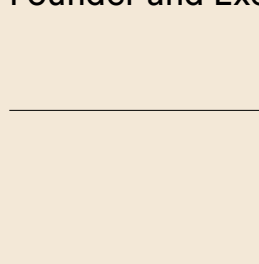
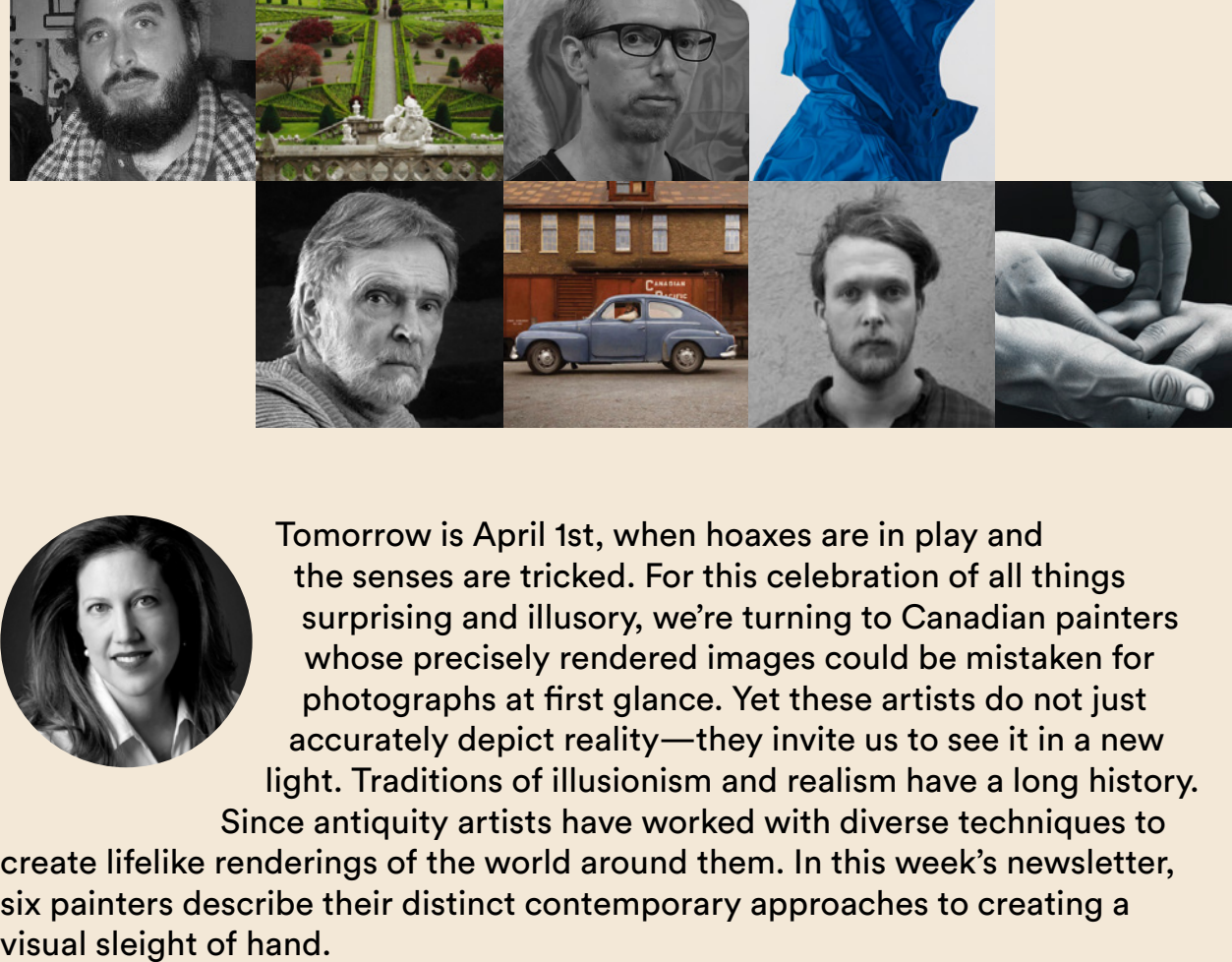


MARCH 31, 2023

SIX DOUBLE TAKES REALIST PAINTERS IN ACTION

These Canadian artists and their true-to-life paintings make us question our perception of veracity.



