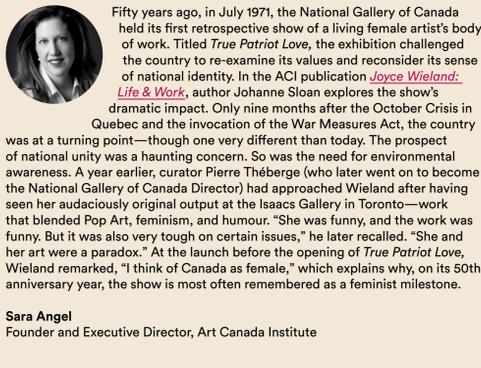


JULY 16, 2021

TRUE PATRIOT LOVE

REMEMBERING JOYCE WIELAND'S LANDMARK CANADIAN EXHIBITION

On the anniversary of one of the National Gallery of Canada's most famed exhibitions we're looking at its creator, Joyce Wieland, her provocative and singular vision, and why her work continues to resonate today.



Installation view of Joyce Wieland's *Arctic Passion Cake*, 1971, at the *True Patriot Love* exhibition.

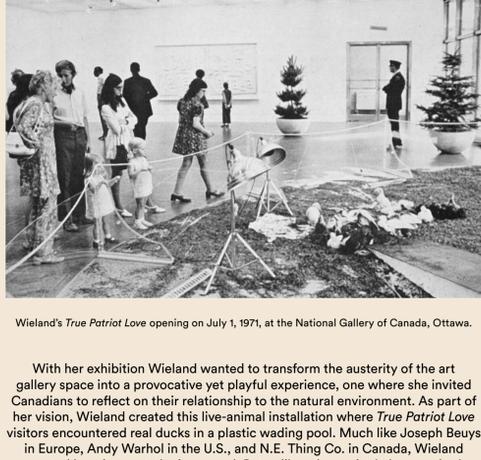
Joyce Wieland, 1955, photograph by Warren Collins.



Fifty years ago, in July 1971, the National Gallery of Canada held its first retrospective show of a living female artist's body of work. Titled *True Patriot Love*, the exhibition challenged the country to re-examine its values and reconsider its sense of national identity. In the ACI publication *Joyce Wieland: Life & Work*, author Johanne Sloan explores the show's dramatic impact. Only nine months after the October Crisis in Quebec and the invocation of the War Measures Act, the country was at a turning point—though one very different than today. The prospect of national unity was a haunting concern. So was the need for environmental awareness. A year earlier, curator Pierre Thiberge (who later went on to become the National Gallery of Canada Director) had approached Wieland after having seen her audaciously original output at the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto—work that blended Pop Art, feminism, and humour. “She was funny, and the work was funny. But it was also very tough on certain issues,” he later recalled. “She and her art were a paradox.” At the launch before the opening of *True Patriot Love*, Wieland remarked, “I think of Canada as female,” which explains why, on its 50th anniversary year, the show is most often remembered as a feminist milestone.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

THE SPIRIT OF CANADA SUCKLES THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH BEAVERS



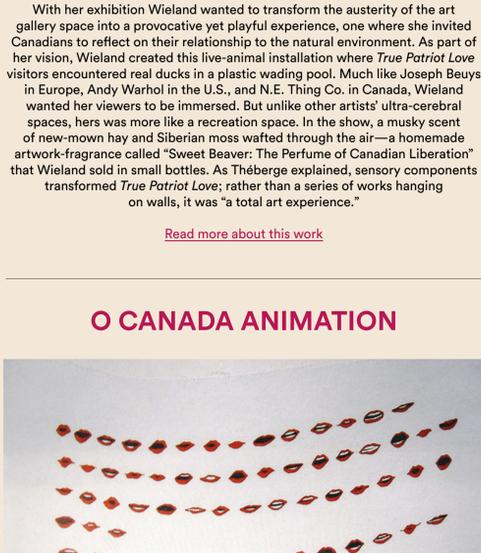
Joyce Wieland, *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers*, 1970–71, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Like a religious allegory of charity, *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers*, 1970–71, features a woman breastfeeding, but rather than cherubs she nurses beavers. For Wieland, the objective of *True Patriot Love* was to reinvent and reinterpret the nation's symbols and iconography, “everything from the trillium to the name of the country ... to renew and begin to invent its future.” This bronze sculpture from the exhibition references the myth of the twin brothers Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, who as infants were fed by a she-wolf. In her book *Beaver* (2015), writer and curator Rachel Poliquin states, “By reworking [this] legend ... Wieland feminized the nation as an all-giving, all-loving mother who ... nourished both French and English Canada.”

