ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

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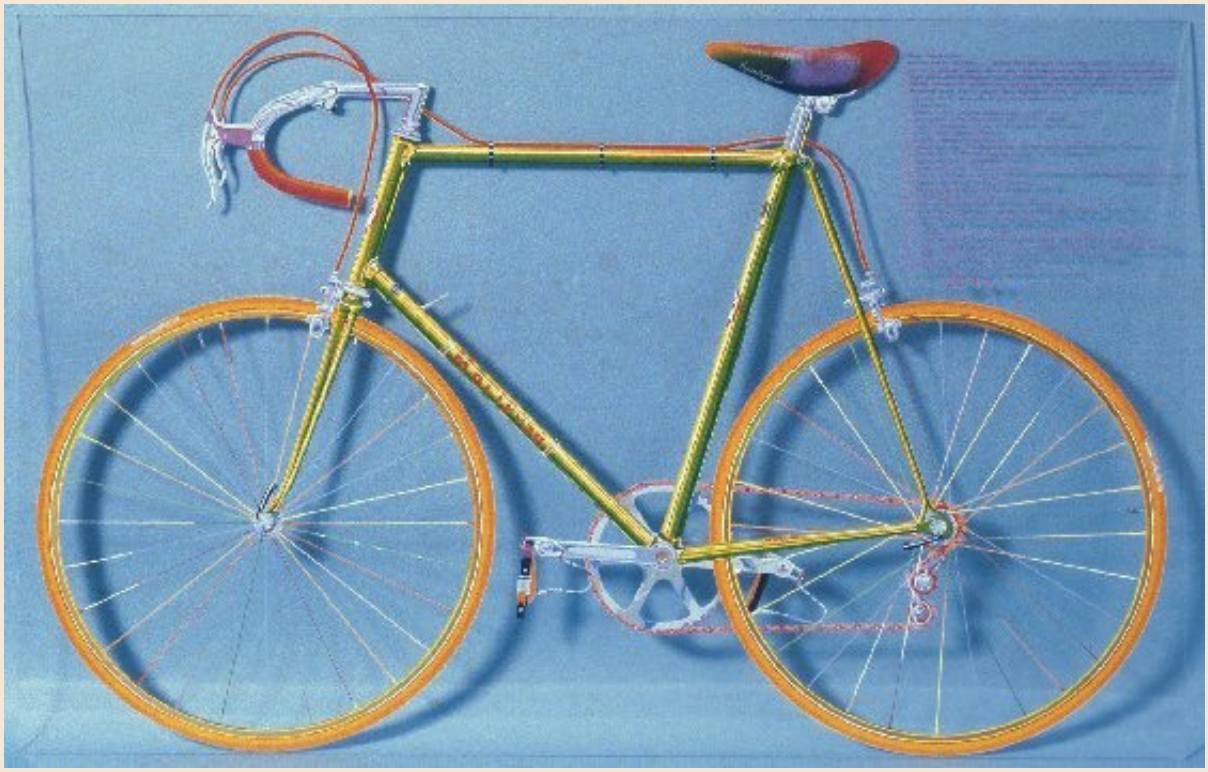
POP GOES ART
IN CANADA PAST AND PRESENT

Join us on this journey into Canadian modern and contemporary art through the lens of Pop.

In a challenge to academic schools of art, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw a movement known as Pop art emerge in the United States and England. Innovators such as Richard Hamilton (1922–2011) and Andy Warhol (1928–1987) took everyday objects and consumer culture, comics, mass media images, and the news as their subject matter. Canadian artists followed suit, including those—past and present—featured in this round-up. They were influenced by the use of bright colours, pictorial flatness, and captioning text. Many created work in series or multiples in a fashion reminiscent of mass production processes, enabling wider circulation. With a nod to the excellent exhibition now on at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *The Pop of Life! Pop Art in the Collection of the MMFA* (which is on until July and includes some of the artists shown below), this week's newsletter looks at eleven Canadian creators whose work engages with the Pop art movement.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

GREG CURNOE



Greg Curnoe, *Mariposa T.T.*, 1979, McIntosh Gallery, London,
© Estate of Greg Curnoe / CARCC Ottawa 2024.

Celebrated London, Ontario, artist Greg Curnoe (1936–1992) created multiple depictions of his beloved bicycles, presenting them in a direct side view—as they would be shown in an advertisement—and rendered in the bright colours and flat style characteristic of Pop. Originally a watercolour, his *Mariposa T.T.*, 1979, was released as a serigraph on Plexiglas print in an edition of thirty. This allowed it to be widely acquired in private and public collections, reaching a larger audience than a single painting would have. Earlier, Curnoe was included in American critic Lucy Lippard's 1966 book *Pop Art* for his work incorporating text, comic strip-style figures, and everyday objects.

Read more in ACI's *Greg Curnoe: Life & Work*
by Judith Rodger

DIANA THORNEYCROFT

Diana Thorneycroft, *Christina's World (Gets turned upside down by Cpl. Dew Wright)*, 2012, courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario.

