

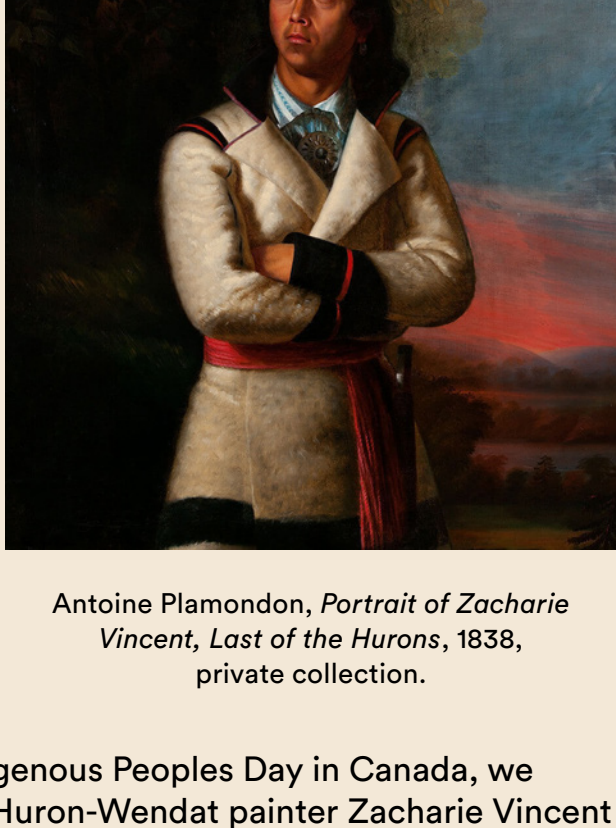
JUNE 21, 2024

CROSS-CULTURAL CONVERSATION IN THE ART OF ZACHARIE VINCENT

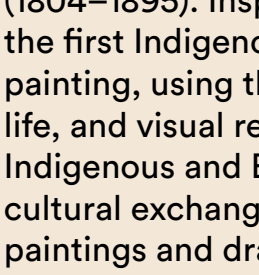
*How Huron-Wendat painter Zacharie Vincent broke ground
in the nineteenth century.*



Zacharie Vincent, *Zacharie Vincent and His Son Cyprien*, c.1851, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.



Antoine Plamondon, *Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, Last of the Hurons*, 1838, private collection.



Today, on National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada, we highlight the work of Huron-Wendat painter Zacharie Vincent (1815–1886). Born on what is now the Wendake Reserve north of Quebec City, Vincent played a critical role in the Huron community as a war chief and hunting guide for residents, visitors, and soldiers from Quebec City. But his life took an artistic turn when he sat for a formal portrait (above right) by famed nineteenth-century Quebec painter Antoine Plamondon (1804–1895). Inspired to take up the brush, Vincent went on to become one of the first Indigenous artists in Canadian art history to adopt European-style easel painting, using the medium to create powerful portraits, scenes of everyday life, and visual records of historical events. In doing so, his art brought together Indigenous and European traditions, forging a unique dialogue regarding colonial cultural exchange. Vincent left behind an important legacy of several hundred paintings and drawings. Today, as documented in the ACI publication [Zacharie Vincent: Life & Work by Louise Vigneault](#), his work is revered for its engagement with themes of self-determination and community expression.

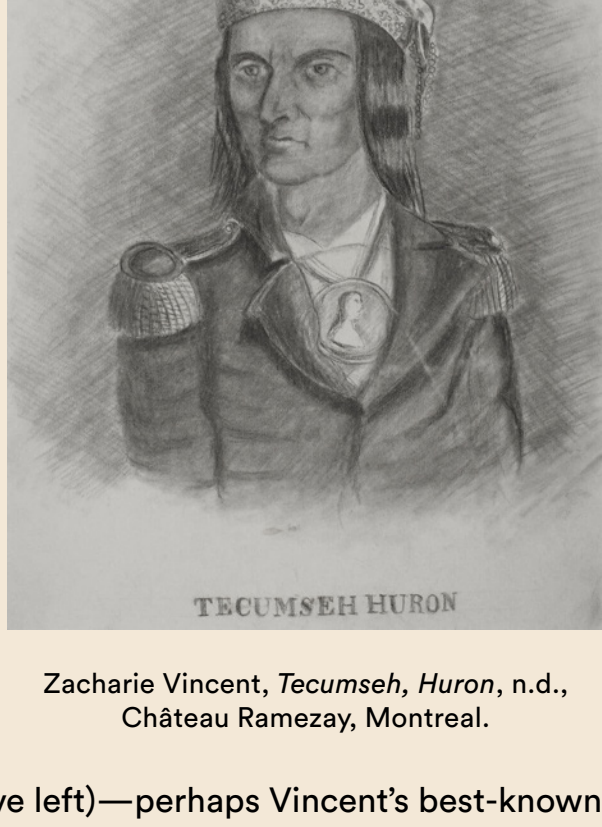
Sara Angel

Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

PORTRAITS OF POWER



Zacharie Vincent, *Self-Portrait*, n.d., Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City.

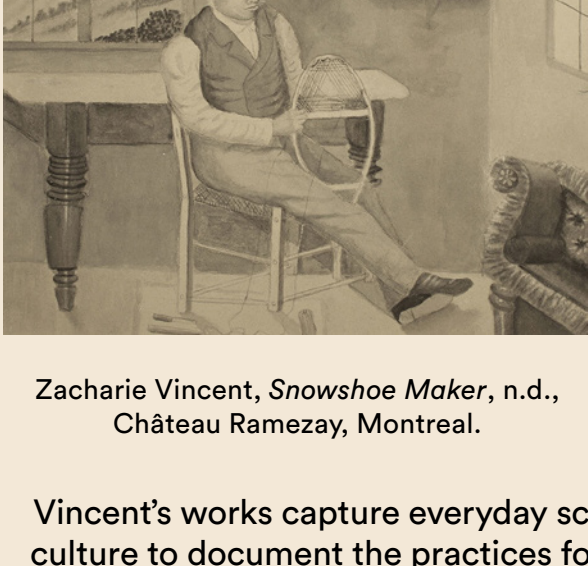


Zacharie Vincent, *Tecumseh, Huron*, n.d., Château Ramezay, Montreal.

In his commanding *Self-Portrait*, n.d. (above left)—perhaps Vincent's best-known work—the artist depicts himself as one in a long line of Huron-Wendat chiefs, engaging in a regal visual performance. As Louise Vigneault [writes](#) in *Zacharie Vincent: Life & Work*, “Here Vincent employs traditional ceremonial objects, borrows status objects from the colonial power, and adapts both to create a powerful image of himself.” His imagined portrait of the Shawnee chief and warrior, *Tecumseh, Huron*, n.d. (above right)—who died two years before Vincent was born—expresses a strong sense of kinship with the great leaders who had come before him. These two works reflect on the condition of Vincent and his community at a time when Huron-Wendat territory was being encroached upon by colonial forces and cultural prosperity was paramount.

[Learn more about Vincent's self-portraits](#)

CAPTURING A THRIVING CULTURE



Zacharie Vincent, *Snowshoe Maker*, n.d., Château Ramezay, Montreal.



Zacharie Vincent, *Two Women with Figure in an Infant Carrier*, n.d., Château Ramezay, Montreal.

Vincent's works capture everyday scenes and ceremonies from Huron-Wendat culture to document the practices for their continuity. In *Snowshoe Maker*, n.d. (above left), we see a man engaged in this vital artisanal trade, seated within a finely detailed domestic interior. *Two Women with Figure in an Infant Carrier*, n.d. (above right), meanwhile, depicts an initiation rite beneath a tree for the accession of a new chief. As Louise Vigneault [explains](#) in *Zacharie Vincent: Life & Work*, the artist played an active part in the life of the Huron community. In addition to being named war chief in 1845, “he devoted himself to painting, hunting, artisanal crafts (the manufacture of snowshoes in particular), and jewellery making.”

[Learn more about Snowshoe Maker](#)

PAINTER OF PAST AND PRESENT



Zacharie Vincent, *Camp Site (Man with Long Coat)*, n.d., Château Ramezay, Montreal.



Zacharie Vincent, *Fire at the Paper Mill in Lorette*, c.1862, Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City.

As Louise Vigneault [notes](#), Vincent's intention was to combat colonial images of Indigenous subjects. His work instead offers “images of a complex identity influenced by the pressures of assimilation and encompassing the transformations brought about by cultural contact and alliances extending back two hundred years.” *Camp Site (Man with Long Coat)*, n.d. (above left), seems to depict initial European contact with the Huron community—note the solitary figure on the right, an outsider to the community—while *Fire at the Paper Mill in Lorette*, c.1862 (above right), illustrates a tragic fire that spread to the local church. The task of representing such events was not to be left to colonial painters alone.