Read more about this work in ACI's online book [Joyce Wieland: Life & Work](#) by Johanne Sloan.

This book was published thanks to the Title Sponsorship of Phyllis Lambert and The Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts.

A LIVE-ANIMAL ART INSTALLATION



Wieland's *True Patriot Love* opening on July 1, 1971, at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

With her exhibition Wieland wanted to transform the austerity of the art gallery space into a provocative yet playful experience, one where she invited Canadians to reflect on their relationship to the natural environment. As part of her vision, Wieland created this live-animal installation where *True Patriot Love* visitors encountered real ducks in a plastic wading pool. Much like Joseph Beuys in Europe, Andy Warhol in the U.S., and N.E. Thing Co. in Canada, Wieland wanted her viewers to be immersed. But unlike other artists' ultra-cerebral spaces, hers was more like a recreation space. In the show, a musky scent of new-mown hay and Siberian moss wafted through the air—a homemade artwork-fragrance called “Sweet Beaver: The Perfume of Canadian Liberation” that Wieland sold in small bottles. As Thiberge explained, sensory components transformed *True Patriot Love*; rather than a series of works hanging on walls, it was “a total art experience.”

[Read more about this work](#)

O CANADA ANIMATION

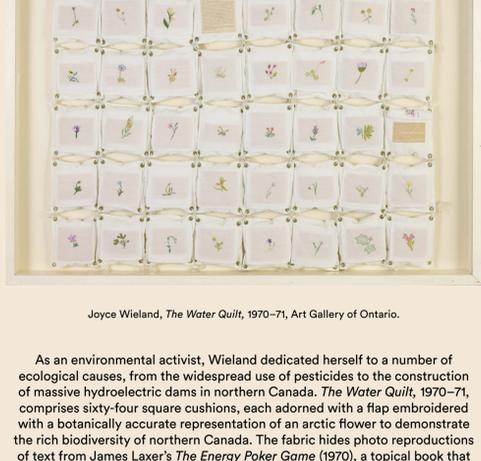


Joyce Wieland, *O Canada Animation*, 1970–71, private collection.

One of the textile works exhibited in *True Patriot Love*, *O Canada Animation*, 1970–71, depicts lush, red lips singing the national anthem embroidered onto a piece of white cloth. Because of the traditional association of fabric with women and domesticity, Wieland intentionally used textiles to express her political ideas. She created quilts and mixed media pieces that challenged notions about art and craft, masculinity and femininity. She was a leader in bringing these materials and mediums into the fine art world, explaining, “I wanted to elevate and honour craft, I wanted to join women together and make them proud of what they had done.”

[Read more](#)

ARCTIC PASSION CAKE



Installation view of Joyce Wieland's *Arctic Passion Cake*, 1971, in *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

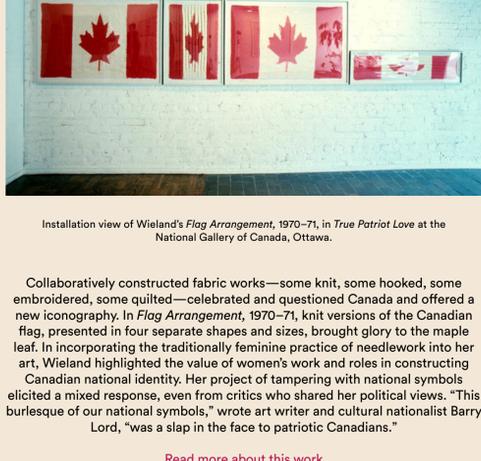
Joyce Wieland, *Arctic Passion Cake*, 1971, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Wieland collaborated with Jan Van Dierendonck, the chef of the parliamentary restaurant, on *Arctic Passion Cake*, 1971, a three-foot-tall, six-foot-wide white Styrofoam sugar sculpture that was one of thirty-five works in the exhibition. Shaped like an iceberg, the sculpture was a giant confection of Canadian topography that featured glaciers, vistas, valleys, and peaks made of icing and included a candied coat of arms for each province. However, not everyone appreciated Wieland's edible representation and her pioneering vision. In a sexist take on the exhibition, an *Ottawa Journal* editorial accused the National Gallery of Canada of “lending its prestige to anti-art.” Similarly, an *Ottawa Citizen* writer condescendingly described Wieland as “Joyce, the housewife,” whose gigantic *Arctic Passion Cake* and quilts would be more appropriately discussed in the newspaper's “women's pages” than in the arts pages.

[Read more about this work](#)

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I LOVE CANADA – J'AIME CANADA



I Love Canada – J'aime Canada, 1969, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, as seen at the opening of *True Patriot Love*.

In *I Love Canada – J'aime Canada*, a metal chain links two quilts that exhibit the title words in French and English. Echoing the bilingual display, a small embroidered panel on each quilt reads: “Death to U.S. Technological Imperialism” and “A Bas L'impérialisme Technologique [sic] des E-U.” With this political piece, Wieland draws us in with the playful appearance of the plushy text and connotations of comfort and warmth associated with quilts before confronting us with its blatantly anti-American message.

[Read more about this work](#)

THE WATER QUILT



Joyce Wieland, *The Water Quilt*, 1970–71, Art Gallery of Ontario.

As an environmental activist, Wieland dedicated herself to a number of ecological causes, from the widespread use of pesticides to the construction of massive hydroelectric dams in northern Canada. *The Water Quilt*, 1970–71, comprises sixty-four square cushions, each adorned with a flap embroidered with a botanically accurate representation of an arctic flower to demonstrate the rich biodiversity of northern Canada. The fabric hides photo reproductions of text from James Laxer's *The Energy Poker Game* (1970), a topical book that outlined the danger of selling Canada's northernmost fresh water to the United States. With works like this one, Wieland aimed to use *True Patriot Love* to seduce viewers into falling in love with Canada while also alerting them to the ecological peril it faced.

[Read more about this work](#)

TRUE PATRIOT LOVE: EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



Photo of Tom Thomson in Joyce Wieland, *True Patriot Love*, 1971, published by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Wieland's sculpture *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers* (left) and sketch (bottom right), alongside Canadian wildflowers (top right) in Joyce Wieland, *True Patriot Love*, 1971, published by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

To accompany *True Patriot Love*, Wieland created a catalogue that has become a work of art in itself. As the basis for the book, she used a mostly facsimile reprint of a Canadian government publication about arctic flowers (A.E. Persild's *Illustrated Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago*). On top of the original content, which consists of scientific prose, simple line drawings of botanical specimens, and a few maps, Wieland overlaid photographs and textual material for a collage-like result. Few of the images featured in the publication referred to the contents of the exhibition. Instead, Wieland featured pictures of snowshoe tracks, multiple reproductions of Tom Thomson's (1877-1917) painting *The West Wind*, 1916–17, and images of Wieland re-enacting Laura Secord's heroic trek during the War of 1812. Leaving through the publication, readers find no singular picture of Canada—nor of her exhibition. Instead, Wieland presents a kind of palimpsest, criss-crossed by various voices, images, and texts.

[Read more about this work](#)

FLAG ARRANGEMENT

Installation view of Wieland's *Flag Arrangement*, 1970–71, in *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Collaboratively constructed fabric works—some knit, some hooked, some embroidered, some quilted—celebrated and questioned Canada and offered a new iconography. In *Flag Arrangement*, 1970–71, knit versions of the Canadian flag, presented in four separate shapes and sizes, brought glory to the maple leaf. In incorporating the traditionally feminine practice of needlework into her art, Wieland highlighted the value of women's work and roles in constructing Canadian national identity. Her project of tampering with national symbols elicited a mixed response, even from critics who shared her political views. “This burlesque of our national symbols,” wrote art writer and cultural nationalist Barry Lord, “was a slap in the face to patriotic Canadians.”

[Read more about this work](#)

WIELAND REVISITED

Brian Jungen, *Wieland*, 2006, Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

Wieland was a leading Canadian artist during the 1960s and 1970s, and her work continues to influence contemporary artists such as the internationally acclaimed Brian Jungen (b.1970). The North Okanagan sculptor, who is of Dane-Zaa and Swiss descent, created *Wieland*, 2006, by deconstructing red leather gloves and machine-sewing them back together into an inverted maple leaf. The piece is simultaneously a tribute to the pioneering feminist artist while also being a critique of her participation in Trudeau's and her limited take on nationhood. Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and his Liberal government's vision for Canada offered a limited consideration of Indigenous rights, which is why Jungen's piece is displayed upside down. With *Wieland*, Jungen recognizes the late artist's enduring impact while presenting a commentary on the period in which *True Patriot Love* took place.

[Learn more about Brian Jungen](#)

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