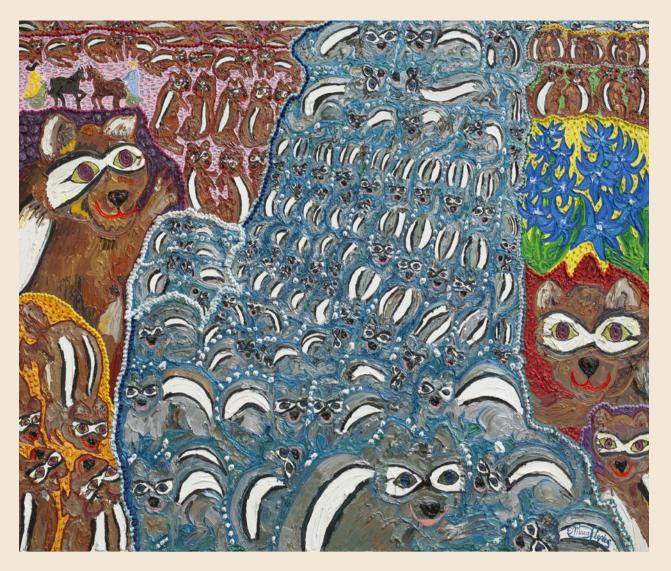
MARCH 28. 2025

JUST FOR LAUGHS HUMOUR IN CANADIAN ART

The exhibition Seriously? Comedy and Satire in Canadian Art 1970s-Now takes a look at some of this country's funniest artists.



Maija Peeples-Bright, Chipmunk Churchill Falls with Charioteers and Convolvulus, 1980, courtesy of the artist and Parker Gallery, Los Angeles.

Slapstick, sarcasm, sinisterism, exaggeration, parody, and political activism—these are all elements of humour in art. Perfectly timed to a moment when we all need a laugh, Vancouver's Griffin Art Projects recently opened its exhibition Seriously? Comedy and Satire in Canadian Art

1970s-Now. The show brings together twenty artists and invites viewers to enjoy comedic, whimsical, playful, silly, satirical, and sarcastic work. Curated by Melissa E. Feldman, Seriously? investigates how-through art-wit, a sideangle, and a joke "can break open seemingly irreducible positions to reveal their hapless, vulnerable and, ultimately, revolutionary elements." With April Fool's Day around the corner, we figured there was no better time to take a peek at the exhibition and its artists, whose work we share below.



Melissa E.

Feldman, curator of Seriously? Comedy and Satire in Canadian Art 1970s-Now on at Vancouver's Griffin Art Projects

Sara Angel Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

SEXY GARDEN: CARROTS III, 2019, AND UNTITLED (ASPARAGUS JAR), N.D. by Victor Cicansky



Victor Cicansky, Sexy Garden: Carrots III, 2019,

various collections.



Victor Cicansky, Untitled (Asparagus Jar), n.d., collection of Maryon Adelaar.



Victor Cicansky (1935–2025) was known for his humour (including in photographs like Sexy Garden: Carrots III, 2019), his imagination, and his ability to transform ordinary objects into strange, cheeky, and wondrous ceramics. Untitled (Asparagus Jar) is one in a series of Mason jars that Cicansky adorned with fruits and vegetables to mimic

their interior contents. In addition to being funny, this clever Victor Cicansky depiction of pantry preserves reflects a connection to Central Canada's agricultural heritage and traditions. Cicansky was involved in the California-based Funk Art movement from the middle to late 1960s and played a key role in the cross-pollination of funk art and ceramics in the Central Canadian art scene.

Learn more about Victor Cicansky

WELCOME BRIGHTLY, 1997 by Marcel Dzama



Marcel Dzama, Welcome Brightly, 1997, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver.



In Welcome Brightly, 1997, Marcel Dzama (b.1974) presents a comic-like scene that poses questions. Is the bear a huggable furry friend or a sinister, shifty-eyed accomplice? Blending fantastical and whimsical imagery with dreamlike, Surrealist elements, Dzama's piece provides little context and presents viewers with more questions than answers. According to curator Melissa E. Feldman, "fairytales, fear, desire, humour and fantasy" collide in Dzama's delicate storybook watercolour illustrations. A founder of Winnipeg's Royal Art Lodge, he creates works that are not always what they seem at first glance.

Learn more about Marcel Dzama

NDN STATUS CARD "PEACE OUT," 2020 by Nico Williams



Nico Williams, NDN Status Card "Peace Out," 2020, collection of Wil Aballe.



In this work, Anishinaabe artist Nico Williams (b.1989) presents a parody of his NDN card. The beaded copy recontextualizes the government document to challenge the symbolism of colonialism and racial categorization. By fusing longstanding Indigenous traditions with twenty-first-century Indigenous experiences, Williams celebrates the resiliency of his people and their heritage. He has established an innovative art practice that blends traditional beadwork techniques with

contemporary themes and objects. Through both recognizable and abstract beaded imagery, he uses satire to explore the intersections of Indigenous identities and culture and to critique colonialist systems and institutions.

Learn more about Nico Williams

SINGLE BLACK CAT, 1964



Maud Lewis, Single Black Cat, 1964, collection of Paul and Tracy Mitchell.



Cats take centre stage in over two hundred paintings made by Maud Lewis (1903–1970) in the final years of her life. These funny feline portraits were all similar in composition: whether she painted one cat or three and whether they were black or white, their unblinking eyes always gazed directly at the viewer. As curator Melissa E. Feldman points out, Lewis had a comic-book-style approach to her "whimsical, light-hearted, idyllic, bright, colourful, and imaginative scenes." In addition to cats, Lewis had a fondness for painting Christmas snowscapes, springtime flowers, dreamy horses and buggies, figures engaging in activities and leisure-

> Read more in ACI's Maud Lewis: Life & Work by Ray Cronin

all of which she depicted through her bold colour palette and flat picture plane.

UNTITLED, 2012 by Shuvinai Ashoona



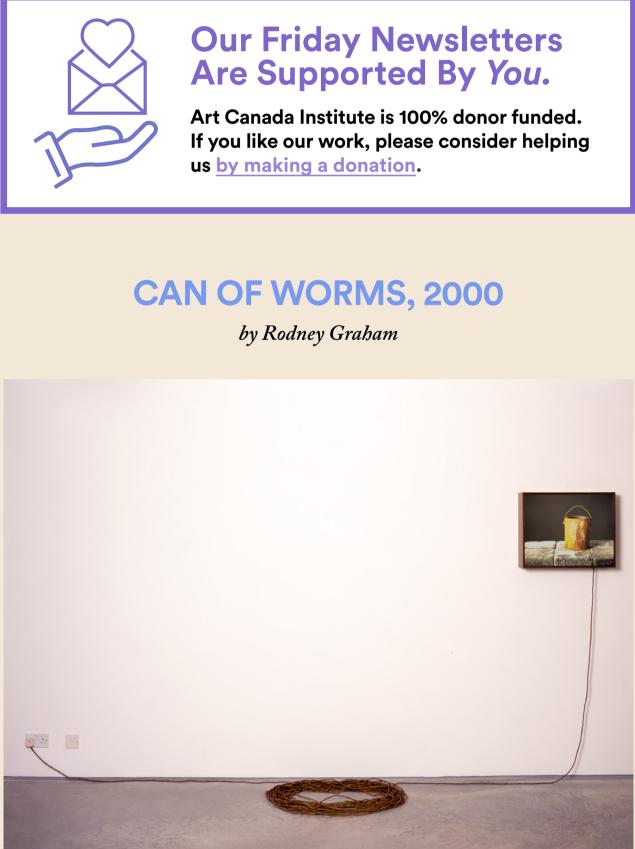
Shuvinai Ashoona, Untitled, 2012, collection of Bruce Munro Wright.



In this drawing, Shuvinai Ashoona (b.1961) humorously plays with scale and space-two giant figures dominate the room, and the audience appears shrunken in comparisonto focus our attention on an everyday arm-wrestling match made larger than life. With surreal deftness, the artist uses comical exaggeration to draw us into the action, charming the viewer with her playful and imaginative glimpse of life in Kinngait (formerly Cape Dorset). Ashoona is an Inuk artist

from Kinngait whose colourful illustrations explore real and imagined moments of contemporary life in the North.

> Read more in ACI's Shuvinai Ashoona: Life & Work by Nancy G. Campbell



Rodney Graham, Can of Worms, 2000, private collection.

Rodney Graham (1949–2022) was a multidisciplinary artist from British Columbia whose abstract photography was influenced by pop culture, puns, philosophy, psychology, literature, and the 1970s post-punk scene. Graham's work often "engaged in genre-bending investigations into technologies of the past and their place in popular culture," and he was closely associated with the Vancouver School of Rodney Graham conceptual photography. Artists involved with the Vancouver School often produced sleek and polished work. In Seriously?, Graham's photo installation transforms puzzling wordplay into a visual form, creating an unexpected combination of the Vancouver School's photo-conceptual aesthetic and a sculptural and humorous play on words.

Learn more about Rodney Graham

ADRIAN'S AWETOPSY, 2024 by Adrian Norvid



Adrian Norvid, Adrian's Awetopsy, 2024, collection of the artist.



"What happens in the colon, stays in the colon"—that's what Adrian Norvid (b.1959) says in his stand-up comedy autopsy routine. Known for his two- and three-dimensional works on paper, Norvid combines performance art and drawing to create a scene reminiscent of the childhood game Operation. Dressed in a lab coat, the artist removes large organs from a cadaver and tells jokes. As he removes each piece, the disassembled body parts are scattered on top of each other, creating a disorderly human form. For curator Melissa E. Feldman, the result of Norvid's procedure is "a charmingly existentialist lament on the limits and

fragility of the body."

Learn more about Adrian Norvid

BANANA OLYMPICS, 1975 by Anna Banana



Anna Banana, screen capture from Banana Olympics, 1975, courtesy of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver.



The Banana Olympics took place in 1975. British Columbiaborn Anne Lee Long (1940–2024), known in the art world

as Anna Banana, hosted a series of real and made-up games at the Embarcadero Plaza in San Francisco. Over one hundred participants dressed in costumes and competed in events such as the fast-walking/water-balancing race, the four-legged race, and the overhand banana throw. Winners Anna Banana were chosen based on their costumes' creativity and their charisma as they crossed the finish line. An interactive and playful display of togetherness, the Banana Olympics exemplified the humour and silliness that were fundamental to Anna Banana's staged performance events, as well as her mail art, zines, and stamps.

Learn more about Anna Banana and the Banana Olympics

THE X-RAY OF THE **MARQUIS DE SADE II, 2002** by Peter Aspell



Peter Aspell, The X-Ray of the Marguis de Sade II, 2002, courtesy of Joy Aspell.

In this portrait of the eighteenth-century nobleman and writer Marquis de Sade, Peter Aspell (1918-2004) presents a "vivisecting gaze" that exposes the inside of the sitter's body as if we are looking at him under an X-ray. In this way, he satirically reveals the inner complexities of this historical and controversial literary figure. Known as a risk-taker for his use of colour, his invented mythologies, and his avant-Peter Aspell garde sensibilities, Aspell merged Expressionist painting with Surrealist subject matter in his art. His work is often thought-provoking and disturbing, and it explores themes of mythology, history, literature, the subconscious, and the human condition.

Learn more about Peter Aspell

CHIPMUNK CHURCHILL FALLS WITH CHARIOTEERS AND **CONVOLVULUS, 1980**

by Maija Peeples-Bright



Maija Peeples-Bright, Chipmunk Churchill Falls with Charioteers and Convolvulus, 1980, courtesy of the artist and Parker Gallery, Los Angeles.



In Chipmunk Churchill Falls with Charioteers and Convolvulus, 1980, dozens of cute critters fill the scene, peering towards the viewer and smirking. Maija Peeples-Bright (b.1942) is known for creating paintings and ceramics in which silly or peculiar images of animals fill the frame. The Canadian and American artist was one of the only women associated with the California-based Funk Art movement of the 1970s. Her art looked to embrace the decorative and the cute at a time when self-serious formalist abstraction was de rigueur.

Learn more about Maija Peeples-Bright

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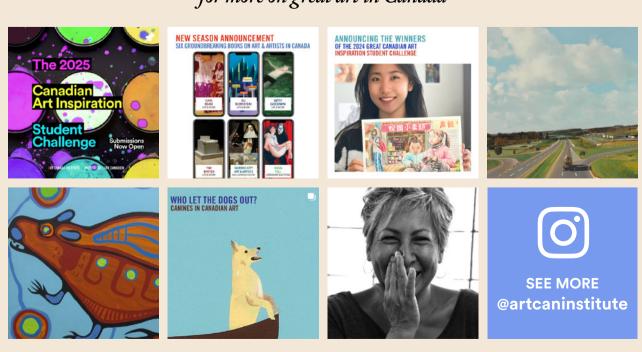


Image Credits: [1] Victor Cicansky, Sexy Garden: Carrots III, 2019, photograph, archival ink on paper, 20.3 x 25.4 cm. Various collections. [2] Victor Cicansky, Untitled (Asparagus Jar), n.d., ceramic, 55.9 x 38.1 cm, 114.3 cm (diameter). Collection of Maryon Adelaar. Photo credit: Maryon Adelaar. [3] Marcel Dzama, Welcome Brightly, 1997, ink and watercolour on paper, 31.7 x 24.9 cm. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia; gift of Wayne Baerwaldt, 2006. Photo credit: Howard Ursuliak. [4] Nico Williams, NDN Status Card "Peace Out," 2020, 11/0 Delica beads, 5.1 x 8.9 cm. Collection of Wil Aballe. Courtesy of the artist and Wil Aballe Projects. Photo credit: Michael Love. [5] Maud Lewis, Single Black Cat, 1964, oil on board, 27.9 x 30.5 cm. Collection of Paul and Tracy Mitchell. Photo credit: Byron Dauncey. [6] Shuvinai Ashoona, Untitled, 2012, coloured pencil on paper, 64.8 x 297.2 cm. Collection of Bruce Munro Wright. Photo credit: Byron Dauncey. [7] Rodney Graham, Can of Worms, 2000, colour transparency mounted and sealed between two-ply Plexiglas in aluminum light box with walnut surround and aged silk electrical cord, 46 x 58.2 x 12 cm. Private collection. Image courtesy of © The Estate of Rodney Graham. [8] Adrian Norvid, Adrian's Awetopsy, 2024, performance documentation and detail, Flashe on paper, Tyvek, cardboard, dimensions varied. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the artist. [9] Anna Banana, screen capture from Banana Olympics, 1975, video, 17 min., 54 sec. Courtesy of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia. [10] Peter Aspell, The X-Ray of the Marquis de Sade II, 2002, oil on board, 60 x 40.6 cm. Courtesy of Joy Aspell. Image courtesy of Gallery Jones. [11] Maija Peeples-Bright, Chipmunk Churchill Falls with Charioteers and Convolvulus, 1980, oil on canvas with wood frame, 121.9 x 144.1 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Parker Gallery, Los Angeles.