Winnipeg artist Diana Thorneycroft (b.1956) is best known for her photographs of staged tableaux such as *Christina's World (Gets turned upside down by Cpl. Dew Wright)*, 2012. Here, a doll re-enactment of American artist Andrew Wyeth's (1917–2009) iconic painting *Christina's World*, 1948, is crashed by the intervention of an RCMP corporal as he throws himself over Christina and aims his pistol at the farmhouse on the horizon. Thorneycroft also adds a coterie of rabbits, three of whom look on as another flees the dramatic, if absurd, scene. Thorneycroft's dolls ambiguously transform the psychological tension of Wyeth's masterpiece into the stuff of child's play.

Learn more about Diana Thorneycroft

TARRALIK DUFFY

Tarralik Duffy, *Fresh Pop (study)*, 2023, courtesy of OCAD University, Toronto.

Originally from Salliq, Nunavut, and currently based in Saskatoon, Tarralik Duffy (b.1979) brings a Pop lens to different consumer products commonly found in the North. For example, *Fresh Pop (study)*, 2023, illustrates Inuktitut-language Coca-Cola and Pepsi cans. Her exhibition *Let's Go Quickstop* (at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, until June 16) includes lovingly detailed two-dimensional and three-dimensional depictions of Red Rose Tea and Robin Hood Flour, among other products. While invoking legendary Pop artworks like Andy Warhol's (1928–1987) *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962—which also celebrated basic staples—Duffy's work looks to her own Inuit culture, one that is often left out of mass-media representation.

Learn more about Tarralik Duffy

JOYCE WIELAND

Joyce Wieland, *O Canada*, 1970, courtesy of Luxembourg and Dayan, New York.

Joyce Wieland (1930–1998) was one of Canada's most beloved artists, and a retrospective co-organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, titled *Heart-On*, is set to open next year. To produce this iconic print, Wieland sang the national anthem, planting her red-lipsticked lips on a lithograph stone to trace each syllable. The 1960s saw not only the golden years of Pop art but also the official introduction of our maple leaf flag (1965) and of "O Canada" as our anthem (1967). In her landmark 1971 exhibition *True Patriot Love* at the National Gallery of Canada, Wieland interrogated these and other national icons with an eye to gender.

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

DOUGLAS COUPLAND

Douglas Coupland, *Brilliant Information Overload Pop Head*, 2010, private collection.

Vancouver author and artist Douglas Coupland (b.1961) is fascinated with popular culture and with how we navigate and make sense of the reams of information we are exposed to daily in the digital age. In his *Brilliant Information Overload Pop Head*, 2010, a frontal photograph of a young person in a checked, button-down shirt—resembling the format of those found in a high school yearbook—is marked by a cascade of multi-coloured paint, which drips down the image from the top of their head to completely obscure their face. This surprising juxtaposition allows us to reflect on how information glut impacts our sense of individuality and our identity.

Learn more about Douglas Coupland

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GATHIE FALK

Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Vancouver artist Gathie Falk (b.1928) has pursued a singular path through multiple mediums, including, notably, ceramic sculpture. While her work bears the traces of the artist's hand rather than the slickness of much Pop, she works with a vocabulary of everyday objects, infusing them with love and value. One of several pieces using display cases, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973, is a shelving unit with eight ceramic sculptures of blue Converse sneakers. Shoes are a frequent motif in her oeuvre, and here their usefulness is undermined by the fragile earthenware material—and the fact that they are all for the right foot.

Read more in ACI's *Gathie Falk: Life & Work*
by Michelle Jacques

KEN LUM

Ken Lum, *Melly Shum Hates Her Job*, 1989, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam.

Vancouver-born and Philadelphia-based artist Ken Lum (b.1956) is celebrated for his large-scale photo-conceptual works pairing declarative texts with photographs, including portraits, which often address themes of class and power. The brilliant *Melly Shum Hates Her Job*, 1989, generates palpable tension from the juxtaposition of Shum's placid smile on the left with the rage connoted by the spiky red typeface used for the word "HATES" on the right. For many years, the work has been installed as public art outside a contemporary art centre in Rotterdam, and in 2021, the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art announced its new name: Kunstinstituut Melly.

Learn more about Ken Lum in ACI's
Photography in Canada, 1839–1989: An Illustrated History
by Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons

CARL BEAM

Carl Beam, *Sitting Bull and Whale (The Columbus Suite)*, 1990, Art Gallery of Sudbury,
© Estate of Carl Beam / CARCC Ottawa 2024.

Born on M'Chigeeng First Nation in Ontario, the great Carl Beam (1943–2005) regularly worked with found photographic images, creating layered compositions where familial histories are intertwined with wider cultural and political forces such as the legacy of colonialism. His powerful Columbus Suite, created in the leadup to the contested quincentennial of Columbus's arrival in the Americas, is perhaps his best-known work. In this striking print depicting one of several martyrs in the series, a reproduction of William Notman & Son's 1885 photographic portrait of the Lakota leader Sitting Bull—who was killed in 1890—sits atop an image of a slaughtered whale.

