JULY 1, 2022

CANADA & QUESTIONS
13 ESSENTIAL WORKS

On Canada Day, we're looking at eye-opening art that makes us rethink conventional narratives of our nation's identity and history.

Jamelie Hassan, *Could we ever know each other...?*, 2013, Ivey Business School, Western University, London, Ontario.

"Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?" Gabrielle Roy, the revered Franco-Manitoban author, wrote in her 1961 novel *The Hidden Mountain*, an exploration of life in pursuit of creativity. Roy's famed phrase appeared on a previous version of our $20 bill—words that caught the eye of the London, Ontario-based multi-disciplinary artist and activist Jamelie Hassan. In 2013, Hassan, of Arab Canadian descent, made the work above: *Could we ever know each other...?* On a two-metre-wide reproduction of the currency, she inserts a glowing maple leaf that casts a light on the sculpture of the Haida carver Iljuwas Bill Reid. With this move, Hassan adds to Roy's inquiry by calling attention to the role that Indigenous art plays in understanding this country.

On the 155th anniversary of Confederation, we're featuring works by Hassan and other artists that challenge the idea of nationhood and what it means to be Canadian. The compositions below encompass many different forms of questioning, including how we honour Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of this land; who we recognize as citizens; how we define our country's history; who has been excluded from it; and what is the meaning of our national symbols. The diverse perspectives presented below encourage us to reconsider our past and the future we hope to build. We hope they inspire you, and we wish you a safe and happy long weekend.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

BRAIDED BOOK

by Chantal Gibson

Chantal Gibson, *Braided Book*, 2011, Courtesy of Chantal Gibson.

Described as a "book sculpture" by its maker, the Vancouver-based poet and artist Chantal Gibson, this work is comprised of an old history book adorned with three black braids that opens to reveal a photograph of a young Black girl from the 1950s—a portrait of the artist's mother. Gibson, who is interested in the "cultural production of knowledge, mythmaking, and border crossings," explains that her altered publications encourage viewers to challenge traditional readings of our country's past. In this autobiographical mixed-media sculpture, she blends the personal and political by making connections with her own ancestral heritage, which saw members of her family of Black British Loyalists—a group often left out of history books—settle in Nova Scotia during the American War of Independence (1776–83).

Learn more about Chantal Gibson

KANATA

by Robert Houle

Robert Houle, *Kanata*, 1992, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In his signature work *Kanata*, 1992, Toronto-based Saulteaux artist Robert Houle (b.1947) rejects the downplayed presence of First Nations peoples in the French and English histories of Canada. For this monumental image, Houle revisits Benjamin West's (1738–1820) famed painting *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1770, which shows the British general dying on the battlefield moments after conquering Quebec. He directs our attention to the Delaware warrior near Wolfe's feet by depicting him in colour, forcing viewers to recognize the presence of Indigenous people at this pivotal battle that effectively concluded the British conquest. In doing so, Houle exposes the false narrative that the founding nations of Canada are England and France.

Read more in ACI's
Robert Houle: Life & Work by Shirley Madill

A GROUP OF SIXTY-SEVEN

by Jin-me Yoon

Jin-me Yoon, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (detail), 1996, Courtesy of Jin-me Yoon.

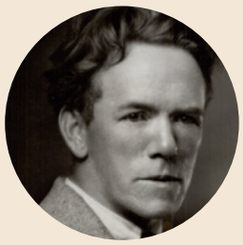
In the early twentieth century, the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven promoted a profoundly influential vision of our nation as uninhabited wilderness, waiting to be explored by Euro-Canadian (male) settlers. Seoul-born Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon (b.1960) responded to this exclusionary vision by photographing sixty-seven members of Vancouver's Korean community in front of Lawren S. Harris's (1885–1970) painting *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park*, 1924—as shown here—and *Old Time Coast Village* (1929–30) by West Coast artist Emily Carr (1871–1945). Yoon's installation directly questions who belongs in these imagined landscapes. Entitled *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, 1996, the work references the year of Canadian Confederation, as well as its centennial year, when the government amended anti-Asian restrictions in the Immigration Act, allowing Yoon's family to move to Canada.

