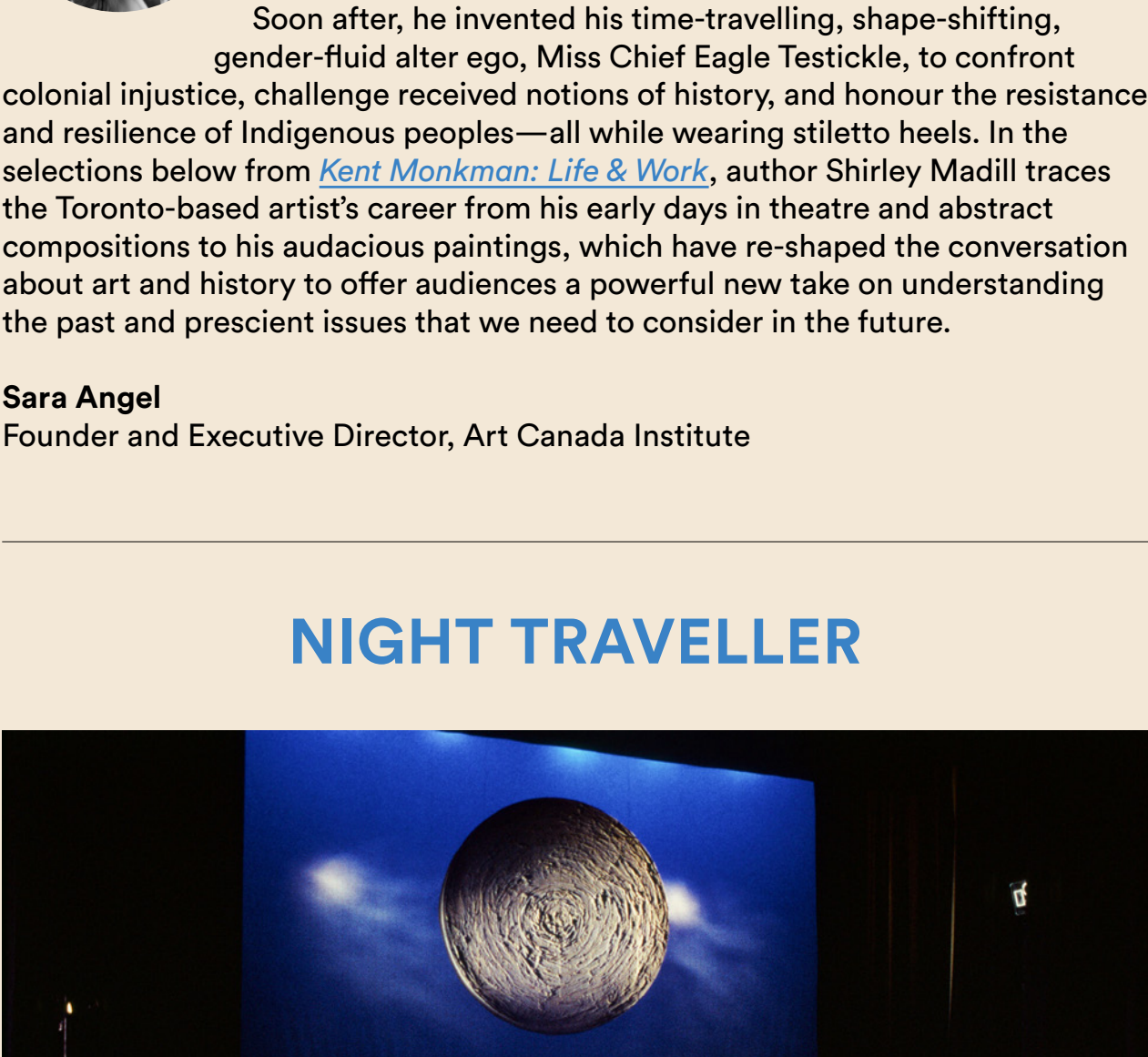


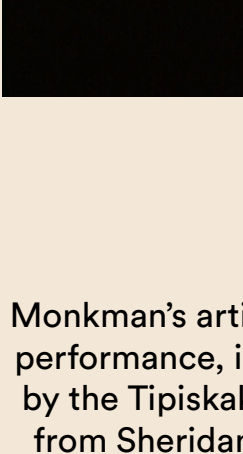
APRIL 8, 2022

MAKING ART HISTORY THE SUBVERSIVE AND SENSUAL PROVOCATIONS OF KENT MONKMAN

The Art Canada Institute is proud to announce the release of Kent Monkman: Life & Work by Shirley Madill, the first comprehensive book on the internationally celebrated talent whose bold interventions into Western art history have transformed contemporary visual culture and made him the only Canadian artist to be commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



