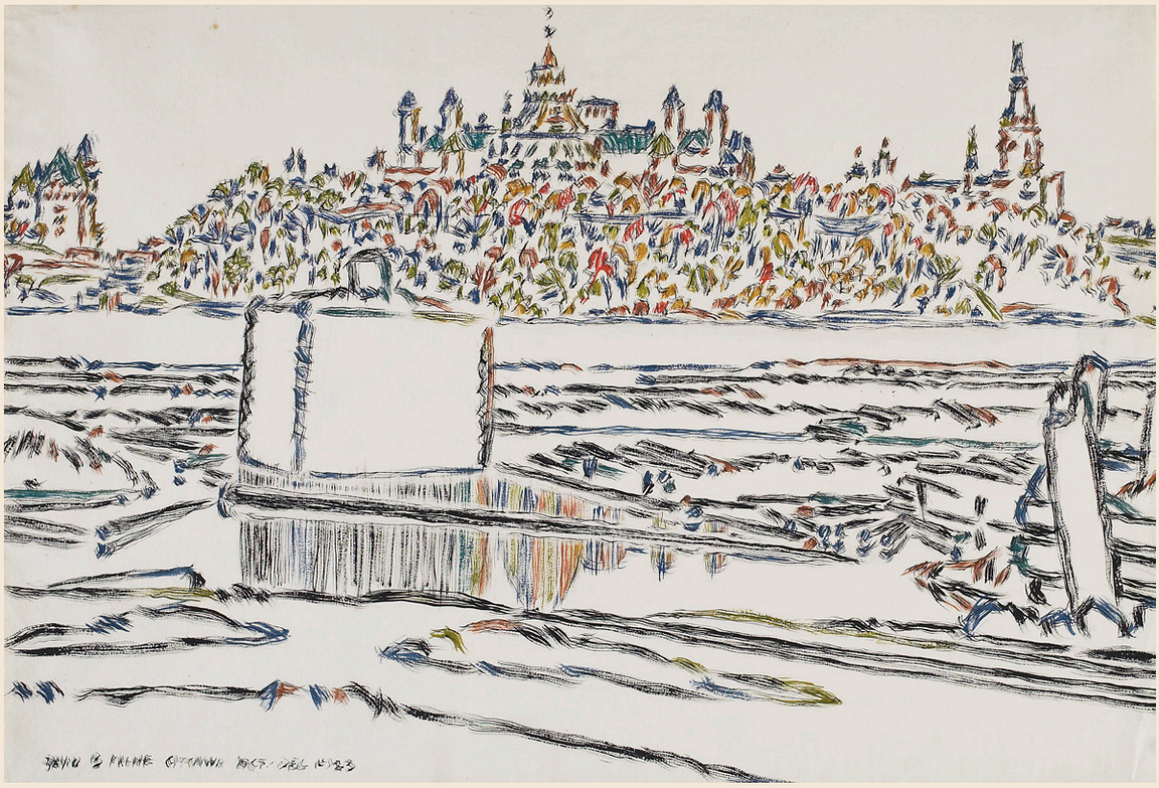
ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

JULY 22, 2022

OTTAWA ART & ARTISTS
A CAPITAL FOR CREATIVITY

Today the Art Canada Institute proudly publishes Ottawa Art & Artists: An Illustrated History *by Jim Burant, which explores the work of talented creators from the pre-contact era to the present who have made a lasting impact on the rich culture of the city.*



David Milne, *Parliament Hill from Hull*, December 1923, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

For most of us, the city of Ottawa conjures images of and associations with politics. Not so for the art historian and author Jim Burant, who in *Ottawa Art & Artists: An Illustrated History*—the Art Canada Institute's inaugural title on the chronicle of art in Canadian cities—spotlights the pioneering artists, inspiring community leaders, and pivotal museums and exhibitions that have contributed to the extraordinary cultural legacy of the nation's capital. The excerpts below, drawn from ACI's latest publication, reveal how for thousands of years, Ottawa has nurtured creators whose works represent a tremendous diversity of backgrounds and interests, from pictographs produced by Anishinābe artists to vivid photographs of Canadian leaders in the era of Confederation, and from modern painters like David Milne and Pegi Nicol MacLeod to contemporary figures such as Annie Pootoogook, Jeff Thomas, and Stephane Alexis.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

PICTOGRAPHS AT MAZINAW LAKE, BON ECHO PROVINCIAL PARK

by unknown Anishinābe artists

Pictographic representations found at Mazinaw Lake, Bon Echo Provincial Park, Cloyne, Ontario, date unknown.

The Ottawa region has been the ancestral territory of the Algonquin (Anishinābe) peoples for millennia, and its pictographs are among the earliest surviving artworks in the area. This photo shows some of the more than 260 pictographs located on the cliff at Mazinaw Lake in Bon Echo Provincial Park in Eastern Ontario—the largest rock art site on the Southern Canadian Shield. The image resembling a fence on the left may represent the cliff itself, while the rabbit-eared figure on the far right is Nanabush, the Anishinābe trickster and culture hero. These pictographs, some of which were painted over earlier ones, may have been made by shamans, whose healing and prophetic powers are often represented in this way. Equally, they may also have served as warnings of territoriality.

Learn more

VIEW OF THE GREAT FALLS ON THE OTTAWA RIVER, LOWER CANADA

by Thomas Davies

Thomas Davies, *View of the Great Falls on the Ottawa River, Lower Canada*, 1791, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Following the 1763 Treaty of Paris, which gave Britain unchallenged power in eastern North America, British military officers like Thomas Davies (c.1737–1812), who were trained in topographical representation, began to travel into the interior of the continent to map the land and to better understand the territory they now controlled. Making numerous trips to Canada between 1757 and 1791, Davies painted this picturesque watercolour of Chaudière Falls shortly before his permanent return to England. On the right, an Indigenous group, identifiable by their ear-loops as Anishinābe Ottawa or Ojibwe, is gathered on a cliff overlooking the water. Many colonial visitors would record the same scene over the next few decades, driven by a fascination with the awesome power of North American waterfalls.

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FANCY BALL GIVEN BY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL LORD DUFFERIN AT RIDEAU HALL ON FEBRUARY 23, 1876

by William J. Topley

William J. Topley, *Fancy Ball Given by the Governor General Lord Dufferin at Rideau Hall on February 23, 1876*, May 1876, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

Ottawa's designation as the capital of the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867 drew to the city a large influx of artists, senior public servants, viceregal representatives, and other notable figures. Many of them appear in William J. Topley's (1845–1930) composite photograph commemorating the first costume ball hosted by Governor General Lord Dufferin and his wife at Rideau Hall in February 1876. Topley, who was the best known and most socially prominent of Ottawa's nineteenth-century photographers, captured the event's major scale. In a pre-Photoshop era, he managed to show the details of each guest's costume by collaging numerous photographs of individual participants within a single frame (a technique he learned from William Notman). For almost five decades (1875–1923), the Topley Studio, located near Parliament Hill, was the Canadian capital's pre-eminent photographic establishment.

