

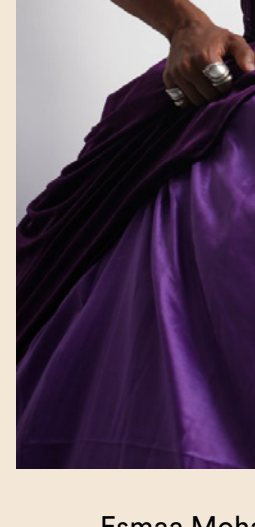
AUGUST 9, 2024

# THE ART OF ATHLETICS TEN CANADIAN WORKS

*On art and sport.*



Alex Colville, *Athletes*, 1960, Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville.

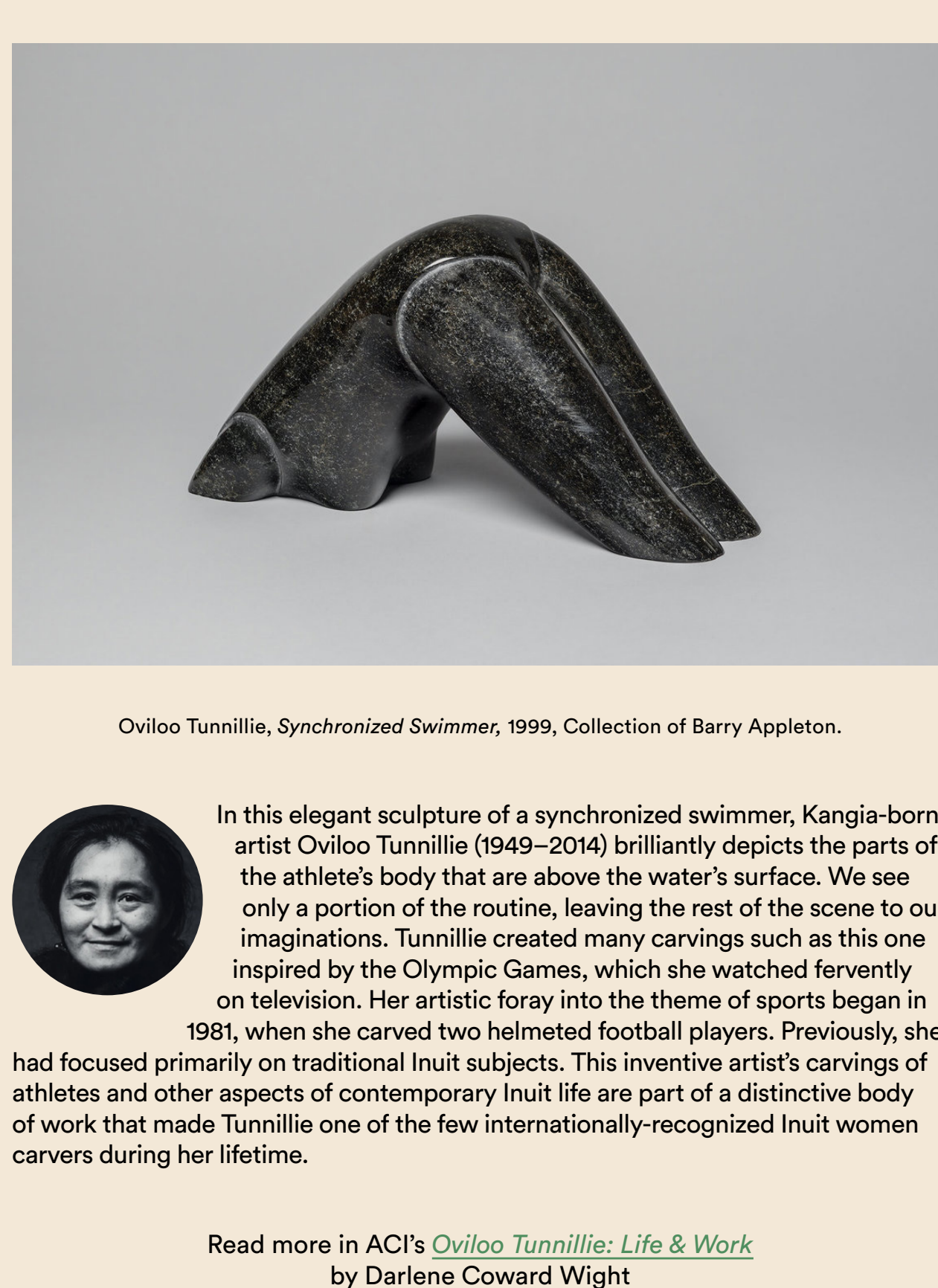


As the 2024 Olympic Summer Games come to a close in Paris, we are looking back to one of our most popular newsletters to date. First published in July 2021, our feature celebrated the extraordinary displays of physical prowess and mental focus by the world's best athletes—attributes that have been front-and-centre these past two weeks in Team Canada's remarkable performances at the 2024 Olympics. Today, we are re-sharing the feature with some new additions, as we soak up the final few days of excitement. We hope you enjoy re-visiting the visual delights of Canadian creators past and present, who explore a wide range of themes related to athleticism, the body, gender, and the sports industry.

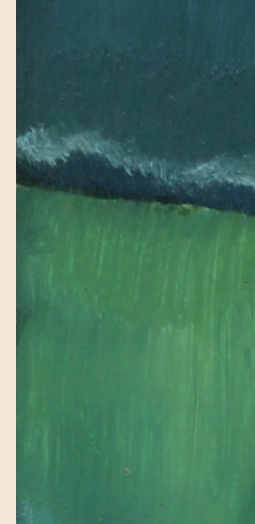
**Sara Angel**  
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

## ONE OF THE BOYS

by *Esmaa Mohamoud*



Esmaa Mohamoud, *One of the Boys (Double Dutch II)*, 2018, Courtesy of the artist and Georgina Scherman Projects, Toronto. Esmaa Mohamoud, *One of the Boys (Double Dutch II)*, 2018, Courtesy of the artist and Georgina Scherman Projects, Toronto.