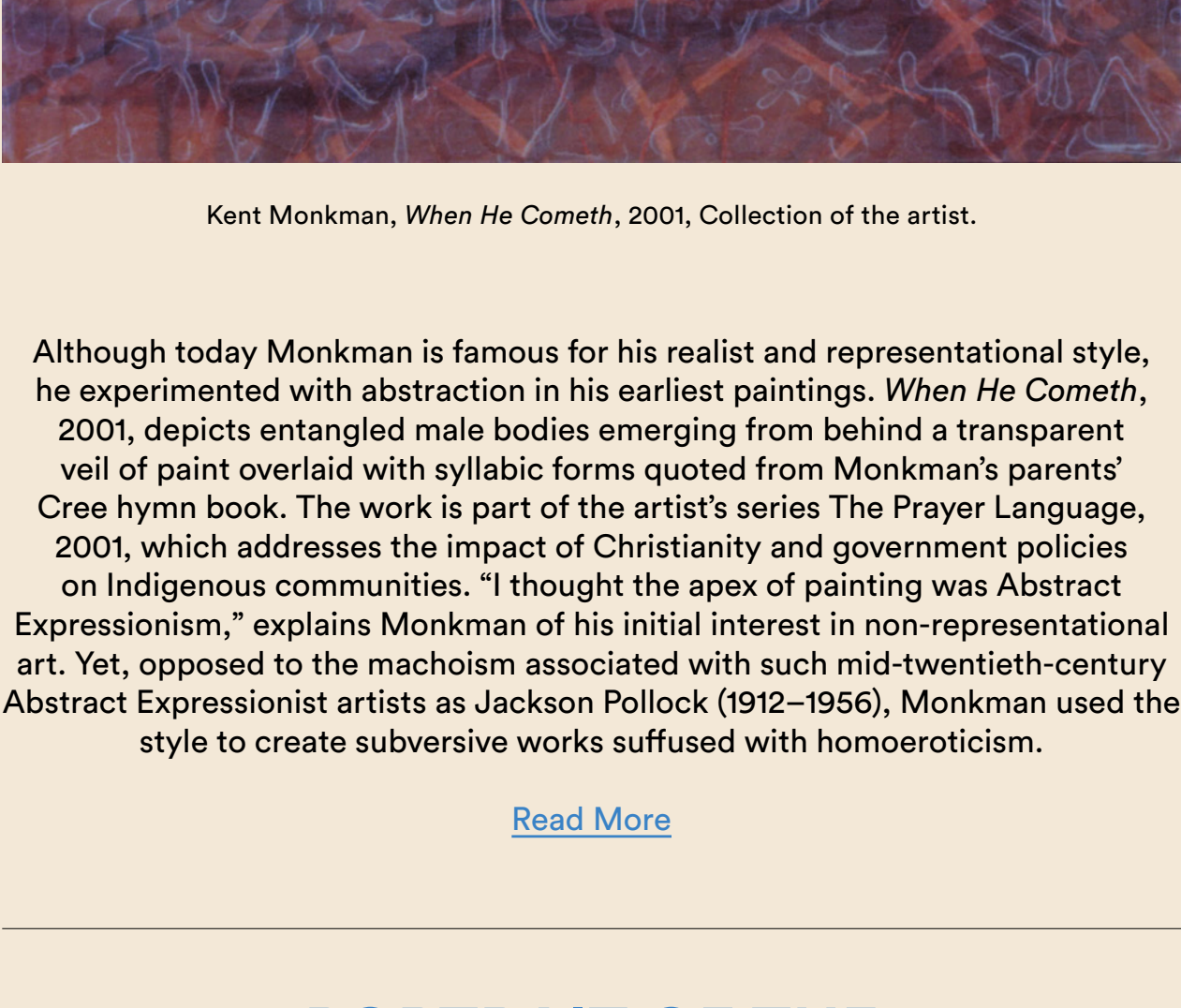
Kent Monkman, *Resurgence of the People*, 2019, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



The Art Canada Institute's latest online art book explores the career of the iconoclastic and widely revered Cree artist Kent Monkman (b.1965), who first garnered acclaim in the early 2000s for reinterpreting nineteenth-century landscape paintings of the North American West and populating them with Indigenous visions of resistance. Soon after, he invented his time-travelling, shape-shifting, gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, to confront colonial injustice, challenge received notions of history, and honour the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples—all while wearing stiletto heels. In the selections below from *Kent Monkman: Life & Work*, author Shirley Madill traces the Toronto-based artist's career from his early days in theatre and abstract compositions to his audacious paintings, which have re-shaped the conversation about art and history to offer audiences a powerful new take on understanding the past and present issues that we need to consider in the future.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

NIGHT TRAVELLER



Kent Monkman, sets and costumes for *Night Traveller*, Tipiskaki Goroh, Canada Dance Festival, Ottawa, 1994.

