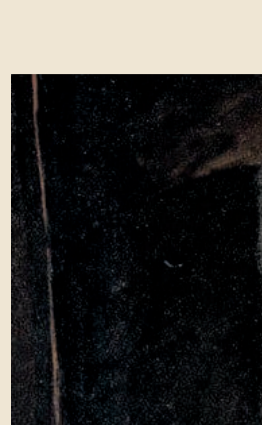


## OUR MOTHERS, OUR ART

Great Canadian works we love that celebrate all aspects of the maternal, as described by ten great art historians

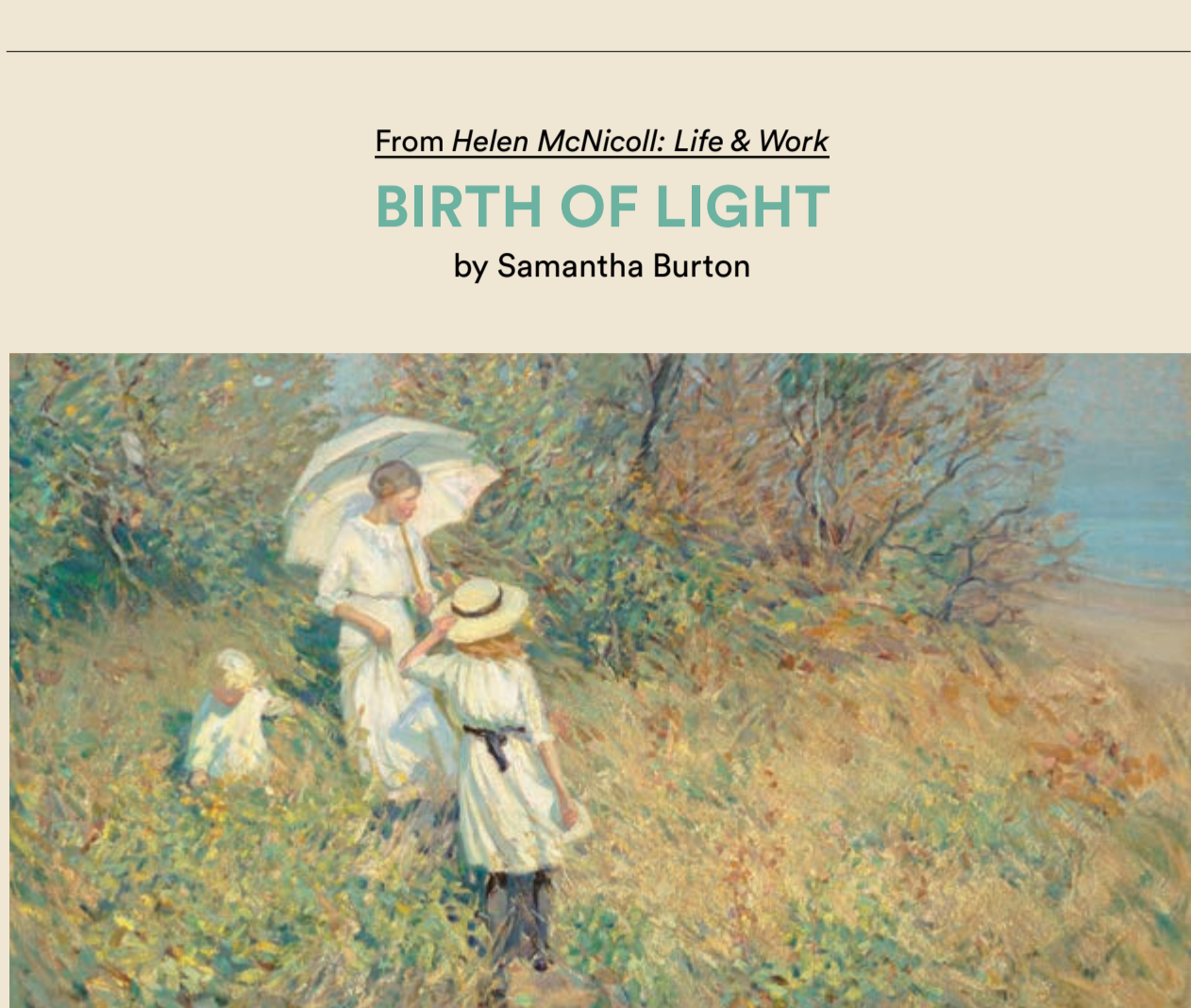


**Sara Angel**  
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

From *Paraskeva Clark: Life & Work*

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

by Christine Boyanoski



Paraskeva Clark, *Myself*, 1933

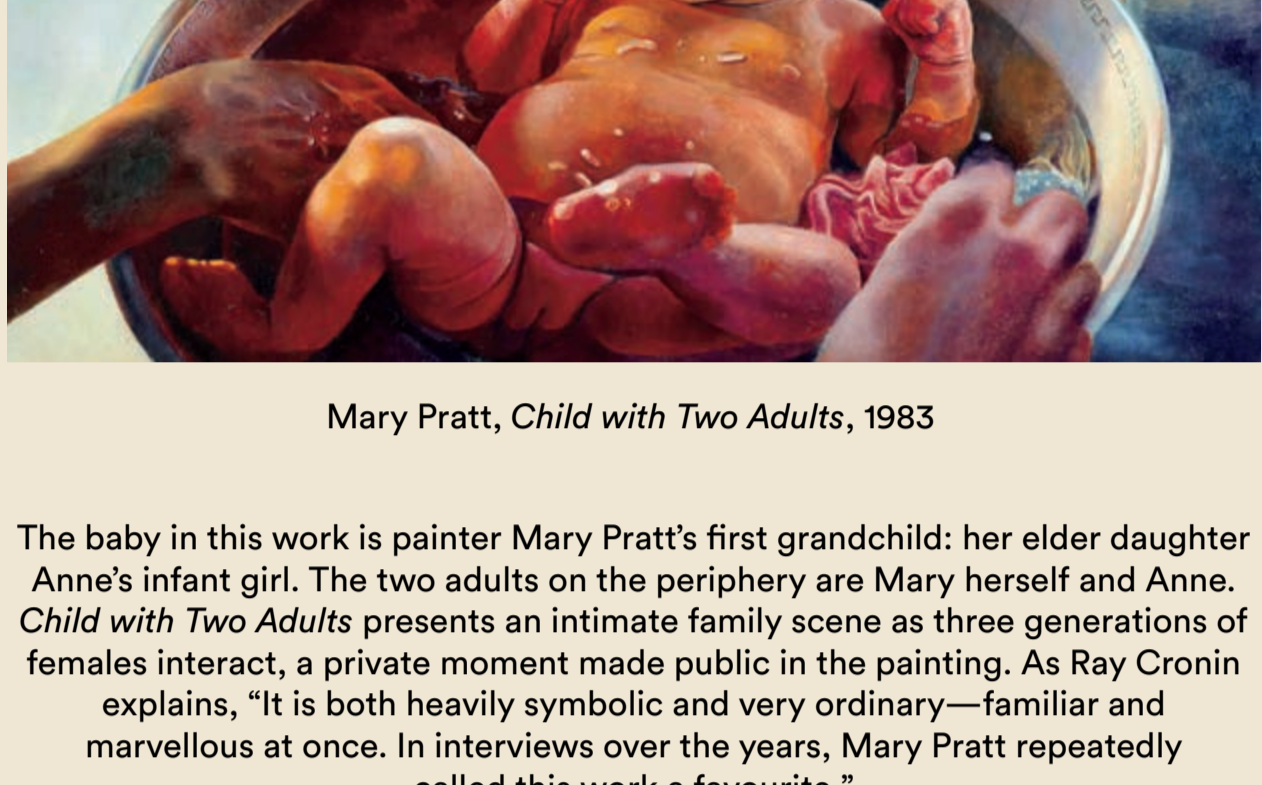
*Myself*, one of Paraskeva Clark's best-known works, is a bold, three-quarter-length self-portrait painted when the artist was pregnant with her second child. Her signature red lips provide the only spot of bright colour in the otherwise monochromatic but highly emotive and self-confident painting. The artist reveals a frontal view of her face, her stylish outfit, and the understated fact that she is with child.

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From *Helen McNicoll: Life & Work*

