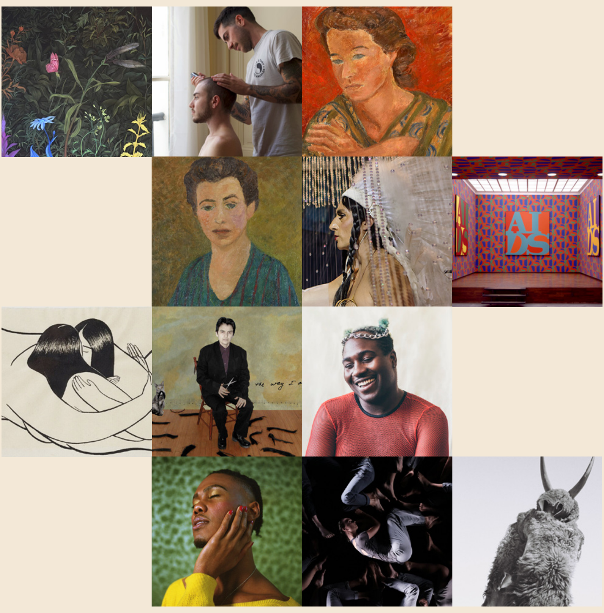
ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

JUNE 4, 2021

PORTRAITS OF PRIDE

WORKS BY TEN CANADIAN ARTISTS

June marks the celebration of Pride Month. Saluting many of the greatest figures in Canadian art who are part of the LGBTQ2S+ community, we're showcasing works of early pioneering artists alongside those by important creators working today.

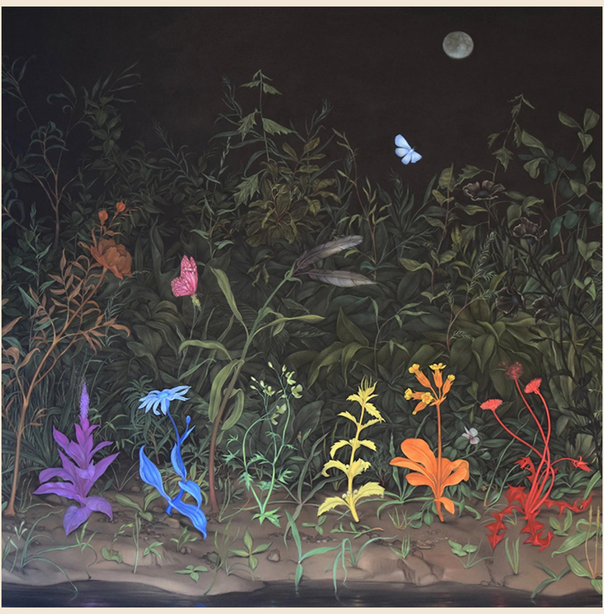


LGBTQ2S+ artists have existed throughout Canadian history, yet prevailing laws and social stigmas prevented queer identity from being openly explored in visual culture until the late 1960s. Since then, art has served as a powerful means of not only giving visibility to this marginalized community, but also challenging normative ideas about gender and sexuality. This week we're looking at some of the most memorable moments in the history of queer Canadian art, from General Idea's iconic painted AIDS logo, 1988–90, to Kent Monkman and Jean Paul Gaultier's 2017 performance piece representing their symbolic union. We're also highlighting the exciting work of emerging artists—including Wynne Neilly, who recently shot trans actor Elliot Page for the cover of *Time* magazine—who reveal new perspectives on the pride, strength, and resilience of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Our admiration goes to these individuals and others who are forging a more just and inclusive understanding of the world, presented through their art.

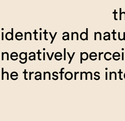
Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

PRIDE BLOOMS DITCHFLOWERS

by Zachari Logan



Zachari Logan, *Pride Blooms Ditchflowers,* 2020, from Eunuch Tapestries, Collection of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park.