Tomorrow is April 1st, when hoaxes are in play and the senses are tricked. For this celebration of all things surprising and illusory, we're turning to Canadian painters whose precisely rendered images could be mistaken for photographs at first glance. Yet these artists do not just accurately depict reality—they invite us to see it in a new light. Traditions of illusionism and realism have a long history.

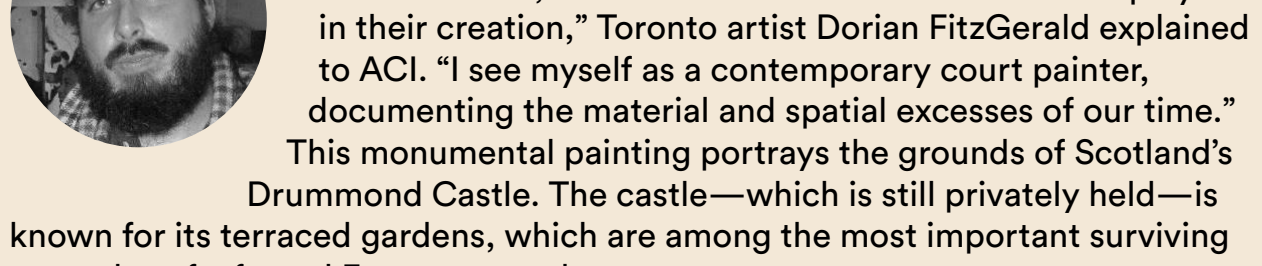
Since antiquity artists have worked with diverse techniques to create lifelike renderings of the world around them. In this week's newsletter, six painters describe their distinct contemporary approaches to creating a visual sleight of hand.

Sara Angel

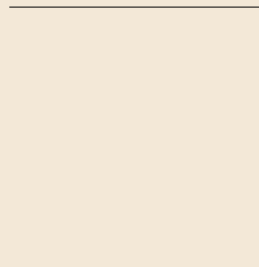
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

FORMAL GARDENS OF DRUMMOND CASTLE, CURRENT SEAT OF THE 28TH BARONESS WILLOUGHBY DE ERESBY, NANCY JANE MARIE HEATHCOTE- DRUMMOND-WILLOUGHBY

by Dorian FitzGerald



Dorian FitzGerald, *Formal Gardens of Drummond Castle, current seat of the 28th Baroness Willoughby de Eresby, Nancy Jane Marie Heathcote-Drummond-Wil提高oughby*, 2013, Ivey Business School, Western University, London, Ontario.



"My practice is concerned with the economy of fine objects—their commission, provenance, collection, and dissemination, as well as the labour and material employed in their creation," Toronto artist Dorian FitzGerald explained to ACI. "I see myself as a contemporary court painter, documenting the material and spatial excesses of our time."

This monumental painting portrays the grounds of Scotland's Drummond Castle. The castle—which is still privately held—is known for its terraced gardens, which are among the most important surviving examples of a formal European garden.

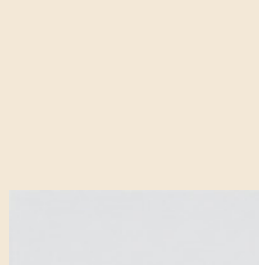
[Learn more about Dorian FitzGerald](#)

SELF PORTRAIT

by Shantel Miller



Shantel Miller, *Self Portrait*, 2019, courtesy of Shantel Miller.

