction that earned unreserved praise from the artist.<sup>3</sup> Kurelek studied Nicolaïdes’s book *The Natural Way to Draw* for three months in Montreal before boarding a cargo ship for England in 1952.

The lack of pretension Kurelek intentionally conveyed through the image of the unschooled “picture maker” also extends to his working method. His earliest major paintings, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1950, and *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1952, were completed in oil on panel (“unprimed plywood with pronounced grain”) and Masonite, respectively. This choice of medium is a modern approximation of that first employed by the artists of the early Northern Renaissance to whom Kurelek was indebted, namely Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) and Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569).<sup>4</sup>



William Kurelek and Avrom Isaacs in the Isaacs Gallery framing workshop, where Kurelek worked from 1960 to 1970, c. 1960s.



The 1969 cover of Kimon Nicolaïdes’s *The Natural Way to Draw* (1941, 1969).





William Kurelek, *The Tower of Babel*, 1954, watercolour and gouache on board, 92 x 122 cm, private collection.

The nightmarish and self-probing paintings, such as *I Spit on Life*, c. 1953–54, and *The Tower of Babel*, 1954, that he produced while in England are painted, for the most part, on paper or illustration board, in watercolour, gouache, or tempera. The formal influence of British (and devoutly Christian) contemporary Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), who often painted in water-based media, may also have informed Kurelek's choice of medium.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the reason, Kurelek may have quickly discovered that these particular media adapted well to his careful but graphic approach to figuration that he had begun to perfect with *Zaporozhian Cossacks*.



After he returned to Canada in 1959, as he was completing the 160 works of the Passion of Christ series in gouache, Kurelek gradually transitioned back to using oil on panel, predominantly Masonite, supports. Through the remainder of his career, as curator Joan Murray notes, Kurelek's preparatory and painting method remained "almost preposterously simple and rough": "He applied a gesso ground to Masonite board, then either oil or acrylic (sometimes in the form of spray), then outlined the composition with a ballpoint pen. For texture, he used coloured pencils; for fine details, he scratched, or scribbled, or brushed the surface. He finished by adding details in pen."<sup>6</sup>

The appearance of ballpoint pen, spray paint, and a vibrant, unnatural colour palette in a work such as *Not Going Back to Pick Up a Cloak; If They Are in the Fields after the Bomb Has Dropped*, 1971, characterizes Kurelek's final period, beginning in the late 1960s.

The studio environment he maintained also sustained Kurelek's image as a "picture maker" craftsman. Kurelek thrived on time and space constraints. He would often combine painting with fasting, and could work for days with little sustenance beyond water, coffee, and oranges.

When he moved to the Toronto Beaches in 1965, Kurelek transformed a former coal cellar in the basement into his studio.<sup>7</sup> He constructed cupboards to store his paintings and tools and decorated the walls and ceiling with elaborately carved and painted Ukrainian designs. Despite these embellishments, Kurelek's windowless studio was small, measuring roughly one by two metres, and remarkably spartan. He executed the majority of his paintings on his flat worktable.

## Inside and Out: Kurelek's Pictorial Composition

"The message is the most important thing in the picture for me," Kurelek explained in a 1962 interview; "experimentation is secondary."<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, in order to achieve his intended message, Kurelek needed to become adept at pictorial composition so he could seamlessly blend style and content. Kurelek's paintings reveal what curator Tobi Bruce describes as the artist's particularly keen sense of "pictorial staging." Whether the setting is a claustrophobic interior, as in his 1955 work *The Bachelor*, or the flat, open Canadian prairie, as with *The Devil's Wedding* from 1967, Kurelek marshalled both style and composition to dramatic effect.



William Kurelek, *Not Going Back to Pick Up a Cloak; If They Are in the Fields after the Bomb Has Dropped*, 1971, oil on Masonite, 60 x 58 cm, private collection.





LEFT: William Kurelek, *The Bachelor*, 1955, mixed media on hardboard, 71.8 x 49.5 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. RIGHT: William Kurelek, *The Devil's Wedding*, 1967, oil on Masonite, 134.6 x 121.9 cm, Corporate Collection of James Richardson & Sons, Limited.

Kurelek's paintings from the 1950s reveal two distinct compositional strategies. In works like *The Maze*, 1953, *I Spit on Life*, c. 1953–54, and *The Tower of Babel*, 1954, the momentum is toward the construction of *horror vacui*, or “fear of empty space” leading to visual overcrowding, to convey his interior life—his haunted memory and sense of isolation from the world around him.<sup>9</sup> Simultaneously, in works like *Where Am I? Who Am I? Why Am I?*, c. 1953–54, and *Lord That I May See*, 1955, Kurelek represents the equally bleak world outside his own mind. Solitary figures roam barren landscapes, groping blindly for answers in an empty world.<sup>10</sup> In his 1957 *Self-Portrait* Kurelek sets himself before a painted collage of photographs, postcards, artworks, and quotations that combine images relating to his inner life and the external world and together announce the new direction his life was to take following his conversion to Roman Catholicism.

In the 1960s Kurelek continues to develop his earlier compositional strategies, but he relinquishes the solipsistic, interior gaze that characterized his English period from 1952 to 1959. *This Is the Nemesis*, 1965, for example, uses visual crowding to imagine the chaos and violence of nuclear annihilation. In contrast, in works like *The Devil's Wedding*, 1967, the Canadian prairie doubles as a vast, engulfing desert, in the Bible a place of moral testing in which humanity battles Satanic temptation.<sup>11</sup> In both paintings the human beings are actors, represented in particular locations and geographies, but playing roles in a fundamentally metaphysical drama.



William Kurelek, *Where Am I? Who Am I? Why Am I?*, c. 1953–54, watercolour on paper, 73.6 x 58.5 cm, American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore.



Beginning in the 1960s, Kurelek routinely elevates the vantage point, as seen in the six works that comprise *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971, 1976. His views become panoramic, the ground often appears to pivot laterally toward the viewer, distance is simplified and clarified through one-point perspective, and, with some notable exceptions such as *Glimmering Tapers 'round the Day's Dead Sanctities*, 1970, horizons rise and the earth comes to dominate his scenes. By the early 1970s, as seen in paintings such as *The Dream of Mayor Crombie in the Glen Stewart Ravine*, 1974, and *The Painter*, 1974, Kurelek abandons the “articulated, volumetric forms and perspectival space” for a rougher, brighter, and flatter pictorial language.<sup>12</sup>

Kurelek boasted of his tendency to “flout artistic rules by doing taboo things like dividing a composition exactly in half,” as in *Dinnertime on the Prairies*, 1963.<sup>13</sup> He also emphasized the degree to which his creative practice differed from the modernist abstract canvases produced by many of his peers at Isaacs Gallery in Toronto. However, as several commentators have observed, Kurelek’s fixation with the colour and geometric patterns of cultivated land, such as in *No Grass Grows on the Beaten Path*, 1975, allowed him to integrate figuration with abstraction. Indeed, the large-scale field and prairie paintings he undertook in the 1960s and 1970s bear compositional and stylistic similarity to the more geometric tendencies of Toronto abstract painting, such as *Magnetawan No. 2*, 1965, by Gordon Rayner (1935–2010).<sup>14</sup>



**LEFT:** William Kurelek, *No Grass Grows on the Beaten Path*, 1975, mixed media on Masonite, 101.6 x 71.1 cm, private collection. **RIGHT:** Gordon Rayner, *Magnetawan No. 2*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 159.8 x 159.8 cm (overall), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



## Celluloid Memory: Film and Photography

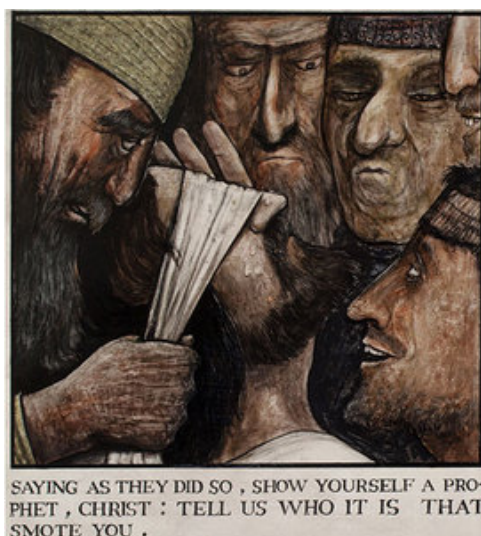
Many of Kurelek's paintings have a theatrical and filmic quality. His paintings often represent figures locked in a dramatic stance, ranging from the dynamic gestures found in *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1952, to the weighted body language of Kurelek's father in *Despondency*, 1963. In both cases, he reveals his debt to and appreciation for the kinetic visuals of film and theatre and for the instantaneity of the photographic record. Later in life he also sought inspiration from other painters who relied on photography in their work. Kurelek's *Don Valley on a Grey Day*, 1972, represents his response to *401 Towards London No. 1*, 1968–69, by Jack Chambers (1931–1978).<sup>15</sup>



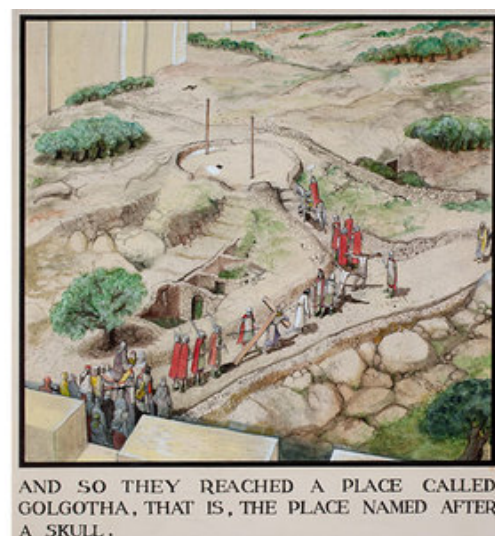
LEFT: William Kurelek, *Don Valley on a Grey Day*, 1972, mixed media on Masonite, 121.9 x 243.8 cm, The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. RIGHT: Jack Chambers, *401 Towards London No. 1*, 1968–69, oil on wood, 183 x 244 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Kurelek's photographic sensibility was forged early, in part as a result of his love of films such as *Odd Man Out* (1947), *Portrait of Jennie* (1948), and likely *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945). As curator Mary Jo Hughes has argued, all three films incorporate a central protagonist, often an artist, "attempting to find moral footing."<sup>16</sup> The artist applied that sensibility consciously for the first time while creating the series *The Passion of Christ*, 1960–63.

Intending to use the paintings of this series in televised broadcast, Kurelek deployed a number of cinematic devices: dramatic lighting and shadow (*And About the Ninth Hour ...*), contrasting close-up (*Saying As They Did So...*), panoramic views (*And So They Reached a Place Called Golgotha ...*), and thematic montage, or what he called "projection," to images other than what is literally described by the main text (*Whereupon Jesus Said to Him, Put Your Sword Back into Its Place ...*).<sup>17</sup> The series is an amalgam of constructed images, each serving as a filmic still, a record of a particular moment and movement frozen in time, and selected to dramatize and advance the narrative.



SAYING AS THEY DID SO , SHOW YOURSELF A PROPHET , CHRIST : TELL US WHO IT IS THAT SMOTE YOU .



AND SO THEY REACHED A PLACE CALLED GOLGOTHA, THAT IS, THE PLACE NAMED AFTER A SKULL .

LEFT: William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ (Saying As They Did So ...)*, 1960–63, gouache on paper, 57 x 49.5 cm, Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum. RIGHT: William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ (And So They Reached a Place Called Golgotha ...)*, 1960–63, gouache on paper, 57 x 49.5 cm, Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.



Still photography became a vital tool, the “trusted and omnipresent pictorial aid,” that helped Kurelek recreate the youthful recollections that dominate his “memory” paintings of the 1960s and 1970s; works like *Studying in Winnipeg*, 1964, and *My First Winter in the Bush*, 1973.<sup>18</sup> The camera became so central to his painting practice because Kurelek conceived his own memories in photographic terms. The memory was the key image, and the artist’s mind could then “shift the frame to get the best composition.” Of course, Kurelek acknowledged that memory betrays: “My father noticed details I’d missed or got wrong, like the way a certain machine was put together” in a painting.<sup>19</sup> The camera was introduced to his creative practice to minimize the mistakes of recall. Kurelek did train his Asahi Pentax Spotmatic on the details of a scene, but he began to use photography more often as a general compositional guide.<sup>20</sup>



William Kurelek taking photographs at his parents’ farm in Vinemount, Ontario, c. 1956.



William Kurelek and his extended family, c. early 1960s. The artist used this photograph as a reference image for *In the Autumn of Life*, 1964.

After his death, some four thousand of Kurelek’s black and white prints and colour slides, along with three photo albums, were deposited at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. Many of the images document the artist’s return and recurring pilgrimages to Western Canada, beginning in the mid-1960s. Some were taken from a speeding car, capturing transitory motion and the immediacy of being on the road. Most are static shots that record the minimalist designs of the agrarian landscape and reflect information on light, proportion, perspective, and the compositional strategies that are easily recognizable in a Kurelek landscape like *Piotr Jarosz*, 1977. As part of the artist’s visual resources, the photographs evidence the authenticity of his paintings, with Kurelek the painter assuming the role of location record keeper.<sup>21</sup>





**LEFT:** William Kurelek, *Piotr Jarosz*, 1977, mixed media on Masonite, 60.7 x 121.5 cm, Art Gallery of Hamilton. **RIGHT:** A view of the road from the dashboard of the artist's Volkswagen Beetle, date unknown.

## Frames: Expanding the Picture

Until recently, photographic reproductions of William Kurelek's paintings rarely included the frames that surround them.<sup>22</sup> This absence is significant because the artist expertly fashioned, often unconventionally, many of his own frames. In many cases his craftsmanship lends symbolic enrichment to his paintings. Occasionally the frame is a literal extension of the painted image. Kurelek regarded his framing practice as parallel with his painting practice, befitting the artist-as-craftsman identity he claimed, in opposition to the "purist philosophy of art" of his peers that he vocally rejected.<sup>23</sup>



The artist painting in his basement studio, October 18, 1973, photograph by Erik Christensen.



William Kurelek in the studio he built in the basement of his Toronto home on Balsam Avenue, c. late 1960s / early 1970s. Note the intricate Eastern European design motifs the artist used to decorate the walls and supports.

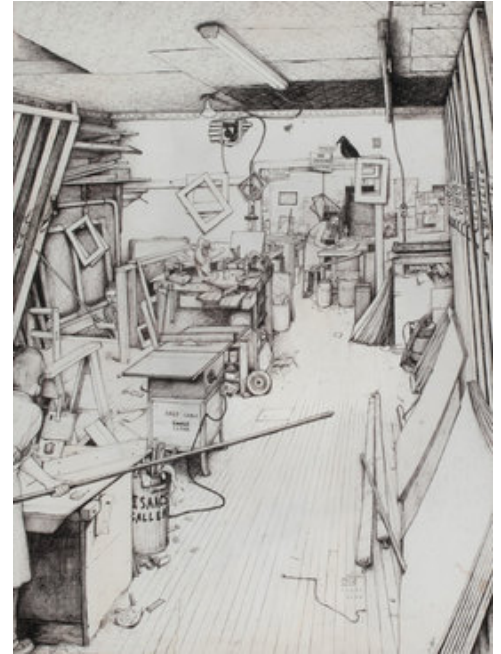
Kurelek began designing and constructing picture frames in London, England. In late 1956, during the months leading up to his formal conversion to Roman Catholicism, he was hired by F.A. Pollak Ltd. Though he had no framing experience, he impressed his new employer with his attention to detail in the *trompe l'oeil* works he had undertaken at Netherne Hospital and begun exhibiting at the British Royal Academy of Art, such as *The Airman's Prayer*, c. 1959.<sup>24</sup>



The framing workshop was run by Frederick Pollak, a Jew who had fled Austria during the 1930s in the wake of National Socialism. Pollak's connection to the European art world was deep. He had completed contracts with the Louvre in Paris, and his workmanship reflected the legacy of picture framing, which was considered a branch of sculpture among European art academies.<sup>25</sup> Frames were designed, constructed, restored, and coloured at Pollak, each job requiring sophisticated training and a precise skill set. Kurelek became a master finisher and considered his two years with Pollak "a continuation of art school," later adapting many of the techniques he learned—"spattering, smudging, sealing"—to paintings such as *Glimmering Tapers 'round the Day's Dead Sanctities*, 1970.<sup>26</sup>

Kurelek's time at Pollak served him well professionally and creatively. Returning to Canada in 1959, and desperate to begin the next chapter of his life in Toronto, Kurelek was eventually hired as a framer by the young art dealer Avrom Isaacs, whose influence was growing in the Canadian art scene. Although Kurelek was not without considerable framing experience, he reports being hired, once again, on the merits of his artwork. Kurelek secured his first exhibition at Isaacs Gallery in 1960 and worked there as a framer for a decade.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the paintings Kurelek completed prior to 1960 do not feature the artist's frames. This includes the vast majority of the paintings he made in his English period, from 1952 to 1959. Exceptions to this include *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1950, *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1952, and *Behold Man Without God #4*, 1955. All three of these works, however, were framed after Kurelek had returned to Canada.



William Kurelek, *The Isaacs Gallery Workshop*, 1973, pen and ink on paper, 91.4 x 71.1 cm, private collection.



LEFT: William Kurelek, *Manitoba Party*, 1964, oil on Masonite, 121.9 x 152.6 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: William Kurelek, *Night and the Winnipeg Flood*, 1977, oil on Masonite, 28 x 27.5 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Kurelek's frames from the 1960s and 1970s follow one of two main design themes. In works like *Glimmering Tapers 'round the Day's Dead Sanctities*, 1970, Kurelek carved and painted bold and exquisite motifs derived from Ukrainian folk art into the frame's frieze. The combination of deep red and lemon-lime complement the dark earth and shimmering northern lights depicted in the painting.



The other element frequently featured in Kurelek's frames is barn board. In 1964, for his exhibition of the series *An Immigrant Farms in Canada*—featuring such works as *Manitoba Party*—Kurelek framed the series in weathered lumber sourced from his father's farm in Southern Ontario.<sup>28</sup> He continued to incorporate rough, untreated wood in subsequent frames, including *Night and the Winnipeg Flood*, 1977, until his death.

On rare occasion, the artist also used the frame to expand on a work's symbolic potency. The frame around *This Is the Nemesis*, 1965, incorporates a collage sourced from the television schedule published in the *Globe and Mail*. *The Painter*, 1974, evokes nationalist sentiment with a frame of maple garland. Finally, Kurelek's most ambitious frames—those surrounding *Reminiscences of Youth* and *Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine*, 1939, both from 1968, for instance—literally extend the narrative of the picture by incorporating the frame into the scene itself. Above all, framing was never an afterthought for Kurelek, but an integral part of his picture-making process.



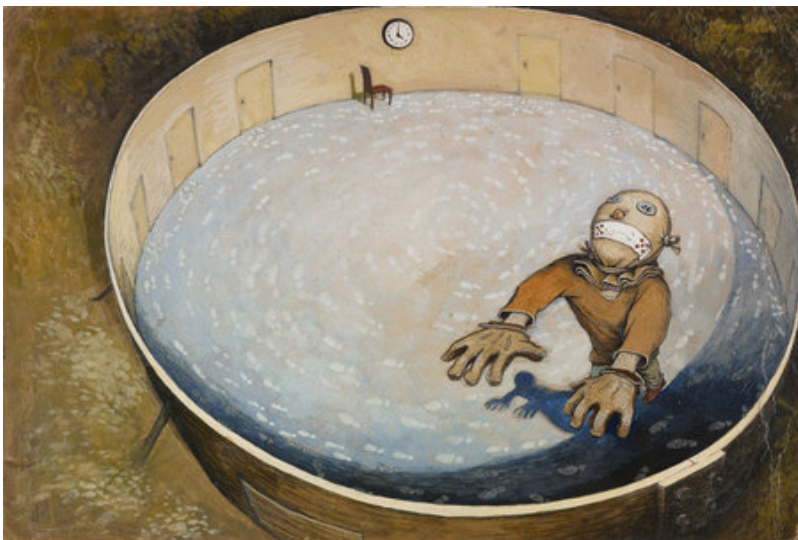
William Kurelek, *Polish Wedding at Kaszuby*, 1977, mixed media on Masonite, 50.5 x 71 cm, Art Gallery of Hamilton.



## The Series

Kurelek created individual works of lasting significance. However, the artist's grouping of imagery, his consistent penchant for bringing singular works together to articulate larger narratives and ideas, distinguishes his oeuvre. Binding multiple paintings to a common set of memories, a single historical experience, or enduring moral quandary lent intentional cohesiveness to Kurelek's solo exhibitions. At times this intent also made his work illustrational, which ran counter to art trends in the 1960s and 1970s but also endeared his work to book publishers. Most significantly, producing series gave Kurelek a sense of interpretive control.

