ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

MAY 6, 2022

MEMORABLE MOTHERS
CANADIAN WORKS WE LOVE

Eleven artists from across the country honour mothers and the strength, joy, care, and wisdom they bring to our lives.

This Sunday, we celebrate Mother's Day by turning our attention to representations of the maternal in Canadian art. The relationship between mother and child is one of the oldest continuously treated subjects in art history, and is explored here in all its complexity. In Inuk artist Napachie Pootoogook's intimate drawing of a domestic scene, we find a touching tribute to maternal tenderness. A series of photographs of seamstresses at work by Italian Canadian artist Sara Angelucci honours her own mother, as well as the invisible labour of women as a whole as they support their families and society at large. A haunting sculpture by Montreal-born artist David Altmejd forces us to confront the inevitable shift in identity that occurs when a woman becomes a parent. And Toronto artist Anique Jordan acknowledges her foremothers and the underappreciated battles they have fought and won. Whether you are a mother, or whether you are celebrating or remembering one, we hope you enjoy this selection.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

THE SIXTH COMPANY BATTALION - THE AUNTIES

by Anique Jordan

Anique Jordan, *The Sixth Company Battalion – The Aunties* (1/3), 2016, Art Gallery of Guelph.

In this work, Toronto artist Anique Jordan (b.1987) photographs her mother and her mother's two sisters as soldiers in the War of 1812 as part of the series The Sixth Company Battalion, 2016. Aware that nineteenth-century women were not allowed to serve in the army, Jordan calls the piece an "impossible image." Her fictionalized portrait recognizes that her female ancestors fought, resisted, and sacrificed in their own wars, and creates space for them within existing historical narratives. The Sixth Company Battalion was also inspired by the story of a troop of Black Loyalists in Trinidad & Tobago—where Jordan's ancestors lived. The unit gained their freedom and became one of six British marine troops composed of former enslaved people who fought in the War of 1812 in support of the British Crown against the United States.

Learn more about Anique Jordan

FAMILY AND RAINSTORM

by Alex Colville

Alex Colville, *Family and Rainstorm*, 1955, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

With billowing storm clouds on the horizon, a mother opens a car door for her son and daughter in this eerie scene of family life by Toronto-born, Nova Scotia-based painter Alex Colville (1920–2013), which was used on a Canadian stamp in 1982. With each figure in the composition looking in a different direction, their faces obscured, the effect is mysterious. The picture is all the more enigmatic when we try to decipher what object the mother holds behind her back. The quiet tension of the painting is characteristic of Colville's style, and the themes at play—family relationships, life at home, and the environs of Sackville and Wolfville, where he lived—appeared throughout his six-decade-long career.

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

AQAQTUQ (SINGING LOVE SONG)

by Napachie Pootoogook

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

In this work by Kinngait (Cape Dorset)-based artist Napachie Pootoogook (1938–2002), two generations form a loop with their hands. A smiling mother and child reach towards each other in a loving embrace, surrounded by a circle of traditional objects, such as the ulu, scraper, and caribou skin bed, and contemporary items, such as the clock and metal cup. The infant is dressed with care in a warm, matching outfit in this cozy interior scene that is typical of Pootoogook's work. She was one of the most prolific figures in Inuit art and the mother of the internationally renowned artist Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016). Napachie portrayed Northern life with nuance and honesty, focusing particularly on the experiences of women, and she even sometimes broached difficult subjects including abuse and starvation.

Learn more about Napachie Pootoogook

PASEO

by Jack Chambers

Jack Chambers, *Paseo*, 1969, private collection.

A portrait formed of light and shadow depicting a mother in a breezy sundress walking alongside her chubby-legged child is framed by neon bands of magenta and cyan in this work by London, Ontario-based artist Jack Chambers (1931–1978). He was diagnosed with acute myeloblastic leukemia at age thirty-eight, and his illness led him to focus on the miracle of life and the significance of the everyday in his pieces. He often rendered domestic scenes, employing his own theory of what he called perceptual realism to accurately convey his sensory experience. This spiritual approach to making art allowed Chambers to create evocative compositions that are remarkable in their intimacy.

