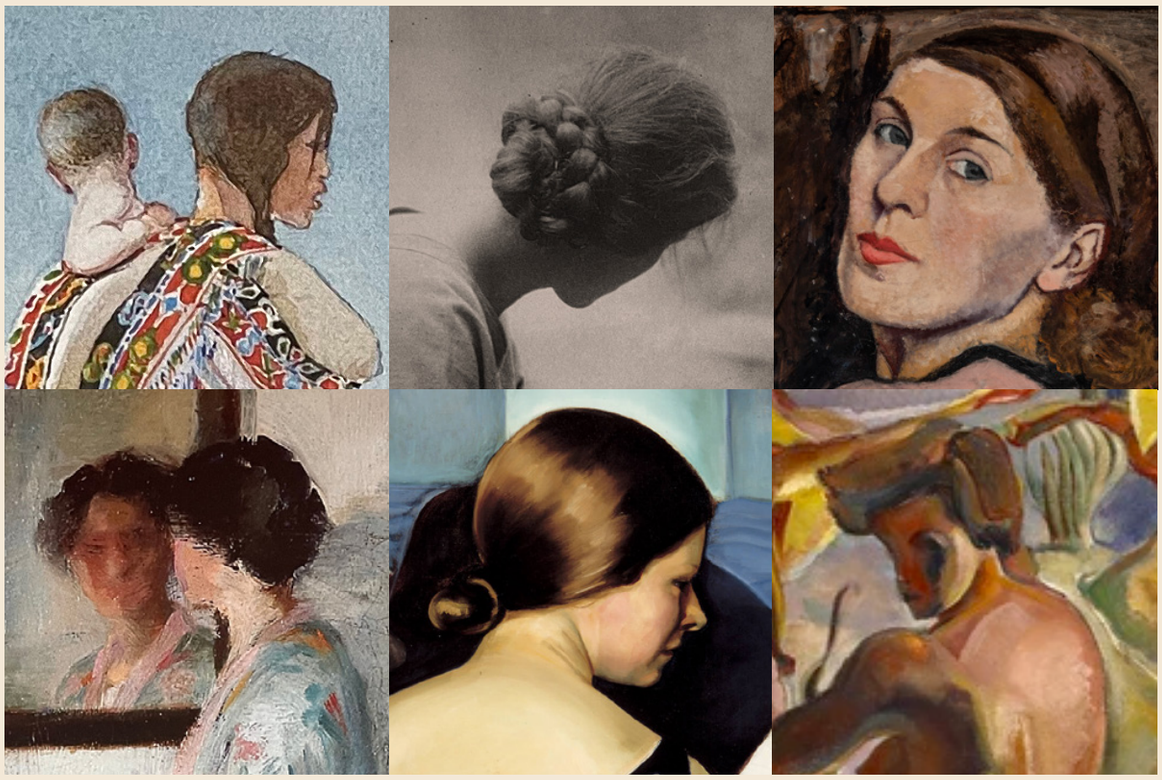
ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

OCTOBER 1, 2021

INTRODUCING CANADA'S UNINVITED MODERN WOMEN ARTISTS

The Group of Seven's all-male membership left their exceptionally talented female contemporaries underrecognized. A groundbreaking new exhibition at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection advances a powerful new narrative.



When the country's famed artist collective the Group of Seven was founded in the early twentieth century its membership was open only to men. The result, explains Sarah Milroy, Chief Curator at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, "was a belief that the archetypal Canadian artist is a man in the woods." To counter this notion, over three years ago, she commenced work on *Uninvited: Canadian Women Artists*

in the Modern Moment, a groundbreaking exhibition featuring the work of over thirty creators. The show presents what the Group of Seven overlooked, says Milroy: “While the men went out to the woods and looked away, their female counterparts saw the world differently. They depicted cities, people, Indigenous cultures, immigration, and the environmental impacts of resource extraction on the landscape.” *Uninvited* documents the exploration of women out in the world, after the war, with increased personal liberty. Its works, including the selection below, spotlight artists who for over a century were not given the priority by museums that they deserve. Now, thanks to *Uninvited* and its accompanying catalogue we have a fresh take on the early Canadian modern movement—one that changes the conversation about this country’s history.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

P.S.: *Uninvited* is on at the McMichael until January 16, 2022, before it travels to Calgary’s Glenbow Museum from April 9 to May 8, 2022, the Vancouver Art Gallery from June 11, 2022 to January 15, 2023, and the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa from March 3 to August 20, 2023.

