

MARCH 13, 2026

# MINTED MASTERPIECES CANADIAN ART ON CURRENCY

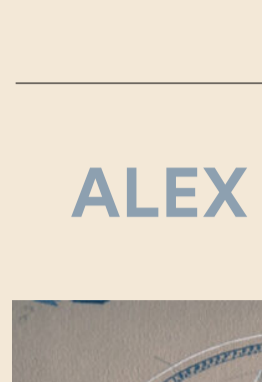
*Nine Canadian artists featured on coins and banknotes.*



Installation view, Jean Paul Riopelle's *Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg (L'Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg)* at the Pierre Lassonde Pavilion, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City.



100th Anniversary of the Birth of Jean Paul Riopelle \$2 Coin, 2023, Royal Canadian Mint, Ottawa.



Jean Paul Riopelle

From sweeping mountain vistas to the gentle beauty of birds in flight, our currency has highlighted the creativity and cultural diversity that shape our artistic heritage. By turning everyday dollars and cents into tiny galleries people can carry in their pockets, we have commemorated cultural milestones, celebrated national narratives, and elevated Indigenous histories. And yet, translating artworks for currency is a unique challenge: each image must remain powerful and recognizable within the limited space of a coin or a bill. As Jean Paul Riopelle's daughter Yseult said about choosing an image for a two-dollar commemorative coin released in 2023, "In trying to select a masterpiece, we were confronted with several constraints: how do we identify an artwork that will fit the middle of a two-dollar coin, while ensuring the work remains integral?"

To mark Global Money Week next week, we're taking a closer look at nine artists whose work has appeared on Canadian coins and banknotes.

**Sara Angel**  
Founder and Executive

## ALEX COLVILLE ON THE 10¢ COIN



Alex Colville, *Drawing for 10 cent coin*, 1965, Estate of Alex Colville.



Centennial Coin, Alex Colville, 10 cents, Canada, 1967, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa.

In 1964, to celebrate Canada's upcoming centennial, the minister of finance launched a national design competition to select artists for a new series of coins. Maritimer Alex Colville (1920–2013), widely regarded as one of the country's most important realist painters, was the winning designer and developed the complete suite of centennial coinage. Rather than depict historical figures or monuments, Colville focused on animals and plants. He chose the mackerel—a fish common to both coasts—for the smallest coin, the dime, noting that it "requires a simple and unambiguous image."

Learn more in ACI's online exhibition *The Measure of Nature: Alex Colville's Centennial Coins*

## KENOJUAK ASHEVAK ON THE \$10 BILL



Kenojuak Ashevak, *Owl's Bouquet*, 2007, private collection.



The Canada 150 Commemorative \$10 Bank Note, 2017, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa.

*Owl's Bouquet*, 2007, by Inuk artist Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013) was featured on the ten-dollar banknote issued to mark Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017. Released in a run of forty million bills, the design incorporated her print as a holographic rendering within the note's transparent window. Ashevak, a pioneering figure in modern Inuit art, was renowned for her bold, expressive, and vividly patterned depictions of birds and animals—particularly owls.

Her work *The Red Owl*, 1995, previously appeared on the 1999 Canadian quarter.

Learn more

## JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE ON THE \$2 COIN



Installation view, Jean Paul Riopelle's *Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg (L'Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg)* at the Pierre Lassonde Pavilion, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City.



100th Anniversary of the Birth of Jean Paul Riopelle \$2 Coin, 2023, Royal Canadian Mint, Ottawa.

In 2023, Montreal-born artist Jean Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) was honoured with a two-dollar coin marking the centenary of his birth. The coin features wild geese drawn from his monumental work *Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg*, 1992. Created with spray paint late in his career, the piece, which is composed of thirty panels, departs from the gestural abstraction for which he is best known. It was an homage to Riopelle's partner, abstract painter Joan Mitchell (1925–1992), following her death. Through rich symbolism expressed in unconventional objects—including geese, horseshoes, and tools—the work meditates on love, loss, life, and mourning, translating personal grief into a universal language of art.

Learn more in ACI's *Jean Paul Riopelle: Life & Work*

## DAPHNE ODJIG ON THE \$2 COIN



Daphne Odjig, *Folk Singer*, 1977, private collection.

