

JANUARY 17, 2025

THE ART OF DRESS NINE WORKS OF EXTRAORDINARY STYLE

Imaginative depictions of fashion in Canadian art history.



With the arrival of Paris Fashion Week on January 21, we are exploring personal style in paintings and photographs by Canadian artists spanning from the late nineteenth century to the present day. This selection of nine visually seductive artworks includes formal portraiture, advertising photography, performance-driven work, street photography, and conceptualist approaches. Each work examines in its own way how dress is vital for both individual self-fashioning and identity and for forging social ties and collective identities. The style performed in each work reveals and communicates aspects of its subjects' interior selves to the public while acting as the terrain of the artists' self-expression.

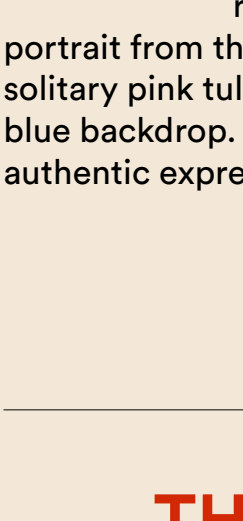
Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

RED STOCKINGS, 1961

by Fred Herzog



Fred Herzog, *Red Stockings*, 1961, courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver.

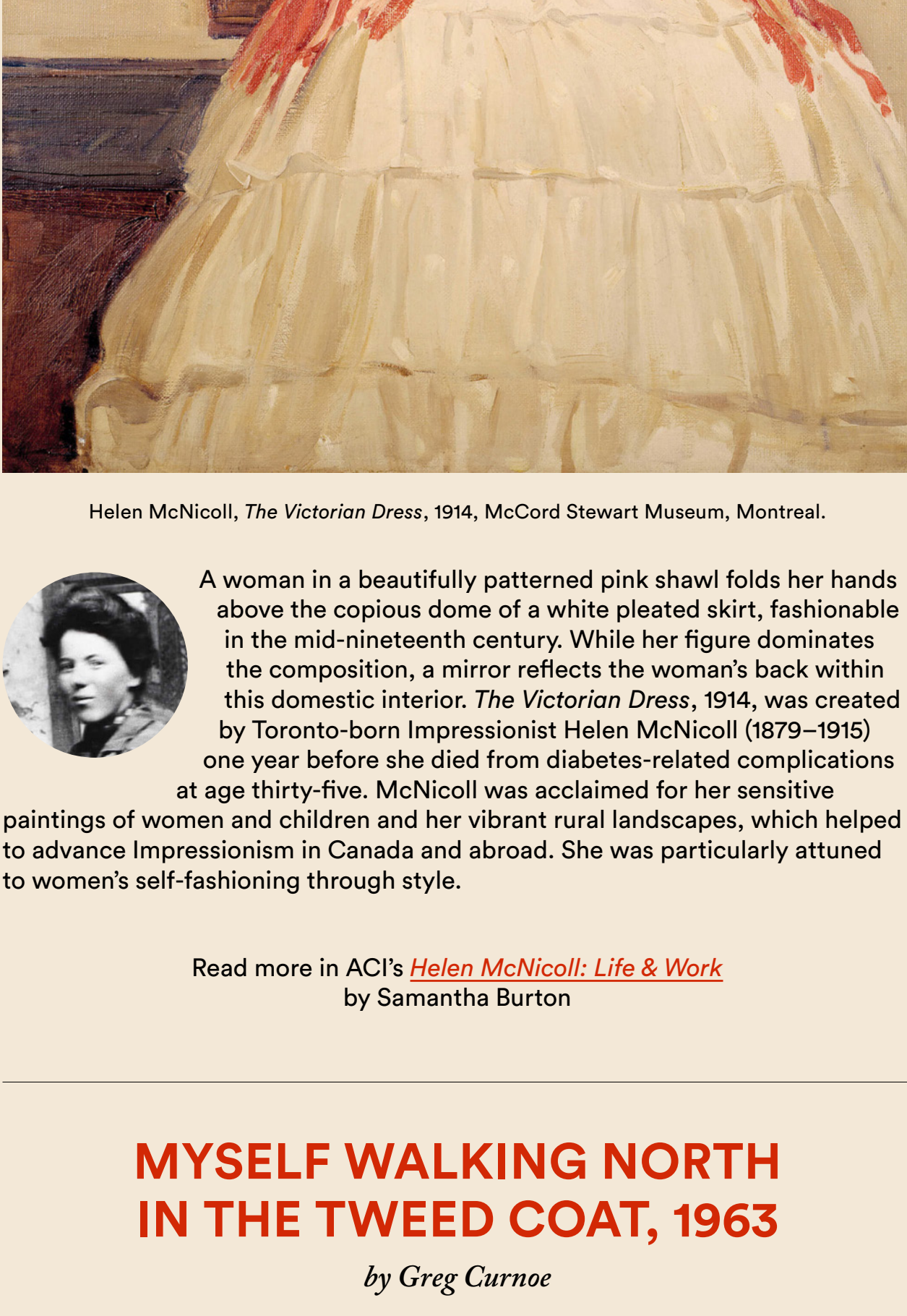


In *Red Stockings*, 1961, the camera is pointed downward to capture the skirts, stockings, and shoes of a woman and a girl as they stand on a sidewalk, with the girl wearing bright red stockings and matching shoes. This unexpected framing embodies the practice of Fred Herzog (1930–2019), who drew attention to poetic and often unexpected visual details in the urban landscape. Herzog was born in Stuttgart, Germany, and settled in Vancouver in 1953, where he became renowned for his pioneering work in colour photography and his vivid chronicle of post-war life in the city.

Learn more about [Fred Herzog](#)

UNMASK OPERA, 2023

by Chun Hua Catherine Dong



Chun Hua Catherine Dong, *Unmask Opera* (detail), 2023, courtesy of the artist.

