

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

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artmuseum.utoronto.ca

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

What is “nation” in the hands of artists? *Nations by Artists* exhibition at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto proposes new political imaginaries

Toronto, ON (February 2, 2022)—The Art Museum at the University of Toronto is pleased to present *Nations by Artists*, an exhibition that explores how artists have engaged the trappings of the nation as a material for protest, parody, or collective utopian wish, dreaming and proposing new political imaginaries in the process. The exhibition is curated by **Mikinaak Migwans and Sarah Robayo Sheridan** and is on view at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto from **February 8 to April 2, 2022**.

Nations by Artists links together the different legacies of artists’ engagement with political utopias. Slovenian Art Collective **IRWIN**’s art project/state apparatus, *NSK State in Time*, was developed as an alternative form of assembly based not on territory but on historical urgency. Their presence in the 2017 Venice Biennale engaged the urgency of the migrant crisis in Europe with an installation that presented a highly theatrical version of a passport office turned upside down. Visitors ascended via movable aircraft passenger stairs to an unconventional passport office whose information kiosk was a

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trampoline, enacting a gravity-defying wish for a state beyond space, territory, and time.

In *King Edward the VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don* by the former Toronto-based collective **Life of a Craphead**, the global intersections of colonial routes are brought into visibility. Intrigued by the persistence of this imperial symbol across time and space, Life of a Craphead built a partial replica of the statue and floated it down the Don River on weekends in the fall of 2017. Resting now in pieces on the gallery floor, the sculpture is surrounded by enlarged pages from the *Manual for Decolonial Operations* written by **Decolonize This Place**, whose DIY instructional “How to Take Down a Monument” offers visitors clear instructions on how to achieve direct change by populist means.

Throughout the exhibition, artists are seen to reinvent boundaries, both territorial and conceptual. South African artist **Walter Battiss**’ concept of Fook Island developed its own visual language replete with alphabet, maps, portraits of inhabitants, taxonomies of local plants, currency, stamps, driver’s licenses, and passports. The notion of artists holding their own frontierless forms of intrinsic knowledge of the world is also mirrored in two newly commissioned works by **Native Art Department International (NADI)**. Their restaging of two iconic mid-twentieth century performances by Saburo Murakami of Japan’s Gutai Group and by Wolfgang Stoecherle establishes within the gallery a post-national space in which paper, plaster,

wood, gesture, and the body become our common language.

Collectively, the works in this show lead us to political imaginaries and modes of critique that could only be envisioned by artists.

“This is a crucial time to reflect on the nation-state and its elements, as things as familiar as paper currency and border crossings become strange and fraught under pandemic conditions. These structures of state power have become more sharply visible than ever in recent days, and the critiques, perspectives, and alternatives put forward by artists have a renewed kind of urgency. The works in *Nations by Artists* address borders, migrations, monuments, revolutionary actions, and intimate origins across a wide range of places and times from the longstanding nationhood of the Haudenosaunee in our local context to the ongoing struggles of displaced peoples globally. I think we’re in a unique place to be receptive to these perspectives, to appreciate their interconnections and connect with them ourselves. This exhibition offers critical tools and strategies for change, but it also offers a sense of humanity and community that sits at the core of what nations might mean,” says Mikinaak Migwans, co-curator of *Nations by Artists*.

Nations by Artists
February 8–April 2, 2022
University of Toronto Art Centre

Curated by Mikinaak Migwans & Sarah Robayo Sheridan
artmuseum.utoronto.ca/exhibition/nations-by-artists/

Works by Ruanne Abou-Rahme & Basel Abbas, Sadie Barnette, Yael Bartana, Walter Battiss, Jasmina Cibic, Decolonize This Place, Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, Demian DinéYazhi’/ R.I.S.E. (Radical Indigenous Survivance and Empowerment), Pablo Helguera, Greg Hill, IRWIN, Iman Issa, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, Will Kwan, Zoe Leonard, Life of a Craphead, Divya Mehra, Alan Michelson, Native Art Department International, Majdulin Nasrallah, Huong Ngô, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa

ONLINE EVENTS

Nations by Artists Podcast

A four-part series inviting participating artists, activists, and scholars to deliver a state of the nation on nations. Produced by Aliya Pabani and hosted by exhibition curators Mikinaak Migwans & Sarah Robayo Sheridan. All podcast episodes will be available to stream on artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Episode 1: Monuments + Online Listening Party

Wednesday, February 2, 6:30pm–7:30pm ET

Episode 1: Monuments will be live-streamed, followed by a live Q&A with the exhibition curators. The episode features guests IRWIN, Will Kwan, Shawna Dempsey & Lorri Millan, and Life of a Craphead.

Register: artmuseum.utoronto.ca/program/nations-by-artists-podcast-release-listening-party/

IN-PERSON EVENTS

Curatorial Tour with Mikinaak Migwans & Sarah Robayo Sheridan

Wednesday, February 9, 5:30pm

University of Toronto Art Centre

Register: artmuseum.utoronto.ca/program/curatorial-tour-with-mikinaak-migwans-and-sarah-robayo-sheridan/

Keynote Lecture with Decolonize This Place

“Under the Museum, Under the University, Under the City: the Land”

Wednesday, March 30, 4pm

University College, UC140

Presented in partnership with the Department of Art History

Register: artmuseum.utoronto.ca/program/keynote-lecture-with-decolonize-this-place-under-the-museum-under-the-university-under-the-city-the-land/

VIRTUAL SPOTLIGHTS

“Statues Also Die, a virtual essay by Ameen Ahmed

Published on artmuseum.utoronto.ca/virtual-spotlights/

About the Art Museum at the University of Toronto

The Art Museum is one of the largest gallery spaces for visual art exhibitions and programming in Toronto. 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

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Canada's leading university and the country's largest city.

Our Supporters

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