ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

LIVING IN COLOUR
CANADIAN CHROMA

Beat the winter blues with these bright works. Here are twelve artists drawn to sumptuous hues and the splendour of colour.

Greg Curnoe, *Large Colour Wheel*, 1980

This week the Art Canada Institute is taking a cue from Michael Gibson and his eponymous London, Ontario, gallery where the brilliant show *Chroma* is currently on view (and equally fantastic in its online format). The exhibition named for the Greek word for colour offers a break from the monochromatic monotony of February to bring much-needed colour into our lives. Moved by Gibson's uplifting concept we are offering our own take on exploring colour by featuring Canadian art that unabashedly celebrates its visual and emotional power. From William Perehudoff's lyrical colour field paintings to Gathie Falk's surreal monochromatic sculptures to Robert Davidson's geometric abstractions that draw on traditional Haida knowledge, these works demonstrate the elemental nature of radiant shades and their startling power to evoke emotion, excitement, and joy.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

PLASTIC BOUQUET

by Sarah Anne Johnson

Winnipeg artist Sarah Anne Johnson's (b.1976) close-up shot of hands delicately holding purple orchids against a background of wild plants evokes welcome thoughts of spring and new growth. Yet, as the work's title indicates, the flowers are artificial—Johnson has glued them onto the surface of the photograph. *Plastic Bouquet*, 2018, prompts us to question our relationship to nature and photography, and to examine our contradictory desires for both photographic authenticity and idealized representations of nature. This work is from Johnson's series Rosy-Fingered Dawn, 2018, in which she applied unconventional materials—such as cotton balls, holographic paint, and spray paint—to her photographs to "mock traditional ideas of high art and to magnify dark truths about our relationship with the environment."

Learn more about this artist

UNTITLED

by Alex Sheriff

In this collage from Oakville-born, Los Angeles-based Sri Lankan Trinidadian Canadian artist Alex Sheriff's (b.1988) series Closing Parties, 2020, bright, saturated colours suggest a celebratory event. The eccentrically-dressed figures standing on opposite sides of the red carpet appear to be waiting for their glamorous guests to arrive. However, a closer look at Sheriff's specific colour choices reveal apocalyptic undertones. The eclipsed sun, an unnatural shade of orange, is surrounded by plumes of smoke. On the left three wilting palm trees stand amidst red tree stumps that foreshadow their own demise. Sheriff's series was inspired by the events of recent years, including "the toppling of structures both literal and figurative, the painting of new ideas over old ones, the rising temperatures of the planet, chaotic weather, mass extinctions."

See the virtual exhibition of Alex Sheriff's show *Closing Parties* at Patel Brown.

BOOTCASE WITH 6 ORANGE BROGUES

by Gathie Falk

Devoting her practice to the "veneration of the ordinary" for more than fifty years, Vancouver-based artist Gathie Falk (b.1923) is celebrated for her iconic and often brightly coloured sculptures of fruit, clothing, and shoes. Falk's profound appreciation for common objects stems from her experiences of being raised by Russian immigrants on the Prairies during economically challenging times. Created in 1973, this piece, consisting of six ceramic brogues displayed in separate compartments in a cabinet, is painted entirely in a vivid, commanding orange. Falk's use of monochromatic colour transforms the shoes into surreal objects. In displaying them in a "bootcase"—similar to a bookcase—the artist draws connections between books and shoes as repositories of journeys past while transforming them by making their veneer a glorious shade of orange.

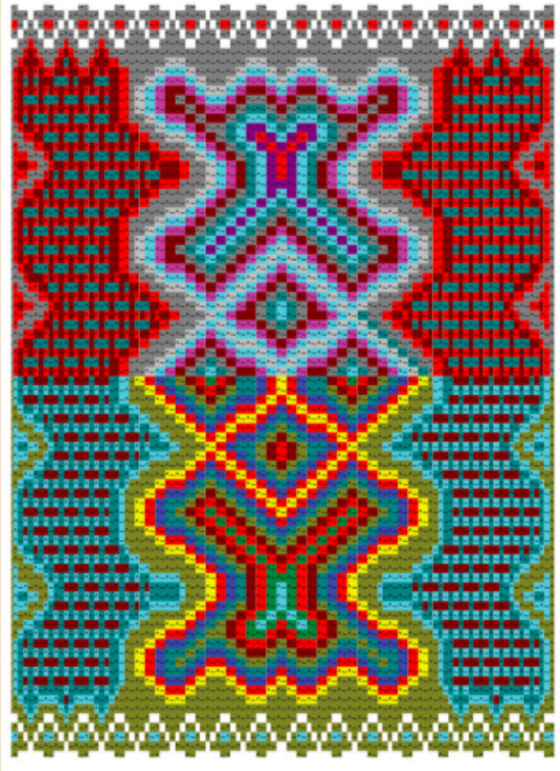
Gathie Falk: Life & Work by Michelle Jacques will be published by the Art Canada Institute in 2022.

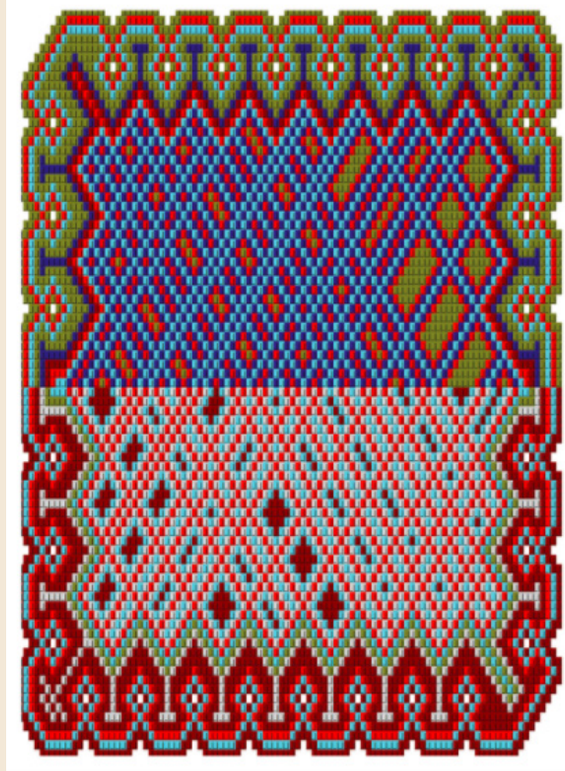
1114.2

and

1114.4

by Shaheer Zazai





Afghan Canadian artist Shaheer Zazai's intricately patterned prints are inspired by the traditional carpets of his ancestors. Creating his own designs in Microsoft Word, Zazai mimics the painstaking process of carpet-making by typing a character for every knot of carpet. Through his skilled modulation of the rich blues, reds, greens, and yellows commonly seen in traditional rugs, Zazai creates highly textured, dynamic compositions that are as mesmerizing up close as they are from afar as can be seen in these works from 2018. Encompassing digital media as well as painting, the Toronto artist's practice explores the development of cultural identity in the present geopolitical climate and diaspora.

Learn more about this artist

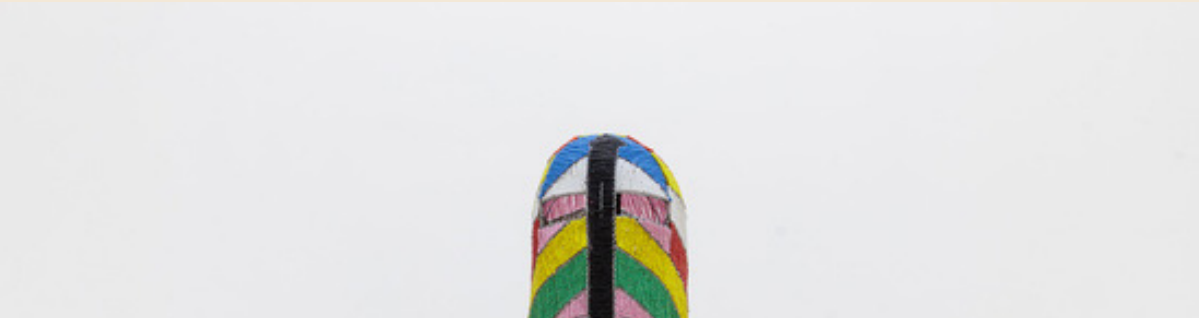
AC-85-55

by William Perehudoff

In this joyful painting by renowned Saskatchewan-born artist William Perehudoff (1918–2013), lyrical dabs of pure colour stand out against an amorphous grey background. The modernist painter's foray into pure abstraction occurred in the early 1960s, after he attended the Emma Lake Artists' Workshops. Influenced by American art critic Clement Greenberg and American colour field painter Kenneth Noland (1924–2010)—who both led classes at Emma Lake—Perehudoff began experimenting with the way colourful forms interact with each other and their relationship to space. Soon after, he developed a technique for staining the canvas, as in the background of *AC-85-55*. Placing the canvas flat on the floor, Perehudoff would use tools such as sponges and rollers to apply the acrylic paint. This technique enabled the artist to create the illusion of free-floating colourful forms existing in three-dimensional space.

JOUVERT KNIGHT

by Curtis Talwst Santiago



The Edmonton-born Trinidadian Canadian artist Curtis Talwst Santiago's (b.1979) striking sculpture *Jouvert Knight*, 2018, is a life-sized suit of armour covered with colourful beaded stripes. It is part of a body of work, entitled By Sea, that was inspired by Santiago's online discovery of an African knight in the Renaissance painting *Chafariz d'El-Rey* (*The King's Fountain*), set in Moorish Portugal around 1570 to 1580. Captivated by this figure, Santiago relocated to Lisbon to study the painting in person, as well as to research Black royalty, Moorish dynasties, and his own ancestral heritage. In the recent CBC documentary on his art Santiago says, "There's a childhood part of me that is interested in knights. And I always remember feeling, well I've never seen any black knights.... If I can't see representation of myself or my brothers as the heroes, well I have to make it myself."

Watch the CBC documentary here

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TRAIN THROUGH TOWN

by Maud Lewis

In this winter landscape painting by celebrated Nova Scotia folk artist Maud Lewis (1903–1970), areas of bright, unmodulated colour direct our attention to the red train passing through town, the couple and horse patiently waiting in the foreground, and the carriage on the right speeding away towards the buildings in the distance. Juxtaposed with the stillness of the simplified, flattened forms are the trail of grey steam escaping the train's smoke stack, the gentleman's billowing orange scarf in the foreground, and the galloping horse on the right. Finding endless inspiration in her surroundings in Marshalltown, Digby County, where she lived in a cabin on the side of a highway, Lewis painted hundreds of charming scenes of country life like this one.

Maud Lewis: Life & Work by Ray Cronin will be published by the Art Canada Institute later this year in collaboration with the

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

UNTITLED

by Robert Davidson

This bold painting from 2013 shows leading Northwest Coast artist Robert Davidson (b.1946) brilliantly interpreting traditional Haida motifs through the language of hard-edge geometric abstraction. Smoothly painted fields of blue, red, and yellow are arranged into a reverse split U-form—a shape often appearing in Haida art to represent a whale's fin. Davidson has isolated and enlarged the motif, highlighting the relationships between line, form, and colour. Of Haida and Tlingit descent, the master sculptor, painter, jeweller, and printmaker comes from a long line of respected artists, including his great grandfather, Daxhiigang (Charles Edenshaw) (1839–1924), and studied sculpture and design under the revered Iljuwas Bill Reid (1920–1998).

Learn more about this artist

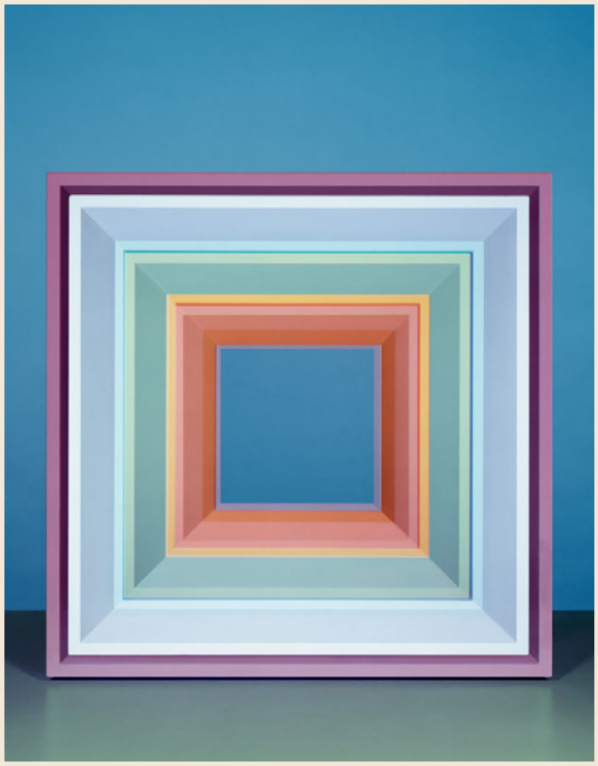
Read more about Davidson's work with Reid in ACI's book *Iljuwas Bill Reid: Life & Work* by Gerald McMaster.

CFAAL 1036

and

CFAAL 1042

by Jessica Eaton



Cfaal 1036 and *Cfaal 1042*, 2018, by Montreal-based artist Jessica Eaton (b.1977) recall the famed series by the German-American Josef Albers (1888–1976) and his iconic Homage to the Square paintings—only Eaton's works are analog photographs. Consisting of nested cubes in varying jewel tones set on a flat surface, the austere yet luminous images from her series Cubes for Albers and Lewitt, 2010–ongoing, are the result of a highly calculated photographic process. Investigating additive colour theory as well as the history and possibilities of photography for the past fifteen years, Eaton makes pictures that challenge how we perceive colour.

Learn more about this artist

HOT SPIDER

by Saimaiyu Akesuk

Displaying her unconventional use of colour, *Hot Spider*, 2015, a fantastical lithograph by Kinngait (Cape Dorset) artist Saimaiyu Akesuk (b.1988), presents a bright orange spider with blue, pink, and green stripes decorating its rotund body and head. Her dense cross-hatching produces a textured surface of vibrating hues that reimagines the typically fearsome spider as a charming creature. Part of the fourth generation of Inuit artists working at Kinngait Studios, Saimaiyu has developed a bold drawing style and preference for large figures with an adventurous and playful approach to colour that has brought a notoriety to her art.

Learn more about this artist

FORMATIVE COLOUR ACTIVITY

by Jock Macdonald

Created in 1934, this radiant rendering of a flower was Jock Macdonald's (1897–1960) first semi-abstract painting—a breakthrough that would lead him to become the first painter to exhibit abstract art in Vancouver. In contrast to the sturdy stalk on the left, the multi-coloured flower petals swirl and expand across the surface of the canvas. This magnificent study of colour and pure form was the culmination of an exercise in which Macdonald, a member of Painters Eleven, focused on a portion of a still-life arrangement of flowers, abstracting the image by magnifying the details of it. In his classes at the British Columbia College of Arts Macdonald quoted from French painter Amédée Ozenfant (1886–1966): "A flower is no longer one of nature's smiles … but magnetic waves directed along certain axes, so rapid that they become matter, colour."

To learn more about this artwork, read ACI's *Jock Macdonald: Life & Work* by Joyce Zemans.

LARGE COLOUR WHEEL

by Greg Curnoe

This vibrant abstract painting by London artist Greg Curnoe (1936–1992) was inspired by the colour wheel, first developed in 1855 by French chemist Michel Chevreul to demonstrate the human perception of juxtaposed colours, particularly complementary ones. Passionate about both bright hues and cycling, Curnoe takes a playful approach to the colour wheel by filling the segments with painterly brushstrokes of intense shades. As well, he pays homage to notable artists who also studied colour theory—including Canadians Oscar Cahén (1916–1956) and Claude Tousignant (b.1932)—by painting their names in a segment of the wheel along with the date of a significant work by these painters.

To learn more about this artwork, read ACI's *Greg Curnoe: Life & Work* by Judith Rodger.

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Image Credits: **[1, 15]** Greg Curnoe, *Large Colour Wheel*, 1980, watercolour and graphite on paper, 189 x 189 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 2012 (no. 45631). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). **[2]** Sarah Anne Johnson, *Plastic Bouquet*, 2018, unique pigment print on archival paper with hand-applied textile mounted to Aluminum Composite Panel, 31.75 x 20.64 cm. © Sarah Anne Johnson. Courtesy Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto; Yossi Milo Gallery, New York. **[3]** Alex Sheriff, *Untitled*, 2020, paper collage. Courtesy of the artist. **[4]** Gathie Falk, *Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues*, 1973, glazed ceramic, painted wood, and glass, 71 x 95 x 16 cm. Photo: Site Photography. **[5]** Shaheer Zazai, *1114.2*, 2018, digital print on watercolour paper, produced in Microsoft Word, 27.94 x 35.56 cm. **[6]** Shaheer Zazai, *1114.4*, 2018, digital print on watercolour paper, produced in Microsoft Word, 27.94 x 35.56 cm. Courtesy of Patel Brown. **[7]** William Perehudoff, *AC-85-55*, n.d., acrylic on canvas, 81.28 x 81.28 cm. Private collection. **[8]** Curtis Talwst Santiago, *Jouvert Knight*, 2018, wire and beads, on steel armature, 208.3 x 61 x 61 cm. **[9]** Maud Lewis, *Train through Town*, n.d., mixed media on board, 30.5 x 35.6 cm. Courtesy of Cowley Abbott. **[10]** Robert Davidson, *Untitled*, 2013, acrylic on canvas 76.2 x 101.5 cm. Photo: Kenji Nagai. **[11]** Jessica Eaton, *Cfaal 1036*, 2018, photograph. Courtesy of the artist. **[12]** Jessica Eaton, *Cfaal 1042*, 2018, photograph. Courtesy of the artist. **[13]** Saimaiyu Akesuk, *Hot Spider*, 2015, lithograph, 76 x 56.7 cm. Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts. **[14]** Jock Macdonald, *Formative Colour Activity*, 1934, oil on canvas, 77 x 66.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1966 (no. 14979). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.