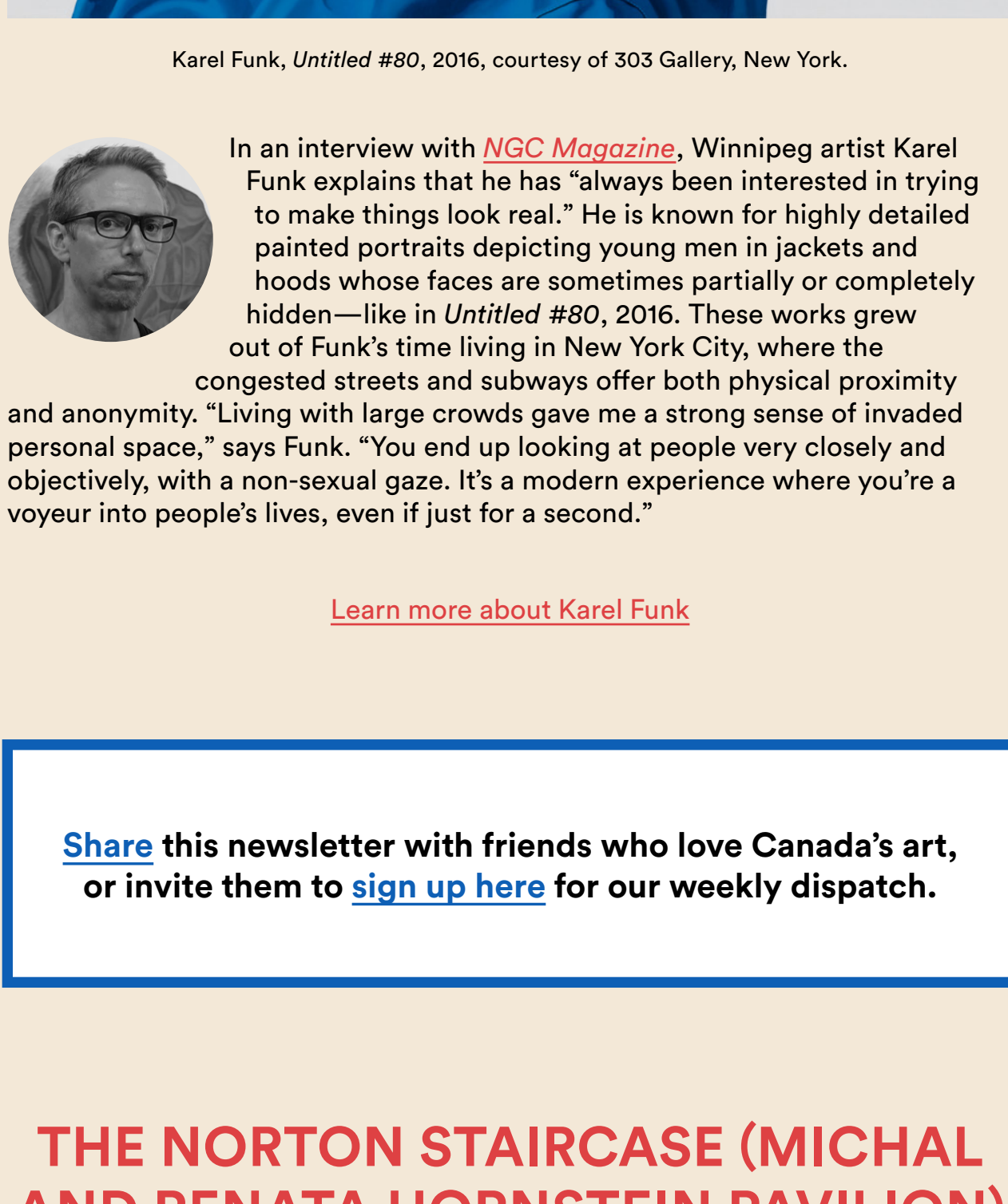


"It's a way for me to process," explains Jamaican Canadian artist Shantel Miller, speaking about her realist painting practice in an interview with [BU Today](#). "How do I feel living in my body and how does this relate to other people who share similar experiences?" In *Self Portrait*, 2019, a lifelike rendering of a furrow-browed Miller is accented with bold pinks and oranges, reflecting a preference for vivid hues that, the artist explained to ACI, "help structure each composition and are used symbolically to evoke the emotional tonality and interconnectedness within the subject matter." As she stated in *BU Today*, "The [personal] is political. It's not overt, but I do feel like the act of making is a political act."

[Learn more about Shantel Miller](#)

UNTITLED #80

by Karel Funk



