

BLACK ART MATTERS

TEN CANADIAN ARTISTS TO KNOW



This past week cultural organizations, across North America and abroad, have been asked to present solutions to help eradicate the systemic racism that exists in our societies and institutions. At the Art Canada Institute we are listening. We recognize that art history has obscured and overlooked artists who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour. As a first step, in this week's newsletter, we're sharing the works of ten Black Canadian artists—historical and contemporary—to help change the conversation and build a multi-vocal narrative. In addition to this list there are many more names to know. For further reading, we conclude with a number of Black community and arts organizations you can connect with in Canada—they are essential to redefining how we understand and appreciate this country's art.

With wishes for wellness and safety,

Sara Angel, Stephanie Burdzy, Jocelyn Anderson, and Simone Wharton
The Art Canada Institute Executive Team

KIT LANG



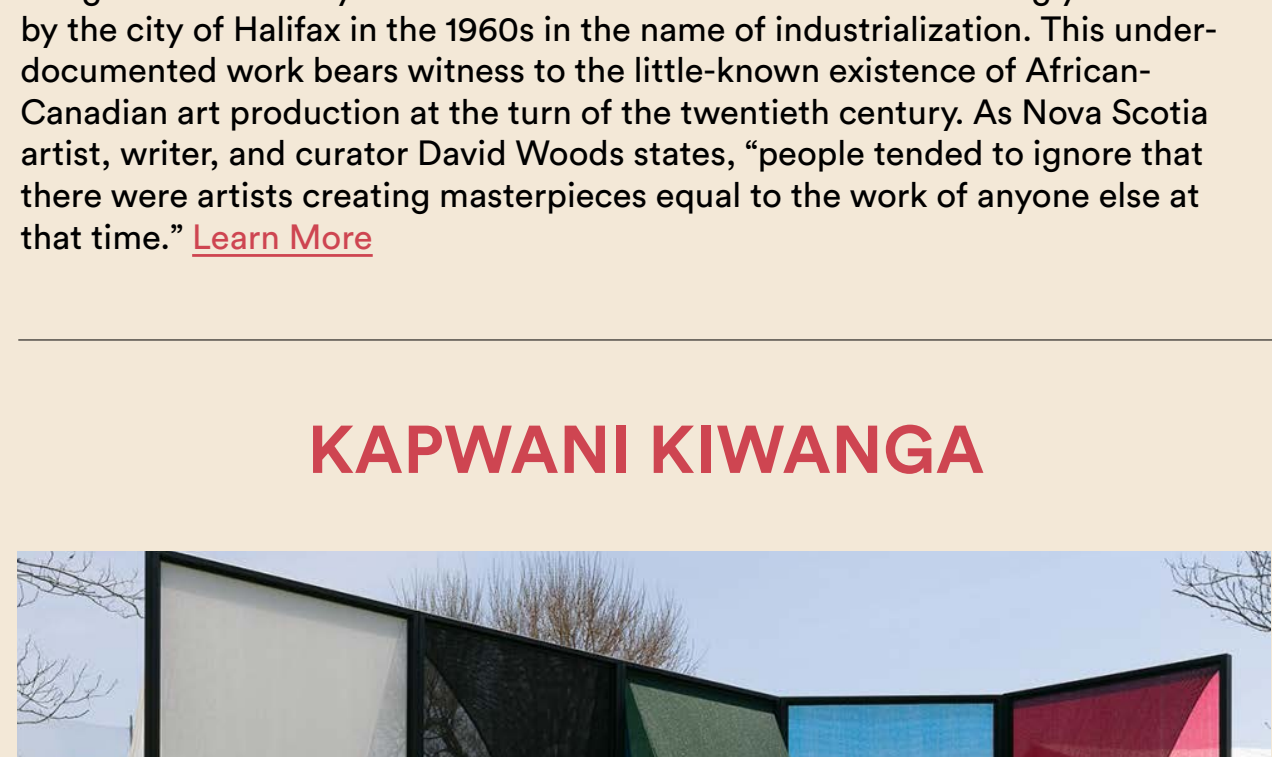
Incendiary, Marie-Joseph Angélique, 2012