Monkman's artistic practice is strongly informed by his early work in theatre and performance, including the stage design for *Night Traveller* (1994), a production by the Tipiskaki Goroh dance company which he co-founded. After graduating from Sheridan College of Applied Arts and Technology in Brampton, Ontario, in 1986, Monkman created sets and costumes for Native Earth Performing Arts—the oldest professional Indigenous theatre company in the country—and for the Canada Dance Festival in Ottawa. Reflecting on the impact of these experiences, the artist says, "My time with Native Earth was a period when I started working collaboratively with other artists. Designing for theatre also introduced my practice into a third dimension which led to film, video, and installations."

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WHEN HE COMETH

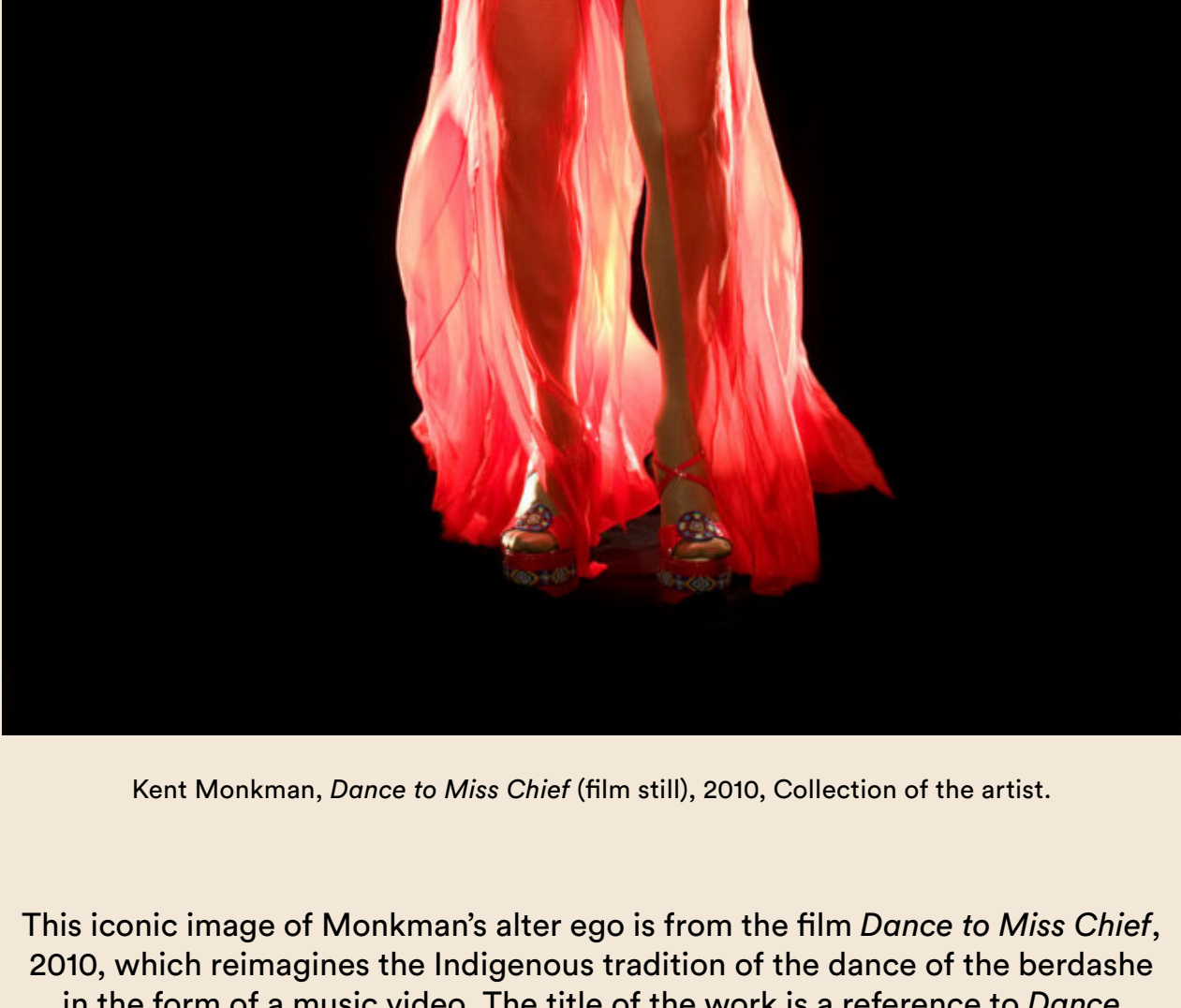


Kent Monkman, *When He Cometh*, 2001, Collection of the artist.