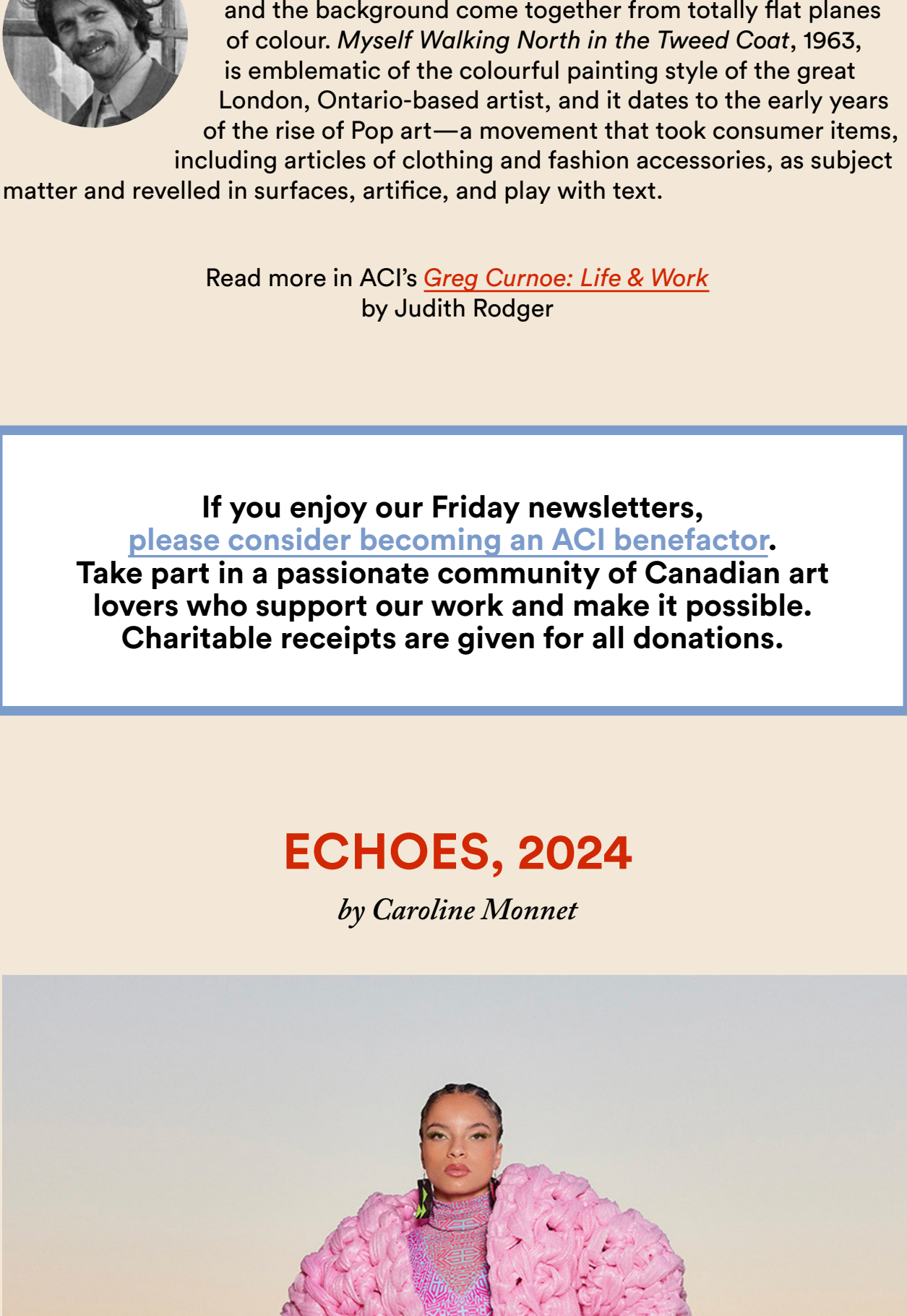


Chinese-born, Montreal-based multimedia artist Chun Hua Catherine Dong (b.1975) is best known for their work influenced by Beijing opera, reimagining its treatment of gender performance, artifice, and theatricality through a non-binary lens. The ambitious *Unmask Opera* series begins with the artist's full-scale transformation through makeup, hair, and costuming, inspired by a cultural tradition where all roles were played by men, whereas women were excluded. In this portrait from the series, Dong's painted face and elaborate headdress join a solitary pink tulip in standing out from their elegant black outfit and midnight-blue backdrop. **In their words**, "The body is both a subject and an object for the authentic expression of one's true self."

Learn more about the [Unmask Opera series](#)

THE VICTORIAN DRESS, 1914

by Helen McNicoll



Helen McNicoll, *The Victorian Dress*, 1914, McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal.