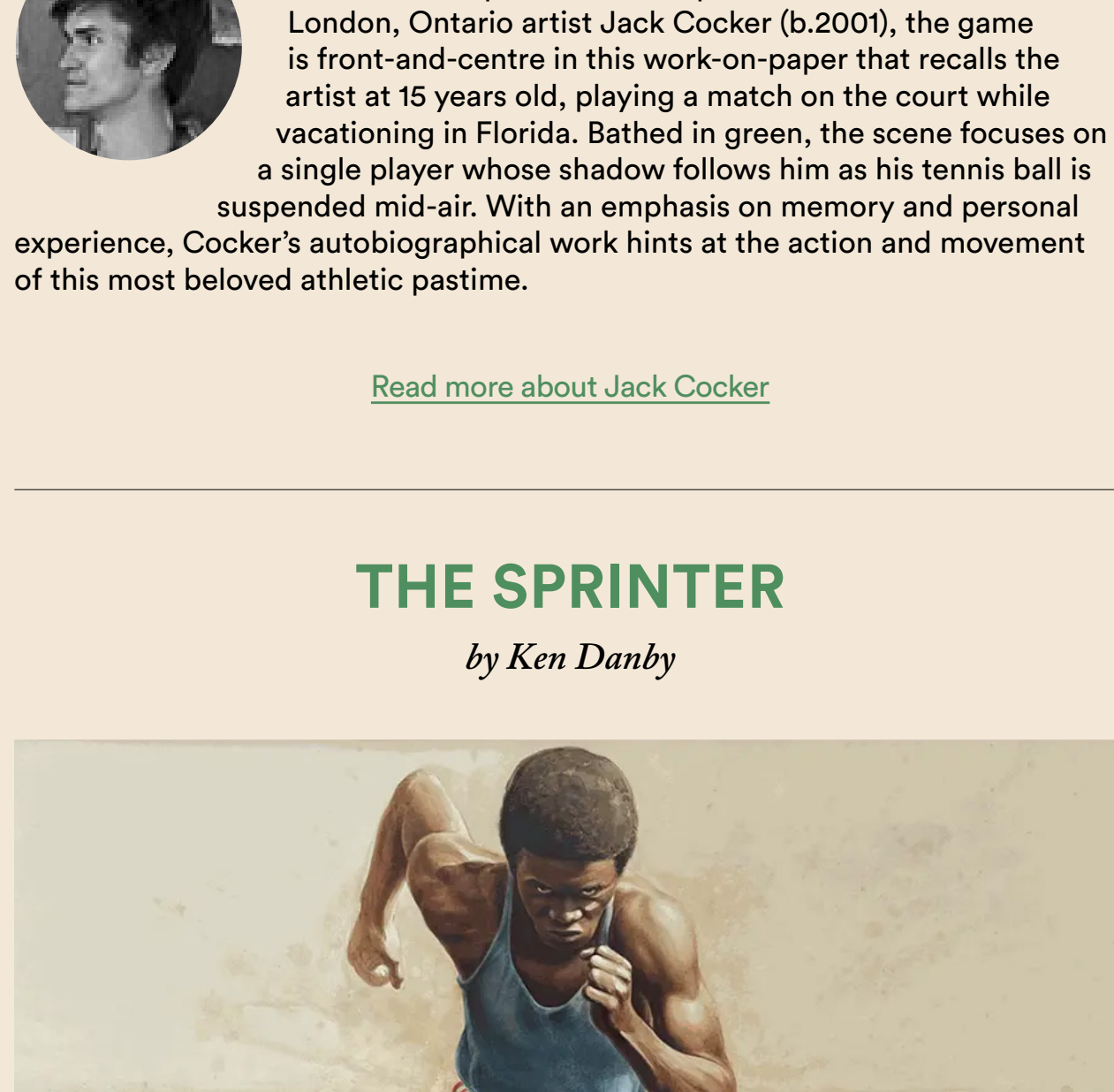


In the photographic series *One of the Boys*, 2018, London, Ontario-born, Toronto-based contemporary artist Esmaa Mohamoud (b.1992) explores the connections between athletics, race, and gender in thoughtful and subversive ways. The legacy of former Toronto Raptors player Vince Carter, a gold medalist at the 2000 Summer Olympics, is evoked in the iconic purple jersey worn by Mohamoud's subject here, while a purple ball gown skirt completes the look. Mohamoud co-created the ball gowns featured in the series with New York City-based artist Qendrim Hoti. The work's title recalls the artist's childhood memory of throwing on a jersey over her dress to play outside with her four brothers. With *One of the Boys*, Mohamoud invites reflection on Blackness, exploitation, the underrepresentation of women in the arena of athletic stardom, and the wider significance of these issues. "I use sports in my work not because I love it so much but as a tool to trick people," Mohamoud explains. "People are uncomfortable talking about race, but they aren't uncomfortable talking about sports."

[Read more about Esmaa Mohamoud in \*The Walrus\*.](#)

## SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMER

by *Ovilio Tunnillie*



Ovilio Tunnillie, *Synchronized Swimmer*, 1999, Collection of Barry Appleton.

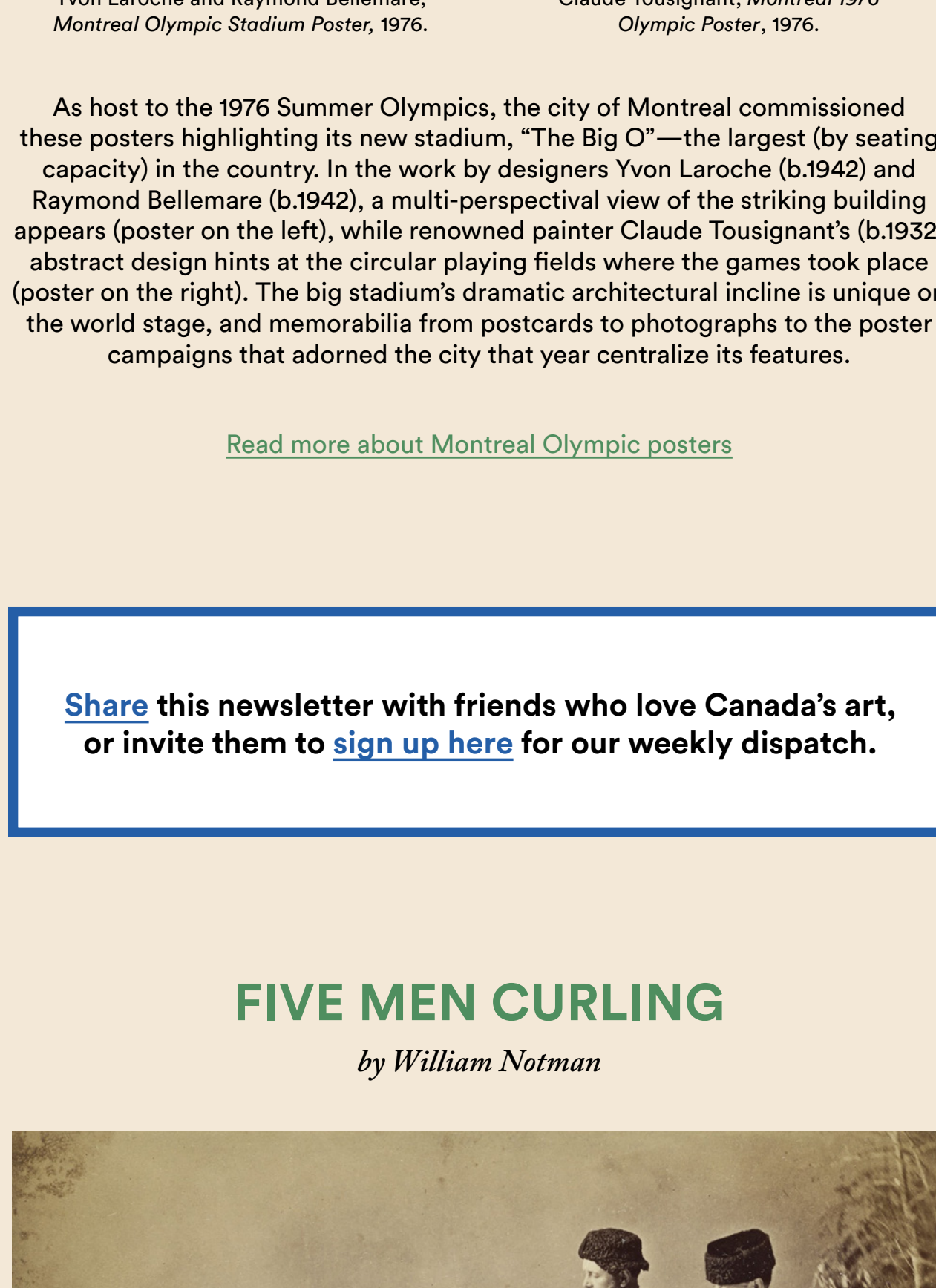


In this elegant sculpture of a synchronized swimmer, Kangia-born artist Ovilio Tunnillie (1949–2014) brilliantly depicts the parts of the athlete's body that are above the water's surface. We see only a portion of the routine, leaving the rest of the scene to our imaginations. Tunnillie created many carvings such as this one inspired by the Olympic Games, which she carved fervently on television. Her artistic foray into the theme of sports began in 1981, when she carved two helmeted football players. Previously, she had focused primarily on traditional Inuit subjects. This inventive artist's carvings of athletes and other aspects of contemporary Inuit life are part of a distinctive body of work that made Tunnillie one of the few internationally-recognized Inuit women carvers during her lifetime.

[Read more in ACI's \*Ovilio Tunnillie: Life & Work\*](#)  
by Darlene Coward Wright

## TENNIS

by *Jack Cocker*



Jack Cocker, *Tennis*, 2023, Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery.



As some of the most popular events of the Olympic games, tennis match-ups are a crowd-pleaser the world over. For London, Ontario artist Jack Cocker (b.2001), the game is front-and-centre in this work-on-paper that recalls the artist at 15 years old, playing a match on the court while vacationing in Florida. Bathed in green, the scene focuses on a single player whose shadow followed him as his tennis ball is suspended mid-air. With an emphasis on memory and personal experience, Cocker's autobiographical work hints at the action and movement of this most beloved athletic pastime.

[Read more about Jack Cocker](#)

## THE SPRINTER

by *Ken Danby*



Ken Danby, *The Sprinter*, 1976, Courtesy of Alan Klinkhoff Gallery.



Few artists capture the vivid realism of Canadian sport like Ontario-based painter and printmaker Ken Danby (1940–2007). In 1976, he created a series of works celebrating six athletes, including *The Sprinter*, pictured here. In this work, the artist captures the determined intensity of the athlete, whose speed, power, and focus bring the image alive. Entitled *The Olympic Watercolours*, the series of works was completed for the National Sport and Recreation Centre in Ottawa the same year Danby received the first ever R. Tait McKenzie Chair for sport.

[Read more about Ken Danby](#)

## 1976 MONTREAL OLYMPICS POSTERS

by *Yvon Laroche, Raymond Bellemare, and Claude Touisngant*



Yvon Laroche and Raymond Bellemare, *Montréal Olympic Stadium Poster*, 1976.

Claude Touisngant, *Montréal 1976 Olympic Poster*, 1976.

As hosts to the 1976 Summer Olympics, the city of Montreal commissioned these posters highlighting its new stadium, "The Big O"—the largest (by seating capacity) in the country. In the work by designers Yvon Laroche (b.1942) and Raymond Bellemare (b.1942), a multi-perspective view of the striking building appears (poster on the left), while renowned painter Claude Touisngant's (b.1932) abstract design hints at the circular playing fields where the games took place (poster on the right). The big stadium's dramatic architectural incline is unique on the world stage, and memorabilia from posters to photographs to the poster campaigns that adorned the city that year centralize its features.

[Read more about Montreal Olympic posters](#)

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## FIVE MEN CURLING

by *William Notman*



William Notman, *Five Men Curling*, n.d., National Galleries Scotland.



The enterprising Scottish-born, Montreal-based photographer William Notman (1826–1891) was renowned for his photographs of snowshoe and curling clubs. In this image, he captures a suspenseful moment as members of a curling team watch the central player sweep the ice to direct the movement of a sliding stone. The work effectively portrays the athletes in action, but in reality it was the result of careful staging undertaken in Notman's studio, where diverse groups and painted backdrops were frequently employed to create realistic scenes of everyday life in the nineteenth century. A popular sport during this period, curling was brought to Canada by immigrants from Scotland, where it was invented in the early sixteenth century.

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

## DRYDEN

by *Serge Lemoyne*



Serge Lemoyne, *Dryden*, 1975, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. © Estate of Serge Lemoyne / SOCAN (2021).



Red, white, and blue are the iconic jersey colours of the Montreal Canadiens hockey team, and comprise the main palette for this portrait homage to legendary goalie, author, and politician Ken Dryden, who also worked as a television hockey commentator at the 1980, 1984, and 1988 Winter Olympics. A monumental diptych made up of two large-scale panels, *Dryden* was painted by Quebec artist Serge Lemoyne (1941–1998) in 1975. Lemoyne's love of the Canadiens ran deep; he devoted ten years of his artistic career—sometimes referred to as his "red, white, and blue" period—to creating paintings and participatory performance works dedicated to hockey. With nods to both Pop Art and the expressive drip techniques of abstract expressionism, Lemoyne's visually arresting tribute to the team he loved has particular resonance with hockey fans.

[Read more about Serge Lemoyne](#)

## THE BANANA OLYMPICS

by *Anna Banana*



Anna Banana, *The Banana Olympics*, 1975.

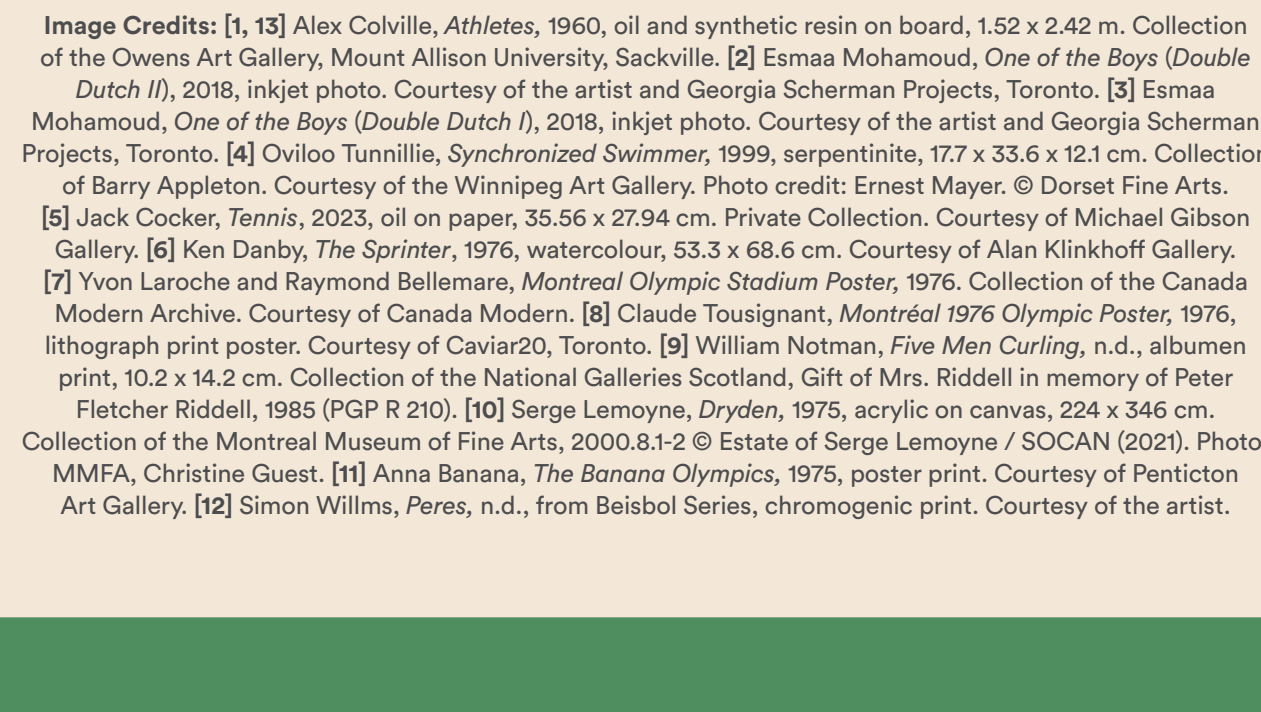


The Banana Olympics were not your typical Olympic games. Devised by contemporary conceptual artist Anna Banana (b.1940 as Anne Lee Long in Victoria, British Columbia) the Banana Olympics—where the overhand banana throw was a main event, and winners were selected based on their costumes—were first held in the vibrant artistic counterculture epicentre of San Francisco in 1975, followed by performances in Surrey, British Columbia, in 1980 and tours in Europe. Banana's participatory art is steeped in the tradition of such movements as Fluxus, Dada, and Theatre of the Absurd. As she explains, "The bottom line in my work is intention—something present in spades in this whimsical "Olympic" affair.

[Read more about Anna Banana](#)

## BEISBOL SERIES

by *Simon Willms*



Simon Willms, *Peres*, n.d., from the Beisbol Series, Courtesy of the artist.

This image of a pitcher winding up his shot is part of a series of works by Toronto-based photographer Simon Willms. The bold conviction of this young baseball player is palpable in the image—a central quality that shines through in each of Willms's portraits. In the Beisbol series, he captures the hopes, dreams, and determination of young and aspiring amateur baseball players in Santo Domingo and San Pedro, hot spots for the development of new athletic talent for those focused on getting to the major leagues. As Willms states, "My images were taken at a vulnerable point in many of these young peoples' lives, between childhood and adulthood, their future uncertain. Whether or not they are destined to play professional baseball is yet to be decided."

[Read more about Simon Willms](#)

## ATHLETES

by *Alex Colville*



Alex Colville, *Athletes*, 1960, Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville.



This mural by Maritime-based realist painter Alex Colville (1920–2013) was commissioned by Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, where the artist was both a student and professor. The three-part work was created for the university's athletics building. From left to right, we see a swimmer preparing to dive, a figure hurling his body over a horizontal bar during a high jump, and a runner crossing the finish line. Geometry is a key feature of this meticulously rendered composition, in which we see the linear elements of the environs, such as the tape at the finish line, the high jump bar, and the fence behind the diver. "*Athletes* reflects the relationship between the figure and space, both physical and psychological," explains Gemey Kelly, Director/Curator of the Owens Art Gallery in Sackville.

[Read more in ACI's \*Alex Colville: Life & Work\*](#)  
by Ray Cronin

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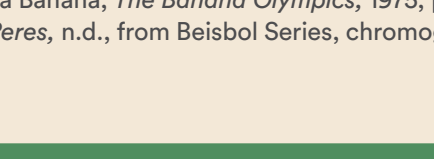
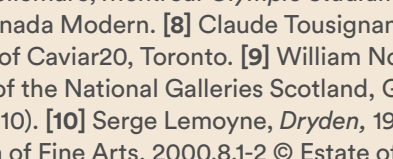
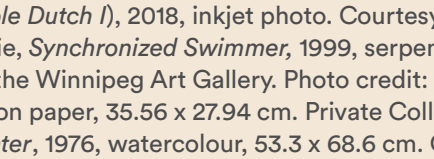


Image Credits: [1] Alex Colville, *Athletes*, 1960, oil and synthetic resin on board, 1.52 x 2.42 m. Collection of the Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville. [2] Esmaa Mohamoud, *One of the Boys (Double Dutch II)*, 2018, inkjet photo. Courtesy of the artist and Georgina Scherman Projects, Toronto. [3] Ovilio Tunnillie, *Synchronized Swimmer*, 1999, serpentine, 177 x 33.6 x 121 cm. Collection of Barry Appleton. Courtesy of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Photo credit: Ernest Mayer / Dorset Fine Arts. [4] Jack Cocker, *Tennis*, 2023, oil on paper, 35.56 x 27.94 cm. Private Collection. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. [5] Ken Danby, *The Sprinter*, 1976, watercolour, 53.3 x 68.6 cm. Courtesy of Alan Klinkhoff Gallery. [6] Yvon Laroche and Raymond Bellemare, *Montréal Olympic Stadium Poster*, 1976, Collection of the Canada Modern Archive. Courtesy of Canada Modern. [7] Claude Touisngant, *Montréal 1976 Olympic Poster*, 1976, lithograph print poster. Courtesy of Caviar20, Toronto. [8] William Notman, *Five Men Curling*, n.d., albumen print, 10.2 x 14.2 cm. Collection of the National Galleries Scotland. Gift of Mrs. Riddell in memory of Peter Fletcher Riddell, 1985 (PGR R 210). [9] Serge Lemoyne, *Dryden*, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 228 x 346 cm. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2000.81.2 © Estate of Serge Lemoyne / SOCAN (2021). Photo: MMFA, Christine Guest. [10] Anna Banana, *The Banana Olympics*, 1975, poster print. Courtesy of Penticon Art Gallery. [11] Simon Willms, *Peres*, n.d., from Beisbol Series, chromogenic print. Courtesy of the artist.