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AFTERGLOW

by Florence H. McGillivray

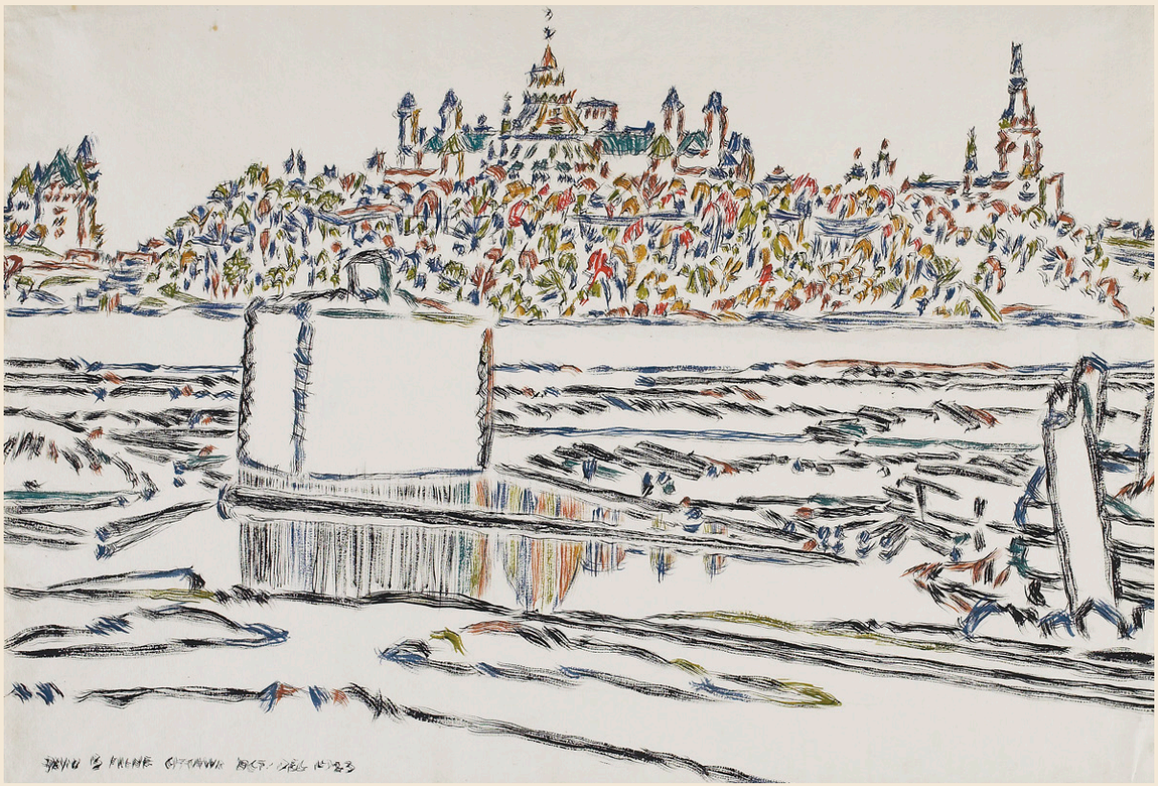
Florence H. McGillivray, *Afterglow*, c.1914, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

The Whitby-born painter Florence H. McGillivray (1864–1938) settled in Ottawa in 1914, bringing with her new trends in European art that she had encountered while living in France. This luminous work, *Afterglow*, c.1914, of an Ottawa-area shoreline scene at sunset, reflects the influence of Post-Impressionism with its vivid colour palette, bold brushstrokes, and simplified forms. McGillivray's painting techniques are reputed to have influenced Tom Thomson (1877–1917) in his final years. Echoes of *Afterglow*, with its heavily outlined trees and distant vista, are reflected in Thomson's iconic painting *The West Wind*, 1916–17. Remaining in Ottawa until 1928, McGillivray painted extensively in the Gatineau River Valley and the Gatineau Hills, and was also a member of the Women's Art Association and a teacher at the Ottawa Art School.

Learn more

PARLIAMENT HILL FROM HULL

by David Milne



David Milne, *Parliament Hill from Hull*, December 1923, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Like many other artists of his day, Bruce County, Ontario-born David Milne (1882–1953) landed in Ottawa in the winter of 1923–24 with the intention of securing a government position or patronage. *Parliament Hill from Hull*, 1923, is one of a small number of paintings and watercolours that Milne completed during his six-month stay. The composition exemplifies the artist's signature use of white space as well as his interest in American and French Impressionism and the bold colour palettes of Fauvism. Although paintings by Milne, who was inspired by international avant-garde art, stood apart from the more conservative tastes of official Ottawa, the National Gallery of Canada purchased six of his pieces. Nearly three decades later, the artist received international recognition when his work was included in Canada's exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 1952, one year before his death.

