

JULY 28, 2023

IN THE KNOW: 9 NOTABLE STORIES ON ART IN CANADA

As July wraps up, we're bringing you the major headlines and most talked about stories from the Canadian art world.

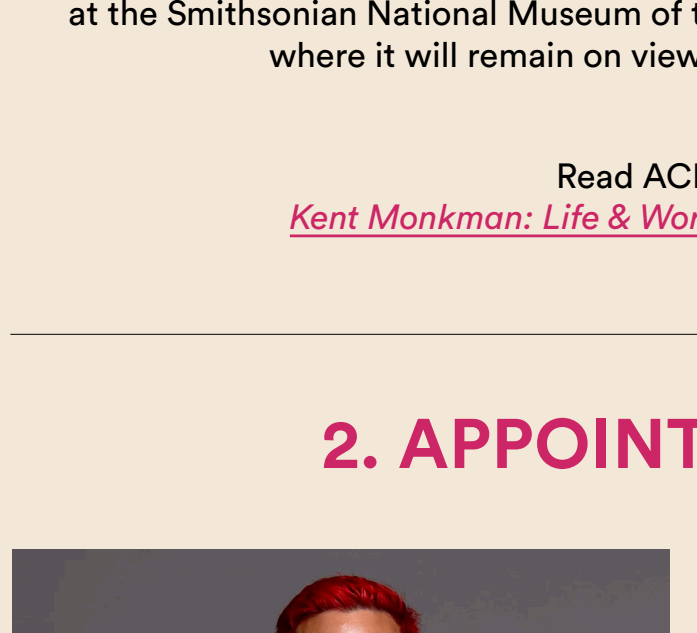


In our monthly news roundup, we're covering the latest developments in honours, appointments, up-and-coming artists to know, and the completion of new public artworks. From the unveiling of the 300-foot-long walkway mural *Path to Reconciliation* in downtown Regina, which was painted by lead artists Brandy Jones and Geanna Dunbar and around 200 volunteers, to the innovative digitization efforts aimed at making Inuit prints held by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection accessible to the public, this has been a compelling month for the visual arts in Canada.

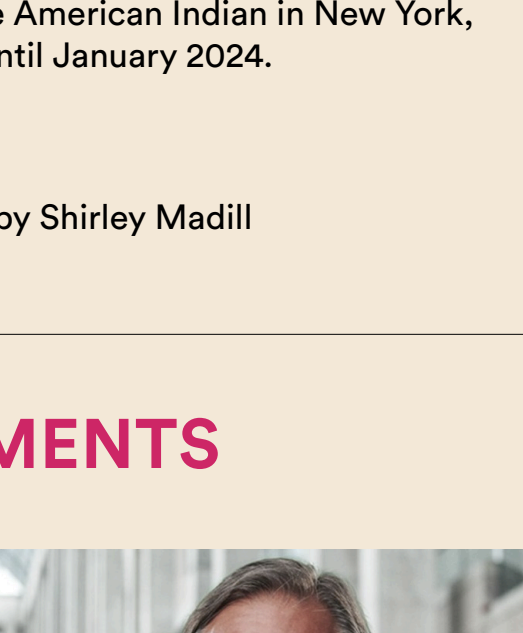
Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

1. HONOURS



Kent Monkman in his studio, 2018, photograph by Sam Engelking.



Shelley Niro, *Abnormally Aboriginal* (detail), 2014, courtesy of Shelley Niro.

On Friday, June 30, 2023, Governor General **Mary Simon** announced 85 appointments to the Order of Canada, including **Kent Monkman** (b.1965). Subversive and bold, the work of Monkman has left an unmistakable mark on Canadian art. Since the early 2000s, Monkman, accompanied by his time-travelling, shape-shifting, gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, has redefined the Canadian cultural landscape. Riffing on techniques of the Old Masters, Monkman first found fame by recreating notable landscape paintings and populating them with Indigenous visions of resistance.