Karel Funk, *Untitled #80*, 2016, courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.



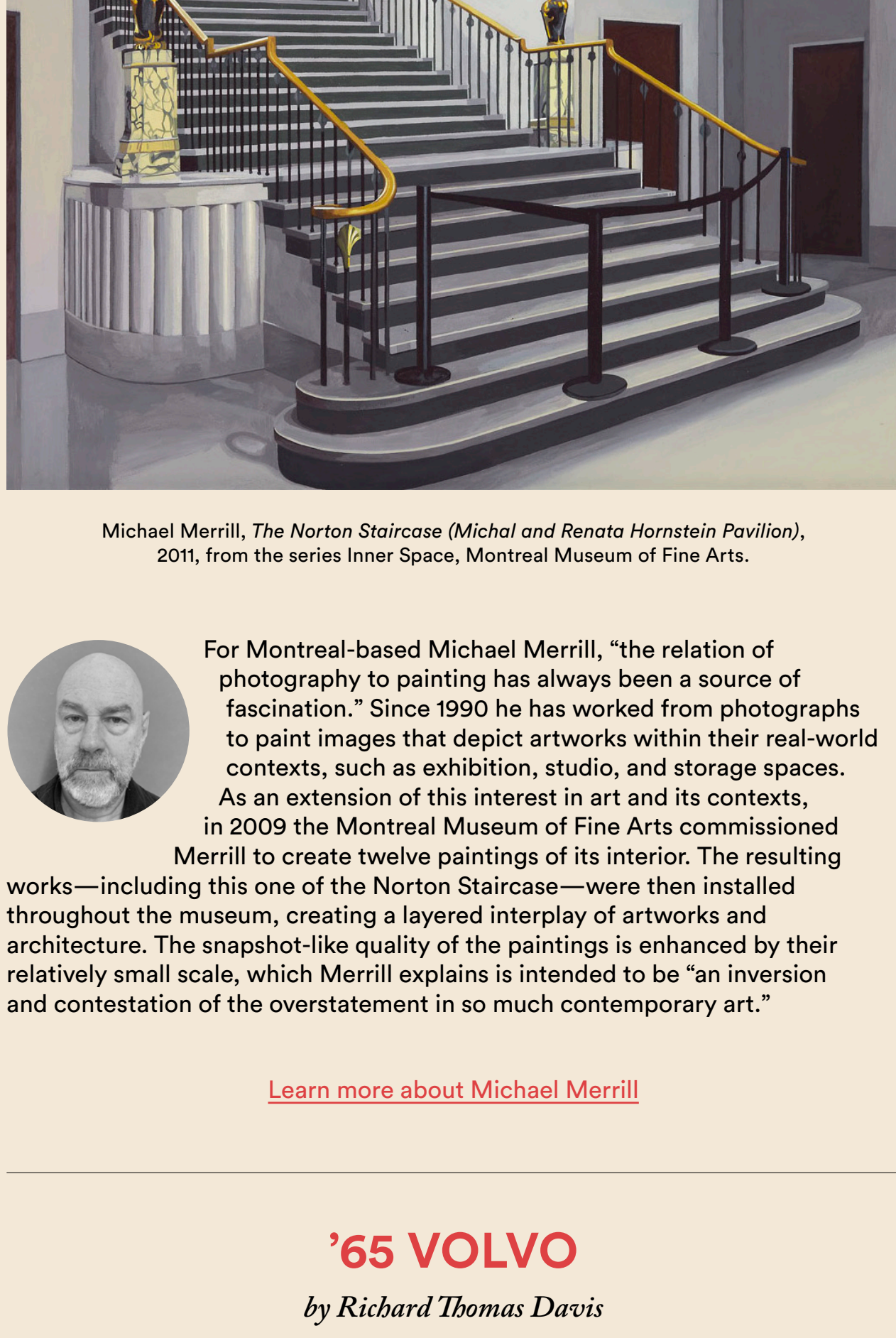
In an interview with [NGC Magazine](#), Winnipeg artist Karel Funk explains that he has "always been interested in trying to make things look real." He is known for highly detailed painted portraits depicting young men in jackets and hoods whose faces are sometimes partially or completely hidden—like in *Untitled #80*, 2016. These works grew out of Funk's time living in New York City, where the congested streets and subways offer both physical proximity and anonymity. "Living with large crowds gave me a strong sense of invaded personal space," says Funk. "You end up looking at people very closely and objectively, with a non-sexual gaze. It's a modern experience where you're a voyeur into people's lives, even if just for a second."

[Learn more about Karel Funk](#)

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THE NORTON STAIRCASE (MICHAL AND RENATA HORNSTEIN PAVILION)

by Michael Merrill



Michael Merrill, *The Norton Staircase (Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion)*, 2011, from the series *Inner Space*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

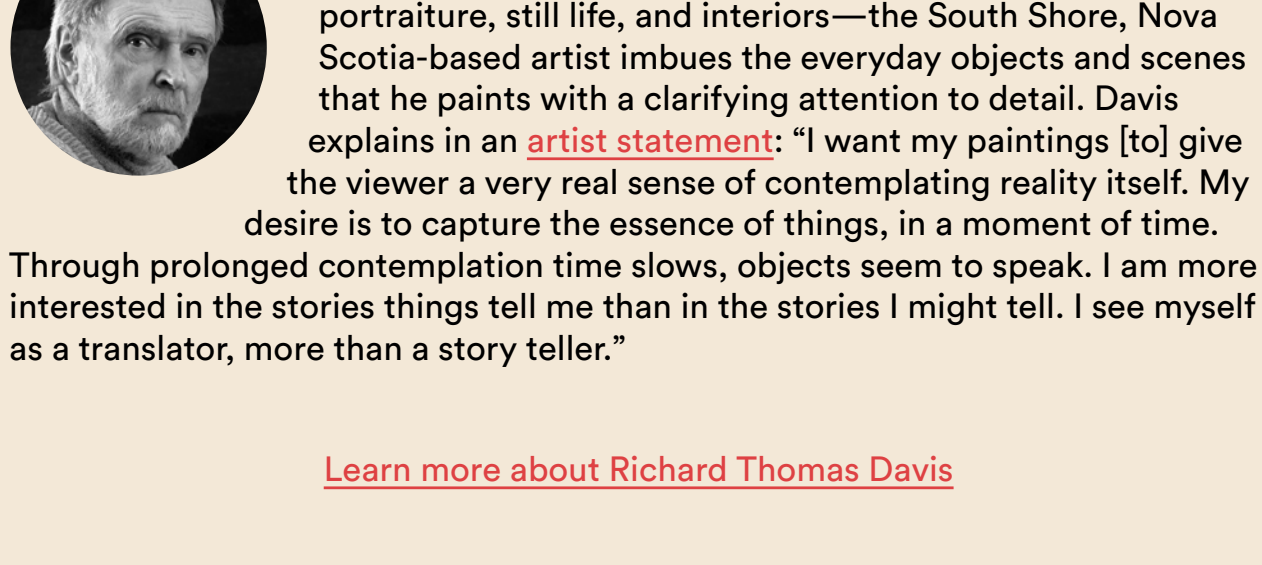


For Montreal-based Michael Merrill, "the relation of photography to painting has always been a source of fascination." Since 1990 he has worked from photographs to paint images that depict artworks within their real-world contexts, such as exhibition, studio, and storage spaces. As an extension of this interest in art and its contexts, in 2009 the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts commissioned Merrill to create twelve paintings of its interior. The resulting works—including this one of the Norton Staircase—were then installed throughout the museum, creating a layered interplay of artworks and architecture. The snapshot-like quality of the paintings is enhanced by their relatively small scale, which Merrill explains is intended to be "an inversion and contestation of the overstatement in so much contemporary art."

[Learn more about Michael Merrill](#)

'65 VOLVO

by Richard Thomas Davis



Richard Thomas Davis, *'65 Volvo*, 2013, courtesy of Richard Thomas Davis.