While in England during the 1950s, Kurelek limited his studio production to autonomous, individual paintings. However, these singular works also hint at the artist's later engagement with series. Motifs of blindness, for example, repeat throughout this period in works that include *Where Am I? Who Am I? Why Am I?*, c. 1953–54, *Lord That I May See*, 1955, and *Behold Man Without God*, 1955. *Pre-Maze*, c. 1953, is paired with a subsequent work through its titular anticipation of *The Maze*, 1953. Later, Kurelek replicated several key early paintings in order to incorporate them into series, the most notable of these being *The Maze* (see *The Maas Maze*, 1971) and *Behold Man Without God* (see *Behold Man Without God #4*, 1973).



William Kurelek, *Pre-Maze*, c. 1953, watercolour and graphite on paper, 25.3 x 37.7 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



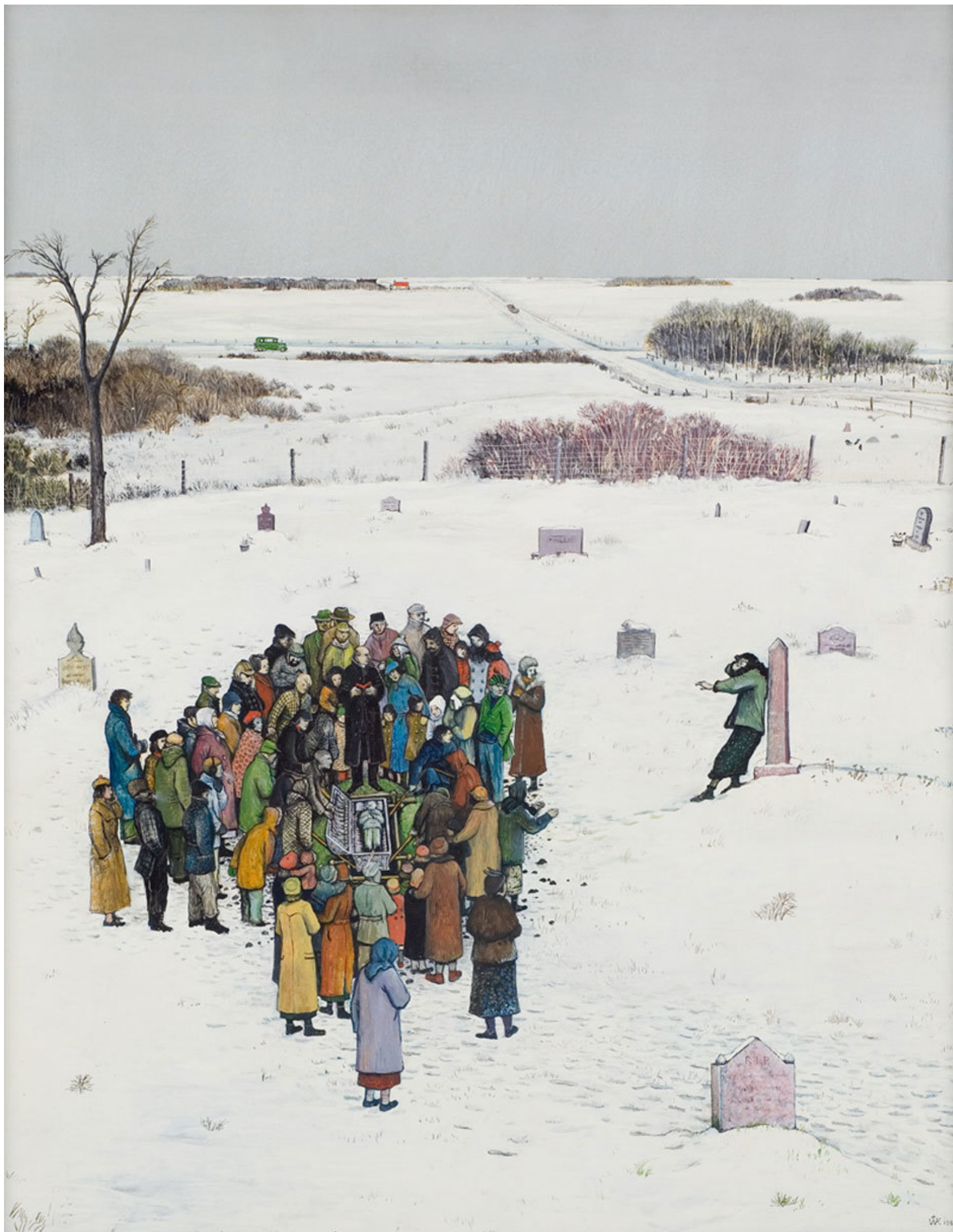
William Kurelek, *The Maas Maze*, 1971, mixed media on panel, 90.8 x 121.3 cm, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca.

After he returned to Canada, Kurelek completed what may be regarded as the artist's largest and first series: *The Passion of Christ*, 1960–63. Kurelek's reliance on a pre-existing narrative distinguishes the *Passion* series from the original narrative series he would undertake throughout his mature career—the first of which, *Memories of Farm and Bush Life*, he created in 1962. He followed with *Experiments in Didactic Art* one year later, and *An Immigrant Farms in Canada* in 1964. Together, these three series highlight Kurelek's thematic range. He would go on to produce bodies of work reflecting themes of personal memory (*My Brother John*, 1973), moral and religious issues related to contemporary life (*Glory to Man in the Highest*, 1966), and the historical experiences of Canada's diverse cultural communities (*The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971, 1976).



Through title and image, Kurelek's paintings relay specific stories, and often make terse, ethical propositions that leave little room for interpretive vagueness. For example, in *Lest We Repent...*, 1964, from the series *Glory to Man in the Highest*, a scene of inconsolable grief staged within a bleak winter landscape, Kurelek aims to make the viewer reflect on the finality that death must be in a world that does not recognize God and repent. Narrative or didactic texts Kurelek wrote and paired with his paintings when they were exhibited at Isaacs Gallery and elsewhere underline his desire for interpretive control. Along with title, image, and text, the series format allowed Kurelek to shape the audience's understanding of his painting. Just as writers develop stories chapter by chapter or build arguments by tying together the strands of evidence, Kurelek worked in visual series because he believed it clarified his intentions and enabled his art to convey a certain message.





William Kurelek, *Lest We Repent...*, 1964, oil on pressed board, 68.6 x 53.3 cm, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston.





# Where to See

PART 5

The works of William Kurelek are held in public and private collections internationally. Although the following institutions hold the works listed below, they may not always be on view. This list contains only the works held in public collections discussed and illustrated in this book; many other works by Kurelek may be found in public collections across Canada.



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## Agnes Etherington Art Centre

Queen's University  
36 University Avenue  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
613-533-2190  
[agnes.queensu.ca](http://agnes.queensu.ca)



**William Kurelek, *Lest We Repent...*, 1964**

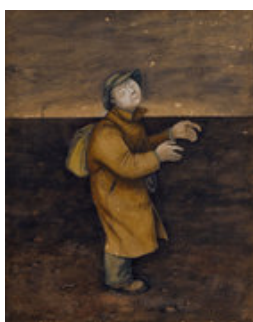
Oil on pressed board

68.6 x 53.3 cm

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## American Visionary Art Museum

800 Key Highway  
Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.  
410-244-1900  
[www.avam.org](http://www.avam.org)



**William Kurelek, *Where Am I? Who Am I? Why Am I?*, c. 1953–54**

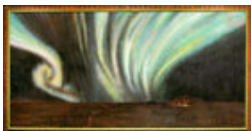
Watercolour on paper

73.6 x 58.5 cm



## Art Gallery of Alberta

2 Sir Winston Churchill Square  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada  
780-422-6223  
youraga.ca



**William Kurelek, *Glimmering Tapers 'round the Day's Dead Sanctities*, 1970**  
Mixed media on hardboard  
120.5 x 243.3 cm

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## Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

1040 Moss Street  
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada  
250-384-4171  
aggv.ca



**William Kurelek, *Lumberjack's Breakfast*, 1973**  
Mixed media on Masonite  
58.5 x 80.8 cm

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## Art Gallery of Hamilton

123 King Street West  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
905-527-6610  
artgalleryofhamilton.com



**William Kurelek, *This Is the Nemesis*, 1965**  
Mixed media on Masonite  
114.8 x 115.6 cm

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**William Kurelek, *Piotr Jarosz*, 1977**

Mixed media on Masonite

60.7 x 121.5 cm

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**William Kurelek, *Polish Wedding at Kaszuby*, 1977**

Mixed media on Masonite

50.5 x 71 cm

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# Art Gallery of Ontario

317 Dundas Street West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
1-877-225-4246 or 416-979-6648  
ago.net



**William Kurelek, *Pre-Maze*, c. 1953**

Watercolour and graphite on paper

25.3 x 37.7 cm

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**William Kurelek, *Behold Man Without God*, 1955**

Watercolour on paperboard

108.5 x 72.5 cm

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**William Kurelek, *The Bachelor*, 1955**

Mixed media on hardboard

71.8 x 49.5 cm

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**William Kurelek, *Self-Portrait*, 1957**  
Watercolour, gouache, and ink on paper  
47.5 x 38 cm



**William Kurelek, *The Rock*, 1962**  
Mixed media on hardboard  
124.7 x 122.4 cm



**William Kurelek, *In the Autumn of Life*, 1964**  
Oil on tempered hardboard  
59.1 x 120.3 cm



**William Kurelek, *We Find All Kinds of Excuses*, 1964**  
Oil and graphite on tempered hardboard  
121.2 x 182.2 cm



**William Kurelek, *Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968**  
Mixed media on hardboard  
125.1 x 149.5 cm



**William Kurelek, *Don Valley on a Grey Day*, 1972**  
Mixed media on Masonite  
121.9 x 243.8 cm



**William Kurelek, *The Painter*, 1974**  
Mixed media on hardboard  
121.9 x 91.4 cm



## Bethlem Museum of the Mind

Bethlem Royal Hospital  
Monks Orchard Road  
Beckenham, Kent, U.K.  
+44-0(20)-3228-4227  
[museumofthemind.org.uk](http://museumofthemind.org.uk)

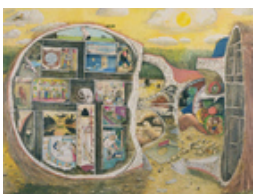


**William Kurelek, *The Maze*, 1953**  
Gouache on board  
91 x 121 cm

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## Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art

Cornell University  
114 Central Avenue  
Ithaca, New York, U.S.A.  
607-255-6464  
[museum.cornell.edu](http://museum.cornell.edu)



**William Kurelek, *The Maas Maze*, 1971**  
Mixed media on panel  
90.8 x 121.3 cm

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# Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Smithsonian Institution

Independence Avenue at 7th Street S.W.

Washington, D.C.

