

LOOKING AT ME

10 CANADIAN SELF-PORTRAITS

When artists become their own subjects



Self-portraits are opportunities for artists to play with their identities in innovative and engaging ways. Whether experimenting with a new medium and trying out techniques, promoting a career, or contemplating the face and the body, artists have found endless reasons to create portraits of themselves. In the spirit of summer as a time to pause and reflect, we're sharing the following ten Canadian self-portraits which offer insights into both their creators and our country.

Sara Angel

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DOUBLE TROUBLE



Shuvina Ashoona and Shary Boyle, *Self-Portrait (detail)*, 2015, private collection

Two of Canada's leading contemporary artists—Shuvina Ashoona and Shary Boyle (both past recipients of the prestigious Gershon Iskowitz Prize)—created this double self-portrait. Kinnigait (Cape Dorset)-based Ashoona and Toronto-based Boyle first collaborated in 2011 when the latter visited the Arctic. *Self-Portrait* was created for their joint 2016 exhibition *Universal Cobra* (organized by Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain in partnership with Feheley Fine Arts), which featured six co-created works for which each artist prepared part of a drawing, leaving white space for her counterpart to fill. This work includes references to Ashoona's and Boyle's shared interests and practices, from the drawing papers scattered at their feet to their mutual love of bright colours and playful patterns.

