God of Gods: A Canadian Play
September 4 – November 30, 2019
HART HOUSE THEATRE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Director: BERTRAM FORSYTH

SEASON
1921-22

Dr. H. J. Macoun—The Nation

Dear Sir,—For two years we have followed the performances of Hart House Theatre without missing a production, and have read your pieces in The Banner each season since then. The Mad and Empire acquired the pieces. An answer of the ordinary theatre-page, without reading publicly, might offer you our own impressions of the subject on which you don't wish to your "Work-end Thoughts of a Monday Morning" at your leisure of yesterday. They are not in any sense criticisms; you can be one of the men that. might possibly make you find them out without interest.

We have seen the advantage of reading G. K. Chesterton's "Magic," but it is the performance of it did justice to the book. Professor Hunter Williams and Professor F. H. Wilson are strains. In a good measure, one had always felt previously that he wished to see and hear the material success being supplied in that part of the world, and to that end the work is most interesting. After watching his theatricals, I believe in no man that one would like to see a versatillion gone more in a more ambitious part.

To the Chester Mysterious we went to test philosophy, beauty, because we had heard of the radical changes, and remembered Mr. Mitchell's production, but all of us are now in the position of being adorers. We found in Mr. Forsey's conception a keen, novel, and historic spirit that changed the atmosphere of life. The women were never fitted for it, but as we fully say, Mr. Forsey is not the theoretician of the stage. He is a great actor and the profoundest actor of his time. After all, the Chester Mysterious are an old English creation, and they are due in giving them a morbidly English atmosphere. Mr. Forsey has an imagination on their previous Italian atmosphere. One woman, too, in a convincing Travestie on the stage of the High Altar was always quite satisfied with the feeling sense of being in the audience and not in the scenery. "Magic," if nothing else, was an example of what happens in a scene initiated in art in the movement of a monstrosity where the eye works, and whether, if anyone else had, anyone would have produced it. Beyond a portrait of the monumental scene again, and that Dad has been done by school, I failed to find anything in it. That of course may have been my own fault, but there was no excuse for it.

TWO OF THE AUDIENCE
God of Gods:
A Canadian Play
Internationally renowned, Toronto-based artist Deanna Bowen revisits *The God of Gods* (1919)


Deanna Bowen is a descendant of the Alabama- and Kentucky-born Black Prairie pioneers of Amber Valley and Campsie, Alberta. Bowen’s family history has been the central pivot of her auto-ethnographic interdisciplinary works since the early 1990s. Her broader artistic/educational practice examines history, historical writing, and the ways in which artistic and technological advancements impact individual and collective authorship.
Commissioned to consider the one-hundredth anniversary of Hart House, Toronto-based artist Deanna Bowen responds to the play *The God of Gods*, which was performed at Hart House Theatre in 1922. Using “native” motifs and casting White actors in red-face to stage theosophist ideas about religion and politics, the play was written by Carroll Aikins, the future director of Hart House Theatre and leader of the Little Theatre movement in Canada. Aikins’s “nationalist pandering caught the eye of Hart House’s Board of Syndics,” and *The God of Gods* was presented as an example of seminal Canadian theatre in the 1926–27 book *Canadian Plays from Hart House Theatre*, edited by Hart House founder and Governor General Vincent Massey. In 2016, *The God of Gods* script was published as part of the research initiative Editing Modernism in Canada Project through the University of Ottawa Press, and thus continues to be celebrated as an important play in Canadian history. Using excerpts from her 2013 artwork *The 1911 Anti-Creek-Negro Petition and The God of Gods* as a contextual framework, Bowen’s project explores the social networks that heavily influenced the formation of Canadian culture in the early twentieth century. The exhibition visualizes the individuals involved in this formation by examining their archived collections. Indigenous cultural production flourishes. This exhibition brings attention to the discriminatory foundations of Canadian culture. It also presents a counter narrative. Bowen has staged and recorded a conversation about Indigenous peoples, and it is found at the very same stage where *The God of Gods* was performed a century ago, the discussion highlights the continued survivance of Indigenous peoples and the necessity for more critical considerations of the construct of Canadian culture. It shifts the focus from the acts of White Canadians to imagine a Canadian culture in which Indigenous cultural production flourishes.

- Maya Wilson-Sanchez

In 1929, Canadian composer Ernest MacMillan collaborated with Barbeau and wrote that “[t]he ancient melodies of West Coast tribes” would “without a doubt be totally lost in the course of thirty or forty years but for the energy and enthusiasm of a handful of collectors.” These writers, politicians, artists, publishers, and poets believed Indigenous cultures were inevitably doomed to extinction, and saw their role as that of preservationists, even if this included racist representations and the theft of cultural objects for museum collections. Indigenous cultural production was understood as a resource for White artists at the same time as Indigenous communities were being persecuted for practicing their own cultural traditions.


* This essay uses contemporary names for institutions that have had different names in the past.
Opening Event

Reception
Wednesday, September 4, 2019, 6–8pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Public Programs

Deanna Bowen and Maya Wilson-Sanchez in Conversation
On mining the archive for the play The God of Gods
Saturday, September 28, 2019, 3pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Deanna Bowen Artist Talk
Wednesday, October 16, 2019, 6pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Deanna Bowen and Jill Carter in Conversation
Deanna Bowen, artist, and Jill Carter, curator and director Encounters at the “Edge of the Woods” discuss process-based work
Wednesday, November 6, 2019, 6pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Drop-In Tours
Led by student-docents

Fall Exhibitions Tour
Every Tuesday, 2pm
Meet at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Malcove Collection Tour
Last Wednesday of each month, 12 noon
University of Toronto Art Centre

Hart House Collection Tour
Last Wednesday of each month, 2pm
Meet at the Hart House information desk

Group tours may be booked by contacting us at artmuseum@utoronto.ca

For program details visit
artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Visiting the Art Museum

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
7 Hart House Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3
416.978.8398

University of Toronto Art Centre
15 King’s College Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7
416.978.1838

Wheelchair access to University College, and therefore the Art Museum’s University of Toronto Art Centre location, will be closed due to University College building revitalization. Accommodations for accessibility are available upon request.

about the author

Maya Wilson-Sanchez is a writer, researcher, and curator based in Toronto. Her writing has been published in The Senses & Society Journal, Canadian Art, the Journal of Visual and Critical Studies, and in the anthology Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts Practices in Canada (PUBLIC Books, 2019). Maya has worked in collections, research, programming, and curatorial research roles at Gallery TPW, the Art Gallery of Ontario, OCAD University, Onsite Gallery, Xpace Cultural Centre, and the Royal Ontario Museum. Her research for Deanna Bowen’s God of Gods: A Canadian Play significantly contributed to the formation of this exhibition and all its contents. Maya is the inaugural recipient of the Art Museum’s Curatorial Residence Award.

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