ART CANADA INSTITUTE | INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

DECEMBER 13, 2024

FROM THE ACI TEAM TO YOU
OUR ART FAVOURITES OF 2024

A showcase of unforgettable Canadian works spotted by the ACI team over the past twelve months.

People often ask me, "How does the Art Canada Institute do its weekly newsletter?" The answer is that we are an extraordinary team committed to making this country's art and history a contemporary conversation that appeals to audiences across the country and beyond. For today's newsletter, I asked members of this talented group to join me in sharing a favourite work of Canadian art they saw over the past year, one that continues to linger in their minds. From all of us at ACI, we're grateful and proud of our ever-expanding and dedicated community of readers, supporters, donors, partners, and friends. Thanks for your belief in the Art Canada Institute's digital resources—books, teacher resources, and virtual exhibitions—on this country's artists, offered free of charge and available 24/7, programming that reaches an audience of millions around the world, in over one hundred countries. We wish you much joy, health, and happiness and all the best for the holiday season.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

ALONG THE YANGTZE

by Doris McCarthy, 1998

Doris McCarthy, *Along the Yangtze*, 1998, Doris McCarthy Gallery, Toronto.

The ACI book *Doris McCarthy: Life & Work*, written by John G. Hatch and published this past June, introduced me to an array of captivating paintings by Doris McCarthy (1910–2010) that depict landscapes outside of Canada, including *Along the Yangtze*, 1998. I have long admired McCarthy's representations of different regions within Canada—most notably her iconic images of the Arctic. In reading Hatch's book, I discovered that McCarthy also drew inspiration from her extensive travels around the world. This painting, which vividly captures the unforgettable beauty of the Yangtze River, conjures up cherished memories of my own visit there nearly fifteen years ago to conduct research for my undergraduate thesis on photographs of the Three Gorges Dam by Canadian artist Edward Burtynsky (b.1955).

Tara Ng
Executive Editor

Read more in ACI's *Doris McCarthy: Life & Work* by John G. Hatch

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THE DINNER TABLE

by Hangama Amiri, 2024

Hangama Amiri, *The Dinner Table*, 2024, courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole Gallery, Toronto.

Growing up in Newfoundland and Labrador, Sunday dinners with my family were a time-honoured and cherished ritual. So, naturally, *The Dinner Table*, 2024, by Afghan Canadian artist Hangama Amiri (b.1989), recently on view at Art Toronto 2024, resonates with me deeply. The vibrant, patterned tablecloth reminds me of the well-loved fabrics on my grandmother's table, and the haphazard spread of cups and dishes speaks to the deep-rooted sense of comfort and belonging that family gatherings have always brought to my life. Exploring themes of identity, community, and togetherness, Amiri's artwork stirs treasured memories of shared meals, where traditions and stories interlace, laughter flows freely, and food becomes a catalyst for connection.

Nicole Bruce
Education Marketing & Development Officer

Learn more about the Hangama Amiri exhibition
Stitch, Thread, Grid: Weaving Everyday Objects

SELF SOWN

by Winnie Truong, 2022

Winnie Truong, *Self Sown*, 2022, courtesy of the artist.

At Art Toronto 2024, Toronto-based artist Winnie Truong (b.1988) showcased *Pick Me*, 2024, an incredible garden of hand-drawn paper flowers. The roots of that collection can be traced back to her earlier Herbaria series, including *Self Sown*, 2022, a diorama made of hyper-detailed, hand-drawn illustrations, cut and layered within the shallow frame. In this work, which provides a glimpse into the evocative and sentimental handmade quality of Truong's art practice, she creates an ethereal whimsicality, and what at first glance seems to be an assortment of naturalistic plants becomes humanistic forms and crawling creatures upon closer inspection. With these tableaus of fantastical primordial worlds, Truong fashions space for feminine beings to exist unbothered by the male gaze.

Hannah Dobbie
Programming Officer

Learn more about Winnie Truong

ARC

by Denyse Thomasos, 2009

Denyse Thomasos, *Arc*, 2009, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Everyone should experience a Denyse Thomasos (1964–2012) painting in the flesh at least once in their lives. In her immersive, large-scale, abstract works—like *Arc*, 2009—the experience of scale is visceral, and it underscores the artist's unique ability to express the claustrophobic feelings imposed by structures of confinement. With her career retrospective, *Denyse Thomasos: just beyond*, touring institutions across the country since 2022, I was finally able to see the show earlier this year at the Vancouver Art Gallery. *Arc* stood out as a monumental example of Thomasos's embodied approach to form, using gesture, line, and colour to create a personal visual language.

