

FORM FOLLOWS FICTION: ART AND ARTISTS IN TORONTO

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17
Oct
2016

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TEXT: Alyssa Lagana

Over the last couple of years, we Torontonians have become quite proud of our city as it gained recognition as a young and bustling multicultural mecca. We've become less self-deprecating and cynical and have embraced the *cool* Drake has graciously showered us with. It's difficult to walk down the street these days without seeing hoards of people donning **Blue Jays** apparel or the "**Toronto vs. Everybody**" logo. We're all quite happy with this particular vision of Toronto and it's great to be admired around the globe. But even before Drake and the recent success of the Blue Jays (and even before the late Rob Ford smoked a crack pipe), Toronto has been an interesting place to live. Toronto has always been diverse but we've seldom been attendant to stories outside the Anglo-Canadian experience.

The exhibition, **Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto**, curated by artist Luis Jacobs, catalogues the diverse histories and experiences in Toronto over the last five decades. The exhibition examines the ways in which our general idea of Toronto was constructed; it examines our city's culture from the point of view of those who helped establish it. **Form Follows Fiction**, on view now at **Art Museum** at the University of Toronto, will run until December 10th. If you've ever been curious about how Toronto has blossomed into **'the 6'**, this exhibition is worth checking out.



(<http://i0.wp.com/novellamag.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/lifestyles1.jpg>)

Keesic Douglas, Lifestyles, 2007, Chromogenic print

The title, ***Form Follows Fiction***, is a play on the dictum of modernist architecture, “form follows function.” The *fiction* that replaces *form* alludes to the idea that culture both reflects and creates reality, a sentiment that goes against the modernist ideas of grand narratives and universalism. Given the title and the theme, it is no wonder that the overall focus of the exhibition is didactical and political in nature. Before your visit, make sure you have plenty of time to spend at the museum; the exhibition includes the works of 86 artists, and it is exactly as overwhelming as it sounds. However, the extensive collection is precisely what makes this exhibition fascinating and satisfying.

Overall, ***Form Follows Fiction*** emphasizes four gestures in its selection of artworks: **mapping, modeling, performing, and congregating**. The artworks that reflect the gesture of mapping provide some of the strongest context for this exhibition. Through the expression of mapping, the viewer gets a sense of how sacred indigenous land was taken, transformed, and mapped into a utilitarian rectangle at the nascence of the metropolis. There is an interesting contrast between visual representations of Toronto before — as seen in some of the early plans for the city and artworks containing life in its area at the time — and after the grid plan was implemented. Through the emphasis on mapping, the viewer is made aware of its indigenous population, their land and its geography that predate Toronto.



(<http://i2.wp.com/novellamag.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Miss-Canadiana.jpg>)

Miss Canadiana Heritage and Culture Walking Tour: The hidden Black history of the Grange

Some of the most intriguing artworks in the exhibition are in video form and they allude to the gesture of performance. The video documentation of Camille Turner's ***Miss Canadiana Heritage and Culture Walking Tour: the Hidden Black History of the Grange (2012)*** performance is an important piece to watch. Through her portrayal of Miss Canadiana, Turner exposes the hypocrisy and absurdity behind the general perception of Canadian identity, which continues to be attached to whiteness and European settlers. Turner's performance also reveals particular histories (specifically pertaining to the black diaspora in Toronto) that have been hidden or erased by exploring the sites in which they took place. The inclusion of Turner's performance as Miss Canadiana in ***Form Follows Fiction*** is important as it demonstrates how narratives are not only invented but also omitted or erased altogether in Toronto's history.

The exhibition features works by renowned Canadian artists, such as **Suzy Lake, Kent Monkman, Michael Snow, and Keesic Douglas** to name a few. However, the most fascinating part of it is the dialogue between the artworks: though they come from similar contexts, they respond differently to those contexts. The viewer gets a sense of interconnectivity within the city, which makes one feel less isolated and anonymous in a city where most of us are used to enjoying our two foot radius of personal space and would rather text strangers than run into an acquaintance on the street.

Overall, ***Form Follows Fiction*** offers a paradoxical and resonant experience. Many of the artworks almost provide comfort and validation: any Torontonian will feel some level of warmth from the recognition and familiarity of the places and events represented in the exhibition. On the other hand, the exhibition also functions as a reminder that some historical and current aspects of Toronto are kept in the periphery. ***Form Follows Fiction*** challenges the perpetuated utopian image of Toronto as a place where people of all background can hold hands under a big cliché rainbow. This exhibition reminds us of Toronto's complexities; it helps us Torontonians to become aware of other perspectives, stories, ways of being in the city; it recognizes that everyone has and will continue to experience Toronto differently. During this time of unbridled Toronto pride, ***Form Follows Fiction*** is one of the more important exhibitions to visit this fall.



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