With *Pride Blooms Ditchflowers*, 2020, Saskatoon native Zachari Logan (b.1980) celebrates the diversity of the natural world, explaining that "this vibrancy is congruent with my thinking about Pride, reinforcing the reality that sexual diversity is not only natural, but found regularly in all species." In this enchanting drawing, ditch flowers illuminate the nighttime wilderness with the effervescent colours of the Pride flag. Often exploring the relationship between queer identity and nature in his work, Logan is drawn to plants and flora that tend to be negatively perceived as weeds, which, as in this delicate and meticulous drawing, he transforms into symbols of "survival, exuberance, and beauty in the margins."

Learn more about Zachari Logan

This work is currently featured in the exhibition *Evocations · Celebrating the Museum's Collection* at the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art

HAVE / HOLD

by Wynne Neilly and Kyle Lasky

Wynne Neilly and Kyle Lasky, *Have / Hold* (detail), 2018, Courtesy of the artists.

Focusing on non-normative presentations of gender identity in his work, Hamilton-based Wynne Neilly (b.1990) recently shot *Time* magazine's first cover featuring a trans man, Canadian actor Elliot Page. Here, as part of a self-portrait series entitled Have / Hold, 2018, Neilly shows New York-based Kyle Lasky (b.1989) cutting his hair—an understated act of physical intimacy and trust. With this collaborative project, the artists challenge the underrepresentation of platonic "same-sex" intimacy as gay and queer visibility increases in popular culture. The other photographs in the series show the pair engaging in everyday activities, including lying in bed or embracing. The images deliberately blur the boundaries between friendship and romance and expand our understandings of what a platonic bond between two queer trans* people can look like.

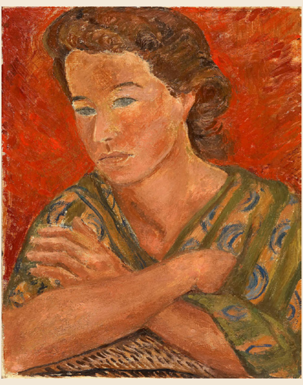
Learn more about Wynne Neilly

PORTRAIT OF DAPHNE VAUGHN

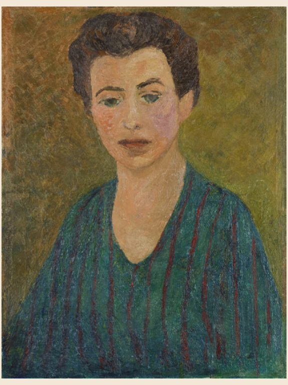
and

SELF-PORTRAIT

by Agnes Martin



Agnes Martin, *Portrait of Daphne Vaughn,* c.1947, Peters Family Art Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico. © Agnes Martin Foundation, New York / SOCAN, Montreal (2021).



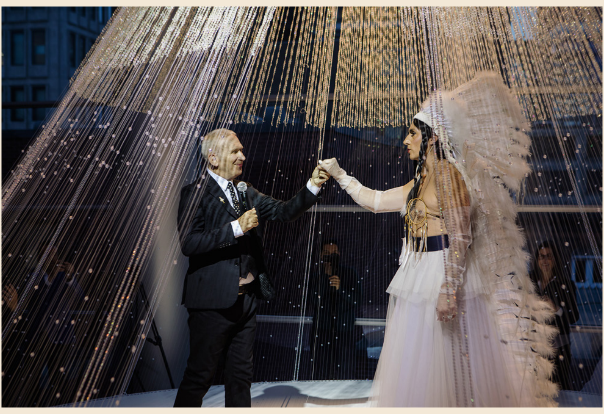
Agnes Martin, *Self-Portrait,* c.1947, private collection. © Agnes Martin Foundation, New York / SOCAN, Montreal (2021).

Before Saskatchewan-born artist Agnes Martin (1912–2004) developed the distinctive and minimalist Abstract Expressionist style of painting that brought her international renown, she produced these portraits of herself and Daphne Cowper, with whom she had a three-year romantic relationship. Set against a fiery red background and with her arms folded in front of her chest, Cowper is portrayed as a serious, intense figure. In contrast, the subdued colour palette of Martin's self-portrait conveys a softer disposition. These works are examples of the artist's earliest extant canvases and were created when she was teaching figurative painting at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque in 1948. That year, Cowper and Martin's students helped Martin build an adobe house, the first of many she would construct in her lifetime.