Learn more about Jin-me Yoon

IMMIGRANTS

by Frederick Horsman Varley

Frederick Horsman Varley, *Immigrants*, c.1922, The Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



An enormous canvas by famed Group of Seven member Frederick Horsman Varley (1881–1969), *Immigrants*, c.1922, presents a vision of a crowded wharf, with people streaming off a ship, surrounded by parcels and boxes and a tense, emotional energy as they view their new country for the first time. Varley himself had moved to Canada in 1912, part of a massive wave of arrivals in the early 1900s that had a transformative effect on national culture. Though the government encouraged immigration, the influx also emboldened xenophobia and racism, with many questioning if people from beyond Britain and the United States should be welcomed; official policies discriminated against individuals from other countries, with particularly stringent laws targeting people of colour. In the painting, the pensive gaze of the man in the lower left, the questioning stare of the woman in the centre, and the tender gesture of the mother and child honour the dignity and strength of the immigrants, as if to underscore their importance to the nation's future.

Learn more about Frederick Horsman Varley

CANADA DAY, YONGE-DUNDAS SQUARE, TORONTO

by Bidemi Oloyede

Bidemi Oloyede, *Canada Day, Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto*, 2018,
Courtesy of Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto.

This photograph is part of a series by Nigerian Canadian artist Bidemi Oloyede (b.1996) that captures Black Canadians celebrating Canada Day in downtown Toronto in 2018. Here, two women are dressed up in matching cowboy hats embellished with the flag. One has her arm extended with phone in hand and is posing for a selfie, while the other gazes directly into the camera. Oloyede, who has sought to document the "self-fashioning" of Black Canadian identity since he moved to the country in 2012, has said that this snapshot represents "a myriad of topics mostly relating to the struggles of being an immigrant in this wild wild west, various notions of access, self representation and the significance of adornment—to name a few."

Learn more about Bidemi Oloyede

O CANADA

by Joyce Wieland

Joyce Wieland, *O Canada*, 1970, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In 1967, the ground-breaking feminist artist Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) created *O Canada* in response to the new official national anthem. Wearing bright red lipstick, she sang the anthem while pressing her lips to a lithographic stone with each syllable. The art historian John O'Brian remarks that *O Canada* "ironically conflates male patriotic love with female erotics, while refusing to collapse the tension between the two." Wieland's deliberately gendered interpretation of the anthem was included in her landmark exhibition *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery of Canada in 1971, which challenged the country to re-examine its values and its identity. Describing her new vision of the nation's symbolism at the exhibition's opening, Wieland boldly stated, "I think of Canada as female."

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

WIELAND

by Brian Jungen

Brian Jungen, *Wieland*, 2006, Courtesy of Brian Jungen and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

The red maple leaf, an instantly recognizable symbol of Canada, is subverted and inverted in this sculpture by British Columbia-based artist Brian Jungen (b.1970), who is of Dane-Zaa and Swiss ancestry. He takes ordinary materials and cuts and sews them back together to create new forms. In *Wieland*, 2006, named after the influential feminist artist Joyce Wieland (1930–1998), Jungen has repurposed women's leather gloves to produce the upside-down, sagging shape that recalls the central element of the flag and presents a wry commentary on what constitutes Canadian identity. It serves as both an homage and a critique of Wieland's contributions to art in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Trudeau-era nation-building efforts that she was included in, but from which many Indigenous artists were excluded.

Learn more about Brian Jungen

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HOMETOWN QUEEN

by Camille Turner

Camille Turner, *Hometown Queen*, 2011, Courtesy of Camille Turner.

In posing as a beauty queen against the industrial backdrop of Hamilton, Ontario, Jamaican-born, Toronto-based artist Camille Turner (b.1960) aims to, in her own words, "re-write my personal history and….pay homage to my complicated relationship with my hometown." Growing up in Hamilton, Turner "experienced many incidents of blatant bigotry" and "couldn't wait to get away." She eventually came to realize that "this complex city made me the person I am today—always looking beneath the surface and recognizing the irony in everything around me." Assuming the identity of Miss Canadiana, resplendent in her red evening gown, satin sash, and sparkly tiara, Turner confronts the idea of the Black body as foreign or "other" and challenges stereotypes around Canadian identity.

Watch the TVO Arts episode on
Hometown Queen

Learn more about Camille Turner in ACI's online exhibition
Black Art Matters

THE DADDIES

by Kent Monkman

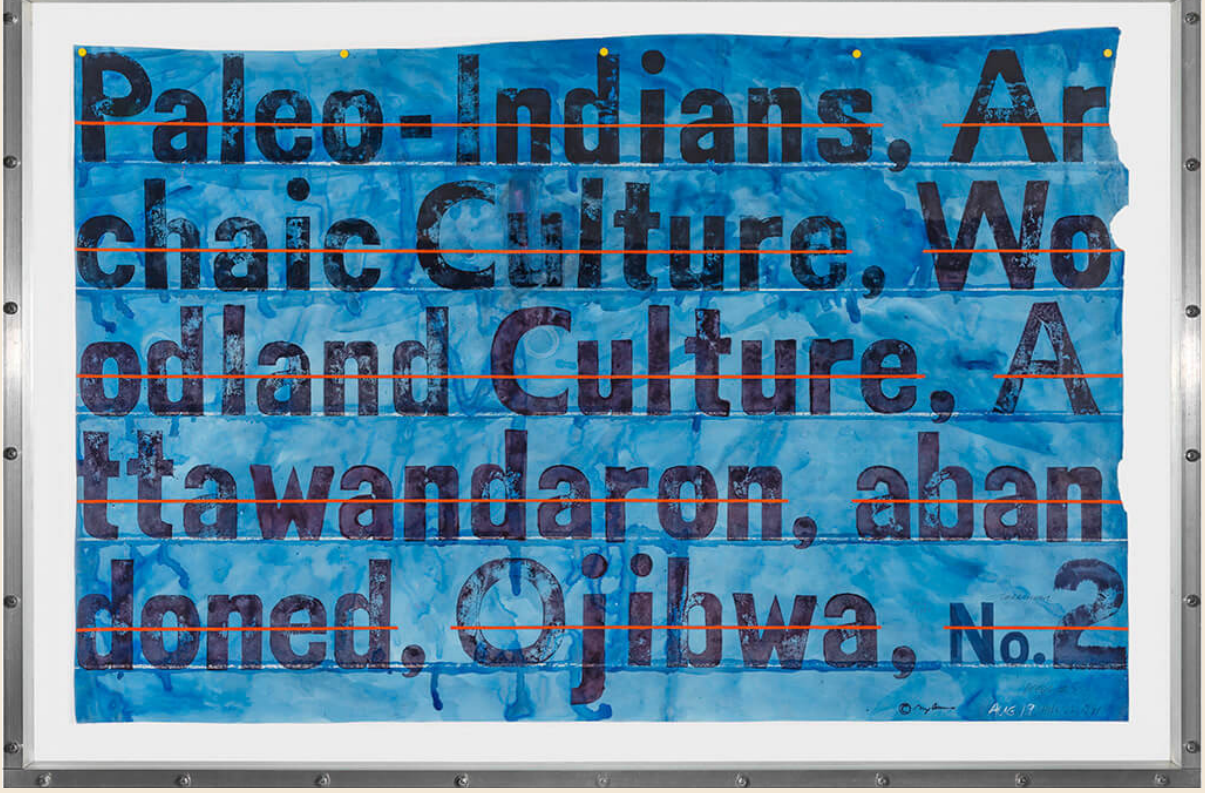
Kent Monkman, *The Daddies*, 2016, Collection of Irfhan Rawji.

In *The Daddies*, 2016, Cree artist Kent Monkman (b.1965) inserts his alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, 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 Monkman's painting, Miss Chief perches on an ottoman, nude save for her signature Louboutin heels. She has invited herself to this gathering of white men who are deciding her people's fate, and she gestures to the fathers, asking them to consider Indigenous title to territory. With this work, Monkman subverts Canadian political history by imposing an Indigenous, queer presence on the origins of Confederation.

Read more in ACI's
Kent Monkman: Life & Work by Shirley Madill

DEEDS #5

by Greg Curnoe



Greg Curnoe, *Deeds #5*, August 19–22, 1991, Winnipeg Art Gallery.

In this text-based painting, Greg Curnoe (1936–1992), best known for his patriotism and brightly coloured works, draws attention to a subject that occupied the final years of his career: the dispossession of lands from the Paleo-Indian Period (8600 BCE) through the "No. 2 Surrender" of Ojibwa lands to the Crown in 1790. *Deeds #5*, 1991, is the last work in a series that explores the stories told and untold about the land on which the artist's house was situated, at 38 Weston Street in London. Curnoe researched records, read deeds, and interviewed Indigenous inhabitants and descendants of European settlers to the region. He commented on Canadian cultural imperialism: "We live in a culture where pre-existing cultures lived and live. They have survived in isolation from the culture of the City of London, both within the city and in areas of original settlement that date back to around 1690, fifteen miles away. They have been omitted from most books of local history." Through this piece and others, Curnoe sought to reinscribe this knowledge into Canadian consciousness.

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

BECOMING LAURA

by Meryl McMaster

Meryl McMaster, *Becoming Laura*, 2012, Courtesy of Meryl McMaster.

Ottawa-based artist Meryl McMaster (b.1988), who is of *nêhiyaw* (Plains Cree), British, and Dutch ancestry, created this theatrical self-portrait after discovering that she is distantly related to the historical hero Laura Ingersoll Secord, a Canadian Loyalist and central figure in the War of 1812. By embodying the persona of Secord, McMaster prompts us to reconsider this cultural icon and her connection to Indigenous history. Secord trekked thirty kilometres to warn British troops and Indigenous allies of an American attack in Upper Canada, and, as the Heritage Minute devoted to her recounts, as a result, "The Kahnawake Mohawks forced the surrender of 500 Yankee soldiers, and the American invasion was stopped." McMaster incorporates the figure of the Raven, a messenger and cultural hero in Plains Cree traditional stories, into her work. As the artist explains, "The Raven appears on my head to guide me/Laura through this ordeal" and to secure the victory of the British and Mohawk allies.

Learn more about Meryl McMaster

ZACHARIE VINCENT AND HIS SON CYPRIEN

by Zacharie Vincent

Zacharie Vincent, *Zacharie Vincent and His Son Cyprien*, c.1851,
Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

A chief from the Huron-Wendat village of Jeune-Lorette (near Quebec City) and a talented artist, Zacharie Vincent (1815–1886) was a thoughtful and creative advocate for his community, and in this self-portrait with his son he celebrates the strength of his family in the face of increasing oppression. In the mid-1800s, many Canadians believed that there was no place for First Nations in the country's future and that they would soon become extinct, a belief known as the vanishing race paradigm. As the Art Canada Institute author Louise Vigneault writes in her book *Zacharie Vincent: Life & Work*, "This painting can be understood as a conscious response to those who had predicted the disappearance of the Hurons." Responding to the intense racism, Vincent proclaims that he and his descendants will not vanish, they will thrive.

