

Form Follows Fiction:
Art and Artists in Toronto
Sep 6–Dec 10, 2016

Art
Museum

Works by

Kim Adams, David Anderson, Napo B, Carl Beam, Adrian Blackwell, Deanna Bowen, Peter Bowyer, David Buchan, Michael Buckland, Colin Campbell, James Carl, Ian Carr-Harris, Carlo Cesta, Paraskeva Clark, Wendy Coburn, John Collins, Carole Conde & Karl Beveridge, Greg Curnoe, Tom Dean, Bonnie Devine, Sarindar Dhaliwal, Keesic Douglas, Sameer Farooq and Mirjam Linschooten, Robert Gagen, General Idea, Janice Gurney, Frederick Hagan, Lawren Harris, Isobel Harry, Bobs Cogill Haworth, Karen Henderson, Robert Houle, Yvonne McKague Housser, John G. Howard, Oliver Husain, Rae Johnson, G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce, Nobuo Kubota, Will Kwan, Suzy Lake, Michel Lambeth, Gordon Lebrecht, Arthur Lismer, Deirdre Logue and Allyson Mitchell, Peter MacCallum, Annie MacDonell, Arnaud Maggs, John Marriott, Sandra Meigs, Olia Mishchenko, Kent Monkman, Bridget Moser, Charlie Murray and Thom Van der Zaag, Shelley Niro, Daniel Olson, Charles Pachter, Roula Partheniou, Christiane Pflug, Ed Pien, Jaan Poldas, Public Studio, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, Steve Reinke, Arthur Renwick, Mitch Robertson, Jon Sasaki, David Armstrong Six, Michael Snow, Lisa Steele, Tess Boudreau Taconis, Ho Tam, Jeff Thomas, Joanne Tod, The Toronto Ink Company, Harold Town, Kwan Tse, Camille Turner, Renée van Halm, Frederick Varley, Lorne Wagman, Joyce Wieland, Robert Wiens, Shirley Wiitasalo, and Tony Wilson.

Curated by Luis Jacob



SEX-ROTTEN-SEXUAL IN-SUBTLE-TOES



.....autobiographical work done
in 1980 to validate my presence
and to make sure that the work
always remains explicitly auto-
biographical in nature, even if I
have to state it in this way.
As far as I'm concerned I'm the
artist (among other things) so this
is my work. **THIS IS MY WORK!!**

I am making time then my work (if it serves no
other function to anyone else) and if I do this
I will say tomorrow, "I was around yesterday, and
here's the fucking proof", "here's yours?" "bubble, bubble,
voicing, etc."

Carl Beorn 1980 TORONTO

Cover: Carl Beam, *Self-Portrait in My Christian Dior Bathing-Suit*, 1980. Watercolour on paper, 106 x 69 cm. Collection of Elizabeth McLuhan and Don Myers. Photo by Yuula Benivolski. Courtesy of Elizabeth McLuhan, Don Myers, and the Estate of Carl Beam.

Right: Gordon Lebrecht, *Get Hold of This Space*, 1974/2010. Latex paint and vinyl lettering, dimensions variable. Photo by Luis Jacob.

Form Follows Fiction:
Art and Artists in Toronto

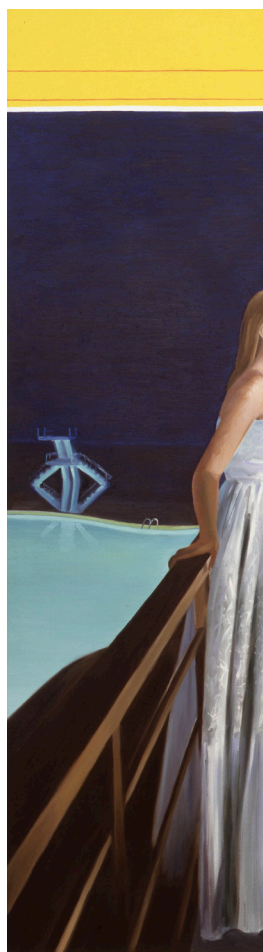


How do artists in
Toronto visualize
their sense of place?
Are there particular
made-in-Toronto
ways of thinking
about the city?



Roula Partheniou,
Doppelkopf, 2013. Acrylic
on wood and MDF, altered
found objects, double-sided
mirror, 168 x 295 x 71 cm.
Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid.
Courtesy of MKG127.

