

Figures of Sleep

Jan 17–Mar 3, 2018

Art
Museum

Works by

Francis Alÿs, Rebecca Belmore,
Louise Bourgeois, Chris Burden,
Sophie Calle, Chris Curreri, Peter Fischli
and David Weiss, Rodney Graham,
Tehching Hsieh, On Kawara, Hassan Khan,
Liz Magor, Ron Mueck, Bruce Nauman,
Gabriel Orozco, Jasmeen Patheja,
Jon Sasaki, Mladen Stilinoić

Curated by Sarah Robayo Sheridan

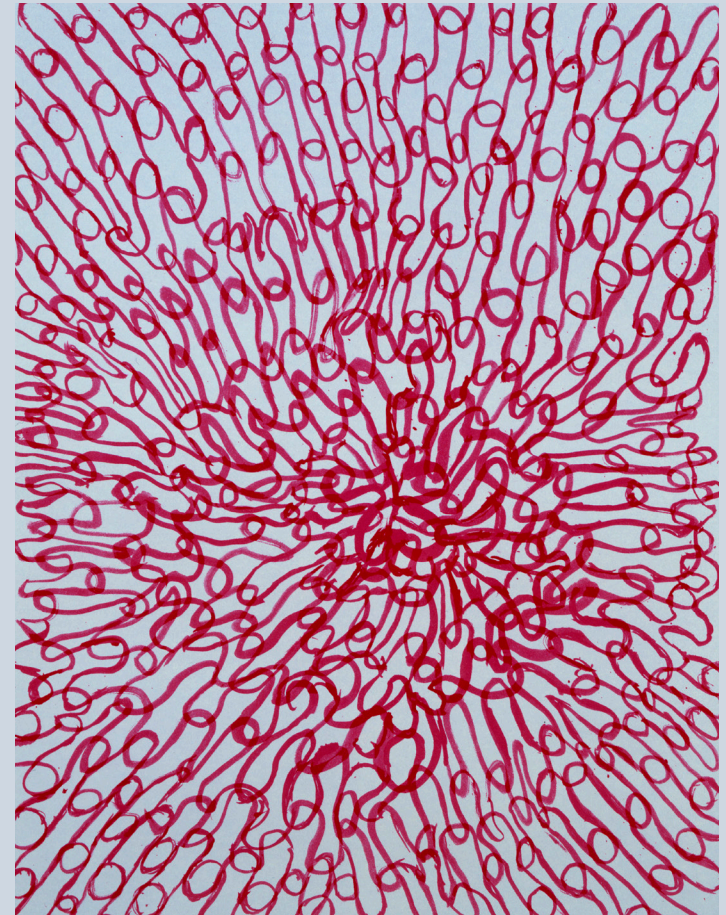


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Figures of Sleep

Cover: Tehching Hsieh,
One Year Performance,
1980-1981. Performance.
Courtesy of the artist and
Sean Kelly Gallery.

Right: Louise Bourgeois,
Insomnia, 1995-1996.
Lithograph on paper, 63.5 x
49.5 cm. Collection of The
Easton Foundation.



Is sleep in crisis?

Figures of Sleep is a major international exhibition that considers the cultural anxieties manifest in the popular and critical imagination around the collapsing biological function of sleep under economic, social and

technological transformation. Is sleep in crisis? Exceedingly, artists have adopted the motif of sleep as a cipher for material, aesthetic, existential and political considerations of these urgent cultural concerns.



Rodney Graham, *Halcion Sleep* (detail), 1994. Textile and single-channel video. Collection of Vancouver Art Gallery. Courtesy of the artist.



Liz Magor, *Burrow*, 1999. Polymerized gypsum, fabric, 23 x 78 x 54 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries.



Ron Mueck, *Old Woman In Bed* (detail), 2002. Mixed media, 25.4 x 94 x 53.9 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Copyright Ron Mueck, courtesy of Anthony d'Offay, London.

Figures of Sleep



Gabriel Orozco
Sleeping Leaves (Hojas durmiendo), 1990. Silver dye bleach print, 40.6 x 50.8 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

“And I entered into sleep, which like a second apartment that we have, into which, abandoning our own, we go in order to sleep.”
— Marcel Proust

The classical separation of sleep and wakefulness would have these two spaces bounded by separate conventions, ethics, perceptions, and gravitational rules. Given the particular sleeper, the passageway between these rooms might look like an effortless entry by automatic door, the plunge through an unexpected hatch, or the continuous pacing through an endless hallway.

It is the difficult crossing that is invoked by Louise Bourgeois’s *Insomnia Drawings* (1994-1995) and by writers like E.M. Cioran who professed “I have never been able to write except in the melancholy of insomniac nights.” More recently, anxiety over sleep has transferred from the quandary of the lonely philosopher into the rhetoric of fast capitalism, with a sleep “recession” widely being reported by popular media. Is sleep in crisis? A differential politics of access between subjects emerges, supported by attendant architecture—contrast the luxury of the airline first-class sleep pod to the aggressive landscape design of serrated benches expressly built to reject the weary. At the margins of the protected 9-5 workday, we find the disjointed relationships of night shift labourers, sleep-deprived parents of young children, jet-setters, elective night owls, and eager partygoers.

Few states are as ambiguous as sleep, a scientific enigma that has produced widely different theories—a hangover of an obsolete evolutionary impulse, the foundation of complex brain function, or the seat of dreaming in psychoanalysis. By turns, sleep has been decried as useless, purposeless and surplus, while on the other hand defended as a precious inalienable human right. Lately, it is subject to detailed quantification, with various self-monitoring health apps adding to the inventory of big data mapping human consciousness. Cultural theorist Jonathan Crary argues that sleep, once a former safe haven from commerce and last substantial

hindrance to capitalism, is now increasingly colonized by the imperatives of global markets and military aims. To the list of contemporary preoccupations, the territory of sleep seems to be another natural resource in jeopardy. Speaking to the fraught comingling of humans in the landscape, Liz Magor’s sculpture *Burrow* (1999) features a sleeping bag asphyxiated by a tree stump, a provisional shelter of last resort which is both compelling and disturbing.

Artists have inhabited the paradigm of sleep as rest, as protest, as withdrawal and a radical expression of a will to live. On Kawara’s *I Got Up* (1968-1979) postcards are time-stamped to demarcate the artist’s entry into consciousness as he travelled the globe, place-marking his position by mailing tourist cards to the art world. Lawrence Weiner described that the postcards “step out of the line of history as we know it.”

Some of the most poignant artworks in the exhibition explore the visibility of bodies in the street. Rebecca Belmore’s *Dream Catcher* (2014) pivots on the agency and visibility of a subject occupying sidewalk space while Tehching Hsieh’s *Outdoor Piece* (1981-1982) charts the artist’s self-imposed directive to spend a year living and sleeping on the streets of Manhattan, a place he had entered without resident status in 1974. A feat of endurance is also the basis of Jon Sasaki’s *A Rest* (2016), a collaboration with dancer James Phillips that catalyzes the photographic records of depression-era dance marathon hopefuls

slumped over their dance partners for support. In the solo performance, removing the secondary body as a buttress, the performer succumbs under the strain of the contrived poses.

Collective sleep actions have served the aims of protest, most famously with John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s *Bed-Ins for Peace*, and by contemporary social movements like the Meet to Sleep campaigns in India organized by Blank Noise that call for women to nap in parks as a means to shift the fear-based relationship with public space into a dialogue about trust. Sophie Calle crosses a divide between private chamber and collective site in her photographic series *Les Dormeurs* by inviting acquaintances to sleep in her bed, transforming it into a convivial site of intensified intimacy. A different disruption in propriety was performed by Chris Burden’s *Bed Piece* (1972) where he lay in a single bed in a gallery for 22 days straight.

Endurance, boredom, counter-resistance, Sisyphean futility—all these themes emerge in the works presented here. If we understand sleep as a type of technology, we might wonder if increasing angst over its demise signals a cultural shift. If McLuhan argued that a new medium “never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them,” then we might ask what new forms will sleep find in the future?

Sarah Robayo Sheridan

Jon Sasaki, *A Rest*, 2016. Choreographed solo performed by James Phillips, 9-10 minutes duration. Courtesy of the artist and Clint Roenisch Gallery. Originally commissioned by the Toronto Dance Theatre.



Opening Events

Reception

Thursday, January 25, 5-7pm
University of Toronto Art Centre

Night of Ideas

To sleep or not to sleep
Thursday, January 25, 7pm-7am
Hart House
An evening of lectures, workshops, performances, screenings and readings presented in partnership with the Cultural Service of the French Embassy in Canada and Hart House as part of global initiative across 50 cities. Night of Ideas will bring together international artists, writers, philosophers, historians, neuroscientists and other restless minds to tackle such wide-ranging subjects as the neuroscience of sleep, the meaning of downtime, the health impact of sleeplessness, the cultural importance of dreaming, and the architecture and politics of sleep.

Public Programs

Art Bus Tour

Sunday, January 21, 11:30am
Meet at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery then bus tour continues to the Art Gallery of Hamilton and Oakville Galleries

Drop-In Tours

Every Friday, 2pm
University of Toronto Art Centre

Curator's Tours

Saturday, February 3, 2pm
Saturday, March 3, 11pm
University of Toronto Art Centre

Extended Hours

On March 3, 2018, Art Museum will be extending public hours from 12pm-12am

For program details visit
artmuseum.utoronto.ca

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Visiting the Art Museum

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
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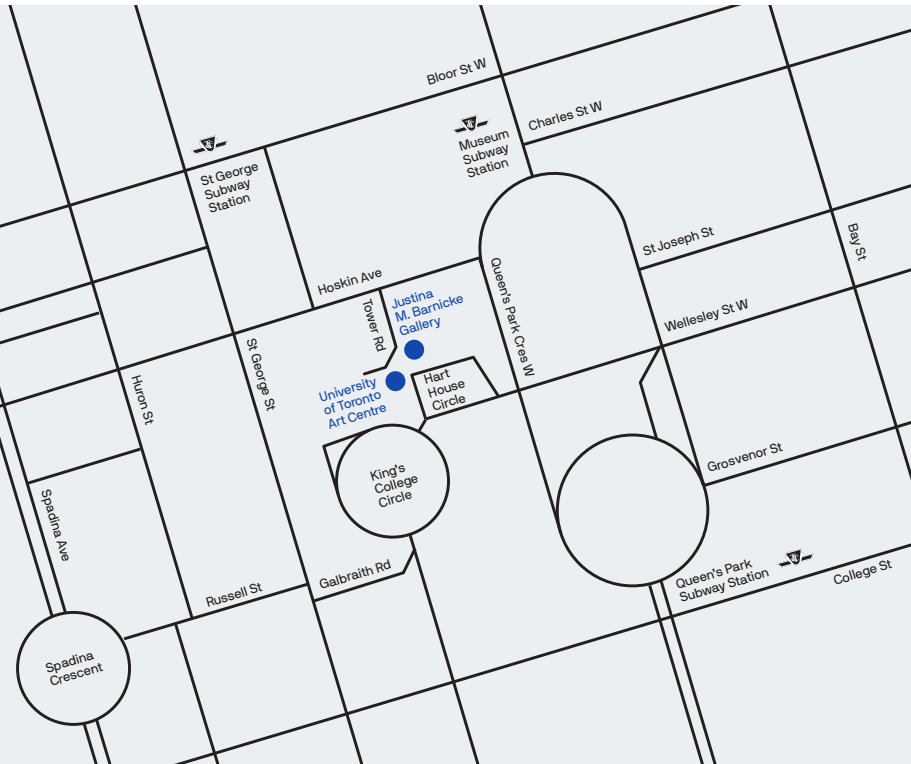
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Tuesday	Noon–5:00 PM
Wednesday	Noon–8:00 PM
Thursday	Noon–5:00 PM
Friday	Noon–5:00 PM
Saturday	Noon–5:00 PM
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

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

 The Galleries are wheelchair accessible.



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