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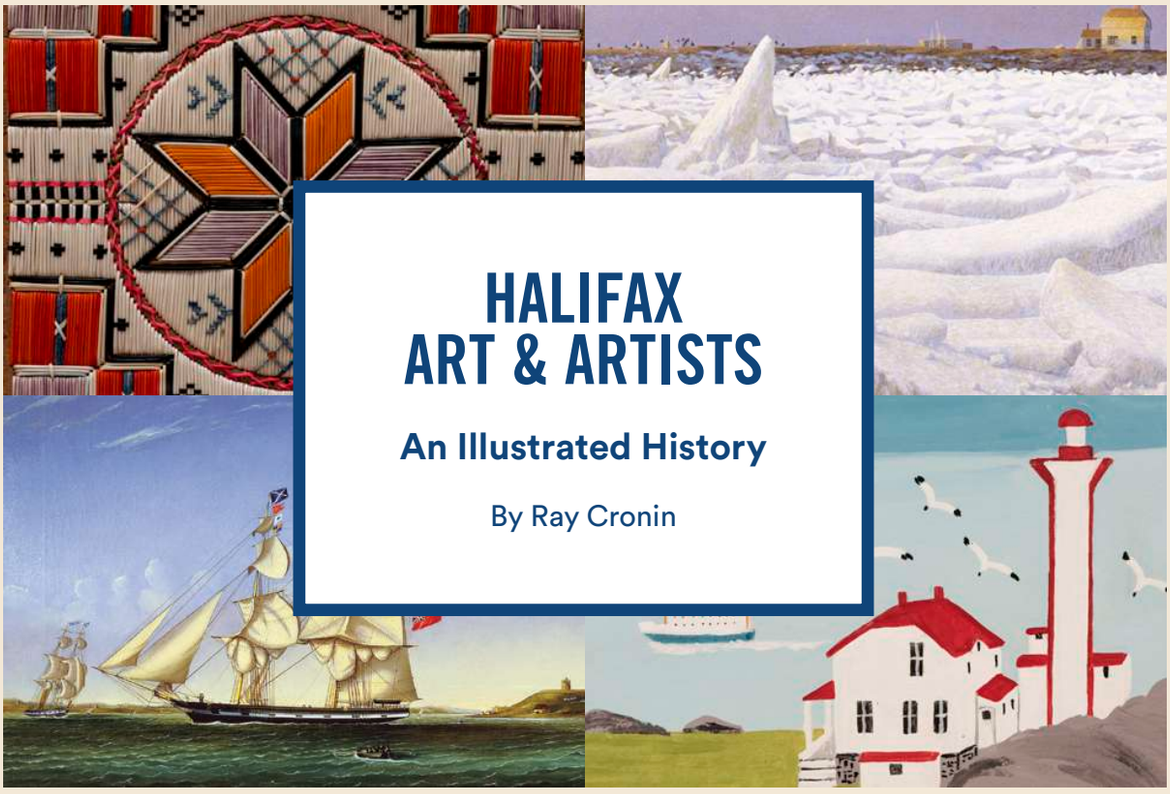
CREATIVITY IN THE MARITIME CITY
ACI'S NEWEST PUBLICATION
HALIFAX ART AND ARTISTS

Today the Art Canada Institute proudly launches Halifax Art and Artists: An Illustrated History *by Ray Cronin. A deep dive into art in one of Canada's oldest settlements, the book explores how residents and visitors past and present have transformed the port city into a centre of artistic innovation.*



Halifax—also known as K'jipuktuk, or "Great Harbour" in the Mi'kmaw language—is the site of many firsts in Canadian art history, including the first public art exhibition and the first fine art association. The Maritime city is also home to one of the most radical contemporary art scenes in the country. In our newest title, *Halifax Art & Artists: An Illustrated History*, author and curator Ray Cronin explores creativity in the region, from time immemorial, to the founding of Halifax in 1749, and to the present. In the excerpts below, drawn from the publication, we highlight some of the city's most outstanding artists, artworks, and legacies.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

EIGHT-POINTED STAR

by Once-Known Mi'kmaw Artist

Once-Known Mi'kmaw Artist, *Eight-Pointed Star*, date unknown, Bedford Barrens, Halifax.

The area that is now called Halifax has always played an important role in Mi'kmaw life and culture. For millennia the Mi'kmaq etched petroglyphs into stone, as in this image of an eight-pointed star, an ancient symbol used to represent both the sun and the eight nations of Mi'kma'ki. Though this incarnation can be viewed at the Bedford Petroglyphs National Historic Site in Halifax, the eight-pointed star is used widely in Mi'kmaw iconography, found in traditional basket-making, textile, and quillwork practices, as well as in contemporary visual art by Mi'kmaw artists such as Charles Doucette (b.1962), Jordan Bennett (b.1986), and Teresa Marshall (b.1962).

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A PLAN OF THE HARBOUR OF CHEBUCTO AND TOWN OF HALIFAX

by Moses Harris

Moses Harris, *A Plan of the Harbour of Chebucto and Town of Halifax*, 1750,
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

First published in London's *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1750, this early map of Halifax was created by one of the colony's original settlers, Moses Harris (1730–1787), a natural historian who was just eighteen when he came to the city from England. While the first few years of life in Halifax were difficult, with most inhabitants focused solely on survival, several early colonists, such as Harris, made the time for cultural pursuits. Now known as the "Porcupine Map" for its fanciful portrayal of the North American mammal, Harris's study of Halifax also includes a beetle and two butterflies, as well as the coats of arms of various prominent families.

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GOVERNOR'S HOUSE AND ST. MATHER'S MEETING HOUSE ON

HOLLIS STREET, ALSO LOOKING UP GEORGE STREET

by Dominic Serres

Dominic Serres, *Governor's House and St. Mather's Meeting House on Hollis Street, also looking up George Street*, c.1762, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

Among the earliest European artists to depict Halifax was Richard Short (active 1748–1777), a purser in the Royal Navy who served on several ships during the Seven Years' War, including on the HMS *Prince of Orange* as part of General Wolfe's fleet bound to lay siege to Quebec City. While moored in Halifax Harbour in 1759, Short came ashore and produced six sketches that were later transformed into dramatic landscape paintings by English painter Dominic Serres (1719–1793). Four takes on Halifax by Serres, including this elevated view of Hollis Street, can be found in the collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Learn more

MI'KMAQ INDIANS

by Unknown

Unknown, *Mi'kmaq Indians*, c.1850, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

This historical painting of a busy Mi'kmaw hunting camp is an example of nineteenth-century painting traditions that privileged settler modes of representation and colonial naming terminology. While oil painting traditions like this one were a European import, the Mi'kmaq were creators of a sophisticated visual culture that married beauty to utility. "In Mi'kmaq and Maliseet [Wolastoqey] communities, recognition and support has always been given to creative expression," observes Mi'kmaq curator Viviane Gray. "People with skills in dance, song, storytelling, and in the creation and decorating of objects have always been appreciated."

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HALIFAX HARBOUR, SUNSET

by John O'Brien

John O'Brien, *Halifax Harbour, Sunset*, c.1853, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

As Halifax's importance as a commercial and naval port grew throughout the nineteenth century, ship portraits, such as this majestic depiction of two schooners at sunset by John O'Brien (1831–1891), became a key part of the city's artistic activity. Ship portraits served as records of shipowners' accomplishments as well as a form of insurance, and most ship portrait painters were only rudimentarily skilled. O'Brien was an exception: born to Irish immigrants and raised in Halifax, he worked as a mostly self-taught ship and sign painter until a group of Halifax merchants recognized his talent and funded his formal studies in Europe.

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HOODED CRADLE

by Christianne Morris, with cabinetwork by Alexander Strum

Mali Christianne Paul Mollise [known as Christianne Morris], with cabinetwork by Alexander Strum, *Hooded Cradle*, 1867, DesBrisay Museum, Bridgewater.

Noted Mi'kmaw artisan Christianne Morris (c.1804–1886) created a large body of work of which only two pieces remain—one being this wooden hooded cradle decorated with quillwork panels. Now in the collection of the DesBrisay Museum in Bridgewater, it is considered to be the largest existing piece of Mi'kmaw quillwork and depicts moose alongside Northern Lights and Starfish motifs. Morris made the cradle around 1868 for a friend, though she was known to gift her works to visiting dignitaries as well, including the Prince of Wales and Queen Victoria.

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LE JARDIN D'HIVER / IN THE CONSERVATORY

by Frances Jones (Bannerman)

Frances Jones Bannerman, *Le Jardin d'hiver / In the Conservatory*, 1883,
Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax.

In 1883 Frances Jones (Bannerman) (1855–1944) became the first Canadian painter to exhibit a Canadian subject in one of the Paris Salons with *In the Conservatory* (exhibited as *Le Jardin d'hiver*), a view of her cousin reading in a sundrenched corner of the Joneses' family home in Halifax. Born into a wealthy and cultured family, Jones studied in Paris and was greatly influenced by the Impressionist movement, evidenced by her use of bright colour palettes and loose brushstrokes. This painting would have been recognized by contemporary audiences as an homage to her neighbour in Paris, Édouard Manet (1832–1883), whose own *In the Conservatory* had been exhibited four years earlier, in the 1879 Salon.

Learn more

SACKVILLE RIVER

by Arthur Lismer

Arthur Lismer, *Sackville River*, 1917, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

In 1916, future Group of Seven member Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) moved to Halifax from Toronto to become principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design (VSAD; now NSCAD University). Once there, he became fascinated with the wild Canadian landscape, his increasing interest in the subject exemplified by works such as *Sackville River*, 1917. Just thirty-one when he started at VSAD, Lismer brought energy and inventiveness to his three-year tenure, creating new programs and expanding the student body from twelve pupils to 150. Despite its brevity, his time in Halifax was impactful: his artistic example, curatorial work for the Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts, and advocacy for artistic professionalism all left their mark on the city's art history.

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MAUD LEWIS HOUSE

by Maud Lewis

Maud Lewis House, c.1920s, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

Although Maud Lewis (1901–1970) lived her whole life in the same corner of Nova Scotia, between Yarmouth and Digby, she has had a tremendous impact on Halifax, a place she only visited once. Her painted house, permanently installed in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, now attracts thousands of visitors to the city every year. During her lifetime, Lewis never had a museum exhibition, nor was her work collected by art galleries or museums. But today, people from around the world are drawn to this singular artist who exhibited cheerful perseverance despite physical and economic hardship.

Learn more

HALIFAX CITY HALL – A PAINTING

by Gerald Ferguson

Gerald Ferguson, *Halifax City Hall – A Painting*, 1980, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

A major figure in Canada's Conceptual art movement, Gerald Ferguson (1937–2009) was best known for his experimentalism, but he also created naturalistic works such as this view of Halifax's City Hall. Whether using stencils and spray paint, or frottage with house paint, or hiring other painters to make his work for him, Ferguson never stopped trying to expand the limits of what paintings could be. As a teacher of art history and painting at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), Ferguson established the famous NSCAD Lithography Workshop, ran the school's art galleries, and championed the creation of the NSCAD Press, shaping the institution's impact and legacy.

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BLACK MOTHER BLACK DAUGHTER

directed by Sylvia D. Hamilton and Claire Prieto

Still from the film *Black Mother Black Daughter*, 1989,
directed by Sylvia D. Hamilton and Claire Prieto.

Born in Beechville, a Halifax suburb first settled by Black Refugees from the War of 1812, Sylvia D. Hamilton began her career working with students in an alternative school in Halifax, before her abiding interest in media and communications led her into radio journalism. In the mid-1980s she was part of an ad hoc women and film group in Halifax whose members wanted to make films by and about women. In 1989, the National Film Board released her documentary *Black Mother Black Daughter* (co-directed with Claire Prieto, b.1945), which went on to win the organization's Kathleen Shannon Documentary Award. In addition to filmmaking, Hamilton is a poet and essayist, and since 2013 she has mounted a series of multimedia exhibitions, "Excavations," across Canada. She is Inglis Professor Emeritus at the University of King's College. She was recently appointed to the Order of Nova Scotia.

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SOBEY AWARDS

by Annie Pootoogook

Annie Pootoogook, *Sobey Awards*, 2006, Collection of John and Joyce Price.

Established by Donald R. Sobey, the $50,000 Sobey Art Award celebrates young artists from every region in Canada. Since its launch at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in 2002, “the Sobey” helped cement Halifax as a centre of contemporary art in Canada—a reputation that has remained even though the award was moved to the National Gallery of Canada seven years ago. In 2006 Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016) became the first Inuk artist to receive the award, and documented the historic occasion with this coloured pencil drawing.

Learn more

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

Ray Cronin is an author and curator who lives in Elmsdale, just outside Halifax, Nova Scotia. From 2007 to 2015, he was the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia’s director and CEO. His online art books *Alex Colville: Life & Work*, *Mary Pratt: Life & Work*, and *Maud Lewis: Life & Work* were published by the Art Canada Institute in 2017, 2020, and 2021. Cronin states, “Halifax was founded as a fortress, evolved into a port, and thrives as a centre for government, education, commerce, and culture. For almost 250 years, the city has been a point of entry and exchange, the dynamic capital of a province, and the economic engine of a region, with a storied art history that continues to be written.”

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