ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

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THE ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY 10 CANADIAN SIGHTS

Canadian artists have long been stimulated by the quotidian beauty of their homes, neighbourhoods, and cities. Now we're taking inspiration from them.

Alex Colville, *To Prince Edward Island*, 1965, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

New pandemic safety measures are keeping us close to home and inside. That said, the regulations don't mean that the months ahead will lack beauty, revelation, or the extraordinary. Canadian art tells us that for decades this country's creators have been inspired by the magic of every day sights. In the spirit of optimism and looking forward to the hope of the new year, this week we're sharing some of the most remarkable art that pays tribute to the splendour of our surroundings and the quiet power of reflecting on them. From L.L. FitzGerald's invitation to delight in winter moments viewed from our home windows to Emily Carr's joyous re-visioning of the British Columbia forest, the stories behind the following works delight us and remind us of their creators' brilliant innovations, tremendous dedication, and talents for celebrating what is often taken for granted. We hope that they inspire you as well, and we wish you a safe and happy 2022.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

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401 TOWARDS LONDON NO. 1

by Jack Chambers

Jack Chambers, *401 Towards London No. 1*, 1968–69, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Leading London artist Jack Chambers (1931–1978) was driving on Highway 401, headed to Toronto, when he glanced at his rear-view mirror and let out a "wow" as he took in the expansive and perfectly harmonious landscape. What many others saw as an unremarkable stretch of road became a revelatory experience for Chambers. The artist returned to the area later that day and then the next to take photographs that would serve as the basis for this pivotal work, which signalled a new direction in his painting after a long period of dissatisfaction with the medium.

Read more in ACI's
Jack Chambers: Life & Work by Mark A. Cheetham

FROM AN UPSTAIRS WINDOW, WINTER

by Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald

Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, *From an Upstairs Window, Winter*, c.1950–51, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In 1950, on a still mid-winter day, Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890–1956) took in this view from the attic window of his Winnipeg home and saw visual poetry in this masterful interplay of household objects set against the icy exterior. FitzGerald's enduring fascination with interior/exterior views prompted art critic Robert Ayre to refer to him as "the man who looks out of the window." This particular painting "is as complete a statement as the artist ever made of how familiar surroundings could act as a reflection of his own quiet and contemplative spirit," writes ACI author Michael Parke-Taylor. To achieve this classic Canadian work, FitzGerald juxtaposed the lyrical lattice of tree branches outside with the linearity of the windowsill and the geometry of the jug. Though painted seven decades ago, by employing an overall subdued colour palette, the artist realized a timeless vision of harmony.

Read more in ACI's
Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald: Life & Work by Michael Parke-Taylor

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LOWLANDS NO. 9

by Gershon Iskowitz

Gershon Iskowitz, *Lowlands No. 9*, 1970, Vancouver Art Gallery.

In 1967 Polish Canadian painter Gershon Iskowitz (1920 or 1921–1988) had an epiphany when, from an aircraft, he took in the sub-Arctic landscape and the coast of Hudson Bay, not far from Churchill, Manitoba. Iskowitz saw the scene below with fresh eyes and this aerial view inspired him to develop a new semi-abstract style of painting. Produced shortly after Iskowitz's transformative journey, *Lowlands No. 9*, 1970, depicts two land masses bordering a vast body of water—a sea of blue punctuated with colourful accents of red, green, and yellow. The pivotal painting was completely distinct from the work of his contemporaries and with it, and other similar creations that followed, he achieved international renown.

Read more in ACI's
Gershon Iskowitz: Life & Work by Ihor Holubizky

FLIGHT STOP

by Michael Snow

Michael Snow, *Flight Stop*, 1979, Toronto Eaton Centre.

A flock of Canada geese may be a common sight in most parts of this country, but Toronto artist Michael Snow (b.1928) transformed it into an astonishing one with his commissioned permanent installation *Flight Stop*, 1979, at the Toronto Eaton Centre. The piece appears to represent sixty geese breaking formation to land at the south entrance of the shopping complex, but it is in fact a combination of fibreglass forms and photographs of a single goose that was found on Toronto Island. Commenting on the nature of illusion, *Flight Stop* remains one of Snow's most famous works, seen by thousands of people every day.

Read more in ACI's
Michael Snow: Life & Work by Martha Langford

SUPPER TABLE

by Mary Pratt

Mary Pratt, *Supper Table*, 1969, Collection of the Family of Mary Pratt.

Newfoundland artist Mary Pratt (1935–2018) began creating her luminous interpretations of domestic objects after experiencing an epiphany at the dinner table one evening in 1969. Struck by how the beaming sunlight from a nearby window fell on the collection of condiments, hot dogs, teacups, glasses of milk, and orange peels, Pratt quickly reached for her drawing materials to record the fleeting light. Meanwhile, her husband, the artist Christopher Pratt (b.1935), preserved the scene with his camera. The slides that he later gave her became the basis for this painting, and convinced Pratt that she could fully capture the sensuous qualities of sun streaming through the window. She explained, "I could see so many things that I hadn't seen before, all kinds of lights and shadows, and how a ketchup bottle hasn't just got an outside, but an inside, too."

Read more in ACI's
Mary Pratt: Life & Work by Ray Cronin

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SUNSHINE AND TUMULT

by Emily Carr

Emily Carr, *Sunshine and Tumult*, 1938–39, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

In 1933 the famed British Columbia artist Emily Carr (1871–1945) did a double-take when she looked at the woods. In *Sunshine and Tumult*, 1938–39, the beloved West Coast painter transforms a forest setting into an awe-inspiring world animated by spiritual forces. Although Carr had represented the subject numerous times before, she explained that the trees caught her attention anew with their "sways and ripples. It may be slow or fast but it is only one movement sweeping out into space but always keeping going—rocks, sea, sky, one continuous movement." *Sunshine and Tumult* marks Carr's turn to using loose and fluid brushstrokes—ones that generated a powerful sense of harmonious movement throughout the composition—a quality Carr also observed in the work of famed Dutch Post-Impressionist artist Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890).

Read more in ACI's
Emily Carr: Life & Work by Lisa Baldissera

Purchase a print copy of *Emily Carr: Life & Work*

CAPE DORSET FREEZER

by Annie Pootoogook

Annie Pootoogook, *Cape Dorset Freezer*, 2005, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Internationally acclaimed for her depictions of contemporary life in the Arctic, Inuk artist Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) embarked on her most ambitious drawing after being inspired by the everyday activity in the co-op store in her hometown of Kinngait, Nunavut. Measuring over two metres wide, *Cape Dorset Freezer*, 2005, was Pootoogook's first attempt at working on such a large scale. Although it was a difficult challenge, it illustrates her mastery of coloured pencil. Pootoogook's groundbreaking piece was immediately acquired by the National Gallery of Canada and prompted a new direction in contemporary Inuit art by encouraging other leading Inuit artists like Tim Pitsiulak (1967–2016) and Shuvinai Ashoona (b.1961) to produce large-format drawings.

Read more in ACI's
Annie Pootoogook: Life & Work by Nancy G. Campbell

FUNNY BICYCLE

by Greg Curnoe

Greg Curnoe, *Funny Bicycle*, December 1985–May 20, 1986, private collection.

As passionate about cycling as he was about art, London, Ontario-based Greg Curnoe (1936–1992) devoted much of his work from the 1970s onward to his favourite vehicle. Curnoe created at least fifteen life-sized bicycle portraits, the last of which was *Funny Bicycle*, December 1985–May 20, 1986. Composed of a real bike frame fitted with painted wooden wheels, the non-functioning bicycle alludes to several key themes in the artist's oeuvre, including colour wheels and sculptural assemblage. His interest in cycling made his art remarkably popular—as ACI author Judith Rodger notes, "Posters of these works are still being produced, and with their appeal beyond art circles they continue to introduce new audiences to Curnoe's art."

Read more in ACI's
Greg Curnoe: Life & Work by Judith Rodger

EXTENDED BREATHING IN THE GARDEN

by Suzy Lake

Suzy Lake, *Extended Breathing in the Garden*, 2008–10, Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto.

The act of inhaling and exhaling may be one of the most under-considered, everyday acts—though not in the work of Suzy Lake (b.1947). In *Extended Breathing in the Garden*, 2008–10, the Toronto-based artist stands in the corner of her backyard, inviting us into her personal space, and calls attention to what is all too often taken for granted. Lake's blurred image juxtaposes against her crisply rendered surroundings in a self-portrait that she created by using an hour-long photographic exposure to record the gentle movements that represent the essence of life. *Extended Breathing* is part of a series in which the artist placed herself in spaces of private and historical interest—including London's Trafalgar Square and the Detroit Institute of Arts—asking her audience to join the calm, meditative still moments of simply being alive.

Read more in ACI's
Suzy Lake: Life & Work by Erin Silver

TO PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

by Alex Colville

Alex Colville, *To Prince Edward Island*, 1965, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

One of Maritime artist Alex Colville's (1920–2013) most famous works, *To Prince Edward Island*, 1965, imbues a quotidian scene aboard a P.E.I. ferry with questions about the complex nature of looking. In this realist painting, a woman on a boat peers directly at the viewer through binoculars. Meanwhile, a man is seated behind her, his face and body largely obscured. Here Colville explores the contrast between what he called "the searching vision of the female" and the "stupid and passive" approach of the male gaze. He commented: "The woman sees, I suppose, and the man does not." The scene was restaged in American director Wes Anderson's film *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), attesting to the painting's iconic status within contemporary pop culture and the extraordinary depiction of a seemingly ordinary gesture.

Read more in ACI's
Alex Colville: Life & Work by Ray Cronin

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Image Credits: [1, 11] Alex Colville, *To Prince Edward Island*, 1965, acrylic emulsion on Masonite, 61.9 x 92.5 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1966 (no. 14954). © National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. **[2]** Jack Chambers, *401 Towards London No. 1*, 1968–69, oil on wood, 183 x 244 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Norcen Energy Resources Limited, 1986 (86/47). Jack Chambers Estate. **[3]** Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, *From an Upstairs Window, Winter*, c.1950–51, oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased, 1951 (5800). © With the permission of Patricia and Earl Green, co-holders of the FitzGerald copyright. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. **[4]** Gershon Iskowitz, *Lowlands No. 9*, 1970, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 93.9 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of the Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, 1995 (VAG 95.26.7). © Gershon Iskowitz Foundation. Photo credit: Ian Lefebvre. **[5]** Michael Snow, *Flight Stop*, 1979, 60 suspended fibreglass Canada goose forms surfaced with tinted black and white photographs, 32 x 20 x 16 m, Toronto Eaton Centre. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: Owen Byrne. **[6]** Mary Pratt, *Supper Table*, 1969, oil on canvas, 61 x 91.4 cm. Collection of the Family of Mary Pratt. Courtesy of The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery, St. John's. © Estate of Mary Pratt. **[7]** Emily Carr, *Sunshine and Tumult*, 1938–39, oil on paper, 87 x 57.1 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, bequest of H.S. Southam, CMG, LL.D, 1966. Photograph by Mike Lalich. **[8]** Annie Pootoogook, *Cape Dorset Freezer*, 2005, coloured pencil, black metallic ballpoint pen, and graphite on wove paper, 111.5 x 233.1 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 2007 (42155). Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts. **[9]** Greg Curnoe, *Funny Bicycle*, December 1985–May 20, 1986, mixed media sculpture, 94 x 168.9 x 35.6 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction House. © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). **[10]** Suzy Lake, *Extended Breathing in the Garden*, 2008–10, Fujitrans light-jet transparency, 76.2 x 101.6 cm; lightbox, 88.3 x 113.7 x 3.8 cm. Collection of Georgia Scherman Projects. Courtesy of Suzy Lake and Georgia Scherman Projects. © Suzy Lake.