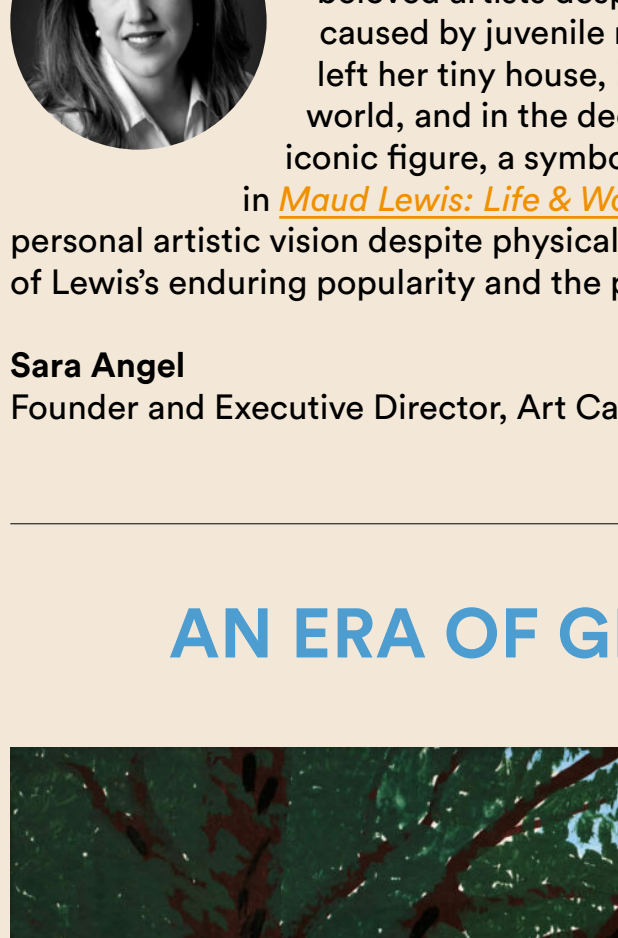


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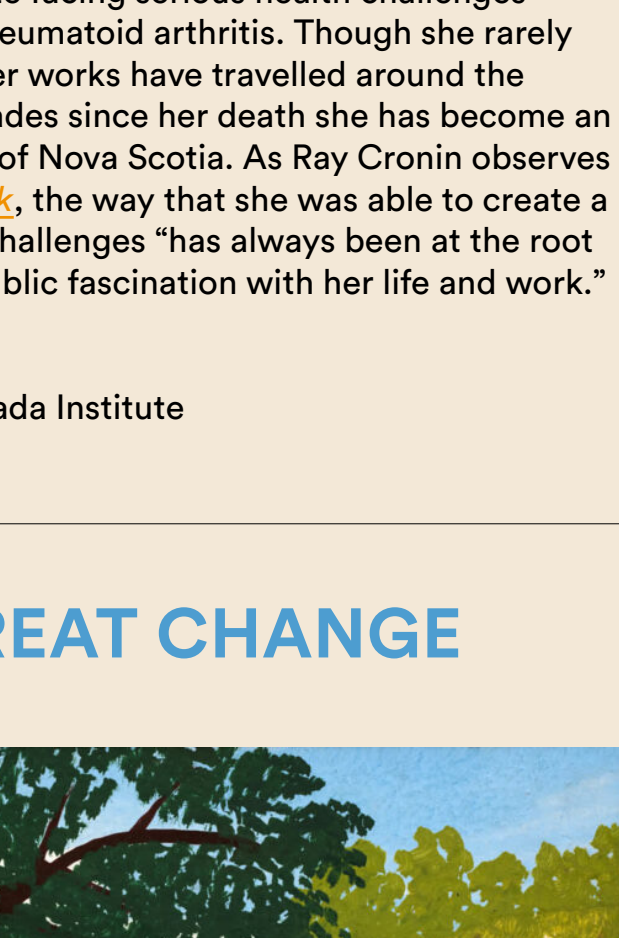
# MAD FOR MAUD

## WHY WE LOVE LEWIS

Today the Art Canada Institute proudly publishes *Maud Lewis: Life & Work by Ray Cronin*, a book that chronicles the astonishing journey of a prolific painter, whose brightly coloured depictions of landscapes, animals, and flowers redefined folk art and whose indomitable spirit continues to captivate.



Maud Lewis, *Roadster and Cow*, c.1960s, Collection of Dr. Doug Lewis and Florence Lewis, Digby, Nova Scotia.



Maud Lewis inside her home, n.d., photograph by Cora Greenway.



"As long as I've got a brush in front of me, I'm all right," said Maud Lewis (1901–1970), who became one of Canada's most beloved artists despite facing serious health challenges caused by juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Though she rarely left her tiny house, her works have travelled around the world, and in the decades since her death she has become an iconic figure, a symbol of Nova Scotia. As Ray Cronin observes in *Maud Lewis: Life & Work*, the way that she was able to create a personal artistic vision despite physical challenges "has always been at the root of Lewis's enduring popularity and the public fascination with her life and work."

**Sara Angel**

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

## AN ERA OF GREAT CHANGE



Maud Lewis, *Blacksmith's Shop*, 1960s, Collection of Dr. Doug and Florence Lewis, Digby, Nova Scotia.

Lewis's early life was a happy one, and her childhood later became a central subject of her paintings. She was born just as the Victorian age ended—a time of profound change for Nova Scotia and the world. Technology was encroaching on the rural lifestyle of Yarmouth County, where Lewis's blacksmith father, John Nelson Dowley—whose profession is pictured here—owned a reasonably prosperous harness shop that afforded her a comfortable middle-class home. As she learned to play the piano and to draw and paint, horses were being replaced by automobiles and tractors. Many people were being drawn off the land and the uncertain life of farming and lumbering, and into the cities and factories. In her adult years, Lewis created art with a distinctly nostalgic tone.

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## THE BUSINESS OF ART

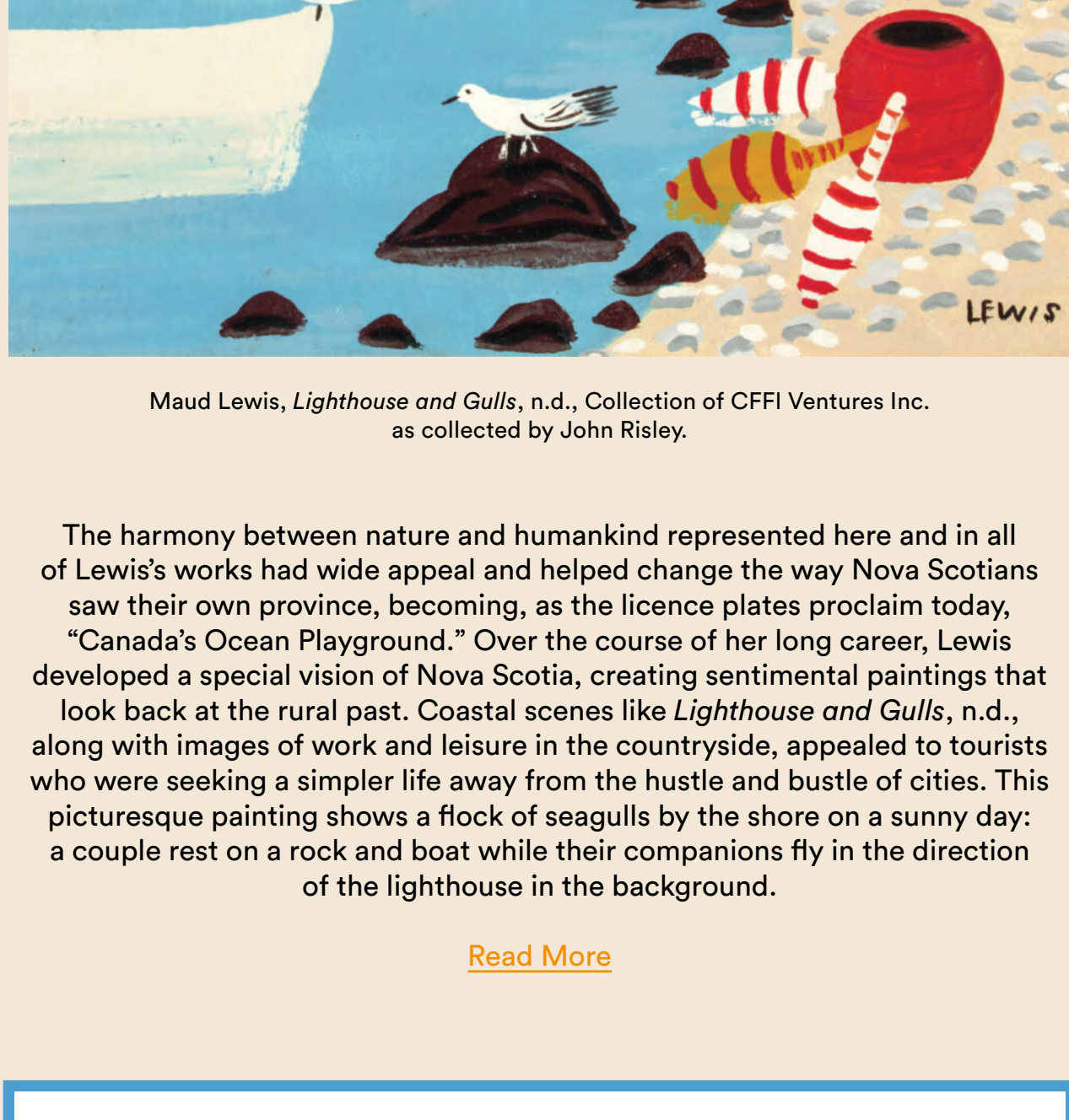


Maud Lewis, *Greetings*, c.1945, Collection of CFFI Ventures Inc. as collected by John Risley.

Even as a young person, Lewis understood the entrepreneurial possibilities of art. During her teenage years, she and her mother, Agnes (German) Dowley, began making Christmas cards—similar to this example showing a figure riding a horse-drawn sleigh—and decorations, which they sold door to door in Yarmouth. In the early 1920s, a friend and local businesswoman, beauty salon owner Mae Rozee, sold Lewis's cards in her shop. As a result of this commercial enterprise, the artist's earliest paintings were influenced by the sentimental and nostalgic imagery of the greeting card industry and mass-produced prints, such as figures in horse-drawn sleighs and carriages. Related scenes often appear in Lewis's later work, evoking an idyllic past before the arrival of the automobile and modern technology.

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## MAUD'S MASTERPIECE: HER PAINTED HOUSE

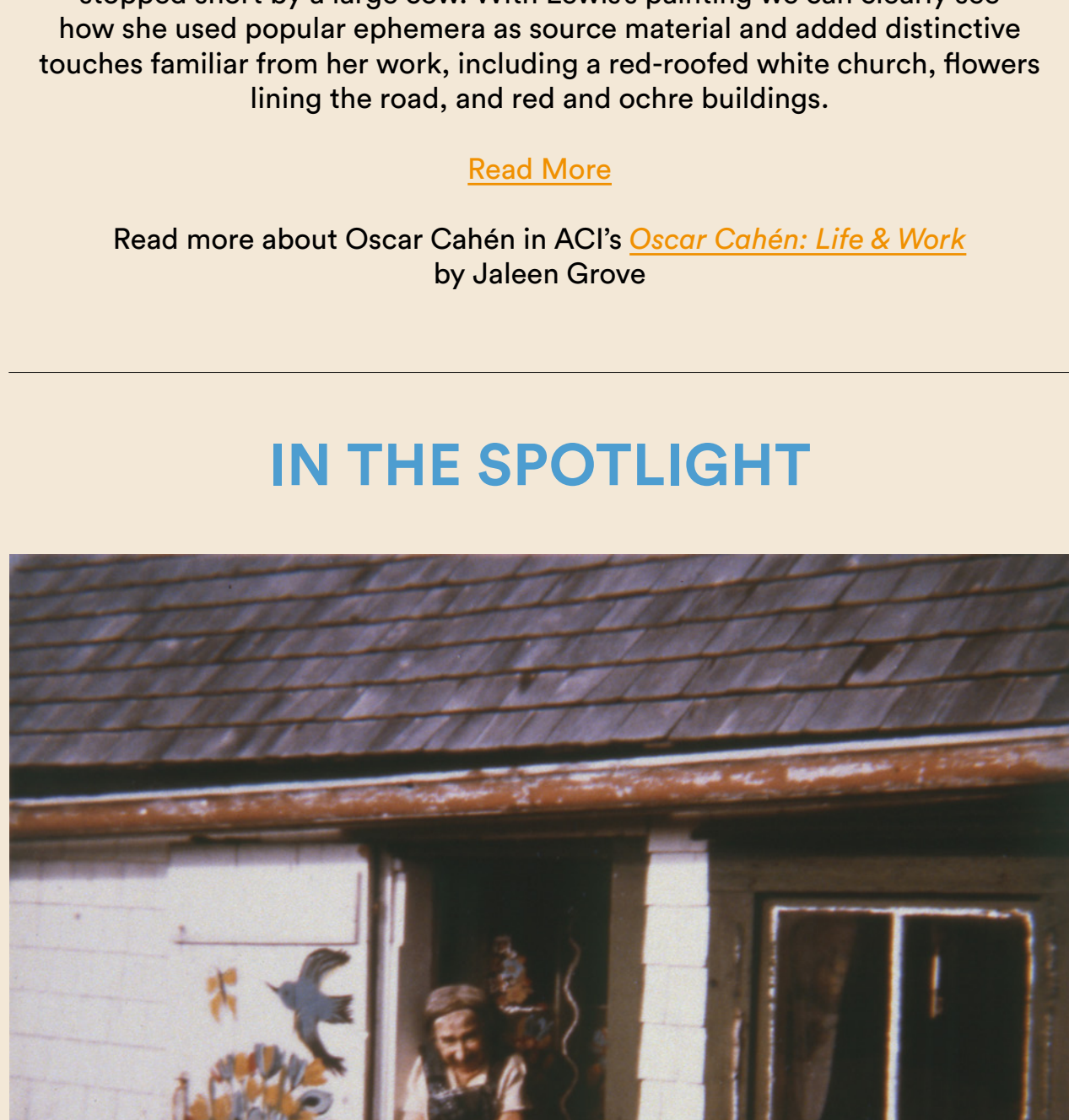


Maud and Everett Lewis in front of the Painted House, n.d., photographer unknown.

Lewis was thirty-six when she moved to the house that changed her life and became her best-known work of art. Her parents had passed away and she had been left with nothing, leading her to marry an older fish peddler named Everett Lewis in 1938. Living with him on the side of the highway in the village of Marshalltown, near Digby, Nova Scotia, she transformed their small home—which had no running water or electricity. She rendered colourful tulips on the window and covered both the interior door and the exterior storm door with birds, butterflies, tulips, and other flowers. Over the years she painted and repainted the walls, furniture, and objects, displaying a near-obsessive attention to the decoration of her living space. Today, her house is displayed in the Scotiabank Maud Lewis Gallery at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax.

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## A PIONEERING ENTREPRENEUR

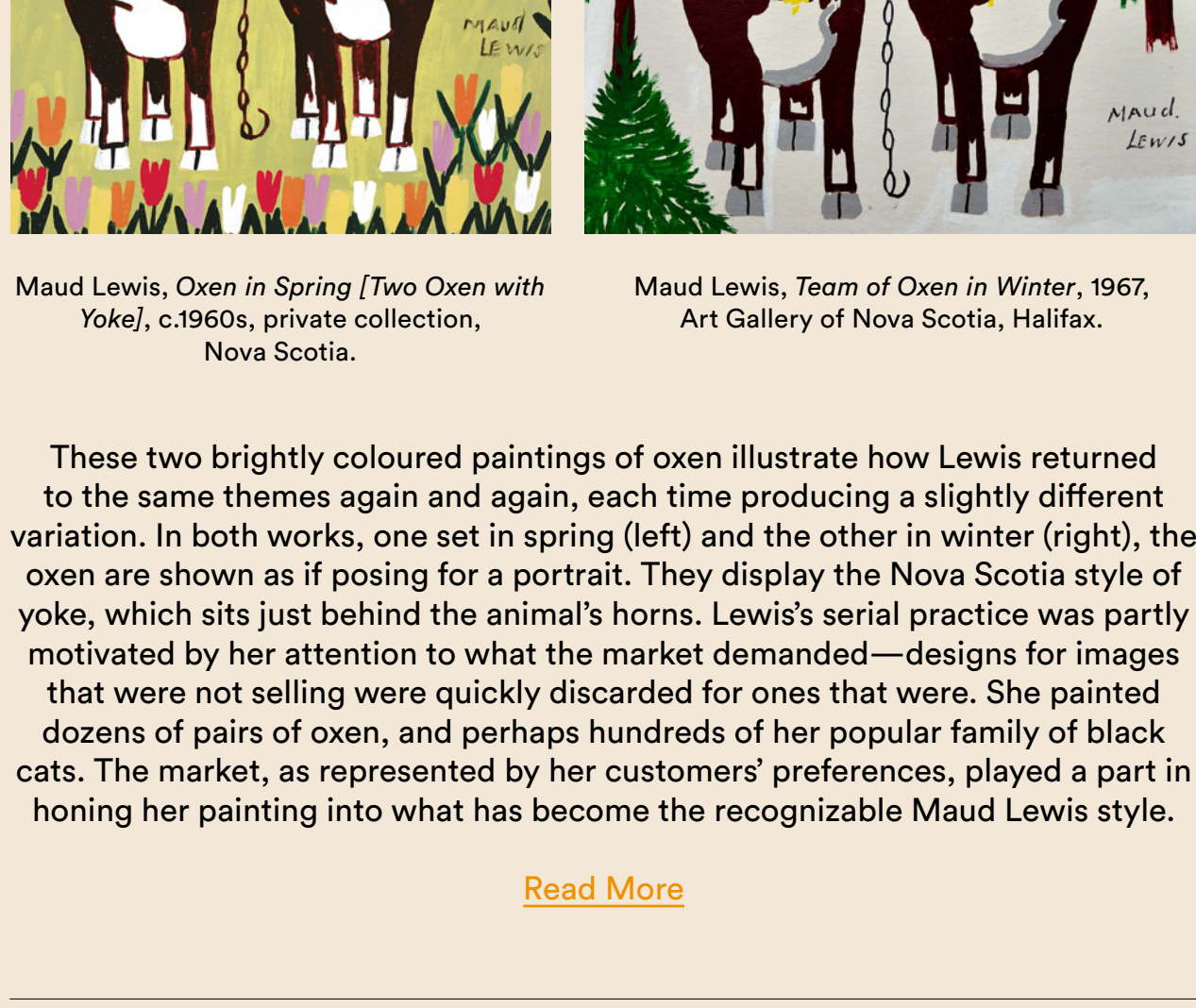


Maud Lewis, *Paintings for Sale*, 1960s, Collection of CFFI Ventures Inc. as collected by John Risley.

Soon after her marriage, Lewis turned her artmaking into a business, selling her work to contribute to the household income. At first, in the warm months of May to October she and her husband would tour the back roads of Marshalltown in his car, selling fish and brightly painted cards. In 1939 Everett took a job as a night watchman, which meant that he no longer had his regular route and customers. Instead, Lewis created a colourful sign to go on their house—similar to this one from the 1960s—and began selling cards and paintings directly from there. As a story in the *Halifax Chronicle* noted on her death in 1970, "visitors soon crowded her tiny cottage, all anxious for her to produce for them examples of her art."

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## AN IDYLIC VISION OF NOVA SCOTIA



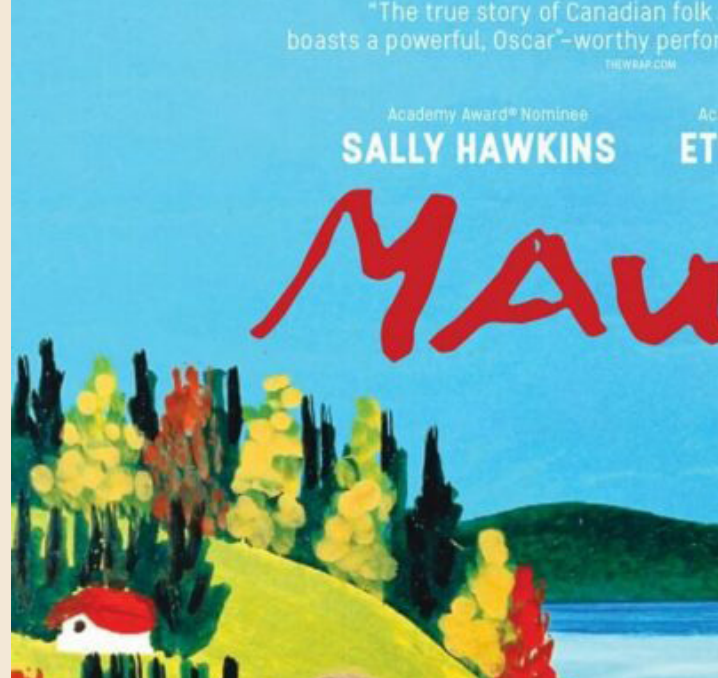
Maud Lewis, *Lighthouse and Gulls*, n.d., Collection of CFFI Ventures Inc. as collected by John Risley.

The harmony between nature and humankind represented here and in all of Lewis's works had wide appeal and helped change the way Nova Scotians saw their own province, becoming, as the licence plates proclaim today, "Canada's Ocean Playground." Over the course of her long career, Lewis developed a special vision of Nova Scotia, creating sentimental paintings that look back at the rural past. Coastal scenes like *Lighthouse and Gulls*, n.d., along with images of work and leisure in the countryside, appealed to tourists who were seeking a simpler life away from the hustle and bustle of cities. This picturesque painting shows a flock of seagulls by the shore on a sunny day: a couple rest on a rock and boat while their companions fly in the direction of the lighthouse in the background.

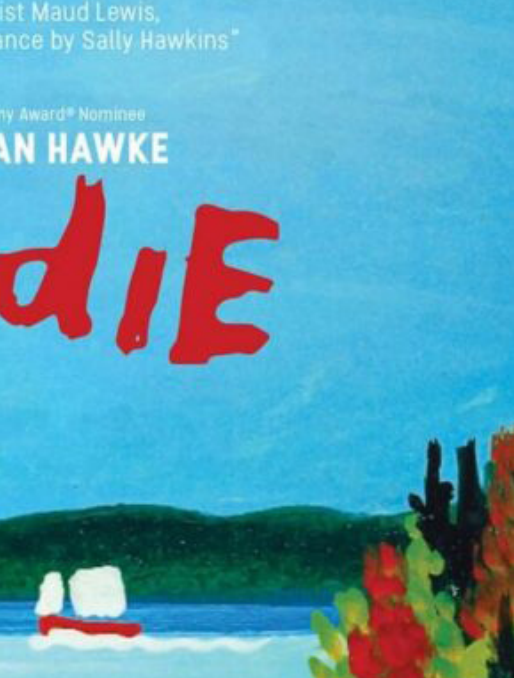
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## INSPIRED BY COMMERCIAL IMAGERY



Maud Lewis, *Roadster and Cow*, c.1960s, Collection of Dr. Doug Lewis and Florence Lewis, Digby, Nova Scotia.



Oscar Cahén, Cover of *Maclean's* magazine, April 14, 1956, The Cahén Archives.

Jeffrey Spalding, a former director of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, noted the similarity of *Roadster and Cow*, c.1960s, to the cover of a 1956 issue of *Maclean's*. In the magazine illustration by Painters Eleven member Oscar Cahén (1916–1956), a well-dressed couple in a convertible on a country road are stopped short by a large cow. With Lewis's painting we can clearly see how she used popular ephemera as source material and added distinctive touches familiar from her work, including a red-roofed white church, flowers lining the road, and red and ochre buildings.

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Read more about Oscar Cahén in ACI's *Oscar Cahén: Life & Work* by Jaleen Grove

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Maud Lewis in the doorway of her home, 1961, photograph by Cora Greenway.

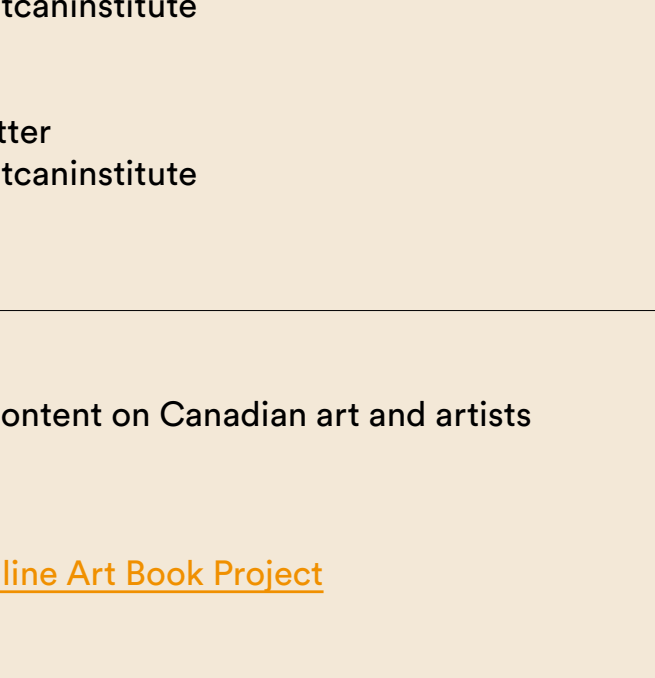
Lewis's painting career would likely have remained a mostly local phenomenon but for Halifax freelance journalist Cora Greenway, a passionate supporter of the artist who produced an interview with Lewis for the CBC Radio program *Trans-Canada Matinee* that aired in February 1964. The feature sparked public interest and in July 1965 the *Star Weekly* (Toronto) sent freelance writer Murray Barnard from Halifax to write about Lewis. His article, which was included in the Saturday edition of Canada's largest circulation newspaper, the *Toronto Star*, created an enormous amount of curiosity about, as its headline read, "The Little Old Lady Who Paints Pretty Pictures." Many people wrote to Lewis requesting paintings after the story ran, creating a rush on her work that continued for the rest of her life.

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## SUBJECTS IN SERIES



Maud Lewis, *Oxen in Spring [Two Oxen with Yoke]*, c.1960s, private collection, Nova Scotia.



Maud Lewis, *Team of Oxen in Winter*, 1967, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

These two brightly coloured paintings of oxen illustrate how Lewis returned to the same themes again and again, each time producing a slightly different variation. In both works, one set in spring (left) and the other in winter (right), the oxen are shown as if posing for a portrait. They display the Nova Scotia style of yoke, which sits just behind the animal's horns. Lewis's serial practice was partly motivated by her attention to what the market demanded—designs for images that were not selling were quickly discarded for ones that were. She painted dozens of pairs of oxen, and perhaps hundreds of her popular family of black cats. The market, as represented by her customers' preferences, played a part in honing her painting into what has become the recognizable Maud Lewis style.

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## A CANADIAN ICON

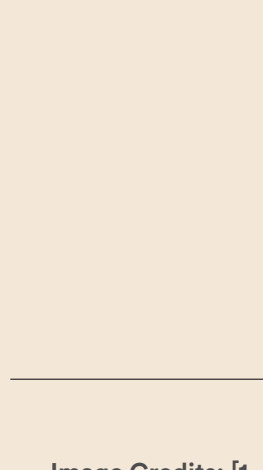


Poster for *Maudie*, 2016.

Lewis's enduring popularity has inspired an acclaimed feature film, *Maudie* (2016), a novel by award-winning Nova Scotia author Carol Bruneau (*Brighter the Corner Where You Are*, 2020), and a special series of holiday postage stamps issued by Canada Post in 2020. Her work, as well as her increasing posthumous fame, also helped spark a new movement in Canadian art—Nova Scotia Folk Art—that continues to grow to this day, with its own galleries and avid collectors. Today, her art continues to enchant, decades after her death, and her hopeful example of finding joy even in the shadows is her enduring legacy.

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## About the Author of *Maud Lewis: Life & Work*



Ray Cronin is an author and curator who lives in Nova Scotia, the former Director and CEO of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and the founding curator of the Sobey Art Award. Commenting on this book, Cronin notes, "By overcoming pain and isolation to create a cheerful world of nostalgic optimism, Maud Lewis has inspired generations. The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has preserved Maud Lewis's legacy since the gallery's inception, a trust that I took my turn upholding over my tenure as a curator and as Director. I remain committed to celebrating an artist who embodies so much of what makes Nova Scotia unique."

## THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS

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