

# FRESH STARTS

## ELEVEN ARTISTIC REINVENTIONS

*Galvanized by inspiration and creative reinvention, these Canadian visual artists steered their practices in dramatically different directions*



We hope this year will be abundant in optimism and new beginnings. In thinking about fresh starts, we were inspired to turn our attention to Canadian artists who redefined themselves with creative breakthroughs and unexpected self-reinventions. Looking ahead, ACI is excited to share upcoming projects, educational resources, and books—in our continuing mission to champion a multi-vocal history of Canadian art. In the spirit of new beginnings and quantum leaps in creativity, our first newsletter of the year celebrates eleven innovative transformations—each one radically altering the course of an artist's career and adding to Canada's cultural legacy. Wishing you many new beginnings in the months ahead and a happy 2021.

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

### LAWREN HARRIS



*Mt. Lefroy*, 1930, McMichael Canadian Art Collection



*Abstraction*, c.1964, private collection



Group of Seven member Lawrence Harris (1885–1970) is best known for his stark depictions of the northern Canadian landscape like *Mt. Lefroy*, 1930 (left), whose snowy mountain peak is illuminated by sunlight. But in his search for a “deeper and more universal expression”—an interest Harris developed after he was introduced to philosophy, a mystical branch of religious philosophy, while studying in Germany from 1904 to 1907—he began creating abstract paintings in the mid-1930s, and continued to do so until the 1960s, the final decade of his life, when he painted the luminous *Abstraction*, c.1964 (right), comprised of overlapping yellow and blue circles that may have been inspired by the light and movement of celestial bodies.

### JESSIE OONARK



*Drying Fish*, 1961, Pehelky Fine Arts



*Untitled (Spirit Figures)*, c.1970, Katilvik



*Drying Fish*, 1961 (left), one of the earliest works by the Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake) artist Jessie Oonark (1906–1985), draws on the celebrated Inuit artist's memories of traditional camp life. Oonark had only begun drawing two years earlier, yet her dynamic figures are confidently rendered using bold, curving lines harmoniously arranged into a lively composition. In the late 1960s, Oonark's practice shifted and she started making large-scale wall hangings, often with shamanic and transformation imagery. *Untitled (Spirit Figures)*, c.1970 (right), features a symmetrical arrangement of birds, hybrid human-animal figures, and figures in traditional clothing surrounded by a border of repeating red ulu forms. In a further display of her mastery of textiles, in 1973 Oonark created her largest hanging (373 x 601 cm), which is displayed in the foyer of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.

### GERSHON ISKOWITZ



*Korban*, c.1952, McMaster Museum of Art

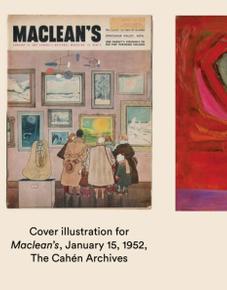


*Lowlands No. 9*, 1970, Vancouver Art Gallery

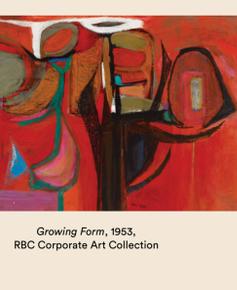


Upon immigrating to Canada in 1948, the renowned Polish Canadian painter and Holocaust survivor **Gershon Iskowitz** (1920 or 1921–1988) primarily created memory works about his life in Europe before the Second World War—including *Korban*, c.1952 (left). In 1967 Iskowitz had an epiphany when he visited Churchill, Manitoba, and observed the sub-Arctic landscape and the coast of Hudson Bay from an aircraft. The aerial views inspired him to develop a new semi-abstract style of painting that garnered him international renown. Created shortly after his trip to Manitoba, *Lowlands No. 9*, 1970 (right), appears to depict two land masses bordering a vast body of water—a sea of blue punctuated with colourful accents of red, green, and yellow.

### AGNES MARTIN



*Self-Portrait*, c.1947, private collection



*Untitled #13*, 1975, private collection

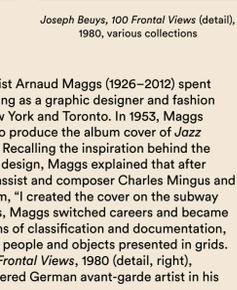


With *Self-Portrait*, c.1947 (left), the celebrated Saskatchewan-born painter **Agnes Martin** (1912–2004) presents a quiet and introspective depiction of herself—an example of her early work as a teacher of figurative painting at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. In the early 1960s, Martin began searching for a mode of non-objective painting that would allow her to express a spectrum of emotional states. What followed were her first grid paintings, works that she explained describe “the subtle emotions that are beyond words.” *Untitled #13*, 1975 (right), with its rows of vertical bands, typifies the abstract paintings that occupied Martin for forty years and established her reputation as a leading postwar artist.

### BERTRAM BROOKER



*Alleluiah*, 1929, National Gallery of Canada



*Manitoba Willows*, c.1929–31, private collection



Among the earliest abstract painters in Canada to exhibit non-figurative work in the 1920s, **Bertram Brooker** (1888–1955) created *Alleluiah*, 1929 (left), a 1920s series *Field Samples*. For this project, Jungen, who is of Dane-Zaa and Swiss ancestry, asked people on the street to draw something that they associated with Indigenous people, and then replicated the images in murals. On a visit to New York not long after, Jungen drew a connection between the display of products in Niketown and that of Indigenous objects in the American Museum of Natural History. Soon Jungen began his ground-breaking series *Prototypes for New Understanding*, 1998–2005, in which he used deconstructed Nike Air Jordan shoes to create sculptures that resemble Northwest Coast masks. In *Prototype for New Understanding #5*, 1999 (right), black, white, and red sneakers are transformed into a face with a red-rimmed mouth and pair of eyes.

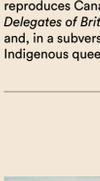
### BRIAN JUNGEN



*Field Sample of Coastal Motif*, 1998, Catriona Jeffries Gallery



*Prototype for New Understanding #5*, 1999, Catriona Jeffries Gallery



*Field Sample of Coastal Motif*, 1998 (left), is a rudimentary image of a hybrid bird-fish from BC-based artist Brian Jungen's (b.1970) series *Field Samples*. For this project, Jungen, who is of Dane-Zaa and Swiss ancestry, asked people on the street to draw something that they associated with Indigenous people, and then replicated the images in murals. On a visit to New York not long after, Jungen drew a connection between the display of products in Niketown and that of Indigenous objects in the American Museum of Natural History. Soon Jungen began his ground-breaking series *Prototypes for New Understanding*, 1998–2005, in which he used deconstructed Nike Air Jordan shoes to create sculptures that resemble Northwest Coast masks. In *Prototype for New Understanding #5*, 1999 (right), black, white, and red sneakers are transformed into a face with a red-rimmed mouth and pair of eyes.

### OSCAR CAHÉN



Cover illustration for *Maclean's*, January 15, 1952, The Cahén Archives

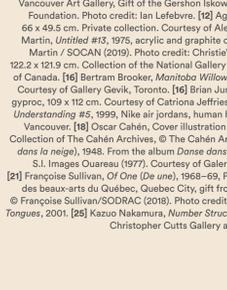


*Growing Form*, 1953, RBC Corporate Art Collection



Shortly after Copenhagen-born **Oscar Cahén** (1916–1956) arrived in Quebec in 1940 following an escape from Nazi Europe, he became a highly successful magazine illustrator. For the cover of a winter 1952 issue of *Maclean's* (left), Cahén created an image that poked fun at clichéd depictions of the snowy Canadian landscape by depicting a family in their winter coats gathered around the single summer landscape painting. In the late 1940s, Cahén took up a dramatically new approach to art-making, grappling with his traumatic past. Co-founding the abstract artists' group Painters Eleven in 1953, Cahén quickly became a leading figure in Canadian modern art with boldly coloured works such as *Growing Form*, 1953.

### ARNAUD MAGGS



*Jazz at Massey Hall*, 1953, various collections



*100 Frontal Views (detail)*, 1980, various collections



The Montreal-born artist Arnaud Maggs (1926–2012) spent his early career working as a graphic designer and fashion photographer in New York and Toronto. In 1953, Maggs was commissioned to produce the album cover of *Jazz at Massey Hall* (left). Recalling the inspiration behind the lyrical, semi-abstract design, Maggs explained that after meeting jazz double bassist and composer Charles Mingus and listening to music with him, “I created the cover on the subway ride back to my studio.” In his late forties, Maggs switched careers and became a professional artist. Interested in systems of classification and documentation, he is known for his serial photographs of people and objects presented in grids. For his famous piece *Joseph Beuys, 100 Frontal Views*, 1980 (detail, right), Maggs repeatedly photographed the revered German avant-garde artist in his trademark fedora and fishing vest.

### FRANÇOISE SULLIVAN



*Dance in the Snow (Danse dans la neige)*, 1948



*Of One (De une)*, 1968–69, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec



A pioneer of modern dance in Canada, **Françoise Sullivan** (b.1923) *snow* her acclaimed performance artwork *Dance in the Snow (Danse dans la neige)* in February 1948 (left), shortly after returning to Montreal from her studies in New York. Part of an improvised sequence of dance solos, inspired by the seasons and featuring Sullivan, *Dance in the Snow* was filmed by **Jean Paul Riopelle** (1923–2002) and photographed by Maurice Perron (1924–1999). In the 1950s, with young children to care for, Sullivan found it increasingly difficult to continue her work as a dancer and choreographer and began working in an entirely new medium: sculpture. Inventing new ways to express energy and movement, as in the translucent, spiral-shaped piece *Of One (De une)*, 1968–69 (right), Sullivan quickly drew attention for her inspired and ingenious work.

### KENT MONKMAN



*Oh For a Thousand Tongues*, 2001, Collection of the artist



*The Daddies*, 2016, Collection of Christine Armstrong and Ifhan Rawji



In *Oh For a Thousand Tongues*, 2001 (left), part of Toronto-based Cree artist **Kent Monkman's** (b.1977) early series *The Prayer Language*, the painter layers Cree syllabics—borrowed from his parents' hymn book—over a shadowy, homoerotic image of men wrestling. But Monkman ultimately concluded that his investigation of the intersection of Indigenous and European cultures, sexuality, and power in this series of semi-abstract paintings was “too personal and cryptic.” Turning to representational art-making, Monkman developed his provocative practice of reinterpreting paintings within the canon of Western art history from an Indigenous perspective. With *The Daddies*, 2016, Monkman reproduces Canadian artist Robert Harris's (1849–1919) painting *Meeting of the Delegates of British North America to Settle the Terms of Confederation*, 1889, and, in a subversive gesture, inserts his alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle—an Indigenous queer presence—as the central subject of the scene.

### KAZUO NAKAMURA



*Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964, MacLaren Art Centre



*Number Structure No. 9*, 1984, Christopher Cutts Gallery



Painters Eleven member **Kazuo Nakamura** (1926–2002) depicted a dense forest bordering a bay in *Blue Reflections, B.C.*, 1964 (left), as part of a series of monochromatic, semi-abstract landscapes created in the 1950s and 60s. Orderly layers of vertical brushstrokes comprise the reflections on the water's surface, revealing Nakamura's interest in the underlying structures and patterns of nature. In the early 1970s, Nakamura abandoned his previous styles of painting and dedicated the next twenty-five years to his Number Structure works, such as *Number Structure No. 9*, 1984. Comprising strings of painted numbers arranged into grids, the Number Structures represent the culmination of Nakamura's lifelong search for a “fundamental universal pattern in all art and nature.”

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