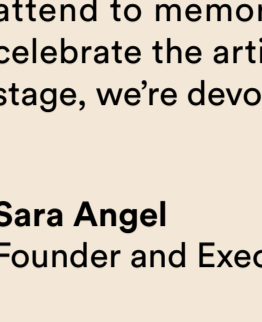


MAY 1, 2026

IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT CANADIAN ARTISTS AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

Since 1895, the famed international art fair has been showcasing the world's finest talent. Here's who is representing Canada this year.



On May 9, the Venice Biennale opens for its sixty-first edition. Established in 1895 and often referred to as the Olympics of the art world, the fair is a defining career milestone, offering selected artists an opportunity to present their work to roughly half a million visitors. Since 1952, Canada has maintained a strong presence at the Biennale, advancing the careers of artists whose practices resonate far beyond national borders.

This year, Montreal-based Abbas Akhavan will represent Canada in the national pavilion, bringing his incisive site-responsive practice into dialogue with one of the art world's most storied institutional settings. Canadian artists Marigold Santos, Alexa Kumiko Hatanaka, Manuel Mathieu, Rajni Perera, and Bonnie Devine will be part of the exhibition *In Minor Keys*, curated by the late Koyo Kouoh. Featuring more than one hundred artists from around the world, this show takes its cues from music, highlighting introspective practices that attend to memory, fragility, and the subtle registers of lived experience. To celebrate the artists who are representing Canada on the biggest international stage, we're devoting this week's newsletter to them.

Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

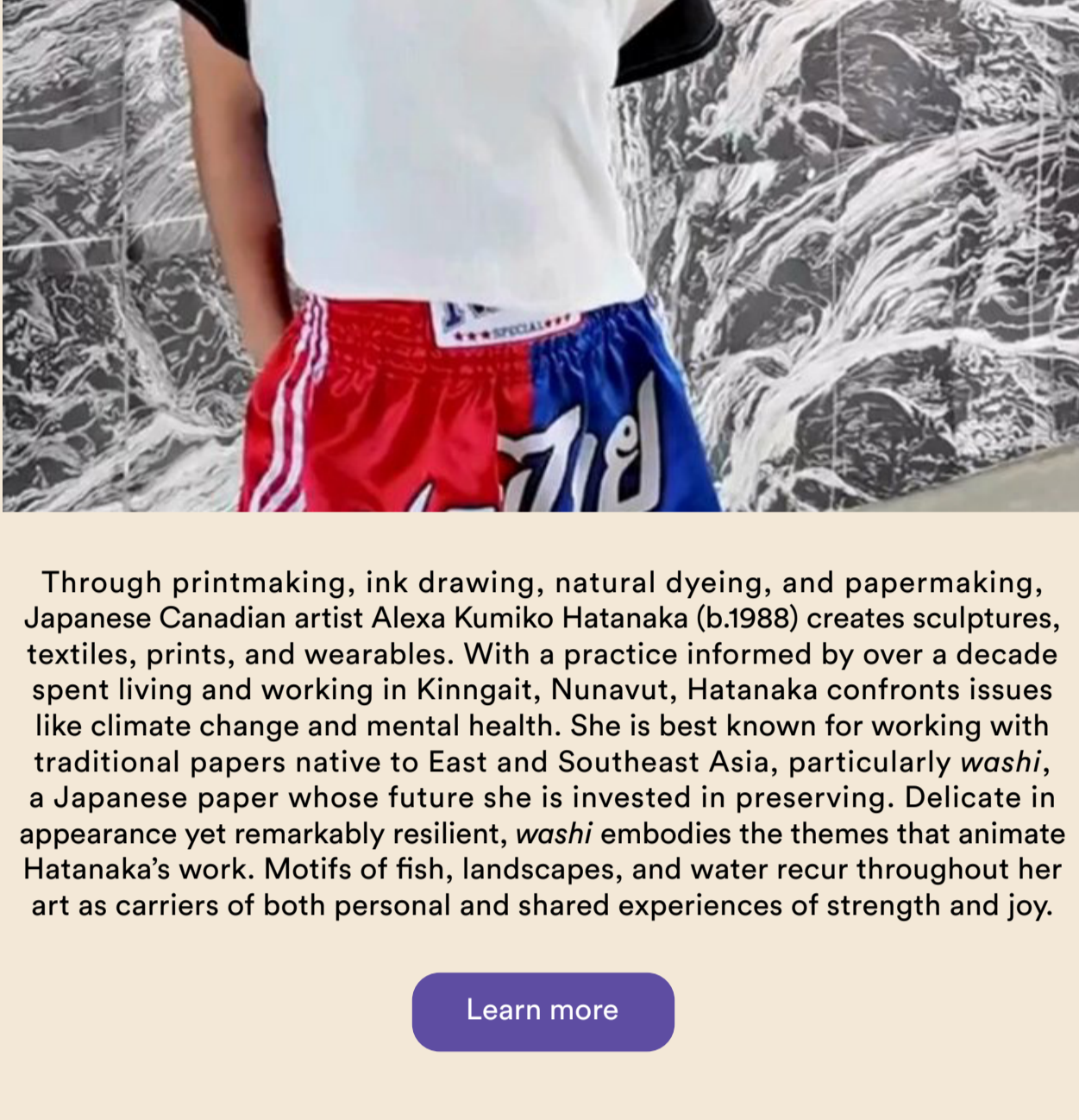
MARIGOLD SANTOS



The multidisciplinary practice of Calgary-based Filipino Canadian artist Marigold Santos (b.1981) spans various mediums, including painting, drawing, sculpture, sound, and tattoo, to investigate questions of heritage and diasporic selfhood. Drawing on her family's immigration story and the folkloric traditions of the Philippines, Santos interweaves the personal with the mythological. A recurring presence across her work is the *aswang*—a shape-shifting demonic creature from Philippine myth that Santos uses as a lens for examining diasporic identity. Employing the supernatural as a framework for decolonization, she traces the figure's roots to explore how folklore transforms under displacement.

[Learn more](#)

ALEXA KUMIKO HATANAKA



Through printmaking, ink drawing, natural dyeing, and papermaking, Japanese Canadian artist Alexa Kumiko Hatanaka (b.1988) creates sculptures, textiles, prints, and wearables. With a practice informed by over a decade spent living and working in Kinngait, Nunavut, Hatanaka confronts issues like climate change and mental health. She is best known for working with traditional papers native to East and Southeast Asia, particularly *washi*, a Japanese paper whose future she is invested in preserving. Delicate in appearance yet remarkably resilient, *washi* embodies the themes that animate Hatanaka's work. Motifs of fish, landscapes, and water recur throughout her art as carriers of both personal and shared experiences of strength and joy.