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MAN IN THE MIRROR

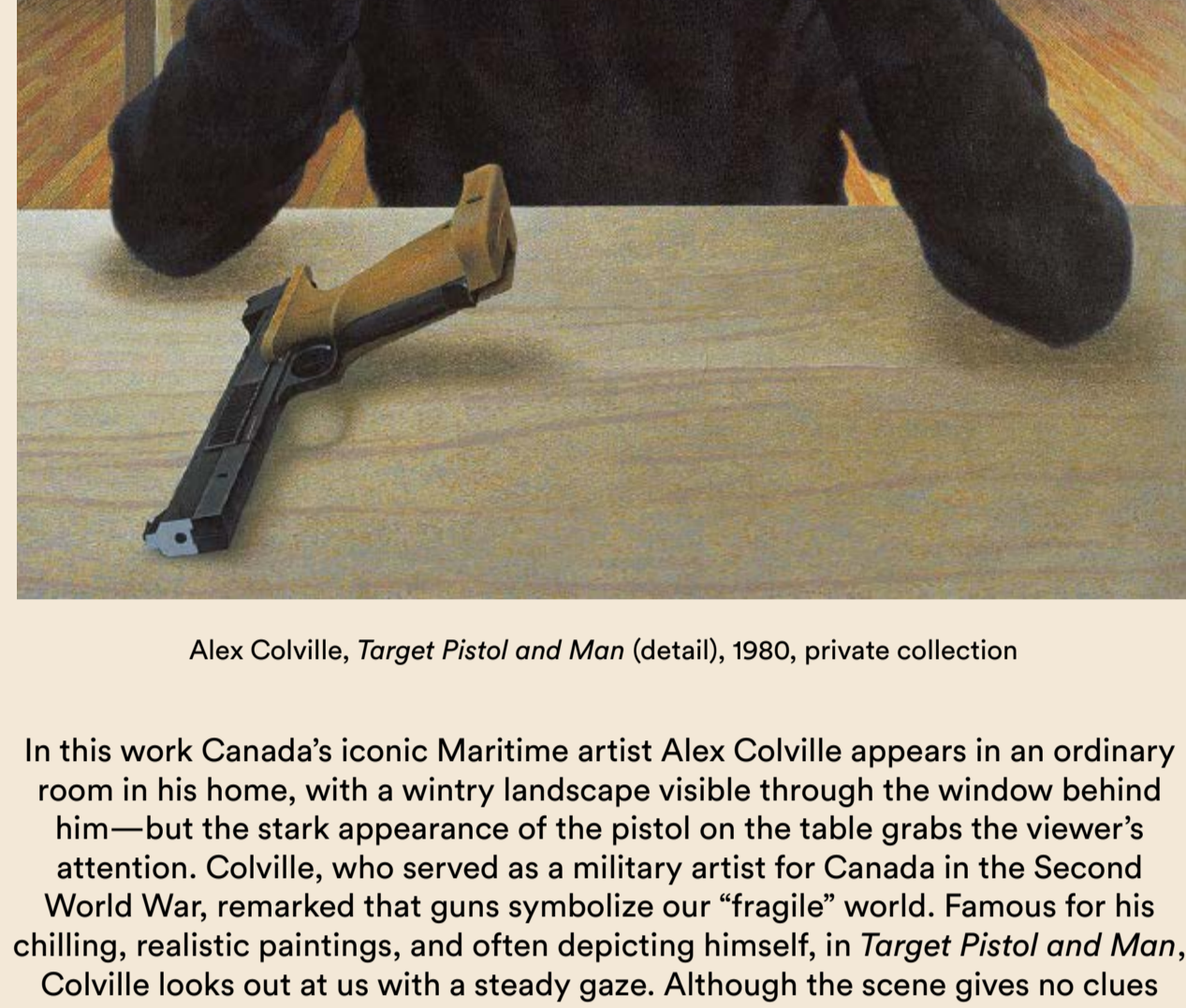


Oziás Leduc, *Self-Portrait with Camera (Autoportrait à la caméra)* (detail), c.1899, BANQ Vieux-Montréal

In 1899 Quebec artist Oziás Leduc created this photograph as part of a body of self-portraits that also includes drawings and a painting. At the turn of the century Leduc was a successful and established artist, a status reflected here in his formal outfit (clothes he would not have worn while working). Posing alongside the camera, Leduc appears as both the photographer and the subject, presenting himself as an artist reflecting on his practice and the connections between technique and inspiration. The artist emerges from a world of darkness to present his own physiognomy and, at the same time, allows the viewer to observe his determined and fixed gaze.

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ME, AND NOT ME

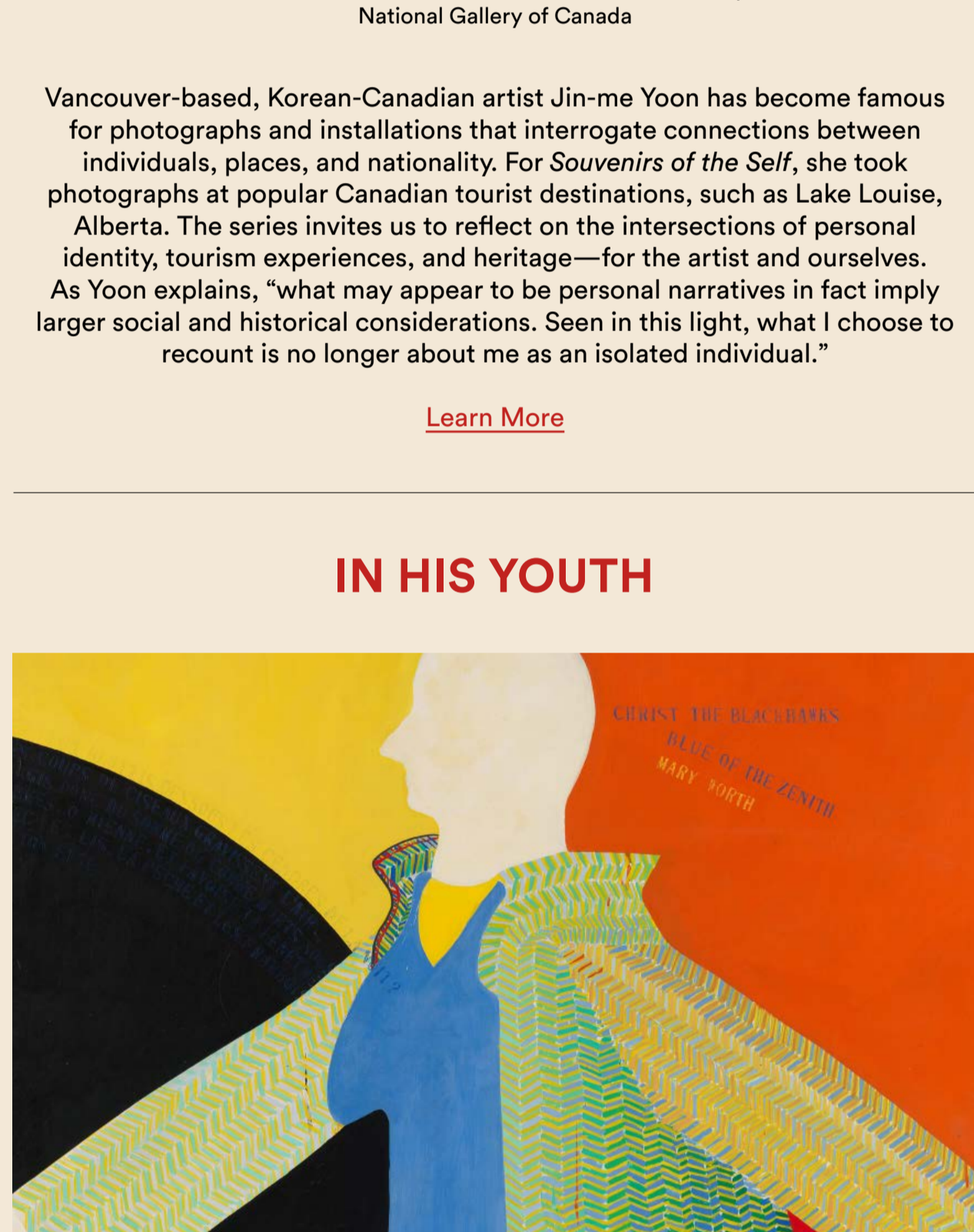


Meryl McMaster, *On the Edge of This Imminence*, 2019, Stephen Bulger Gallery and Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain

This work by Meryl McMaster is part of the series *As Immense as the Sky*, a group of self-portraits that each involve elaborate costumes, props, and sculptures created by the artist and in which she poses herself against the Canadian landscape. The images, all theatrical embodiments of different aspects of herself, explore McMaster's Cree and European lineage. Of the series, McMaster says that the images "are me and not me. I still am a pretty shy, introverted person, and didn't want to ask someone to pose for me. So I thought I'm going to try to do it on my own. However long that takes, and however challenging it's going to be. I kept coming back to wanting my voice to be personal in my work so maybe I was really the best person to be the subject of the work."

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A MOMENT OF TENSION



Alex Colville, *Target Pistol and Man* (detail), 1980, private collection

In this work Canada's iconic Maritime artist Alex Colville appears in an ordinary room in his home, with a wintry landscape visible through the window behind him—but the stark appearance of the pistol on the table grabs the viewer's attention. Colville, who served as a military artist for Canada in the Second World War, remarked that guns symbolize our "fragile" world. Famous for his chilling, realistic paintings, and often depicting himself, in *Target Pistol and Man*, Colville looks out at us with a steady gaze. Although the scene gives no clues as to the painter's specific thoughts it is fraught with ominous tension and a stillness that prompts us to imagine what might happen next.

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SELF TOUR



Jin-me Yoon, *Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise)* (detail), 1991 (printed 1996), National Gallery of Canada

Vancouver-based, Korean-Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon has become famous for photographs and installations that interrogate the connections between individuals, places, and nationality. For *Souvenirs of the Self*, she took photographs at popular Canadian tourist destinations, such as Lake Louise, Alberta. The series invites us to reflect on the intersections of personal identity, tourism experiences, and heritage—for the artist and ourselves. As Yoon explains, "what may appear to be personal narratives in fact imply larger social and historical considerations. Seen in this light, what I choose to recount is no longer about me as an isolated individual."

