

art

GROUP SHOW

For 28 Days only

Top artists fuel Black History show **By FRAN SCHECHTER**

28 DAYS: REIMAGINING BLACK HISTORY MONTH at Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (7 Hart House Circle, 416-978-8398), to February 19; and Georgia Scherman Projects (133 Tecumseth, 416-554-4112), to February 29. Rating: **NNNN**

EVERY FEBRUARY, WE WONDER WHETHER Black History Month is a relevant or marginalizing force. Curators **Sally Frater** and **Pamela Edmonds** join the debate with their exhibition **28 Days**, which shows that artists of African descent still have plenty to say about black history, and still deserve a lot more recognition than they're getting.

The two-gallery exhibit brings together 18 artists from countries that observe the month: Canada, the U.S. and Britain (where it's in October). Perhaps because they're critiquing a

culture in which blacks are often invisible or misrepresented, many work with some form of collage, layering photographs, altering historical images, adding to painted surfaces or mixing video footage.

At Barnicke, **Carrie Mae Weems**, showing blurry photos of black women singers in *Slow Fade To Black*, seems to melt these icons together into a memory of pure vocal emotion. **Sonia Boyce's** video *Crop Over* juxtaposes street carnivals, cane fields and plantation houses in Barbados with a mas-costumed black man on stilts who sombrely wanders the gardens of a British estate.

In **Wangechi Mutu's** *Black Thrones*, a trio of black-plastic-and-feather-wrapped kitchen chairs, also on stilts, have a strong presence. **Dana Inkster** uses video drama to put a queer spin on the story of the destruction of



Sonia Boyce's video probes themes of carnival, slavery and British privilege.

Halifax's Africville; a video documents Miss Canadiana's (the beauty queen/goodwill ambassador alter ego of **Camille Turner**) spirited black history tour of the Grange neighbourhood.

At Georgia Scherman, highlights include a photo riffing on retro representations of black women by **Mikaelene Thomas**, also known for sequined collages on the same subject; **Nari Ward's** hair- and cowrie-enhanced painting of the World Bank logo; **Radcliffe Bailey's** glittering

Black Ark, a magical sailing vessel to counter the slave ship; and **Godfried Donkor's** solemn Jamestown Masquerade video of Caribbean dancers appropriating a European performance style.

It's impossible to touch on everything in this big show. Let's hope we get a chance to see more by Weems and Boyce, major figures in their native U.S. and UK, and other artists of **28 Days**, outside Black History Month. © art@nowtoronto.com

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