

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

7 Hart House Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3
artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Art Museum

Exhibition *The Performance of Shadows* exploring intuition and meaning-making opens at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto

Opening Night: Wednesday, September 6, 6pm–8pm
Exhibition Dates: September 7–November 25, 2023
Art Museum at the University of Toronto

Toronto, ON (August 1, 2023)—Curated by Toronto-based curator Lillian O’Brien Davis, *The Performance of Shadows* explores intuition as a condition of consciousness through the work of three artists of different generations, **Betye Saar** (b. 1926, Los Angeles), **Tim Whiten** (b. 1941, Inkster, Michigan), and **Erika DeFreitas** (b. 1980, Toronto). These three artists consider understandings of human existence from perspectives as wide-ranging as phenomenology, spirituality, and political engagement.

Betye Saar’s assemblage work, which was increasingly influenced by her rising political consciousness beginning in the 1960s, consists of objects carrying their own history and meaning selected for their “ancestral, ritual, autobiographical, nostalgic, and historical” aura. Saar, who lives in Los Angeles, assembles found materials to link history and experiences, emotion and knowledge, as they travel across time and back again. Based in Toronto,

Tim Whiten bridges material and spiritual experiences that encourage “sensing” over “reading”. Whiten investigates consciousness and its role in the constitution of meaning. Informed by a deep generosity, his work seeks to connect to others through its experience.

1 of 6



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Toronto artist Erika DeFreitas’s practice emphasizes process, the body and paranormal phenomena, using primarily lens-based media to reflect on feelings of love and loss. DeFreitas explores the miraculous as a way of considering that which is beyond our comprehension; through simple gestures, she seeks to make perceptible the intangible and invisible.

As Lillian O’Brien Davis writes, “All three artists embrace intuitive intelligence, working to connect with what lies beyond our immediate experience of reality. Objects and materiality function as transmitters for memory, experience, and consciousness. Meaning and significance cannot be fully experienced through objectivity alone. The artists in *The Performance of Shadows* nurture intuitive practices that expand our perception of the world.”

The exhibition is presented in partnership with the Gallery of the School of Art Gallery, University of Manitoba with the generous support of Michael F. B. Nesbitt.

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PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Opening Reception

Wednesday, September 6, 6pm–8pm
University of Toronto Art Centre
15 King’s College Circle

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Curatorial Tour with Lillian O'Brien Davis
Saturday, October 7, 2pm–3pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
7 Hart House Circle

All programs are free and open to the public.
For more information and to register:
artmuseum.utoronto.ca/exhibition/the-performance-of-shadows/

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ABOUT THE CURATOR

Lillian O'Brien Davis is a curator and writer based in Toronto, ON. She is currently the Curator of Collections and Contemporary Art Engagement at the Art Gallery of York University. She holds a Master of Visual Studies in Curatorial Studies and a BA Honours with Distinction in the History of Art and English Literature from the University of Toronto. Lillian is currently the curator of *Nuit Blanche Etobicoke 2023*. She has curated independent projects at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto, Susan Hobbs Gallery (Toronto), the School of Art Gallery at the University of Manitoba and the MacKenzie Art Gallery (Regina). Her writing has appeared in *BlackFlash Magazine*, *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Insight Magazine* and *RACAR (revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review)*. She is currently one of two inaugural Visiting Curators at the School of Art Gallery at the University of Manitoba.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Erika DeFreitas's multidisciplinary practice includes performance, photography, video, installation, textiles, drawing, and writing. Placing emphasis on gesture, process, the body, documentation, and paranormal phenomena, DeFreitas mines concepts of loss, postmemory, legacy, and objecthood. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues including the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery; Platform Centre for Photographic and Digital Arts, Winnipeg; Gallery TPW, Toronto; Project Row Houses and the Museum of African American Culture, Houston; Fort Worth Contemporary Arts; and Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita. She is a recipient of the 2016 Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts Finalist Artist Prize and the 2016 John Hartman Award, and she was long-listed for the 2017 Sobey Art Award. DeFreitas holds a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto.

For over six decades, **Betye Saar** has created assemblage works that explore the social, political, and economic underpinnings of America's collective memory. She began her career at the age of 35 producing work that dealt with mysticism, nature and family. Saar's art became political in the 1970s, namely with her 1972 assemblage *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*. As did many of the women who came to consciousness in the 1960s, Saar takes on the feminist mantra "the personal is political" as a fundamental principle in her assemblage works. Her appropriation of Black collectibles, heirlooms, and utilitarian objects transforms the items through subversion. Despite Saar's status as a pioneer of the Assemblage movement, the impact of her oeuvre on contemporary art has yet to be fully acknowledged or critically assessed. Among

the older generation of Black American artists, Saar is without reproach and continues to both actively produce work and inspire countless others.

In over forty years of creating cultural objects, **Tim Whiten** has sought to navigate the territory of the human condition with the intent of inviting experiences and encouraging “sensing” over “reading”. Whiten’s work extends from two- to three-dimensional forms and includes ritual performances, real-time systems, site-specific and mixed media installations. His work is held in numerous private, corporate, and public collections, such as the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the Tom Thomson Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Windsor, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, the Mackenzie Art Gallery, and the Achenbach Foundation for the Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (both the de Young and the Legion of Honor).

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About the Art Museum at the University of Toronto

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

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Our Supporters

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