Learn more

SKATERS, ANGLESEA SQUARE

by Henri Masson

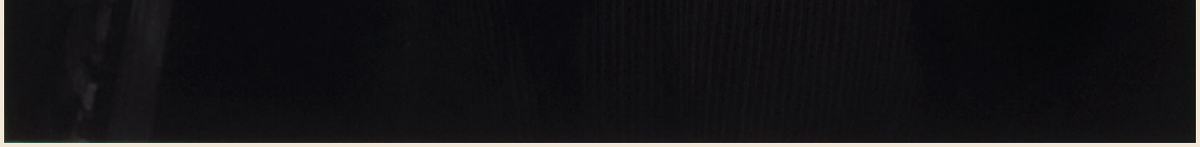
Henri Masson, *Skaters, Anglesea Square*, 1940, Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, Ottawa Art Gallery.

Arriving in Ottawa from Belgium in 1921, Henri Masson (1907–1996) gained fame in the 1940s for his everyday scenes in the working-class neighbourhoods of Hull and in the villages of the surrounding countryside. Compositions like *Skaters, Anglesea Square*, 1940, with their bright colours and relatable images of daily life, were irresistible to such collectors as H.S. Southam, then chair of the board of the National Gallery of Canada, who purchased and donated Masson's works to galleries across the country. Throughout the 1940s critics praised the artist's realism and his unique visual vocabulary. In 1944, the National Film Board of Canada produced a documentary about Masson, and in 2001 the city of Ottawa honoured him and photographer Yousuf Karsh (1908–2002) for their contributions to Canadian art by naming its 1,500-square-foot gallery space at City Hall the Karsh-Masson Gallery.

Learn more

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

by Yousuf Karsh



Yousuf Karsh, *Sir Winston Churchill*, 1941, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

Armenian-born Yousuf Karsh (1908–1993), who settled in Ottawa in 1932, was among the highly sought-after photographers who made the city a centre for international salon photography in the interwar period. This iconic portrait of Winston Churchill was taken in 1941, when the Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King invited Karsh to the House of Commons to mark the occasion of the British leader's visit. When Karsh shone lights on Churchill, preparing for the photo shoot, his sitter roared, "What's this, what's this?" adding "Why was I not told?" as he lit a cigar. When Karsh removed it from Churchill's mouth, he "looked so belligerent he could have devoured me," Karsh later recalled. "It was at that instant that I took the photograph." The portrait of Churchill graced the cover of *Life* magazine, became one of Karsh's most famous images, and earned him artistic immortality.

Learn more

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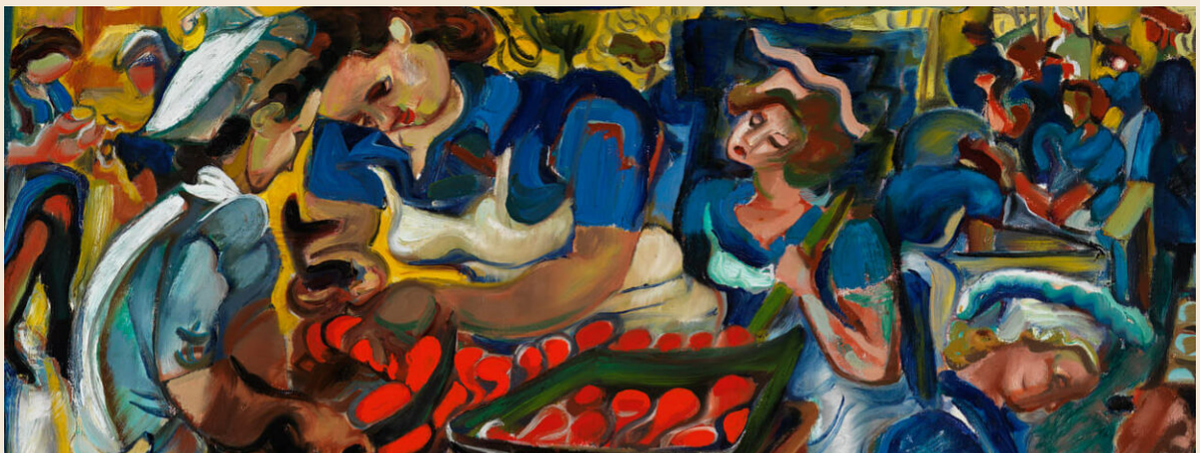
SALMON IN THE GALLEY

by Pegi Nicol MacLeod



Pegi Nicol MacLeod, *Salmon in the Galley*, 1944, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

Many Ottawa artists played important roles during the Second World War by joining the armed forces, becoming official war artists, or contributing on an unofficial basis, like Pegi Nicol MacLeod (1904–1949). Celebrated for her bold colours and expressive lines, Nicol was commissioned by the director of the National Gallery of Canada to paint the women's division of the Canadian Armed Forces, recording their activities in works such as *Salmon in the Galley*, 1944. This painting documents the bustling kitchen in the recruiting and basic training centre, HMCS *Carleton*, in Ottawa. "Here in the galleys life was joyous, with the girls singing, amazingly agreeable under their hanging pots and sieves," recalled Nicol. Born in the small Ontario town of Listowel, the artist lived in Ottawa on and off for much of her life, creating modern paintings of the city and its people.

Learn more

NEIGHBOURS

by Norman McLaren

Norman McLaren, still photo from *Neighbours*, 1952, National Film Board of Canada, Montreal.

In the mid-twentieth century, “Ottawa was for a time the epicentre of film production in Canada,” wrote historian Tom McSorley. The creation of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) in 1939 attracted a new generation of talented artists to the capital, including Scottish-born Norman McLaren (1914–1987), who arrived in 1941. While working for the NFB, McLaren created the celebrated short *Neighbours* (1952), which conveyed a powerful anti-war message, depicting two men, living peacefully side by side, who fight each other to death over ownership of a flower that blooms between their houses. It offered a moral lesson about the futility of war and the need to love one’s neighbour. The work earned an Oscar for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), and established McLaren as a filmmaker and animator of international renown.

Learn more

GREG HILL IN HIS CEREAL BOX CANOE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO

by Jeff Thomas

Jeff Thomas, *Greg Hill in his cereal box canoe, Ottawa, Ontario*, 2000, Courtesy of Jeff Thomas.

Settling in Ottawa in 1991, Buffalo-born artist and curator Jeff Thomas (b.1956) has played a leading role in confronting Indigenous stereotypes in the visual arts and in cultural institutions. In this image taken by Thomas, Kanyen'kehaka artist and curator Greg Hill poses in a canoe and headdress made of cereal boxes at the base of the Samuel de Champlain statue in Ottawa, where a sculpture of a kneeling Anishinābe scout once stood. With this photograph and others, Thomas forces viewers to compare stereotypical depictions of Indigenous people with the current realities of their late twentieth-century existence. The artist began his photography practice in 1979 after noticing the absence of Indigenous photographers as well as images of Indigenous people living in cities. "I was frustrated by the silence and challenged to stimulate conversations that did not exist," says Thomas.

Learn more

UNTITLED (KENOJUAK AND ANNIE WITH GOVERNOR GENERAL MICHAËLLE JEAN)

by Annie Pootoogook

Annie Pootoogook, *Untitled (Kenojuak and Annie with Governor General Michaëlle Jean)*, 2010, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Internationally acclaimed for her drawings of contemporary life in the North, Kinngait artist Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) moved to Ottawa in late 2007 and began producing works about her life in the South. This image documents the momentous occasion in 2009 when she and the iconic modern Inuk artist Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013) met Governor General Michaëlle Jean—who was then serving as the patron of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative for its fiftieth anniversary—in her office at Rideau Hall. While living in Ottawa, Pootoogook worked with other Inuit artists and showed her drawings at SAW Gallery. Starting in the 1960s, several Inuit artists began to travel south, and today, Ottawa is home to the largest number of Inuit in Canada outside of the Arctic, with an estimated population of 1,800 in 2006.

