

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

Secret Chord: An Ode to Montreal

December 10, 2022 – January 21, 2023

“I feel at home when I'm in Montreal — in a way that I don't feel anywhere else.”

– Leonard Cohen

Andrew Edlin Gallery is excited to present an invitational group exhibition of works by artists who are either based in Montreal or represented there in local galleries and museums. Working in diverse media, from small ceramic or papier-mâché objects to intricate assemblages and collages to large oil paintings, these seventeen individuals come from many different backgrounds, cultures, and nationalities: contemporary, self-taught, First Nations, Inuit, Quebecois, Anglophone, Congolese, Croatian, German, Italian, Romanian, Russian. Their reputations range from celebrated (eight have had solo museum shows) to emerging, to even obscure, but all of them epitomize the vibrant multicultural spirit of Montreal.

Inuk artist **Shuvinai Ashoona** (b. 1961), whose drawings were featured at this year's Venice Biennial in *The Milk of Dreams*, and Montreal-based artist **Joseph Tisiga** (b. 1984) render both everyday and fantastical depictions of their respective communities. Ashoona uses colored pencil, graphite and ink, while Tisiga, a member of the Kaska Dena First Nation (who are originally from northwestern Canada) works with watercolors to create his unlikely scenarios that explore identity and nationhood. Inspired by her son, **Sally Tisiga** (b. 1960) plays with tradition using beads and wool to create intricate wall-hangings and dolls bearing ancestral names, such as *Grandmother Bear Protector of the Four Legged Ones*.

Leopold Plotek (b. 1948), **Marion Wagschal** (b. 1943) and **Bill Anhang** (b. 1931) are all from families who fled the Holocaust. Plotek and Wagschal are perhaps the two most venerated Montreal-based artists in this exhibition and have taught and influenced legions of their younger colleagues. Each explores the notion of memory. Wagschal's ghostly figures of family, friends and lovers, rendered with a sun-bleached, patchy palette, wear the heaviness of mortality in what are otherwise domestic and banal environments. In his large-scale canvases, Plotek interrogates the boundaries between the abstract and the figurative, memory and experience, subconscious and intellect. *Johnny-Come-Lately*, a large oil from 2014, was inspired by the artist's passion for the Billy Strayhorn song first recorded in 1944 by Duke Ellington. Completely self-taught as an artist, the electrical engineer turned mystic, Bill Anhang has integrated LEDs into his artworks for decades. Working reclusively in his modest apartment, Anhang has recognized the aesthetic possibilities of the electronic circuitry and other hardware that he designed during the early days of the digital era. He was a pioneer in that domain, and his works are in some sense notable cultural artifacts of the computer age.

Jérôme Fortin (b. 1971) and **Myriam Dion** (b. 1989) use cut-up paper to create coded visual languages. In *Écran no. 12* from 2007, Fortin cuts, folds and weaves together small fragments of posters from a Montreal film festival to fashion a large, patterned abstraction. In *Elisabeth II, Le Devoir, Le vendredi 9 septembre 2022*, Dion explores the local media coverage of Queen Elizabeth's passing through a delicate mosaic of chopped-up articles, woven Japanese paper, and drawing.

Self-taught artists **The Great Antonio** and **Arthur Villeneuve** created idiosyncratic worlds through which they perpetuated their own myths. Anton Barichievich (1925-2003), who proclaimed himself

"The Great Antonio," was a 440-pound strong man whose feats of strength were entered into the Guinness Book of World Records and who performed on the Johnny Carson and Ed Sullivan shows in the 1960s. He made his own promotional posters and postcards collaged from newspaper articles and shock headlines. Quebecois barber Arthur Villeneuve (1910-1990) experienced a revelation while attending Sunday mass in 1946 and began to paint at a prolific pace, covering every surface of his modest home, which he dubbed the "musée de l'artiste." He went on to receive national acclaim, and in 1972, a retrospective was held at the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal.

Karen Tam (b. 1977), **Palmerino Sorgente** (1920-2005) and **Moridja Kitenge Banza** (b. 1980) explore their cultural heritage by blurring the distinction between art object and artifact. In her series of papier-maché vases, Tam mimics not only traditional Chinese porcelain found in museum collections, but also the cheap knock-offs sold in Montreal's Chinatown. Similarly, Banza, born in Kinshasa, revisits the traditional African masks exhibited in Western institutions. In his Byzantine-inspired Christ Pantocrator paintings, Banza covers Jesus's face with these masks, thus, in his words, "restoring [their] glory and their function to be worn." Italian immigrant Palmerino Sorgente (1920-2005), aka the "Pope of Montreal," crafted a vast array of cardinal's hats, tiaras, and crowns, which he exhibited in the 1980s at his secondhand shop on Notre-Dame Street.

Ève K. Tremblay's (b. 1972) "photo-pebbles" are small porcelain pieces imprinted with photographed scenes of Lake Champlain, which connects her homeland with the Adirondacks, where Tremblay now lives. **Marlon Kroll's** (b. 1992) modest-sized canvases with their ring-shaped abstractions are curious for their compelling palettes and subdued, meditative auras. **Isabella Kressin** (b. 1996)'s small assemblages, made from laser print on silk, felt, wool, and fiber, are filled with images of silhouetted animal creatures reminiscent of medieval bestiaries. **Allie Gattor** (b. 1994)'s narrative drawings inhabit a terrain of contemporized mythology showing traces of influence by the likes of Henry Darger and Antoine de St. Exupery.

The genesis of *Secret Chord* was the New York Times profile of Shuvina Ashoona and the Inuit artistic community, "Making Art on Top of the World," by Patricia Leigh Brown, published on June 1, 2022. While neither Ashoona nor her compatriots are based in Montreal, the city has a rich concentration of Inuit aficionados and specialist dealers, who have graciously opened their doors to us. Immersing ourselves in the Montreal art world introduced us to the galleries and museums that helped complete the vision for *Secret Chord*. We are especially grateful to Mary Dailey-Desmarais, Chief Curator of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and contemporary art collector François Roy for their friendship and guidance.

We are, of course, also grateful to our collaborators:

Blouin Division: Myriam Dion

Bradley Ertaskiran: Sally Tisiga, Joseph Tisiga

Corkin Gallery: Leopold Plotek

Galerie Hugues Charbonneau: Moridja Kitenge Banza, Allie Gattor, Karen Tam

Fonderie Darling: The Great Antonio

Joe Project: Marion Wagschal

Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain: Jérôme Fortin

Pangée: Marlon Kroll