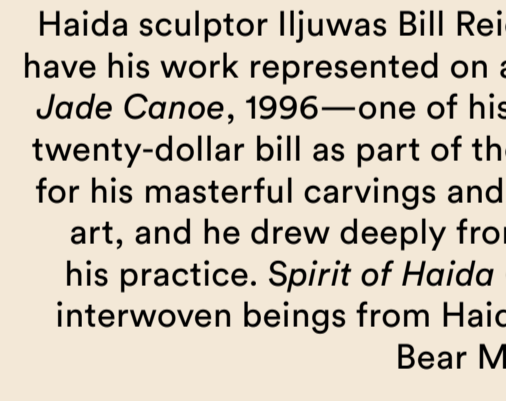


Celebrating the Life and Art of Daphne Odjig \$2 Coin, 2025, Royal Canadian Mint, Ottawa.

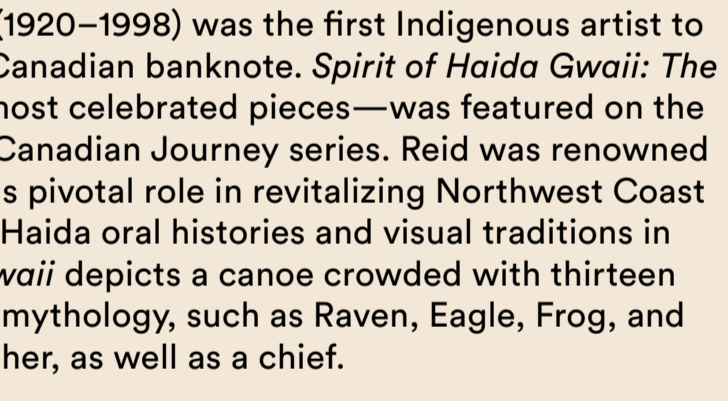
In 2025, a two-dollar circulation coin featured the work of First Nations artist Daphne Odjig (1919–2016)—a tribute to her lasting impact on Canadian art. The coin, which depicts a woman holding a drum, isolates the central figure from the surrounding bird form in her piece *Folk Singer*, 1977, while retaining the essence of Odjig's artistic vision. A founding member of Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. (known as the Indian Group of Seven), Odjig was a trailblazing advocate for Indigenous artistic expression and the preservation of cultural traditions. Her work—widely recognized for its bold contours, vibrant colours, and expressive narrative style—often centred on storytelling, community, and spirituality.

Learn more

## YOUSUF KARSH ON THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE SERIES



Yousuf Karsh, *Princess Elizabeth*, 1951, Estate of Yousuf Karsh.

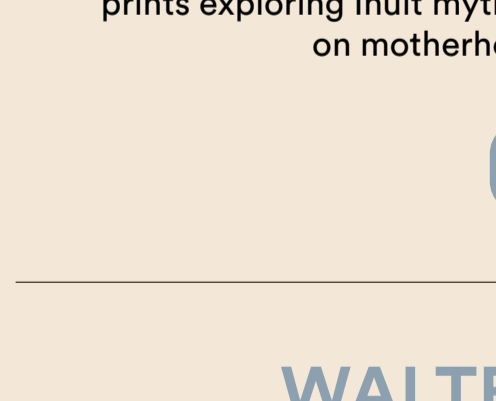


Bank notes from the Canadian Landscape series featuring Yousuf Karsh's portrait of Queen Elizabeth II, 1954, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa.

