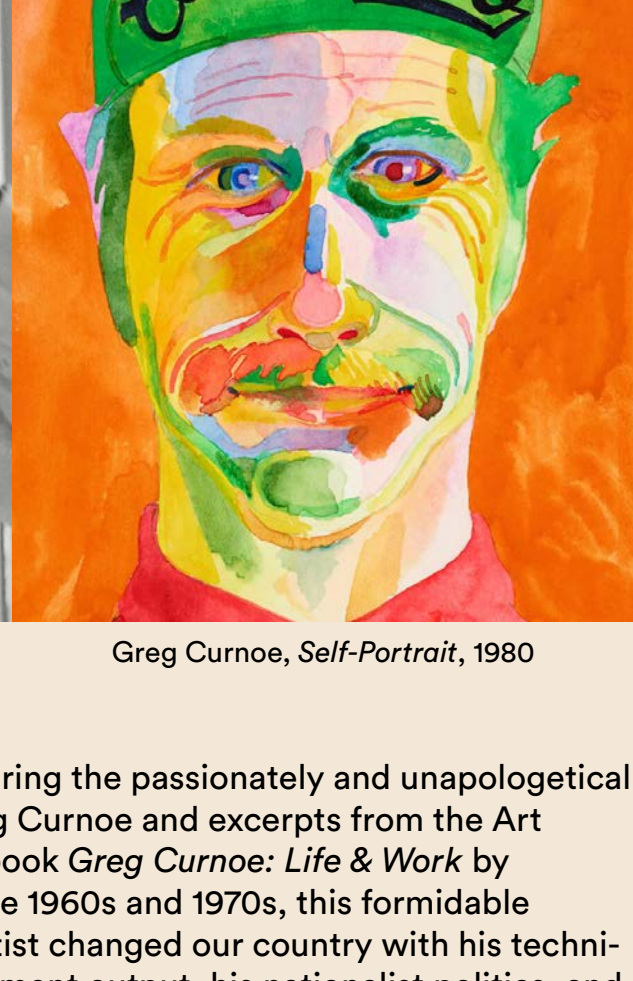


WHY WE LOVE GREG CURNOE'S ART

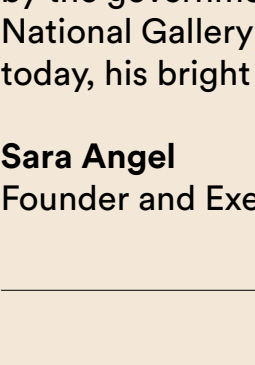
— Especially now, in COVID-19 Canada



Photo of Greg Curnoe, 1969



Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait*, 1980

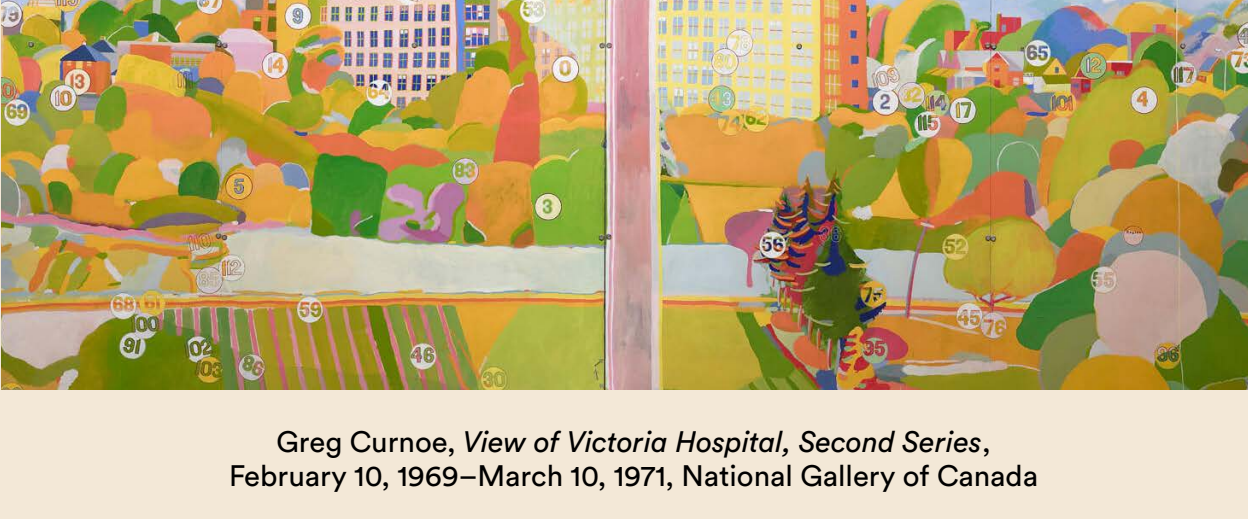


This week we're featuring the passionately and unapologetically Canadian artist Greg Curnoe and excerpts from the Art Canada Institute's book *Greg Curnoe: Life & Work* by Judith Rodger. In the 1960s and 1970s, this formidable multidisciplinary artist changed our country with his technicolour anti-establishment output, his nationalist politics, and