ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

MARCH 26, 2021

SENSATIONS OF SPRING
TWELVE CANADIAN WORKS

Captivated by the optimistic spirit of the new season, these pieces explore nature's magnificent reawakening and the continuity of cultural traditions

At last—spring has arrived. We can't get enough of the season and the hope its sunshine and warmth offers, along with re-openings and vaccinations, leaves on trees and flowers in gardens. It's a time of year that feels sprightly and refreshing, drawing us outdoors to see the Earth emerging from its chilly slumber. Canadian artists have captured the spirit of spring in all kinds of ways that reflect the festive feeling of the vernal days. Whether you're celebrating Nowruz, Passover, Easter, Ramadan, or simply the first plants in bloom, we hope you enjoy this selection that highlights the optimism that is now in the air.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

OXEN IN SPRING

by Maud Lewis

In this cheerful painting by the revered Nova Scotia painter and folk artist Maud Lewis (1901–1970), two enchanting yoked oxen are framed by red, pink, and yellow tulips and pink blossoming trees. Although the animals are equipped for work, Lewis emphasizes their beauty by bestowing them with long eye lashes, bright yellow bells around their necks, and yellow-tipped horns. *Oxen in Spring*, c.1960s, represents one of Lewis's favourite subjects—which also included people riding sleighs in winter, deer in the forest, and fluffy black cats. She delighted in repeatedly returning to this topic, with slight variations each time. Over the course of her career, Lewis's rural surroundings in Marshalltown remained her foremost source of inspiration.

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.

THE KINGDOM

by Matthew Wong

The Kingdom, 2017, by Edmonton-based artist Matthew Wong (1984–2019) presents the brilliant colours and patterns of nature in spring. The forest floor is awash with blooming flowers composed of lively dabs of paint. Deeply engaged in the history of painting, Wong drew inspiration from the Post-Impressionist, Fauvist, and Nabi painters to produce vibrant, meditative, and mystical landscapes like *The Kingdom*.

A pathway on the right leads to a mysterious, shrine-like arched enclosure near the painting's centre, where a small white figure in a headdress stands. Despite the dark sky—partially visible between the tall and slender birch trees—the forest interior is magically illuminated.

Learn more about this artist

THE FOUR QUESTIONS ON JEANNE MANCE STREET

by Jacqueline Kott-Wolle

In this depiction of a Passover seder—which Jews will celebrate this Saturday and Sunday—Toronto-born, Illinois-based artist Jacqueline Kott-Wolle (b.1969) captures the joys of family gatherings and rituals. Based on a vintage family photograph, Kott-Wolle's painting shows multiple generations seated at a dining table and looking on as a young girl reads the Haggadah, the guide for the Passover seder. *The Four Questions on Jeanne Mance Street*, 2019, belongs to Kott-Wolle's series of thirty-five paintings entitled Growing Up Jewish – Art and Storytelling. Drawing on decades of family photos for inspiration, the artist, who is a grandchild of Holocaust survivors, celebrates the freedom to practice one's religious identity and rituals in her series.