202-633-4674

hirshhorn.si.edu



**William Kurelek, *Farm Boy's Dreams*, 1961**

Watercolour and ink on board

76.2 x 101.6 cm

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# London Transport Museum

Covent Garden Piazza

London, U.K.

+44-(0)20-7379-6344

ltmuseum.co.uk



**William Kurelek, *Tramlines*, 1952**

Gouache on board

89 x 104.2 cm

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# McMaster Museum of Art

1280 Main Street West

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

905-525-9140

museum.mcmaster.ca



**William Kurelek, *Dinnertime on the Prairies*, 1963**

Oil on Masonite

44.7 x 72 cm



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# Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

1380 Sherbrooke Street West

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

514-285-2000

mbam.qc.ca



**William Kurelek, *Lord That I May See*, 1955**

Watercolour and gouache on cardboard

119.4 x 74.9 cm

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# National Gallery of Canada

380 Sussex Drive

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

613-990-1985

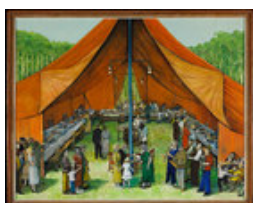
gallery.ca



**William Kurelek, *Lumber Camp Sauna*, 1961**

Watercolour, ink, and graphite on Masonite

41.2 x 46 cm



**William Kurelek, *Manitoba Party*, 1964**

Oil on Masonite

121.9 x 152.6 cm

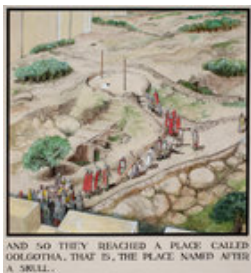




**William Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 1971, 1976**  
Acrylic, graphite, and coloured pencil (gouache and watercolour?) on Masonite  
Each hexptych 152.5 x 121.5 cm

# Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum

8058 Oakwood Drive  
Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada  
905-356-1514  
niagarafallsartgallery.ca



**William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ (And So They Reached a Place Called Golgotha ...)*, 1960–63**  
Gouache on paper  
57 x 49.5 cm



**William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ (And, While They Were at Table ...)*, 1960–63**  
Gouache on paper  
57 x 49.5 cm



**William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ (Saying As They Did So ...)*, 1960–63**  
Gouache on paper  
57 x 49.5 cm





**William Kurelek, *All Things Betray Thee Who Betrayest Me*, 1970**

Mixed media on Masonite

122 x 122 cm

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## Ontario Jewish Archives

Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre

UJA Federation of Greater Toronto

Sherman Campus

4600 Bathurst Street

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

416-635-5391

[ontariojewisharchives.org](http://ontariojewisharchives.org)



**William Kurelek, *Yom Kippur*, 1975**

Mixed media on board

50.8 x 57.2 cm

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## The Robert McLaughlin Gallery

72 Queen Street

Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

905-576-3000

[rmg.on.ca](http://rmg.on.ca)



**William Kurelek, *Hunter Awaiting Seal at Breathing Hole*, 1976**

Photographic lithograph

47.9 x 40.6 cm



# Ukrainian Museum of Canada

910 Spadina Crescent East  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada  
306-244-3800  
umc.sk.ca

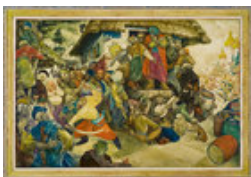


**William Kurelek, *Ukrainian Canadian Farm Picnic*, 1966**  
Oil on panel  
70.5 x 70.5 cm

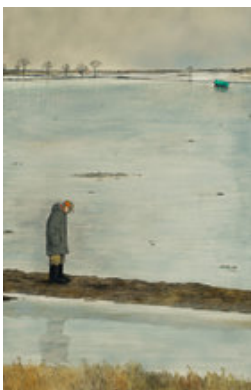
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# Winnipeg Art Gallery

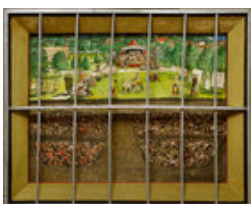
300 Memorial Boulevard  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
204-786-6641  
wag.ca



**William Kurelek, *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1952**  
Oil on Masonite  
102 x 152 cm



**William Kurelek, *Despondency*, 1963**  
Oil on Masonite  
120.2 x 78.5 cm



**William Kurelek, *Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine*, 1939, 1968**  
Ballpoint pen, ink, house paint, wood, oil, and graphite on Masonite  
57.5 x 76 cm





**William Kurelek, *Behold Man Without God #4*, 1973**  
Oil on board  
95.9 x 59.1 cm

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**William Kurelek, *Night and the Winnipeg Flood*, 1977**  
Oil on Masonite  
28 x 27.5 cm

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# Notes

## Biography

1. Kurelek's sister Nancy was born in 1936, a decade after Kurelek. His siblings Alexandra, Paul, and Iris were born in 1944, 1946, and 1948, respectively.
2. William Kurelek, *Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), 39–40. This is the second, shorter, and best-known version of Kurelek's autobiography, published posthumously. Cornell University's Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education published the first version in 1973. Significant differences in style and content exist between the two versions. They will be distinguished hereinafter based on their years of publication: *Someone* (1973) and *Someone* (1980).
3. Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period, 1891–1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1991), 99.
4. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 72.
5. Patricia Morley, *Kurelek: A Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 18; Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 77.
6. Morley, *Kurelek*, 36; Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 66–67.
7. Morley, *Kurelek*, 35.
8. Paul Yuzyk, "A Personal Reflection," in *The Ukrainian Religious Experience: Tradition and the Canadian Cultural Context*, ed. David Goa (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989).
9. Andrew Kear, "Incarnation on the Prairies: The Theology of William Kurelek's Ethnic Consciousness," in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 102; William Kurelek, "The Development of Ethnic Consciousness in a Canadian Painter," in *Identities: The Impact of Ethnicity on Canadian Society*, ed. Wsevolod Isajiw (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1977), 47.
10. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 103.
11. A Winnipeg doctor apparently diagnosed Kurelek with an underactive thyroid gland, likely sometime in 1947–48. No later documents confirming this diagnosis are extant. Though he reports that the "booster pills" he was prescribed did much to resolve his lethargy, Kurelek's underlying mental and emotional problems were never professionally assessed until he went to England. See Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 100–101; Morley, *Kurelek*, 55–58.
12. Morley, *Kurelek*, 62.
13. Morley, *Kurelek*, 67; Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 115.
14. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 105–13.
15. Mary Jo Hughes, "The William Kurelek Theatre Presents William Kurelek An Epic Tragedy," in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 42.
16. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 122.
17. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 126.
18. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 294.
19. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 289; See Morley, *Kurelek*, 76.
20. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 288.



21. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 289. That Kurelek’s priority was receiving medical attention is emphasized by the letter he wrote to Dr. D.L. Davies, a senior physician at Maudsley, before he left Canada. Kurelek omits this detail from his autobiography. See Morley, *Kurelek*, 76.

22. Kurelek’s medical records from Maudsley and Netherne are with Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Personal Journals Series, vol. 11, William Kurelek Fonds, Library Archives Canada).

23. Morley, *Kurelek*, 80.

24. Morley, *Kurelek*, 84.

25. Kear, “Incarnation on the Prairies,” 107.

26. Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theater Presents,” 46.

27. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 342.

28. Morley, *Kurelek*, 130–31, 138.

29. Morley, *Kurelek*, 139.

30. Morley, *Kurelek*, 154–55.

31. Robert Fulford, from a typed manuscript article, *William Kurelek: The Clarity of Innocence*, n.d., file 11, vol. 2, William Kurelek Fonds, MG31 D231, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

32. Kear, “Incarnation on the Prairies,” 108. See also Lorene Hanley Duquin, *They Called Her the Baroness: The Life of Catherine de Hueck Doherty* (New York: Alba House, 1995), 65.

33. Avrom Isaacs, “Knowing Kurelek,” in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 20.

34. Tobi Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction: Kurelek as Journeyman Picture Maker,” in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 148–50.

35. Harry Malcolmson, “Art and Artists,” *Telegram* (Toronto), March 12, 1966.

36. Morley, *Kurelek*, 174–80.

37. Isaacs, “Knowing Kurelek,” 20.

Key Works: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

1. William Kurelek, *Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), 103.

2. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 116.

3. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 116.

4. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 91.

5. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 116.

6. Mary Jo Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents William Kurelek An Epic Tragedy,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 43; see 56n15. See also Andrew Kear, “Incarnation on the Prairies: The Theology of William Kurelek’s Ethnic Consciousness,” in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 102–3.

7. Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents,” 43–44.

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## Key Works: Zaporozhian Cossacks

1. Patricia Morley, *Kurelek: A Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 301–2.
  2. Serhii Plokhyy, *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 2.
  3. Mary Jo Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents William Kurelek An Epic Tragedy,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 45.
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## Key Works: The Maze

1. William Kurelek, *Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), 18.
  2. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 18.
  3. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 18.
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## Key Works: And, While They Were at Table ...

1. Patricia Morley, *Kurelek: A Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 124, 164.
  2. Many of these sketches are deposited at Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
  3. Brian Smylski, “The Passion of Christ—William Kurelek’s Cinematic Vision: A Journey from Storyboard to Film,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 71.
  4. Smylski, “The Passion of Christ,” 71.
  5. Smylski, “The Passion of Christ,” 73.
  6. William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ* (Niagara Falls, ON: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum, 1975), 15.
  7. Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ*, 15.
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## Key Works: Hailstorm in Alberta

1. The Museum of Modern Art, “Notes” for *Recent Acquisitions: Painting and Sculpture*, November 20, 1962–January 13, 1963, 3. LAC, MG31 D231 vol. 13, “Additional Papers—Three 1959-1972 R4640.”
  2. Patricia Morley, *Kurelek: A Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 157.
  3. The Museum of Modern Art, “Notes” for *Recent Acquisitions*, 3.
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## Key Works: In the Autumn of Life

1. Barrie Hale, “Kurelek Is the Man,” *Telegram* (Toronto), September 26, 1964, 25.
  2. Tobi Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction: Kurelek as Journeyman Picture Maker,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 150–52.
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## Key Works: This Is the Nemesis

1. Andrew Kear, “Incarnation on the Prairies: The Theology of William Kurelek’s Ethnic Consciousness,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 107; Edward Holloway, *Catholicism: A New Synthesis* (Wickford, U.K.: Keyway, 1969).
  2. Kay Kritzwiser, “Quiet Assessor in a Tartan Shirt,” *Globe and Mail*, March 15, 1966; Harry Malcolmson, “Art and Artists,” *Telegram* (Toronto), March 12, 1966.
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## Key Works: Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine, 1939

1. William Kurelek, *The Burning Barn: 16 Paintings by William Kurelek*, March 11–29, Hart House Art Gallery, University of Toronto, 1969.
  2. Dorothy Barnhouse, “Artist’s Work Shows Feeling for Sick World,” *Edmonton Journal*, November 13, 1967, 24.
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## Key Works: Reminiscences of Youth

1. Mary Jo Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents William Kurelek An Epic Tragedy,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 54.
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## Key Works: The Ukrainian Pioneer

1. William Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer* (Niagara Falls, ON: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum, 1980), 22.
  2. Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 54.
  3. Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer*, 8.
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## Key Works: Glimmering Tapers ’round the Day’s Dead Sanctities

1. William Kurelek, quoted in Joan Murray, *Kurelek’s Vision of Canada* (Oshawa, ON: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1982), 34.
  2. Patricia Morley, *Kurelek: A Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 193, 197.
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## Key Works: The Painter

1. Patricia Morley, *Kurelek* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 190–91.
2. William Kurelek, diary entry, 15 September 1972, file 4, vol. 1, William Kurelek Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.
3. Tobi Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction: Kurelek as Journeyman Picture Maker,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 148.
4. William Kurelek, *Kurelek’s Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975), 91.