Although today Monkman is famous for his realist and representational style, he experimented with abstraction in his earliest paintings. *When He Cometh*, 2001, depicts entangled male bodies emerging from behind a transparent veil of paint overlaid with syllabic forms quoted from Monkman's parents' Cree hymn book. The work is part of the artist's series *The Prayer Language*, 2001, which addresses the impact of Christianity and government policies on Indigenous communities. "I thought the apex of painting was Abstract Expressionism," explains Monkman of his initial interest in non-representational art. Yet, opposed to the machism associated with such mid-twentieth-century Abstract Expressionist artists as Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), Monkman used the style to create subversive works suffused with homoeroticism.

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PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS HUNTER

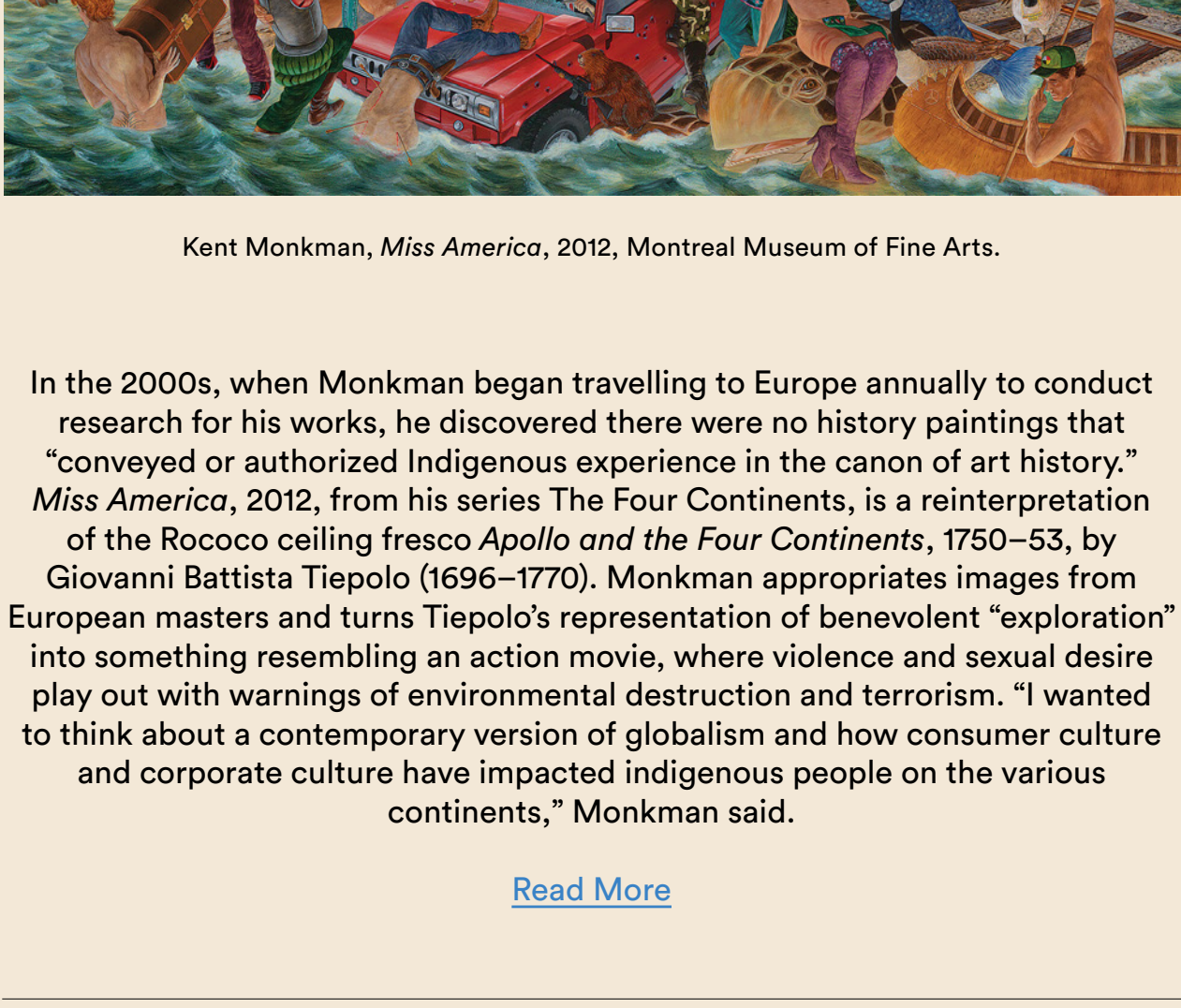


Kent Monkman, *Portrait of the Artist as Hunter*, 2002, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Monkman's art moved from abstraction to realism when he concluded that the impact of colonialism on Indigenous sexuality could only be adequately addressed through representational painting. Inspired by nineteenth-century depictions of the North American West, *Portrait of the Artist as Hunter*, 2002, features nearly naked Indigenous riders on horseback racing into a herd of buffalo across a majestic prairie landscape. Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, Monkman's alter ego, makes her first-ever appearance in this work. Wearing a pink headress, fluttering loincloth, and stiletto heels, the diva warrior chases after a semi-naked cowboy in chaps. Monkman invented Miss Chief as a figure who could "live inside his work," a person who could represent empowered Indigenous sexuality, study European settlers, and ultimately reverse their gaze.

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THE ACADEMY



Kent Monkman, *The Academy*, 2008, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Soon after Monkman's stylistic turn to figurative art, he gained national recognition for his provocative paintings and performances. In 2008, as part of the Art Gallery of Ontario's (AGO) renovation, he was commissioned to develop a work for the Canadian Galleries, curated by Gerald McMaster and David Moos. The result was *The Academy*, 2008, a painting about the process of creation in which Miss Chief appears wearing the bridal gown of Harriet Boulton Smith, whose gift of her art collection was critical to the establishment of the AGO. Monkman himself appears on the far right, wearing a Cree coat and speaking with the French Neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825). Referencing numerous pieces in the AGO collection, including works by artists Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007) and Charles Edenshaw (1839–1920), among others, Monkman's painting inserts Indigenous figures into the space of the Western art academy.

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DANCE TO MISS CHIEF



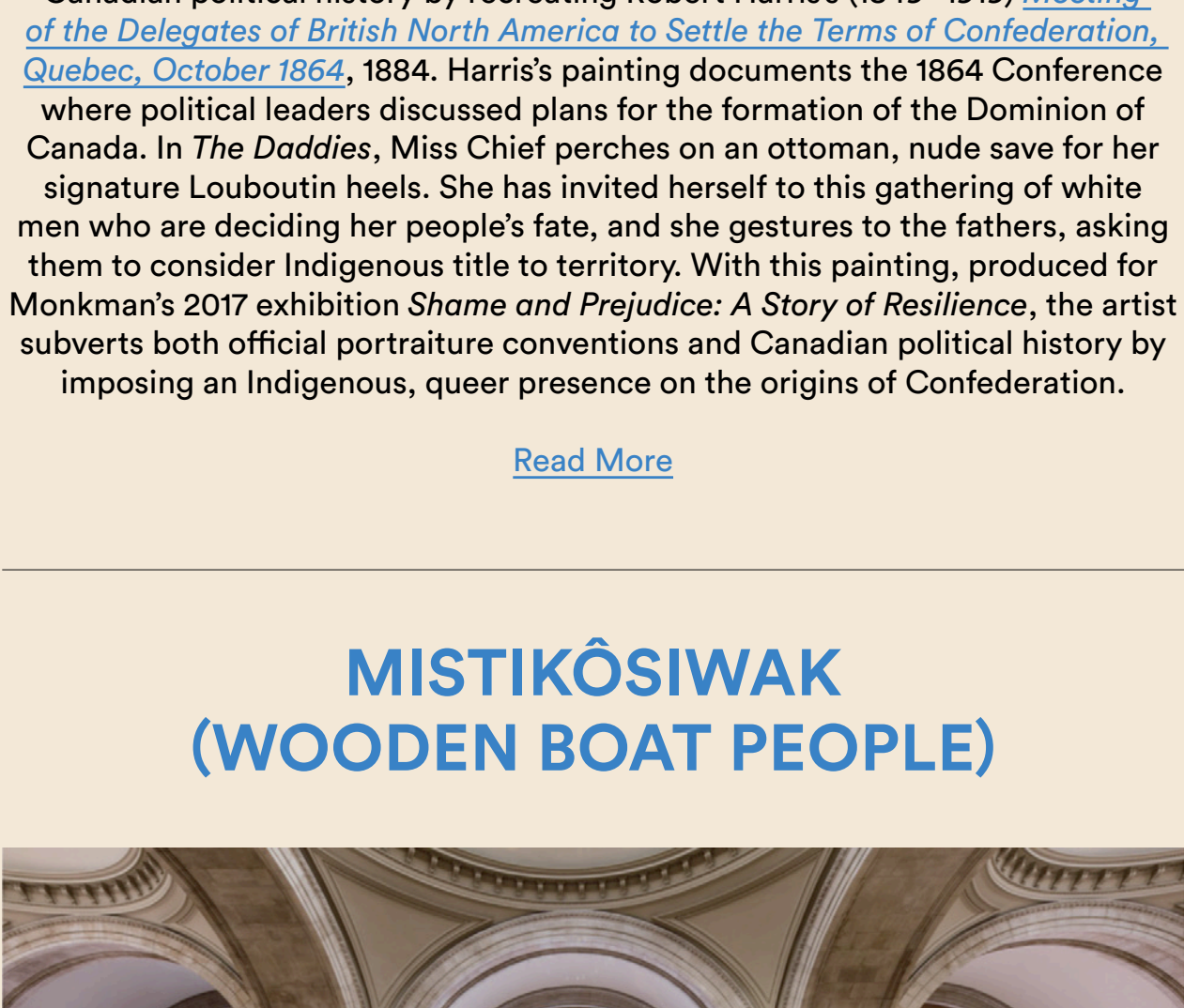
Kent Monkman, *Dance to Miss Chief* (film still), 2010, Collection of the artist.

