ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

FEBRUARY 10, 2023

THE LOOK OF LOVE
12 CANADIAN WORKS

To mark Valentine's Day next Tuesday, we're featuring a dozen pieces that celebrate lovers, mothers, a Hollywood icon, and the staying power of an old flame.

Michèle Pearson Clarke, *Val and Martika*, 2013, from the series It's Good to Be Needed, courtesy of Michèle Pearson Clarke.

With Valentine's Day fast approaching, we look at twelve artworks that capture the power—and sometimes the pain—of love. From scenes of close-knit family life and queer romance, to moments of intimate friendship and awkward run-ins with an ex, these works present diverse takes on what it looks like to love and be loved in return. "Ah, what remains, now that the storm no longer teems?" wondered Montreal poet Émile Nelligan, whose writing served as an influence for the art of fellow Montrealer Alfred Laliberté. "What has my heart become, thus set adrift at sea? / Alas, that ship has sunk in an abyss of dreams!”

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

THE POWER OF A HUG

by Anthony Gebrehiwot

Anthony Gebrehiwot, *The Power of a Hug*, 2020, courtesy of Anthony Gebrehiwot.

This work is part of a series of photographs called *From Boys to Men: The Road to Healing*, 2020, by Scarborough-based artist and activist Anthony Gebrehiwot, whose portraits question stereotypes of Black masculinity by presenting Black men in moments of vulnerability and closeness. In this scene, two men rest their heads on each other's shoulders, sharing a tender embrace. "What I am doing is tracing the roots of my trauma, in a nutshell," Gebrehiwot explains in a video produced by the University of Toronto Scarborough. "I want people to feel things that challenge the norms of masculinity … to know that it's okay to hug another man."

Learn more about Anthony Gebrehiwot

LE VAISSEAU D'OR [SHIP OF GOLD]

by Alfred Laliberté

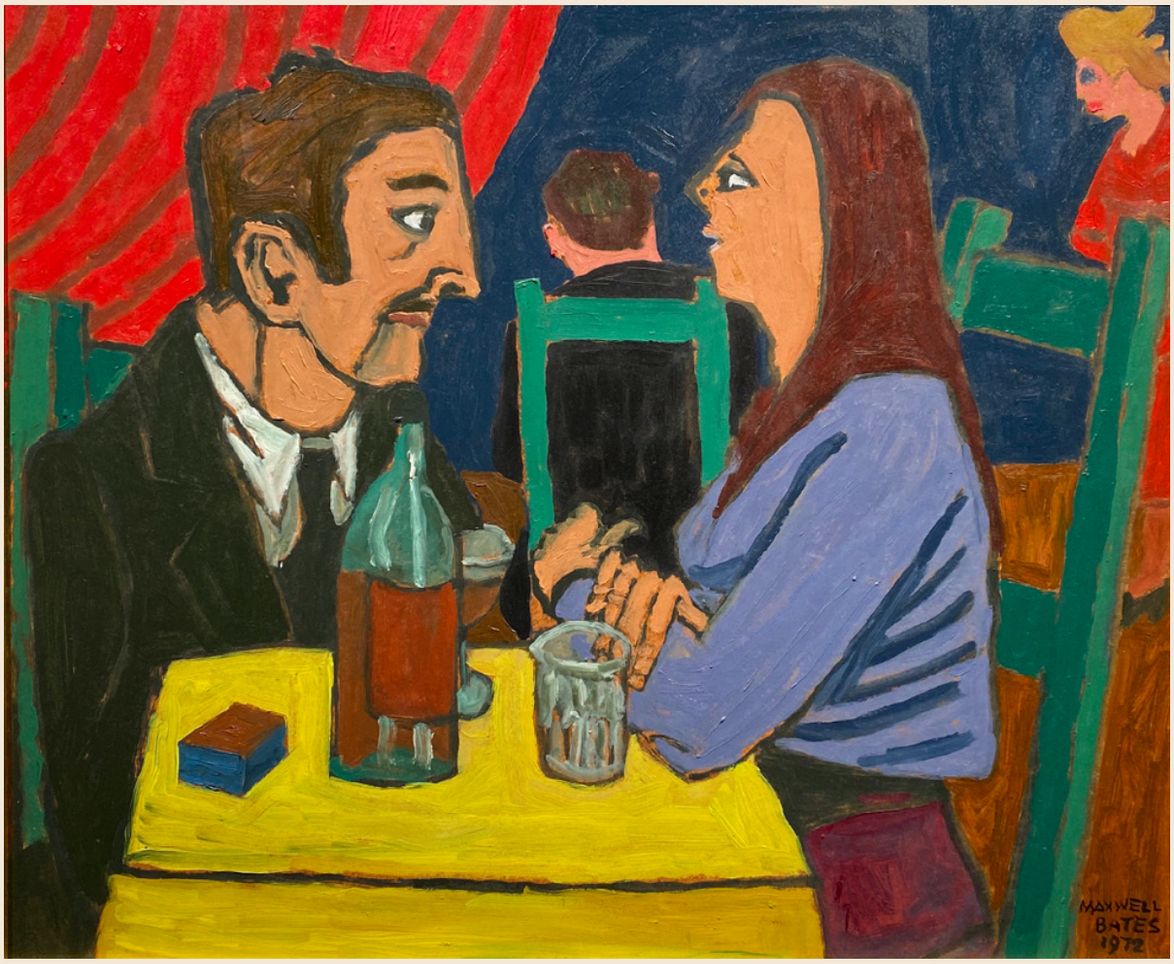
Alfred Laliberté, *Le Vaisseau d'Or [Ship of Gold]*, 1910–11,
Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City.

At one end of this elaborate bronze inkwell—sculpted by Montreal-based artist Alfred Laliberté (1877–1953)—we find a depiction of Montreal writer Émile Nelligan (1879–1941), whose poem "Le Vaisseau d'Or" ("Ship of Gold") gives the sculpture its name. At the other end of the sinking ship, there is the "goddess Love" from Nelligan's poem, her back arched as she leans against a lyre. The figures seem caught in the throes of yearning and desire, lending this scene a sense of love unconsummated and unreached.

Learn more about Alfred Laliberté

COUPLE IN A RESTAURANT

by Maxwell Bates



Maxwell Bates, *Couple in a Restaurant*, 1972, private collection.

Calgary-born artist Maxwell Bates (1906–1980) was a satirist and an expert people-watcher who drew inspiration from the social worlds around him, capturing minute expressions of human behaviour at public and private events. In this colourful painting, characteristic of his vibrant, playful style, the artist has captured a couple at dinner, gazing deeply into each other's eyes. The sentimental moment is offset by Bates' acerbic style, which flattens the pair with sharp, angular faces and surrounds them in garish colours.

Learn more about Maxwell Bates

ARCTIC EVENING

by Shuvinai Ashoona

Shuvinai Ashoona, *Arctic Evening*, 2003, courtesy of Dorset Fine Arts.

In this softly lit scene by Kinngait-based artist Shuvinai Ashoona (b.1961), an Inuit family shares a peaceful moment in bed. While the woman tends to the qulliq, an Inuit oil lamp, her children have fallen fast asleep beside her, with her baby bundled in an amauti, the parka used by Inuit women to carry their infants. A man sips tea and watches her work, leaning against her in a posture of familiarity and comfort. The quiet, touching scene draws from Ashoona's own experience living with her family in traditional camps around Kinngait.

Read more in ACI's
Shuvinai Ashoona: Life & Work by Nancy G. Campbell

UNTITLED

by Paul P.

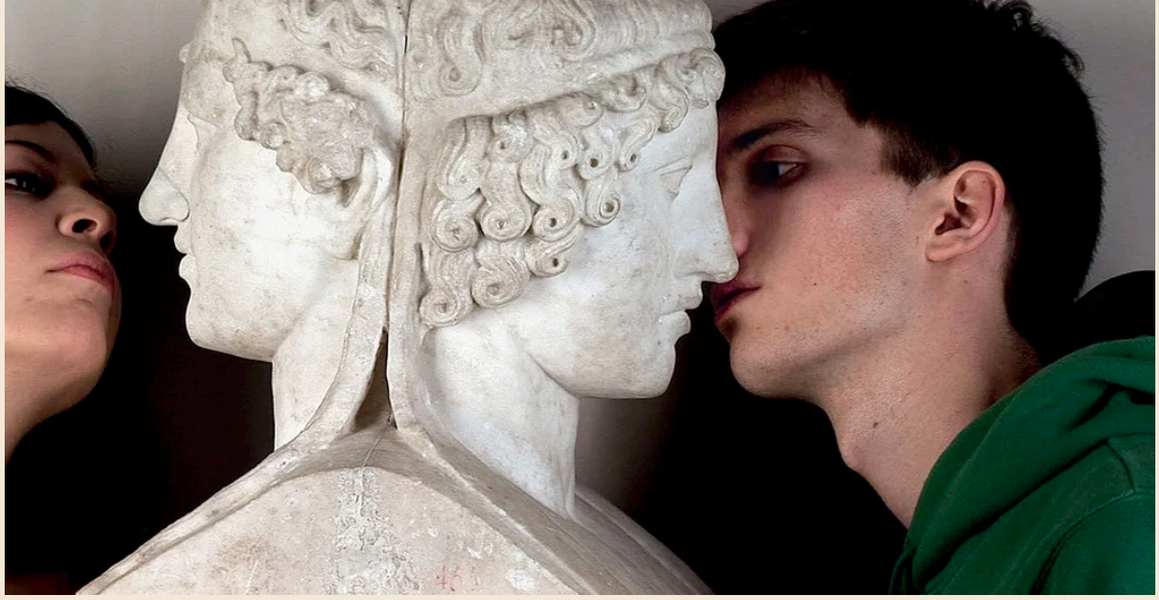
Paul P., *Untitled*, 2011, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Out of a blur of blue and black waves, two male silhouettes emerge from the ocean carrying their surfboards. The work is characteristic of Toronto-based artist Paul P. (b.1977), who often draws from vintage gay erotica and photographs taken before the AIDS crisis. The oceanside scene is also inspired by the artist's connection of waterfronts like Venice Beach to "queer social history"; as he explains in AnOther magazine, he sees these "peripheral and water-bounded places [as] haunted by their bygone licentiousness and allure to outcasts." *Untitled*, 2011, is one of thirty works on view in Paul P.'s new exhibition, *Amor et Mors*, opening today at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa.

Learn more about Paul P.

EROS AND APHRODITE

by Adad Hannah



Adad Hannah, *Eros and Aphrodite*, 2008, from the series Prado Project, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In Vancouver-based artist Adad Hannah's (b.1971) *Eros and Aphrodite*, 2008, a man and woman face each other, separated by the fused sculptural heads of the Greek goddess of love and her son, the god of beauty, sex, and pleasure. Undaunted by the cold marble, the couple has leaned in to kiss the deities, frozen in an incomplete expression of intimacy that is typical of Hannah's work, which draws inspiration from the nineteenth-century tradition of *tableaux vivants* ("living pictures"). The seven-minute video initially appears to be a still image, as the motionless pair hold their poses. Upon closer inspection, they betray small signs of movement: the twitch of an eye, an inhalation, a slight shift in posture.

Learn more about Adad Hannah

See his work at Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain

See his work at Equinox Gallery

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YOUNG WOMAN'S BLUES

by Joyce Wieland

Joyce Wieland, *Young Woman's Blues*, 1964, University of Lethbridge Art Collection.

Toronto-based Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) was known for her provocative approach to artmaking, in which she applied her distinctly female gaze to topical subjects such as Canadian nationalism, pop culture, and the feminist movement. *Young Woman's Blues*, 1964, is inspired by the much-publicized personal trials and tribulations of American actress Elizabeth Taylor, including her many marriages and breakups. In this multimedia work, the actress's celebrated violet eyes are faintly visible as she gazes forlornly from a boxed-in neon heart, above which a silver airplane hints at a desire for freedom and escape.

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

DRAWING THE LINE

by Kiss & Tell

Kiss & Tell, *Drawing the Line*, 1990, courtesy of Kiss & Tell.

As members of the Vancouver-based collective Kiss & Tell, artists Persimmon Blackbridge, Lizard Jones, and Susan Stewart broke ground in the 1990s with their photographic exhibition *Drawing the Line*, which included this black-and-white portrait of two women embracing in a manner that suggests post-coital bliss. The exhibition and its series of images centred on expressions of lesbian sexuality that ranged from kissing and foreplay to more explicit themes like whipping and bondage. The series presented diverse, empowered representations of queer sexuality at a time when prejudice and censorship were rampant.

Learn more about Kiss & Tell in our newsletter about the 2022 recipients of the Redefining Canadian Art History Fellowship

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CHIQUITA 1

by Shelley Niro

Shelley Niro, *Chiquita 1*, 2021, courtesy of Shelley Niro.

In this photocollage by Brantford, Ontario-based artist Shelley Niro (b.1954), a fifteen-year-old girl in a white dress poses shyly before a giant red rose. This is Chiquita, the mother of the artist, who is a member of the Turtle Clan of the Kanien'kehaka Nation from the Six Nations Reserve. "My mother could have been a successful artist in her own right," Niro says in an interview with the National Gallery of Canada. "But mostly the things she made at the kitchen table were meant to be sold at pow-wows and tourist shops. Her hands were always doing something." Niro displays her tenderness toward her mother by cocooning Chiquita in the petals of the rose.

Learn more about Shelley Niro

WRITING ON THE WALL, TORONTO

by Joan Latchford

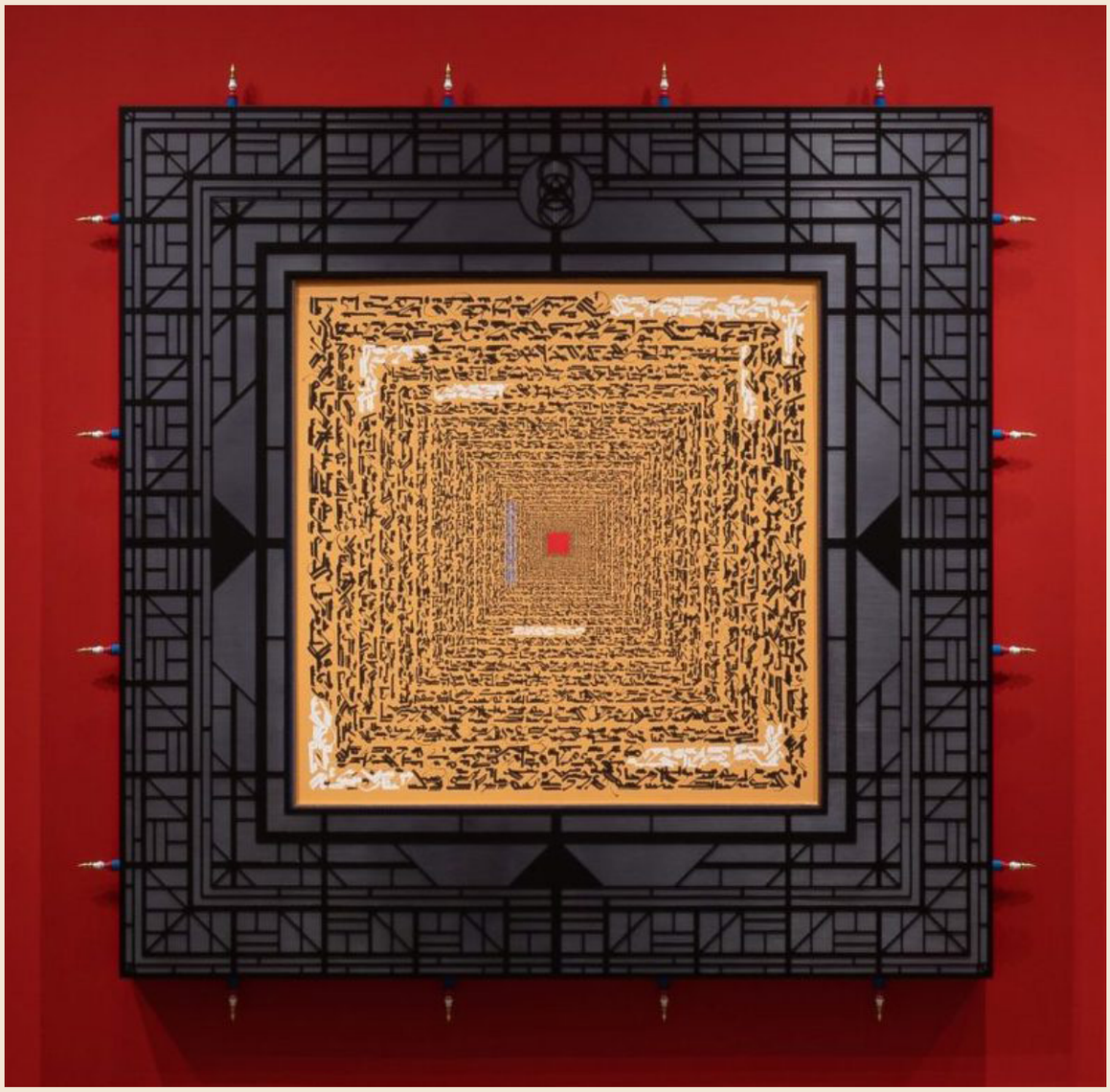
Joan Latchford, *Writing on the Wall, Toronto*, 1971,
courtesy of the Joan Latchford Estate and Cardinal Gallery, Toronto.

A heart, shot with an arrow, frames the words “Love Isn’t Limited” in this photo by Toronto-based photojournalist and former nun Joan Latchford (1926–2017). The phrase could have served as a motto for the socially engaged artist, who left her convent in the 1950s to practice photography full-time. Exhausted by the widespread depiction of immigrants and racialized minorities as “poor, angry, confrontational… reinforcing stereotypes,” she dedicated much of her artistic career in the 1960s and 1970s to a richer, more humane representation of Toronto’s diverse population, including the growing communities of Hungarian refugees and the Caribbean diaspora.

Learn more about Joan Latchford

CONFIRMATION B

by Nep Sidhu



Nep Sidhu, *Confirmation B*, 2014, courtesy of Nep Sidhu.

A tribute to Toronto artist Nep Sidhu's late mother, *Confirmation B*, 2014, is based on a letter he wrote to her after her passing, expressing his everlasting love and his dream of reuniting in the next life. Those words are presented alongside the last ones spoken by his mother, rendered in Kufic script, arranged in a square spiral, and nestled within an elaborately decorated geometrical frame. Sidhu, who is trained as a welder, created the intricate frame from brass and sheet veneer marble to represent a parent's unconditional love. "After the pain and hurt [of her loss], the work paved a way for an opportunity for her to become bigger than she ever was as a single-bodied woman," he tells *The Source*. "It was something that represented not just her personally, but [all] the others that were roaming and singing."

Learn more about Nep Sidhu

VAL AND MARTIKA

by Michèle Pearson Clarke

Michèle Pearson Clarke, *Val and Martika*, 2013, from the series *It's Good to Be Needed*, courtesy of Michèle Pearson Clarke.

At a neighbourhood playground, two people hold hands, an affectionate gesture somewhat undermined by their rigid body language. The image is part of a series by Toronto-based artist and academic Michèle Pearson Clarke (b.1973) called *It's Good to Be Needed*, 2013, where she photographed queer women who once were partners and are now no longer friends. Clarke explains on her website that her aim with the project is to explore "what happens when you perform intimacy despite time and distance and hurt and conflict." The series highlights the complicated feelings—both positive and negative—that linger between people who used to be close.

Learn more about Michèle Pearson Clarke

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Image Credits: **[1, 13]** Michèle Pearson Clarke, *Val and Martika*, 2013, from the series It's Good to Be Needed, c-print, 50.8 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of Michele Pearson Clarke. **[2]** Anthony Gebrehiwot, *The Power of a Hug*, 2020. Courtesy of Anthony Gebrehiwot. **[3]** Alfred Laliberté, *Le Vaisseau d'Or [Ship of Gold]*, 1910–11, gilt bronze, 21.4 x 51.6 x 35 cm. Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City (1977.206). Photo credit: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie.**[4]** Maxwell Bates, *Couple in a Restaurant*, 1972, oil on board. Private collection. Courtesy of Loch Gallery, Toronto. **[5]** Shuvinai Ashoona, *Arctic Evening*, 2003, lithograph. Dorset Fine Arts, Toronto, and various collections (03–29). Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts. © Dorset Fine Arts. **[6]** Paul P., *Untitled*, 2011, oil paint on cream paper, 16 x 23.8 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 2020 with the generous support of Diana Billes, Toronto (49043). © Paul P. Photo: NGC. **[7]** Adad Hannah, *Eros and Aphrodite*, 2008, from the series Prado Project, HD colour video, silent, 4/5, 7 min 18 s. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Horsley and Annie Townsend Bequest (inv. 2019.185). Courtesy of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. **[8]** Joyce Wieland, *Young Woman's Blues*, 1964, wood, paint, found objects, and plastic, 53.3 x 30.5 x 22.2 cm. University of Lethbridge Art Collection, purchased with funds provided by the Canada Council Special Purchase Grant, 1986. © National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. **[9]** Kiss & Tell, *Drawing the Line*, 1990, photograph. Courtesy of Kiss & Tell. **[10]** Shelley Niro, *Chiquita 1*, 2021, digital photography, 101.6 x 101.6 cm. Courtesy of Shelley Niro. **[11]** Joan Latchford, *Writing on the Wall, Toronto*, 1971, silver gelatin, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the Joan Latchford Estate and Cardinal Gallery, Toronto. **[12]** Nep Sidhu, *Confirmation B*, 2014, ink on paper, brass, sheet veneer marble. Courtesy of Nep Sidhu.