

Conceptions of White
January 11—
March 25, 2023

Art
Museum

Works by

Arthur Jafa, Barbara Meneley,
Deanna Bowen, Fred Wilson,
Hiram Powers, Howardena Pindell,
Jennifer Chan, Jeremy Bailey,
Ken Gonzales-Day, Michèle Lalonde,
Nell Painter, Nicholas Galanin,
Robert Morris, Ryan Kuo, and
Artist once known, after Leochares

Exhibition organized by the
MacKenzie Art Gallery

Curated by John G. Hampton and
Lillian O'Brien Davis



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Conceptions of White

Cover: Fred Wilson, *Love and Loss in the Milky Way* (detail), 2005. Table with 47 milk-glass elements, plaster bust, plaster head, standing woman, ceramic cookie jar. Courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery.

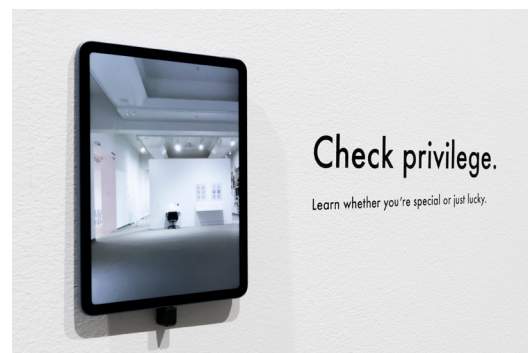
Right: Ken Gonzales-Day, *The Wonder Gaze, St. James Park* (detail), from the *Erased Lynching* series, 2006–2022. Print and vinyl wall installation. Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.



An exhibition that examines the myths and meanings behind the idea of a “White race”—a relatively recent invention that helped shape the modern world.

Conceptions of White offers context and nuanced perspectives that help viewers grapple with contemporary configurations of White identity. The exhibition features important historical reproductions alongside the work of twelve contemporary artists from across North America—offering nuanced perspectives on concepts such as white guilt, supremacy, benevolence, fragility, and power.

Together, the diverse narratives, images, and concepts presented in *Conceptions of White* examine the existential, experiential, and ethical dimensions of engaging in classifications of Whiteness, while also drawing on the conceptual connections between colonial Whiteness and the aesthetic, social, and philosophical meaning we ascribe to the colour white.



Left: Barbara Meneley, *White Land / Treaty 4?*, 2022, 21 ink drawings on paper, assorted items on Plexiglass shelves (rocks, feather, tree bark, dried plant material, sand, vials of water, photographs, small video monitors). Collection of the artist, with support from SK Arts. Photo by Carey Shaw, courtesy of the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

Middle: Howardena Pindell, *Free, White and 21*, 1980, video, 12 minutes and 15 seconds. Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Gift of Garth Greenan and Bryan Davidson Blue.

Top Right: Deanna Bowen, *White Man's Burden*, 2022, Installation of giclée prints on paper and oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Bottom Right: Jeremy Bailey, *Whitesimple*, 2022, custom augmented reality filters. Courtesy of the artist.

Artworks

Robert Morris *Portal*, 1964

—
latex on aluminum.
Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art,
Chicago. Gift of Mrs. Robert B. Mayer.
—

Robert Morris’s *Portal* is a formative piece of Minimalist art history, and the entry point for *Conceptions of White*. It acknowledges that this exhibition’s exploration of Whiteness is firmly situated within the context of the “white cube,” as contemporary art galleries are known.

Portal is a simple post-and-lintel construction of a doorframe. Passing through its open void is meant to be an embodiment of shifting perception. *Portal* follows the Minimalist principle of reducing sculpture to its most essential elements. Its construction erases traces of the human hand, suspending a rigid yet hollow form in space, while the absence of nonessential content sparks the imagination. This Minimalist reduction of form emphasizes the relationship between the body and space, between the act of perception and imagination. The implied doorframe is both familiar and alien, while referencing architectural standards and presumptions of a “standard body.” It inspires shifting comparisons to the many structures that it resembles, while foregrounding the neutral forms that surround us, which have been so naturalized that they have become invisible.

The “white cube” operates under similar psychological assumptions as Minimalist art. White cubes are designed to function as supposedly neutral voids that remove all distractions and context so that the art they exhibit can speak for itself. This “neutral” framing, however, is still laden with history, expectations, power, and class dynamics, as well as a tradition of equating the colour white to purity, neutrality, morality, civility, and godliness. Within this Western framework, white is not a colour, but the absence of colour. According to this logic, whiteness is the neutral backdrop we do not see, but within which everything else is framed.