Incendiary is part of Kit Lang's Black and Blue series, which represents significant people of the African diaspora throughout history. The work depicts Marie-Joseph Angélique, an enslaved woman in Montreal and owned by Thérèse de Couagne de Francheville. Lang documents the moment after a fire destroyed Montreal's merchants' quarter: Angélique was blamed for starting it, purportedly in an attempt to escape her bondage. She was convicted, tortured, and hanged. *Incendiary* is an important reminder of Canada's own history of oppression, enslavement, and anti-Black racism. Lang's Black and Blue series has been recognized and published internationally. Lang has also produced commissioned pieces for Black Lives Matter Toronto's Freedom School.

[Learn More](#)

STAN DOUGLAS



Still from *Luanda-Kinshasa, 2013*



Vancouver-based artist Stan Douglas (b.1960), who will represent Canada in the 2021 Venice Biennale, creates films, photographs, and theatre productions that investigate technology's role in image-making. *Luanda-Kinshasa* is a fictional live recording of a seventies band laying down a jazz, funk, and Afrobeat mix. The title combines the names of two African capital cities—Luanda (Angola) and Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo)—but the work is set in New York, referencing colonial appropriation of African culture and music. Douglas is the recipient of numerous notable honours, including the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography (2016); the Scotiabank Photography Award (2013); and the Infinity Award from the International Center of Photography, New York (2012). [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

EDITH HESTER MACDONALD-BROWN

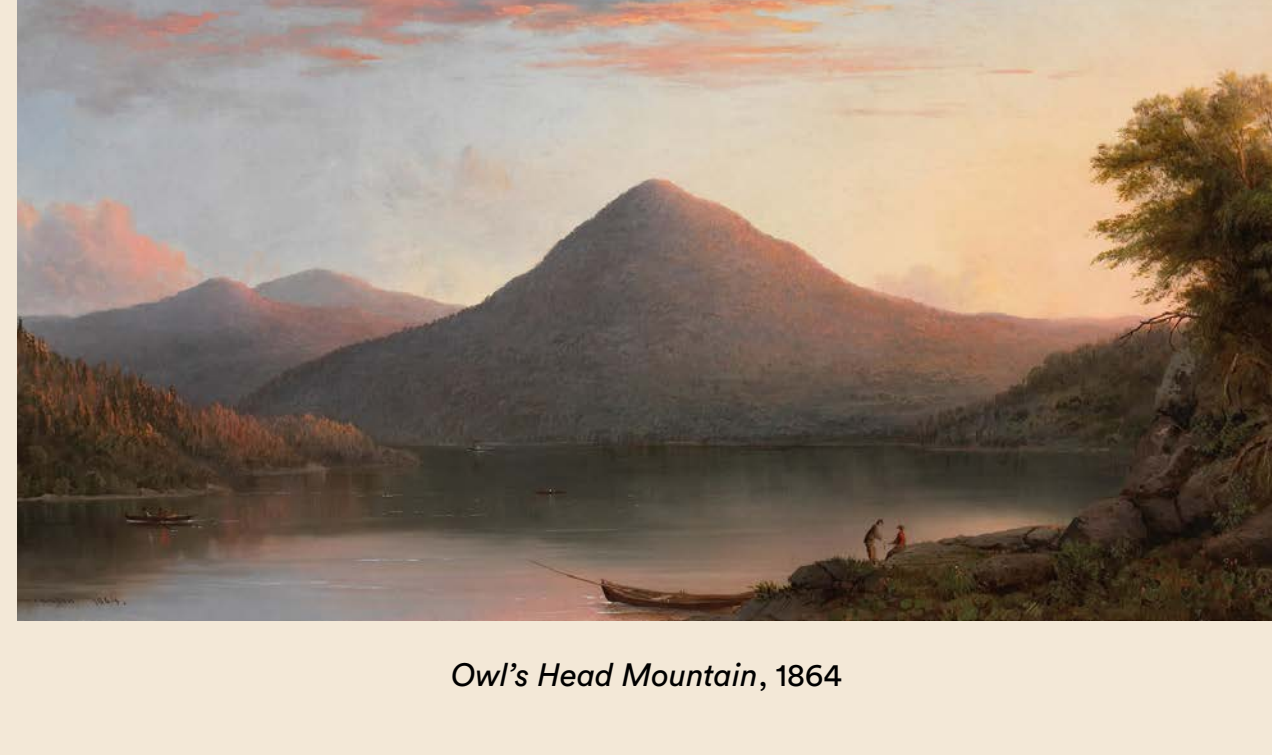


Untitled, 1906

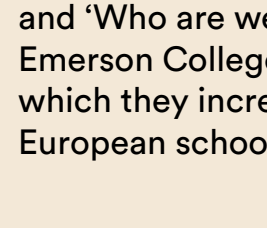
Edith Hester Macdonald-Brown (1880–1956) is believed to be the first recorded Black female painter in the history of Canadian art. This scene of cows in a hilly locale is one of only four existing works by the artist. After studying art in Montreal, Macdonald-Brown returned to her hometown Africville, a thriving village established by Black settlers in Nova Scotia that was wrongly razed by the city of Halifax in the 1960s in the name of industrialization. This under-documented work bears witness to the little-known existence of African-Canadian art production at the turn of the twentieth century. As Nova Scotia artist, writer, and curator David Woods states, "people tended to ignore that there were artists creating masterpieces equal to the work of anyone else at that time." [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