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IN HIS YOUTH



Greg Curnoe, *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat* (detail), 1963, Vancouver Art Gallery

Self-portraits by the celebrated London painter artist Greg Curnoe changed dramatically over the course of his career. In *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat* we see the hallmarks of Curnoe's work in the early 1960s when he was a young man. Vivid colours, juxtapositions of flattened shapes with patterns, and a figure shown as a mannequin-like silhouette work together to present a brash image of confident youth. Like many of Curnoe's works, the painting also includes stamped texts with pithy sayings; for instance, "BLUE OF THE ZENITH" was the name of his favourite in-flight magazine.

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PAINTING FOR TWO

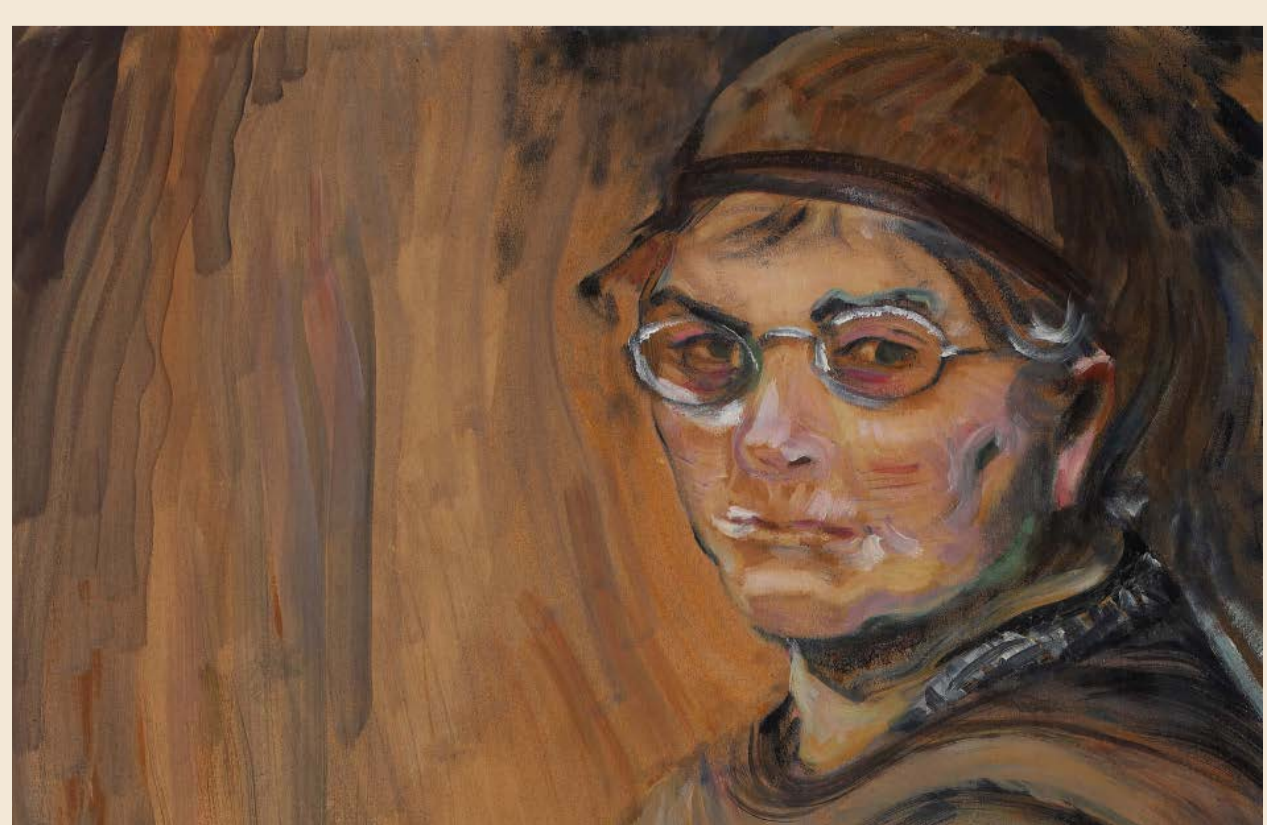


Paraskeva Clark, *Myself*, 1933, National Gallery of Canada

In this self-portrait—in which Paraskeva Clark is pregnant with her second son—the artist painted herself much larger than she was in life, standing almost the entire height of the canvas. She gazes directly at the viewer, presenting herself as confident, content, and stylish. Originally from Russia, Clark spent several years living in Paris before moving to Canada upon her marriage in 1931. Within a few years, she had become well-known as a provocative and outspoken modern painter. Clark exhibited *Myself* in a show organized by the Canadian Group of Painters in November 1933.

