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FORM FOLLOWS FICTION AT THE ART MUSEUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

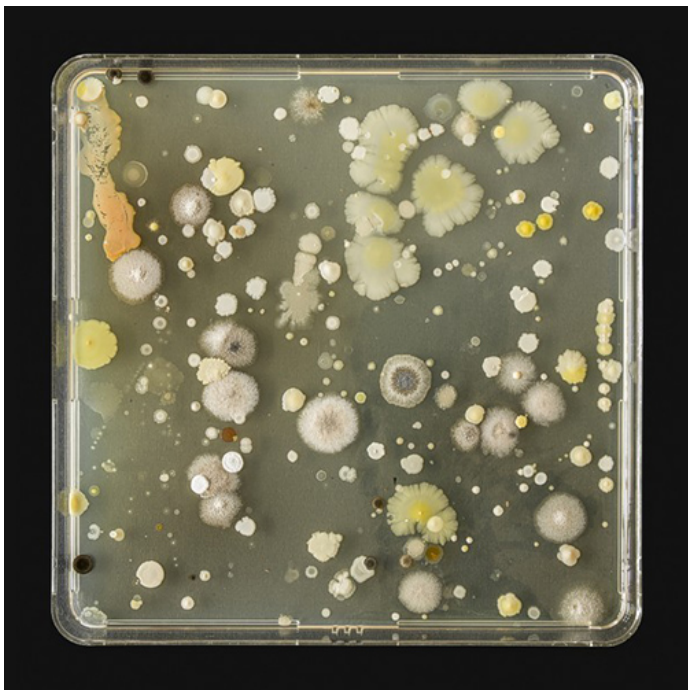
September 28, 2016

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If ever there was a time for citizens and visitors alike to get a handle on the trajectory, breadth, and maybe even defining characteristics of the Toronto art scene, then this fall could just be the moment. The simultaneous exhibiting of *Form Follow Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto* at the **Art Museum at the University of Toronto** and *Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989* at the Art Gallery of Ontario indicates a pressing need to trace and reflect on the history of creative practices emerging from this place. Perhaps it is due to an uncertainty of identity that permeates the present's rapidly changing economic/architectural/demographic/cultural landscape. Perhaps it comes from a generation of artists and curators reaching an advanced enough age that they recognize their emerging years are now part of the historical past? Or perhaps it's because there is a body of artists and curators who never felt part of the history that was written in the first place, so they look for other stories that include them and mean something to them?

Arthur Lismer, *Undergrowth*, 1946, oil on aluminum

Luis Jacob, the curator of the Art Museum's third attempt this year at distilling Toronto's relationship to art in a jam packed group exhibition, understands that the past as remembered isn't singular and unchanging but threaded with various histories, both official and secret, that evolve as generations change. The rewards of his curation are rooted in the way he generates a bounty of connections, influential links, and serendipitous sympathies from a surprising range of sources. From landholding maps when the city was first established through historical works by familiar names (**Lauren Harris**, **Arthur Lismer**) as well as some less so (**Paraskeva Clark**, **Christiane Pflug**), he moves on to long unseen works from the eighties and nineties and then ends up in a variety of places throughout the present. As you move through the exhibition, at each turn there is a possible epiphany that links the usual suspects (**General Idea**, **Carol Condé & Karl Beveridge**) with some unlikely additions (**Charles Pachter**, **Napo B**) and some new faces (**Kwan Tse**'s short animation is a particular delight). The most illuminating and delightful aspect of Jacob's exhibition is this avoidance of any adherence to fashion or conventional reading of art history. In managing this, he allows for interactions that are greater than the sum of their parts. One such example is his slam-dunk placement of **Carlo Cesta**'s *Reserved Parking Set* sculpture in the middle of a room hung with **Robert Houle**'s four-part *Premises for Self-Rule*. It's one of those moments when you hear a voice in your head exclaim, "Yes!"



Jon Sasaki, *Microbes Swabbed from a Palette Used by A.J. Casson*, 2012, digital print

If there is one downside to such an in-depth and expansive exploration of the hometown spirit, it is that the theme holds the work down to a localized reading. Visitors should allow themselves the experience of finding in such original combinations new and potentially non-Torontonian readings. The small room off the main entrance to the gallery's University College space provides a condensed opportunity to do just that. **Jon Sasaki's** petri dishes of Group of Seven generated bacterial culture rubs up against, on the one side, **David Armstrong Six's** gooey-footed urban night walk and, on the other, the **Toronto Ink Company's** found pigments. **Bonnie Devine's** deer rawhide drawing adds a final piece to a puzzle concerned with the organic as both medium and metaphor for creation.

I ran into Jacob just as he finished up touring a student group through the show and we joked that an hour and a half was just enough to scratch the surface of what could be said about the exhibition. It took him three years to put together, but there's far more than that at work here, and impact of what it proposes about the past and present of Toronto will be felt for years to come.

The Art Museum: <http://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/>

Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto continues until December 10.

Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog. You can follow his quickie reviews and art news announcements on Twitter [@TerenceDick](https://twitter.com/TerenceDick).

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