ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

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THE ART OF AFFECTION
12 CANADIAN WORKS

Gripped by feelings of desire and devotion, these artists depict love in all its beauty, power, and complexity.

As Valentine's Day approaches next Monday, we are drawn to look at art meditating on love, on its deep mysteries and extraordinary power. The iconic Canadian musician, artist, and poet Leonard Cohen declared, "This is the most challenging activity that humans get into…we have the sense that we cannot live without love, that life has very little meaning without it." It's a sentiment that runs through the work of numerous artists throughout this country's history who celebrate love in its many forms to enable us to look beyond our limits. At once fleeting and profound, love is arguably life's most motivating force and its definitions continuously expand. In the following selection, we see tenderness and care between family members and friends, appreciate how early enchantments can mature into deep bonds of fidelity, feel the agonizing crush of love lost, and learn how mutual respect can spark healing conversations that move toward reconciliation. Here's a Valentine for you from the Art Canada Institute, sent with our love.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

UNTITLED

by Sarain Stump

Sarain Stump, *Untitled*, 1973, Collection of Linda Jaine.

This glorious pen on paper drawing of a couple riding a galloping horse captures a moment of exhilaration in time. Three beings are joined together in flight above the earth, unencumbered by gravity. Free, safe, and happy, the figures radiate self-worth and pride in their Indigenous heritage. The image was created by self-taught Plains Cree polymath Sarain Stump (1945–1974), an artist, poet, musician, actor, and educator whose place in mainstream art history has been largely overlooked. During his bright but brief life, cut short at age twenty-nine by a drowning accident, he was dedicated to promoting love and appreciation of Indigenous art, and inspired many others while teaching at Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College in Saskatoon.

Learn more about Sarain Stump

NOT OVER YOU

by Mark Clintberg

Installation views of *Not over you*, 2014–15, in the exhibition *Tragedy Plus Time* at the Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina, June 20 to August 27, 2014.

Montreal-based Mark Clintberg often addresses the public directly in his art, using forms of signage familiar in a commercial context—such as billboards or neon lights—to display words or phrases that are startling in their intimacy and vulnerability. The message in this work speaks to the painful longing of unrequited love, the ache of heartbreak, and the mourning of love lost—those inevitable flipsides of devotion that we tend to hastily dismiss when giving our hearts away. The stacked words were installed over a doorway at Regina's Dunlop Art Gallery, an ironic placement that prompted the individuals passing under it to privately confess who might still be getting under their skin.

Learn more about Mark Clintberg

MAGIC LANDSCAPE

by Joyce Wieland

Joyce Wieland, *Magic Landscape*, c.1980, private collection.

In this fantastical watercolour landscape, Toronto-born artist Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) presents joyous ribbons of colour to create an image bursting with life. A glowing orange sun, puffy heart pierced by Cupid's arrow, feathery bird, shaggy monster, and floppy flowers are discernible among the scene's abstract splashes and ripples. Wieland was interested in showing what women's sexuality, intimacy, and desire looked like, and this giddy painting offers up an orgiastic celebration of feminine sensuality. The first living female artist to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in 1971 and the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1987, Wieland treated gender, ecology, and national identity as interchangeable issues.

Learn more in ACI's
Joyce Wieland: Life & Work by Johanne Sloan

THE GUEST, VENICE

by Florence Carlyle

Florence Carlyle, *The Guest, Venice*, 1913, Woodstock Art Gallery Permanent Collection.

The Galt, Ontario-born Florence Carlyle's (1864–1923) *The Guest, Venice*, 1913, depicts a couple engaged in a merry conversation by an open window. The seated woman, wearing a strapless burgundy dress, absentmindedly plays with her necklace as she listens to her gregarious friend, equally radiant in ethereal layers of white. This warm and sensuously coloured work is likely a portrait of the artist and her companion Julie Hastings, who became Carlyle's frequent model and partner after they met in England in 1911. Following their trip to Italy in 1913—the same year that this work was created—the pair settled in East Sussex, England, where they lived together for the next ten years in a cottage they called "Sweet Haws" until the artist's death. Carlyle's work is currently on view at the National Gallery of Canada in the exhibition *Canada and Impressionism: New Horizons*.

Learn more about Florence Carlyle

REFRIGERATOR

by Alex Colville

Alex Colville, *Refrigerator*, 1977, private collection.

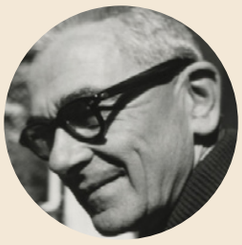
In this intimate painting by Nova Scotia–based Alex Colville (1920–2013), a naked, middle-aged, perhaps post-coital husband and wife stand at ease in their darkened kitchen, illuminated by a refrigerator bulb. The man drinks a glass of milk while the woman opens the door, their three cats purring at their feet. This image was considered controversial at the time of its creation—and is still filtered by online search engines—due to its portrayal of a naked male body, a considerably less ubiquitous sight in art than the female nude. Couples make regular appearances in Colville's work, and almost always represent the artist and his wife, Rhoda, with whom he had a sixty-year love affair.

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

THOSE BEAUTIFUL DAYS (LES BEAUX JOURS)

by Jean Paul Lemieux

Jean Paul Lemieux, *Those Beautiful Days* (*Les beaux jours*), 1937, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City.



Quebec City-born modernist Jean Paul Lemieux (1904–1990) created this hybrid portrait-landscape just after his marriage to Madeleine Des Rosiers in 1937. Penniless but content in the private new world of their union, the young couple spent that summer at Port-au-Persil, Quebec, a quiet hamlet ensconced within a cove of a larger tributary that flows into the Saint Lawrence River. With her hair tucked beneath a blue bandana, the young woman looks out onto the vertiginous vista, nearly blending in with the blues and greens of the sky, water, and field before her. At once quiet and sublime, this vision of an isolated figure in an immense landscape—a signature of Lemieux's artistic output—captures the heady feeling of new love.