Read more about this artist in ACI's
Agnes Martin: Life & Work by Christopher Régimbal

ANOTHER FEATHER IN HER BONNET

by Kent Monkman and Jean Paul Gaultier



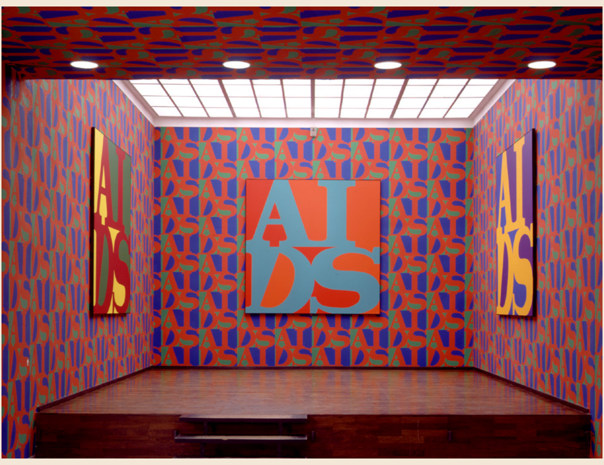
Kent Monkman and Jean Paul Gaultier, *Another Feather in Her Bonnet,* September 8, 2017, performed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

For the exhibit *Love Is Love: Wedding Bliss for All à la Jean Paul Gaultier* at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Toronto-based Cree artist Kent Monkman (b.1965) created one of his most dramatic performances, *Another Feather in Her Bonnet,* 2017: a symbolic marriage between Gaultier—the "enfant terrible of fashion"—and the artist's celebrated alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. The event symbolized greater cultural understanding and solidarity between two figures who had long been advocates of sexual diversity. For the ceremony, in which the artists exchanged vows of mutual respect and friendship, Miss Chief wore a headdress created by Gaultier for the wedding gown of the 2002-2003 fall-winter haute couture collection. The performance took place inside the glass beaded tipi Monkman made for his installation Théâtre de Cristal.

Watch a video of this performance

AIDS (WALLPAPER)

by General Idea



General Idea, *AIDS (Wallpaper),* 1988–90, Courtesy of the artist.

The iconic AIDS logo—shown here in an exhibition installation consisting of three paintings hung over *AIDS* (*Wallpaper*)—was created by General Idea, a three-person artist collective established in Toronto by Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal, and AA Bronson. In 1969, the three men (who identified as gay) began an internationally renowned body of work that pushed the boundaries of sexual identity representation and challenged ideas of gender, consumerism, glamour, and the media. For the AIDS project, they appropriated the work *LOVE*, 1966, by the American Pop artist Robert Indiana, creating an image they then made ubiquitous through sculpture, paintings, wallpaper, posters, installations, and multiples. As Bronson later explained, "Our intention with this logo was that it would…play the part of a virus itself … that it would spread within the culture and create a…visibility for the word 'AIDS,' so it couldn't be swept under the carpet, which was…what was happening."

Read more about this work in ACI's
General Idea: Life & Work by Sarah E. K. Smith

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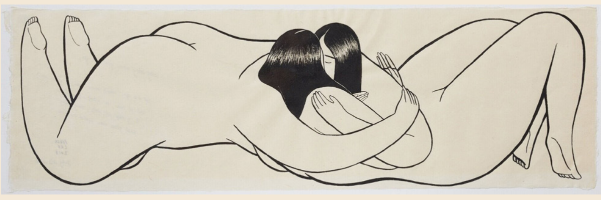
WHY STAY