Coming soon: ACI's *Carl Beam: Life & Work*
by Anong Beam

MICHAEL SNOW

Michael Snow, *Walking Woman in the Subway*, 1963/2016, courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario.

Legendary Canadian artist and polymath Michael Snow (1928–2023) famously quipped in 1967: “My paintings are done by a filmmaker, my sculpture by a musician, my films by a painter, my music by a filmmaker, my paintings by a sculptor, my sculpture by a filmmaker, my films by a musician, my music by a sculptor… who sometimes all work together.” While typically not associated with the Pop movement, Snow’s “Walking Woman” series, 1961–67, was an icon or viral female figure, an “outline and plane,” whom he rendered in myriad paintings, sculptures and, as in *Walking Woman in the Subway*, 1963/2016, photographs of her out in the world.

Learn more in ACI's *Michael Snow: Life & Work*
by Martha Langford

GUY MONTPETIT

Guy Montpetit, *Two Cultures – One Nation*, No. 4 from the series "C," 1968, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, © Guy Montpetit / CARCC Ottawa 2023.

Born in Montreal, revered painter and muralist Guy Montpetit (b.1938) played a key role in the Pop art movement in Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s. Working with flat fields of saturated colour, his art is characterized by a fusion of both mechanical and organic forms. In the evocatively titled *Two Cultures – One Nation*, 1968, the symmetrically organized shapes call to mind animal limbs and eyes, as well as a game with interlocking pieces. Montpetit also created a number of public artworks in Quebec, which are still on view decades later.

Learn more about Guy Montpetit

GENERAL IDEA

General Idea, *AIDS*, 1987, private collection.

Artist collective General Idea—Felix Partz (1945–1994), Jorge Zontal (1944–1994), and AA Bronson (b.1946)—formed in Toronto in 1969, and their work critically occupied popular culture forms from magazines to beauty pageants. Intervening into the devastating AIDS crisis, *AIDS*, 1987, mimics American Pop artist Robert Indiana's (1928–2018) widely reproduced *LOVE*, 1966; and like Indiana's work, it acted as an "image virus" circulating in the public sphere in sculptures, posters, postcards, and other mediums. At a time when governments in the U.S. and Canada were reluctant to discuss AIDS due to homophobia, General Idea "infected" the urban landscape with the word. Partz and Zontal would both die of AIDS-related causes.

Learn more in ACI's *General Idea: Life & Work*
by Sarah E.K. Smith

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Image Credits: **[1]** Greg Curnoe, *Mariposa T.T.*, 1979, colour serigraph on Plexiglas, 108 x 169.9 cm. Collection of McIntosh Gallery, Western University, London (1986.0083). Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery. © Estate of Greg Curnoe / CARCC Ottawa 2024. **[2]** Diana Thorneycroft, *Christina's World (Gets turned upside down by Cpl. Dew Wright)*, 2012, chromogenic digital photograph, various sizes. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario. **[3]** Tarralik Duffy, *Fresh Pop (study)*, 2023. Courtesy of OCAD University, Toronto. **[4]** Joyce Wieland, *O Canada*, 1970, one colour lithograph on Arches paper, 57.15 cm × 76.2 cm. Collaborating Printer: Robert Rogers. Courtesy of Luxembourg and Dayan, New York. **[5]** Douglas Coupland, *Brilliant Information Overload Pop Head*, 2010, acrylic and epoxy on pigment print, 121.8 x 143.5 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. **[6]** Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973, earthenware, glaze, wood, glass, paint, 101.5 x 105.4 x 16.1 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe (83.41.a-i). © Gathie Falk. **[7]** Ken Lum, *Melly Shum Hates Her Job*, 1989, chromogenic print, vinyl lettering, 124 x 230.3 cm. Collection of Melly KunstInstitut, Rotterdam. **[8]** Carl Beam, *Sitting Bull and Whale (The Columbus Suite)*, 1990, etching on paper, 115.20 x 75.60 cm. LUMAC Collection, Collection of the Art Gallery of Sudbury. © Estate of Carl Beam / CARCC Ottawa 2024. **[9]** Michael Snow, *Walking Woman in the Subway*, 1963/2016, colour photograph, Edition of 7 + 3 AP, 22 x 15 in. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario. **[10]** Guy Montpetit, *Two Cultures – One Nation, No. 4*, from the series "C," 1968. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Saidye and Samuel Bronfman Collection of Canadian Art. © Guy Montpetit/CARCC Ottawa 2023. Photo credit: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Christine Guest. **[11]** General Idea, *AIDS*, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 182.9 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Esther Schipper. © General Idea. Photo credit: Zindman/Fremont.