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

MOTHER AND SON

by David Altmejd

David Altmejd, *Mother and Son*, 2015, Courtesy of David Altmejd and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels.

This grotesquely beautiful double portrait mounted on a pole by Montreal-born sculptor David Altmejd (b.1974) presents two heads that share one set of eyes. Titled *Mother and Son*, the sculpture has a visceral, violent quality due to the severed neck at its top, dripping epoxy at its base, and unblinking stare. It speaks to the powerful bond between parent and child, as well as the rupture of identity and wreckage of the body that come as a natural consequence of growing and birthing a human being. Sensual, frightening, and luxurious, Altmejd's intensely detailed work hovers between seduction and revulsion.

Learn more about David Altmejd

JULIE PAPINEAU (NÉE BRUNEAU) AND HER DAUGHTER EZILDA

by Antoine Plamondon

Antoine Plamondon, *Julie Papineau (née Bruneau) and her Daughter Ezilda*, 1836, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

A rosy-cheeked mother and daughter in sumptuous attire practice piano together in this nineteenth-century painting by Quebec artist Antoine Plamondon (1804–1895), who chronicled members of the rising middle class and religious bourgeoisie in Quebec City. Depicted here are Julie Papineau and her eight-year-old daughter, Ezilda, one of nine children Julie had with Louis-Joseph Papineau, a radical political leader who played a major role in the events leading up to the Rebellions of 1837. He commissioned this painting—which honours Julie's role as a devoted mother—as a companion piece to a portrait of himself by Plamondon. Louis-Joseph's frequent absences from home as a result of his political duties weighed on him, but Julie kept him apprised of family life in the hundreds of letters they exchanged over the course of four decades.

Learn more about Antoine Plamondon

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PIECE WORK

by Sara Angelucci

Sara Angelucci, *Piece Work* (detail), 2017, Courtesy of Sara Angelucci.

In *Piece Work*, 2017, second-generation Canadian artist Sara Angelucci (b.1962) pays tribute to her late mother, Nina, and fellow seamstresses employed at a garment factory in Hamilton, Ontario, in the 1950s and 1960s. Angelucci documents the careful measuring, cutting, and sewing of 123 separate pieces of fabric that mostly immigrant women turn into high-end suits worn by powerful businessmen. The factory, founded in 1883, has recruited new Canadians from every wave of immigration since Confederation, from Italy, Portugal, and Jewish communities in Angelucci's mother's time, to women from Syria, Jordan, China, the Philippines, India, and Guyana today. In this project, the work that mothers do to support their families and society as a whole is made visible and celebrated.

Learn more about Sara Angelucci

ROBSON STREET

by Fred Herzog

Fred Herzog, *Robson Street*, 1957, Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver.

Two mothers in pastel blue and pink dresses stroll proudly past Vancouver storefronts with their children in this candid snapshot of everyday life by German-born artist Fred Herzog (1930–2019), a renowned pioneer of colour street photography. A medical photographer by day, Herzog used Kodachrome slide film on the weekend to document Vancouver's people, signage, and storefronts—an unusual choice in the 1950s and 1960s, when art photography was predominantly black and white. For decades Herzog's work was unknown until digital technology made it possible for him to create high-quality prints that show off his signature use of intense colour.

Learn more about Fred Herzog

WILLIAM BELL AND GRANDMA

William Bell and Grandma, n.d., photographer unknown, Bell-Sloman Collection of the James Gibson Library, Brock University, St. Catharines.

A young boy is pictured with his grandmother in this portrait from the Bell-Sloman Collection, described as a “fugitive archive” containing stories and material artifacts from African Canadian communities. Housed at the James Gibson Library at Brock University, the collection includes photographs and records from members of the Bell and Sloman families, who were formerly enslaved people in the American south. Curator and art historian Dr. Julie Crooks, head of the Department of Arts of Global Africa and the Diaspora at the Art Gallery of Ontario, has remarked that photographs such as this one were used “as a critical and powerful tool for self-representation” in Black communities who settled in southern Ontario in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

Learn more about the Bell-Sloman Collection

BACKYARD, WISH YOU WERE HERE

by Rosalie Favell

Rosalie Favell, *Backyard, Wish You Were Here*, 2011, Courtesy of Rosalie Favell.