by Ness Lee



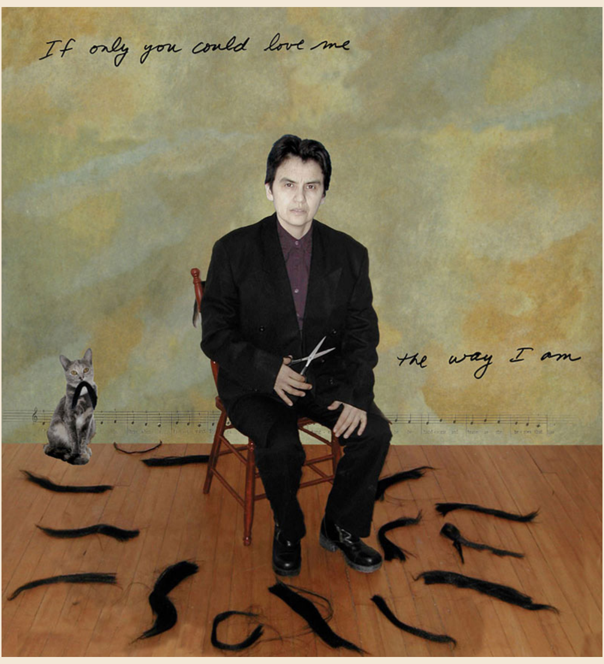
Ness Lee, *Why Stay*, 2017, Courtesy of Patel Brown Gallery, Toronto.

Known for her long-haired, nude female figures, Toronto-based Hakka-Chinese Canadian illustrator and artist Ness Lee depicts two women entwined in an affectionate embrace. Rendered with simplified, flowing lines, the pair's figures meld, signifying their physical and emotional closeness. Examining notions of the body, intimacy, love, and identity, Lee's tender and expressive work reflects her experiences of being queer and a person of colour. "When I started to do these drawings, I was really trying to love myself and love my body," she has remarked. "I began to explore feelings of sexuality and accepting myself as enough. Not quite fitting in or feeling part of much growing up, I think I really craved examples of what it can be to thrive and feel free."

Learn more about Ness Lee

IF ONLY YOU COULD LOVE ME…

by Rosalie Favell


If only you could love me
the way I am

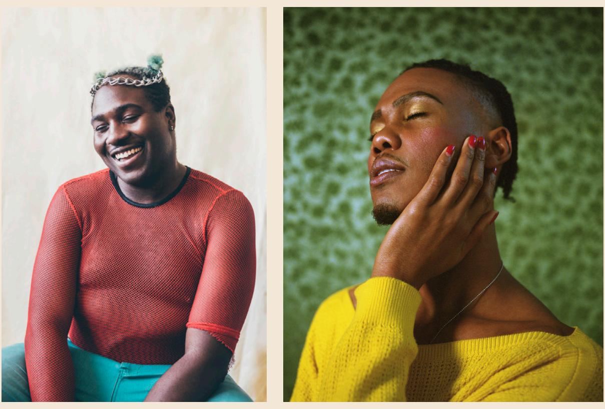
Rosalie Favell, *If Only You Could Love Me…*, 2003,
Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In this melancholy self-portrait, Ottawa-based Métis (Cree/English) artist Rosalie Favell (b.1958) presents herself wearing a man's suit and holding a pair of scissors while her chopped locks of hair lie scattered on the floor. Cursive text reads "If only you could love me the way I am." Favell's work references Frida Kahlo's (1907–1954) *Self Portrait with Cropped Hair*, 1940, which the iconic Mexican bisexual painter created shortly after her divorce from the artist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and similarly shows herself as an androgynous figure. *If Only You Could Love* Me…, 2003, also "calls to mind both the cutting of hair in times of mourning and historic photographs of Native American children at boarding schools," says Favell, "where they were dressed in suits and their long hair was cut short."

Watch a video about this work

OUT OF MANY, ONE PEOPLE

by Brianna Roye



Brianna Roye, *Out of Many, One People*, ongoing, Courtesy of the artist.