In recognition of over fifty years of artmaking, on June 21, **Shelley Niro** (b.1954) was awarded an **honorary Doctor of Laws** from her alma mater, the University of Western Ontario, where she earned her MFA in 1997. A member of the Turtle clan of the Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) Nation from Six Nations of the Grand River, Niro is known for her autobiographical practice which spans performance art, installation, film, and photography, and often addresses issues surrounding Indigenous women. In May, her retrospective *Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch* opened at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in New York, where it will remain on view until January 2024.

Read ACI's [Kent Monkman: Life & Work](#) by Shirley Madill

2. APPOINTMENTS



Léuli Eshraghi, photograph by Rhett Hammerton.



Marc Mayer, courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada.

On July 10, the **Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA)** named **Léuli Eshraghi** as its **first curator of Indigenous arts**. Eshraghi, who is a member of the Sāmoan clans Seumanutafa and Taatua as well as of Persian, Cantonese, and European descent, is an artist and curator who has exhibited at the Tate Modern, the Queensland Art Gallery, and the Centre d'exposition de l'Université de Montréal, among other institutions. As a curator, they have organized exhibitions across Canada, at venues such as the Vancouver Art Gallery, the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, and A Space Gallery in Toronto. In their new role at the MMFA, they hope to "to improve the experience and understanding of contemporary Indigenous artists' practices and their historical contexts."

In mid-July, Arsenal Contemporary Art in New York announced the **appointment of Marc Mayer** as Director, a position he will officially assume on August 1. The private art centre, which focuses on the promotion and display of contemporary Canadian art in a global context and which also has locations in Toronto and Montreal, cited Mayer's extensive experience in the Canadian art world, as Director of the National Gallery of Canada from 2008 to 2019.

3. MARKET WATCH



Tom Thomson, *Ragged Oaks*, 1916, courtesy of Cowley Abbott, Toronto.

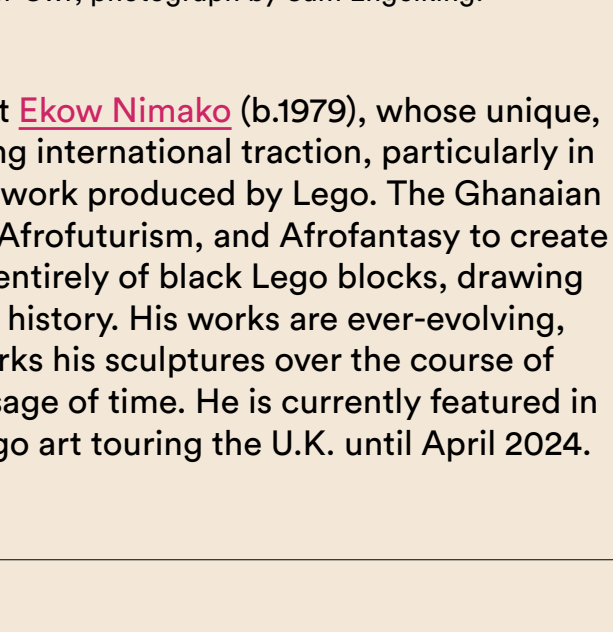
While working as a fire ranger at Achray, a park station in Algonquin Park, Tom Thomson (1877–1917) created *Ragged Oaks*, 1916, which **broke records on June 8 when it sold for \$1,800,000** at Cowley Abbott's Spring Live Auction in Toronto. The vibrant, gestural work, initially owned by Thomson's younger brother, Fraser, was created as a forest study and dates to what is known as the Ontario artist's "golden year"—the time when he also produced sketches for his most famed paintings, *The Jack Pine*, 1916–17, and *The West Wind*, 1917.

Read ACI's [Tom Thomson: Life & Work](#) by David P. Silcox

4. MUSEUM OPENING



Installation view of the exhibition *The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act*, 2023, Chinese Canadian Museum, Vancouver, photograph by Ian Kobylanski.