Learn more about this artist

GATHERING / SPRING FISHING

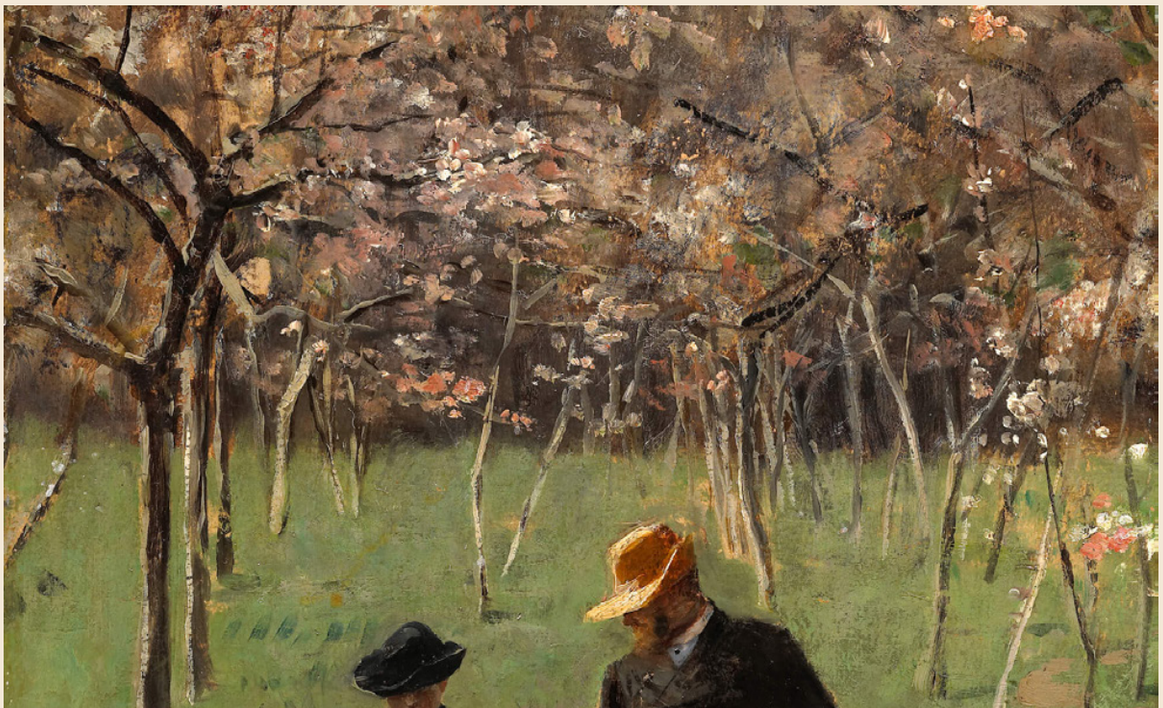
by Jimmy Manning

This photographic diptych by Kinngait (Cape Dorset) photographer, drawer, and carver Jimmy Manning (b.1951) comprises aerial views of Inuit ice fishing in his community during spring. In the image on the left, figures lie face down in the snow and practice the traditional Inuit method of ice fishing. Peering into small holes that they have bored in the frozen surface, they see the fish swimming below while simultaneously maneuvering short sticks with lines attached. In the image on the right, a large group of people gather on the ice with their snowmobiles and fishing equipment. Manning's documentary photographs emphasize the strong sense of community and close connection to the vast landscape that encompass contemporary Northern life.

Learn more about this artist

IN THE ORCHARD (SPRING)

by William Brymner



In this intimate scene by Scottish-born, Montreal-based artist William Brymner (1855–1925), a man and woman engage in a deep discussion as they stroll through a springtime orchard in blossom. As her companion speaks, the woman gazes downward while absentmindedly carrying her open umbrella at her side. Oblivious to their picturesque surroundings, the pair piques our curiosity about the nature of their conversation. To create this intriguing painting Brymner combined an academic technique with Impressionism—both styles he learned while studying abroad in Paris. Whereas the figures are well-defined, the blooms on the trees are represented by dabs of pale pinks and whites, demonstrating the artist's resistance to limiting himself to one particular style.

Learn more about this artwork in ACI's *William Brymner: Life & Work* by Jocelyn Anderson.

MONUMENT FOR EAST VANCOUVER

by Ken Lum

With Easter approaching, *Monument to East Vancouver*, 2010, a luminous public sculpture by Vancouver-born, Philadelphia-based conceptual artist Ken Lum (b.1956) comes to mind. Consisting of a cross shape framing the intersecting words "VAN" and "EAST," the 17.5-metre-tall sign is made of steel and light-emitting diodes that automatically switch on from dusk to dawn. Lum's art investigates the complexities of class, race, labour, and language, and here he pays tribute to East Vancouver by monumentalizing a symbol of pride within the region. The work reimagines on a grand scale a graffiti symbol commonly seen in East Vancouver and possibly originating within the area's once-substantial Roman Catholic population.

Learn more about this work

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KITCHEN DOOR WITH URSULA

by Christiane Pflug

In *Kitchen Door with Ursula*, 1966, Toronto painter Christiane Pflug (1936–1972) frames a wintery scene outdoors, yet at the same time, the reflection shows a lush garden with the artist's daughter reading. Such a contrast of seasons is an impossible perspective, but Pflug was interested in how painting could take us beyond reality, noting, "Something is revealed that otherwise would not be known." In this work, the juxtaposition speaks to the reality of early springtime, when threats of snowfalls still linger even as the warmth of the sunshine hints at the coming summer. Widely admired for her talent for her realist technique, Pflug often focussed on spaces in and near her home as her subject, inviting her viewers to share her perspective as she looked out at her neighbourhood.

