



- NEWS
- LIFESTYLE
- FOOD & DRINK
- MUSIC
- MOVIES
- STAGE
- ART & BOOKS
- LISTINGS
- CLASSIFIEDS

HOME / ART & BOOKS / ART / SLUT NATION: ANATOMY OF A PROTEST

# SLUT NATION: ANATOMY OF A PROTEST

Wendy Coburn video probes police ruse

BY **FRAN SCHECHTER** DECEMBER 10, 2014 9:04 AM

Like 14 8

**WENDY COBURN** at Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (7 Hart House), to December 19.  
416-978-8398. Rating: **NNNNN**

Having read that some women of colour accused the Slutwalks of being expressions of white privilege, I was worried that OCAD prof Wendy Coburn's video might be an uncritical glorification of the marches, which spread worldwide in 2011 after Toronto Constable Michael Sanguinetti advised women at York University that they should "avoid dressing like sluts" if they don't want to be raped.

Though Slut Nation: Anatomy Of A Protest doesn't touch on women of colour's critiques, the half-hour video doc is an important and timely examination of how police were able to undermine the demonstrators' message.



Wendy Coburn's video *Anatomy Of A Protest* catches police in the act of sabotaging the political action.

Coburn focuses on colourfully costumed male and female "protesters" calling themselves the Big Sluts After-Party, carrying ambiguous placards reading "Will you marry me?" or "I'm with slut" and cavorting on a van conveniently parked right in front of police headquarters. When Coburn asks them point-blank if they're police, they mysteriously disappear.

They and two young women who dance provocatively, one carrying a sign reading "Sluts say yes," grab more media attention than the serious marchers, with their "Don't tell us how to dress, tell men not to rape" signs. The dancers tell an interviewer the walk is a celebration of female sexuality, omitting any mention of rape.

Coburn doesn't try to present an open-and-shut case, but I'm convinced by her tie-in of the burning police cars that dominated coverage of the Toronto G20 protests. In 2010, I saw officers under no threat abandoning these vehicles on Queen West to set up this police-generated street theatre.

She shows how easy it is to hijack the political narrative with distracting antics, especially in a city that lacks a vibrant protest culture.

I wonder, what if installation artists or yarn bombers had been mobilized to transform those police cars, or street theatre performers or puppeteers had dramatized the slut-blaming abuser? Couldn't artists help up the ante to get the message across?

[art@nowtoronto.com](mailto:art@nowtoronto.com)

Tags [Wendy Coburn](#), [Justina M. Barnicke Gallery](#)