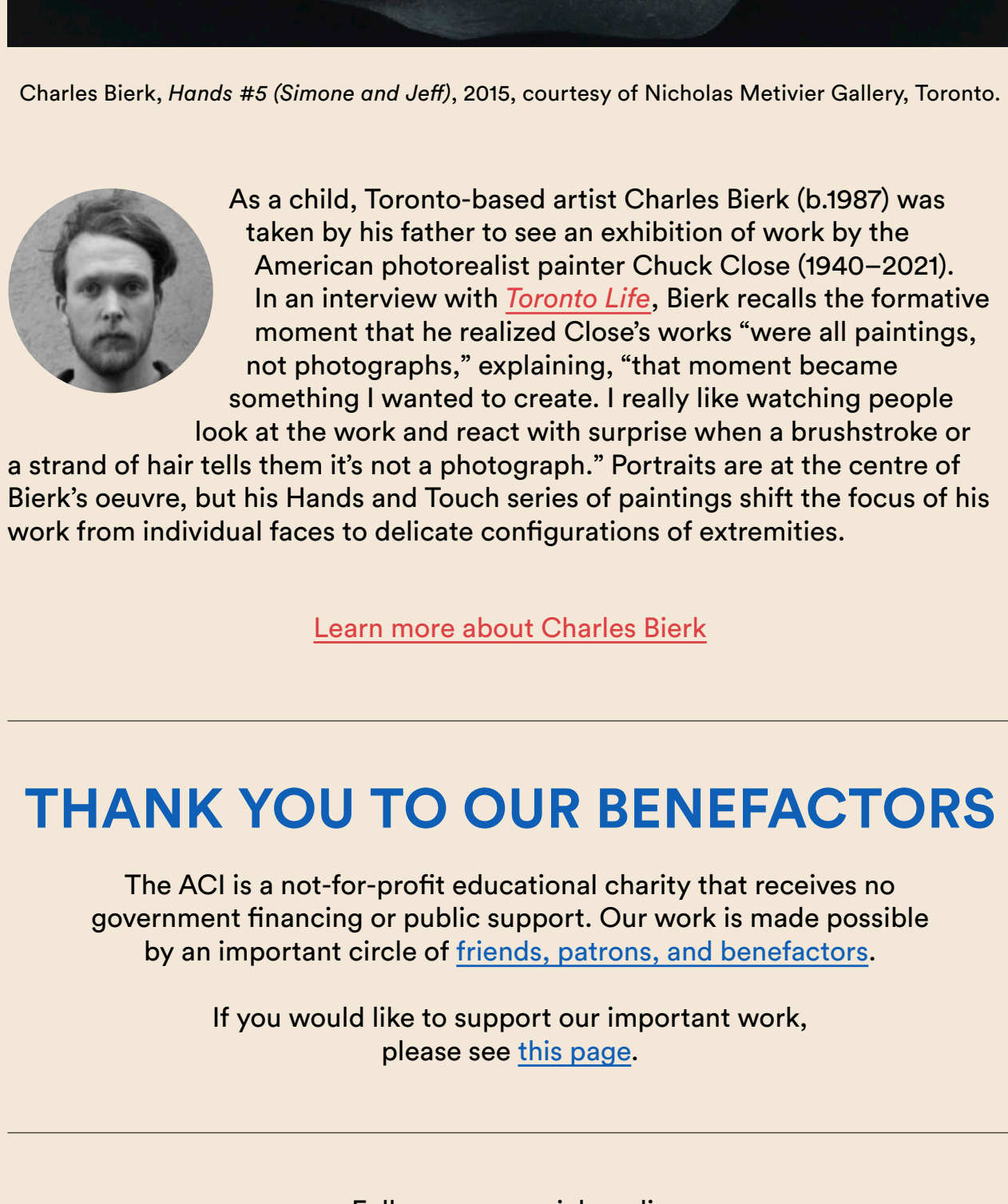


Richard Thomas Davis (b.1947) describes himself as a "high realist" painter. Working across diverse genres—including portraiture, still life, and interiors—the South Shore, Nova Scotia-based artist imbues the everyday objects and scenes that he paints with a clarifying attention to detail. Davis explains in an [artist statement](#): "I want my paintings [to] give the viewer a very real sense of contemplating reality itself. My desire is to capture the essence of things, in a moment of time. Through prolonged contemplation time slows, objects seem to speak. I am more interested in the stories things tell me than in the stories I might tell. I see myself as a translator, more than a story teller."

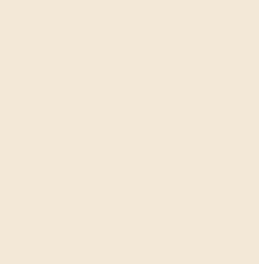
[Learn more about Richard Thomas Davis](#)

HANDS #5 (SIMONE AND JEFF)

by Charles Bierk



Charles Bierk, *Hands #5 (Simone and Jeff)*, 2015, courtesy of Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto.



As a child, Toronto-based artist Charles Bierk (b.1987) was taken by his father to see an exhibition of work by the American photorealist painter Chuck Close (1940–2021). In an interview with [Toronto Life](#), Bierk recalls the formative moment that he realized Close's works "were all paintings, not photographs," explaining, "that moment became something I wanted to create. I really like watching people look at