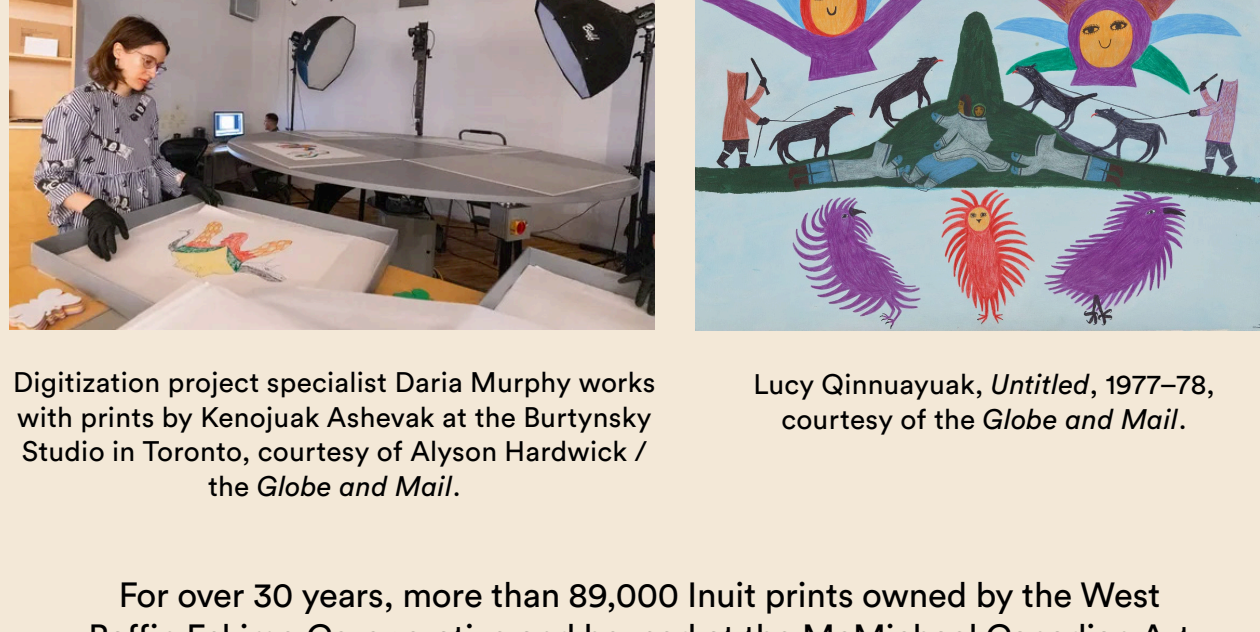


Marlene Yuen, *The Journeys Here* (detail), 2023, courtesy of Maclean's.

The first permanent exhibition space in the country to focus on Chinese Canadian history and culture opened in Vancouver on July 1. Housed in the historic Wing Sang Building—the oldest structure in Vancouver's Chinatown—the **Chinese Canadian Museum's** inaugural exhibition is *The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act*, which presents archival documents, artifacts, and images from the 24-year period between 1923 and 1947 when persons of Chinese origin were not permitted to immigrate to the country. The museum also features a painted wall mural, *The Journeys Here*, by Chinese Canadian artist Marlene Yuen. "I hope that the Chinese Canadian Museum can play a role in changing the impression of the communities that built Canada," **says its CEO, Melissa Karmen Lee**.

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5. AN ARTIST TO KNOW



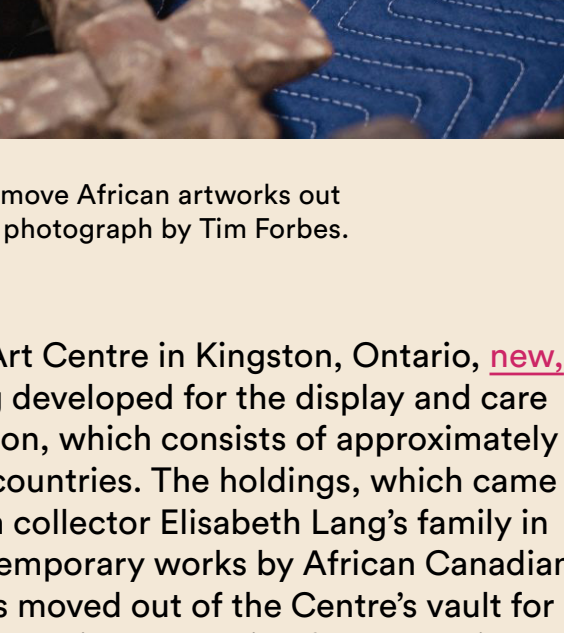
Ekow Nimako with his sculpture *Warrior Owl*, photograph by Sam Engelking.