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SELF-CROWNED

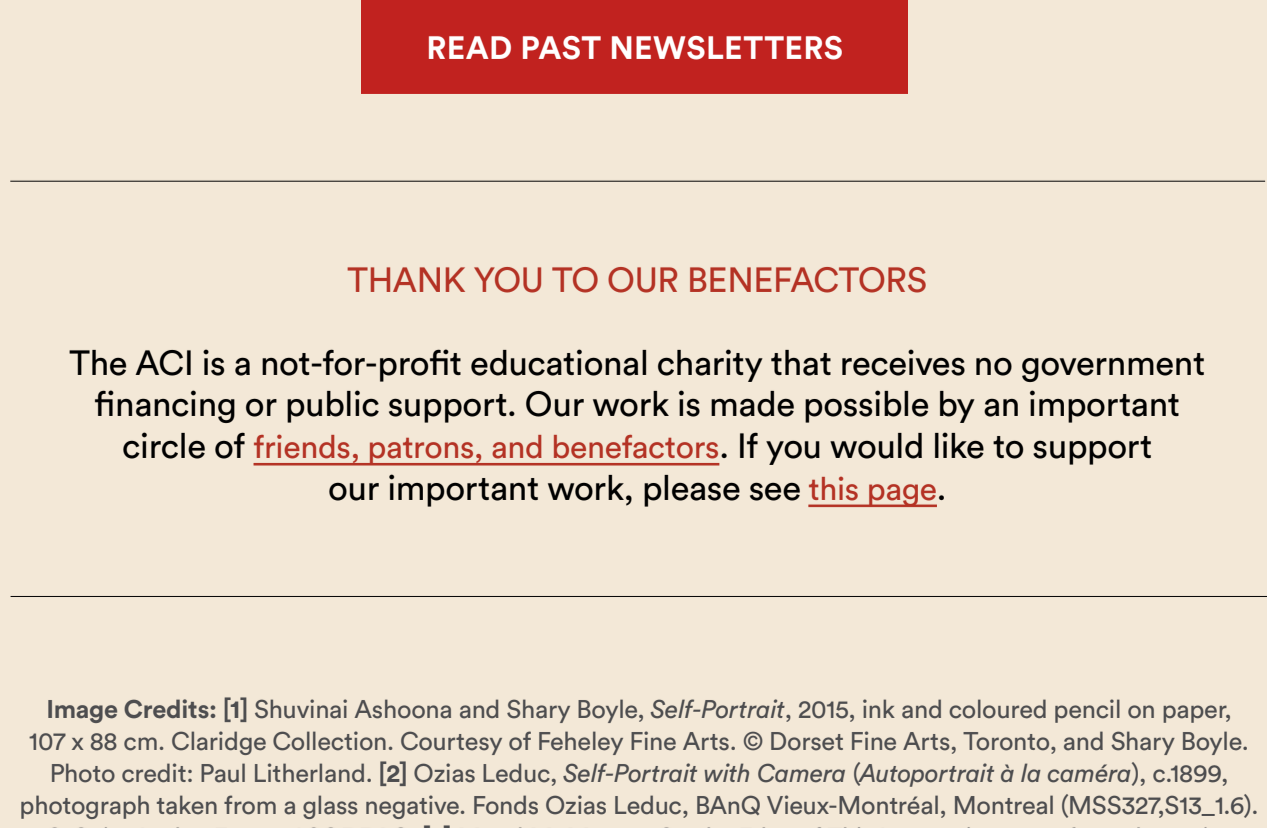


Camille Turner, *Hometown Queen*, 2011

Jamaica-born, Toronto-based artist Camille Turner challenges perceptions of "Canadian-ness" in her performative persona of Miss Canadiana, confronting the idea of the Black body as foreign or "other" and being a surprising representation of Canadian heritage. In this series of staged photographs, Turner posed in front of different landmarks in Hamilton, Ontario. "I created the Hometown Queen series to re-write my personal history and to pay homage to my complicated relationship with my hometown," explains Turner. "Growing up there, I witnessed and experienced many incidents of blatant bigotry. I couldn't wait to get away from Hamilton when I was young but now I realize that this complex city made me the person I am today."