Joanne Tod, *The Magic
of Sao Paulo*, 1985. Oil on
canvas, 213.4 x 170.18 cm.
Collection of Mrs. Pamela
Hallisey. Courtesy of the
artist.



Curated by artist Luis Jacob, *Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto* concentrates on a period of more than 50 years to consider the ways in which artists visualize Toronto. Presenting a thematic clustering of works by 86 artists, the exhibition is premised on the tendency of artists in this city to favour performative and allegorical procedures to articulate their sense of place. Four gestures—mapping, modelling, performing, and congregating—serve as guideposts to a diverse array of artistic practices. The exhibition is a

constellation of symbolic forms, or memes, that repeatedly appear in the work of artists of different generations. It presents a panorama of the blueprints that artists have drafted over many decades to give form to life in one of North America's largest cities.

The exhibition signals the Art Museum's continued, energetic engagement with art and artists in Toronto, to foster research and histories concerning sense of place.



Keesic Douglas, *Lifestyles #4*, 2007. Colour photograph 76.2 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto



Peter MacCallum,
*Demolition Site, North
West Corner of King and
Bathurst Streets, January
1982*, 1982. Gelatin silver
print, 22.9 x 29.2 cm.
Courtesy of the artist and
Diaz Contemporary.

“Form follows fiction” is a distortion of the familiar dictum of Modernist architecture: form follows function. According to this reformulation, art is not a mirror held up to the world. Rather, the world’s form is prefigured by its articulation in artistic practice.

The exhibition, *Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto*, begins with panoramic outlooks that map a context for “Toronto” as place. Robert Houle’s monumental work, *Premises for Self-Rule* (1994), gives visual form to four legislative acts: 1) the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that established the

colonial administration of North American territories relinquished by France to Britain following the Seven Years’ War, and that recognized all other land as Aboriginal territory unless ceded by treaty to the Crown; 2) the British North America Act of 1867, passed by the British Parliament to create the Dominion of Canada; 3) the Indian Act of 1876, a Canadian federal law governing in matters pertaining to Indian status (designation of Aboriginal identity), Indian bands (governing structures imposed on Aboriginal communities), and Indian reserves (land base of Aboriginal peoples); and 4) the Constitution Act of 1982 that patriated the Canadian Constitution and affirmed Aboriginal rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This legislative framework prescribes the relational landscape of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

From here, the exhibition surveys Toronto at overlapping levels: the global, the local, the neighbourhood, the home, and the body. Carole Conde & Karl Beveridge’s photographic series, *Work in Progress* (1998–2006), charts the evolution of women’s domestic labour in Canada within broader patterns of empire, mass migration, social movements, and globalization. Camille Turner’s performance, *Miss Canadiana’s Heritage and Walking Tour: A Hidden History of the Grange* (2011), explores the histories of Black communities in the Grange neighbourhood, named for its connection to the Grange House—a meeting-place during the 19th century for the city’s ruling Family Compact, and the site of Toronto’s first art museum.

Camille Turner, *Miss Canadiana's Heritage and Culture Walking Tour: the hidden Black history of the Grange*, 2012. Documentation of a performance during Jane's Walk. Photo by Michele Pearson Clarke. Courtesy of the artist.



Lisa Steele's video, *Birthday Suit—with scars and defects* (1974), chronicles the story of every scar on the artist's body.

The exhibition continues with works that model an experience of place that is of particular significance to art in Toronto. The Toronto Purchase of 1787 provides the archetype, or interpretive key, that elucidates decades of artistic representations portraying “place” as a vacant lot. This historical document codifies an agreement conducted between the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation and the British Crown, which established the colonial territory that eventually became the city of Toronto. The British surveyor who documented the agreement drew a pristine rectangle to represent the land—neglecting the existing natural and social features of the terrain, and treating the land as signifying nothing but an empty page waiting to be inscribed at will.

This figure of the vacant lot reappears in the work of Toronto artists across the decades. In Gordon Lebrecht's wall painting, *Get Hold of This Space* (1974), the artwork takes the form of an allotment on the gallery walls. Jeff Thomas' photographic series, *Seize the Space* (2001–02), documents the artist's intervention at the vacated site of the “Indian Scout” statue at the Champlain monument in Ottawa. Carlo Cesta's sculpture, *Reserved Parking* (2010), adopts the vernacular use of household objects to reserve a parking space, and repurposes that practice to claim space for popular forms of culture within the art gallery.