Keep an eye out for Toronto-based artist **Ekow Nimako** (b.1979), whose unique, Lego-based sculptural practice is gaining international traction, particularly in the wake of a 2022 documentary on his work produced by Lego. The Ghanaian Canadian artist blends Africanfuturism, Afrofuturism, and Afrofantasy to create large-scale, intricate sculptures made entirely of black Lego blocks, drawing on themes from mythology and Black history. His works are ever-evolving, as Nimako often returns to and reworks his sculptures over the course of years, adapting them to reflect the passage of time. He is currently featured in *Brick by Brick*, a group exhibition of Lego art touring the U.K. until April 2024.

6. RECONCILIATION



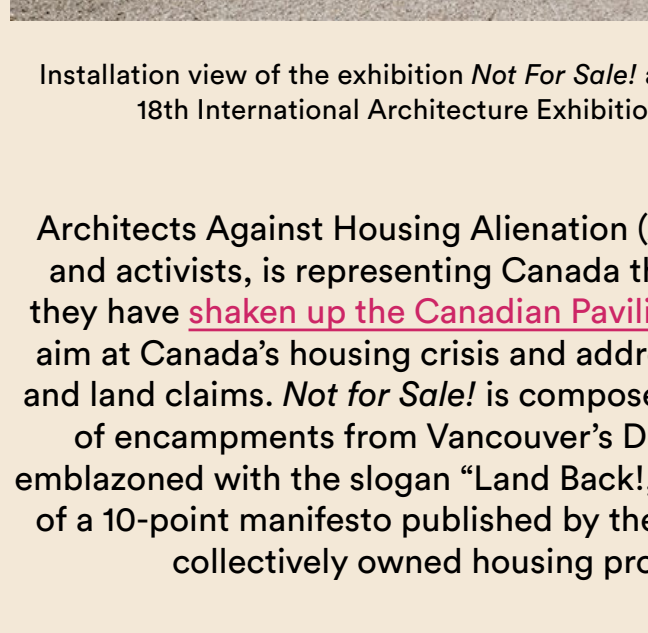
Brandy Jones and Geanna Dunbar, *Path to Reconciliation*, 2023, courtesy of Hallee Handryk / CTV News.



Volunteers work on *Path to Reconciliation*, 2023, Regina, courtesy of CBC News.

A literal and visual representation of social justice, *Path to Reconciliation*, a 2.4-metre-wide walkway mural spearheaded by Inuvialuit-and-Gwich'in artist Brandy Jones and Cree-Métis artist Geanna Dunbar, was unveiled as part of a ceremony for National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21. Jones and Dunbar worked in conjunction with volunteer artists who painted over 2,600 bright bead-shaped motifs to create the new public art installation in Regina's Scarth Street pedestrian mall. The project was a collaborative effort between Creative City Centre and the Regina Downtown Business Improvement District, which included input and support from local elders, volunteers, community leaders, and arts and business organizations. **As reported by CBC**, the work is a "visual representation of what does reconciliation mean, not to Indigenous people, but to all people," said Marian Donnelly, the founder of the Creative City Centre. "We all have a responsibility to be part of the efforts of reconciliation."