the work and react with surprise when a brushstroke or a strand of hair tells them it's not a photograph." Portraits are at the centre of Bierk's oeuvre, but his *Hands and Touch* series of paintings shift the focus of his work from individual faces to delicate configurations of extremities.

[Learn more about Charles Bierk](#)

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Image Credits: [1] Dorian FitzGerald, *Formal Gardens of Drummond Castle, current seat of the 28th Baroness Willoughby de Eresby, Nancy Jane Marie Heathcote-Drummond-Wil提高oughby*, 2013, acrylic paint, acrylic caulk, acrylic transfer, GAC 800, 213.4 x 609.6 cm. Collection of the Ivey Business School, Western University, London, Ontario. Commissioned for the Richard Ivey Building by Richard W. Ivey. [2] Shantel Miller, *Self Portrait*, 2019, oil on canvas, 66 x 61 cm. Courtesy of Shantel Miller. [3] Karel Funk, *Untitled #80*, 2016, acrylic on panel, 58.4 x 64.1 cm. Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York. © Karel Funk. [4] Michael Merrill, *The Norton Staircase (Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion)*, 2011, from the series *Inner Space*, inv. 2018.282. [5] Richard Thomas Davis, *'65 Volvo*, 2013, oil over tempera emulsion on panel, 162 x 177 cm. Courtesy of Richard Thomas Davis. [6] Charles Bierk, *Hands #5 (Simone and Jeff)*, 2015, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto.