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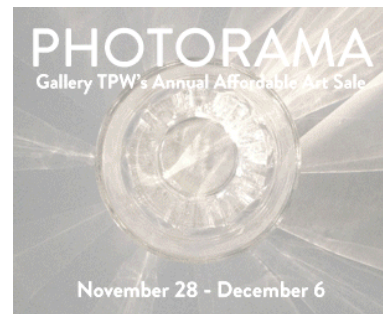
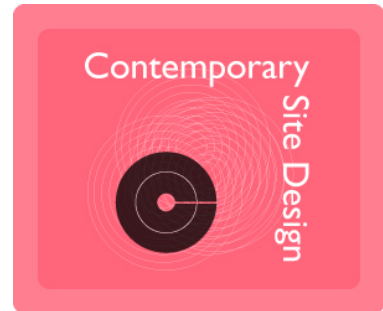
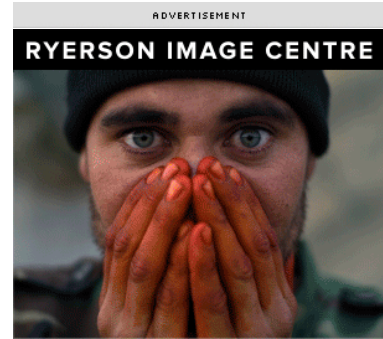
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TORONTO
TERENCE DICK
WENDY COBURN AT THE JUSTINA M. BARNICKE GALLERY | CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN
AT G GALLERY
December 02, 2014

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If there were an award for most disheartening movie of 2014, Wendy Coburn's short experimental documentary Slut Nation: Anatomy of a Protest, now screening at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, would be at the top of my list. Which is not to say it's not worth seeing. Far from it. This film should be required viewing for everyone in Toronto and anyone in the world who is concerned about the role of the police and whose interests they serve (which, in the wake of Ferguson, should be just about everyone in the world). With only two weeks left before the exhibition closes, I'm surprised there hasn't been more media attention to Coburn's revelations, particularly since media manipulation is what she, in part, documents. Our leading news sources got punked, but I'm only hearing about it through word of mouth, running into curators in the galleries or filmmakers at dinner parties, everyone saying this is a film to be seen.



Wendy Coburn, Anatomy of a Protest

The backstory is familiar. The protest being anatomized is the first Slutwalk in 2011. The now-international phenomenon was sparked by a comment made by a police officer at a York University safety and security panel. His suggestion that women could avoid sexual assault by not dressing like sluts was the catalyst for a public demonstration against victim-blaming. In videotaping the event, Coburn discovered a counter-narrative at work in a disturbing bit of theatre perpetrated by certain participants in the march. She later found that much of the media coverage focused on these clownish and exuberant figures whose messaging seemed convoluted or, at least, distracting compared to the majority of the marchers. Now, sad as it may seem, it shouldn't be surprising to anyone that there would be uncover cops amongst the crowd at any political gathering. However, by following the strangers in her play (and later following up with research on social media and footage from previous protests like the G20 demos in 2010), Coburn discovered that they were in fact members of the Toronto Police Service who were not only recording the event and its participants, but were actively skewing the message and, in fact, ridiculing it, not simply to the crowd but to the world at large through their prominence in the news. Given that one of their own was, in a sense, the target of this protest, could this be their retaliation? If so, who organized it? And, in light of the violence that ensued at the G20, could the police be instigating their own "performance events" by setting up situations and perhaps even playing them out to justify their own presence? The part of the movie focused on the conveniently abandoned police cars that were inevitably torched could be called "Manufacturing a Riot." The lesson is, and again it's depressingly unsurprising in light of the past couple weeks, that the police protect their own. We the people are in the end abandoned as well.

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Carolee Schneemann, *Fuses*, 1965, 16mm film

A different kind of documentary exhibition is on display at **G Gallery** in *Dear Carolee: Carolee Schneemann in Letters*. The ground breaking performance artist, filmmaker, visual artist, etc. is presented through a couple examples of her work (some films are shown on monitors), but is largely seen through her correspondence with collaborators (like the composer James Tenney) and colleagues. For artists of the present, this kind of ephemera is now in the hands of Mark Zuckerberg, but back then it was scurried away into forgotten drawers or stuffed in filing cabinets gathering dust in basements by correspondents clever or prescient or egotistical enough to think they'd be important one day. And just by coincidence they are, but I'm not sure what value these letters detailing the lives and passings of cats, struggles with affording film gear, and the neverending story of downsized art departments (including a rejection letter from OCA to Stan Brakhage!) has other than to remind us that things today aren't much different.

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery: <http://www.jmbgallery.ca/exhibitions.html>

Wendy Coburn: Anatomy of a Protest continues until December 19.

G Gallery: <http://ggalleryprojects.ca/>

Dear Carolee: Carolee Schneemann in Letters continues until January 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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