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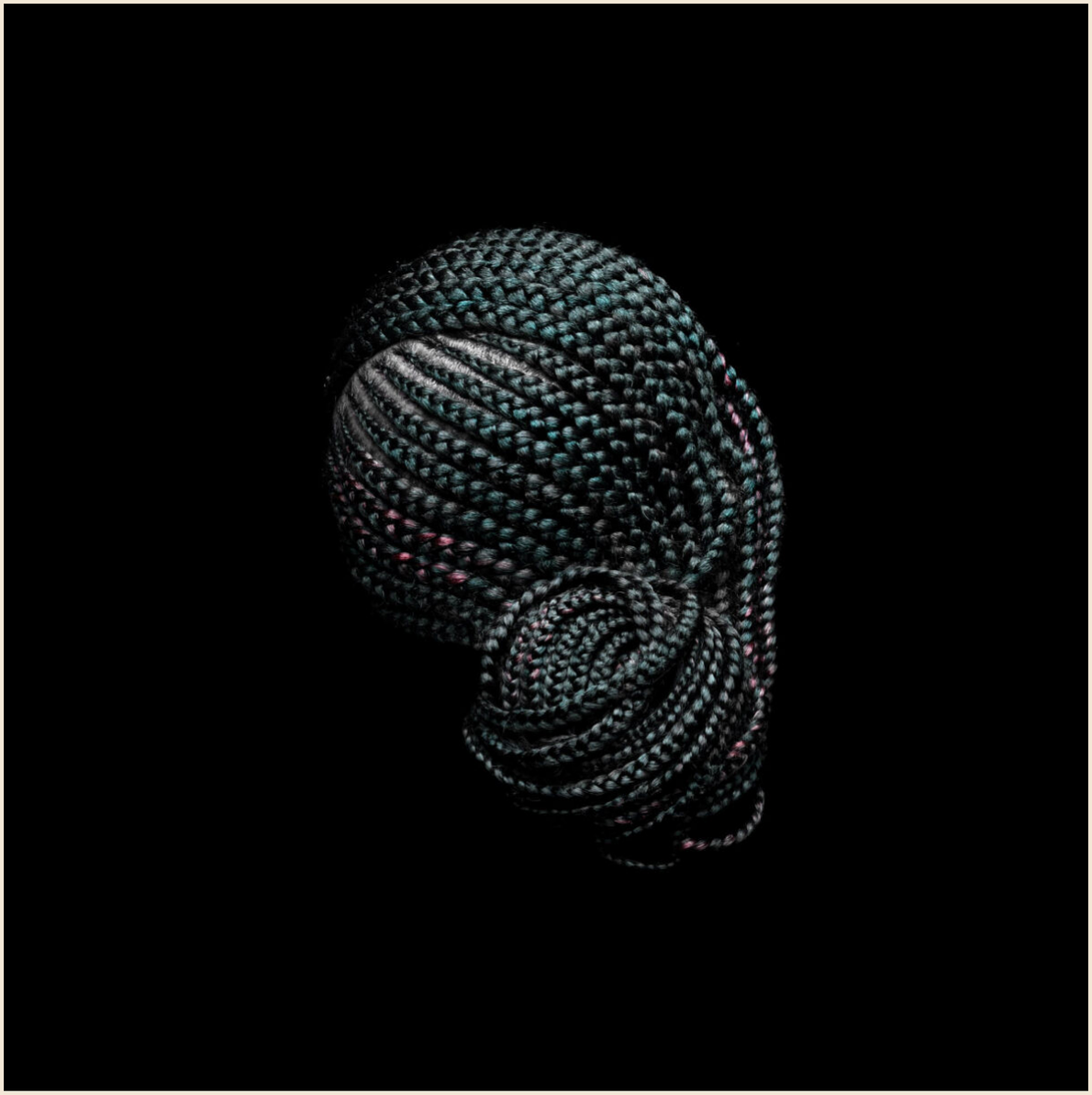
GHANA BRAIDS NO. 1

by Stephane Alexis



Stephane Alexis, *Ghana Braids no. 1*, 2020, Courtesy of Stephane Alexis and Pierre François Ouellette Art Contemporain, Montreal.