## BIRTH OF LIGHT

by Samantha Burton



Helen McNicoll, *Sunny September*, 1913

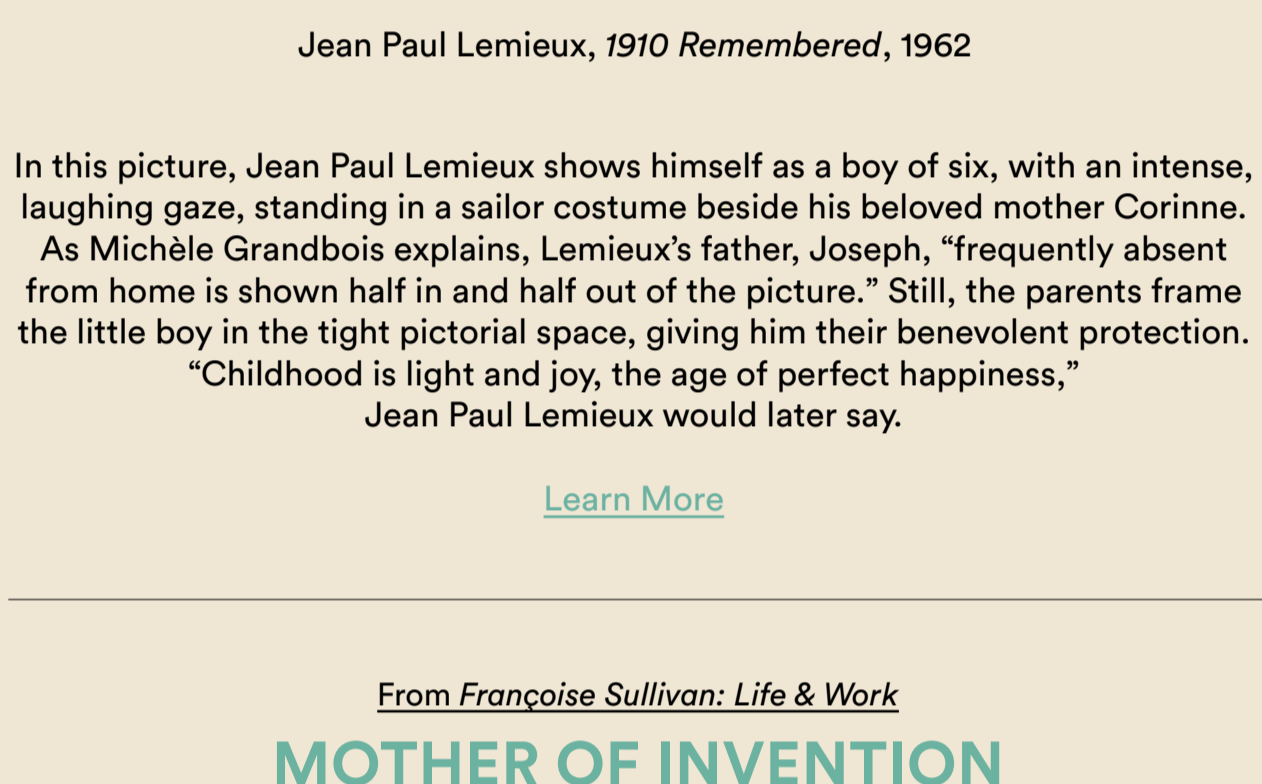
Although Helen McNicoll never became a mother she helped deliver Impressionism to Canada at a time when the movement was neither popular nor known. A frequent painter of intimate maternal scenes like this one, McNicoll, who worked for most of her career in Europe, achieved international success with her bright representations of rural landscapes, youth, and modern female figures.

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From *Mary Pratt: Life & Work*