his passionate belief in regionalism. He played a critical role in the arts community in his hometown of London, Ontario. With his art and his activism, Curnoe was so provocative that in 1968 he was censored by the government for a work that is now (in an ironic twist of fate) a gem at the National Gallery of Canada. In 1992, Curnoe died tragically and too young, but today, his bright art messages louder than ever.

Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

HE LOVED THE LOCAL

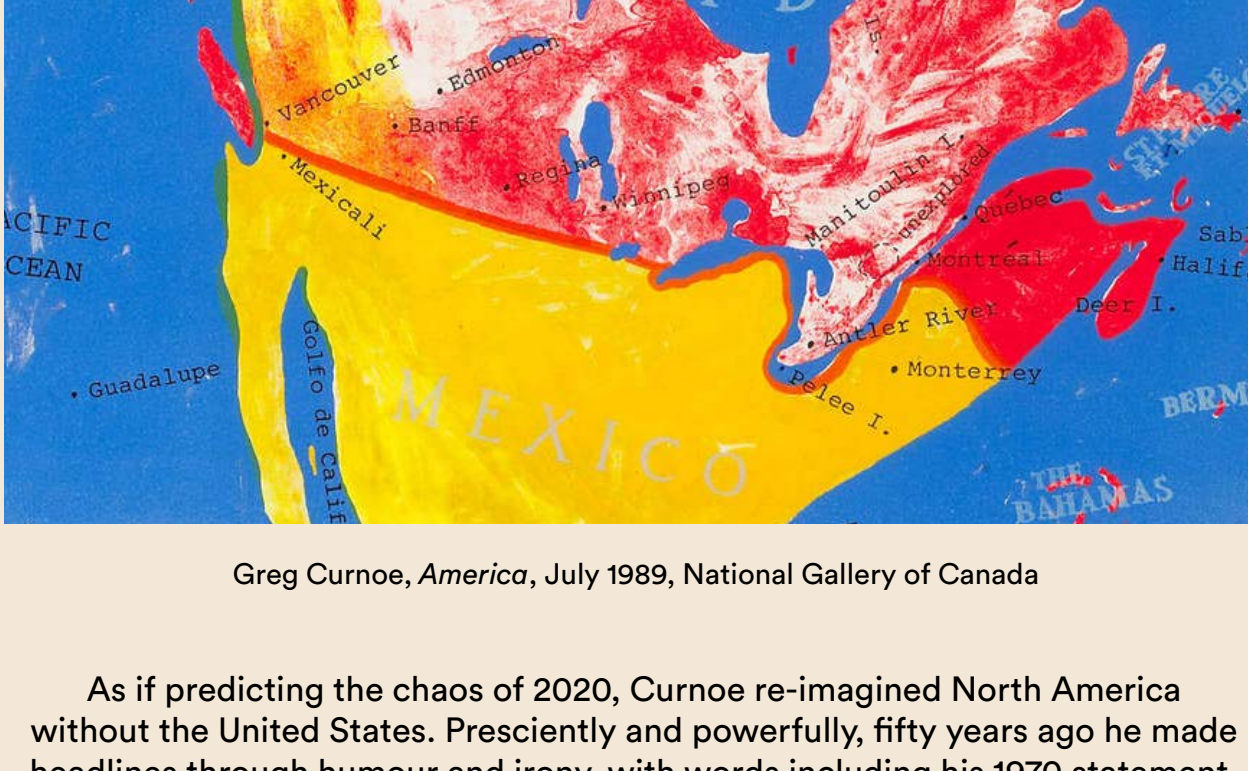


Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969–March 10, 1971, National Gallery of Canada

Watch this two-minute intro video that says it all and features vintage footage of Curnoe himself. It gets at the heart of Curnoe's desire to ground his art in daily encounters with his surroundings—rather than the latest international art trend. As he wrote in 1963, “We are not using regionalism as a gimmick, but rather as a collective noun to cover what so many painters, writers, and photographers have used—their own environment—something we don't do in Canada very much.”

[Watch Now](#)

HE RE-MAPPED NORTH AMERICA

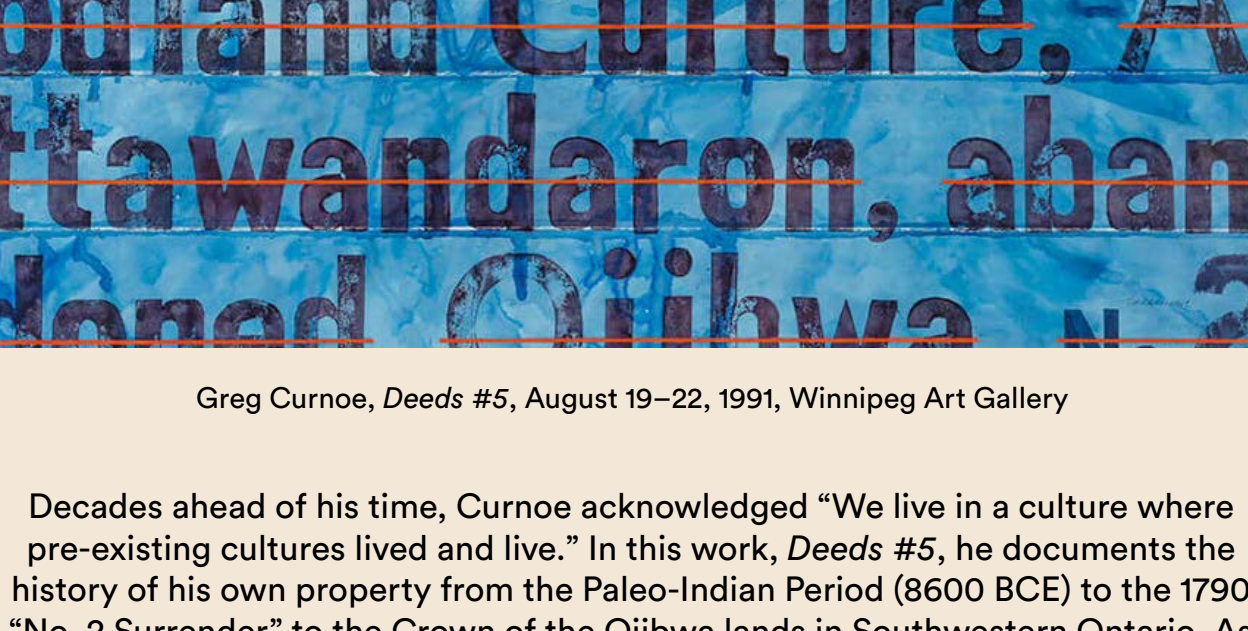


Greg Curnoe, *America*, July 1989, National Gallery of Canada

As if predicting the chaos of 2020, Curnoe re-imagined North America without the United States. Presciently and powerfully, fifty years ago he made headlines through humour and irony, with words including his 1970 statement, “All Canadian atlases must show Canada's southern border to be with Mexico. Bridges & tunnels must be built between Canada & Mexico.” It was a belief that he carried for many years and into several works, such as this one—*America*.