This iconic image of Monkman's alter ego is from the film *Dance to Miss Chief*, 2010, which reimagines the Indigenous tradition of the dance of the berdache in the form of a music video. The title of the work is a reference to *Dance to the Berdache*, 1835–37, by the American artist George Catlin (1796–1872). His painting of a ceremonial dance honouring a Sac and Fox Two Spirit–century was a disparaging and racist commentary on the Indigenous view of sexuality and gender as fluid. By bringing Miss Chief to life after seeing Catlin's painting in 2004, Monkman honours the Two Spirit figure that has been obscured by colonial history. As the artist explains, embodying the persona of Miss Chief brought empowerment to his identity and affirmed his sense of belonging within Indigenous culture.

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MISS AMERICA

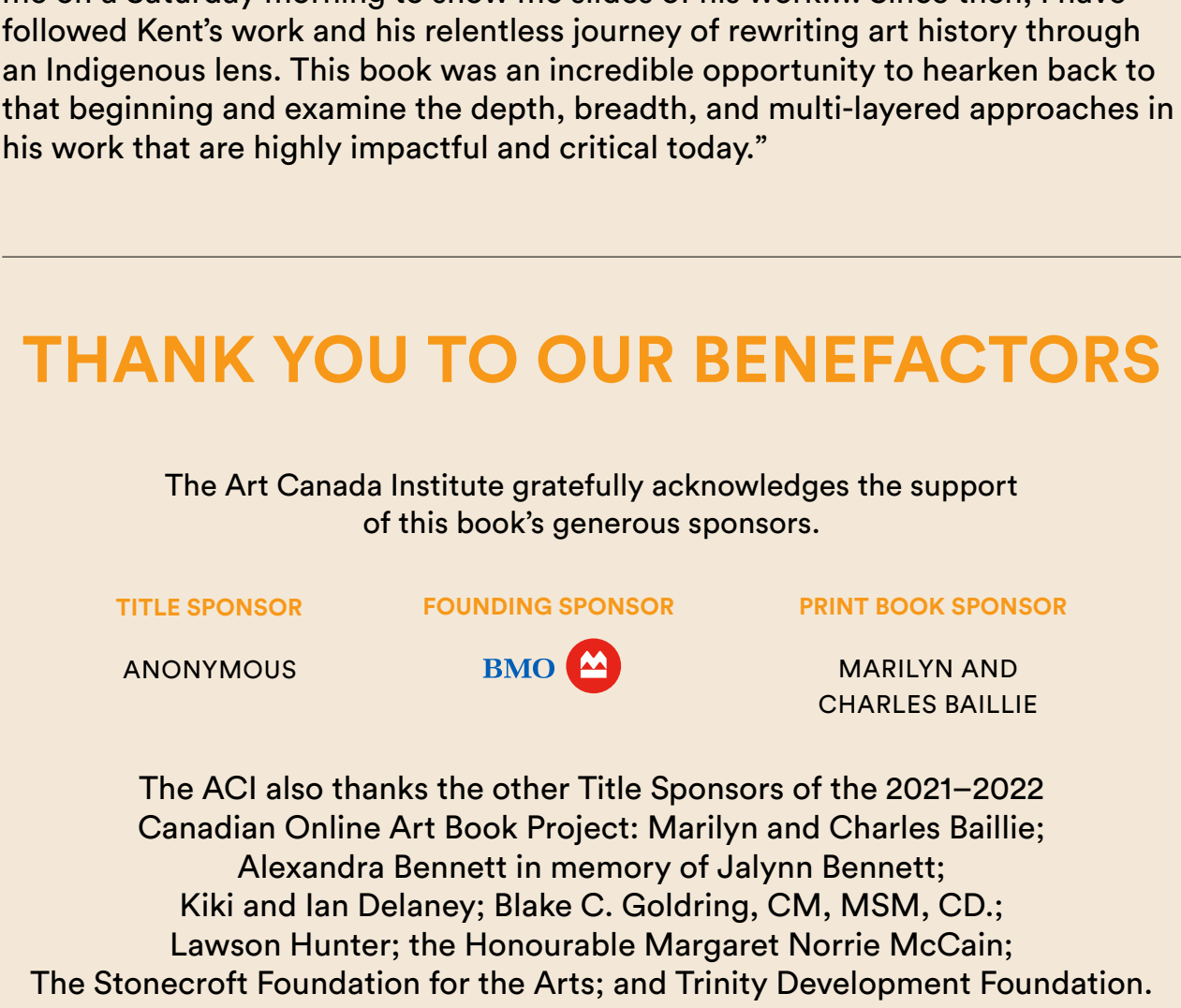


Kent Monkman, *Miss America*, 2012, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In the 2000s, when Monkman began travelling to Europe annually to conduct research for his provocative paintings and performances, he discovered there were no history paintings that "conveyed or authorized Indigenous experience in the canon of art history." *Miss America*, 2012, from his series *The Four Continents*, is a reinterpretation of the Rococo ceiling fresco *Apollo and the Four Continents*, 1750–53, by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696–1770). Monkman appropriates images from European masters and turns Tiepolo's representation of benevolent "exploration" into something resembling an action movie, where violence and sexual desire play out with warnings of environmental destruction and terrorism. "I wanted to think about a contemporary version of globalism and how consumer culture and corporate culture have impacted indigenous people on the various continents," Monkman said.

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CASUALTIES OF MODERNITY

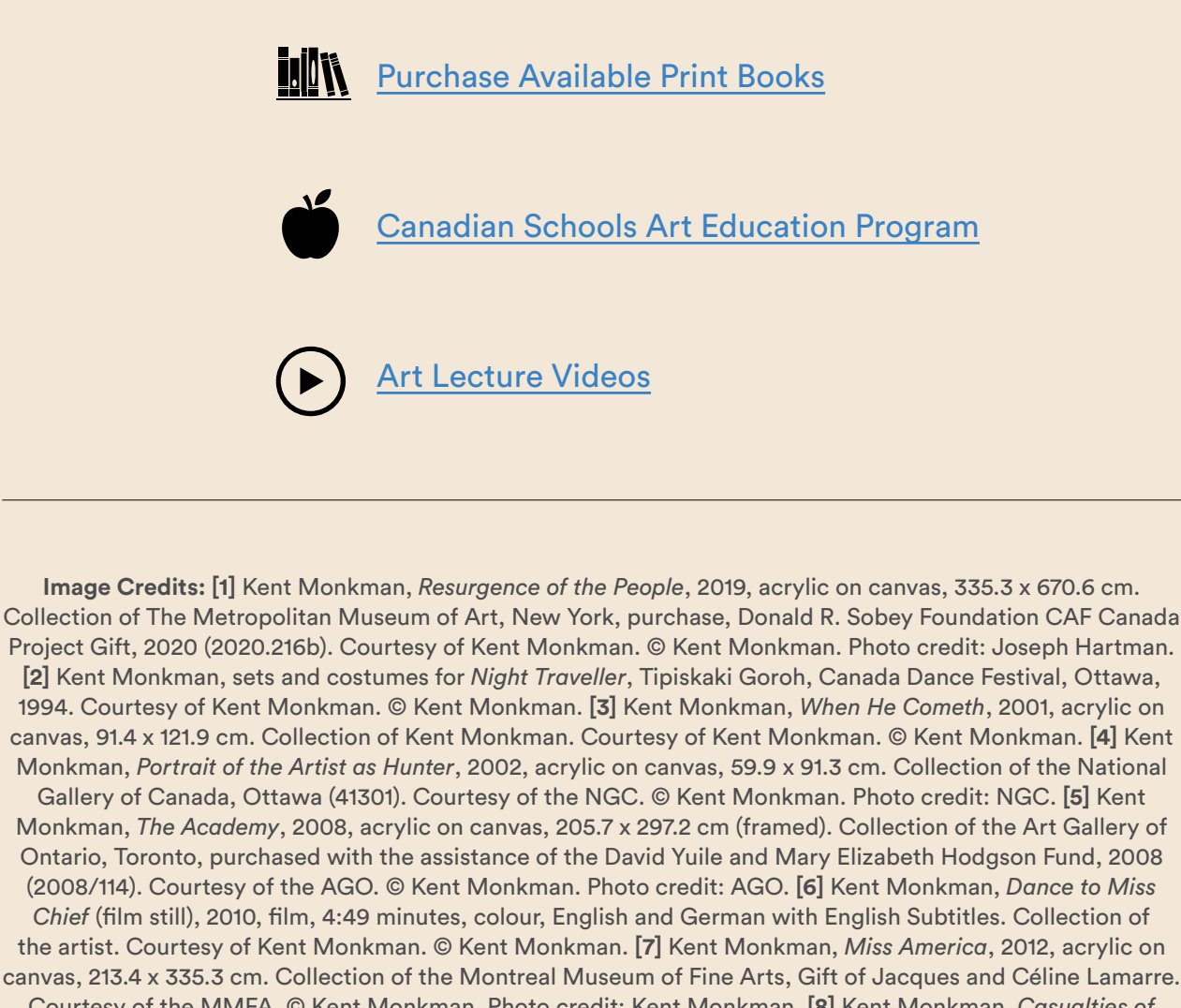


Kent Monkman, *Casualties of Modernity* (installation view), 2015, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

With the installation *Casualties of Modernity*, 2015, Monkman looks critically at the modernist era, in which leading artists like Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) drew upon and perverted the traditions of Oceanic and African art, reducing and reassembling living things and inanimate objects into two-dimensional planes and geometries. Here Monkman presents a simulated hospital room high above a city, where a mannequin of Miss Chief, dressed as a nurse, tends to a prone and flattened Cubist construction of a female patient. She bears a remarkable resemblance to one of the women in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907, by Picasso. Opposite the bed, an installation airs an episode from Miss Chief's popular syndicated TV show, *Casualties of Modernity*, in which she and the erudite Doctor of Fine Arts tend to hospital patients, who are illing art movements.

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THE SCREAM



Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2017, Denver Art Museum.

The Scream, 2017—which derives its title from *The Scream*, 1893, by Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (1863–1944)—references the horrors of the residential school system. Between the late 1800s and the 1990s, the Canadian government forced more than 150,000 Indigenous children to attend residential schools, where they were stripped of their language, culture, and identity. Monkman's work viscerally and unflinchingly captures the violence of these facilities, depicting children being ripped from the arms of their mothers by members of the Catholic clergy and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The painting was included in Monkman's 2017 exhibition *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*. Launched in the same year as Canada's sesquicentennial, the show aimed to disrupt the celebration by looking back on our nation's history from the perspective of the colonized and telling the dark, shameful story of legislated genocide.

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THE DADDIES

Kent Monkman, *The Daddies*, 2016, Collection of Irhan Rawji.

In *The Daddies*, 2016, Monkman inserts Miss Chief into a major event in Canadian political history by recreating Robert Harris's (1849–1919) *Meeting of the Delegates of British North America to Settle the Terms of Confederation, Quebec, October 1864*, 1884. Harris's painting documents the 1864 Conference where political leaders discussed plans for the formation of the Dominion of Canada. In *The Daddies*, Miss Chief perches on an ottoman, nude save for her signature Louboutin heels. She has inverted herself to the gathering, asking them to consider Indigenous title to territory. With this painting, produced for Monkman's 2017 exhibition *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, the artist subverts both official portraiture conventions and Canadian political history by imposing an Indigenous, queer presence on the origins of Confederation.

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MISTIKÔSIWAK (WOODEN BOAT PEOPLE)

Kent Monkman, *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)* (installation view), 2019, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In 2019, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art commissioned Monkman to produce the diptych *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)*, 2019, as part of a new series of contemporary projects presented in its Great Hall. Shown on the left in this installation view, *Welcoming the Newcomers* dramatically recreates the arrival of Europeans who colonized the so-called New World. On the right, *Resurgence of the People* is a testament to Indigenous resiliency. Both compositions teem with references to European and North American objects in the Met's collections that perpetuate the harmful myth of Indigenous people as a "dying race." For Monkman, the project represented the pinnacle of many years of work and served as an international showcase for his practice. He shared, "I'm very proud that I was given that opportunity and welcomed into the museum to speak candidly to their collection and to museum practices, which are on the edge of significant change."

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About the Author of *Kent Monkman: Life & Work*

Shirley Madill is executive director at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery. She has curated two exhibitions of work by Kent Monkman, *Kent Monkman: The Triumph of Mischief* at the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 2007 and *Kent Monkman: The Four Continents* at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery in 2016. Commenting on this book, Madill notes, "During my curatorial tenure at the Winnipeg Art Gallery [1979–99], a young Kent Monkman visited me on a Saturday morning to show me slides of his work... Since then, I have followed Kent's work and his relentless journey of rewriting art history through an Indigenous lens. This book was an incredible opportunity to hearken back to that beginning and examine the depth, breadth, and multi-layered approaches in his work that are highly impactful and critical today."

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