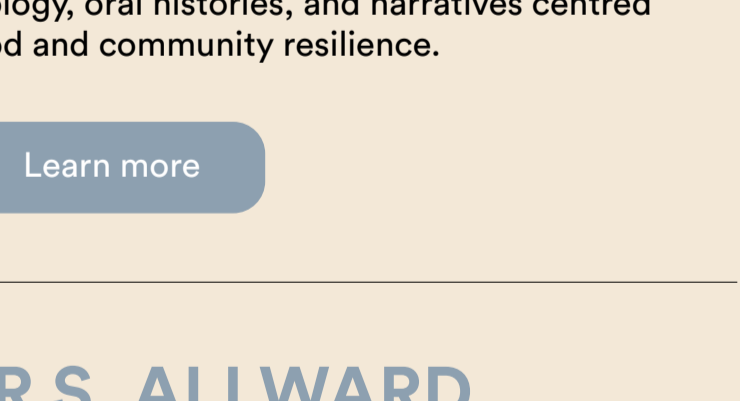
An image of Queen Elizabeth II, featured on the 1951 portrait *Princess Elizabeth* by Armenian Canadian photographer Yousuf Karsh (1908–2002), was issued across all denominations in the iconic 1954 Canadian Landscape banknote series. Karsh's original photograph, taken just six months before the twenty-five-year-old princess ascended the throne, shows her wearing a tiara, although the Bank of Canada removed that for the currency engraving to distinguish it from a Canadian stamp using the same image. The portrait became one of the first official reproductions of the new Queen on Canadian currency, and the bills remained in circulation for sixteen years.

Learn more in ACI's *Yousuf Karsh: Life & Work*

## ILJUWAS BILL REID ON THE \$20 BILL



Bill Reid, *Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe*, 1996, Vancouver International Airport.



Canada, Bank of Canada, \$20 Note, 2004, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa.

Haida sculptor Iljuwas Bill Reid (1920–1998) was the first Indigenous artist to have his work represented on a Canadian banknote. *Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe*, 1996—one of his most celebrated pieces—was featured on the twenty-dollar bill as part of the Canadian Journey series. Reid was renowned for his masterful carvings and his pivotal role in revitalizing Northwest Coast art, and he drew deeply from Haida oral histories and visual traditions in his practice. *Spirit of Haida Gwaii* depicts a canoe crowded with thirteen interwoven beings from Haida mythology, such as Raven, Eagle, Frog, and Bear Mother, as well as a chief.

Learn more in ACI's *Iljuwas Bill Reid: Life & Work*

## GERMAINE ARNAKTAUYOK ON THE \$2 COIN



Germaine Arnaktauyok, *Drummer*, 1993.

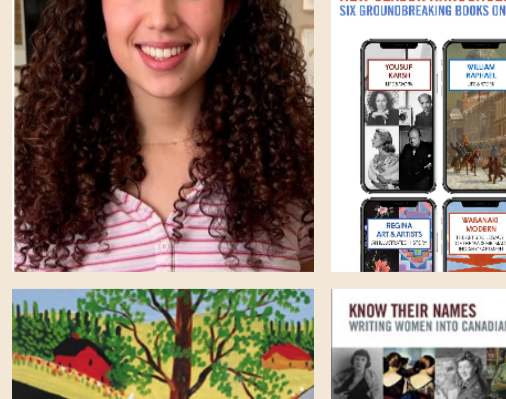


Commemorative coin featuring Arnaktauyok's *The Drummer*, 1999.

On April 1, 1999, Nunavut officially became Canada's newest territory. The occasion was marked with a two-dollar circulation coin designed by Inuk artist Germaine Arnaktauyok (b.1946). The coin depicts an Inuk dancer playing a drum inscribed with an outline of the new territory. At the centre is a traditional stone oil lamp (qulliq), symbolizing warmth, sustenance, and hope for the future. Arnaktauyok is widely recognized for her stylized paintings, drawings, and prints exploring Inuit mythology, oral histories, and narratives centred on motherhood and community resilience.

Learn more

## WALTER S. ALLWARD ON THE \$20 BILL



Walter S. Allward, *Vimy Memorial*, 1921–36, Parc Mémorial Canadien, Chemin des Canadiens, Vimy, France.



Frontiers Series \$20 Commemorative Note, 2015, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa.

Toronto-born sculptor Walter S. Allward (1874–1955) was best known for his monumental commemorative works—most notably the Vimy Memorial in France, which appeared on the reverse of the twenty-dollar note in the Frontiers series. Unveiled in 1936, the Vimy monument carries the names of 11,285 Canadians who lost their lives in the First World War and whose final resting place remains unknown. Inscribed at its base are these words: "To the valour of their countrymen in the Great War and in memory of their sixty thousand dead this monument is raised by the people of Canada."