Read more in ACI's
Zacharie Vincent: Life & Work by Louise Vigneault

COULD WE EVER KNOW EACH OTHER...?

by Jamelie Hassan

Jamelie Hassan, *Could we ever know each other...?*, 2013, Ivey Business School, Western University, London, Ontario.

Issues surrounding human rights, social activism, and cultural displacement are at the core of work made by the Arab Canadian artist Jamelie Hassan (b.1948). In this piece, a two-metre-wide reproduction of a Canadian twenty-dollar bill glows green under a neon maple leaf—from a diner in Hassan's hometown of London, Ontario—positioned over a quotation on the currency from Manitoba-born Francophone author Gabrielle Roy: "Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?" The words, when they were written in 1961, concerned relations between French and English speakers in Canada. As Hassan draws attention to the statement, she illuminates the art of Haida artist Iljuwas Bill Reid (1920–1998)—whose sculptures appeared on Canadian twenty-dollar bills produced between 2004 and 2012—to give renewed urgency to Roy's question with respect to Indigenous issues. "Where do we situate ourselves in this juncture in history?" Hassan told *Canadian Art* in 2017, asking how we might "raise those issues and be genuinely in dialogue with very crucial and very difficult questions around colonialism."

Learn more about Jamelie Hassan

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Image Credits: **[1, 14]** Jamelie Hassan, *Could we ever know each other...?*, 2013, recycled neon, electrical, and colour photography mounted on Masonite. Collection of Ivey Business School, Western University, London, Ontario. Courtesy of Jamelie Hassan. **[2]** Chantal Gibson, *Braided Book*, 2011, mixed media altered text, *A History of Canada*, 1935. Courtesy of Chantal Gibson. Photo credit: Chantal Gibson. **[3]** Robert Houle, *Kanata*, 1992, acrylic and Conté crayon on canvas, 228.7 x 732 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1994 (37479.1-4). Courtesy of the artist. © Robert Houle. **[4]** Jin-me Yoon, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (detail), 1996, two grids of 67 framed c-prints, for a total of 135 c-prints, 47.5 x 60.5 cm each. Courtesy of Jin-me Yoon. **[5]** Frederick Horsman Varley, *Immigrants*, c.1922, oil on canvas, overall: 182.9 x 152.4 cm. The Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (AGOID.104090). Photo credit: AGO. © Art Gallery of Ontario. **[6]** Bidemi Oloyede, *Canada Day, Yonge-Dundas Square*, *Toronto*, 2018, Baryta fine art print, 50.8 x 71.12 cm, Edition of 5. Courtesy of Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto. © Bidemi Oloyede. **[7]** Joyce Wieland, *O Canada*, 1970, lithograph in red on wove paper, 57.4 x 76.4 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1971 (16901). Photo credit: NGC. **[8]** Brian Jungen, *Wieland*, 2006, leather gloves, 64 x 64 cm. Courtesy of Brian Jungen and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. Photo credit: Mary Crandall. **[9]** Camille Turner, *Hometown Queen*, 2011, staged photographs, digital prints, 30.5 x 45.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Photographed by Barb Greczny and Patrick Ellard. Digitally composited by Camille Turner. **[10]** Kent Monkman, *The Daddies*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 285.6 cm. Collection of Irfhan Rawji. Courtesy of Kent Monkman. © Kent Monkman. **[11]** Greg Curnoe, *Deeds #5*, August 19–22, 1991, stamp pad ink, poster paint, graphite, watercolour on paper, 110 x 168 cm. Collection of Winnipeg Art Gallery, acquired with funds from the Volunteer Committee to the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Winnipeg Art Gallery Foundation Inc. (G-94-238). © Estate of Greg Curnoe/SODRAC (2016). **[12]** Meryl McMaster, *Becoming Laura*, 2012, giclée on cotton rag. Courtesy of Meryl McMaster. **[13]** Zacharie Vincent, *Zacharie Vincent and His Son Cyprien*, c. 1851, oil on canvas, 48.5 x 41.2 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (1947.156).