

# OTHER-PORTRAITS: “SELF-PORTRAITS” BY COLONIAL SUBJECTS IN THIS LAND NOW CALLED CANADA

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“Other-portraits” compiles the images of five colonial figures from Canadian history as they are drawn against notions of the Indigenous Other. Their portrayals, as elaborated in this exhibition, can only be fully comprehended through consideration of what is left absent.

None of the images in this exhibition are conventional self-portraits. The production of the physical form (whether photograph, print or medal) was not crafted by the person(s) in the picture. They each, however, had a hand in crafting their own image. This was done in varying ways: through the performance of a personality; the promotion or branding of oneself; a legal sanction or royal decree; personalized and historicized myth-making; or as a result of fame and infamy.

By probing conventions in Western traditions of self-portraiture, we might better distinguish some of the political dimensions of authorial control in image making: we may discern how an image of oneself may correspond to images of the Other.

The instances included in this exhibition permit a reconsideration of the depicted subjects within the context of colonization. Imperatives of national identity, immigration and racial conflict have observable influenced on the self-awareness of these subjects. In considering these images we may ask how various projected images of the self correspond to, bump against or contradict the intentions and conditions of colonization.

Calculated and constructed, the conventional self-portrait images oneself as one wishes to be seen. What artists see in the mirror, or in their own mind, might be lived out in their own likeness. Conversely, one may alternately read into a self-portrait and find it to reveal personal qualities unbeknownst to its creator. This capacity for an image to inadvertently divulge attributes of its maker allows for a study of both the extents of selfhood, and the cultural circumstances of the image's creation.

Through a process of lateral thinking, by stretching and bending the edges of what we may accurately call a "self-portrait," we can approach pictures as projected images of individuals. "Other-portraits" does just this to equip us with a vocabulary to identify and comprehend issues around colonial subjects within this land now called Canada.



Laura Secord, legendary patriot

postage stamp : lithograph, 5 colours, perf. 13+, Polyvinyl alcohol, 4 sides

1992 - 1998

Canada : 42 cents

Date of issue of stamp: September 8, 1992

Designed by: Ralph Tibbles, based on illustrations by Deborah Drew-Brook and Allan Cormack.

4,000,000 copies of the stamp were printed by Ashton-Potter Ltd.

Library and Archives Canada; Copyright: Canada Post Corporation

<[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=2266334](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2266334)>.

Championed for her role in Canadian Confederation, Laura Secord's (1775 – 1868) war story relates her arduous journey of some thirty kilometers in the Ontario woodland to warn the British of an approaching American attack in the War of 1812. In the final leg of this harrowing journey (as related by an early 20<sup>th</sup> century historian), a fatigued Secord bravely approached an “Indian camp” and convinced one “Big chief Mishe-mo-qua” to escort Laura through the rest of her journey.<sup>1</sup>

This Secord narrative, as historian Pierre Berton has maintained, has been “used to underline the growing myth that the War of 1812 was won by true-blue Canadians.”<sup>2</sup> Various sources since the war suggest that word of the American invasion came not, in fact, from Secord, but from Kahnawake or Iroquois scouts.<sup>3</sup> Downplayed in the story of Secord's great trek is the presence of her Aboriginal aides. Her story comes to us through various accounts coloured in a range of embellishments. Notably, she herself related the story when supplicating the government for a pension (which was denied). Apocryphal as the story may be, Secord is celebrated in Canada in books, songs, plays, a postage stamp (as pictured) and, naturally enough, with Laura Secord chocolates, Canada's largest and best known chocolatier.

Perhaps thoroughly divorced from the actual woman Laura Secord, her representation has been capitalized as a “respectable” image for candy sales or as a heroine for Canadian nationalism. Revealing in her image—part self-created and part ridden with corporate and nationalistic imperatives—is the effective absence of the Aboriginal subject.



Meeting Between Laura Secord and Lieut. Fitzgibbon, June 1813.

Smith, Lorne K., (Lorne Kidd), 1880-1966. ca. 1920

oil on canvas; 48.3 x 63.8 x 1.8 cm (image); 57.9 x 73.1 x 4.1 cm (framed). Image:

63.800 x 48.300 x 1.800 cm Frame: 73.100 x 57.900 x 4.100 cm Inventory no.: I-2

<[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=2837234](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2837234)>.



Artist Edmund Morris painting model Chief Chessequim

(attributed to) Duncan Campbell Scott (1862 - 1947)

1906

photograph Duncan Campbell Scott ; 7.8 x 13.7 cm

Positive Paper Silver - gelatine

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<[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3191846](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3191846)>.

Better known as a luminary of the Canadian Confederate poets, Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947) had, in fact, a larger historical bearing in his role as Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, a position he held from 1913 to 1932. Scott's relation to the Indigenous population in Canada is evident in his poetry, as in "The Onondaga Madonna," where he illustrates a noble-yet-doomed Aboriginal subject. It is evident even more frankly in his professional maxim: "I want to get rid of the Indian problem."<sup>4</sup>

Scott had a heavy hand in instigating the racist policies of nationalistic objectives and in moulding a unitary Canadian identity. Photographs from Scott's travelogues, showing natural landscapes littered with residential schools, reveal some of the effects of the assimilation tactics and impositions of a homogenous Christian civilization that he administered. In this image taken at Brunswick House, Ontario, during the time of the James Bay Treaty payment ceremony in July, 1906, we see a double portrait of the artist Edmund Morris (1871-1913) and the Anishinaabe (Northern Ojibway) Chief Cheesequinin, who, wearing a white shirt and bowtie, obligingly poses for his portrait. What we do not see but even more present in this image is the overbearing presence of Scott whose policy of assimilation was determined to turn the "red man" Chief into a "white man." It is perhaps a dialectical triple portrait indicative as it is of Scott and his totalitarian intent. The absence of Scott's image in his photograph no less portrays the image of himself that he sought to impose onto the Other.



Maritime provinces - photos taken by duncan campbell scott during his maritime tour.  
= provinces maritimes - photographies prises par duncan campbell scott pendant sa  
visite dans les maritimes.

Duncan Campbell Scott, 1911.

Photographic album

<[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=2073555&back\\_url=\(\)](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2073555&back_url=()>)>.





Parks Canada, My name is Grey Owl.

1977

photomechanical print,

27.6 x 42.60cm

Library and Archives Canada; Source: Indian and Northern Affairs

<[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=2975576](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2975576)>.

Archibald Standfield Belaney (1888 –1938), also known as Wa-sha-quon-asin (wenjiganoozhiinh), and best known as Grey Owl, was a pioneer of the modern conservationist movement in Canada who lived a highly controlled, self-written fiction of a life. Born an English bastard in Hastings, Sussex, Belaney was abandoned by his parents, and raised by high-handed aunts before immigrating to Canada in 1906 to settle on Lake Temiskaming, astride the border of Ontario and Quebec. Here, he donned buckskin and feathers, dyed his hair black, tinted his skin with henna, married an Ojibwa woman and piecemealed together an identity from cultures and languages foreign to his British heritage. In the early 1930s he began to pen environmentalist writings under the name Grey Owl, and quickly became extremely popular. His books, lectures and films turned him into an international celebrity, and he was very arguably, for a time, the most famous “Canadian” alive. Grey Owl was a contrived “Indian” persona. The dubious grammatical errors, which he apparently insisted his editors let pass, lent a degree of legitimacy to his environmentalist motives. When the news broke after his death in the exposé in the *North Bay Nugget* published the same day, his fame as a conservationist was supplanted by infamy. Publishers stopped pressing his texts and his adverse reputation exacerbated the conservationist foundations that he supported. The 1960s environmental movement gave reason to re-examine Grey Owl’s character after a generation of neglect. The 1970s saw a CBC-aired documentary on Grey Owl and the re-editions of his books. In 1977 Indian and Northern Affairs released this poster with Parks Canada. Rendered weathered as the trees amongst him, his arm and axe extended horizontally, Grey Owl all but blends into his chosen environment with braids and buckskin tassels dangling atop his white, collared shirt. It is a commemoration of Belaney’s conservationism, and recognizes his very real contribution to the preservation of nature, despite his fraudulent persona.



Grey Owl (Archibald Belaney) writer and conservationist. Date unknown.

Yousuf Karsh / Library and Archives Canada / PA-195791

<[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3194976](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3194976)>.



Death of Wolfe [After West], 1776

William Wollett

Intaglio on wove paper

Library and Archives Canada

<[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3030517](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3030517)>.

The British General James Wolfe (1727-1759), fêted as “the conqueror of Quebec” died on the Plains of Abraham during the Seven Years' War in the final phase of a long struggle between France and Great Britain for supremacy in North America. His conceit, a quality not unusual for generals of war, was perhaps unique in this instance for the way the public celebrated his image after his death with as much the same valour that he saw in himself. Wolfe was posthumously championed by the English as a militant mascot whose death served to enthuse troops throughout the remainder of the war. This narration of Wolfe’s military exploits was in large measure a fabrication that all but erased his rather clumsy military past, as it did the significant role of the Six Nations (Iroquois) in the British campaign for the Battle of Quebec.<sup>5</sup> Benjamin West’s (1738-1820) famous neo-classical, glorified portrayal of Wolfe (an image itself rigged with inaccuracies) proclaims the death and lamentation of a great martyr. Bottommost in the picture-plane is the crouching “noble savage”: mirroring the prominently foregrounded hero, the uncivilized and conspicuously subservient “Indian” furrows his brow with fist under chin in apparent contemplation. He does not appear to share in the active expression of sorrow of the British soldiers. Close to the ground and thus connected to the land, his elemental nature is rendered as a classicized, anonymous, naked, brown body. Depicted in opposition to Wolfe, he is an obvious double, the lesser ‘other’ who is here undermined—as certainly was the case in most written, visual and oral retellings of the role of the Iroquois as participants in the war. West, some scholars have suggested, might have here been trying to reconcile this fact, placing the Native as equal as the principal actor in the picture.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, the warrior’s attendance may merely be an exotic, romantic element that undoubtedly appealed to the artist’s British patrons. Indeed the image’s response was enthusiastic, to say the least, in fact, the public reaction has been “described as delirious.”<sup>7</sup> This etching by William Wollett (1735-1785) from the original, sold in its time in England, France, Germany and America, garnered “countless copies,”

propelled West's painting to be the "most widely known eighteenth-century art work," and brought Wolfe international recognition as a legendary hero.<sup>8</sup>





Indian Chiefs Medal

1873-1899

Silver

Artists:

Wyon, Joseph Shepherd, 1836-1873.

Wyon, Alfred Benjamin, 1837-1884

Library and Archives Canada

<[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=2851185](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2851185)>.

The particular relationship between the Crown and Aboriginal peoples in Canada is embodied in this version of a Treaty Medal that was cast for treaties number 3 through 8. Made for the Aboriginal Chief Treaty signatories, the silver medal marks an “agreement” between Indigenous communities and the Crown that resulted in the legal restraints of Aboriginal ownership of land and rights of land use. The treaty process was established to expedite the spread of colonial settlements; this is how “the West was won.” On the reverse of the medallion, a generic staff-officer shakes hands with a generic, pan-Indian figure. On the obverse side of the medal is the likeness of a woman’s profile, that of Queen Victoria (1819-1901). Her glance evades us, but her command does not: with the transfer of the medallion came the iteration of this control. This coin, as the extension of the Crown, is less an exchange token, and more a part of the Queen herself. Her likeness is impressed along with her ruling hand. Like the stare of Medusa, the oblique-gaze of Victoria casts the recipient not into stone, but into the hegemony of the Crown. She interpolates the Indian subject into her own image.





Obverse of Indian Chiefs Medal, 1873-1899

Silver

Artists:

Wyon, Joseph Shepherd, 1836-1873.

Wyon, Alfred Benjamin, 1837-1884

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<[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=2851185](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2851185)>.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Rev. Geo. Bryce, *Laura Secord: a Study in Canadian Patriotism Being an Address Delivered before the Canadian Club of Winnipeg* 1 May 1907 (Winnipeg: Manitoba Free, 1907) 12.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Berton, *Flames across the Border: the Canadian-American Tragedy, 1813-1814* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981) 83.

<sup>3</sup> William Wood, *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1920) 65.

<sup>4</sup> Full quote: "I want to get rid of the Indian problem. Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed. They are a weird and waning race...ready to break out at any moment in savage dances; in wild and desperate orgies." National Archives of Canada, Record Group 10, 6810, file 470-2-3, 7, 55 (L-3) and 63 (N-3). For a more accessible source see: John Leslie, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act, second edition* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Treaties and Historical Research Branch, 1978) 114.

<sup>5</sup> Vivien Green Fryd, "Rereading the Indian in Benjamin West's 'Death of General Wolfe,'" *American Art* 9:1 (Spring 1995) 75.

<sup>6</sup> Fryd, 77.

<sup>7</sup> John Charles Dent, *The Canadian Portrait Gallery* (Toronto: J.B. Magurn, 1880) 228.

<sup>8</sup> New Brunswick Museum, *A Nation Treasure in New Brunswick: Jame's Barry's The Death of General Wolfe* © New Brunswick Museum (2003) All Rights Reserved <<http://website.nbm-mnb.ca/Wolfe/ThePhenomenon.html>>.

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