

Art Museum
University of Toronto
—
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
University of Toronto Art Centre

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artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Art Museum

For Immediate Release

The Art Museum at the University of Toronto presents *God of Gods: A Canadian Play*, a project by Deanna Bowen

(Toronto, August 22, 2019) On the occasion of Hart House’s Centennial, internationally renowned, Toronto-based artist Deanna Bowen revisits *The God of Gods*, an early 20th century play, to examine the foundations of racialized cultural identity in Canada. Written in 1919 by Carroll Aikins (1888-1967), founder of the first national theatre in Canada and artistic director of Hart House Theatre (1927–29), the play was staged at Hart House in 1922 with White actors performing a caricatured cast of Indigenous characters. Encompassing a film, photographs and archival materials, the exhibition ***God of Gods: A Canadian Play*** will be on view at the **Art Museum at the University of Toronto’s Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at Hart House** from **September 4 – November 30, 2019**. Join the Art Museum and Hart House for the opening reception on **September 4 from 6-8pm**. The artist will be in attendance.

Aikins’ play, staged at Hart House in 1922, projected the horrors of war into a loose adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* — using “native” motifs and casting White actors in red-face. The play is steeped in primitivism, a manufactured construct that positioned Indigenous cultures as naïve precursors to European civilization. In the past, *The God of Gods* has been presented as an example of seminal Canadian theatre, and it continues to be celebrated as an important play in Canadian history.

Bowen’s project visualizes the social and political networks that, in the early twentieth century, came to shape long-lasting and deeply entrenched ideas of Canadian culture. Curated by Barbara Fischer,

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and contextualized with an essay and research by Maya Wilson-Sanchez, this multi-layered installation traces the intertwined voices of individuals such as Vincent Massey, the founder of Hart House and later the first Canadian-born Governor General of Canada, and artists and writers such as A.Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, Barker Fairley, and Carroll Aikin. It also touches upon institutions that include not only Hart House, but also the Arts and Letters Club and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

In her essay that accompanies the exhibit, writer Maya Wilson-Sanchez states that “Bowen’s exhibition highlights the nature of an emerging Canadian identity as one shaped by nationalist, White, and settler ideals. Her project maps how colonial ideas about Indigenous cultures and cultural production were mobilized to create a national aesthetic.”

In addition to the selection of archival materials on view, Bowen has staged a conversation between herself and Indigenous artists and curators John G. Hampton, Peter Morin, Lisa Myers, Archer Pechawis, and cheyanne turions. Filmed on the same stage in the Hart House Theatre where *God of Gods* was performed a century ago, the discussion highlights the necessity for a more critical conversation about Canadian culture. Presenting an alternate reading of Canadian cultural history, the exhibition *God of Gods: A Canadian Play* questions the nation’s understanding of itself.

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God of Gods: A Canadian Play
September 4 – November 30, 2019

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Curated by Barbara Fischer

Opening Reception
Wednesday, September 4, 2019, 6-8pm

Deanna Bowen and Maya Wilson-Sanchez in Conversation on mining
the archive for “God of Gods: A Canadian Play”
Saturday, September 28, 2019, 3pm

Deanna Bowen Artist Talk
Wednesday, October 16, 2019, 6pm

Deanna Bowen, artist *God of Gods: A Canadian Play*, and Jill Carter,
curator and director *Encounters at the “Edge of the Woods”* discuss
process-based work
Wednesday, November 6, 2019, 6pm

Drop-In Tours
Tuesdays, 2pm

For more information, please visit:
<https://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/exhibition/deanna-bowen-the-god-of-gods/>

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For high resolution images please visit:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/9d51nnknla6ng2f/AAArquFg5EpAFvj3gLuZqlTQa?dl=0>

About Deanna Bowen:

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.

About Maya Wilson-Sanchez:

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 the Media Arts Practices in Canada*. 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. She is the inaugural recipient of the Art Museum Curatorial Residency Award.

About Hart House:

On November 11, 2019, Hart House will reach a historic milestone with the 100th anniversary of Vincent Massey's extraordinary gift of the building to the students of the University of Toronto. More than just a physical space, Hart House continues to play a pivotal role as a diverse

and inclusive gathering place—one that enhances student experience on all three campuses by providing opportunities to engage in wellness, arts, and dialogue activities and helps prepare students for their role as future citizens of the world.

About the Art Museum at the University of Toronto:

The Art Museum is comprised of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (Hart House) and the University of Toronto Art Centre (University College). Located just a few steps apart, the two galleries were federated in 2014 and began operating under a new visual identity as the Art Museum at the University of Toronto, one of the largest gallery spaces for visual art exhibitions and programming in Toronto. Building on the two galleries' distinguished histories, the Art Museum originates and organizes an intensive year-round program of exhibitions and events that foster—at a local, regional, and international level—innovative research, interdisciplinary scholarship, and knowledge of art and its histories befitting Canada's leading university and the country's largest city.

Our Supporters

The Art Museum gratefully acknowledge operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council. Media support for this exhibition is provided by NOW Magazine and the Walrus.