7. ART ACCESS



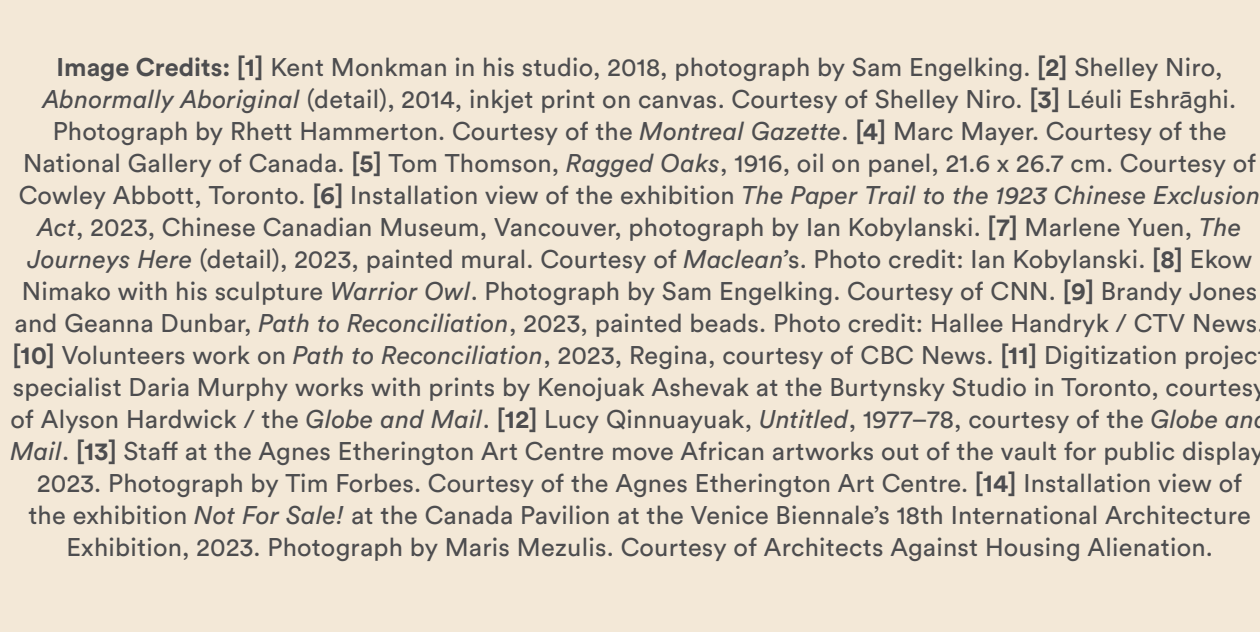
Digitization project specialist Daria Murphy works with prints by Kenosjuk Ashevak at the Burtynsky Studio in Toronto, courtesy of Alyson Hardwick / the *Globe and Mail*.



Lucy Qinnuayyak, *Untitled*, 1977–78, courtesy of the *Globe and Mail*.

For over 30 years, more than 89,000 Inuit prints owned by the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative and housed at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, remained out of sight in the museum's storage. Now, **an innovative digitization project** led by Toronto photographer Edward Burtynsky (b.1955), working in conjunction with the McMichael, has brought this body of art to light. Using a rotating platform developed by Burtynsky to photograph and digitize the collection, the McMichael recently launched an open-access website for the works, which are available for viewing at <https://iningatlagijit.ca/>.

8. COLLECTIONS



Agnes Etherington Art Centre staff move African artworks out of the vault for public display, 2023, photograph by Tim Forbes.

At Queen's University's Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, Ontario, **new, decolonial curatorial approaches** are being developed for the display and care of the centre's extensive African art collection, which consists of approximately 600 pieces from 19 different West African countries. The holdings, which came to the university by way of a donation from collector Elisabeth Lang's family in 1984, were exhibited in 2022 alongside contemporary works by African Canadian artists. On July 15, the entire collection was moved out of the Centre's vault for the first time, to a temporary home on campus in preparation for renovations that will prioritize accessibility and decolonial programming.

9. THE CANADA PAVILION AT THE VENICE BIENNALE'S 18TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION

Installation view of the exhibition *Not For Sale!* at the Canada Pavilion at the Venice Biennale's 18th International Architecture Exhibition, 2023, photograph by Maris Mezulis.

Architects Against Housing Alienation (AAHA), a group made up of architects and activists, is representing Canada this year at the Venice Biennale, where they have **shaken up the Canadian Pavilion with a radical installation** that takes aim at **Canada's housing crisis** and addresses issues of Indigenous sovereignty and land claims. *Not for Sale!* is composed of construction banners with images of encampments from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and protest signs emblazoned with the slogan "Land Back!," which also serves as the first demand of a 10-point manifesto published by the AAHA, alongside calls for affordable, collectively owned housing projects and a gentrification tax.

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