WINIFRED PETCHEY MARSH

Arctic Cameo

Winifred Petchey Marsh, *Arctic Cameo*, 1937, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Yellowknife.

Arctic Cameo, 1937, is one of many exquisite watercolour paintings of the landscape and Inuit in Eskimo Point (now Arviat), Nunavut, created by English-born Winifred Petchey Marsh (1905–1995) over a forty-year period in the Canadian Arctic. “The woman and child were a jewel of colour and interest,” remarked Marsh of this work, one of her favourite drawings. “I thought to myself, if only I can do it! What a subject!” In 1933 Marsh settled on the western shore of Hudson’s Bay, joining her soon-to-be husband, an Anglican missionary. Initially, she felt too shy to portray Inuit community members, but over time, they developed friendships.

Learn More about Winifred Petchey Marsh in a Virtual Curatorial Talk on *Uninvited* by Sarah Milroy

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REGINA SEIDEN GOLDBERG

The Immigrant

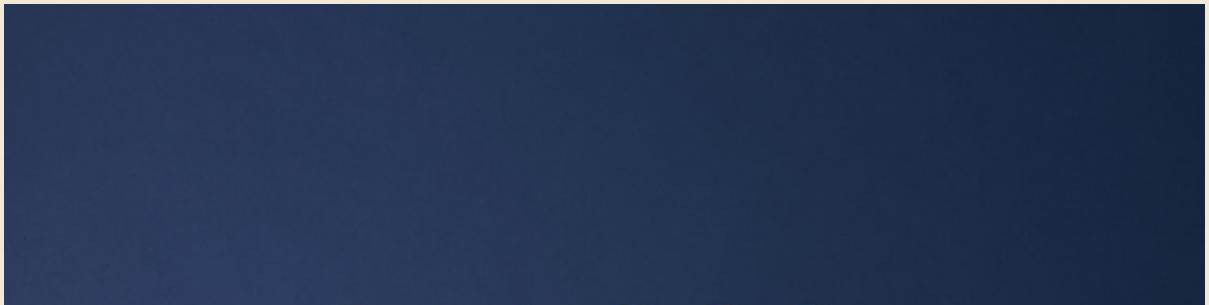
Regina Seiden Goldberg, *The Immigrant*, c.1921, private collection.

Montreal-based Jewish Canadian artist Regina Seiden (1897–1991) was interested in painting contemporary women. In *The Immigrant*, c.1921, the young sitter, dressed in a shoulder-baring pink dress and partially wrapped in a patterned fabric, appears forlorn. Her mood may reflect the xenophobic sentiment that characterized the early 1920s, reinforced by the Immigrant Act of 1919 which restricted the number of non-Anglo-Saxon people who settled in Canada. This was a deeply personal issue for Seiden, who was the daughter of Galician Jewish immigrants. The artist, a member of the Beaver Hall Group, had a gift for capturing women in ways that defied tradition, yet she ended her promising career in 1935 to support her husband and fellow artist Eric Goldberg (1890–1969).

Learn More about Regina Seiden Goldberg

ELIZABETH KATT PETRANT

Cradleboard and moss bag



Elizabeth Katt Petrant, Cradleboard and moss bag, 1919–1938,
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Elizabeth Katt Petrant (1891?–1922), an Anishinaabe woman from N'Daki Menan ("our land"), Bear Island, Temagami, Ontario, sewed and decorated this fabric moss bag for her daughter, Madeline Katt Theriault, to be used with a cradleboard to carry her babies. Offering warmth and safety to an infant, the cradleboard and moss bag display symmetrical beaded floral designs that were likely originally conceived by Katt Petrant's grandmother, Angele Katt. "What I see when I look at Madeline's cradleboard is the intergenerational transmission of knowledge between Anishinaabe women rendered in renewed floral form," writes Alexandra Kahsenni:io Nahwegahbow, Associate Curator of Historical Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada, commenting on the work in the *Uninvited* catalogue.

Learn More about Elizabeth Katt Petrant

MARION LONG

The Fan

Marion Long, *The Fan*, 1914, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

In her masterpiece *The Fan*, 1914, Marion Long (1882–1970) depicts a white woman wearing a light blue flowered kimono as she peers into a mirror. Her reflection, rendered with loose brushstrokes, lacks definition, suggesting the figure's uncertainty towards her own sense of identity. Her costume provides a striking contrast to her neutral surroundings, reinforcing the woman's alienation, which may be a response to the dramatic social change that women experienced in the early twentieth century. Best known for her street scenes, in 1933 Toronto-based Long became the second woman to be elected a full member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, fifty-three years after Charlotte Schreiber (1834–1922).

Learn More about Marion Long

MARGARET WATKINS

The Back of A.Z.W.

Margaret Watkins, *The Back of A.Z.W.,* 1923, Robert Mann Gallery, New York.

Hamilton-born Margaret Watkins (1884–1969) captured this painterly photograph of a woman watching over a pan heating in a fire pit in the early 1920s, when she was living in New York City. She was then at the height of her career: in addition to being one of the first women to succeed in the field of advertising photography, she was a prominent art photographer admired for her unusual still-life compositions. Watkins has been widely acclaimed for bringing together warm tones in softly focused, striking compositions of everyday objects and scenes, qualities that can be seen in *The Back of A.Z.W.*, 1923.

Learn More about Margaret Watkins

Margaret Watkins: Life & Work by Mary O'Connor
is one of the ACI's forthcoming titles.

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PARASKEVA CLARK

Self-Portrait

Paraskeva Clark, *Self-Portrait*, 1931–32, Museum London.

Russian artist Paraskeva Clark (1898–1986) embarked on *Self-Portrait*, 1931–32, in the same year that she married her second husband, a Canadian accountant named Philip Clark, and relocated from Paris to Toronto. Representing a transformative moment in Clark's life, this painting shows her confidently looking over her shoulder. It became her first work to be publicly exhibited when it was included in the annual juried exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in December 1932. In a note attached to its back, Clark wrote that *Self-Portrait* represented "a foot in the door of the temple of Canadian art." She went on to become one of the first Canadian artists to address social issues in her work and to challenge the dominance of landscape painting.

Learn More in ACI's *Paraskeva Clark: Life & Work*
by Christine Boyanoski

This book was made possible thanks to the Title Sponsorship of The McLean Foundation.

ATTATSIAQ

Tuilik (woman's parka) panel

Attatsiaq, Tuilik (woman's parka) panel, 1926–37, Manitoba Museum, Winnipeg.

Created by Attatsiaq (1910–c.1955), a Padlirmiut Inuit expert beader and seamstress from the region west of Hudson Bay, this extraordinary panel was formerly sewn onto a *tuilik* (woman's parka). Attatsiaq made clothing to keep her family warm, but she also took pleasure in designing beadwork that transformed the garments into beautiful and unique creations. This panel is composed of white and coloured beads she purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company post that she and her family visited each spring in the 1930s to trade fox furs. Despite the time and effort Attatsiaq put into her beadwork, she was known to take apart her designs so that she could create new ones.

Learn More about Attatsiaq

SUZANNE DUQUET

Group

Suzanne Duquet, *Group*, 1941, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City.

Painted while Suzanne Duquet (1916–2000) was still a student at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal, this psychologically complex group portrait presents the artist as an androgynous figure in front of an easel, surrounded by her three conventionally feminine sisters. While Duquet portrays herself gazing directly at the viewer, her siblings are lost in introspection, neither looking at us or at each other. Their detachment from their surroundings, coupled with the claustrophobic composition, suggests an unusual view of "women seeking emancipation well beyond their legal rights alone, pushing the limits of female personhood in portraiture," writes Anne-Marie Bouchard, Curator of Modern Art at Musée nationale des beaux-arts du Québec in the *Uninvited* catalogue.

Learn More about Suzanne Duquet

MARIAN DALE SCOTT

Stairway

Marian Dale Scott, *Stairway*, c.1940, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Featuring expressionless figures moving through a gloomy and sterile urban space, Montreal-based Marian Dale Scott's (1906–1993) dystopic *Stairway*, c.1940, is reminiscent of the famous Surrealist town squares of Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978). Whether depicting streets, waterfronts, or park scenes, Dale Scott's paintings from the 1930s and early 1940s all share an ominous atmosphere, reflecting her negative view of contemporary urban life. She and her husband, poet F.R. Scott, were part of a socialist organization that brought to Montreal an exhibition of Soviet art, whose style influenced her paintings from this period, including *Stairway*. A versatile painter, Scott soon moved on to other artistic styles, and she changed her subjects with each new decade of her seventy-year career.

Learn More about Marian Dale Scott

PRUDENCE HEWARD

At the Theatre

Prudence Heward, *At the Theatre*, 1928, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

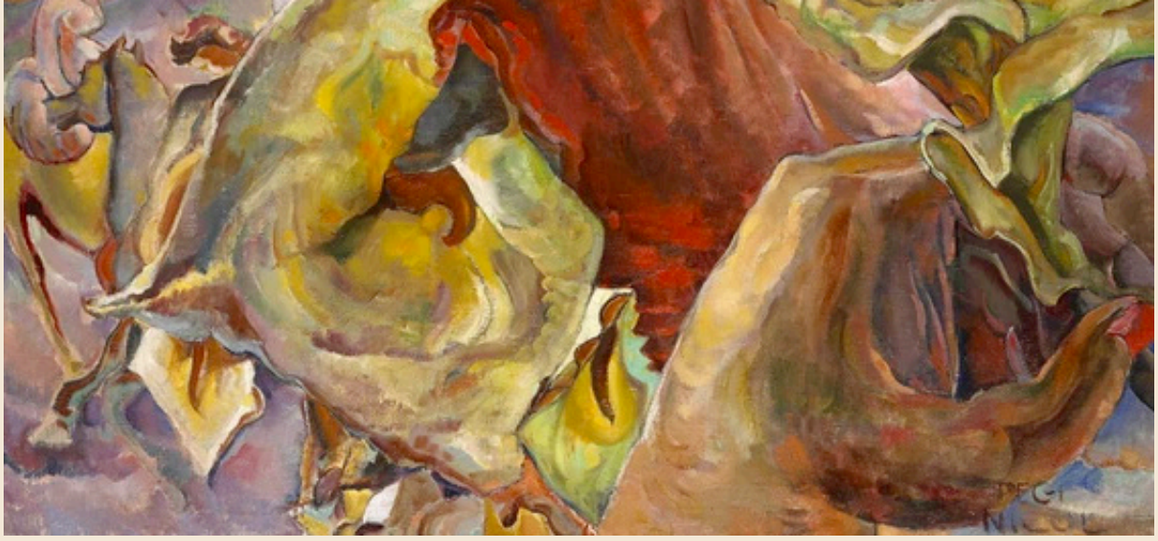
In *At the Theatre*, 1928, Montreal artist Prudence Heward (1896–1947) paints a close-up view of two seated young women waiting for the performance on stage to begin. That they are not accompanied by men indicates the growing independence of women in the 1920s. Although the elegantly dressed pair engage in separate activities, their similar attire, smooth brown hair, and sloping shoulders, along with their slightly overlapping bodies, suggest a close bond between them. As a matter of fact, according to art historian Barbara Meadowcroft, the models for this painting were the sisters of Beaver Hall Group artist Sarah Robertson (1891–1948). Described by A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974) as "the very best painter we ever had in Canada," Heward is celebrated for her portraits of strong and defiant women.

Learn More in ACI's *Prudence Heward: Life & Work*
by Julia Skelly

This book was made possible thanks to the Title Sponsorship of Sandra L. Simpson.

PEGI NICOL MACLEOD

A Descent of Lilies



Pegi Nicol MacLeod, *A Descent of Lilies*, 1935, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Sexuality was not commonly explored by Canadian artists in the mid-twentieth century, yet Ottawa-born Pegi Nicol MacLeod (1904–1949) boldly addressed the topic in a series of sensuous paintings she created between 1935 and 1939, including the arresting self-portrait *A Descent of Lilies*, 1935. The artist depicts herself confidently gazing at us over her bare shoulder, a pose that emphasizes the feminine curves of her partially draped body. Swirling around her are female figures, large lilies resembling human genitalia, bucking horses, and, in the lower right, her left hand clutching a lily bloom. Infused with an erotic energy that reflected MacLeod's passionate relationship with her husband, Bill Graham, this masterpiece is a rare and important representation of female sexuality in Canadian modern art.

Learn More about Pegi Nicol MacLeod

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