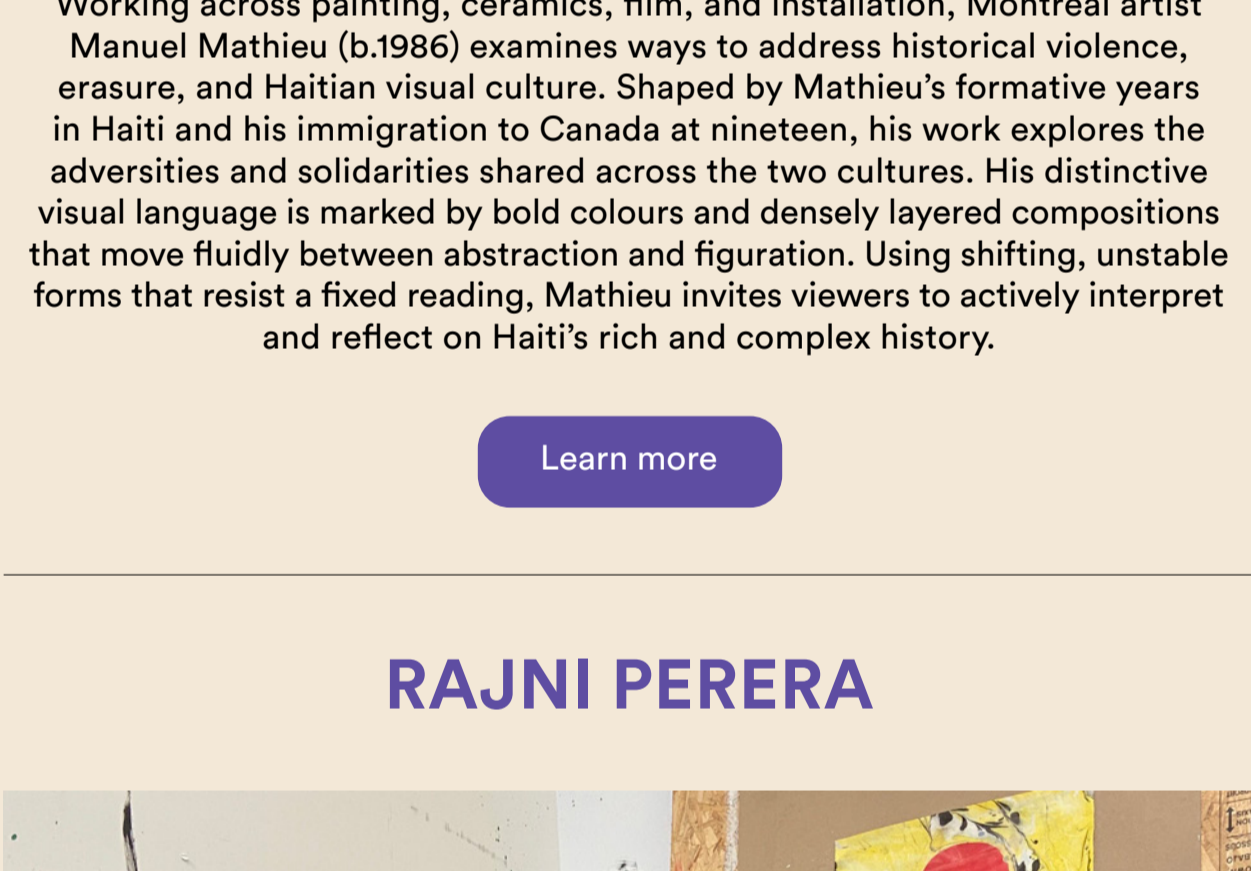
[Learn more](#)



Our Friday Newsletters Are Supported By You.

The Art Canada Institute is donor-funded. If you like our work, please consider helping us [by making a donation](#).

MANUEL MATHIEU



Working across painting, ceramics, film, and installation, Montreal artist Manuel Mathieu (b.1986) examines ways to address historical violence, erasure, and Haitian visual culture. Shaped by Mathieu's formative years in Haiti and his immigration to Canada at nineteen, his work explores the adversities and solidarities shared across the two cultures. His distinctive visual language is marked by bold colours and densely layered compositions that move fluidly between abstraction and figuration. Using shifting, unstable forms that resist a fixed reading, Mathieu invites viewers to actively interpret and reflect on Haiti's rich and complex history.

[Learn more](#)