[Learn more about Vincent's place in history](#)

WORKING FROM PHOTOGRAPHY



Zacharie Vincent, *Self-Portrait*, n.d., Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City.



Zacharie Vincent seated at his easel, at work on a self-portrait, c.1875–78, photograph by Louis-Prudent Vallée.

When photography came to Canada in the early 1840s, Vincent was at the forefront of using the new medium as an aid for pictorial compositions. As Vigneault [writes](#) of Vincent's bold forays into creative self-expression (above left), the artist constructed “another image—that of an active, creative, and highly individual personality.... Photography completed this process of affirmation by recording the objective, concrete reality of Vincent's life.” The painter also sat for his photographic portrait (above right): this remarkable image of an elder seated at his easel, working on one of his self-portraits, was taken by Louis-Prudent Vallée in the late 1870s.

[Learn more about Vincent and photography](#)

A LASTING LEGACY



Rebecca Belmore, *Rising to the Occasion*, 1987–91, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Pierre Sioui, *Tehariolui in the Land of Spirits*, 1985, Musée amérindien de Mashteuiatsh, Quebec.

Over the decades, Vincent has become a resonant inspiration for many Indigenous artists. The abiding sense of self-determination present in his self-portraits, for example, shines through in the performance sculpture *Rising to the Occasion*, 1987–91 (above left), created and worn by Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore (b.1960) for a silent parade titled *Twelve Angry Crinolines*, made in critical response to the 1987 royal visit to Thunder Bay by the Duke and Duchess of York. By utilizing both Indigenous and European regalia, Belmore's work opens the same complex dialogue regarding colonial cultural exchange as Vincent's self-portraits. Contemporary Huron artist Regard Intérieur (1950–2024) refers directly to Vincent's oeuvre in works like *Regard intérieure*, 1985 (above right). Through an aesthetic of visual distortion, it reflects on the historical forces that sever individuals and communities from their heritage.

[Watch Rebecca Belmore break down *Rising to the Occasion*](#)

THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS

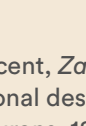
The ACI is a not-for-profit educational charity that receives no government financing or public support. Our work is made possible by an important circle of [friends, patrons, and benefactors](#).

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

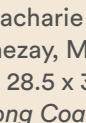
Follow us on social media



Facebook
[artcaninstitute/](#)



Instagram
[@artcaninstitute](#)



X (formerly Twitter)
[@artcaninstitute](#)

Image Credits: [1] Zacharie Vincent, *Zacharie Vincent and His Son Cyprien*, c.1851, oil on canvas, 48.5 x 41.2 cm. Collection of Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (1947.156). [2] Antoine Plamondon, *Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, Last of the Hurons*, 1838, oil on canvas, 114.3 x 96.5 cm. Private collection. [3] Zacharie Vincent, *Self-Portrait*, n.d., oil on paper, 62.5 x 53 cm. Collection of Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City (1991.102). [4] Zacharie Vincent, *Tecumseh, Huron*, n.d., charcoal on paper, 42.5 x 36.1 cm. Collection of Château Ramezay, Montreal. [5] Zacharie Vincent, *Snowshoe Maker*, n.d., graphite and wash on paper, 23 x 30 cm. Collection of Château Ramezay, Montreal. [6] Zacharie Vincent, *Two Women with Figure in an Infant Carrier*, n.d., charcoal on paper, 28.5 x 39.5 cm. Collection of Château Ramezay, Montreal. [7] Zacharie Vincent, *Camp Site (Man with Long Coat)*, n.d., ink on paper (wash), 37.5 x 44 cm. Collection of Château Ramezay, Montreal. [8] Zacharie Vincent, *Fire at the Paper Mill in Lorette*, c.1862, oil on cardboard, 44.4 x 59.4 cm. Collection of Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City. [9] Zacharie Vincent, *Self-Portrait*, n.d., oil on paper, 62.5 x 53 cm. Collection of Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City. [10] Zacharie Vincent seated at his easel, at work on a self-portrait, c.1875–78. Photograph by Louis-Prudent Vallée. Special Collections and Rare Books, Université de Montréal. [11] Rebecca Belmore, *Rising to the Occasion*, 1987–91, mixed media, 200 x 120 x 100 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift from the Junior Volunteer Committee, 1995 (95/173). © Rebecca Belmore. Photo: AGO. [12] Pierre Sioui, *Tehariolui in the Land of Spirits*, 1985, serigraph, 55 x 41 cm. Collection of Musée amérindien de Mashteuiatsh, Quebec.