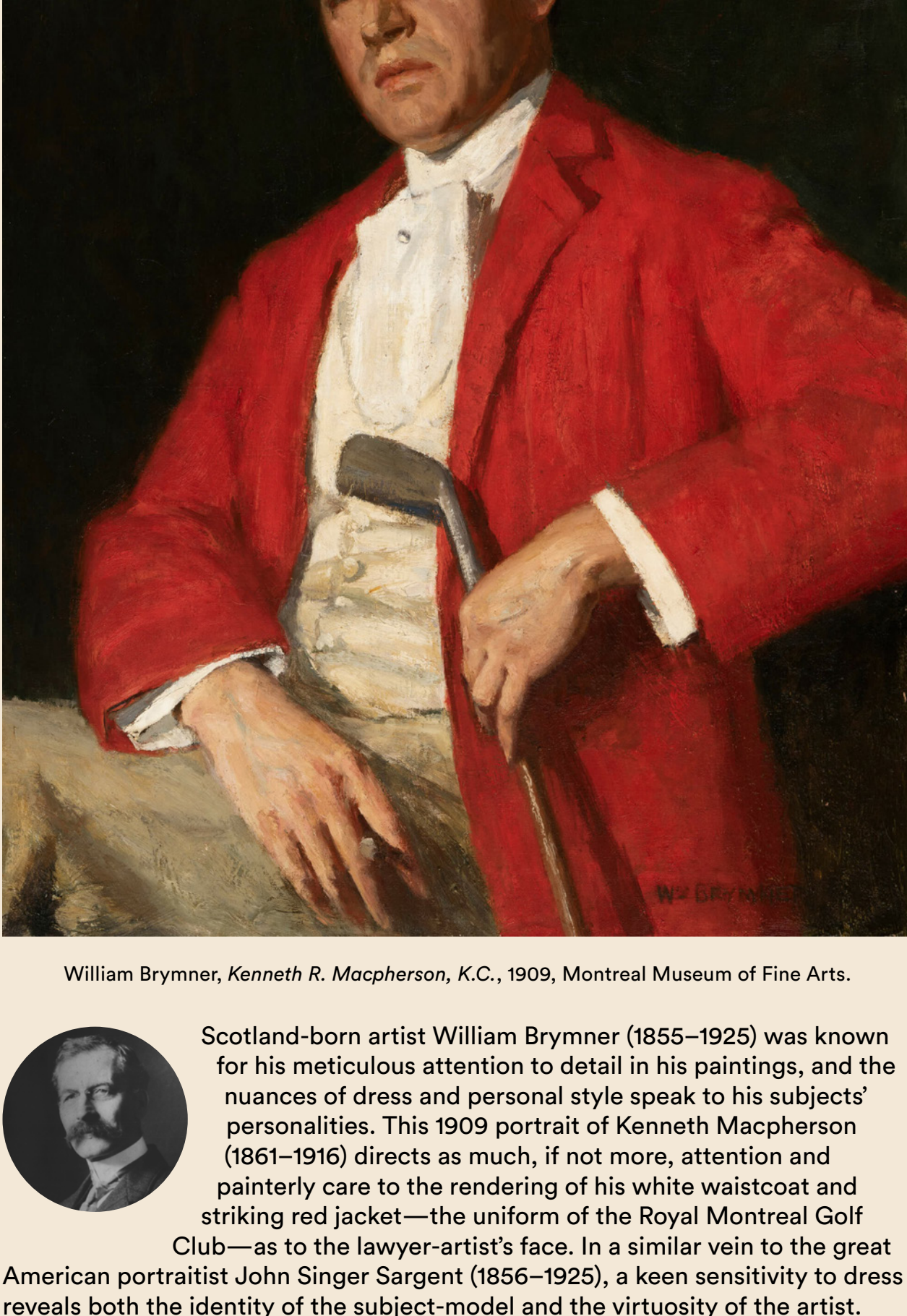


A woman in a beautifully patterned pink shawl folds her hands above the copious dore of a white pleated skirt, fashionable in the mid-nineteenth century. While her figure dominates the composition, a mirror reflects the woman's back within this domestic interior. *The Victorian Dress*, 1914, was created by Toronto-born Impressionist Helen McNicoll (1879–1915) one year before she died from diabetes-related complications at age thirty-five. McNicoll was acclaimed for her sensitive paintings of women and children and her vibrant rural landscapes, which helped to advance Impressionism in Canada and abroad. She was particularly attuned to women's self-fashioning through style.

Read more in ACI's [Helen McNicoll: Life & Work](#)
by Samantha Burton

MYSELF WALKING NORTH IN THE TWEED COAT, 1963

by Greg Curnoe



Greg Curnoe, *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat*, 1963, Vancouver Art Gallery.
© Estate of Greg Curnoe / CARCC Ottawa 2025.



In this work, Greg Curnoe (1936–1992) shows himself in a tweed coat rendered in meticulous zigzag detail. His figure and the background come together from totally flat planes of colour. *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat*, 1963, is emblematic of the colourful painting style of the great London, Ontario-based artist, and it dates to the early years of the rise of Pop art—a movement that took consumer items, including articles of clothing and fashion accessories, as subject matter and revelled in surfaces, artifice, and play with text.