KAPWANI KIWANGA



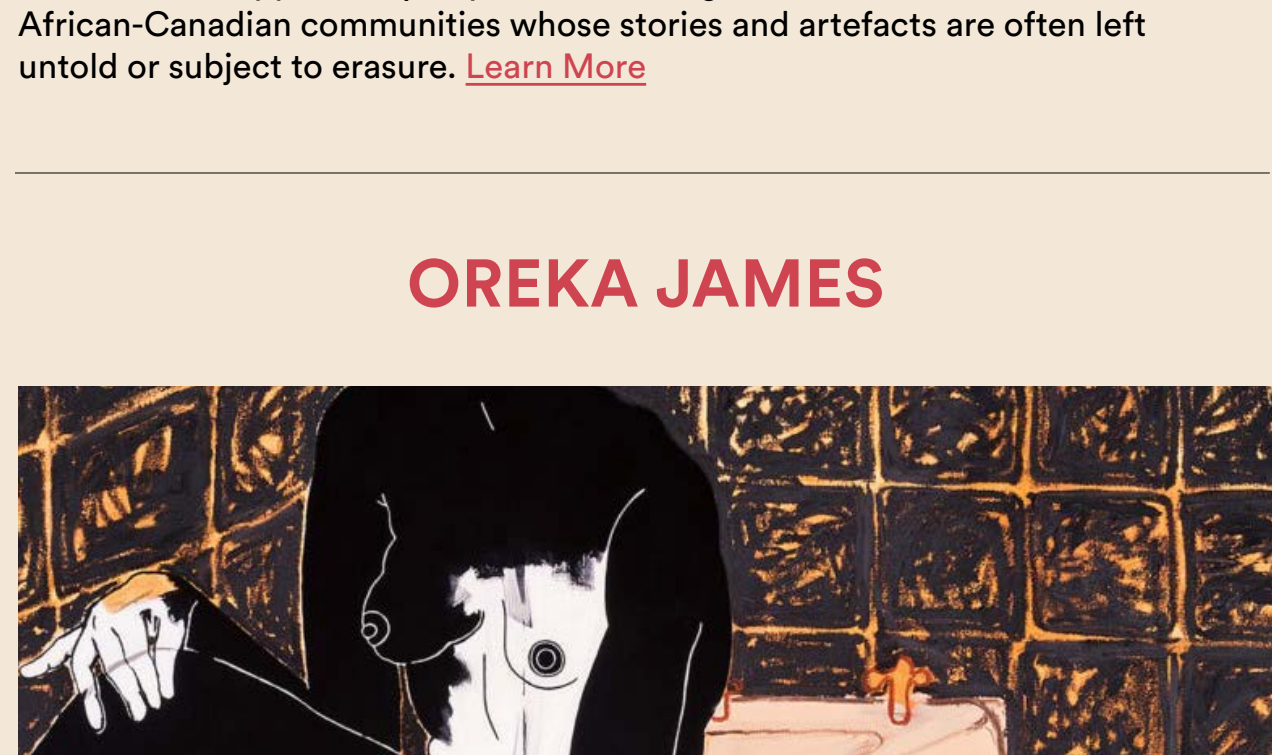
Shady, 2018



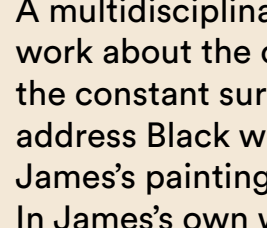
Hamilton, Ontario-born Kapwani Kiwanga (b.1978) is the recipient of the 2018 Sobey Art Award and a Paris, France-based artist whose work explores history and the impact of colonialism on contemporary culture. Kiwanga's installation piece *Shady*—commissioned for Frieze New York 2018—draws inspiration from the large expanses of shade cloth that cover ginseng fields in Haldimand County, Ontario. Kiwanga saw it as a metaphor for tensions between the Six Nations and settler communities. "Here is this quote—unquote foreign plant or crop brought in and then maintained with shade cloth that otherwise couldn't be cultivated at such scale in an environment it maybe wasn't meant to be in," said Kiwanga. "It echoed the sort of colonial activities seen there before." [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

SANDRA BREWSTER



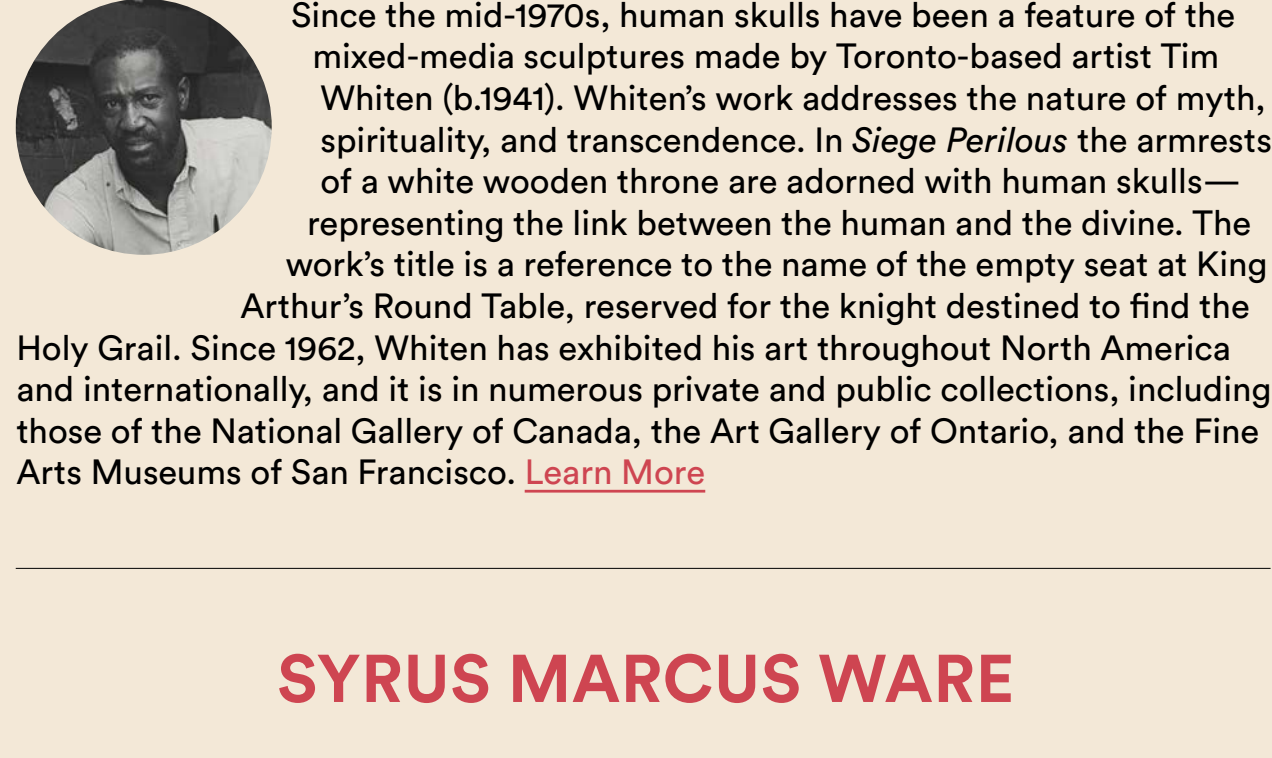
Untitled (Blur), 2017–19



Sandra Brewster (b.1973) is a Toronto-based artist whose work addresses notions of likeness, representation, and memory. At her 2019 Art Gallery of Ontario exhibition, viewers were greeted by Brewster's massive wall covering image *Untitled (Blur)*. It is the first of a series of works that are an examination of movement, the self, and Black identity. Brewster's work has been exhibited nationally and abroad. A recipient of the Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts Artist Prize (2016) and the Gattuso Prize for Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival (2017), Brewster has been recognized for her community-based practice that centres Black presence in Canada. [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

ROBERT S. DUNCANSON



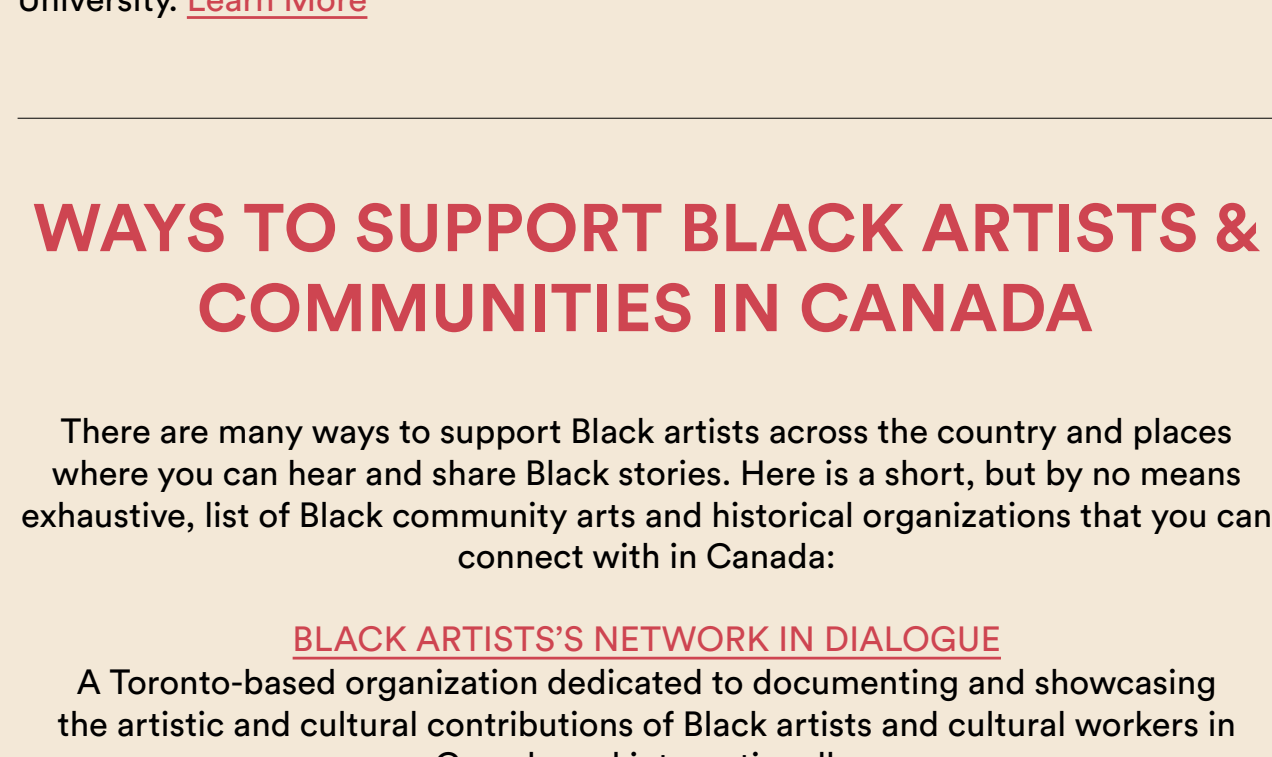
Owl's Head Mountain, 1864



At the start of the American Civil War, Robert Seldon Duncanson (1821–1872), born in Seneca County, New York, moved to Montreal, where he was inspired by the Canadian landscape, depicting its beauty in works such as *Owl's Head Mountain*. Much admired by the Montreal art community, Duncanson set an example for Canadian painters, who began to follow him. He arrived in Canada at a formative time, when Canadian painters were asking themselves, "Who are we?" and "Who are we going to become?" explains Joe Kettner, curator at Boston's Emerson College. Duncanson helped these artists find a new approach—one in which they increasingly looked for inspiration in their own country rather than in European schools of landscape painting. [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

UNKNOWN

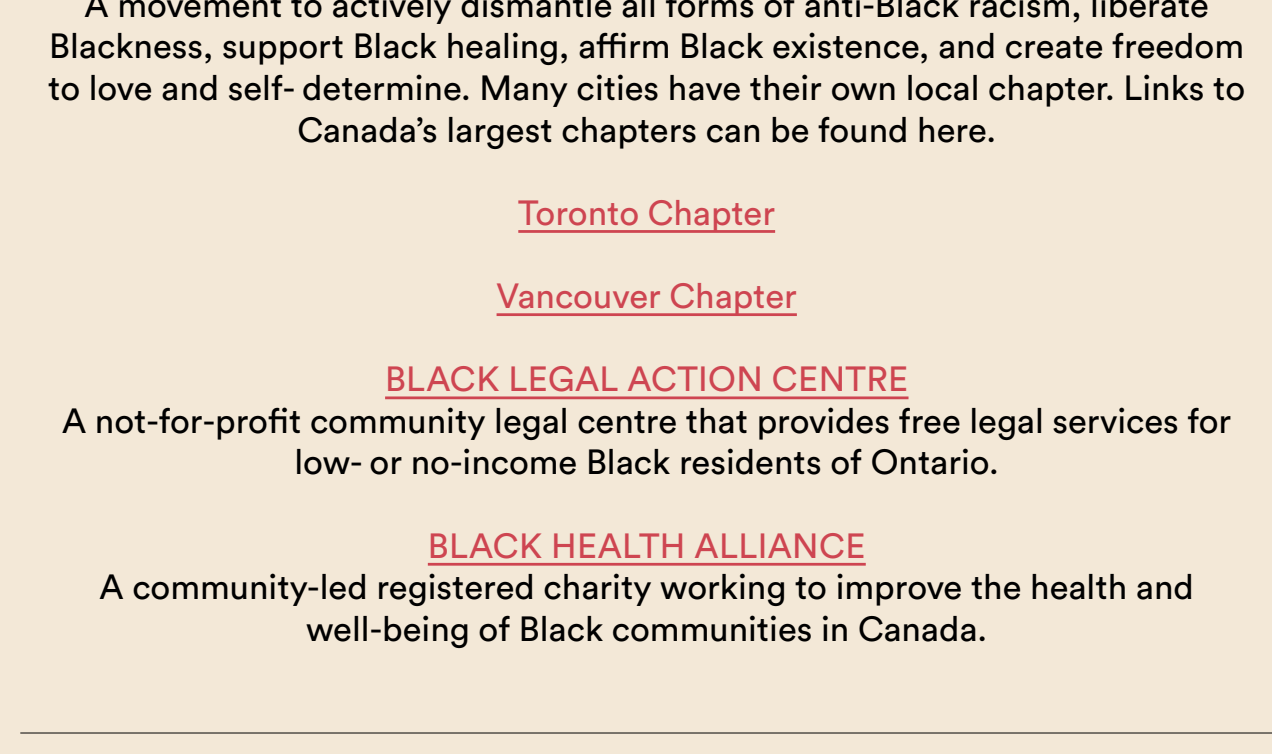


Tintype of *Young African American Woman Seated at Table, n.d.*

This photograph of a young woman is part of the Bell-Sloman Collection donated to Brock University in 2010. It is an important body of work that comprises more than 300 images that span more than a century and document the Bell and Sloman families, descendants of former enslaved people in the American south. It also illustrates how photography is a powerful tool for self-representation. The collection has been studied extensively by Art Gallery of Ontario curator Dr. Julie Crooks, who calls it a "fugitive archive" and a holding that offers an opportunity to preserve, salvage, and recover histories of African-Canadian communities whose stories and artefacts are often left untold or subject to erasure. [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

OREKA JAMES



Untitled, 2016

A multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto, Canada, Oreka James creates work about the complexities surrounding the construction of Blackness and the constant surveillance and themes of love, *Untitled* and other works in this series address Black womanhood and Black people, sexuality, mental health, and healing. James's paintings often depict black figures as headless or white-washed out. In James's own words, "It reminded me of the figure being present but also not being present at the same time. It's something that is intuitive, that I can't really explain, but if I had to explain it, I would say it's mirroring a psychological aspect of being Black in this world." A year after receiving her BFA from the Ontario College of Art and Design University, James was artist in residence at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Her work has been exhibited in Canada and the United States. [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

TIM WHITEN



Siege Perilous, 1988

Since the mid-1970s, human skulls have been a feature of the mixed-media sculptures made by Toronto-based artist Tim Whiten (b.1941). Whiten's work addresses the nature of myth, spirituality, and transcendence. In *Siege Perilous* the armrests of a white wooden throne are adorned with human skulls—representing the link between the human and the divine. The work's title is a reference to the name of the empty seat at King Arthur's Round Table, reserved for the knight destined to find the Holy Grail. Since 1962, Whiten has exhibited his art throughout North America and internationally, and it is in numerous private and public collections, including those of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

SYRUS MARCUS WARE



Portrait of QueenTite Opaleke, 2016

This work by Syrus Marcus Ware is part of a series of large-scale graphite portraits of revolutionaries and community mobilizers, commemorating activist culture as an act of reverence, defiance, and love. Ware explored the Trans Archives at the University of Victoria and historic archives on Salt Spring Island, "digging for and finding Black history in the pages and fields." Depicted here is QueenTite Opaleke, a Toronto-based multidisciplinary queer artist and activist with Black Lives Matter. In his own activism, Ware works to ensure that Black, Indigenous, racialized Queer and Trans people, and people living with disabilities are given safe and creative spaces. Ware's art has been shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of York University. [Learn More](#)

[Learn More](#)

WAYS TO SUPPORT BLACK ARTISTS & COMMUNITIES IN CANADA

There are many ways to support Black artists across the country and places where you can hear and share Black stories. Here is a short, but by no means exhaustive, list of Black community arts and historical organizations that you can connect with in Canada:

BLACK ARTISTS'S NETWORK IN DIALOGUE

A Toronto-based organization dedicated to documenting and showcasing the artistic and cultural contributions of Black artists and cultural workers in Canada and internationally.