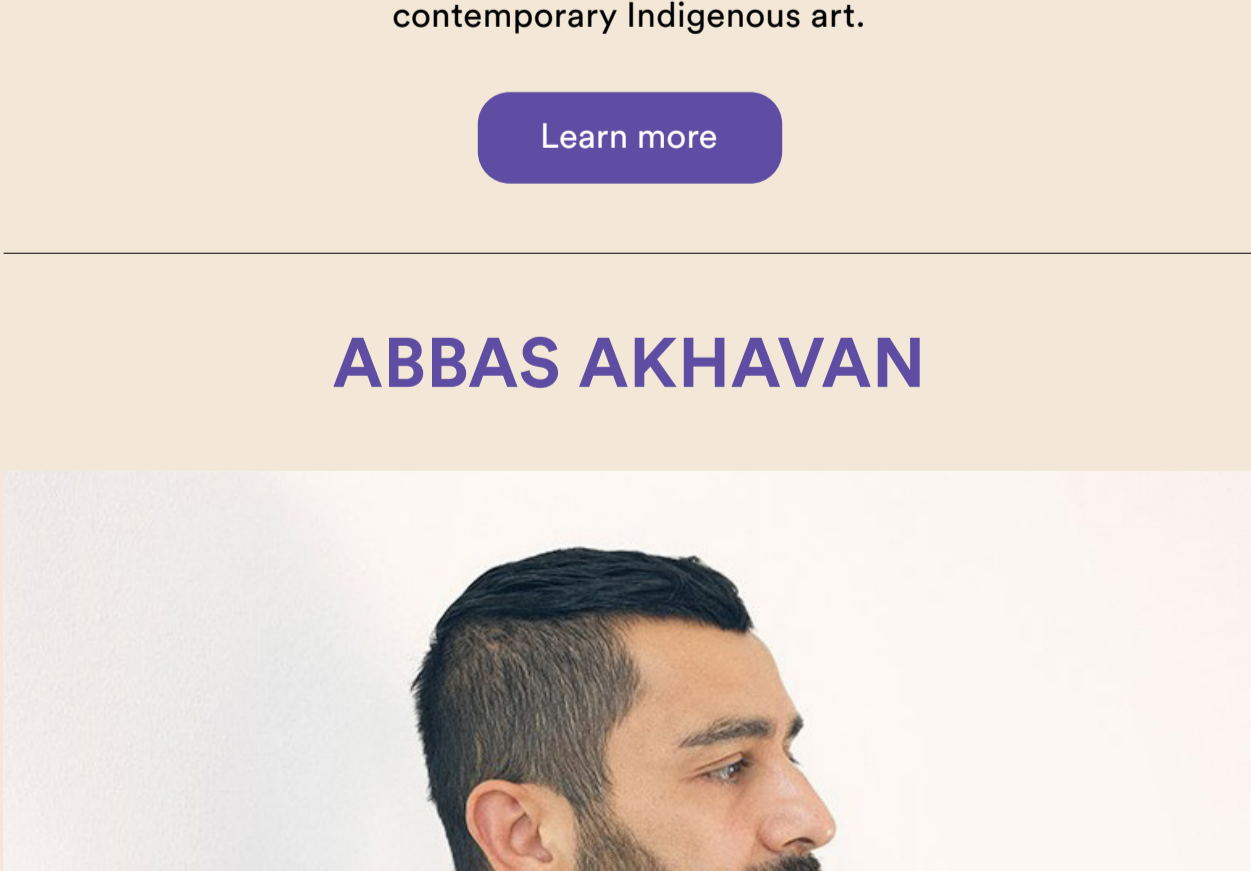
RAJNI PERERA



Toronto-based artist Rajni Perera (b.1985) works with drawing, painting, sculpture, and textile to construct elaborate worlds populated by mutated figures and hybrid beings. Rooted in the visual traditions of her native Sri Lanka and referencing Indian miniature painting and science fiction, Perera's art offers a subversive visual language that challenges dominant narratives within unstable ecological and cultural landscapes. Her creatures and dreamscapes resist entrenched systems of power, reclaiming space for marginalized identities and gesturing towards reimagined futures for those who have historically been excluded.

[Learn more](#)