Christiane Pflug: Life & Work by Georgiana Uhlyarik is one of the Art Canada Institute's upcoming titles.

Learn more about this work

MY DAUGHTER'S FIRST STEPS

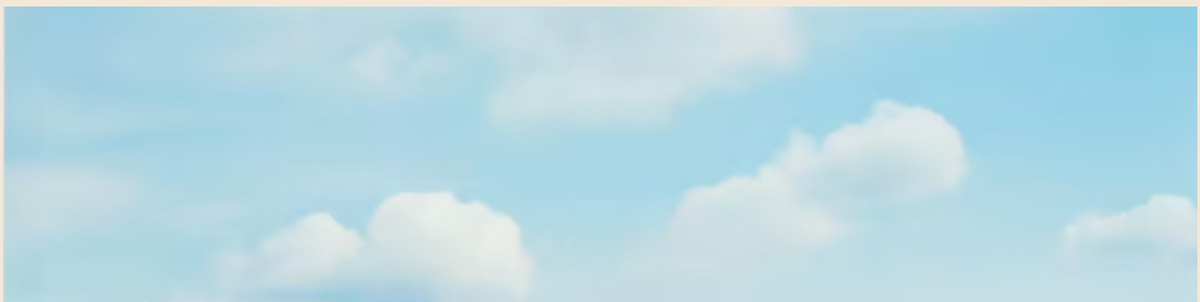
by Napachie Pootoogook

In *My Daughter's First Steps*, 1990, acclaimed Kinngait (Cape Dorset) artist Napachie Pootoogook (1938–2002) depicts herself as a young mother supporting her infant daughter as she learns to walk. Unencumbered by her parka and boots, the girl takes her first steps towards the mesmerizing deep blue water nearby, seemingly drawn to the beauty of nature in spring. Pootoogook's body appears monumental, its contours echoing the shape of the mountains in the background. The artist focused on traditional Inuit life, particularly the experiences of women, including her grandmother and mother, the legendary Pitseolak Ashoona (c.1904/8–1983). Her masterful and dynamic integration of figure and landscape reflects her decades-long dedication to her artistic practice in drawing and printmaking, which she began in the late 1950s.

Learn more about Napachie Pootoogook and Pitseolak Ashoona in ACI's *Pitseolak Ashoona: Life & Work* by Christine Lalonde.

SCHOOLYARD, VANCOUVER – SPRING, 2011

by Jeff Wall



In this photograph of children playing in a schoolyard on a sunny spring day, Vancouver-based Photoconceptualist artist Jeff Wall (b.1946) employs his signature practice of photographing staged scenes of everyday life, using non-professional models to recreate everyday moments—what he describes as "near documentary." The figures appear to be in motion, yet their immaculate shadows suggest they are in fact still. In the foreground, a group of similarly aged boys are engaged in an unknown game. Combining the vivid colours of painting with the spontaneous quality of photography, Wall creates multilayered images that urge us to look at them more closely and to "contemplate the effects and meanings of documentary photographs."

Learn more about this work

SPRING OF LIFE

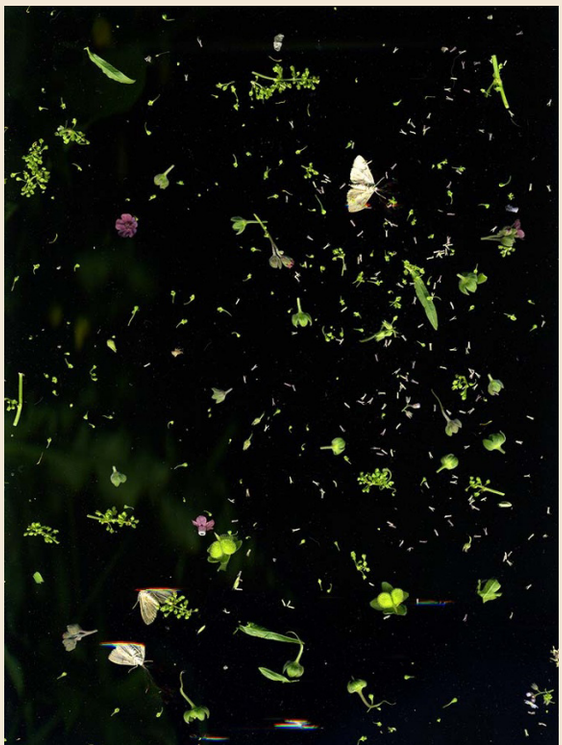
by Lorraine Gilbert

The sublime photograph *Spring of Life*, 2002–3, by French-born, Ottawa-based artist Lorraine Gilbert (b.1966) depicts three hikers exploring the magnificent landscape of Iceland in spring, when the snow slowly retreats and the barren ground becomes vivid green. Although the image purports to document Gilbert's Icelandic walking expeditions with other artists, not everything is as it appears: she has selected fragments of different documentary photographs that she took of the expedition and placed people and natural features in different locations than where they were shot, creating a composite image that blends fact and fiction. *Spring of Life* is part of Gilbert's series Without a Trace, which explores her interest in the difference between the landscape as an ideal vision of nature and as lived experience.

Learn more about this artist

JUNE 18

by Sara Angelucci



June 18, White Clover, Vetch, Black Medic, Hound's Tongue, Forget-me-nots

June 18 (2), Moth with an assortment of seeds, flowers, leaves

Taken on a late spring evening, these captivating images by Toronto artist Sara Angelucci (b.1966) reveal the invisible activities of plants and insects. Exploring a protected provincial forest near her cottage in Southern Ontario, Angelucci carefully waded through the tall grasses, using a scanner and its light to detect and record specimens. The image on the left shows flowers on the verge of blooming, while on the right, moths rest on celestial seeds. Part of the series Nocturnal Botanical Ontario, these pictures are not merely plant still lifes but reveal deep colonial histories. The images present Indigenous plants intermingled with foreign/cultivated and invasive species and pose the difficult questions: "To whom does the land really belong? And how did these plants come to be entwined?"

Learn more about this work

See this work at CONTACT

PINK MOON

by Jack Bush

Pink Moon, 1974, by Jack Bush (1909–1977), the celebrated Toronto-based Painters Eleven member, refers to the first full moon in April. The richly textured teal background may be interpreted as the sky, yet the diagonal strip of colour abutting the pink crescent challenges a literal reading of the work. As a Colour Field painter, Bush sought to express emotion through joyful hues, and with *Pink Moon* he pays tribute to the vitality of spring. Initially a landscape painter, Bush ventured into Colour Field painting in the 1950s after meeting the New York City art critic Clement Greenberg, who championed the abstract style.

Learn more about this artist

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PAST NEWSLETTERS

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Image Credits: **[1]** Maud Lewis, *Oxen in Spring*, c.1960s, oil on pulpboard. Private collection. © Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. **[2]** Matthew Wong, *The Kingdom*, 2017, oil on canvas, 121.92 x 182.88 cm. Courtesy of Karma. **[3]** Jacqueline Kott-Wolle, *The Four Questions on Jeanne Mance Street*, 2019, oil on canvas, 45.72 x 60.96 cm. Courtesy of the artist. **[4]** Jimmy Manning, *Gathering / Spring Fishing*, 1999–2000, colour photographs. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa. **[5]** William Brymner, *In the Orchard (Spring)*, 1892, oil on paperboard, 40.2 x 30.6 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. **[6]** Ken Lum, *Monument for East Vancouver*, 2010, concrete, steel, aluminum, impact modified acrylic, LED illumination, 17.5 m, site specific installation, Vancouver. **[7]** Christiane Pflug, *Kitchen Door with Ursula*, 1966, oil on canvas, 164.8 x 193.2 cm. Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. **[8]** Napachie Pootoogook, *My Daughter's First Steps*, 1990, lithograph on paper. Collection of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, on loan to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. **[9]** Jeff Wall, *Schoolyard, Vancouver – Spring, 2011*, ink-jet print, 48.7 x 62.1 cm. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. **[11]** Lorraine Gilbert, *Spring of Life*, 2002–2003, chromogenic print, 63.1 x 83.3 cm. Collection fo the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. **[10]** Sara Angelucci, *June 18, White Clover, Vetch, Black Medic, Hound's Tongue, Forget-me-nots*, from the series Nocturnal Botanical Ontario, 2020. Courtesy of the artist. **[11]** Sara Angelucci, *June 18 (2), Moth with an assortment of seeds, flowers, leaves*, from the series Nocturnal Botanical Ontario, 2020. Courtesy of the artist. **[12]** Jack Bush, *Pink Moon*, 1974, screenprint on paper, 74 x 53.7 cm. Collection of the Tate, United Kingdom.
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