THE LOOK OF LOVE
THE ART OF AFFECTION

Six Canadian work on intimacy.

Stephen King, Kissing, 2011, courtesy of Gallery Gallos, Toronto.

Stephen King, Kissing, 2011, courtesy of Gallery Gallos, Toronto.

Sara Angel
Curator and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

MOTORCYCLISTS AT LAKE BALATON, 1954

by Gabor Szilasi

Gabor Szilasi, Motorcyclists at Lake Balaton, 1954, courtesy of PHOTO, Toronto.

Gabor Szilasi, Motorcyclists at Lake Balaton, 1954, courtesy of PHOTO, Toronto.

Photographer Gabor Szilasi, who died last year at the age of 100, was a Hungarian-Canadian Holocaust survivor who escaped his native Budapest by a hair. His work is characterized by a humanist approach, Szilasi purchased his first camera in 1940 and travelled throughout his homeland documenting the lives of his countrymen, their rituals and pastimes. In retrospect, his photos are stunning in their sensitivity and complexity of tone—and the many ways that artists have made intimacy, desire, and love visible.

Learn more in ACI's Photography in Canada, 1870–1980: An Illustrated History by Sarah Bassett and Sarah Parsons

ANOTHER FEATHER IN HER BONNET, 2017

By Jean Paul Gaudon and Eric Kerchinskie

Jean Paul Gaudon and Eric Kerchinskie, Another Feather in Her Bonnet, (September 8, 2017), courtesy of the artists.

Jean Paul Gaudon and Eric Kerchinskie, Another Feather in Her Bonnet, (September 8, 2017), courtesy of the artists.

Jean Paul Gaudon
Photographer

In 2017, Toronto based Cree artist Kent McKenzie (b.1960) and his partner, photographer Jean Paul Gaudon (b.1962), met Ella Mae Lamouche (1919–2020), a Métis resident of the Kootenay Indian Residential School in Cranbrook, BC. McKenzie had attended the school in 1970 and later criticized Prime Minister Stephen Harper for his government's failure to fully apologize for Canada's genocidal policies between the two artists. Moreover, they discovered that Lamouche's mother was Métis and her father was Indigenous, underscoring, in this recontextualization, the headdress's transformed function: fashion specimen into an assertion of Indigenous presence and agency.

Learn more in ACI's Photography in Canada, 1870–1980: An Illustrated History by Sarah Bassett and Sarah Parsons

IN THE ORCHARD (SPRING), 1892

by William Brymner

William Brymner, In the Orchard (Spring), 1892, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

William Brymner, In the Orchard (Spring), 1892, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Alexis Kugenia
Curator, Art Gallery of Ontario

Painter, teacher, Scottish-born, Montreal-based painter William Brymner (1855–1925) captures intimacy through the lushness of his brushwork. Two figures, a woman and a through-line or orchard, dancing along the canvas's left and right edges, are rendered in a blur of pink and green, drawing towards the woman, while her gaze kindly tracks the viewer's approach, inviting us into the intimacy of her embrace. In this recontextualization, the headdress is transformed from fashion specimen into an assertion of Indigenous presence and agency.

Learn more in ACI's Painting in Canada, 1890–1930: An Illustrated History by Ann Davis

FAMILY, BEDFORD-STUYVESANT, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, 1969

By Michael Stewart

Michael Stewart, Family, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York, 1969.

Michael Stewart, Family, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York, 1969.

Michael Stewart
Photographer

Family, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York, 1969, presents a dynamic moment in which intimacy towards self-and-community-care-and-repair-as-affectionate-exchange-as-their (child, positioned just behind them, points a toy towards the camera) is shared between a mother and her child. Photographer Michael Stewart (1946–2000) produced most of his work in the 1960s and 1970s, a period of significant social change. Across his practice, Stewart turned his camera towards his community, documenting the everyday lives and intimate moments that emerged in the wake of the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement.

Learn more in ACI's Photography in Canada, 1870–1980: An Illustrated History by Sarah Bassett and Sarah Parsons

KISS WITH HONDA, 1989

By Alex Colville

Alex Colville, Kiss with Honda, 1989, private collection.

Alex Colville, Kiss with Honda, 1989, private collection.

Alex Colville
Painter, Nova Scotia

In this work, morning sees dog and man, woman and child, lovers the spread-winged silhouette of a Honda hatchback in the driveway, the sun rising behind them. Painter Alex Colville (1920–2019) was known for depicting everyday moments, but his work, with its sharp lines and cool tones, is anything but ordinary. The figures in this work are rendered as mannequins, their faces hidden from view, their bodies, in contrast, fleshy. Yet, they couldn't look still again. Kiss with Honda, 1989, is a portrait of significant social change. Across his practice, Sarah Jackson has sought to interrogate the ways in which the ideals of a particular time and place are reproduced and normalized. In this work, she has taken a photograph of a woman and her child, and, through the application of a wash of pink, has transformed the image into a portrait of intimacy.