Jeremy Bailey *Whitesimple*, 2022

—
custom augmented reality filters.
Courtesy of the artist.
—
Toronto-based artist Jeremy Bailey’s work offers tongue-in-cheek parodies of technological attempts to solve complex social problems. The artist’s persona inhabits the awkward space between the White saviour, ally, and opportunist. Bailey devised their speculative company using the design language of tech start-ups. *Whitesimple* offers software-as-a-service that claims to improve race relations while capitalizing on the momentum built by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) activists. The resulting software address progressive White audiences as a potential market segment. It strives to disrupt anxiety about their White privilege by offering surface-level changes that still leave underlying structures intact.

Deanna Bowen *White Man’s Burden*, 2022

—
installation of giclée prints on paper and oil on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist.
—
In this new installation, Montreal-based artist Deanna Bowen uses historical and archival materials to articulate relationships among the authors of Canada’s cultural identity, the founders of the three institutions hosting this very exhibition, the representation and appropriation of Indigenous identity, and Canadian White supremacist ideologies and organizations in the first half of the 20th century. Bowen’s work maps the tight network of actors who established the blueprint for Canadian culture—a blueprint that continues to influence our institutions, policies, and national identity—in order to examine the context in which this exhibition is held. By repositioning images from national and international archives alongside original works from the MacKenzie Art Gallery’s permanent collection, Bowen invites viewers to make their own way through the relationships between the people, events, and concepts within the material. The close-knit nature of Canada’s cultural elite allows for continual revelations and shifting understandings of the mythologies that uphold the idea (and ideal) of Canada that many take for granted today.

Michèle Lalonde *Speak White*, 1968

—
excerpt from the film *La Nuit de la poésie 27 mars 1970* by Jean-Claude Labrecque et Jean-Pierre Masse, 1971. Video, 5 minutes.
Video from the collection of the National Film Board, courtesy of the Michèle Lalonde estate. Poem © Michèle Lalonde, 1968. All rights reserved in all countries and in all languages.
—

Michèle Lalonde’s celebrated poem responds to the statement “speak White,” a command formerly used by overseers on American plantations, but subsequently used by Anglo-nationalists against French Canadians. The phrase ostensibly means to “speak English,” yet it reveals the relationship between assimilation and the construction of White identity by directly equating the language of the dominant colonizer with Whiteness. Anglophones used the phrase against French Canadians in the 1960–70s to remind them of their inferiority, and that they are not fully White. Its usage demonstrates that tiered racial hierarchies are built on more than just skin colour.

Lalonde’s poem decries Anglo-Saxon colonialism, but *Speak White* does not champion Quebec nationalism. Rather, the poem examines the experiences of Quebecers within the larger project of imperialism. It condemns both French and English colonialism as much as it denounces any group of people oppressing another through forced cultural and linguistic assimilation. Therefore, to “speak White” is not exclusively to speak English. To “speak White” is also to submit to colonial assimilation, to abandon the specificity of one’s own culture while aspiring to be absorbed into the dominant power of an expanding White majority.

—Adapted from French text by Alexandra Duchastel for the Michèle Lalonde estate.

Michèle Lalonde
Speak White, 1968

—
extrait du film *La Nuit de la poésie 27 mars 1970* par Jean-Claude Labrecque et Jean-Pierre Masse, 1971. Vidéo, 5 minutes.
Vidéo de la collection de l’Office national du film du Canada, gracieuseté de la succession Michèle Lalonde. Poème © Michèle Lalonde, 1968. Tous droits réservés dans tous pays et dans toutes langues.
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Le célèbre poème de Michèle Lalonde prend la forme d’une riposte dramatique directe au mot d’ordre notoire « *Speak White* », jadis en usage dans les plantations nord-américaines pour commander aux esclaves de s’exprimer en tout temps dans la langue de leurs maîtres blancs. L’expression en vint par la suite à être adressée couramment aux Canadiens français pour leur enjoindre de parler anglais et leur rappeler leur infériorité ou position subalterne.