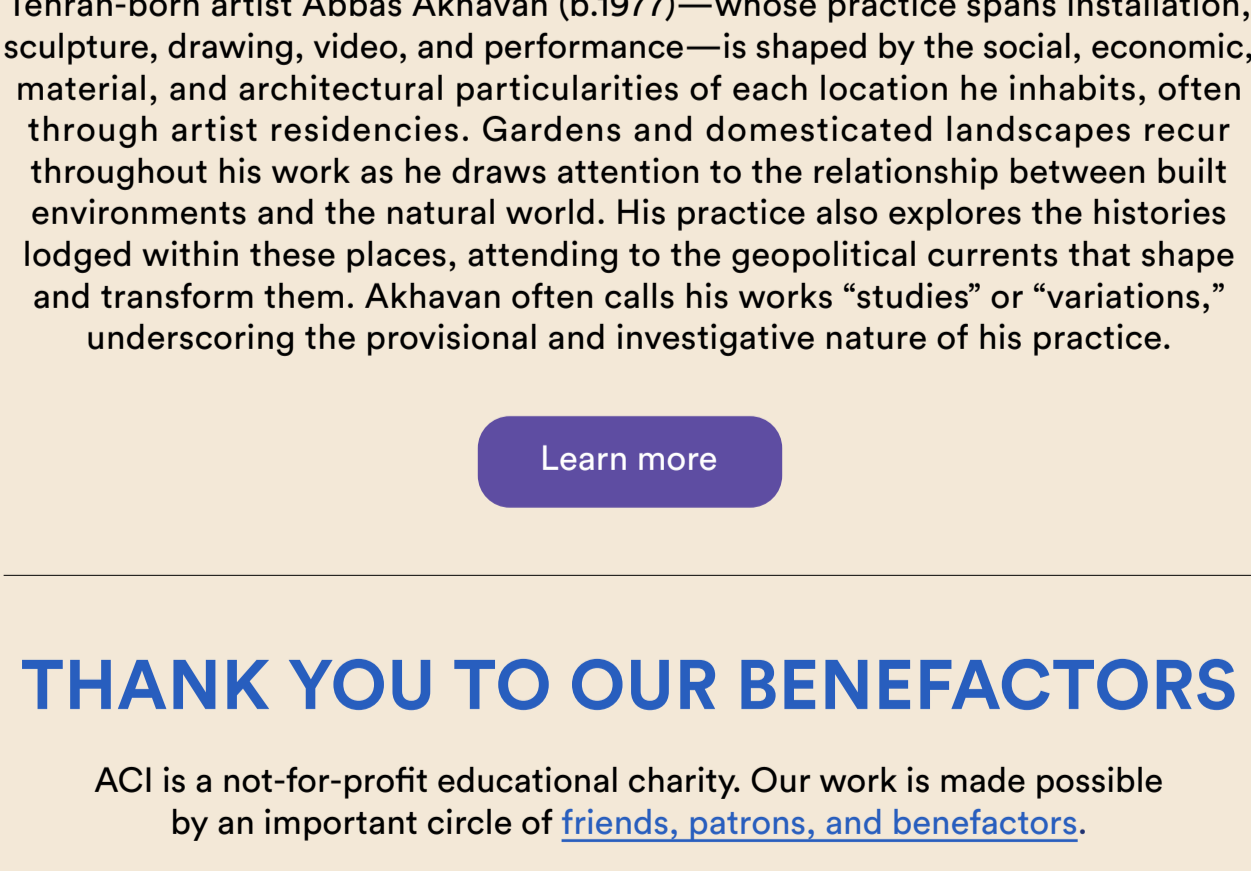
BONNIE DEVINE



Toronto-based Anishinaabe artist and scholar Bonnie Devine (b.1952) moves across drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, and site-specific intervention, rooting her practice in the rich storytelling and pictorial traditions of Indigenous culture. Land, treaty, and sovereignty anchor her work, which draws on recorded knowledge, memory, and dreams. Influenced by her grandparents, who were trappers in Northern Ontario, Devine brings a resourceful approach to her materials and her artmaking. Through her work, she plays a vital role in the increased recognition and continued vitality of contemporary Indigenous art.

[Learn more](#)

ABBAS AKHAVAN



Tehran-born artist Abbas Akhavan (b.1977)—whose practice spans installation, sculpture, drawing, video, and performance—is shaped by the social, economic, material, and architectural particularities of each location he inhabits, often through artist residencies. Gardens and domesticated landscapes recur throughout his work as he draws attention to the relationship between built environments and the natural world. His practice also explores the histories lodged within these places, attending to the geopolitical currents that shape and transform them. Akhavan often calls his works "studies" or "variations," underscoring the provisional and investigative nature of his practice.

[Learn more](#)

THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS

ACI is a not-for-profit educational charity. Our work is made possible by an important circle of [friends, patrons, and benefactors](#).

If you would like to support our important work, please see [this page](#).

FOLLOW ACI ON INSTAGRAM

for more on great art in Canada

Image Credits: [1] Marigold Santos, with her work *sibling shroud (lotus and balintawak)*, 2025. Photograph by Jared Sych. [2] Alexa Kumiko Hatanaka, with her work *Faultlines and Loneliness*, 2025. Still from a video by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. [3] Manuel Mathieu, with one of his works. Photograph by Jeanne Tetreault. [4] Rajni Perera in her studio. Photograph by Ritabh Essayh. [5] Bonnie Devine, with one of her works. Courtesy of Figure 1 Publishing. [6] Abbas Akhavan, 2024. Photograph by Alex de Brabant.