NIA CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

A Toronto-based organization that supports, showcases, and promotes an appreciation of arts from across the African Diaspora.

HOGAN'S ALLEY SOCIETY

An organization committed to researching, preserving, and publicizing Black history in Vancouver and British Columbia.

BLACK SPACE WINNIPEG

An organization that creates safe spaces for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour communities through events, artist demonstrations, and workshops.

OBSSIDIAN THEATRE

A Toronto-based theatre company passionately dedicated to the exploration, development, and production of the Black voice.

BLACK THEATRE WORKSHOP

Canada's longest running Black theatre company, based in Montreal, which aims to promote and produce Black theatre that educates, entertains, and delights its audiences.

There are also Black-led organizations that you can engage with now. These are organizations on the front lines protecting protestors, supporting families who have lost their loved ones to senseless violence, and fighting to end systemic racism and make lasting infrastructural changes:

BLACK LIVES MATTER (CANADA)

A movement to actively dismantle all forms of anti-Black racism, liberate Blackness, support Black healing, affirm Black existence, and create freedom to love and self-determine. Many chapters have their own local chapter. Links to Canada's largest chapters can be found here.

Toronto Chapter

Vancouver Chapter

BLACK LEGAL ACTION CENTRE

A not-for-profit community legal centre that provides free legal services for low- or no-income Black residents of Ontario.

BLACK HEALTH ALLIANCE

A community-led registered charity working to improve the health and well-being of Black communities in Canada.

We encourage you to share this newsletter with friends and family and to actively seek more information about the many talented Black artists who are changing art in Canada today.

SHARE

THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS

The ACI is a not-for-profit educational charity that receives no government financing or public support. We thank the generous donors who make our work possible.

Image Credits: [1] Kit Lang, *Incendiary, Marie-Joseph Angélique*, mixed media, 2012. © Kit Lang. [2] Stan Douglas, still from *Luanda-Kinshasa*, 2013, overall dimensions vary with installation, single-channel video projection, 6 hr 1 min (loop), colour, sound. © Stan Douglas. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York. [3] Edith Hester Macdonald-Brown, *Untitled*, 1906, oil on canvas, 49.3 x 74.9 cm, collection of Mrs. Geraldine Parker. Photo credit: Joey Yazer. [4] Kapwani Kiwanga, *Shady*, 2018, shade cloth and steel, 410 x 400 x 810 cm. © Kapwani Kiwanga. Courtesy the artist and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa. Commissioned for Frieze Artist Award, supported by Luma Foundation. Installation view at Frieze New York 2018, Randall's Island Park, New York City. Photo credit: Mark Blower. [5] Sandra Brewster, *Untitled (Blur)*, 2017–19. © Sandra Brewster and Georgia Scherman Projects. Photo credit: Art Gallery of Ontario. [6] Robert S. Duncanson, *Owl's Head Mountain*, 1864, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 91.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [7] Tintype of Young African American Woman Seated at Table, n.d., Bell-Sloman Collection of the James Gibson Library, Brock University, St. Catharines. [8] Oreka James, *Untitled*, 2016, oil paint, oil stick, and acrylic gouache on stretched canvas, 162 x 122 cm. © Oreka James. [9] Tim Whiten, *Siege Perilous*, 1988, plywood and paint, Art Gallery of Hamilton. Photo credit: Robert McNair. [10] Syrus Marcus Ware, *Portrait of QueenTite Opaleke*, 2016, graphite on paper, 182.9 x 365.8 cm. © Syrus Marcus Ware.