Learn more in ACI's Painting in Canada, 1890–1930: An Illustrated History by Sarah Bassett and Sarah Parsons

AND THEN WHAT WAS LEFT, 2017

by Nan Lee

Nan Lee, And Then What Was Left, 2017, courtesy of Field Bowen Gallery, Toronto.

Nan Lee, And Then What Was Left, 2017, courtesy of Field Bowen Gallery, Toronto.

Robert Kleer
Curator, Field Bowen Gallery

In *And Then What Was Left*, 2017, composed of two panels across the canvas, that bodies entangled as one gently rocking, Nan Lee (b.1968) and Ian Lee (b.1966) represent Gabor Szilasi and Kent Mckenzie's (and Jean Paul Gaudon's) tender, intimate, and sensitive exchange, and sensitive exchange, known for flat, dissimilar, contrasting tones, the Lees, in this work, have used the medium of oil on reflective or flat surfaces, allowing the visual language, her paintings explore emotional vulnerability and present love as a quiet and necessary act of care.

Learn more about Nan Lee

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PORTRAIT OF BESSIE IN HER WEDDING GOWN, 1885

by Robert Harris

Robert Harris, Portrait of Bessie in Her Wedding Gown, 1885, Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown.

Robert Harris, Portrait of Bessie in Her Wedding Gown, 1885, Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown.

Robert Kleer
Curator, Field Bowen Gallery

British-born Canadian painter Robert Harris (1849–1919) was known for his portraits of Canada's elite. In this work, he uses his brushes to create a tender intimacy between his wife, Elizabeth (Bessie) Forman, dressed in her wedding gown, and their daughter, Lily. Mother and daughter are turned from the viewer, and the pure bedding of the green coverlet, the pure white of the wedding gown, and the pure white of the daughter's dress pointing to commemorate their union—an act of devotion that uses love as something reflective and deeply personal.

Learn more about Robert Harris

KISSING, 2011

by Stephen Oxley

Stephen Oxley, Kissing, 2011, courtesy of Gallery Gallos, Toronto.

Stephen Oxley, Kissing, 2011, courtesy of Gallery Gallos, Toronto.

Stephen Oxley
Painter, Toronto

Connection and affection are recurring themes in the work of Toronto-based painter Stephen Oxley (b.1960). In this work, he has described two work as created in shared residency. In Kissing, 2011, she turns to romantic intimacy, depicting a kiss between two figures, one of whom, Oxley's partner, Jennifer Dough (Tolgay's characteristic flowing lines and intertwined figures, Oxley's characteristic bold colours and thick impasto). Together, the boundaries between the two bodies dissolved, the artists' bodies and their painting gesture present love as a shared endeavour.

Learn more about Stephen Oxley

BETWEEN DREAMING AND LIVING #8, 1986

by Filitz Alexander

Filitz Alexander, Between Dreaming and Living #8, 1986, courtesy of the artist.

Filitz Alexander, Between Dreaming and Living #8, 1986, courtesy of the artist.

Filitz Alexander
Artist, Toronto

Artist Filitz Alexander (born Alexander Kuzmanovic, b.1950) is widely recognized for her refined examination of how beauty and desire are constructed and commodified in contemporary culture. In Between Dreaming and Living #8, 1986, Alexander treats a fashion advertisement onto an idealized landscape, the figure's gaze directed towards the viewer, her body composition is a contrast with their Fragile, recalling, in a way, the work of Stephen Oxley. In this work, the artist's elements create a painfully staged vision of romance as defined by anticipation rather than fulfillment.

Learn more in ACI's Photography in Canada, 1870–1980: An Illustrated History by Sarah Bassett and Sarah Parsons

SHE REMAINS MONUMENTALLY SELF-CONTAINED, 2020

by Erika DeFreitas

Erika DeFreitas, she remains monumentally self-contained, 2020, courtesy of the artist.

Erika DeFreitas, she remains monumentally self-contained, 2020, courtesy of the artist.

Erika DeFreitas
Artist, Toronto

In she remains monumentally self-contained, 2020, Toronto-based artist Erika DeFreitas (b.1990) presents a diptych pairing photographs of Black and white women. In one image, they remain a prize found in sculpture, in the other, they are a prize found in a photo. Artist Kara Walker's *Lift*, 1997, in the other image, they are hidden in plain view. In this work, DeFreitas has paired her attention to the historic exclusion of Black artists and subjects from the canon of art history, with a tender, intimate, and monumental representation of Black women, and has created a work that celebrates their shared presence as both an expression of their bond and a sociopolitical and ontological stance.

Learn more about Erika DeFreitas

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