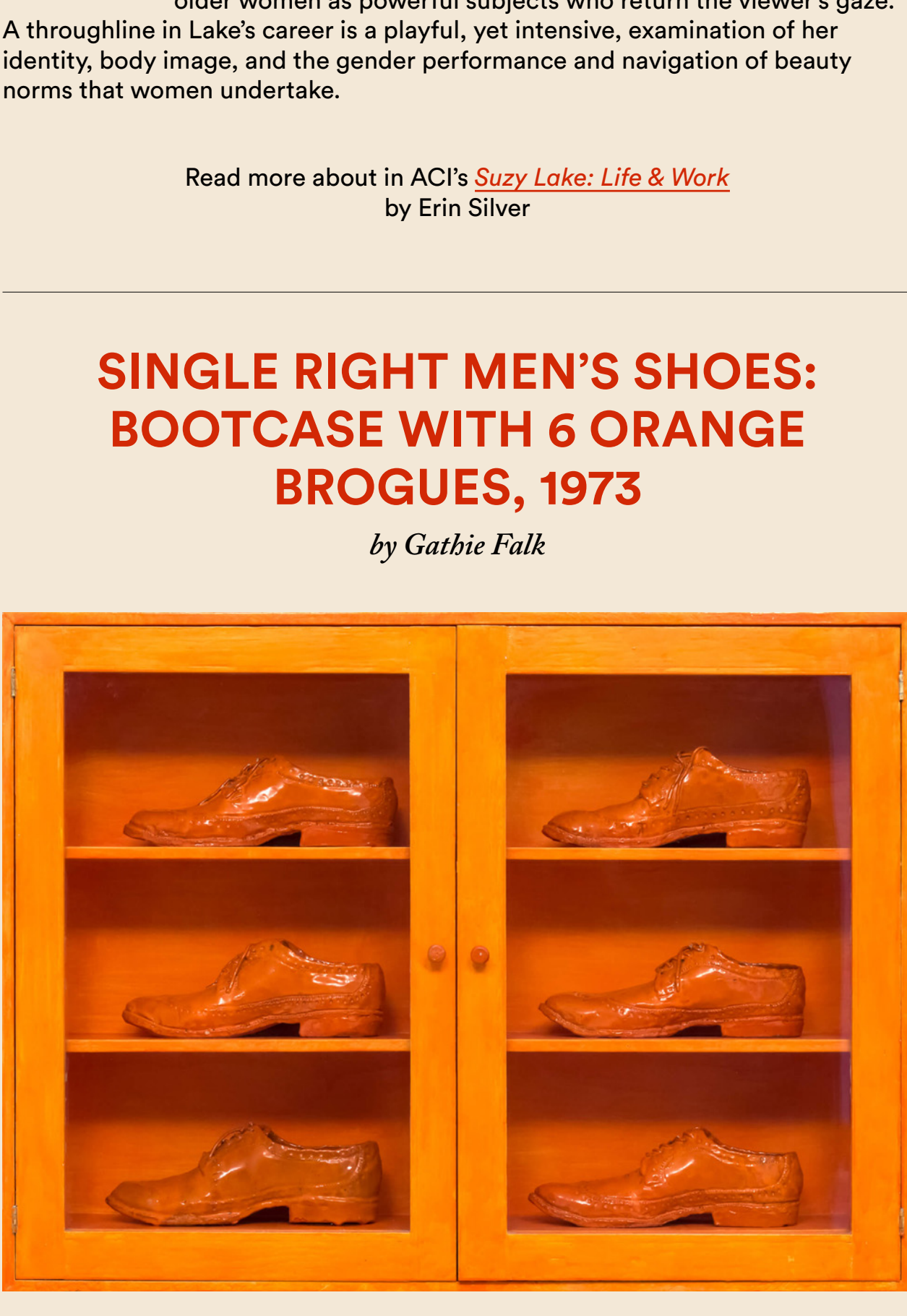
Read more in ACI's [Greg Curnoe: Life & Work](#)
by Judith Rodger

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ECHOES, 2024

by Caroline Monnet



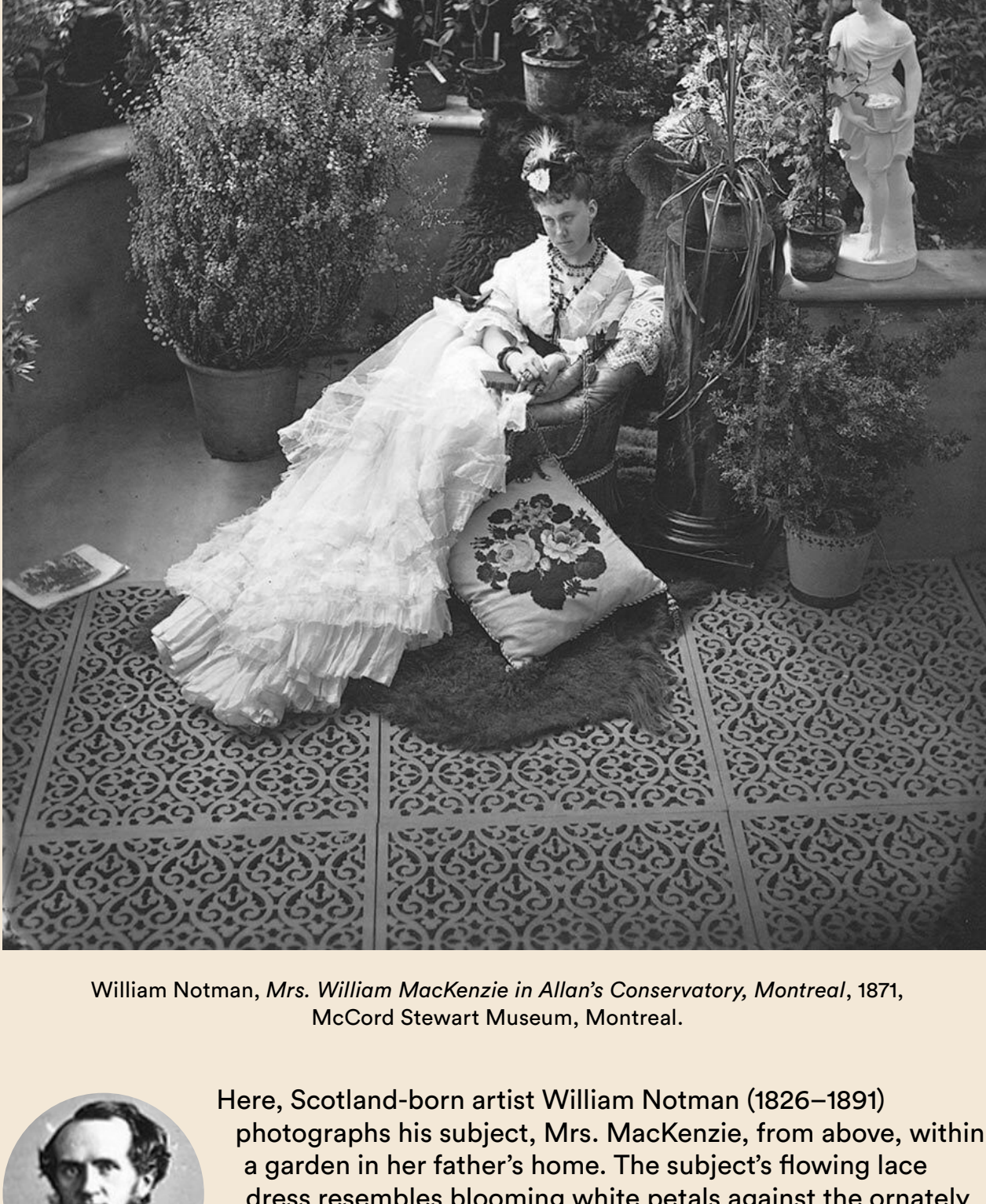
Caroline Monnet, *Rose* (from Echoes collection), 2024, courtesy of Blouin Division Gallery and the artist.



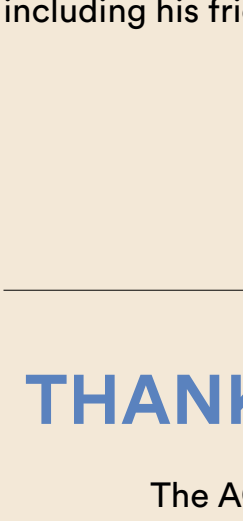
Montreal-based Anishinaabe and French Canadian artist Caroline Monnet (b.1985) showcased *Echoes*, 2024, a collection of wearable pieces (what she refers to as "living sculptures") last September as part of Fashion Indigenous Futurism at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. The show presented works by Monnet and other designers—including Jason Baerg, Orlando Dugi, Jontay Kahm, and Jamie Okuma—that draw on their cultural and ancestral knowledge, producing a thought-provoking look at the future of Indigenous fashion. Monnet's pieces, including this stunning pink ensemble (pictured above), incorporate building materials to comment on the housing crisis faced by Indigenous communities across Canada. Anchored between past and present, Monnet honours the legacy of her ancestors while also seeking to create a more equitable future for generations to come.

KENNETH R. MACPHERSON, K.C., 1909

by William Brymner



William Brymner, *Kenneth R. Macpherson, K.C.*, 1909, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



Scotland-born artist William Brymner (1855–1925) was known for his meticulous attention to detail in his paintings, and the nuances of dress and personal style speak to his subjects' personalities. This 1909 portrait of Kenneth Macpherson (1861–1916) directs as much, if not more, attention and painterly care to the rendering of his white waistcoat and striking red jacket—the uniform of the Royal Montreal Golf Club—as to the lawyer-artist's face. In a similar vein to the great American portraitist John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), a keen sensitivity to dress reveals both the identity of the subject-model and the virtuosity of the artist.

Read more about in ACI's [William Brymner: Life & Work](#)
by Jocelyn Anderson

PERFORMING HAUTE COUTURE #1, 2014

by Suzy Lake



Suzy Lake, *Performing Haute Couture #1*, 2014, courtesy of Bradley Ertaskiran, Montreal.

Brilliant, photo-based artist Suzy Lake (b.1947) was born in Detroit and moved to Montreal in 1968. *Performing Haute Couture #1*, 2014, is from a series Lake initiated in her late sixties. Framed to display her full body, the photograph captures her fiercely posing in a grey Rei Kawakubo suit, her right arm caught in a blur of motion. The self-portrait both builds on her influential legacy in the genre and asserts older women as powerful subjects who return the viewer's gaze. A throughline in Lake's career is a playful, yet intensive, examination of her identity, body image, and the gender performance and navigation of beauty norms that women undertake.

Read more about in ACI's [Suzy Lake: Life & Work](#)
by Erin Silver

SINGLE RIGHT MEN'S SHOES: BOOTCASE WITH 6 ORANGE BROGUES, 1973

by Gathie Falk

Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues*, 1973, collection of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver.

Now almost one hundred years old, Manitoba-born Gathie Falk (b.1928) has long been one of Vancouver's most intriguing and experimental artists, working in performance and video, for example. She is most celebrated, however, for her ceramic sculptures and paintings, which depict accumulations of fruits, vegetables, trees, shoes, dresses, and other objects. From 1970 to 1973, Falk created her Bootcases series, which features different types of footwear in a variety of colours, all neatly arranged and encased. In *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues* (above), she presents six nearly identical men's brogues all painted bright orange, compelling viewers to notice details like stitching, perforations, laces, and signs of wear.

Read more in ACI's [Gathie Falk: Life & Work](#)
by Michelle Jacques

MRS. WILLIAM MACKENZIE IN ALLAN'S CONSERVATORY, MONTREAL, 1871

by William Notman

William Notman, *Mrs. William MacKenzie in Allan's Conservatory, Montreal*, 1871, McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal.

Here, Scotland-born artist William Notman (1826–1891) photographs his subject, Mrs. MacKenzie, from above, within a garden in her father's home. The subject's flowing lace dress resembles blooming white petals against the ornately patterned floor. Her high-fashion ensemble is accentuated with a feathered hat and beaded necklace. Notman arrived in Canada in 1856 and quickly achieved fame as Montreal's most prominent studio photographer. His considerable reputation hinged on staging captivating and revealing portraits of his many clients, including his friend Mrs. MacKenzie.

Read more in ACI's [William Notman: Life & Work](#)
by Sarah Parsons

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Image Credits: [1] Fred Herzog, *Red Stockings*, 1961, archival pigment print, 30.5 x 45.7 cm. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. [2] Chun Hua Catherine Dong, *Unmask Opera* (detail), 2024, performance photograph, digital print, 81.3 x 86.4 cm. Courtesy of the artist. [3] Helen McNicoll, *The Victorian Dress*, 1914, oil on canvas, 108.8 x 94.5 cm. Collection of the McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal. Gift of Fraser Elliot (M976.134). Courtesy of the McCord Stewart Museum. [4] Greg Curnoe, *Myself Walking North in the Tweed Coat*, 1963, oil on plywood, 183.2 x 122.2 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (64.23). Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. © Estate of Greg Curnoe / CARCC Ottawa 2025. [5] Caroline Monnet, *Rose* (from Echoes collection), 2024. Polyethylene foam gasket, 21 x 40 x 13 in. Courtesy of Blouin Division Gallery and the artist. Photo: Angella Choe (The Getty Center). [6] William Brymner, *Kenneth R. Macpherson, K.C.*, 1909, oil on canvas, 84.7 x 65.4 cm. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Gift of William J. Morrice (1919.20). Courtesy of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Photo credit: MMFA, Jean-François Brière. [7] Suzy Lake, *Performing Haute Couture #1*, 2014, Chromogenic print, black frame with museum glass, 167.6 x 127 cm. Courtesy of Bradley Ertaskiran, Montreal. [8] Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues*, 1973, glazed ceramic, painted wood, and glass, 70.2 x 94.9 cm. Collection of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography. [9] William Notman, *Mrs. William MacKenzie in Allan's Conservatory*, Montreal, 1871, silver salts on glass, wet collodion process, 25 x 20 cm. Collection of the McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal. Purchase from Associated Screen News Ltd. J-63833). Courtesy of the McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal. © McCord Stewart Museum.