These joyful portraits by Toronto-based Jamaican Canadian photographer Brianna Roye are part of her ongoing series *Out of Many, One People*, which challenges the underrepresentation of LGBTQ2S+ members of the Caribbean community and the stigmas associated with being queer. The body of work is named after the Jamaican national motto, which promotes unity among the multiplicity of cultural minorities that comprise the country. "[The saying] didn't always make sense to me, because out of many, which people?" says Roye. "I'm sure that didn't include [queer] people like me." With her portraits, the artist asserts the presence of LGBTQ2S+ people of Caribbean descent while capturing the beauty of their authentic selves.

Learn more about Brianna Roye

FREE FALL, FOR CAMERA

by Brendan Fernandes

Brendan Fernandes, *Free Fall, for Camera,* 2019, Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

With *Free Fall, for Camera,* 2019, Nairobi-born, Chicago-based Canadian artist Brendan Fernandes (b.1979) responds to the mass shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in 2016, in which forty-nine people were killed and fifty-three were injured. In Fernandes's multimedia video installation, sixteen dancers dressed in grey explore the experience of falling onto a stage, their kaleidoscopic movements recalling the work of the legendary film director and musical choreographer Busby Berkeley (1895–1976). Says Fernandes, "*Free Fall* was originally in response to the Pulse shooting, but our bodies are still being marginalized and that means the work needs to continue." He observes, "As a society, we're finding out how hard we can fall, but also how to stand up, move forward and move on."

Learn more about Brendan Fernandes

BUFFALO BOY AT BURNING MAN

by Adrian Stimson

Adrian Stimson, *Buffalo Boy at Burning Man,* 2004, Courtesy of the artist.

Adrian Stimson (b.1964), a member of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation in southern Alberta, is widely admired for a highly diverse oeuvre which includes his persona Buffalo Boy, seen here at the Burning Man festival in Nevada. This gender-bending figure has taken on multiple roles, including Pow Wow dancer, shaman, and gay cowboy, and has appeared in everything from fishnet stockings to buffalo robes. Both serious and playful, Buffalo Boy confronts stereotypes of Indigenous people, offers a satirical commentary on the history of colonial exhibitions (particularly through allusion to the notorious nineteenth-century showman Buffalo Bill), and invites reflection on intersectional identities.

Learn more about Adrian Stimson

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PAST NEWSLETTERS

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Image Credits: **[1]** Zachari Logan, *Pride Blooms Ditchflowers,* 2020, from Eunuch Tapestries, pastel on black paper, 69 x 65 inches. Collection of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park. **[2]** Wynne Neilly and Kyle Lasky, *Have / Hold,* n.d., digital C print, dimensions unknown. Courtesy of the artist. **[3]** Agnes Martin, *Portrait of Daphne Vaughn,* c.1947, encaustic on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Peters Family Art Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico. © Agnes Martin Foundation, New York / SOCAN, Montreal (2021). **[4]** Agnes Martin, *Self-Portrait,* c.1947, encaustic on canvas, 66 x 49.5 cm, private collection. © Agnes Martin Foundation, New York / SOCAN, Montreal (2021). **[5]** Kent Monkman and Jean Paul Gaultier, *Another Feather in Her Bonnet,* September 8, 2017. Performed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. **[6]** General Idea, *AIDS (Wallpaper),* 1988–90, screen print on wallpaper, 244 x 244 cm. Courtesy of the artist. **[7]** Ness Lee, *Why Stay,* 2017, ink on handmade Japanese paper, 16.5 x 55.9 cm. Courtesy of Patel Brown Gallery, Toronto. **[8]** Rosalie Favell, *If Only You Could Love Me...,* 2003, ink jet print photograph, 82.6 x 76.2 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. **[9]** Brianna Roye, *Out of Many, One People,* ongoing, photograph, dimensions unknown. Courtesy of the artist. **[10]** Brendan Fernandes, *Free Fall, for Camera,* 2019, image still from multimedia dance and video installation. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago. **[11]** Adrian Stimson, *Buffalo Boy at Burning Man,* 2004, black and white photographs, dimensions unknown. Courtesy of the artist.