
The Oh, Canada catalog accompanies a major survey exhibition of contemporary Canadian art curated by Denise Markonish at MASS MoCA. Like the exhibition it was named after, Oh, Canada provides a snapshot of art produced by some sixty emerging, mid-career, and senior Canadian artists.

In her introduction and catalog essay, Markonish discusses her initial interest in the art of a country she knew so little about. She wonders why Canadian art is still relatively unknown to the world at large and offers some possible explanations: a lack of both international exposure and exotic appeal, a cultural identity that blends easily with that of the United States, and (for some) the irrelevancy of identifying artists by their nationality. Markonish argues that an unstable contemporary art market at home coupled with a generous, publicly-funded grant system has led many Canadian artists to develop experimental "studio practices" that are independent of art market forces.

Markonish’s research into Oh, Canada began several years ago when she traveled across Canada to conduct over 400 studio visits with artists. If the final selection of participants for the exhibition reflects the vision of one curator, the catalog itself represents multiple viewpoints. It is divided into provincial or regional sections, and each section includes a contribution by a creative writer and an essay by a Canadian art specialist. Artists are presented according to where they work, and each is interviewed by another Oh, Canada artist. These innovative approaches to writing provide a wealth of information without overwhelming the reader.

Oh, Canada stands up well alongside other publications that have surveyed contemporary Canadian art: O Kanada (1983), Contemporary Canadian Art (1983), The Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art (1989), The Visual Arts in Canada (2010), It Is What It Is (2010) and Builders: Canadian Biennial (2012). It stands apart from these titles because of the outsider (i.e. non-Canadian) perspective Markonish brings to the subject. Oh, Canada is less a "Who’s Who of Canadian Art" than it is a selection of artists whose artworks best represent the studio practice themes she identifies in the catalog (landscape, craft, humor, identity, accumulation, etc.).

Oh, Canada is clearly written and well organized. It is supported by a commendable timeline of Canadian art history, footnotes and an exhibition checklist; although a bibliography and index are missed. It is beautifully illustrated with color reproductions of artworks in the exhibition as well as other works. This catalog is not only recommended for contemporary art specialists (curators, critics, artists, art librarians, etc.), but also for a museum-going public.

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