The blankness of the vacant lot—uninhabited, like the New World of the colonial imagination—serves both as placeholder for experiences yet to be accounted for, and as erasure of things ignored, repressed or misrecognized. This dual notion of space as both construction site and site of demolition—suited to the image of Toronto as neo-liberal city of real estate speculation—is emblematically captured in Peter MacCallum's documentary photographs, such as *Demolition Site, North West Corner of King and Bathurst Streets, January 1982*.

Artists in Toronto characteristically adopt performative and highly mediated strategies to articulate their sense of place and identity. The exhibition proposes a broad definition of “mediation” as an act of mirroring or splitting enacted for the sake of opening a fictive space of theatricality.

Fred Hagan's *Canadian Painting* (1948) is a composition formally folded in two, with each half subdivided again in two. A reflection of the artist's face on a shard of broken mirror is paired with a view of the unfinished painting on an easel in the studio; a mass-media reproduction of a canonical work by Tom Thomson is coupled with the *mise en abyme* appearance of a blank canvas anticipating the artistic act. This composition creates a network of reciprocities and correspondences that is complex to the point of vertigo.

Acts of splitting, imprinting, mirroring, and doubling are also discernible in other works in the exhibition. In Christiane Pflug's



Frederick Hagan, *Canadian Painting*, 1948. Oil on canvas on hardboard, 50.7 x 61 cm. Framed: 71.1 x 81.3 x 6.4 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario. Gift of the Artist's Family, 1998. 98/3. © Estate of Frederick Hagan.

painting, *Interior at Night* (1965), two dolls—surrogates, perhaps, for the artist in her studio and for the viewer in the gallery—look through a transparent window that becomes an opaque and reflective mirror. Michael Snow's photowork, *Authorization* (1969), associates the act of mirroring and obscuring with the effort of artistic self-authorization. In Roula Partheniou's installation, *Doppelkopf* (2013), two collections of facsimile versions of office supplies are displayed in a vitrine that is divided in two, so that each side supplements what is correspondingly eclipsed in the other.

Mediation attests to the dual, manifold, fractal, and reversible nature of things. Several works in the exhibition mobilize the performative dimension of self-identity that is activated by the split-reality generated in acts of mediation. Suzy Lake's photowork, *A Genuine Simulation of...* (1973–74), depicts the artist applying make-up both to cover and mimic her "natural" complexion. In Carl Beam's watercolour, *Self-Portrait in My Christian Dior Bathing-Suit* (1980), the artist dons an item of designer bathing-wear that alludes to globally marketed French *haute couture* and to Christian missionary practice in North America. David Buchan's photo series, *My Summer Vocation* (1982), charts the self-representational options available to male identities, and contextualizes them in terms of queer cultural conventions and the fabric of the city. In these works, performative self-portraiture serves as tool for negotiating gender roles, and the complex and protean relations between normative and queer desires,

colonizing and de-colonizing dispositions—and, by extension, "central" and "peripheral" forms of culture.

The exhibition concludes with views of Toronto as a meeting place. Three metaphors define three interrelated visions of "place" as social scene: the artist-bar, the tangled garden, and the family tree.

The Cameron House on Queen Street West—with its Tom Dean mural famously proclaiming, "This is Paradise"—is the prototype of the artist-bar as place of congregation for the arts community. The artist-bar appears in the exhibition in various guises—alternately as a realm of togetherness, alienation, and confounding in-betweenness—in Sandra Meigs' series of drawings, *Purgatorio, A Drinkingbout* (1981), as well as in paintings like Tony Wilson's *The Art Bar* (1984) and Rae Johnson's *Night Games at the Paradise* (1984). Colin Campbell's *Bad Girls* (1980), a serial video produced for weekend screenings in the Cabana Room, at the Spadina Hotel on King Street West, depicts the artist-bar as an aspirational space for self-invention.

The city, as defined by its skyscraping corporate headquarters, high-rise condominiums, and iconic CN Tower, finds a counterpoint in its self-image as a city of neighbourhoods and ravines. This double image is lucidly captured in Yvonne McKague Housser's painting, *Summer Night, Toronto* (1949), with its residential backyards nestled under a canopy of trees, and set against a backdrop of the city's office towers.

Sarindar Dhaliwal, *Punjabi Sheets #2: Family Tree*, 1989. Pigment, slate, coconut shells, dimensions variable. Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston. Purchased, Chancellor Richardson Memorial Fund and Canada Council Acquisition Assistance Fund. Courtesy of the artist.



Competing visions of Toronto's urban and cultural context are made perceptible by juxtapositions of works in the exhibition. On the one hand, the artwork for Martha and the Muffins' music album, *This Is the Ice Age* (1981), features the cool-white marble of a new corporate skyscraper looming over the bricks-and-mortar textures of an older low-rise building. On the other hand, a poster for Drake's chart-topping album, *Views* (2016), depicts the artist sitting pensive and alone, overlooking the city of his birth from the vantage of the CN Tower, and his position as an internationally famous rapper. In a similar vein, the city's cultural ecosystem, as defined by reach-for-the-top competitiveness, in General Idea's 1971 *Miss General Idea Poster* (1971), encounters its symbiotic counter-image in Charlie Murray and Thom Van der Zaag's sprawling collaborative project, *Underground Space Station* (2008–ongoing), permanently installed in Alliston, Ontario. In these works, the tangled garden and its views-from-below function as “other” to the reciprocal image of the arts scene as a pyramidal pedestal for solitary ascendancy.

The allegory of the family tree is an enduring strategy in portraying Toronto as a meeting place. David Buchan's project, *Lamonte Del Monte's Family Tree* (1979), was described in the press release for its inaugural exhibition as a family tree “rife with incest, mixed marriage, bigamy, adoptions, divorce and illegitimate offspring.” The work thus proposes a family, or intentional community, defined by the aberrant kinship of its

members. Sarindar Dhaliwal's installation, *Punjabi Series #2: Family Tree* (1989), aligns the tracing of family-relations to the experience of immigration and cross-cultural translation. The work thereby presents a lesson in a “second language,” possibly offered to non-Punjabis as a precondition for the acquisition of new perceptual resources.

Mapping, modelling, performing, and congregating. These reference-points allow for the condensation and crystallization of associative resonances generated by the artworks on view in the exhibition.

According to the German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, symbolic forms such as myth, language, and art “are not imitations, but *organs* of reality.” Rather than simply imitating or representing a reality that precedes them, symbolic forms “produce and posit a world of their own.” The exhibition *Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto* suggests that Toronto is a verb, not a noun. “Toronto” is a series of acts performed by artists to ground forms of life, defined as much by location as by the anticipatory maps, models, fictions, and scenarios that their work strives both to realize and to destabilize.

Luis Jacob
Guest Curator



Napo B, *Cameron House Ten-Ants*, 1984. Found plywood, newspapers, coat-hangers, found resin and mat, spray paint, found penny washers, 30 x 61 x 46 cm. Photo by Napo B.

Acknowledgements

The exhibition *Form Follows Fiction* is part of a long-standing conversation with Luis Jacob, whose passionate interest in Toronto's arts scene is as activist as it is legendary. Starting out as an artist in Toronto in the late 1990s, his contributions include a host of insightful writings, lectures, publishing projects, and invaluable exhibitions. *Form Follows Fiction* is his most ambitious and wide-ranging curatorial endeavour to-date—a culmination of his astute, insightful reading of the city's artistic pre-occupations and imagistic formations as they span over a half century. The exhibition follows the first major conference on the subject, *This is Paradise*, which was co-organized by the Art Museum and Luis Jacob.

We are proud to host *Form Follows Fiction*, which underscores our sustained commitment to engaging the local through diverse, contemporary, and worldly perspectives. Greatly indebted to the nimble and passionate staff—especially Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Su-Ying Lee, and Marsya Maharani—the exhibition's realization owes special thanks to all the participating artists. We gratefully acknowledge the many individuals and public institutions for their generous loans of works. Most of all, our collective thanks are due to Luis Jacob, whose wonderful collegiality, perseverance, and generosity have been nothing short of inspiring.

Barbara Fischer
Executive Director/Chief Curator

My sincere thanks to the artists who, at various moments in their lives, have made Toronto their home and place of work, and who continue to contribute to the city's vibrant cultural ecology. Their collective work over the years constitutes a tradition that remains yet to be adequately articulated, and a kind of "whispered art history" that remains yet to be appropriately annotated. I am grateful for their trust, and for the generosity of the numerous private and public lenders who are the custodians of their work. I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to Barbara Fischer for her ongoing commitment to artists in Toronto and to developing a critical discourse around their artistic practice. I am indebted to Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Su-Ying Lee, Marsya Maharani, and Christopher Régimbal for their enthusiastic care for all aspects of mounting this ambitious exhibition. I also acknowledge the professionalism of the entire team of the Art Museum at the University of Toronto, as well as the installation crew without whose work this project could not have happened.

Luis Jacob
Guest Curator

Opening Event

Outdoor Reception

Wednesday, September 21, 6pm

Please join us in the Hart House courtyard to celebrate the exhibition's artists in attendance.

Public Programs

The 20th Janet E. Hutchison Lecture: Researching Contemporary Indigenous Art in Public by Richard Hill

Monday, September 19, 4:30pm

Room 140, University College

ARTbus

Sunday, September 25, 12pm

Meet at the University of Toronto Art Centre. Tour continues to the Art Gallery of Mississauga and Oakville Galleries. To register, visit oakvillegalleries.com.

Curator's tour with Luis Jacob

Wednesday, October 5, 6pm

Meet at the University of Toronto Art Centre

Early Closure

Please note that the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery section of this exhibition will close on November 5, 2016.

Collateral Programming

The Toronto Project: Tributes and Tributaries

September 28, 2016 – April 2, 2017

Art Gallery of Ontario

A landmark exhibition co-curated by Andrew Hunter, Curator of Canadian Art, and Wanda Nanibush, Curator of Indigenous Art.

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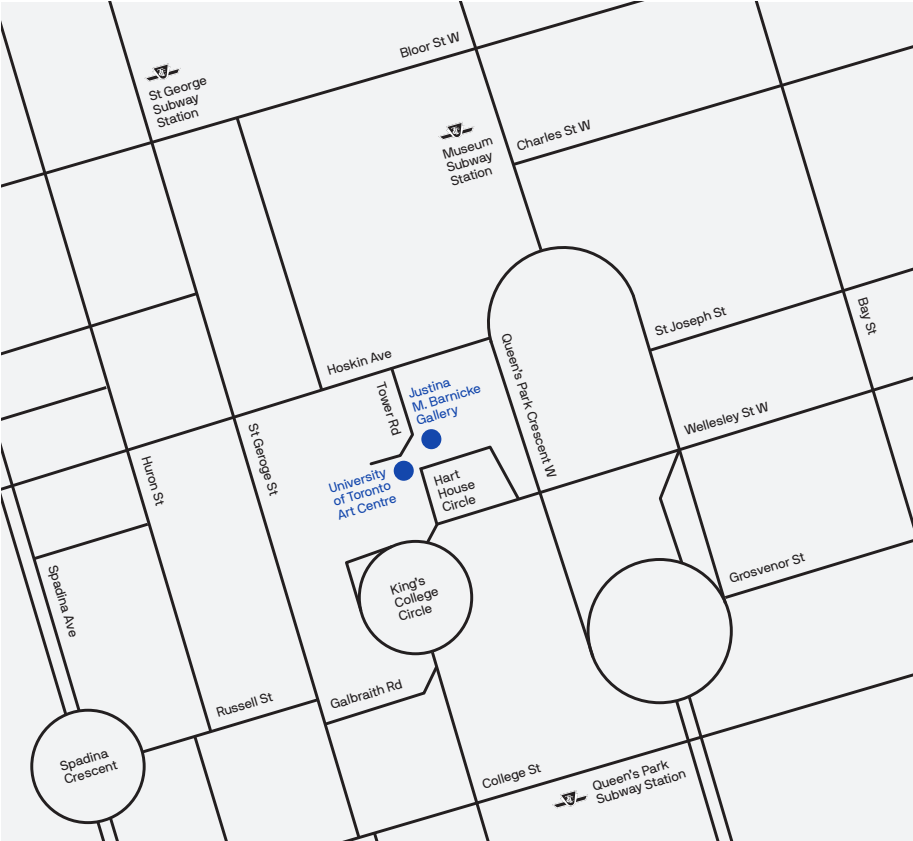
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Tuesday	Noon–5:00 PM
Wednesday	Noon–8:00 PM
Thursday	Noon–5:00 PM
Friday	Noon–5:00 PM
Saturday	Noon–5:00 PM
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

Closed on statutory holidays. Class tours and group bookings by appointment.
Admission is FREE.

 The Galleries are wheelchair accessible.



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