En dépit de sa charge contre le colonialisme anglo-saxon, le poème « *Speak White* » ne se veut pas nationaliste. Dans ce texte, Michèle Lalonde lie le sort des Québécois à celui de tous les peuples exploités et s’insurge contre toute forme d’impérialisme. D’une portée universelle, « *Speak White* » dénonce l’oppression de tout peuple par un autre par le biais de sa langue et de culture. *Speak White* a été composé en 1968 à l’occasion d’un spectacle intitulé *Poèmes et chants de la résistance*, qui visait à soutenir la cause de Pierre Vallières et Charles Gagnon, tous deux emprisonnés pour leurs activités au sein du FLQ. Il a ensuite été récité au Gesù, lors de *la mémorable Nuit de la poésie* du 27 mars 1970.

À la grande surprise des organisateurs, la foule, sans doute excitée par le contexte politique, est venue en très grand nombre assister à cet événement regroupant une cinquantaine de poètes québécois. Les gens font la queue devant le théâtre, mais la salle est comble et plusieurs personnes doivent repartir manque de place. Durant des heures, le public est attiré par les performances des artistes. Lorsque Michèle Lalonde remonte sur scène, vers la fin de l’événement, pour réciter *Speak White*, son interprétation dramatique galvanise la salle qui se soulève d’un seul mouvement pour une ovation mémorable.

Depuis, *Speak White*, n’a rien perdu de sa force et continue de marquer l’imaginaire québécois. Malheureusement, il est trop souvent utilisé de manière abusive (pastiches, parodies, plagiat), publié, diffusé ou associé à différentes causes politiques sans l’autorisation de l’auteure qui en a beaucoup souffert tout au long de sa carrière.

—Alexandra Duchastel
Pour la SUCCESSION MICHÈLE LALONDE

Barbara Meneley
White Land / Treaty For?, 2022

—
21 ink drawings on paper, assorted items on Plexiglass shelves (rocks, feather, tree bark, dried plant material, sand, vials of water, photographs, small video monitors).
Courtesy of the artist. Created with support from SK Arts.
—
Saskatchewan-based artist Barbara Meneley’s installation explores the concept of “white land,” which is a legal term used by developers to delineate land that is not slated for development. Like “crown land,” it marks limits on development, while also building off the legal tradition of the “Doctrine of Discovery,” used by colonial powers to claim sovereignty over Indigenous lands. Meneley’s exploration of white land is connected to her interest in Euro-settler relationships to treaty land, with a focus on Treaty 4.* For this project, Meneley traveled the perimeter of Treaty 4 as it has been mapped to explore how Treaty is understood by the institutions and settlers who exist within its perimeter. The installation includes video, photographs, and found objects that Meneley collected during her trip, alongside drawings that document the margins of Treaty 4.

Through this journey, Meneley reflects on her own position as a White settler who is able to travel with impunity. Meneley’s work plays with the language of “white land” to consider how colonial institutions shelter White-settler identity, while they push Indigenous peoples towards Whiteness through forced assimilation, education systems, and displacement from the land.

*Treaty 4 is a treaty established between Queen Victoria and some Cree and Saulteaux First Nation governments in 1874. The area covered by Treaty 4 represents most of current-day southern Saskatchewan, plus small portions of what are today known as western Manitoba and southeastern Alberta.

Artist once known, after Leochares
Apollo Belvedere

—
plaster replica of Roman copy (c. 120–140 AD) of Greek Bronze (c. 330–320 BCE).
Produced by the RMN Grand Palais Workshop in Paris, from a cast of *Apollo Belvedere* commissioned by King Francis I shortly after it was put on display in the Vatican in 1511.
—
Apollo Belvedere is one of the most celebrated sculptures in the Western art canon and has played an important role in the development of White origin myths. German intellectual Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), known as the “father of Art History,” first encountered the white marble sculpture in the Vatican. He celebrated *Apollo Belvedere* as “the highest ideal of art” and as the finest representation of human beauty and spirit.

The white marble sculpture Winckelmann saw in the Vatican was a Roman recreation of a dark bronze Greek original. Unaware of the difference in material (or the likelihood that the original was painted), he equated the Greco-Roman sculpture’s whiteness with white skin, and proximity to perfection.