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ONE WITH NATURE

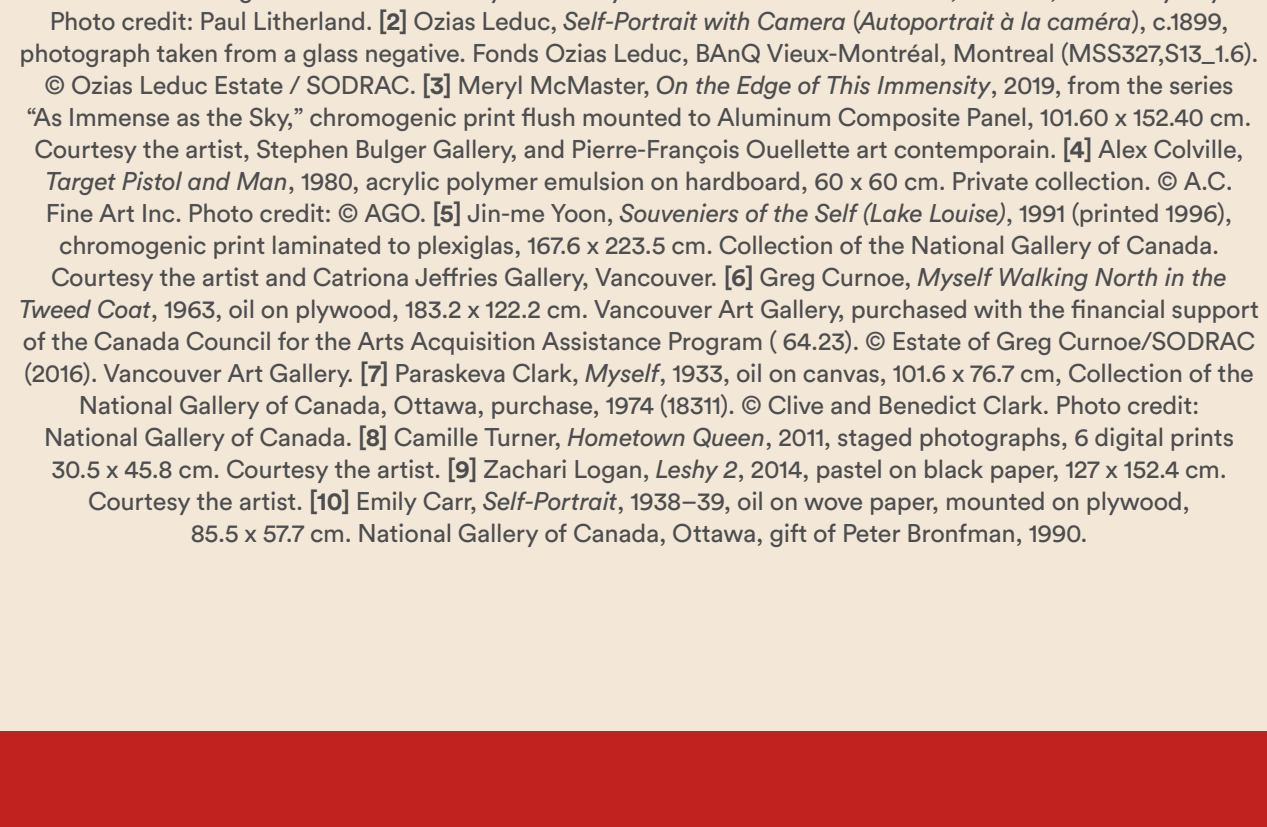


Zachari Logan, *Leshy 2*, 2014

Weaving together flora and fauna with the human body, 40-year-old Saskatoon-based mixed media artist Zachari Logan uses his self-portraits to explore themes of masculinity, queerness, identity, memory, and place. Here the artist's self-portrait is what he calls "Natural Drag"—a fantastical and allegorical character who is centred as an outsider, inhabiting an in-between space between flesh and nature, just as queer identities sit outside and between heteronormative gender binaries. "Land is body; body is personal..." says Logan. "[My] drawings articulate my desire to invoke images of empathy, utilizing imagery from nature to point to the physical environments we inhabit and endanger."

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RELUCTANT SELF-REFLECTION



Emily Carr, *Self-Portrait* (detail), 1938–39, National Gallery of Canada

"I hate painting portraits," stated Emily Carr, Canada's famed British Columbia painter, a year after creating this work, one of the artist's few self-portraits. "The better a portrait, the more indecent and naked the sitter must feel." Though Carr's health was beginning to decline (she had had a heart attack the year before) when she presented herself in this painting, around her sixty-seventh birthday, the work emphasizes her strength. Using dynamic expressive brushstrokes to convey energy, a technique Carr also used in landscape paintings from this period, she looks at the viewer with a confident, challenging, and direct gaze.

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Image Credits: [1] Shuvina Ashoona and Shary Boyle, *Self-Portrait*, 2015, ink and coloured pencil on paper, 107 x 88 cm. Claridge Collection. Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts. © Dorset Fine Arts, Toronto, and Shary Boyle. Photo credit: Paul Litherland. [2] Oziás Leduc, *Self-Portrait with Camera (Autoportrait à la caméra)*, c.1899, photograph taken from a glass negative. Fonds Oziás Leduc, BANQ Vieux-Montréal, Montréal (M5S3Z7/S13_1). © Oziás Leduc Estate / SODRAC. [3] Meryl McMaster, *On the Edge of This Imminence*, 2019, from the series "As Immense as the Sky," chromogenic print flush mounted to Aluminum Composite Panel, 101.60 x 152.40 cm. Courtesy the artist, Stephen Bulger Gallery and Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain. [4] Alex Colville, *Target Pistol and Man*, 1980, acrylic polymer emulsion on hardboard, 60 x 60 cm. Private collection. © A.C. Fine Art Inc. Photo credit: © AGO. [5] Jin-me Yoon, *Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise)*, 1991 (printed 1996), chromogenic print laminated to plexiglas, 167.6 x 223.5 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Courtesy the artist and Carriana Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver. [6] Greg Curnoe, *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat*, 1963, oil on plywood, 183.2 x 122.2 cm. Vancouver Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (64-23). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). Vancouver Art Gallery. [7] Paraskeva Clark, *Myself*, 1933, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.7 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchase, 1974 (18311). © Olive and Benedict Clark. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. [8] Camille Turner, *Hometown Queen*, 2011, staged photographs. 6 digital prints 30.5 x 45.8 cm. Courtesy the artist. [9] Zachari Logan, *Leshy 2*, 2014, pastel on black paper, 127 x 152.4 cm. Courtesy the artist. [10] Emily Carr, *Self-Portrait*, 1938–39, oil on wove paper, mounted on plywood, 85.5 x 57.7 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, gift of Peter Brantman, 1990.