This year, the Ottawa-based Caribbean Canadian photographer Stephane Alexis was one of three emerging artists recognized by the Karsh Award program, which was established in 2003 to honour the enormous cultural contributions of brothers Yousuf and Malak Karsh, two of the city's most famous photographers. *Ghana Braids no. 1*, 2020, is part of Alexis's series Chains and Crowns, which challenges hair discrimination and mainstream beauty standards by showing that for people of African descent, hair is "something that we use to build our creativity and showcase who we are as an individual." Alexis developed his series based on extensive research and conversations with family members and friends about their relationship with their hair. Recognizing the outstanding talent of both established and young practitioners in Ottawa, the Karsh Award speaks to the importance of photography in the history of art in the city.

Learn more

About the Author of *Ottawa Art & Artists: An Illustrated History*

Jim Burant is an Adjunct Professor of Art History at Carleton University, as well as Director of the Ontario Region of the National Archival Appraisal Board of Canada. He retired from his position as head of the Art and Photography Archives at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in 2011, but has continued to work on curatorial, writing, and research projects. Commenting on this book, Burant notes, "Canadians in general are indifferent to or angry at the federal politicians and bureaucrats who inhabit the city, but few give any thought to the people who have made it their home and are proud to live here. This publication is an effort to show how Ottawa has contributed to Canadian art and how art represents a sense of place that deserves to be celebrated."

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Image Credits: **[1, 6]** David Milne, *Parliament Hill from Hull*, December 1923, watercolour over graphite on wove paper, 36.9 x 54.6 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the J.S. McLean Collection, Toronto, 1969, donated by the Ontario Heritage Foundation, 1988 (L69.42). © Art Gallery of Ontario. **[2]** Pictographic representations found at Mazinaw Lake, Bon Echo Provincial Park, Cloyne, Ontario, date unknown. Courtesy of Ontario Parks. **[3]** Thomas Davies, *View of the Great Falls on the Ottawa River, Lower Canada*, 1791, watercolour over graphite on wove paper, 34.6 x 51.4 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Purchased 1954 (6287). Photo credit: NGC. **[4]** William J. Topley, *Fancy Ball Given by the Governor General Lord Dufferin at Rideau Hall on February 23, 1876*, May 1876, composite photograph, 34.7 x 83.4 cm (image); 53.0 x 102.0 cm (mat). Collection of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/The Brechin Group Inc. **[5]** Florence H. McGillivray, *Afterglow*, c.1914, oil on paperboard, 42 x 57.5 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Purchased from the artist, 1914 (1041). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada. **[7]** Henri Masson, *Skaters, Anglesea Square*, 1940, oil on Masonite, 30.5 x 40.6 x 0.3 cm. Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, the Ottawa Art Gallery Donated to the City of Ottawa by the Ontario Heritage Foundation (FAC0957). Courtesy of the Ottawa Art Gallery. © Estate of Henri Masson. Photo credit: Tim Wickens. **[8]** Yousuf Karsh, *Sir Winston Churchill*, 1941, gelatin silver emulsion texture enhanced, 27.8 x 21.7 cm. Collection of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (e010751643-v6). Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/The Brechin Group Inc. © Estate of Yousuf Karsh. **[9]** Pegi Nicol MacLeod, *Salmon in the Galley*, 1944, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 91.7 cm. Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa (CWM 19710261-5806). Courtesy of the Canadian War Museum. **[10]** Norman McLaren, still photo from *Neighbours*, 1952, film, 8 minutes. Collection of the National Film Board of Canada, Montreal. Courtesy of the National Film Board. **[11]** Jeff Thomas, *Greg Hill in his cereal box canoe, Ottawa, Ontario*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist. © Jeff Thomas. **[12]** Annie Pootoogook, *Untitled (Kenojuak and Annie with Governor General Michaëlle Jean)*, 2010, coloured pencil on wove paper, 51 x 66 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Purchased 2010 (43064). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada. Photo credit: NGC. **[13]** Stephane Alexis, *Ghana Braids no. 1*, 2020, pigment ink on cotton rag. Courtesy of Stephane Alexis and Pierre-François Ouellette Art Contemporain, Montreal.