As white is the colour which reflects the greatest number of rays of light, and consequently the most easily perceived, a beautiful body will, accordingly, be the more beautiful the whiter it is.
—Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of the Art of Antiquity*, 1764

Winckelmann’s hugely influential work inspired Neoclassicists and race theorists to propose a new concept of racial superiority theorizing that European features like light skin are indicative of more highly evolved humans. Such theories evolved to suggest racial lineage from the Ancient Greeks and Romans, to the German/French/English, to American/Canadian. This mythical lineage was articulated variously as Aryan, Caucasian, White, or European. The discipline of art history helped spread and naturalize these neoclassical ideals of a superior White race, which came to be at the core of the Western concept of “civilization.”

Nell Painter
Ancient Hair, 2019

—
mixed-media installation.
Courtesy of the artist.

—
This installation reproduces one iteration of an evolving installation from a wall in Nell Painter’s studio at the MacDowell artist residency in New Hampshire. While there in 2019, Painter had been reflecting on her 2010 book *The History of White People* (which heavily influenced this exhibition) and was considering how White identity was changing in an era of Trump. In this new wave of White nationalism, Painter observed that White supremacists were once again attempting to appropriate the imagery and identity of ancient Greece and Rome by claiming that the ancients were “White.” Whiteness as a racial classification, however, was not invented until somewhere around the end of the 17th century (depending on where you are looking); the ancients can’t be White by their own account. Painter was curious to see if the racial category of Whiteness, as we understand it now, could apply retroactively to the “ancients” who lived between the Middle East and Northern Africa regions. Over the course of her time at MacDowell, she posted surveys with questions such as, “Were the ancients white people?” She then examined representations of the ancients through the lens of hair as a racial signifier. In an email correspondence with the curators, Painter says that she “played on the differences in the actual bodies of the ancients who became revered as White-people ancestors, especially Greeks and Romans, those people with famously fluffy, curly hair, so different from the lank locks of scholars of Whiteness such as Winckelmann and Goethe.”

Jennifer Chan
Aryan Recognition Tool, 2022

—
artificial intelligence–driven web application,
<https://aryan.tools>.
AI development supported by Andrew Matte;
user experience design by Anu Kuga. Courtesy
of the artist.

—
Aryan Recognition Tool uses machine-learning trained facial recognition to superficially determine how “Aryan” a viewer is. Toronto-based artist Jennifer Chan addresses the Western obsession with visual difference—from racial classification to augmented-reality filters. *Aryan Recognition Tool* offers a playful yet uncomfortable window into the continuity of thought in facial typologies, moving from neoclassical thinkers like Winckelmann and the influential writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, to Nazi eugenicists, to emerging technologies like facial recognition and machine learning—which often replicate and perpetuate existing biases. Chan directly confronts the use of race science as a justification for the genocide of Jewish peoples, and presents a thorough mapping of Aryan history and mythology in a tool that would otherwise be expected to be a light-hearted and superficial novelty.

The reflection on the troubling history embedded within new technologies reminds us of the lasting impacts of racist ideologies and invites the audience to question their own position within arbitrary—yet deathly serious—systems of racial classification.

To view this work on your phone, scan here:



Ryan Kuo
File: A Primer, 2018

—
keynote animation, 6 minutes and 20 seconds.
Collection of the artist.

—
File: A Primer is a slideshow presentation about file management protocols that act as an allegory for larger systems of standards, classification, and control. The presentation sells the concept of an organized, neutral, white file that can overcome blackout and disorder. The animations become increasingly chaotic as the file struggles to maintain order, until it loops back to the original blank file. By perpetually returning to this baseline of White erasure, New York-based artist Ryan Kuo’s *File* stands in for systems that evade accountability or connection to their direct history. It is a system designed to replicate and self-preserve, absorbing or rejecting whatever does not reinforce its understanding of truth and order.

Nicholas Galanin
White Noise, *American Prayer Rug*, 2018

—
wool, cotton.
Courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

—
White Noise refers to the steady droning tones used to mask or obliterate unwanted sounds, an active dissociation occurring when a signal is gone or lost. The work’s title refers to the sources of American political power and media who produce constant noise in support of xenophobia. The work points to Whiteness as a construct used throughout the world to obliterate the voices and rights of cultures regardless of complexion. The work calls attention to white noise as a source of increasing intolerance and hate in the United States while politicians, media, and citizens attempt to mask and obliterate the reality of America’s genocidal past and racist present. The white noise referenced is produced by a kind of Whiteness based on more than complexion. This White noise is based on capital, blind belief, and faith in itself, and fear of everything outside the lines it uses to enforce inclusion or exclusion. The American Prayer rug hangs on the wall in place of flat screen televisions, as the image accompanying the droning sound we use to distract us from our own suffering, from love, from land, from water, from connection; there is no space for prayer, only noise.

—Artist statement written by Nicholas Galanin, Lingit, and Unangaʼ

Hiram Powers *Model of the Greek Slave, 1843*

—
painted PLA printed replica from 3D scan of plaster sculpture.

File courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, original purchased in memory of Ralph Cross Johnson.

—
Greek Slave is widely considered one of the first great pieces of American art, and presents a telling portrait of the racial dynamics at play during the early formation of American identity. The subject is a young, Christian woman in the nude, typically bound in chains (although the chains were absent from the original model replicated here), who has been taken captive by Ottoman Turks during the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829).

The fetishization of “Turkish sex slaves” played an important role in the invention of the concept of a “White race.” The term “Caucasian” is derived from literary and artistic depictions of slaves from the Caucasus region (around present-day Azerbaijan and Georgia). Tales of beautiful Circassian/Caucasian slaves in the *odalk*, Turkish for “harem room,” feature in the prominent artistic tradition of the *Odalisque* painting, including Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres’s *Grande Odalisque*, one of the most well-known examples.

Like most painters who depicted Turkish harems, Ingres never actually travelled to the region, and instead painted European models and transposed them into scenes with imaginary Turkish captors. This misrepresentation of Caucasian features perseveres to this day, and historically created significant confusion when used as a legal definition in the United States—such as when Bhagat Singh Thind, a Brahmin immigrant from India, successfully argued that he was Caucasian. Instead of granting him the right to citizenship, the Supreme Court chose to remove objective terminology from their definition of White in favour of “common sense,” which did not include brown-skinned people.

During the first half of the 18th century, the demographics of slavery in America shifted substantially in tandem with the rise of race science. Colonists dramatically increased the abduction of Africans into American chattel

slavery, and direct enslavement of White people was almost eliminated. In the years preceding American Independence, the myth of race science allowed a moral and scientific justification for the abhorrent practice of slavery as long as it was constrained to “other races.” This helped create a unifying identity for the American majority. Certain lower-class people of European descent were granted minor privileges and a promise of equal access to opportunity. In 1776 America declared its independence in a revolution that ended in 1783. In the 1780s, the new racial concept of different types of humans was articulated under three categories of Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid. In 1790 America legally became a White ethno-state with the adoption of the Naturalization Act, which restricted citizenship to “White persons.” From their earliest moments, the concepts of “White persons” and American identity were inextricably linked.

As European-aligned Greeks fought Ottoman rule in the Greek War of Independence, the image of White slaves held by Turks re-emerged as a symbol for the fortitude of the White spirit. Drawing influence from the Greco-Roman tradition, Powers’s Neoclassical sculpture promotes a myth of racial and cultural continuity from Ancient Greece to Rome, to Europeans and then Americans.

Powers’s work, however, expresses the complicated racial moral debates of his era. The sculpture was a source of inspiration for abolitionists, but through a lens of White unity and moral responsibility. The image of a White Christian woman in slavery helped inspire a paternalistic empathy—and a conception of the injustice of slavery—for some viewers who could not see slavery’s harm. As such, the work became an important source of inspiration within social justice movements that still reinforced narratives of White superiority and moral authority above the uncivilized other. The sentiment of “we are supposed to be the civilized ones” can be seen in the reception to this work by abolitionists, such as this satire of Christian reactions to *Greek Slave*:

We are in thy presence reminded that no divine image of humanity wrought as thou hast been in white can here be chained and worked like mere animals. By thee we are reminded that in our Christian land no Turk can lay his trafficking

hand upon a skin that is white . . . but that, under the benignant sway of Christianity, this doom shall be confined to black people.

—Anonymous abolitionist satirizing an American response to Powers’s sculpture, *The National Era*, 1851

Powers intended for this work to be seen widely by the American public. He sculpted a clay model in 1843, from which plaster casts were produced to act as a guide for master carvers to create five copies that would travel the country and enter different collections. The replica on view here is a modernization of this original intent. It was 3D-printed by Carvel Creative from a 3D scan—produced by the Smithsonian Institution’s Digitization Program—of Powers’s original model.

For an audio recording of this label, scan here:



Ken Gonzales-Day *“The Wonder Gaze,” St. James Park, 2006–2022*

—
vinyl wall installation.

Courtesy of Luis de Jesus Los Angeles.

—
Los Angeles-based artist Ken Gonzales-Day created his *Erased Lynchings* series by photographing lynching postcards—popular souvenirs within the United States during the early 20th century—and then digitally removing the victims.

The horrific nature of lynching can easily obscure the apparatus surrounding the spectacle of the dead body on display. By removing the victim, Gonzales-Day shows us what is hiding in plain sight: the identity-building of White herd mentality, and the participatory logic of a lynching as a form of torture designed for an audience. The people in the audience may not be actively tying a noose, but they are complicit participants nonetheless. Their mere presence and inaction created an atmosphere that normalized and perpetuated such violence.

The *Erased Lynchings* series often depicts Asian and Latinx victims in addition to the more common practice of lynching African Americans, but this particular image depicts a 1933 lynching of two White men, John Holmes and Thomas Thurmond. The race of the victims is notable because the subjugation of poor rural Whites is a key factor in the development of White identity. Early American race scholarship suggested that southern, rural Whites were intellectually and physically inferior to northern Whites, and thus unworthy of the same rights and protections. This stereotype became politically useful in policy-making. Many aspects of the “redneck” stereotype persist today—although that particular term is historically rooted in the condemnation of poor rural White people who allied with Black people in solidarity for workers’ rights.

Within the legacy of lynching as a hate crime against Black people and people of colour, the act was not only directed towards the victim; but it also served to remind gathered community members of what happened to outsiders who transgress their position in life. The crowd is both reinforced as a social group

but also reminded of their own place in the community. The less frequent instances of lynching poorer Whites extended this form of coercive control, punishing more vulnerable, lower-class White people who supposedly transgressed against the higher-class White elite. Gonzales-Day brings the conflicted nature of White identity into focus as a category in constant flux: expanding and contracting its own perimeters at the will of the most powerful; the tacit consent of the crowd; and the arbitrary parameters for White identity—including its own internal hierarchies.

Howardena Pindell
Free, White and 21, 1980

—
video, 12 minutes and 15 seconds.
Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Gift of Garth Greenan and Bryan Davidson Blue.

—
Free, White and 21 is a deadpan account of the everyday racism that artist Howardena Pindell experienced while coming of age as a Black woman in America. Racial classification is an arbitrary construction, but its effects are very real, and although Whiteness is designed to be invisible from the inside, it can often be made very apparent when one is on the outside.

Born in Philadelphia in 1943, Pindell was 21 when the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964. Pindell grew up in an era when the southern United States were still lawfully segregated. This was a period of flux, when the end of the Second World War began to shift the country’s social strata. The US sought to distinguish itself from Nazi Germany’s xenophobia, to assert itself as a country strengthened by the diversity of its people at a time when the increasing momentum of the civil rights movement empowered Black and other racialized people to demand equal rights. Despite this movement towards an image of a more unified nation, a growing White backlash reacted against their perceived diminishing power and resisted these changes.

The phrase “free, White and 21” originated around 1828 to refer to individuals who should have a right to vote. Its definition expanded in the 1930s to refer to America’s broader promise of the freedom of choice. Occasionally throughout her video, Pindell adopts a White persona whose role is to mimic a casual dismissal of her experience. While the phrase’s original usage excluded women, since they were barred from voting at the time, its later usages included women as full humans with free agency. The artist’s first-hand accounts of being “othered” portray the insidious subtleties of White power pervasive through everyday interactions. Her account of her lived experience reveals how those who are protected under the mantle of Whiteness are unable to see outside their own experience.

Fred Wilson
Love and Loss in the Milky Way, 2005

—
table with 47 milk-glass elements, plaster bust, plaster head, standing woman, ceramic cookie jar.
Courtesy of Pace Gallery, New York.

—
New York–based artist Fred Wilson is known for creating meaning by bringing various objects into proximity to one another. His work challenges dominant narratives by reconfiguring them through an African American lens. In his arrangements, each object becomes charged through its own historical context in addition to its relationship to the other objects. *Love and Loss in the Milky Way* features an arrangement of ceramics, milk-glass elements, and found sculptures that were collected by the artist. A broken Greco-Roman male bust lies in close proximity to the bust of a young African woman, under the watchful eyes of Hebe (the cup-bearer and goddess of youth) and a common “Mammy” cookie jar. All of these assemble in a milky White and jet-black constellation in which kitsch brushes against the tropes of art history. The arrangement provokes audiences to question their socially conditioned assumptions and biases by suggesting differing modes of agency, consumption, and relation.