## A GRANDMOTHER AND HER GIRLS

by Ray Cronin



Mary Pratt, *Child with Two Adults*, 1983

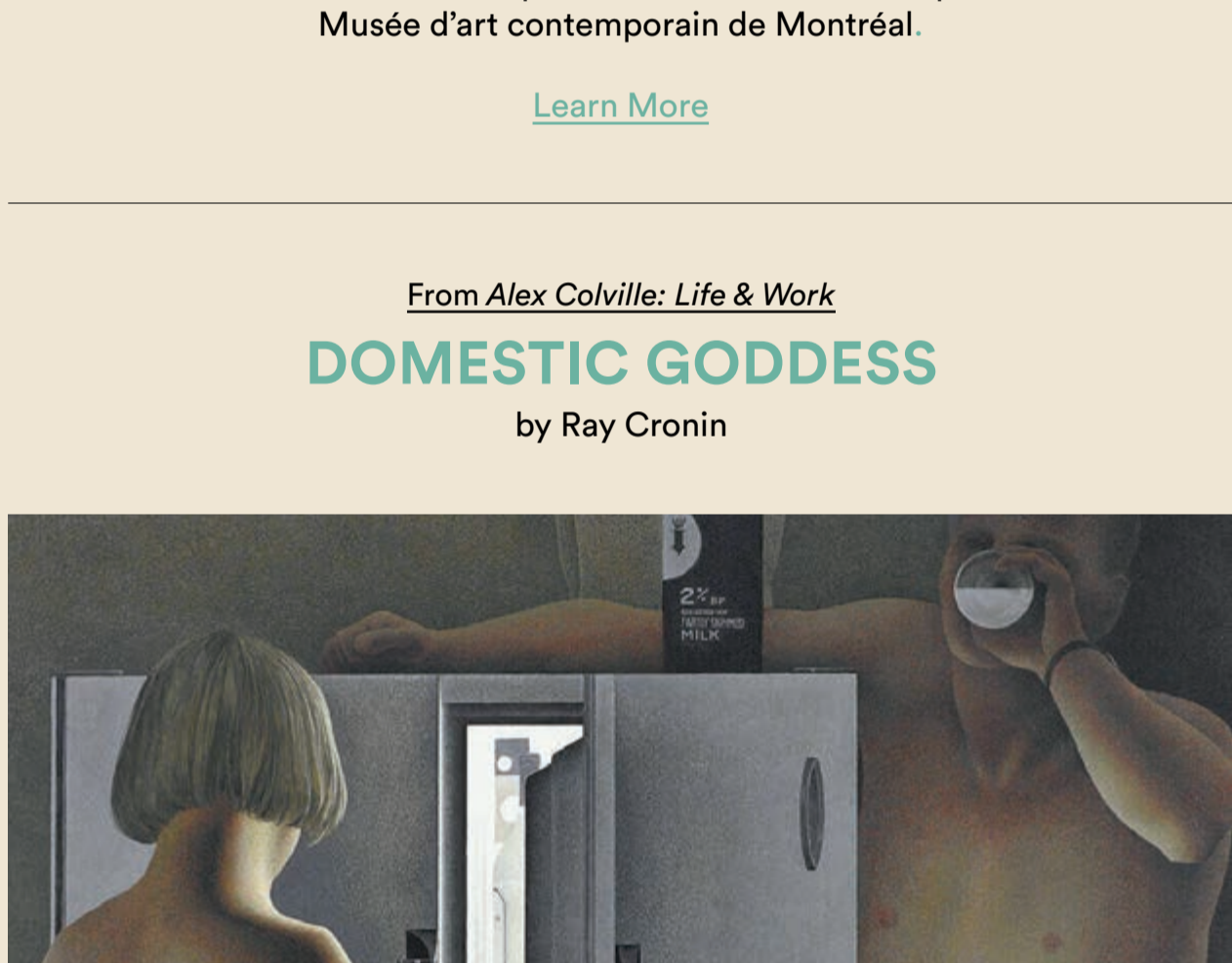
The baby in this work is painter Mary Pratt's first grandchild: her elder daughter Anne's infant girl. The two adults on the periphery are Mary herself and Anne. *Child with Two Adults* presents an intimate family scene as three generations of females interact, a private moment made public in the painting. As Ray Cronin explains, "It is both heavily symbolic and very ordinary—familiar and marvellous at once. In interviews over the years, Mary Pratt repeatedly called this work a favourite."

[Learn More](#)

