ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

JUNE 18, 2021

FACES OF FATHERHOOD: TEN CANADIAN WORKS

These artists' intimate reflections explore heartfelt and often-overlooked aspects of men's lives—and those who love them.

In honour of Father's Day this Sunday, we're looking at artists who have created works about familial relationships that are at once deeply personal and also connected to broader issues of identity. In Urban Indian, 2005, Terrance Houle aims to challenge the underrepresentation of and stereotypes about Indigenous fathers. William Kurelek pays tribute to his father's hardships and achievements as an immigrant Prairie farmer, while Mary Pratt recalls her father's support for her interest in art. Whether you are a father, remembering one, or celebrating one, we hope you enjoy this week's selection and its rich variety of narratives and perspectives on what it means to be a dad.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

THE UKRAINIAN PIONEER, NO. 6

by William Kurelek

William Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer, No. 6,* 1971, 1976, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

This large-scale painting by beloved Alberta-born artist William Kurelek (1927–1977) depicts his immigrant father, Dmytro, standing in a vast field of golden grain. It is the last in a series of six paintings entitled *The Ukrainian Pioneer,* 1971, 1976, which chronicles the experiences of Ukrainian Canadian settlers in the early twentieth century. Part of the second major wave of Eastern-European immigration, Dmytro arrived in Canada in 1923 and endured the hardships of subsistence farming while raising a large family. Although Kurelek portrays his father as a farmer reaping the rewards of his labour, a tiny atomic cloud can be observed on the horizon (as is typical in many apocalyptic scenes he created)—a menacing threat that tempers this otherwise bucolic celebration.

Learn more in ACI's book
William Kurelek: Life & Work by Andrew Kear

MAN HOLDING TWO BABIES

by C.D. Hoy

C.D. Hoy, Man Holding Two Babies, c.1910, Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

Chinese-born Chow Dong Hoy (1883–1973) was one of the first Asian Canadian professional photographers in British Columbia in the early twentieth century. In the town of Quesnel he documented Indigenous, Chinese, and Caucasian communities, including this man proudly posing with two babies on his lap, all three outfitted for the occasion. The sitter's hair is carefully coiffed and he has a scarf wrapped around his neck, while the babies are wearing long white dresses and jewellery. Hoy photographed his subjects in a variety of settings, including outdoor makeshift studios and homes, farms, and ranches.

Learn more in ACI's online exhibition
Through the Lens of C.D. Hoy

THE DOLL'S HOUSE

by Mary Pratt

Mary Pratt, *The Doll's House,* 1995, private collection.

This picture of the model of the family home that the realist painter Mary Pratt's (1935–2018) father built for her to play with as a child is part of a series inspired by the artist's memories of growing up in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Pratt embarked on the project shortly after her divorce from fellow artist Christopher Pratt (b.1935), likely finding comfort in reminiscing about her joyful childhood. Both Mary Pratt's father and mother were fiercely supportive of her desire to become an artist. She recalled that once, during a personal moment of doubt, her father declared, "You have a talent and it is a requirement of you to paint. It is your fate—you're going to have to study art."

Learn more in ACI's book
Mary Pratt: Life & Work by Ray Cronin

DEUIL I / JAMES 2

by Spring Hurlbut

Spring Hurlbut, *Deuil I / James 2*, 2005, Courtesy of Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto.

Exploring themes of life and death, this simultaneously poetic and unsettling photograph by Toronto-based artist Spring Hurlbut (b.1952) depicts a plastic bag filled with her father's ashes, resting on a scale. Hurlbut received a quarter of her father's ashes after he passed away in 1999, and with the passage of time she started to sift through them, imbuing them with a ritual significance akin to being in dialogue with her father. In 2005, she started to integrate the ashes into a series of contemplative works that evoke a sense of privacy and solace. This approach has been the catalyst for numerous artistic creations in which Hurlbut has been entrusted with the remains of other families, creating timeless images that honour the vestiges of lost loved ones.

Learn more about this project

URBAN INDIAN

by Terrance Houle

Terrance Houle, *Urban Indian Series (No. 2)*, 2007, Courtesy of the artist.

In this loving image, Calgary-based artist Terrance Houle (b.1975), who is a member of the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe), kisses his wife and child goodbye before heading out for the day. Part of his Urban Indian series, the work demonstrates Houle's playful photographic exploration of how Indigenous identities have been represented and exploited in Western photographic traditions. As the artist states, "My regalia is both a catalyst in the image.... and a representation that is part of my everyday, much like my culture, thus challenging the suggestion that I am out of place in a world that only identifies with conformity." From grocery shopping to riding public transportation to a typical day at work, Houle pictures himself moving through the routines of life with humour, wit, and pride in his Indigenous identity. Houle and his daughter, Neko Wong-Houle, recently created an animation together. *Otanimm/Onnimm (Daughter/Father)* won the Golden Sheaf Indigenous Award at Yorkton Film Festival in May—Neko is the youngest ever to win an award at this event, one of the longest running film festivals in Canada.

Learn more about Terrance Houle

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1910 REMEMBERED

by Jean Paul Lemieux

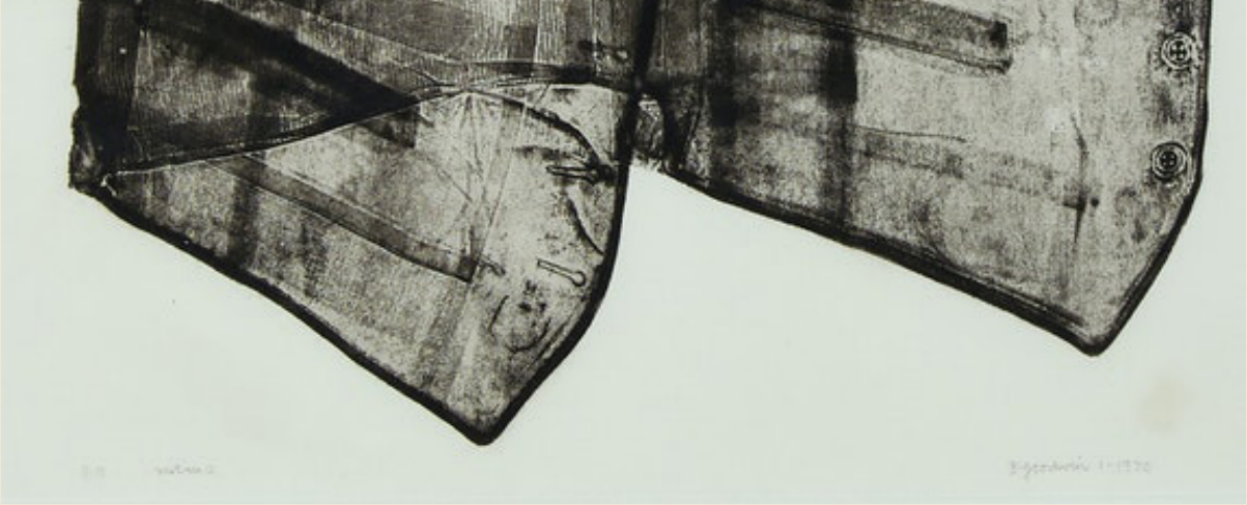
Jean Paul Lemieux, *1910 Remembered,* 1962, private collection.

One of the most significant Canadian modern artists, Quebec City-born Jean Paul Lemieux (1904–1990) portrays himself as a six-year-old boy in a sailor costume standing between his parents in *1910 Remembered,* 1962. Gazing at the viewer with a smile, the boy is positioned closer to his father, who is partially out of the frame—possibly alluding to his frequent work-related absences during Lemieux's childhood. While the artist described his early childhood as the "age of perfect happiness," the grey sky and the umbrella that his mother is holding foreshadow more challenging times ahead. Lemieux remarked, "It is possible to be happy before the age of ten, and after the age of fifty. Between those two ages it is all struggle and bitter combat."

Learn more in ACI's book
Jean Paul Lemieux: Life & Work by Michèle Grandbois

VEST NO. 2

by Betty Goodwin



Betty Goodwin, *Vest No. 2,* 1970, Courtesy of Cowley Abbott Fine Art, Toronto.

When Montreal-based artist Betty Goodwin (1923–2008) was nine years old she lost her father, who was a factory owner and maker of vests. Her most renowned body of work, a series of etchings entitled Vest, was made in homage to him and gained international attention. In *Vest No. 2,* 1970, Goodwin conjures the memory of her father. Presence and absence are both explored: the physicality of the vest, which Goodwin placed in an etching press, is rendered here in traces that evoke themes of loss, grief, and the passage of time. Early on in her practice, Goodwin integrated three-dimensional objects into her art by innovatively passing clothing through a printing press to leave direct imprints on paper.

Learn more about Betty Goodwin

Betty Goodwin: Life & Work by Jessica Bradley is one of ACI's upcoming titles.

THE ARTIST'S FATHER

by John Lyman

John Lyman, *The Artist's Father,* 1922, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In this portrait, John Lyman (1886–1967), an early twentieth-century Montreal painter, pictures his father sitting cross-legged in a relaxed suit, sinking into his armchair and settling into the beginning of a good read. "At the age of 72" appears at the top of the composition, followed by the year the work was painted. The contemplative nature of the scene is typical of Lyman, whose pensive images are cornerstones of Canadian modernism. As the founder of the Contemporary Arts Society in 1939, Lyman promoted a dedication to line, colour, and form that represented the cutting edge of avant-garde painting.

Learn more about John Lyman

THE BEAR PORTRAITS

by Jeff Thomas

Jeff Thomas, *The Bear Portraits: Cultural Revolution,* 1984, Courtesy of the artist.

Part of Ottawa-based Iroquois artist Jeff Thomas's (b.1956) portrait series of his son from 1984, this photograph shows seven-year-old Bear wearing a hat with a reproduction of an Edward Curtis portrait of Two Moons, a respected Cheyenne leader who took part in the Battle of Little Bighorn and other campaigns against the United States Army. "When I saw the print, I saw myself as a young boy and remembered the fractured relationship I had with my father," Thomas has remarked of the work. It is part of a series that explores the loss of male role models by using Bear as a marker of Indian-ness in sites where it does not exist. For Thomas, this first photograph "set in motion a new way of looking at the city and, like the graffiti, my revolution was against the invisible urban Iroquois presence."

Learn more about this series

Jeff Thomas: Life & Work by Rhéanne Chartrand
is one of ACI's upcoming titles.

ON THE NEST

by Dona Schwartz

Dona Schwartz, *Bobby & Kevin, Waiting to Adopt,* 2012, from the On the Nest series, Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto.

Calgary-based photographer Dona Schwartz's (b.1955) work *Bobby & Kevin, Waiting to Adopt,* 2012, pictures two expectant fathers standing in the bedroom they have created for their first child, imbuing the space with the hope and anticipation borne through the transition into parenthood. Schwartz states, "In our lives we experience multiple transitions, and in these moments of change we renegotiate our sense of self." These renegotiations inform her series On the Nest in which she examines the different states of being that emerge through the journey of parenthood, from the arrival of a first child to the transition away from daily parental duties when young adults leave the proverbial "nest." The series was published as a monograph in 2015.

Learn more about this series

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PAST NEWSLETTERS

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Image Credits: [1] William Kurelek, *The Ukrainian Pioneer No. 6,* 1971, 1976, acrylic, graphite, and coloured pencil (gouache and watercolour) on Masonite, 152.5 x 121.5 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, transfer from the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada, 1990 (30836.6). © Estate of William Kurelek, courtesy of the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. **[2]** C.D. Hoy, Man Holding Two Babies, c.1910, printed 1998, photograph. Collection of the Barkerville Historic Town Archives, P1710. **[3]** Mary Pratt, *The Doll's House,* 1995, oil on linen, 45.7 x 61 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the Family of Mary Pratt and Mount Allison University Archives, Sackville, New Brunswick. © Estate of Mary Pratt. **[4]** Spring Hurlbut, *Deuil I / James 2,* 2005, archival pigment print, 62 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto. **[5]** Terrance Houle, *Urban Indian Series (No. 2)*, 2007, digital C-Print, 35.6 x 27.9 cm. © Terrance Houle. Photo credit: Jarusha Brown 유. **[6]** Jean Paul Lemieux, *1910 Remembered,* 1962, oil on canvas, 108 x 148.8 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Heffel Canada. © Gestion A.S.L. Inc. **[7]** Betty Goodwin, *Vest No. 2,* 1970, soft-ground etching, 66 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of Cowley Abbott Fine Art, Toronto. **[8]** John Lyman, *The Artist's Father,* 1922, oil on canvas, 10 x 81.2 cm. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Corbeil Fund, inv. 1964.1449. **[9]** Jeff Thomas, *The Bear Portraits: Cultural Revolution,* 1984, photograph. Courtesy of the artist. **[10]** Dona Schwartz, *Bobby & Kevin, Waiting to Adopt,* 2012, chromogenic print flush mounted to archival board, 50.8 x 63.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto.