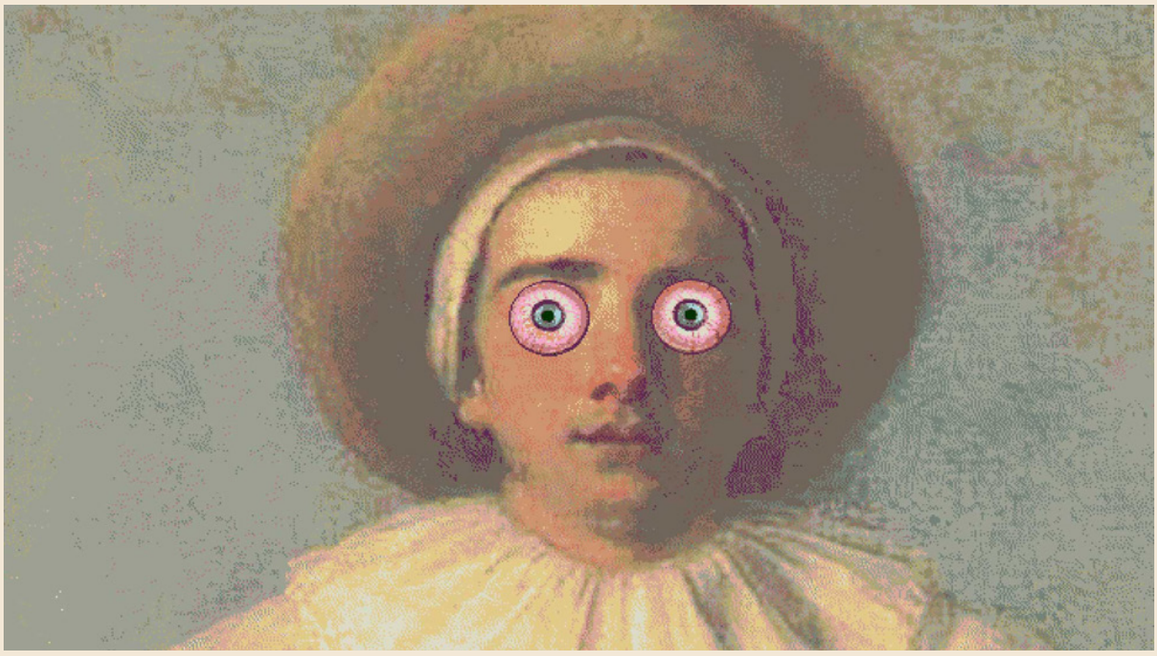
ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

OCTOBER 29, 2021

SUPERNATURAL SIGHTINGS ELEVEN CANADIAN WORKS

To mark Halloween this Sunday, we're looking at artists who have a gift for making the familiar seem very strange.



Daniel Barrow, Scene from *I can't stop looking at you* 6, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

What's more frightening than horses frozen to death in the Red River while fleeing a Winnipeg racetrack fire in 1926? A masked and hooded figure stalking Labrador streets? A young boy who wanders through a picture gallery where the eyes of his ancestors' portraits—art historical masterpieces—follow him? The answer is nothing. All of these scenes are straight out of Canadian art—a subject that is packed with terror. Scroll through this gallery of unsettling scenes by some of Canada's most innovative creators, whose works show how the otherworldly can elicit fear and thrills in equal measure. As the following images reveal, there is nothing so scary as an artist's mind. Have a happy and safe All Hallows' Eve.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

NALUJUK NIGHT

by Jennie Williams

Jennie Williams, Nalujuk Night (detail), 2010, The Rooms, St. John's.

In this bone-chilling image by Labrador-born Inuk photographer and filmmaker Jennie Williams, a masked and hooded figure stalks the streets during an evening snowstorm. The work is part of the Nunatsiavut-based artist's documentary series Nalujuk Night, 2010–ongoing, about a unique Labrador Inuit tradition. Williams explains, "On January 6 each year, the community gathers to await the *Nalujuit* (plural for *Nalujuk*)—masked figures who represent startling characters said to come inland from the Eastern sea ice." They playfully chase after local residents, whose only means of escaping the *Nalujuit* is to sing an Inuktitut song to them. Williams's debut film, *Nalujuk Night*, won Best Atlantic Short Documentary at the FIN Atlantic International Film Festival this year.

Learn more about Jennie Williams

UNTITLED

by Marcel Dzama

Marcel Dzama, *Untitled*, 2000. © Marcel Dzama, Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner.

Winnipeg-born, New York City-based artist Marcel Dzama (b.1974)'s drawing *Untitled*, 2000, depicts an enormous bat feasting on the blood of a slender woman, who has obligingly rolled up her sleeve to expose her bare arm. Bats are a recurring motif in Dzama's work, and they hearken back to an indelible memory from his childhood: "At my school, we were using these trucks as classrooms.... There were boards beneath these trucks. One day, my friend and I took away the boards and out flew the bats. It was my first time seeing bats." Today Dzama is internationally renowned for his delicate drawings of fantastical—and often unsettling—scenes inspired by childhood fears and experiences, current events, and folklore.

Learn more about Marcel Dzama

SALUT LES FILLES (ANASTASIA'S HALLOWEEN MARTINI)

by Chloe Wise

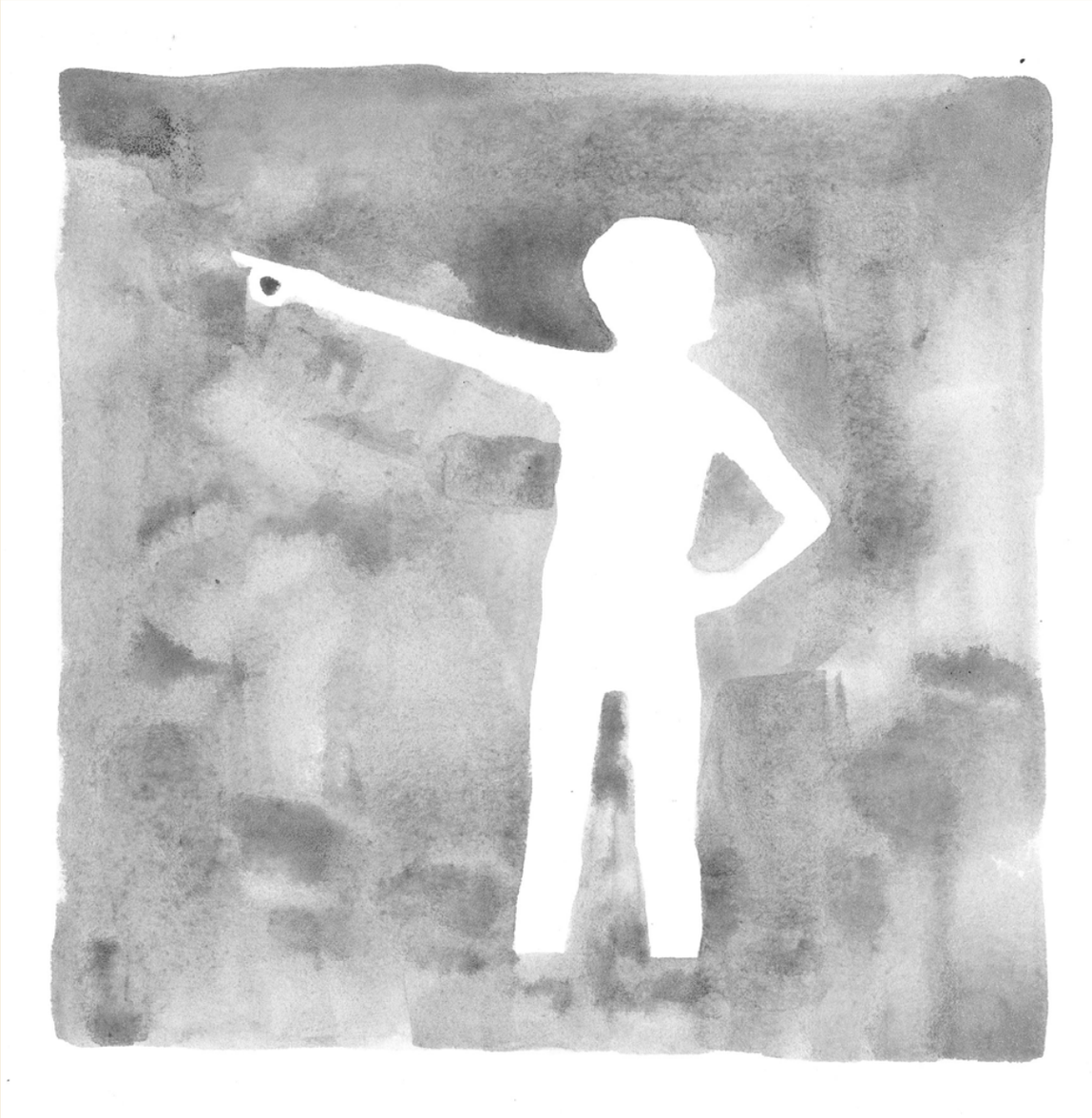
Chloe Wise, *Salut Les Filles (Anastasia's Halloween Martini)*, 2020. © 2021 Chloe Wise / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOCAN, Montreal.

Presenting a close-up portrait of a person in a witch costume drinking a martini, Montreal-born, New York City-based artist Chloe Wise (b.1990) playfully explores notions of glamour and gender. The figure gazes at us with a deadpan expression as her fake, absurdly large nose pierces the surface of her drink. Although her face is covered in green makeup, her hand is left unpainted, further adding to the humorous undertones of the picture. The painting's title, translating to "hello ladies" in English, pokes fun at society's expectation of women to be desirable and seductive while alluding to the subject's queer identity. Anastasia has appeared in several of Wise's works, as the artist often chooses her friends and family members to be her subjects.

Learn more about Chloe Wise

GUESTBOOK: GHOST STORIES

by Leanne Shapton



Page from Leanne Shapton's *Guestbook: Ghost Stories* (Riverhead Books, 2019).

This poignant watercolour of a white apparition against an amorphous background by Toronto-born, New York City-based artist and writer Leanne Shapton (b.1973) is featured in her 2019 work *Guestbook: Ghost Stories*. A mix of writing, prose, collage, photography, and watercolour, *Guestbook* is composed of thirty-three short stories and vignettes with characters who are haunted by former lovers, departed family members, and their possessions. The ghosts that Shapton conjures up are not frightening, but instead are symbolic of loneliness, absence, and human fragility.

Learn more about Leanne Shapton

SELF-PORTRAIT AT HANOVER

by Carl Schaefer

Carl Schaefer, *Self-Portrait at Hanover*, April 23, 1939, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In this rare, unsettling self-portrait, celebrated landscape painter Carl Schaefer (1903–1995) gazes suspiciously at something to his left beyond the frame. Above him looms a dark, ominous sky, while nondescript farm buildings and a leafless tree are visible in the background. Schaefer produced this mysterious work during the decade from 1932 to 1942 when he made annual summer trips to his birthplace of Hanover, Ontario, to paint the rural landscape to which he was deeply attached. According to art historian Marylin Jean McKay, Schaefer's and many other artists' decisions to create disturbing landscapes during the 1930s signify the mood of the Great Depression.

Learn more about Carl Schaefer

MY WINNIPEG

by Guy Maddin

Guy Maddin, *My Winnipeg* (still), 2007, 80 min, Courtesy of the artist.

Internationally renowned Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin's (b.1956) self-described "docu-fantasia" *My Winnipeg* (2007) blends together fact, memory, and fantasy in surreal scenes about the history of his native city—such as this one, depicting horses that fled a Winnipeg racetrack fire in 1926 and ended up freezing to death in the Red River, their heads visible above the surface of the ice all winter. Shot in Maddin's typical black and white style, the image appears all the more haunting—yet he humorously narrates that the locals grew accustomed to the frozen heads and couples even took romantic strolls amidst them, as seen here.

Learn more about Guy Maddin

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UNTITLED (FIGURE IN KIMONO)

by Kudluajuk Ashoona

Kudluajuk Ashoona, *Untitled (Figure in Kimono)*, 2019, coloured pencil and ink, 76.2 x 58.4 cm, Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts.

Simultaneously connoting delicate beauty and brutality, this striking portrait by Kinngait (Cape Dorset) artist Kudluajuk Ashoona (1958–2020) depicts a child posing in a skeletal mask and floral blue kimono while clutching a knife. The bandaged fingers on their right hand suggest a genuine wound but heighten the overall menacing nature of this figure in their brilliant homemade Halloween costume.

Ashoona only began seriously making art in 2011, when she was in her fifties. Over the course of her brief career, she produced captivating coloured pencil drawings that were largely inspired by photographs of family gatherings, domestic life, and leisurely activities in Kinngait.

Learn more about Kudluajuk Ashoona

QUEEN

by Aganetha Dyck

Aganetha Dyck, *Queen*, from the Masked Ball Series, 2007, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In Winnipeg artist Aganetha Dyck's (b.1937) *Queen*, 2007, an undulating layer of honeycomb clings to an old porcelain figurine of Queen Elizabeth II, disturbingly covering her right eye so that it appears as a black hole. This surreal sculpture is part of Dyck's Masked Ball Series, 2007–8, in which she placed broken porcelain figures into a beehive so that the creatures could build honeycomb on their surfaces. Commenting on *Queen*, Dyck says, "I purchased the figurine while thinking of Queen Elizabeth's daily life: a lifetime of servitude to others and her lack of privacy....I gave the honeybees restoration hints, especially requesting that they give The Queen a new crown." Dyck has worked with live honeybees in her art practice for over twenty years.

Learn more about Aganetha Dyck

ÉTUDE 3

by Raphaëlle de Groot

Raphaëlle de Groot, *Étude 3*, 2007, colour video, 9 min, Musée National des beaux-arts du Québec.

In her performance *Étude 3*, 2007, Montreal artist Raphaëlle de Groot (b.1974) covers her face with a blank sheet of white paper and draws a portrait—a haunting, distorted mask featuring sad blue eyes and red lips slightly parted in surprise. The black scribbles on the right side of the face further suggest disfigurement. De Groot's interest in blindly producing portraits began in the late 1990s and inspired several collaborative projects. Her work examines the nature of representation, the unpredictable outcomes of placing physical restrictions on herself, and the relationship between the artist and the Other.

Learn more about Raphaëlle de Groot

NEW FOSSTON

by Neil Farber

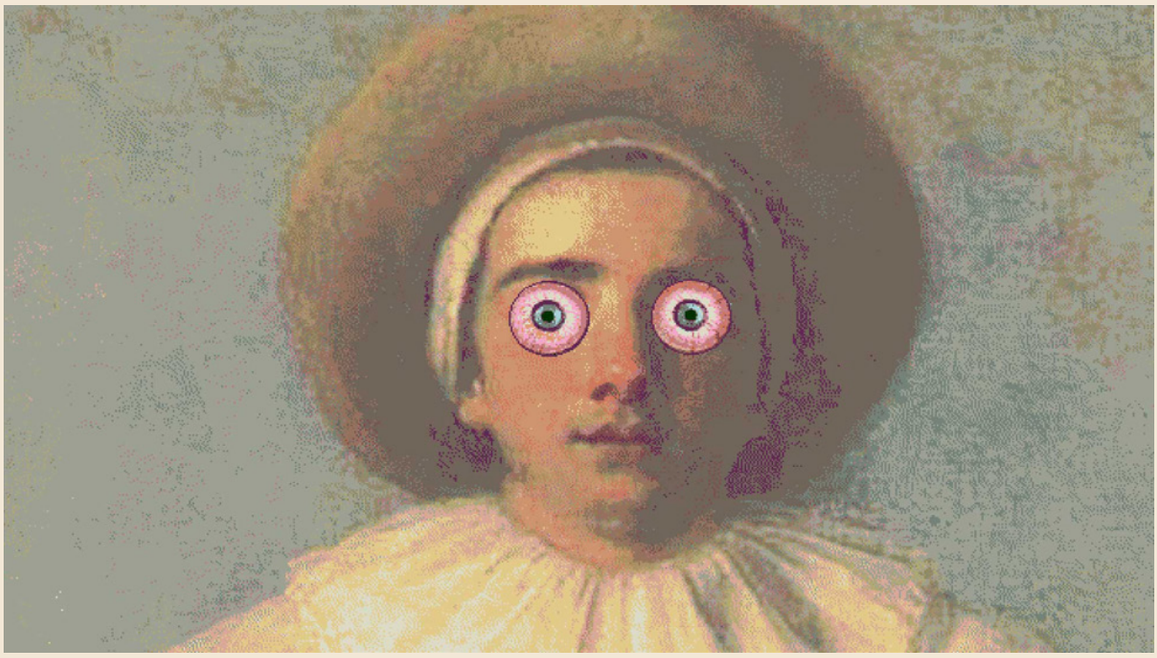
Neil Farber, *New Fosston*, 2010, Collection of Antoine de Galbert.

This group of human-animal hybrids and ghostly childlike figures may appear menacing, but Winnipeg-based artist Neil Farber (b.1975) imagines them as the pioneers of New Fosston (Fosston is a small town in Saskatchewan). Red text running along the bottom of the work reads, “And they set out to create a New Fosston. A new town of freedom.” Farber was a founding member of the Royal Art Lodge, a group of Winnipeg-based artists who shared a childlike style of drawing and painting to explore serious subject matter. In works like this one Farber explores themes of conflict, persecution, and depression.

Learn more about Neil Farber

I CAN’T STOP LOOKING AT YOU

by Daniel Barrow



Daniel Barrow, Scene from *I can’t stop looking at you* 6, 2014, Courtesy of the artist.

Winnipeg-born, Montreal-based Daniel Barrow (b.1971) presents French Rococo painter Jean-Antoine Watteau's (1684–1721) widely known depiction of Pierrot—the melancholy stock character from the Commedia dell'Arte—with bulging, bloodshot eyeballs in this scene from *I can't stop looking at you*, 2014. Barrow's work is based on a story about a young boy who wanders through a picture gallery where the eyes of his ancestors' portraits—art historical masterpieces—follow him. The artist is acclaimed for his surreal storytelling, and here he repurposes an obsolete animation program to present his narrative as a series of digital slides.

Learn more about Daniel Barrow

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Image Credits: **[1, 12]** Daniel Barrow, Scene from *I can't stop looking at you* 6, 2014, digital slide and performance. Courtesy of the artist. **[2]** Jennie Williams, Nalujuk Night (detail), 2010, digital image on paper (A/P), 40.5 x 50.7 cm. Collection of The Rooms, St. John's. **[3]** Marcel Dzama, *Untitled*, 2000, ink and gouache on paper. © Marcel Dzama. Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner. **[4]** Chloe Wise, *Salut Les Filles (Anastasia's Halloween Martini)*, 2020, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm. © 2021 Chloe Wise / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOCAN, Montreal. **[5]** Leanne Shapton, *Guestbook: Ghost Stories* (Riverhead Books, 2019). Courtesy of Riverhead Books. **[6]** Carl Schaefer, *Self-Portrait at Hanover*, April 23, 1939, watercolour over graphite on wove paper, 38 x 29 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1992 (36758). Photo credit: NGC. **[7]** Guy Maddin, *My Winnipeg*, 2007, 80 min. Courtesy of the artist. **[8]** Kudluajuk Ashoona, *Untitled (Figure in Kimono)*, 2019, coloured pencil and ink, 76.2 x 58.4 cm. Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts. **[9]** Aganetha Dyck, *Queen*, from the Masked Ball Series, 2007, porcelain, beeswax. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo credit: Peter Dyck. **[10]** Raphaëlle de Groot, *Étude 3*, 2007, colour video, 9 min. Collection of the Musée National des beaux-arts du Québec, purchase (2009.08). © Raphaëlle de Groot. Photo credit: MNBAQ. **[11]** Neil Farber, *New Fosston*, 2010, acrylic on birch panel, 76.2 x 101.6 cm. Collection of Antoine de Galbert. Courtesy of Actuart.