Learn more in ACI's *Walter S. Allward: Life & Work*

## CHARLES F. COMFORT AND NICHOLAS MORANT ON THE \$10 BILL



Nicholas Morant, *Winter view of a cargo train at Morant's Curve*, c.1945–60, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff.



Canada, Bank of Canada, \$10 Note, 1954, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa.

Until the early 1950s, Canadian banknotes were designed by the printing companies that produced them. In 1952, the Bank of Canada took the unprecedented step of commissioning Scottish-born Canadian artist Charles F. Comfort (1900–1994) as the design consultant for a new series. Comfort oversaw the artistic direction and sought out imagery that felt distinctly Canadian. Many of the landscapes were based on the works of Kamloops-born Nicholas Morant (1910–1999), the Canadian Pacific Railway's principal photographer. The resulting 1954 Canadian Landscape series marked a decisive shift from ornate Victorian ornamentation to a clean, modern aesthetic. Although Morant never received direct credit for his work, millions of Canadians handled these notes over nearly two decades—making them his most widely circulated publications by far.

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Image Credits: [1, 7] Installation view, Jean Paul Riopelle's *Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg (L'Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg)* at the Pierre Lassonde Pavilion, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City, 2023. Photo credit: MNBQA. [2, 8] 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Jean Paul Riopelle \$2 Coin, 2023, three-ply nickel-plated steel (outer ring), three-ply brass-plated aluminum bronze with selective colour (inner core), 2.8 cm. Royal Canadian Mint, Ottawa. [3] Alex Colville, *Drawing for 10 cent coin*, 1965, white paint, ink, and pencil on brown card, 30.4 x 22.8 cm. Estate of Alex Colville. © A.C. Fine Art. [4] Centennial Coin, Alex Colville, 10 cents, Canada, 1967, silver and copper. ID 1967.0040.00013. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa. © A.C. Fine Art. [5] Kenojuak Ashevak, *Owl's Bouquet*, 2007, stonecut and stencil, 30/50, 61 x 76.2 cm. Private collection. [6] The Canada 150 Commemorative \$10 Bank Note, 2017, 7 x 15.2 cm. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa. [9] Daphne Odjig, *Folk Singer*, 1977, colour lithograph, 40/75, 74.3 x 64.1 cm. Private collection. [10] Celebrating the Life and Art of Daphne Odjig \$2 Coin, 2025, three-ply nickel-plated steel (outer ring), three-ply brass-plated aluminum bronze (inner core), 2.8 cm. Royal Canadian Mint, Ottawa. [11] Yousuf Karsh, *Princess Elizabeth*, 1951. Courtesy of the Estate of Yousuf Karsh. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. [12] Bank notes from the Canadian Landscape series featuring Yousuf Karsh's portrait of Queen Elizabeth II, issued by the Bank of Canada and printed by the Canadian Bank Note Company, Limited, 1954, each 6.9 x 15.3 cm. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa. [13] Bill Reid, *Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe*, 1996, plaster, bronze with patina, 389 x 608 x 348 cm. Vancouver International Airport. [14] Canada, Bank of Canada, \$20 Note, 2004, paper, 6.9 x 15.3 cm. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa. [15] Germaine Arnaktauyok, *Drummer*, 1993, etching, 20.3 x 21.6 cm. [16] Commemorative coin featuring Arnaktauyok's *The Drummer*, 1999, gold, silver, and copper, 2.8 cm. Photo credit: Coins Unlimited. [17] Walter S. Allward, *Vimy Memorial*, 1921–36, seget limestone and concrete. Parc Mémorial Canadien, Chemin des Canadiens, Vimy, France. [18] Frontiers Series \$20 Commemorative Note, 2015, polymer, 70 x 15.2 cm. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa. [19] Nicholas Morant, *Winter view of a cargo train at Morant's Curve*, c.1945–60. Nicholas Morant fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff (V500/I/C1/105/PA-20). Courtesy of Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. [20] Canada, Bank of Canada, \$10 Note, 1954, paper, 6.9 x 15.2 cm. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa.