

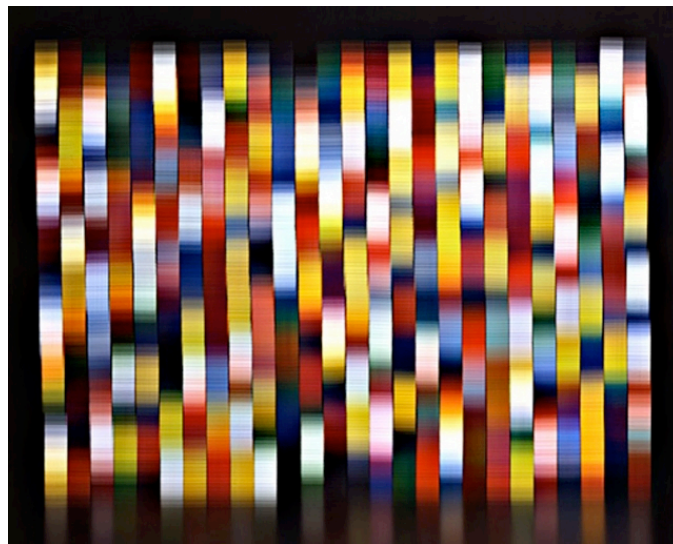
# M + B

## BLOUIN ARTINFO

### CANADA'S TOP 12 SHOWS OF 2012

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By Sky Goodden, Benjamin Bruneau and Matthew Ryan Smith



It's been a big year for Canadian art. We've celebrated homegrown international success stories, like those of **Jessica Eaton** and **Ed Pien**; emerging talents, like **Olivia Boudreau**; storied icons making strong returns, like **Rodney Graham**; history-in-the-making, like the **National Gallery of Canada's** co-purchase of **Christian Marclay's** celebrated "The Clock" and its exhibition at two of our brightest institutions. Group shows have renewed our artists' currencies and demonstrated our country's curatorial strength; canonical figures, like **William Kurelek**, have come up for fresh air; and quiet but powerful partnerships have been forged among disparate talents. **ARTINFO Canada** commemorates the vastness of this year's achievements with a selection of some of our best — it's not nearly comprehensive, but it is a gesture of our marvelling appreciation for those making Canadian art what it is today.

**"Jessica Eaton: Squeezed Coherent States,"** **Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto** (September 6 – October 13)

This year has been very good for Montreal-based photographer **Jessica Eaton** — her highly technical in-camera photographic abstractions have found a wide audience among international collectors, gallerists, and the hip denizens of Tumblr alike. The work is very *cool*, with an effortless composition and color that belie their meticulous creation. But Eaton's interests lie in perception and phenomenology, with an admirable rigor of production and endless experimentation. Standing at the forefront of a generation of young Canadian artists whose practices and concerns are increasingly aimed at international success over local renown, it would be best to buy now, before she's completely out of reach. — *Benjamin Bruneau*

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**“Rodney Graham: Canadian Humourist,” Vancouver Art Gallery (May 26 – September 30)**

With a wry and deft touch, **Rodney Graham**, master of the understatement, presented a small but dense exhibition of new work at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Five large-scale photographs feature the artist in the guise of also-rans who are nonetheless has-beens: a painter’s model miming a soldier’s death throes; an author striking a visionary pose in his fuzzy slippers; an aging sous-chef enjoying a barely-earned smoke break. The relative poverty of their character is put in counterpoint to the richness of the photos’ realization. Graham has proven his continued incisiveness, painting himself—and the Canadian art world in general, perhaps — somewhere between lovable goof and born loser. – *Benjamin Bruneau*

**“Ohotaq Mikkigak & Jack Bush: Blue Cloud,” Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto (September 5 – October 28)**

“Blue Cloud” marks the triumphal third and final installment of curator **Nancy Campbell’s** heralded series, wherein she pairs a Cape Dorset artist with a Canadian southerner. Intimately installed at the Justina M. Barnicke gallery, “Blue Cloud” married early works of celebrated Canadian modernist **Jack Bush** with the late-career abstract landscapes of Inuit drawer **Ohotaq Mikkigak**. Everything about the pairing succeeds, from the exquisite gestural quality each artist brings to his work, to the remarkable visual rhythms they share. Campbell’s vision in connecting the two is to be commended, as is historian **Sarah Stanners’s** canny uncovering of rarely-seen early Bush works. – *Benjamin Bruneau*

**“William Kurelek: The Messenger,” Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (various dates, 2012)**

It has been a most peculiar year for **William Kurelek**, one of Canada’s most peculiar artists. Some 35 years after his death, fifteen works sold for in excess of \$1.4 million at auction, making the artist the toast of the fall season; meanwhile, the first large-scale survey of his work has travelled across Canada and revealed the breadth of his talent — and strangeness. Assembled by curators **Andrew Kear, Tobi Bruce, and Mary Jo Hughes**, in a unprecedented formation among three of Canada’s strongest museums, the exhibition brought together 80 works spanning the entirety of Kurelek’s prematurely-terminated career. Perhaps 2012 was the perfect time for a resurgence of interest in Kurelek; oft-spurned in his day as a religious naif or nut, his trio of interests (nostalgia, faith, and the apocalypse) have become touchstones of our contemporary era. . – *Benjamin Bruneau*

**“Will Munro: History, Glamour, Magic,” Art Gallery of York University, Toronto (January 11 – March 11)**

The AGYU’s moving retrospective of the late **Will Munro’s** diversiform practice illustrated the value of active collaboration, which Munro himself strongly supported. Channelling the assistance and advice of friends, family, and fellow artists, in addition to receiving several works on loan for the exhibition, “History, Glamour, Magic” became an act of love born out of an early loss. An unmatched arbiter for queer iconography in Canada, Munro revelled in aesthetic fancy and flash, in a keen and queered

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conceptualism made aware by lush fetishism and beautiful sex. His mark endures. – *Matthew Ryan Smith*

**"Jason Mclean / Raymond Pettibon," McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London** (September 27 – November 3)

What at first seemed like an uneasy pairing may have provided us a new model for evocative interactions. **Jason McLean**, the predominant Canadian autobiographer now living in London, ON, and **Raymond Pettibon**, the pioneering punk-core illustrator from California, share a wonderfully idiosyncratic aesthetic vocabulary with strikingly disparate conclusions. McLean is frenetically contemplative and cajoled by the deep significance (and yet mystery) of place while Pettibon spits visual venom through anti-establishment rhetoric and metaphor. Yet here it works. Pettibon's influence on McLean is clear, particularly in his stylistic references to zine culture, revealing confessional writings and dexterous penmanship. And amidst McLean's chatty and cacophonous mind mappings, his strong line evokes those in Pettibon, piquing their strident visual impact. Cleverly tying it all together is an unassuming display case featuring selected Pettibon works and magazines, all owned by McLean himself. – *Matthew Ryan Smith*

**"My Winnipeg," Plug In ICA, Winnipeg** (September 8 – March 17)

A monumental undertaking including four group exhibitions, the "My Winnipeg" project, organized by the Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, presents the work of over 100 artists who have had a close association at one time or another to the city of Winnipeg. Of course, the series gets its name from **Guy Maddin's** praised fantastical documentary, by the same name. Like the film, the exhibition scrutinizes its subject with whimsy, and falls somewhere between the fictitious, historical, and the mythological. The list of names is astounding. From **Wanda Koop** and **Kent Monkman**, to **Jeanne Randolph** and **Norval Morrisseau**, "My Winnipeg" is wildly ambitious yet warmly intimate. Kind of like the city itself. Curated by **Paula Aisemberg, Sigrid Dahle, Hervé di Rosa, Noam Gonick, Anthony Kiendl, and Cathy Mattes**. – *Matthew Ryan Smith*

**"Zoo," Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal** (May 24 – September 3)

As the MACM's seemingly simple curatorial conceit — animals and our projections onto them — in fact presented a complicated, dark, and tumultuous exhibition with its range of provocative commissions, top artists, and challenging design, chief curator **Marie Fraser** once again proved the strength and complexity of her approach. Among the most powerful offerings were **Ai Weiwei's** magisterial ring of "Zodiac Heads," alluding to tenuous relations between the East and West while referencing the augury calendar in all its mammalian difference; and **Pierre Huyghe's** "Zoodram 5," in which an actual spider dons a bobbing **Brancusi** head as it navigates its bright vitrine in a pool of darkness, epitomizing the strongest conviction the show has to offer: that this is less about animals than ourselves; it is the burden of beasts to uphold our mythologies. – *Sky Goodden*

**"Marcus Coates: Stories from the Lower World," Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge** (June 22 – September 9)

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Presenting himself as a shaman of urban defeat, **Marcus Coates** has built an international reputation for his work's humor, awkwardness, and gravity. "Stories from the Lower World" presented three of Coates's most significant works to date: "Journey to the Lower World," "The Plover's Wing," and "Kamikuchi." Each film features the artist channeling the animal kingdom as he earnestly addresses very real-life problems, from eviction and illegal bicycle-parking to the politics of the Middle East. Revealed is a serious endeavor tarped in vulnerability and humor, and itchy disturbed by questions that have no easy resolution. The exhibition accompanied a residency Coates undertook at the SAAG, a north-prairie institution with a remarkable knack for bringing the contemporary to Canada. – *Sky Goodden*

**"Olivia Boudreau: Intérieur," Darling Foundry, Montreal** (October 2 – December 2)

**Olivia Boudreau** is a young artist to watch. As she seemingly maintains a course set by Montreal art stars **Patrick Bernatchez** and **Adad Hannah**, Boudreau lingers over her lens, tests the limits of the moving frame, and approaches her subjects with the touch of a Romantic. She was stationed at the Darling Foundry for a three-year residency, and her first solo exhibition bears out her considerable talents. Boudreau's true debut, however, came in the form of a stunning and memorable inclusion in the 2011 Quebec Triennial. Her video installation, "L'Étuve," provided intimacy, evoked sensation, queried the gaze, and all with a humid and ephemeral beauty worthy of late-nineteenth century landscape painting. We hope to see much more of her in the year to come. – *Sky Goodden*

**"Shannon Bool: Patterns of Emancipation," Daniel Faria, Toronto** (May 31 – July 21)

The Berlin-based **Shannon Bool** explores freedom through constraint. She weaves the world into "Casino Runner," a masterful embroidered wool work which moves through ethnographic influence and imitation to arrive at a deeply personal response to Pop design. She presents a diptych photogram of donkeys donning zebra stripes with humor and a touch of bathos, while beautifully tilting at formal concerns and the nebulousness of truth in narrative. But her greatest achievement in "Patterns of Emancipation" pivots around a collection of minimal sculptures born of Bool's interaction with a German women's prison. Her bar sculptures go sparsely rung with bronzed personal sundries that hang like charms on hollowed wrists. We commend fast-rising Daniel Faria for seeking out and reclaiming our Canadian-born Bool. – *Sky Goodden*

**"Ed Pien: Under Water," Pierre-Francois Ouellette Art Contemporain** (November 28, 2012 – January 26, 2013)

**Ed Pien** closes a banner year with an intimate and gem-like show at his Montreal gallery, Pierre-Francois Ouellette. Unfolding his large-scale and celebrated **Sydney Biennial** installation, "Source," the Taiwanese-Canadian artist dives into mythological and dreamlike narratives about our country's most prized element with an installation that transcends the decorative arts that inform it. Paper-cuts and latticed profiles maintain Pien's gorgeous exploration of the grotesque while bringing his watery subject into an ethereal state. Pien reminds us of the beauty imbedded in the sources that maintain us. – *Sky Goodden*

**BONUS: "Christian Marclay: The Clock," National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa** (March 30 – August 6)

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Jointly owned by the National Gallery of Canada and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, this (un)Canadian spectacle and source of innumerable worldwide reflections and line-forming enthusiasm wins the bonus entry. **Christian Marclay**'s adored mash-up earned the artist accolades at the Venice Biennale, and caused a buying frenzy in London, UK. And for good reason. "The Clock" is a tour de force of cinematic craft that brings high to low, and strikes its audiences still. Manipulating thousands of filmic references to the temporal, "The Clock" moves through real time by representing the passing minutes of the day. Wondrous, gripping, and strangely visceral, Marclay reconceptualized the performative characteristics of video, perhaps even the temporal gait of spectatorship itself. Moreover, it persuaded viewers to stay with video art and ironically lose track of time altogether. That's a feat worthy of distinction. – *Matthew Ryan Smith*