## Significance & Critical Issues

1. Andrew Kear, “Incarnation on the Prairies: The Theology of William Kurelek’s Ethnic Consciousness,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 102–3.
2. William Kurelek, “The Development of Ethnic Consciousness in a Canadian Painter,” in *Identities: The Impact of Ethnicity on Canadian Society*, ed. Wsevolod Isajiw (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1977), 55.
3. William Kurelek, *The Last of the Arctic* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976), 9; Patricia Morley, *Kurelek: A Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 284.
4. Kay Kritzwiser, “Kurelek: Documenting the Ancient Way of Eskimo Life, and Cutting Budget Corners by Eating Only One Meal a Day,” *Globe and Mail*, May 20, 1978.
5. Kurelek, “The Development of Ethnic Consciousness,” 49.
6. Joan Lowndes, “Kurelek: Visionary Painter as Pragmatic Salesman,” *Vancouver Sun*, October 13, 1973, 43.
7. Nancy Tousley, “Kurelek’s Vision of Canada Comes West,” *Calgary Herald*, January 7, 1984, F1. For Kurelek’s discussion of his “potboilers,” see *Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education, 1973), 506–7.
8. Peter Sypnowich, “The Easter Story,” *Star Weekly* (Toronto), April 13, 1963, 4.
9. Kurelek, “The Development of Ethnic Consciousness,” 53, 55. See also Ramsay Cook, “William Kurelek: A Prairie Boy’s Visions,” *William Kurelek Memorial Lectures*, 1978. Reprinted from the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 33–48.
10. Leonard Marcoe, “Kurelek’s Brush Preaches Morals,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 22, 1980, 48.
11. Elizabeth Kilbourn, “Dogma and Experience,” *Toronto Star*, May 18, 1963.
12. Harry Malcolmson, “Art and Artists,” *Telegram* (Toronto), March 12, 1965.
13. Denise Ball, “Art Establishment Is Still Resisting William Kurelek,” *Regina Leader-Post*, April 26, 1984.
14. Kurelek’s response to Malcolmson quoted in Cook, “William Kurelek,” 45–46.
15. Sypnowich, “The Easter Story,” 7.
16. Joan Murray, *Kurelek’s Vision of Canada* (Oshawa, ON: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1982), 11.
17. Cook, “William Kurelek,” 33.



18. William Kurelek, *Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), 174.
19. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 174. See also K.P. Stich, “Painters’ Words: Personal Narratives of Emily Carr and William Kurelek,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 29 (Summer 1984): 167.
20. Patricia Morley, “William Kurelek: The Man and the Myth,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984): 28. See also Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 192.
21. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 18. See also Stich, “Painters’ Words,” 164–65.
22. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 175.
23. Morley, “William Kurelek: The Man and the Myth,” 28.
24. Art Perry, “William Kurelek Screams His Pain,” *The Magazine*, April 27, 1980, 6.
25. Diane Waller, *Becoming a Professor: The History of Art Therapy in Britain, 1940–80* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991), 153.
26. Susan Hogan, “British Art Therapy Pioneer Edward Adamson: A Non-Interventionist Approach,” *History of Psychiatry* 11 (2000): 259–71.
27. Mary Jo Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents William Kurelek An Epic Tragedy,” in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 56n20.
28. Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents,” 46.
29. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 12, 22.
30. Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents,” 56n22.
31. Edward Adamson in association with John Timlin, *Art as Healing* (Boston and London: Conventure, 1984), 23.
32. Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents,” 46–47.
33. Kear, “Incarnation on the Prairies,” 112n61.
34. Charles C. Hill, *William Kurelek (1927–1977)* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992).

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## Style & Technique

1. William Kurelek, *Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education, 1973), 503–4. See also Tobi Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction: Kurelek as Journeyman Picture Maker,” in Tobi Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011), 138–39.
2. William Kurelek, quoted in Joan Murray, *Kurelek’s Vision of Canada* (Oshawa, ON: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1982), 71.
3. Mary Jo Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents William Kurelek An Epic Tragedy,” in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 56n11.
4. William Kurelek, *Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), 115.
5. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 258.
6. Murray, *Kurelek’s Vision of Canada*, 18.
7. Originally, Kurelek sought to convert the coal cellar into a nuclear fallout shelter.
8. Janice Tyrwhitt, “William Kurelek: The Power of Obsession,” *Saturday Night*, May 26, 1962, 30.
9. Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction,” 136.
10. Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction,” 137.

11. Andrew Kear, “Incarnation on the Prairies: The Theology of William Kurelek’s Ethnic Consciousness,” in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 109.
  12. Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction,” 139.
  13. William Kurelek, *O Toronto* (Don Mills, ON: General Publishing, 1973), 14.
  14. Murray, *Kurelek’s Vision of Canada*, 16.
  15. Kurelek, *O Toronto*, 6.
  16. Hughes, “The William Kurelek Theatre Presents,” 43–44.
  17. William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ According to St. Matthew* (Niagara Falls, ON: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum, 1975), 14. The series was not filmed or televised during his lifetime. Two film versions of the series were created in 1981 and 2009. See Brian Smylski, “The Passion of Christ—William Kurelek’s Cinematic Vision: A Journey from Storyboard to Film,” in Bruce et al., *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, 76.
  18. Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction,” 135.
  19. Tyrwhitt, “The Power of Obsession,” 32.
  20. Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction,” 155n38.
  21. Bruce, “The Clarity of Conviction,” 144.
  22. The exhibition catalogue for *William Kurelek: The Messenger* (2011) was the first publication to include reproductions of every painting in the exhibition framed by the artist.
  23. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 504
  24. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 435.
  25. Patricia Morley, *Kurelek: A Biography* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986), 129.
  26. Kurelek, *Someone* (1980), 159.
  27. Kurelek, *Someone* (1973), 488–89; Morley, *Kurelek*, 158.
  28. William Kurelek, *An Immigrant Farms in Canada* (Isaacs Gallery, 1964).
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## Glossary

### **abstract art**

Visual art that uses form, colour, line, and gestural marks in compositions that do not attempt to represent images of real things. Abstract art may interpret reality in an altered form, or depart from it entirely. Also called nonfigurative or nonrepresentational art.

### **Albright, Ivan (American, 1897–1983)**

A Chicago painter of haunting and meticulously constructed portraits and still lifes. His most famous works—among them his earliest monumental painting, *Into the World There Came a Soul Named Ida*, 1929–30—convey his lifelong concern with the idea of mortality. Albright also wrote and worked in sculpture, lithography, and film.

### **Bosch, Hieronymus (Netherlandish, c. 1450–1516)**

A highly influential artist known for pictures populated by multitudes of fantastic creatures and filled with marvellous detail. Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1500)—a triptych depicting the pleasures of the Garden of Eden, the horrors of the Last Judgment, and the world in between—is among the most famous paintings in the Western art historical canon.

### **Bruegel, Pieter (Netherlandish, 1525–1569)**

An acknowledged master of the Northern Renaissance, known for the inventiveness of his work and its enduring and widespread popularity. His landscapes, parables, and religious images circulated widely as prints, ensuring the primacy of his creations within the visual culture of his era. Bruegel's paintings often depicted the lives of Flemish commoners.

### **Chambers, Jack (Canadian, 1931–1978)**

A London, Ontario, painter and avant-garde filmmaker, whose meditative paintings typically depict domestic subjects. Chambers was committed to regionalism, despite the international outlook he developed during five years of artistic training in Madrid. He was one of the founders of CARFAC, Canada's artists' rights protection agency. (See *Jack Chambers: Life & Work* by Mark Cheetham.)

### **Chardin, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon (French, 1699–1779)**

A French painter renowned for his genre scenes and still lifes. His lowly subject matter was at odds with the Rococo style that prevailed in the Paris of his day, yet he was a star of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture and his works were in high demand around Europe. Chardin never left Paris; his knowledge of art derived solely from what he was able to see in his city.

## **Coughtry, Graham (Canadian, 1931–1999)**

An influential painter and teacher known for his conceptual use of colour, expressive brushwork, and abstract representations of the human figure. Coughtry's first exhibition was with Michael Snow in 1955; he went on to represent Canada at the Bienal de São Paulo of 1959 and the Venice Biennale of 1960.

## **Cubism**

A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

## **Curnoe, Greg (Canadian, 1936–1992)**

A central figure in London regionalism from the 1960s to the early 1990s, Curnoe was a painter, printmaker, and graphic artist who found inspiration in his life and his Southwestern Ontario surroundings. His wide-ranging art interests included Surrealism, Dada, Cubism, and the work of many individual artists, both historical and contemporary.

## **Dalí, Salvador (Spanish, 1904–1989)**

The star of the Surrealists and one of his era's most exuberant personalities, Dalí is best known for his naturalistically rendered dreamscapes. *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, with its melting clock faces, remains one of the twentieth century's most parodied artworks.

## **Freifeld, Eric (Russian/Canadian, 1919–1984)**

A renowned artist and influential teacher of figure drawing at the Ontario College of Art, who showed major promise from a young age. Freifeld's interests and output were broad, but he is perhaps best known for a series of structural, minutely detailed watercolours that placed him among the leading Canadian artists of his generation.

## **Hagan, Frederick (Canadian, 1918–2003)**

A painter, watercolourist, lithographer, and educator, who taught at the Ontario College of Art for almost forty years. Hagan had an abiding interest in his immediate surroundings; his work is best described as autobiographical. His pictures of his small-town life in Newmarket provide a compelling window onto Ontario society of the 1940s.

## **Holbein, Hans (German, 1497–1543)**

A painter, printmaker, and metalworker considered one of the masters of the Northern Renaissance. Holbein is particularly renowned for his portraiture. He painted the members of the Tudor nobility as a court artist in England from 1526 to 1528 and again from 1532 to 1543. His only surviving portrait of Henry VIII is among the most famous in his oeuvre. He died of the plague in London.



## **Martin, John (Canadian, 1904–1965)**

A painter, watercolourist, printmaker, and illustrator and member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and the Canadian Group of Painters, Martin taught design at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. His work is held by the National Gallery of Canada.

## **Mexican mural painting**

Commissioned by the Mexican government following the Mexican Revolution of 1910–20, Mexican mural paintings are highly visible public-art pieces that often depict common labourers and scenes of revolution. Prominent Mexican mural painters include José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

## **Nicolaïdes, Kimon (American, 1891–1938)**

A painter and highly influential teacher, who shared his pedagogical techniques in the book *The Natural Way to Draw*, first published in 1941 and now a classic in the field. Nicolaïdes taught for fifteen years at the Art Students League of New York, where he himself had been a student.

## **Northern Renaissance**

Flourishing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Renaissance in Northern Europe was characterized by the rise of Humanism, by an engagement with Italy and the classical world, and by the impact of the Protestant Reformation. Advances in artistic techniques, notably the development of oil paint and printmaking, saw various art forms generated with a high level of invention, detail, and skill. Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Holbein are key figures.

## **one-point perspective**

A style of perspective drawing in which parallel lines converge at a single vanishing point. An image of a road or hallway disappearing into the distance is an example of one-point perspective.

## **Orozco, José Clemente (Mexican, 1883–1949)**

A painter, draftsman, and printmaker and a leading figure in Mexico's mural movement. Active predominantly in Mexico City, from 1927 to 1934 Orozco lived and worked in the United States, where he completed several important commissions. More interested in the human condition than in politics per se, he painted in a highly Expressionistic style that influenced many younger muralists.

## ***plein air***

French for “open air,” used to describe the practice of painting or sketching outdoors to observe nature and in particular the changing effects of light.

### **Pohorecky, Zenon (Ukranian/Canadian, 1928–1998)**

An artist, human rights activist, and University of Saskatchewan professor of anthropology and archaeology for more than thirty years. One of Pohorecky's major scholarly contributions was his pioneering research and writing on the culture, history, and rights of Saskatchewan's Indigenous peoples.

### **Post-Impressionism**

A term coined by the British art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe painting produced originally in France between about 1880 and 1905 in response to Impressionism's artistic advances and limitations. Central figures include Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh.

### **Pre-Raphaelites**

A group of artists and critics founded in 1848 by William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and John Everett Millais who sought to combine the spirituality and intensity of fifteenth-century art with the naturalism of their own time. The original group had disbanded by the early 1850s, but strains of its doctrines and stylistics carried on in the work of associated and later artists into the twentieth century.

### **Rayner, Gordon (Canadian, 1935–2010)**

A prominent artist in Toronto from the early 1960s, Rayner explored in both painting and sculpture the complex relationship between representation and abstraction. He was a member of the Artists' Jazz Band.

### **Repin, Ilya (Russian, 1844–1930)**

A major figure in nineteenth-century Russian art. Repin was celebrated in his home country during his life and was one of the first of his countrymen to achieve fame in Europe with work that was specifically Russian in content. He worked methodically and slowly, creating his portraits and narrative paintings in an academic style.

### **Rivera, Diego (Mexican, 1886–1957)**

A painter, draftsman, and celebrated muralist. Rivera was deeply committed to the idea of art's transformative power and to socialist ideals; his large-scale works typically exalt workers, revolutionaries, and indigenous and folk culture through a style and iconography that combines traditional and avant-garde techniques. He was famously married to Frida Kahlo from 1929 until her death in 1954.

### **Romantic tradition**

A multi-faceted movement that affected most areas of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western culture, including art, literature, and philosophy. Romanticism privileged the emotional and the subjective; it arose in opposition to Enlightenment-era rationalism.



## **Schaefer, Carl (Canadian, 1903–1995)**

A painter who studied under Arthur Lismer and J.E.H. MacDonald at the Ontario College of Art, where he later taught for over twenty years. Schaefer's preferred subjects were the rural landscapes of his Ontario home. He served as a war artist, attached to the Royal Canadian Air Force, during the Second World War.

## **Siqueiros, David Alfaro (Mexican, 1896–1974)**

A social-realist painter and a member of the Mexican muralists group, which included Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. He completed numerous murals for the Mexican government that celebrated the nation's people and its history. A member of the Mexican Communist Party, Siqueiros was involved in an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Leon Trotsky in 1940.

## **Snow, Michael (Canadian, b. 1928)**

An artist whose paintings, films, photographs, sculptures, installations, and musical performances have kept him in the spotlight for over sixty years. Snow's Walking Woman series of the 1960s holds a prominent place in Canadian art history. His contributions to visual art, experimental film, and music have been recognized internationally. (See *Michael Snow: Life & Work* by Martha Langford.)

## **Spencer, Stanley (British, 1891–1959)**

A painter of expressive portraits and multi-figure scenes. His complex compositions often evoke his Christian faith in a style reminiscent of both Neo-Raphaelitism and Cubism. Spencer lived most of his life in the English village of Cookham; his reputation soared following a posthumous retrospective at the Royal Academy in 1980.

## **Tissot, James (French, 1836–1902)**

A painter, etcher, and illustrator trained in the 1850s at the École des beaux-arts in Paris alongside James McNeill Whistler and Edgar Degas. Tissot participated in the Paris Commune and had to flee the city after its suppression in 1870, only returning thirteen years later. His best-known paintings depict scenes of contemporary Parisian life.

## **Town, Harold (Canadian, 1924–1990)**

Town was a founding member of Painters Eleven and a leader in Toronto's art scene in the 1950s and 1960s. An internationally recognized abstract artist, he created paintings, collages, sculptures, and prints with brilliant effect and developed a unique form of monotype, "single autographic prints." (See *Harold Town: Life & Work* by Gerta Moray.)

## ***trompe l'oeil***

French for "deceives the eye," trompe l'oeil refers to visual illusion in art, especially images and painted objects that appear to exist in three dimensions and even aim to trick the viewer into thinking that they are real. Common examples are the painted insects that appear to sit on the surface of Renaissance paintings, and murals that make flat walls appear to open into spaces beyond.

**van Eyck, Jan (Netherlandish, 1390–1441)**

The most prominent in a family of painters and an artist of the early Netherlandish school, van Eyck is often noted as the first master of oil painting. His technique involved layering oil paint to portray light and surface effects; his works often depicted religious subjects as well as portraits of nobles, clergy, and merchants.

**Wieland, Joyce (Canadian, 1930–1998)**

A central figure in contemporary Canadian art, Wieland engaged with painting, filmmaking, and cloth and plastic assemblage to explore with wit and passion ideas related to gender, national identity, and the natural world. In 1971 she became the first living Canadian woman artist to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada. (See *Joyce Wieland: Life & Work* by Johanne Sloan.)





# Sources & Resources

PART 6

William Kurelek's complex portrait emerges from the numerous exhibition catalogues and reviews, academic writing, and films about the artist. These secondary materials are enriched by Kurelek's well-known autobiography, unpublished and archived letters, diaries, lecture notes, and exhibition commentary. This selection is an overview of resources that have contributed to the current understanding of the artist, his art, and legacy.



## Key Exhibitions



William Kurelek posing before his paintings *Lest We Repent...*, 1964 (top left), and *This Is the Nemesis*, 1965 (bottom left). The artist created both works for the series *Glory to Man in the Highest*, exhibited at the Isaacs Gallery, Toronto, March 2–21, 1966.



William Kurelek combines Eastern European textile trimmings to craft the mock-up exhibition poster for *The Burning Barn: 16 Paintings by William Kurelek*, held at Hart House Art Gallery, University of Toronto, March 11–29, 1969.

## 1956–58

May–August, (three consecutive) *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, U.K.

## 1960

March 26–April 7, *William Kurelek: Exhibition of Paintings*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

## 1963

April 4–21, *William Kurelek / Michael Snow*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

May 14–29, *William Kurelek: Experiments in Didactic Art*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

August 14–September 22, *Religious Art*, Art Gallery of Toronto. Catalogue.

September–October, *Biennale Exhibition of Canadian Painting 1963*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Kurelek participated in subsequent Biennale exhibitions at the NGC in 1965 and 1968.

## 1964

September 18–October 5, *William Kurelek: An Immigrant Farms in Canada*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto. Travelled to Edmonton Art Gallery.



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**1966**

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March 2–21, *William Kurelek: Glory to Man in the Highest*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

March 31–April 20, *William Kurelek*, Winnipeg Art Gallery.

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**1967**

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July 4–22, *Kurelek: Memories of a Manitoba Childhood*, La Galerie Agnès Lefort, Montreal.

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**1968**

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January 10–29, *The Ukrainian Pioneer Woman in Canada*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

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**1969**

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March 11–29, *The Burning Barn: 16 Paintings by William Kurelek*, Hart House Art Gallery, University of Toronto.

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**1970**

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September 20–October 20, *William Kurelek: A Retrospective*, Edmonton Art Gallery. Catalogue.

November 11–30, *Nature, Poor Stepdame: A Series of 16 Paintings by William Kurelek*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

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**1971**

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October 14–November 17, *William Kurelek*, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

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**1972**

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March 22–April 23, *William Kurelek: Canadian Paintings*, Commonwealth Art Gallery, Commonwealth Institute, London, U.K.

October 10–30, *William Kurelek: The Toronto Series*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

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**1973**

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September 29–October 12, *William Kurelek: A Prairie Boy's Winter*, Marlborough-Godard Gallery, Montreal. Travelled to Isaacs Gallery, Toronto; Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon; Rodman Hall Arts Centre, St. Catharines, Ontario.

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**1974**

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January 6–30, *William Kurelek: A Retrospective Exhibition*, Art Gallery of Windsor. Catalogue.

November 7–27, *William Kurelek: The Happy Canadian*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

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**1975**

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September 22–December 28, *William Kurelek: A Prairie Boy's Summer*, Art Gallery of Windsor. Exhibition travelled to forty venues, concluding March 1982.

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1976

February 13–March 21, *Changing Visions: The Canadian Landscape*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and Edmonton Art Gallery. Travelled to eight venues, concluding April 1977.

November 13–December 3, *William Kurelek: The Irish in Canada*, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto.

1977

May 28–June 18, *William Kurelek: Big Lonely*, Marlborough-Godard Gallery, Montreal.

1978

January 11–February 8, *William Kurelek: Painter, Illustrator, Author*, Canada House Gallery, London, U.K.

February 23–April 2, *William Kurelek: The Polish Canadians*, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

1980

October 10–November 23, *Kurelek*, Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, Oseredok. Catalogue.

1982

June 4–August 14, *Kurelek's Vision of Canada*, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. Travelled to fourteen venues, concluding December 1984. Catalogue.

1990

July 5–September 21, *William Kurelek: The English Years, 1952–59*, Canada House Cultural Centre, London, U.K. Catalogue.

1992

September 4–January10, *William Kurelek (1927–1977)*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

2011

September 20–December 31, *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, Winnipeg Art Gallery. Travelled to co-organizer venues Art Gallery of Hamilton and Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, concluding September 2012. Catalogue.



### Selected Archives

Avrom Isaacs Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives, York University, Toronto.

William Kurelek Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

### Selected Writings by the Artist

“The Development of Ethnic Consciousness in a Canadian Painter.” In *Identities: The Impact of Ethnicity on Canadian Society*, edited by Wsevolod Isajiw, 46–56. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977.

*Someone With Me: The Autobiography of William Kurelek*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education, 1973. Second Edition: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980.

### Selected Illustrated Writings by the Artist

*A Prairie Boy's Winter*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1973.

*O Toronto*. Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing, 1973.

*Kurelek's Canada*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975.

*Lumberjack*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1974.

*A Prairie Boy's Summer*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1975.

*Fields*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1976.

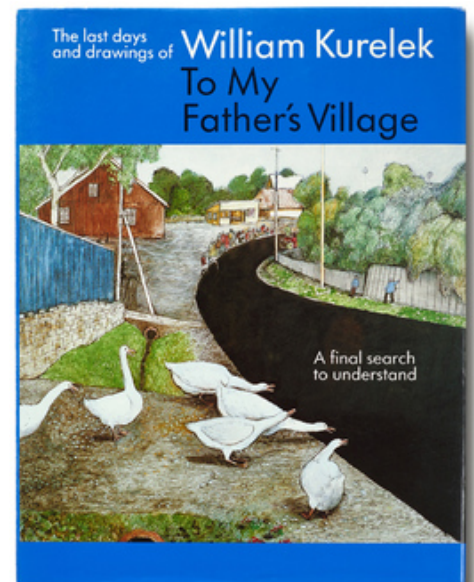
*Jewish Life in Canada*. With Abraham Arnold. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1976.

*The Last of the Arctic*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976.

*A Northern Nativity*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1976.

*The Ukrainian Pioneer*. Niagara Falls, Ontario: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum, 1980.

*To My Father's Village: The Last Days and Drawings of William Kurelek*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1988.



Cover of William Kurelek's *To My Father's Village* (1988).

## Selected Books Illustrated by the Artist

*The Passion of Christ According to St. Matthew.* Niagara Falls, Ontario: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum, 1975.

W.O. Mitchell. *Who Has Seen the Wind.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1976.

## Selected Critical Writing

Arnold, Abraham. "William Kurelek, Multicultural Artist," *The Beaver* (December/January 1986–87): 51–56.

Bruce, Tobi, Mary Jo Hughes, Andrew Kear, with Brian Dedora, Avrom Isaacs, and Brian Smylski. *William Kurelek: The Messenger.* Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria: Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011.

Cook, Ramsay. "William Kurelek: A Prairie Boy's Visions," *William Kurelek Memorial Lectures*, 1978. Reprinted from the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 5 (1980): 33–48.

Dedora, Brian. *With WK in the Workshop: A Memoir of William Kurelek.* Stratford, Ontario: Aya / The Mercury Press, 1989.

Ewanchuk, Michael. *William Kurelek: The Suffering Genius.* Steinbach, MB: Derksen / Michael Ewanchuk, 1996.

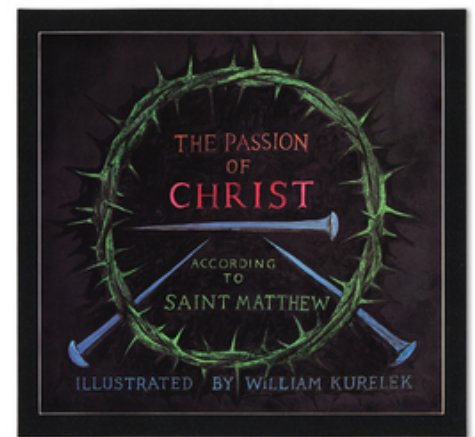
Friesen, Isle E. *Earth, Hell and Heaven in the Art of William Kurelek.* Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic, 1997.

Kilbourn, Elizabeth. "William Kurelek," *Canadian Art* 19, no. 2 (March/April 1962): 136–37.

Morley, Patricia. *Kurelek: A Biography.* Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1986.

Murray, Joan. *Kurelek's Vision of Canada.* Oshawa, Ontario: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1982.

O'Brien, Michael. *William Kurelek: Painter and Prophet.* Ottawa: Justin, 2013.



William Kurelek, *The Passion of Christ (Introduction Panel)*, 1960–63, mixed media, 54.3 x 50.3 cm, Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.



## Selected Audio and Video



David Grubin and Robert M. Young with William Kurelek and his children during the making of the documentary *The Maze*, 1969 (2011).

Pettigrew, William, dir. *William Kurelek*. National Film Board of Canada, 1967. Colour, 10 min.

Young, Robert M., and David Grubin, dirs. *The Maze: The Story of William Kurelek*. National Film Network, 1969. Colour, 30 min. (Expanded high-definition version reissued in 2011 as *William Kurelek's The Maze* by Nick Young and Zack Young, 60 min.)

## About the Author

### Andrew Kear

Andrew Kear is chief curator and curator of Canadian art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery and a sessional lecturer at the University of Winnipeg. His curatorial efforts include *William Kurelek: The Messenger*, *Storm and Spirit: The Eckhardt-Gramatté Collection of German Expressionist Art*, and *L.L. Fitzgerald's Impressionist Decade, 1910–1920*. In 2016 he prepared the first survey exhibition on the painter Karel Funk. Kear's writing has been published in *Canadian Art*, *Border Crossings*, and *Sculpture*.



“ William Kurelek is captivating because he is so difficult to square. One of his paintings can simultaneously celebrate youthful abandon and revel in a violent moralism. He was a family man steeped in Roman Catholic virtue, and yet he wrestled real devils as a result of mental illness. Among his artistic peers he was a strange throwback, whose work nonetheless attracted serious contemporary tastemakers. He was a social conservative committed to social justice, a religious universalist attuned to cultural particularities. Today, William Kurelek and his art remains equally beguiling and unsettling, proclamatory and inscrutable. ”

—

Andrew Kear



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*Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968. (See below for details.)

Credits for Banner Images



Biography: Artist William Kurelek, c. 1965. (See below for details.)



Key Works: *In the Autumn of Life*, 1964. (See below for details.)



Significance & Critical Issues: *The Painter*, 1974. (See below for details.)



Style & Technique: *Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968. (See below for details.)



Sources & Resources: *The Airman's Prayer*, c. 1959. (See below for details.)



Where to See: Installation view of the exhibition *William Kurelek: The Messenger* at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2012.  
© Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Robert McNair.

Credits for Works by William Kurelek



*The Airman's Prayer*, c. 1959. Private collection. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*All Things Betray Thee Who Betrayest Me*, 1970. Collection of the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.



*And This Was So Ordained...*, c. 1959–65. William Kurelek Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (1997-499-4.3V). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*The Bachelor*, 1955. The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.103991). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



*Behold Man Without God*, 1955. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Mr. and Mrs. George G. Sinclair, 1982 (82/51). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



*Behold Man Without God #4*, 1973. Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, gift of Robert and Margaret Hucal (2012-183). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Ernest Mayer.



*But Jesus Said to Them...*, c. 1959–65. William Kurelek Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (1997-499-5.39V). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



Cover of William Kurelek, *Kurelek's Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Heritage Library, 1975). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.



Cover of William Kurelek, *A Prairie Boy's Summer* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1975). Courtesy of Tundra Books / Penguin Random House Canada. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.



Cover of William Kurelek, *A Prairie Boy's Winter* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1973). Courtesy of Tundra Books / Penguin Random House Canada. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.





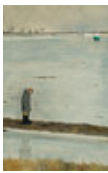
Cover of William Kurelek, *Someone With Me* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980). Courtesy of McClelland & Stewart / Penguin Random House Canada. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.



Cover of William Kurelek, *To My Father's Village* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988). Courtesy of McClelland & Stewart / Penguin Random House Canada. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.



*Cross Section of Vinnitsia in the Ukraine, 1939, 1968*. Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, gift of Mr. & Mrs. Desmond Smith (G-78-55). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Ernest Mayer.



*Despondency, 1963*. Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, gift of an anonymous donor (G-77-34). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Ernest Mayer.



*The Devil's Wedding, 1967*. Corporate Collection of James Richardson & Sons, Limited, Winnipeg. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Ernest Mayer, courtesy of the Winnipeg Art Gallery.



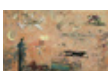
*Dinnertime on the Prairies, 1963*. Collection of McMaster Museum of Art, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Wentworth House Art Committee Purchase, 1963 (1963.008.0001). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: McMaster Museum of Art.



*Don Valley on a Grey Day, 1972*. The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.104138). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



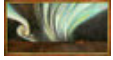
Exhibition poster design for *The Burning Barn*, c. 1969. Avrom Isaacs Fonds (FO134), Box 019, File 13, Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, York University. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Stephanie Burdzy, courtesy of Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections.



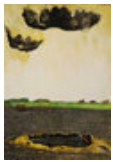
*Farm Boy's Dreams, 1961*. Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966 (66.2862). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.



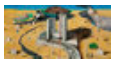
*Farm Children's Games in Western Canada*, 1952. Private collection. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*Glimmering Tapers 'round the Day's Dead Sanctities* (Nature Poor Stepdame Series), 1970. Art Gallery of Alberta Collection, Edmonton, purchased in 1990 with funds from the Art Associates of the Edmonton Art Gallery (90.15). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Alberta.



*Hailstorm in Alberta*, 1961. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of the Women's Committee of the Art Gallery of Toronto (380.1961). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*Harvest of Our Mere Humanism Years*, 1972. Manulife Art Collection, Toronto. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Robert McNair, courtesy of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



*He Gloats over Our Scepticism*, 1972. Private collection, Canada. Courtesy of Waddingtons.ca. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*The Hope of the World*, 1965. Private collection. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Robert McNair, courtesy of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



*Hunter Awaiting Seal at Breathing Hole*, 1976. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, gift of Christopher Ondaatje, Pagurian Press Limited, 1977 (1977KW47). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.



*The Isaacs Gallery Workshop*, 1973. Private collection of Avrom Isaacs and Donnal Wigmore, Toronto. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



Illustrations on pages 28 and 29 of Ivan Franko and Bohdan Melnyk, *Fox Mykyta* (1978), c. 1977. Courtesy of Tundra Books / Penguin Random House Canada. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.





Illustration on page 90 of William Kurelek, *The Last of the Arctic* (Toronto: Pagurian Press, 1976), c. 1976. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Stephanie Burdzy, courtesy of the Toronto Reference Library.



Illustration on page 497 of William Kurelek, *Someone With Me* (Ithaca: Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education at Cornell University, 1973), c. 1973. Courtesy of the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Martin P. Catherwood Library, Cornell University; and Stephen Kurelek. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Stephanie Burdzy.



Illustration on page 267 of W.O. Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1976), 1975. Power Corporation of Canada Art Collection / Collection Power Corporation du Canada. Courtesy of Loch Gallery, Calgary. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Loch Gallery.



*In the Autumn of Life*, 1964. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the McLean Foundation, 1964 (64/9). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



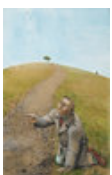
*I Spit on Life*, c. 1953–54. Adamson Collection, Wellcome Library, University College London, U.K. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



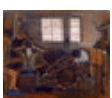
*King of the Castle*, 1958–59. Private collection. Courtesy of Mayberry Fine Art. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Mayberry Fine Art.



*Lest We Repent...*, 1964. Collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, purchase, George Taylor Richardson Memorial Fund, 1966 (09-006). Photo credit: Bernard Clark.



*Lord That I May See*, 1955. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Saidye and Samuel Bronfman Collection of Canadian Art (1963.1387). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Christine Guest.



*Lumber Camp Sauna*, 1961. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, gift of M.F. Feheley, Toronto, 1993 (37369). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.



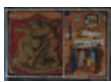
*Lumberjack's Breakfast*, 1973. Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Freeman and Rosita Tovell (1980.090.001). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Stephen Topfer.



*The Maas Maze*, 1971. Collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, gift of Professor James B. Maas. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.



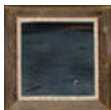
*Manitoba Party*, 1964. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchase, 1965 (14761). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.



*The Maze*, 1953. Collection of Bethlem Museum of the Mind, Beckenham, Kent, U.K. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Bridgeman Images.



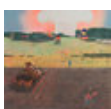
*Netherne Hospital Workshop*, 1954. Private collection. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*Night and the Winnipeg Flood*, 1977. Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, gift of Margaret and Robert Hucal (G-96-74). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Ernest Mayer.



*No Grass Grows on the Beaten Path*, 1975. Private collection of Avrom Isaacs and Donnalu Wigmore, Toronto. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: David Kemp.



*Not Going Back to Pick Up a Cloak; If They Are in the Fields after the Bomb Has Dropped*, 1971. Private collection, Canada. Courtesy of Loch Gallery, Calgary. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*The Painter*, 1974. The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.104135). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.





*The Passion of Christ (And So They Reached a Place Called Golgotha ...)*, 1960–63. Collection of the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.

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*The Passion of Christ (And, While They Were at Table, He Said, Believe Me, One of You Is to Betray Me)*, 1960–63. Collection of the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.

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*The Passion of Christ (Introduction Panel)*, 1960–63. Collection of the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.

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*The Passion of Christ (Saying As They Did So ...)*, 1960–63. Collection of the Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Niagara Falls Art Gallery and Museum.

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*Piotr Jarosz*, 1977. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, gift of the Polish Alliance of Canada and Wintario, 1978 (77.46). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Michael Lalich.

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*Polish Wedding at Kaszuby*, 1977. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, gift of the Polish Alliance of Canada and Wintario, 1978 (77.59). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Michael Lalich.

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*A Poor Mexican Courtyard*, 1976. Collection of Mayberry Fine Art, Toronto. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Mayberry Fine Art.

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*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1950. Collection of Loch Gallery, Calgary. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Heffel Fine Art.

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*Pre-Maze*, c. 1953. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the collection of Bruno M. and Ruby Cormier, 1983 (83/300). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.

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*Reminiscences of Youth*, 1968. The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.104143). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



*The Rock*, 1962. The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.104134). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



*Self-Portrait*, 1957. The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.103679). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



*Skating on the Bog Ditch*, 1971. Private collection. Courtesy of Tundra Books / Penguin Random House Canada. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



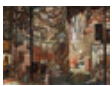
*Someone With Me*, 1974. Private collection, Quebec. Courtesy of Waddingtons.ca. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*Softball*, 1974. Permanent loan to the Art Gallery of Windsor from the private collection of Hiram Walker and Sons Limited, Walkersville. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Windsor Art Gallery.



*This Is the Nemesis*, 1965. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, gift of Mrs. J.A. McCuaig, 1966 (66.75.Q). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Michael Lalich, courtesy of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



*The Tower of Babel*, 1954. Private collection, Burlington. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*Tramlines*, 1952. Collection of the London Transport Museum, U.K. (1990/118). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: London Transport Museum collection, courtesy of Transport for London.



*Trompe l'oeil with a Fisherman's Fly*, 1955. Collection of Loch Gallery, Calgary. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Loch Gallery.





*Ukrainian Canadian Farm Picnic*, 1966. Collection of the Ukrainian Museum of Canada of the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada, Saskatoon. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*The Ukrainian Pioneer* (series), 1971, 1976. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, transfer from the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada, 1990 (30836.1-.6). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.



*The Ukrainian Pioneer, No. 6*, 1971, 1976. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, transfer from the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada, 1990 (30836.6). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.



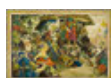
*We Find All Kinds of Excuses*, 1964. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of the Estate of Annette Cohen, 2001 (2001/165). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



*Where Am I? Who Am I? Why Am I?*, 1953–54. American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, gift of Edward Adamson Collection, London, U.K. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: American Visionary Art Museum.

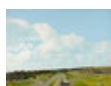


*Yom Kippur*, 1975. Collection of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: David Kaufman, courtesy of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, and the Ontario Jewish Archives.



*Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1952. Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, gift of Robert G. Kearns (2003-146). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Ernest Mayer.

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*401 Towards London No. 1*, 1968–69, by Jack Chambers. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Norcen Energy Resources Limited, 1986 (86/47). © Jack Chambers Estate. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario.



The artist at the Isaacs Gallery frame shop, c. 1959. Private collection, Toronto. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto



Artist William Kurelek, c. 1965. Tess Taconis Collection, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (PA-129623). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc. © Estate of Tess Taconis. Photo credit: Tess Taconis.



Cover of Edward Holloway, *Catholicism: A New Synthesis* (Wickford: Faith Keyway Publications, 1969). Photo credit: Lee Henderson.



Cover of Kimon Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1941). © 1941, renewed 1969 by Ann Nicolaïdes. Used by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.



*Echo of a Scream*, 1937, by David Alfaro Siqueiros. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Edward M.M. Warburg (633.1939). © 2016 David Alfaro Siqueiros / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico.



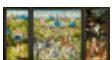
*Family and Rainstorm*, 1955, by Alex Colville. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchase, 1957 (6754). Courtesy of Ann Kitz. © Estate of Alex Colville. Photo credit: A.C. Fine Art Inc.



Father Peter Mayevsky, c. 1937. Courtesy of Oseredok—Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre and Archives, Winnipeg.



Frontispiece, *Psychotic Art* (1950), by Francis Reitman. Courtesy of Routledge / Taylor and Francis Group, U.K. Photo credit: Lee Henderson.



*The Garden of Earthly Delights* (details), 1490–1500, by Hieronymus Bosch. Collection of the Museo del Prado, Madrid, on permanent loan from Patrimonio Nacional since 1943 (P02823).



*The Harvesters*, 1565, by Pieter Bruegel. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1919 (19.164). Photo credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art.





The Isaacs Gallery, 832 Yonge Street, c. 1970. City of Toronto Archives, Ellis Wiley Fonds (FO124), File 2, Item 114 (429294). Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives. © Estate of Ellis Wiley. Photo credit: Ellis Wiley.



Occupational therapist Margaret Smith, c. 1953–59. Private collection, Toronto. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



*Magnetawan No. 2*, 1965, by Gordon Rayner. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchase, 1967 (15315). Courtesy of the Estate of Gordon Rayner. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.



*Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 1880–91, by Ilya Repin. Collection of the State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg (zh-4005).



Ukrainian Orthodox cathedral of St. Mary the Protectress, Winnipeg, 2011. Photo credit: Andrew Kear.



Video still from *The Maze*, 1969 (2011), directed by David Grubin and Robert M. Young. Courtesy of Nick and Zach Young / MachinEyes. © Robert M. Young and David Grubin.



Video still from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, directed by Albert Lewin, 1945.



William Kurelek and Avrom Isaacs in the Isaacs Gallery framing workshop, where Kurelek worked from 1960 to 1970, c. 1960s. Private collection, Toronto. Courtesy of Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



William Kurelek and his extended family, c. early 1960s. Private collection. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



William Kurelek and his paintings at Maudsley Hospital, London, c. 1953. Private collection. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



William Kurelek and his Volkswagen Beetle, c. 1963. Private collection. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.

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William Kurelek in the studio he built in the basement of his Toronto home on Balsam Avenue, c. late 1960s / early 1970s. Courtesy of Bill Kirby, Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, Concordia University, Montreal.

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William Kurelek in Toronto during his days as a student at the Ontario College of Art, c. 1949. Private collection. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.

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William Kurelek painting in his basement studio, October 18, 1973. Courtesy of Globe and Mail Inc., Digital Media. © Erik Christensen / *The Globe and Mail*. Photo credit: Erik Christensen.

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William Kurelek posing before the paintings *Lest We Repent...* (top left) and *This Is the Nemesis* (bottom left). Courtesy of Bill Kirby, Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, Concordia University, Montreal.

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William Kurelek taking photographs at his parents' farm in Vinemount, Ontario, c. 1956. Private collection. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.

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William Kurelek with a painting in the Isaacs Gallery framing workshop, date unknown. Private collection. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.

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William Kurelek with the sign he created for his exhibition *The Burning Barn: 16 Paintings by William Kurelek*, held at Hart House Art Gallery, University of Toronto, March 11–29, 1969. Private collection, Toronto. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.

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William Kurelek's father and mother, Dmytro and Mary Kurelek (née Huculak), c. 1925. Private collection, Toronto. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.

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William Kurelek's father, Dmytro (Metro) Kurelek (far right), as a young man, c. 1923. Private collection, Toronto. Courtesy of the Estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.



A view of the road from the dashboard of the artist's Volkswagen Beetle, date unknown. William Kurelek Fonds, File 10, Prairies, Slide 20. Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / The Brechin Group Inc. © Jean Kurelek.

## Acknowledgements

### *From the Author*

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### *From the ACI*

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