Learn more in ACI's
Jean Paul Lemieux: Life & Work by Michèle Grandbois

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AQAQTUQ (SINGING LOVE SONG)

by Napachie Pootoogook

Napachie Pootoogook, *Aqaqtuq (Singing Love Song)*, 1993, Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts, Toronto.

The loving bond between mother and child is at the heart of this touching work by Kinngait (Cape Dorset)–based artist Napachie Pootoogook (1938–2002), whose daughter was contemporary Inuit artist Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016). In this portrait of familial love, a mother clasps her daughter's hands while singing a lullaby. Their cozy surrounds include household items from both traditional Northern and Southern settler cultures, such as a striped Hudson's Bay blanket and desk clock. These commingling objects might be read as symbols of forced assimilation in Arctic settlements—a subject Napachie never shied away from in her unflinchingly honest portrayals of Northern life. They turn a seemingly everyday moment between mother and child into a powerful statement beyond love into a commentary as well on Inuit resilience.

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

BABY MAKES 3

by General Idea

General Idea, *Baby Makes 3*, 1984/89, various collections.

Felix Partz (1945–1994), Jorge Zontal (1944–1994), and AA Bronson (b.1946)—pictured in *Baby Makes 3*—formed the countercultural art collective General Idea in Toronto in the late 1960s. The three men often used artifice and subversive wit to tackle social issues, especially queer identity and sexuality. This airbrushed multiple self-portrait renders the group as cherubic infants, their eyes sparkling and cheeks rosy. Defiantly challenging heteronormative prejudices about what society considers innocent and endearing, it asserts queer love as deserving of both of these descriptors. It also calls into question how notions of family are defined outside the narrow scope of the nuclear model. When 2SLGBTQQIA+ people face rejection from biological relatives, chosen families—made up of loving and supportive friends—are born.

Learn more in ACI's
General Idea: Life & Work by Sarah E.K. Smith

IN THE ORCHARD (SPRING)

by William Brymner

William Brymner, *In the Orchard (Spring)*, 1892, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

A courting couple amble along a manicured path, surrounded by an eruption of blush-pink spring blossoms. Looking down shyly at the ground in front of them, the woman twirls her parasol and the man pokes the dirt with his walking stick, both with fidgeting hands grateful for the implements that occupy them. In this work, the always experimental Canadian modernist William Brymner (1855–1925) flirted with Impressionism, an art movement—made famous by painters such as Claude Monet (1840–1926) and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919)—that was less concerned with realism and more interested in capturing changing light and atmospheric colour. For both Impressionists and lovers, beauty is found not in provable facts, but in the eye of the beholder.

Learn more in ACI's
William Brymner: Life & Work by Jocelyn Anderson

TOWARDS AN INDIAN GAY IMAGE

by Sunil Gupta

Sunil Gupta, *Towards an Indian Gay Image*, Lake Pichola, Udaipur, 1983, Courtesy of Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto.

In this arresting picture, Indian Canadian photographer Sunil Gupta (b.1953) captures a private moment between two men standing at the edge of Lake Pichola in Udaipur, India. The work is part of Gupta's photographic series Towards a Gay Indian Image, 1982, which documents furtive encounters between gay men in public gardens or near historical monuments. The artist, who came out in his teens in Montreal, conceived of this series during a visit to his hometown of New Delhi in 1980. Gupta sought to document urban gay life in the city, although he quickly discovered that no one was willing to have their picture taken, as being gay was illegal in India at the time. With the exception of this documentary work, Gupta created staged photographs of trysts between anonymous individuals, offering rare glimpses of hidden lives.

Learn more about Sunil Gupta

Learn more about Sunil Gupta's upcoming retrospective at the Ryerson Image Centre

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PORTRAIT OF CHRISTIANA CARTEAUX BANNISTER

by Edward Mitchell Bannister

Edward Mitchell Bannister, *Portrait of Christiana Carteaux Bannister*, c.1860, RISD Museum, Providence.

New Brunswick–born painter Edward Mitchell Bannister (1828–1901), one of the most successful Black American artists of the nineteenth century, created this portrait of his wife, Christiana Carteaux Bannister, soon after they were married. This is a personal love letter as well as a work of reverence for a woman of significant historical repute: Carteaux Bannister, a successful entrepreneur of Black and Indigenous ancestry, was a dedicated patron of the arts and tireless abolitionist. The artist's romantic love is clearly expressed in the special care with which he painted her face, the work's focal point. Her gaze is self-assured, her lips gently curved, and her skin luminous. The other elements of the composition feel muted in comparison.

Learn more in ACI's online exhibition on Edward Mitchell Bannister

ANOTHER FEATHER IN HER BONNET

by Kent Monkman and Jean Paul Gaultier

Kent Monkman and Jean Paul Gaultier, *Another Feather in Her Bonnet*, September 8, 2017, performed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In a surprise performance as part of an exhibition of couture creations by Jean Paul Gaultier at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (one that included a white-feathered headdress paired with a wedding gown), Plains Cree artist Kent Monkman (b.1965) staged a mock matrimonial ceremony between his gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, and the French fashion designer. The extravaganza was Monkman's response to Gaultier's cultural appropriation of an article of clothing considered sacred to Indigenous people. "Through the alliance of marriage, we learn to understand and forgive the mistakes of our partners and to build true understanding," said Monkman of the symbolic union. "And better understanding is really at the core of all my work."

Watch a video of this performance

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PAST NEWSLETTERS

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