The same backyard features twice in this collaged photograph: once in the past, with a glamorous young woman in a bathing suit striking a self-assured pose, and once in the present, without her. In the series Wish You Were Here, 2011, Ottawa-based Métis artist Rosalie Favell (b.1958) combines archival photographs of her grandmother, whom she describes as "a free spirited Aboriginal woman," with contemporary images of the same places. In doing so, she creates an ongoing conversation between generations. Although her grandmother died when Favell was eighteen, this work and others that are part of the same series, explains the artist, pay "tribute to her continued presence in my life, as well as acknowledging her strength and sense of adventure."

Learn more about Rosalie Favell

KITCHEN DOOR AND ESTHER

by Christiane Pflug

Christiane Pflug, *Kitchen Door and Esther*, 1965, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In this tender portrait of a little girl in a soft pink T-shirt and braids sitting in a doorway, Toronto-based artist Christiane Pflug (1936–1972) presents her daughter Esther, age seven at the time. Later, Esther remembered that her mother gave her a book of stories by Hans Christian Andersen to help her sit still. Self-taught Pflug, whose work often features domestic interiors, was born to a single mother in Berlin, Germany. The artist moved to Canada in 1959 and soon found professional success, showing at the reputable Isaacs Gallery in Toronto and securing a solo exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1966, where this painting was first publicly displayed. Pflug wrote to her mother-in-law in Germany about the work after visiting the gallery, commenting that Esther “looks very nice and dominates the whole painting, despite the smallness of the figure.”

Learn more about Christiane Pflug

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PAST NEWSLETTERS

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Image Credits: **[1]** Anique Jordan, *The Sixth Company Battalion – The Aunties* (1/3), 2015, giclée print, 84.5 x 122.2 cm (framed). Collection of the Art Gallery of Guelph, purchase, 2018 Art Gallery of Guelph Collection (AG2018.017). Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Guelph. **[2]** Alex Colville, *Family and Rainstorm*, 1955, glazed tempera on Masonite, 57.1 x 74.9 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Purchased 1957 (no. 6754). © A.C. Fine Art Inc. Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. **[3]** Napachie Pootoogook, *Aqaqtuq (Singing Love Song)*, 1993, lithograph, 51 x 66.3 cm. Courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts, Toronto. Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts. **[4]** Jack Chambers, *Paseo*, 1969. Private collection. Courtesy of Heffel Fine Art Auction House. **[5]** David Altmejd, *Mother and Son*, 2015, polyurethane foam, epoxy gel, epoxy clay, resin, glass eyes, bronze, pyrite, acrylic paint, steel, marble, head with pole, 80 x 32 x 30 cm. Courtesy of David Altmejd and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels. © David Altmejd. **[6]** Antoine Plamondon, *Julie Papineau (née Bruneau) and her Daughter Ezilda*, 1836, oil on canvas, 121.8 x 107 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1974 (17920). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. **[7]** Sara Angelucci, *Piece Work*, 2017, photographs, sound installation, sculpture, video projection, dimensions variable. Courtesy of Sara Angelucci. **[8]** Fred Herzog, *Robson Street*, 1957, photograph. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. **[9]** *William Bell and Grandma*, n.d. Photographer unknown. Bell-Sloman Collection of the James Gibson Library, Brock University, St. Catharines. **[10]** Rosalie Favell, *Backyard, Wish You Were Here*, 2011, inkjet, 38.1 x 38.1 cm. Courtesy of Rosalie Favell. **[11]** Christiane Pflug, *Kitchen Door and Esther*, 1965, oil on canvas, 159.5 x 193 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (40963). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.