Victoria Nolte
Commissioning Editor and Acting Director of Programming

Learn more about Denyse Thomasos

NAPOLEON (CRIME AND PUNISHMENT SERIES)

by Bertram Brooker, c.1933

Bertram Brooker, *Napoleon (Crime and Punishment Series)*, c.1933, MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie.

Napoleon (Crime and Punishment Series), c.1933, is part of a series of ink drawings by Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) that narrate Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky's literary masterpiece *Crime and Punishment* (1866). The McMichael Canadian Art Collection featured Brooker's work earlier this year in the outstanding exhibition *Bertram Brooker: When We Awake!* The themes explored in Dostoevsky's writings, and Brooker's visual interpretation and representation of them, feel as relevant to me today as they must have to these great artists when they originally conceived them.

Stephen Sieger
Director of Finance

Read more in ACI's *Bertram Brooker: Life & Work*
by James King

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PORTRAIT (STUDIO AT DUSK)

by Jack Cocker, 2023–24

Jack Cocker, *Portrait (Studio at Dusk)*, 2023–24, courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London.

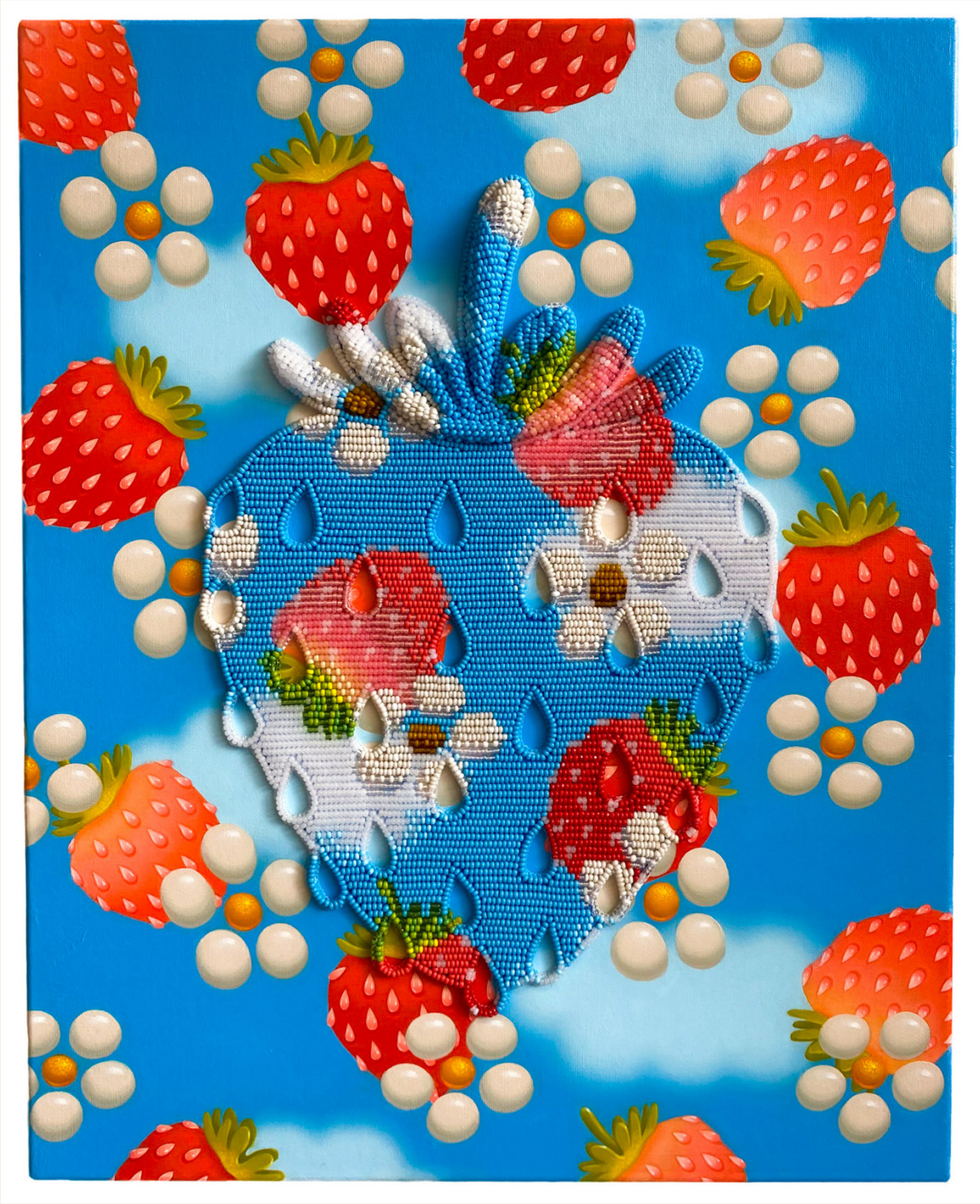
More than once in recent months, Jack Cocker (b.2001) and his art have made me stop in my tracks. A spiritual heir to such masters as Tom Thomson (1877–1917), Jack Chambers (1931–1978), Peter Doig (b.1959), and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), Cocker, newly graduated from Western University, paints large, bright, and brilliant scenes like *Portrait (Studio at Dusk)*, 2023–24, which simultaneously emit joy and mystery. In *Portrait (Studio at Dusk)*, we see the artist with his dog at his feet and his brushes at his side, standing before a painting of himself holding a basketball. The purple haze of sunset illuminates the world beyond Cocker's window and casts a glow that engulfs the room. Interior and exterior space meld into one another as Cocker transforms this scene—and others like it—of everyday life in southwestern Ontario into a magical, lyrical vision that is at once autobiographical and otherworldly.

Sara Angel
Founder & Executive Director

Learn more about Jack Cocker

THE HEART

by Sierra Barber, 2024



Sierra Barber, *the heart*, 2024, courtesy of the artist.

Sierra Barber (b.1991), an Upper Mohawk and mixed-European artist from Port Dover, Ontario, has always impressed me with her ability to seamlessly combine multiple media with such detail. Having first seen her work at the *Indigenous Art 2022* exhibition at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, I discovered that viewing it in person is a necessity. Primarily using a combination of oil painting and beadwork, Barber creates space to explore, reclaim, and connect with her own layered identity. Her recent work *the heart*, 2024, is on view at Musée régional de Rimouski as part of the Contemporary Native Art Biennial (BACA) until February 2, 2025. The Haudenosaunee imagery of strawberries are a symbol of life, while her repetitive icons represent cycles, continuity, and connectedness.

Eden Grace Capulong
Administrative Manager

Learn more about Sierra Barber

WÀBIGON

by Caroline Monnet, 2024

Caroline Monnet, *Wàbigon* (detail), 2024, courtesy of the artist.

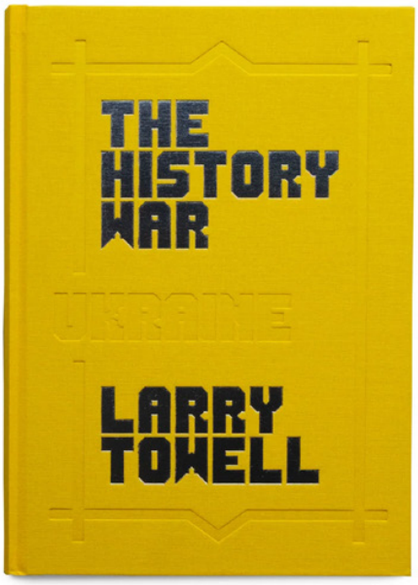
I have long observed the vast photographic mural by Anishinaabe and French artist Caroline Monnet (b.1985) that welcomes visitors to the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Set against a soft pink background and elaborate botanical décor, the frieze features eight Indigenous women and one child, each dressed in exuberant robes, opulently adorned, gracefully posed, and gazing determinedly at the camera. They are visual artists, performers, composers, dancers, writers, and more, but above all, they are proud and strong. Entitled *Wàbigon*, meaning "a flower blossoms" in Anishinaabemowin, the work was commissioned for the museum's current exhibition devoted to Abenaki filmmaker and storyteller Alanis Obomsawin, who paved the way for generations of Indigenous women—and it also celebrates those women. Monnet challenges the image of Indigenous women as victims by renewing their representation with rebellious, elegant, and inspiring portraits.

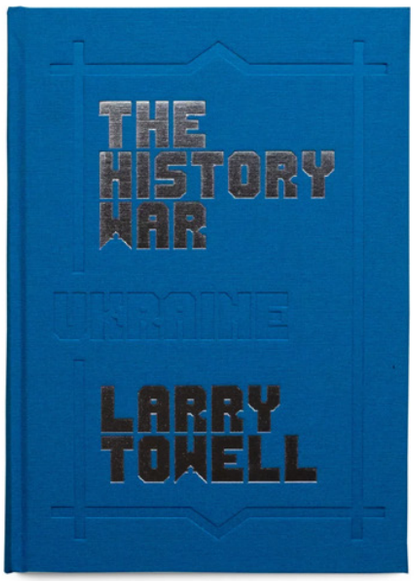
Annie Champagne
French Editorial Director

Learn more about *Wàbigon*, 2024

THE HISTORY WAR

by Larry Towell, 2024





Top: Interior of Larry Towell, *The History War*, 2024, courtesy GOST Books.
Bottom: Cover of Larry Towell, *The History War*, 2024, courtesy GOST Books.

The History War by Larry Towell (b.1953) immediately came to mind as my favourite work from 2024 not only because of the quality and impact of the artist's photographs but because of a presentation that reinvigorates the photobook format. Towell mixes his own photography with found material into collages that bring richness and vibrancy to the work while maintaining a reverence for the serious and important subject matter of the book. Even more admirable is the fact that *The*

History War emerges from Towell's long-standing engagement with Ukraine and its history, bringing depth and context to the immediate historical moment.

Shane Krepakevich
Graphic Designer

Learn more about *The History War*

SERENE POOL

by Jan Wheeler, 2023

Jan Wheeler, *Serene Pool*, 2023, courtesy of Arta Gallery, Toronto.

My husband and I enjoy exploring Toronto's art galleries on weekends and occasionally find a piece that brings us so much joy that we are compelled to pause, gaze, and lose track of time. That is what happened when we stumbled upon *Serene Pool*, 2023, by Jan Wheeler (b.1959) at Arta Gallery, located in the city's Distillery District. This Canadian artist has always been drawn to the country's raw wilderness, and her work draws on the rhythms and choreography found in the wind, water, and sky. While she has worked, studied, and exhibited internationally, growing up in Canada is what grounded her in landscape art.

Suneel Khanna
Deputy Executive Director

Learn more about Jan Wheeler

OEILLADE

by Callen Schaub, 2024

Callen Schaub, *Oeillade*, 2024, courtesy of the artist.

Callen Schaub (b.1990) is a Montreal-based abstract artist known for creating vibrant paintings using trapezes, pendulums, and spinning machines. Expanding on methods like the Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) drip technique, Schaub uses gravity, momentum, and his own custom-made devices to create bold, colourful shapes and forms. The act of creating his works is quite physical and often involves swinging upside down from the ceiling or splashing buckets of paint on a rotating canvas. I discovered Schaub on TikTok, where he openly shares this eye-catching process with over 5.7 million followers.

Nathan Kelly
Communications & Technology Manager

Learn more about Callen Schaub

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Image Credits: [1] Doris McCarthy, *Along the Yangtze*, 1998, oil on canvas, 61 x 76.2 cm. Collection of the Doris McCarthy Gallery, University of Toronto Scarborough, Gift of the Estate of Doris McCarthy, 2012 (2013.02.052). Courtesy of the Doris McCarthy Gallery, Toronto. **[2]** Hangama Amiri, *The Dinner Table*, 2024, denim, cotton, chiffon, linen, muslin, silk, dye canvas, polyester, gauze, velvet, mesh polyester, and Jack Lenor Larsen fabrics, 196.9 x 139.7 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole Gallery, Toronto. Photo credit: Chris Garder. **[3]** Winnie Truong, *Self Sown*, 2022, coloured pencil and cut paper collage, 50.8 x 40.6 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the artist. **[4]** Denyse Thomasos, *Arc*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 335.3 x 609.6 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Purchase, with funds from the Women's Art Initiative, 2022 (2021/356). © The Estate of Denyse Thomasos and Olga Korper Gallery. Photo credit: AGO. **[5]** Bertram Brooker, *Napoleon (Crime and Punishment Series)*, c.1933, pen and ink on paper, 27.9 x 20.3 cm. Collection of the MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Purchased with assistance from the Walter & Duncan Charitable Foundation, 1997. **[6]** Jack Cocker, *Portrait (Studio at Dusk)*, 2023–24, oil on canvas, 243.8 x 182.9 cm. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London. **[7]** Sierra Barber, *the heart*, 2024, new and vintage glass seed beads and oil paint on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist. **[8]** Caroline Monnet, *Wàbigon* (detail), 2024. Collection of Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Jean-François Lemire. **[9, 10]** Larry Towell, *The History War*, 2024, courtesy GOST Books. **[11]** Jan Wheeler, *Serene Pool*, 2023, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm. Courtesy of Arta Gallery, Toronto. **[12]** Callen Schaub, *Oeillade*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Andre Beneteau.