

FORT GANSEVOORT



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Eight artists and curators receive Canada's Governor General's Award

This year's winners of the prestigious Canadian honour include the Inuk artist Shuvina Ashoona and Saskatchewan-based curator Michelle Jacques

By Hadani Ditmars – March 07, 2024



Shuvina Ashoona working on a drawing in 2022

Photo: Hadani Ditmars

The eight winners of this year's Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts, one of Canada's most prestigious cultural honours, were announced on Wednesday (6 March) by the Canada Council for the Arts.

Among the honourees is rising art world star Shuvina Ashoona, from Kinngait, Nunavut, whose unique world view is expressed through her distinctive style of drawing, which marries intricate graphic detail with Inuit cosmology and concern for climate change. She is only the third Inuk woman to receive a Governor General's Award. The winners this year also include the Saskatchewan-based Métis documentary film-maker Marjorie Beaucage and the Toronto-based photographer Greg Staats, whose images of the natural world marry Indigenous and settler perspectives.

FORT GANSEVOORT

Other honourees are Torontonians Barbara Astman, known for her conceptual, photo-based work has been featured at the Canadian Embassy in Berlin and on the cover of an album by the band Loverboy. Two Montreal-based artists are also winners: Don Ritter, whose sound and visual installations have been shown internationally, and Dominique Blain, whose large-scale sculptures and installations explore politically charged subjects. Louise Lemieux Bérubé, who works with textile and printing techniques often producing multidisciplinary installations incorporating weaving, printing and poetry is this year's winner of the Sayidye Bronfman Award, which recognises achievements using craft techniques and materials. Saskatchewan-based curator Michelle Jacques won this year's Outstanding Contribution Award.

The Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts awards were created in 1999 by the Canada Council for the Arts and the [Governor General of Canada](#). Up to eight awards are distributed every year: six awards recognize artistic achievements, one award recognizes an exceptional fine craft artist ([Sayidye Bronfman Award](#)) and one award recognizes an outstanding contribution to contemporary visual arts, media arts or fine crafts. The winners all receive a medallion and a cash prize of C\$25,000 (\$18,000) each. A [display](#) of works by last year's honourees at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa closed on 3 March.

Ashoona, from Cape Dorset—now called Kinngait—in Canada's northern province of Nunavut, comes from a family of celebrated artists. Her parents were the sculptor Kiugak Ashoona and the graphic artist Sorosilooto Ashoona. She is a cousin to the late artist Annie Pootoogook and her grandmother, Pitseolak Ashoona, was one of the most celebrated Inuk artists of her time.

Ashoona's work has been shown internationally and received special mention at the 2022 Venice Biennale. The artist—whose dense, often phantasmagorical work plays with scale, perspective and recurring images like the egg shape, the *kudlik* or stone oil lamp and the *ulu*, a semi-circular blade—was the 2018 recipient of the prestigious Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). The award, which is presented annually to an artist who has made an outstanding contribution to the visual arts in Canada, includes a C\$50,000 (\$37,000) cash prize and a solo exhibition at the AGO within two years.

Dealer Robert Kardosh, who has championed Ashoona's work and mounted several solo exhibitions at his Vancouver gallery, Marion Scott Gallery, nominated her for the award. "Shuvinai Ashoona has a unique place within contemporary Inuit and Canadian art," he tells *The Art Newspaper*. "Her artistic vision is profoundly rooted in Inuit culture and the land. At the same time, it embraces a global view of the world we all share. She is a super-connector. This richly justified award recognises her unique contribution."

Reached at a studio in Vancouver where she is preparing for a new show at Marion Scott Gallery, newly retitled *Shuvinai Ashoona: An Exhibition and Celebration* (9 March-6 April), the artist says, "It's a great honour to win this award." She adds that she hopes it will result in more recognition for Inuit art, saying: "I feel excited knowing that this is not just for me but for my people."