Arthur Jafa
The White Album, 2018

—
video, 30 minutes.
Collection of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

—
Los Angeles–based artist Arthur Jafa’s film reflects the current state of White identity in America through a collage of found and original video. Moments of joy, love, and beauty clash against scenes depicting fear, hatred, and anger. Jafa captures intimate and tender relationships—for example, of the trust between the artist and his gallerist—and contrasts them against appalling, heart-wrenching scenes—like when a Black police officer must stand dispassionately as a White man she has just arrested repeatedly shouts a racist slur at her. Jafa’s snapshot of contemporary White identity is painful, honest, delicate, and brutal; it presents a complex picture of a category of a racial identity that tends to evade a direct gaze—even though it’s right in the open, ready to be seen.

Public Programs

Opening Reception:
Winter 2023 Exhibitions

Wednesday, January 11, 6pm–8pm
University of Toronto Art Centre
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Celebrate the opening of *Conceptions of White* at the University of Toronto Art Centre in University College and *THE COUNTER/SELF* at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery in Hart House.

Curatorial Tour with John G. Hampton
and Lillian O'Brien Davis

Saturday, January 14, 2pm–4pm
University of Toronto Art Centre

John G. Hampton and Lillian O'Brien Davis will speak about the origins, travel, and present reality of “Whiteness” as a concept and a racial invention that classifies degrees of civility/humanity as presented in the artworks in *Conceptions of White*.

All programs are free and open to all.
For more information and to register,
visit artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs/

Exhibition Tours


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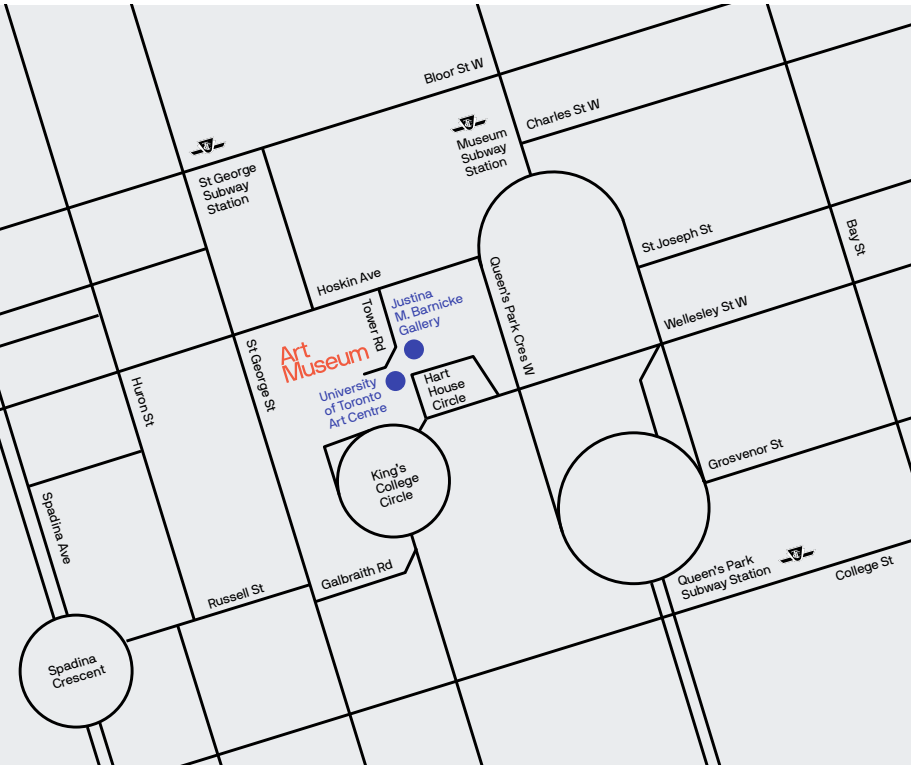
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Wednesday	12 noon–8pm
Thursday	12 noon–5pm
Friday	12 noon–5pm
Saturday	12 noon–5pm
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

Closed on statutory holidays.
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