From *Jean Paul Lemieux: Life & Work*

## MOTHER MEMORY

by Michèle Grandbois



Jean Paul Lemieux, *1910 Remembered*, 1962

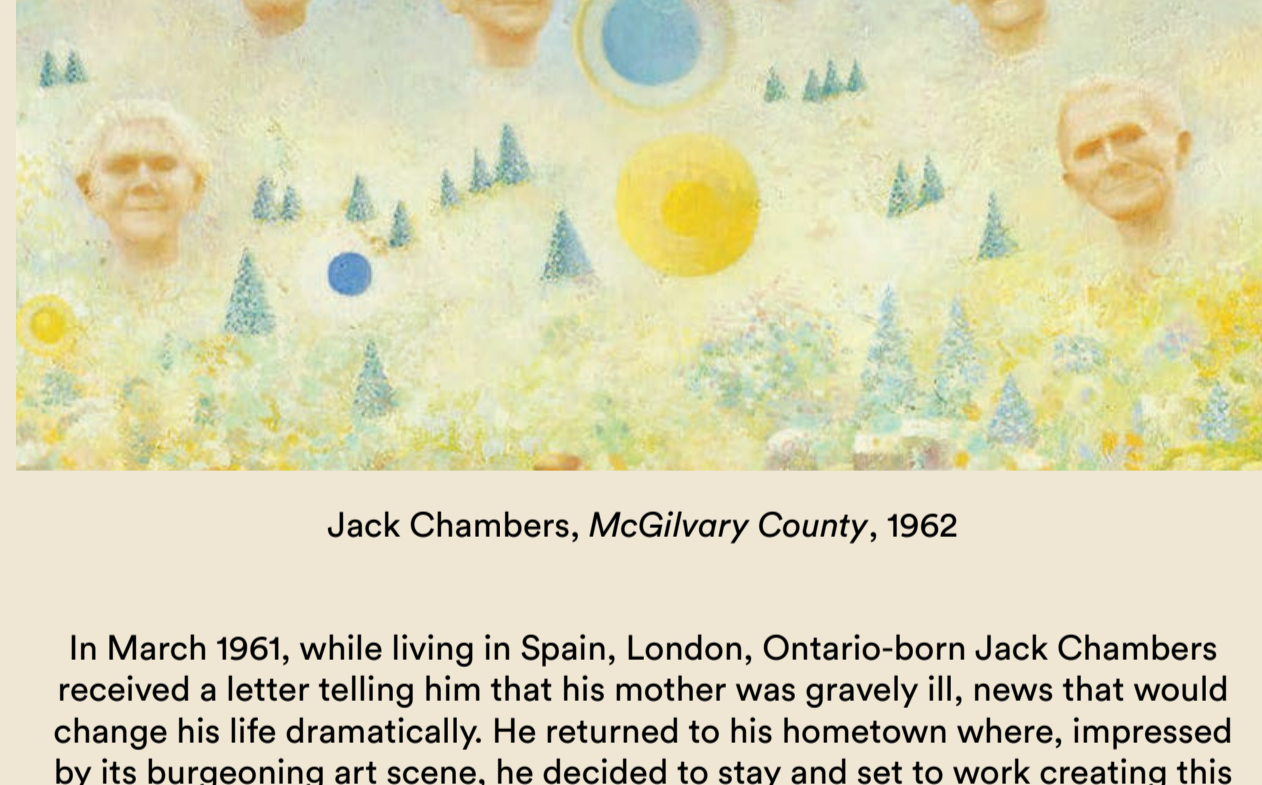
In this picture, Jean Paul Lemieux shows himself as a boy of six, with an intense, laughing gaze, standing in a sailor costume beside his beloved mother Corinne. As Michèle Grandbois explains, Lemieux's father, Joseph, "frequently absent from home is shown half in and half out of the picture." "Still, the parents frame the little boy in the tight pictorial space, giving him their benevolent protection. "Childhood is light and joy, the age of perfect happiness," Jean Paul Lemieux would later say.

[Learn More](#)

From *Françoise Sullivan: Life & Work*

## MOTHER OF INVENTION

by Annie Gérin



Françoise Sullivan, *Portraits of People Who Resemble One Another (Portraits de personnes qui se ressemblent)*, 1971 (printed 2003)

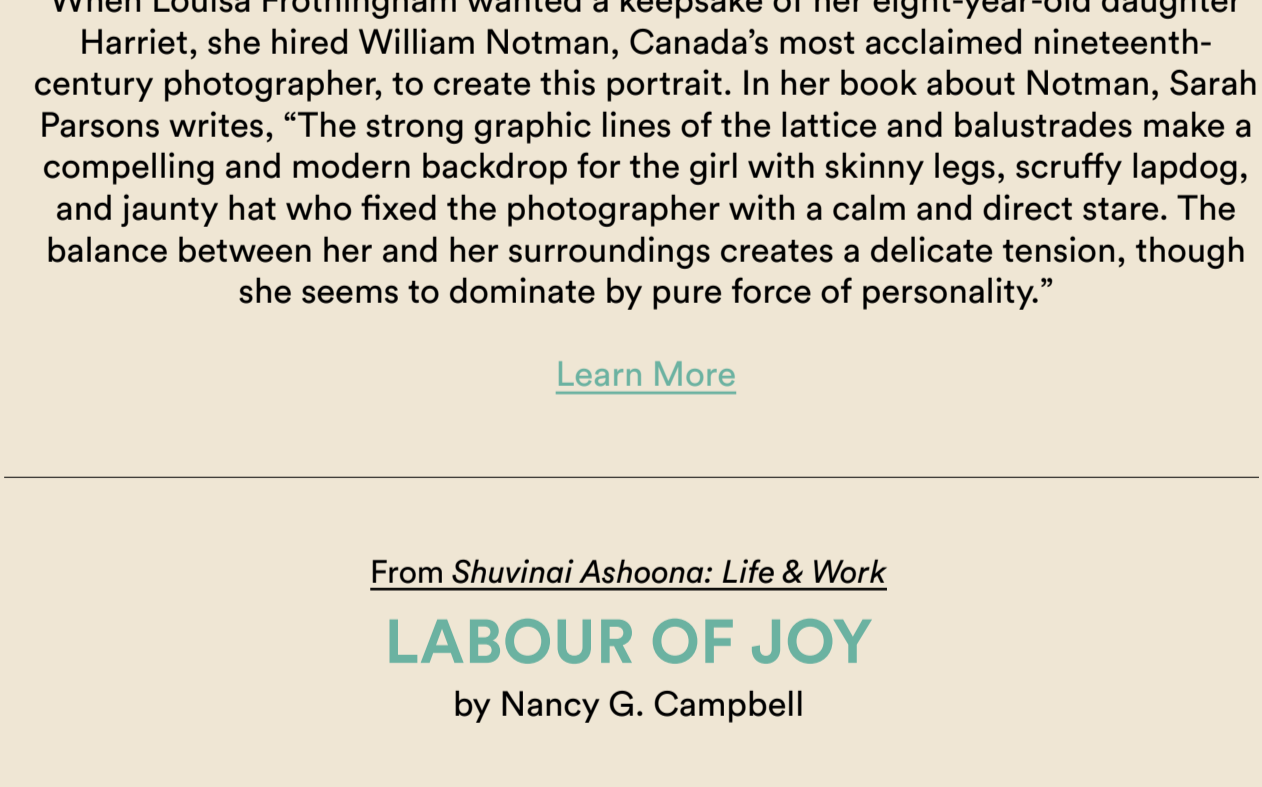
In 1971, Quebec multi-disciplinary artist Françoise Sullivan was living in Rome with her four sons, and she often visited museums while her boys were in school. One day, at the Galleria Nazionale, Sullivan happened upon *Portrait of a Young Man* by the Renaissance painter Lorenzo Lotto. Struck by how much the work resembled her youngest son, Francis, Sullivan created this work of conceptual art to illustrate the recurrence of images, styles, and ideas over time. It was first shown in 1981 as part of Sullivan's first retrospective at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

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From *Alex Colville: Life & Work*

## DOMESTIC GODDESS

by Ray Cronin



Alex Colville, *Refrigerator*, 1977

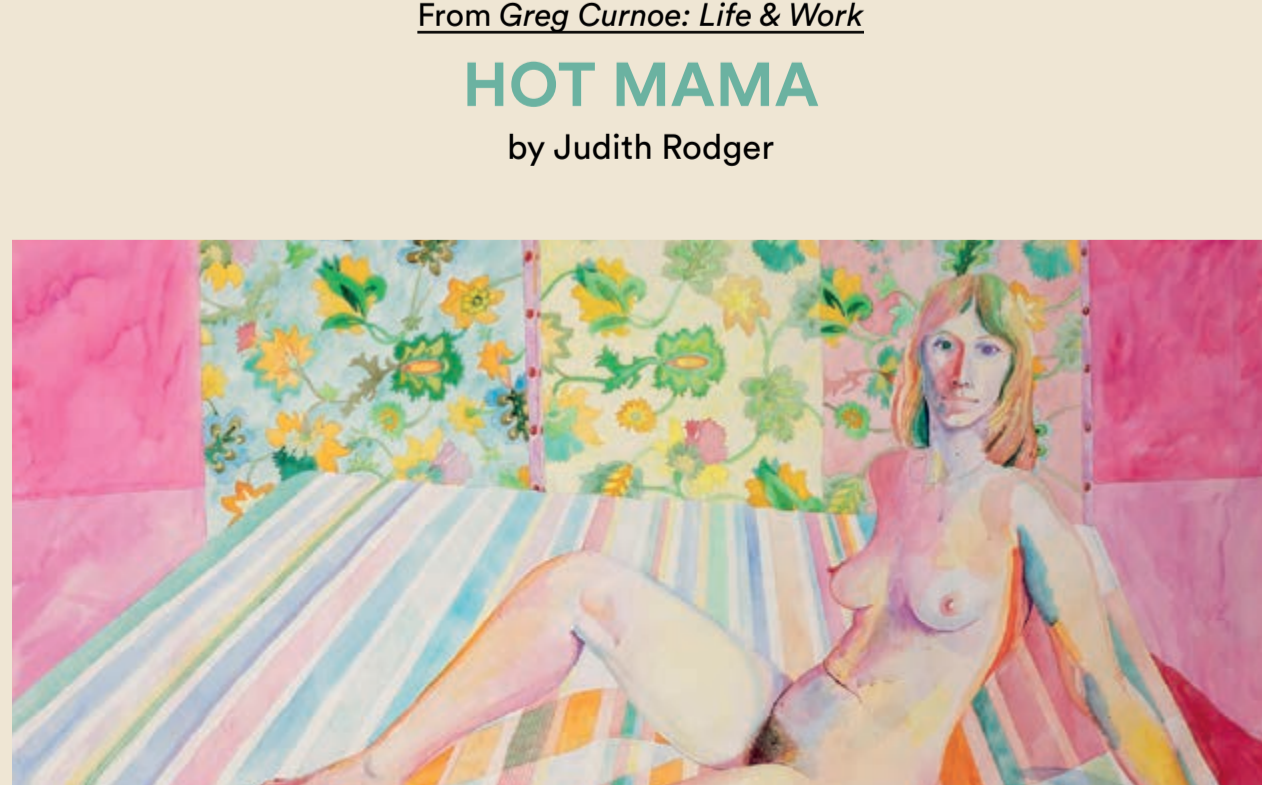
Alex Colville presents Rhoda, his wife and mother of their four children, and himself in *Refrigerator*, a frank depiction of a nude, middle-aged couple. The painting shows the pair in a dark kitchen standing by their fridge—the glowing "hearth" around which this domestic scene centres—as Colville drinks a glass of milk and Rhoda looks inside, enjoying the simple pleasure of considering her options.

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From *Jack Chambers: Life & Work*

## MATERNAL REMEMBRANCE

by Mark Cheetham



Jack Chambers, *McGillivray County*, 1962

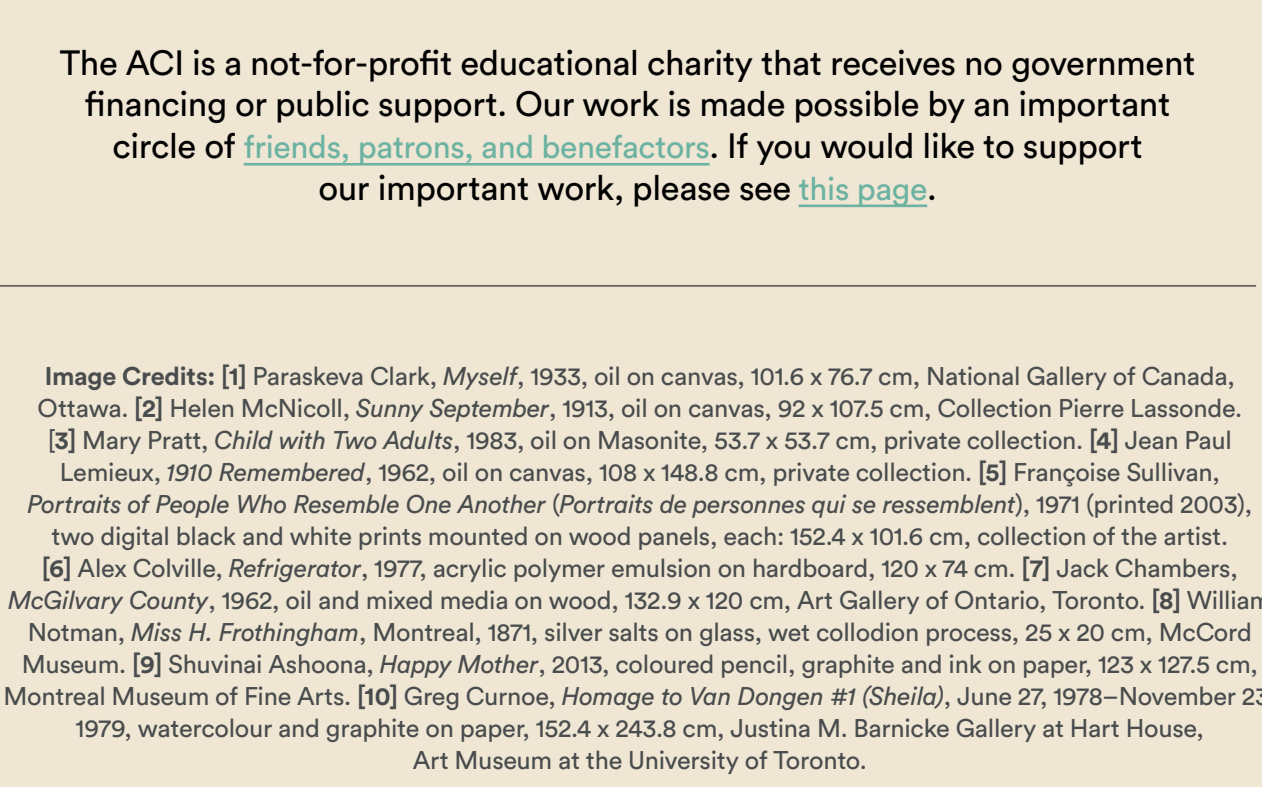
In March 1961, while living in Spain, London, Ontario-born Jack Chambers received a letter telling him that his mother was gravely ill, news that would change his life dramatically. He returned to his hometown where, impressed by its burgeoning art scene, he decided to stay and set to work creating this painting, a colourful and celebratory vision of family matriarchal faces floating above a fantasy landscape and an overlaid table set for a holiday celebration. Family continued to be a focus for Chambers, who went on to elegize his wife Olga and their sons, John and Diego, numerous times.

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From *William Notman: Life & Work*

## MOM-ENTO

by Sarah Parsons



William Notman, *Miss H. Frothingham*, Montreal, 1871

When Louisa Frothingham wanted a keepsake of her eight-year-old daughter Harriet, she hired William Notman, Canada's most acclaimed nineteenth-century photographer, to create this portrait. In her book about Notman, Sarah Parsons writes, "The strong graphic lines of the lattice and balustrades make a compelling and modern backdrop for the girl with skinny legs, scruffy lapdog, and jaunty hat who fixed the photographer with a calm and direct stare. The balance between her and her surroundings creates a delicate tension, though she seems to dominate by pure force of personality."

[Learn More](#)

From *Shuvina Ashoona: Life & Work*

## LABOUR OF JOY

by Nancy G. Campbell



Shuvina Ashoona, *Happy Mother*, 2013

*Happy Mother*, a work by Shuvina Ashoona, centres on a blue-eyed, blond-haired woman, birthing a crowning baby whose head is encircled with six small globes. Shuvina has not mentioned being witness to childbirth nor her own personal experience of giving birth: that she has not made such comments in relation to *Happy Mother* suggests that the image may be intended to depict a depersonalized experience, which in turn allows it to convey a greater sense of the mystical or supernatural.

[Learn More](#)

From *Greg Curnoe: Life & Work*

## HOT MAMA

by Judith Rodger



Greg Curnoe, *Homage to Van Dongen #1 (Sheila)*, June 27, 1978–November 23, 1979

Greg Curnoe's sexual attraction to his wife Sheila, the mother of their three children, Owen, Galen, and Zoë, was ferocious, and the impact of their union on his creativity was profound. Curnoe had a willing model and muse in Sheila, who he represents here as confident and self-possessed in a life-sized, superbly rendered watercolour portrait. In her book on Curnoe, Judith Rodger quotes the art historian Sarah Milroy, who remarked, "He found her feral and unpredictable, and he was intrigued by her in a way that for him was unprecedented."

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We hope that you liked this selection of works celebrating mothers and motherhood in Canadian art. If you enjoyed this newsletter, please share it.

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Image Credits: [1] Paraskeva Clark, *Myself*, 1933, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [2] Helen McNicoll, *Sunny September*, 1913, oil on canvas, 92 x 107.5 cm, Collection Pierre Lassonde. [3] Mary Pratt, *Child with Two Adults*, 1983, oil on Masonite, 53.7 x 53.7 cm, private collection. [4] Jean Paul Lemieux, *1910 Remembered*, 1962, oil on canvas, 108 x 148.8 cm, private collection. [5] Françoise Sullivan, *Portraits of People Who Resemble One Another (Portraits de personnes qui se ressemblent)*, 1971 (printed 2003), two digital black and white prints mounted on wood panels, each: 152.4 x 101.6 cm, collection of the artist. [6] Alex Colville, *Refrigerator*, 1977, acrylic polymer emulsion on hardboard, 120 x 74 cm. [7] Jack Chambers, *McGillivray County*, 1962, oil and mixed media on wood, 132.9 x 120 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. [8] William Notman, *Miss H. Frothingham*, Montreal, 1871, silver salts on glass, wet collodion process, 25 x 20 cm, McCord Museum. [9] Shuvina Ashoona, *Happy Mother*, 2013, coloured pencil, graphite and ink on paper, 123 x 127.5 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. [10] Greg Curnoe, *Homage to Van Dongen #1 (Sheila)*, June 27, 1978–November 23, 1979, watercolour and graphite on paper, 152.4 x 243.8 cm, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at Hart House, Art Museum at the University of Toronto.