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HE CONFRONTED CULTURAL IMPERIALISM



Greg Curnoe, *Deeds #5*, August 19–22, 1991, Winnipeg Art Gallery

Decades ahead of his time, Curnoe acknowledged “We live in a culture where pre-existing cultures lived and live.” In this work, *Deeds #5*, he documents the history of his own property from the Paleo-Indian Period (8600 BCE) to the 1790 “No. 2 Surrender” to the Crown of the Ojibwa lands in Southwestern Ontario. As archaeologist Neal Ferris has stated, “Until Greg Curnoe's monumental effort to track down, follow up and piece together the personal biographies and family histories of the Native people signing the Southwestern Ontario land surrenders of the 18th and 19th centuries, little had been done to make sense of who most of those signatories were, or their roles in local and regional communities.”

[Read More](#)

HE SET A NEW STANDARD FOR NATIONAL ART



Greg Curnoe, *Large Colour Wheel*, 1980, National Gallery of Canada

Watch Judith Rodger's talk on “What Makes Curnoe's Art Canadian.” Rodger, author of *Greg Curnoe: Life & Work*, is an art historian, adjunct professor at Western University, and a cultural leader who knew her subject personally and professionally. Here, she explains how Curnoe was instrumental in fostering and developing a creative milieu that inspired other local artists to produce their own works and put London Regionalism on the map.

[Watch Now](#)

CENSORSHIP NEVER STOPPED HIM



Greg Curnoe, *Homage to the R 34* [the Dorval mural], October 1967–March 1968, National Gallery of Canada

This detail is from *Homage to the R 34*, the largest work Curnoe produced and a commission for the international arrivals tunnel at Montreal's international airport in Dorval, Quebec. Only four days after the 26-panel work was installed, riot of protest led to its removal. Curnoe said *Homage to the R 34* was an antimilitaristic statement—it was conceived in the middle of the Vietnam War.

But its powerful content (including U.S. president Lyndon Johnson with a severed hand) was too much for audiences who argued it was too anti-American for the location. Though suppressed, Curnoe kept making art and today *Homage to the R 34* is an esteemed part of the National Gallery of Canada collection.

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RAZZLE-DAZZLE COLOUR



Greg Curnoe, *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, 1965–66, National Gallery of Canada

Curnoe was about colour—saturated, intense, and insistent—something that we can't get enough of right now. With *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, as Judith Rodger puts it, he produced a piece that “overwhelms the viewer with its dazzling, pulsating colours and very large scale.” Curnoe described the mixed-media *without any logical order*” and it has many elements that would become signatures of the artist's work: a found object (the hotel sign); a comic-book style figure (the Dick Tracy character on the right-hand side); and surprising hues (the green hands and hair of the piano player).

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We hope that you loved these works by Greg Curnoe as much as we do. If you enjoyed this newsletter, please share it.

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Image Credits: [1] Greg Curnoe wearing a jacket with a “NO” badge, 1969, photograph by Don Vincent. [2] Greg Curnoe, *Self-Portrait*, 1980, watercolour on paper, 30.5 x 22.5 cm, private collection. [3] Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969–March 10, 1971, oil, rubber stamp and ink, graphite, and wallpaper on plywood, in Plexiglas strip frame, with audiotape, tape player, loudspeakers, and eight-page text (photocopied from a rubber-stamped notebook), 243.8 x 487 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [4] Greg Curnoe, *America*, July 1989, trial proof II state 2, colour lithograph on wove paper, printed by Don Holman, 73.9 x 57.6 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [5] Greg Curnoe, *Deeds #5*, August 19–22, 1991, stamp pad ink, poster paint, graphite, watercolour on paper, 110 x 168 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery. [6] Greg Curnoe, *Large Colour Wheel*, 1980, watercolour and graphite on paper, 189 x 189 cm, National Gallery of Canada. [7] Greg Curnoe, *Homage to the R 34* [the Dorval mural], October 1967–March 1968, bostik urethane enamel paint on plywood and steel, propellers, metal screens, and electric motors, 26 panels of irregular dimensions installed in three units: 295 x 1551 x 25.5 cm; 195 x 1109.9 x 25.5 cm; 191.5 x 492.7 x 2.5 cm (overall length 32.2 m). Commissioned by the Department of Transport, Ottawa, for the Montreal International Airport, Dorval, Quebec; collection of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, since 1998. [8] Greg Curnoe, *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*, 1965–66, oil on plywood with hotel sign with incandescent lights, 259.7 x 372.1 x 29 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.