

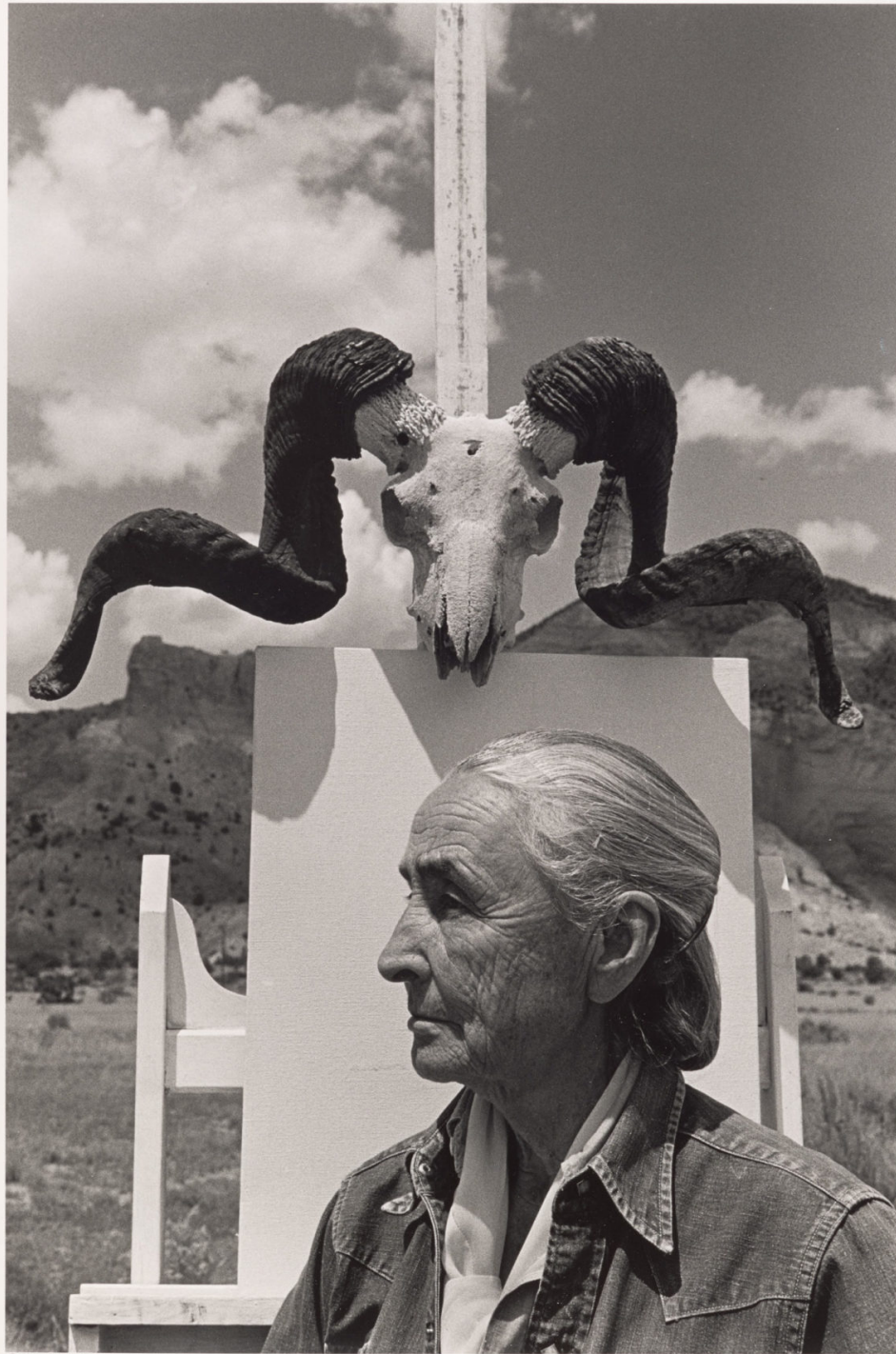
Ten things to see, do, read and hear in Toronto this October

Including an exhibition of powerful portraits, an Indigenous filmmaker's retrospective and a Barrie alt-rocker's country turn

BY TORONTO LIFE | SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

An exhibition of powerful portraits

1 On its face, a photo portrait may seem like a straightforward affair: there's the person, the pose, the flash. For Arnold Newman, it was an art. The prolific portrait photographer brilliantly captured artists, politicians and other influential figures for the great magazines of the 20th century. More than 200 of his masterful works are on display for the AGO's latest exhibition, *Building Icons: Arnold Newman's Magazine World, 1938–2000*, which opens on October 21. Here, AGO curators Sophie Hackett and Tal-Or Ben-Choreen share the stories behind some of Newman's most famous photographs.



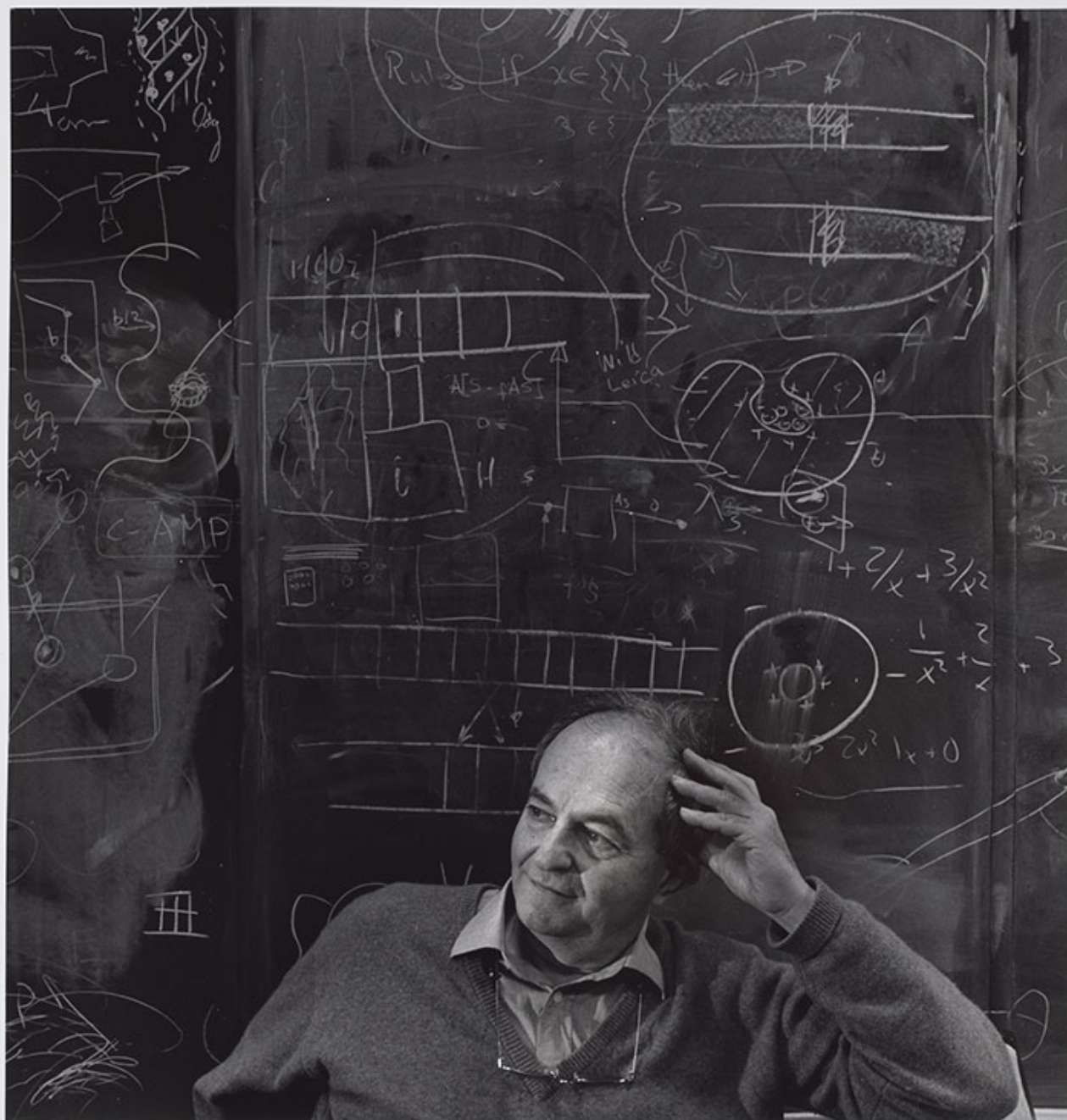
Georgia O'Keeffe, 1968: Commissioned by Holiday Magazine for a story about Santa Fe, New Mexico, Newman captured modernist painter Georgia O'Keeffe before a blank canvas with a gnarled ram's skull—a common motif in her work—looming above her head. The exhibition features this print alongside others showing how the shot was composed. “Before O'Keeffe comes into the picture, Newman is playing with the way the shadow of the bones falls onto the canvas,” says Ben-Choreen. “The shadows

allude to the brush strokes that will ultimately appear on the canvas, standing in for the act of painting itself,” adds Hackett. Portraits © Arnold Newman Properties / Getty Images (2023)

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Igor Stravinsky, 1946: By far his most recognized work, Newman’s elegant portrait of Russian composer Igor Stravinsky uses the silhouette of a grand piano to form the musical notation for flat. “He was supposed to shoot the portrait in a very bland studio,” says Hackett. But Newman refused, demanding a piano for the shot. Once he got it, Newman carefully cropped the image to emphasize its visual double entendre.



Albert J. Libchaber, 1995: If images of chalk scribbles on a blackboard seem like a trope of scientific

genius these days, we have compositions like this to thank for it. “Newman helped popularize this idea through photography,” says Ben-Choreen. For Newman, it solved a tricky problem: How do you show someone’s work when it’s entirely abstract? In this portrait of French physicist Albert J. Libchaber, who studied the different states of chaos and turbulence, “the blackboard becomes an all-consuming thing that seems like it’s depicting his ideas.”



Buffy Sainte-Marie, 1966: In 1966, Newman was commissioned by Seventeen Magazine to shoot Indigenous icon Buffy Sainte-Marie. Despite the teen glossy’s frothy reputation, the artist refused to compromise on his vision. The result was a striking portrait of Sainte-Marie, taken just after the release of her third album—one that made bold political statements and would go on to crack the Billboard 200. Even with its heavy shadows, says Hackett, the image doesn’t trap its subject. “It signals a well that the artist is drawing on to create the work.”



Photo by Scott Dudelson / Getty Images

A legendary Scarborough singer comes home

2 Ashton Simmonds—better known as Daniel Caesar—got his first taste of R&B growing up in Scarborough and singing gospel at his father’s Oshawa church. Today, he’s a Grammy- and Juno-winning artist, collaborating with Justin Bieber and touring the world. His April album, *Never Enough*, shot to number two on the R&B Billboard charts and was followed by a tour of sold-out shows in Europe and North America. Caesar is keeping the momentum going with the second leg of his tour, which comes to 33 cities across the continent, including his hometown of Toronto. Joining him onstage are recent collaborators Charlotte Day Wilson and BadBadNotGood as well as special guest Moses Sumney. *Oct. 13, Scotiabank Arena*

A comedy about sex, lies and royals

3 We all know the story of *Beauty and the Beast*, but what many people don’t know is that it was inspired by real-life events. In the 1500s, Petrus Gonsalvus—a fellow with long hair growing from every pore on his face—was captured and brought from the Canary Islands to the court of King Henry II of France as a curiosity. There, Gonsalvus met the new queen, Catherine de Medici, who takes centre stage in the play *Wildwoman* as she deals with her royal husband, a sneaky maid

and the king's older mistress, all in the company of the so-called wildman. Historically, Petrus pulled off an improbable romance—but we'll spare you the spoilers. *October 5 to 29, Soulpepper*



Photo by Vita Cooper

A beloved theatre festival returns

4 After three years of pandemic disruptions, Next Stage Theatre Festival is back. Now in a new home at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, the event showcases up-and-coming artists poised for their big break. The lineup includes three theatre pieces—Gregory Prest's *Bremen Town*, Kole Durnford's *Echo* and S. E. Grummett's *Something in the Water*—plus Shohana Sharmin's dark sketch comedy *Dead Parents Society*, Braeden Soltys's musical number *Guildwood*, and dance performance *Black in Canada* by Shameka Blake and Artists in Motion. *October 18 to 29, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre*

A harrowing story of Black resilience

5 Jesmyn Ward is renowned for her powerful lyricism and unflinching perspective on racism. Her latest novel, *Let Us Descend*, is set in the Antebellum South and follows Annis, an enslaved woman on a Carolinas rice plantation, as she's sent on a gruelling march to

Louisiana. Faced with the brutality of the trek, Annis flees inward to memories of her mother and stories of her grandmother, an African warrior queen, embarking on an inner odyssey filled with spirits, myths and history. Annis's journey is ultimately one of rebirth and reclamation. *Out*
October 24

A trailblazing artist's body of work

6 The life of filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin has coincided with decades of Indigenous struggle and resilience—and she was there for much of it, camera in hand. She's filmed from behind the barriers at many protests, including the Oka standoff, creating powerful documentaries that have gained international acclaim. Five years ago, Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt museum proposed a survey of her work. Curated by Hila Peleg and Indigenous art historian Richard Hill, *The Children Have to Hear Another Story* arrived at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto after stops in Berlin and Vancouver and runs until November 25. Here, Barbara Fischer, executive director of the Art Museum at U of T, gives us a behind-the-scenes look.



Incident at Restigouche, 1984: This documentary, which follows the Mi'kmaq in Restigouche, Quebec, as they fight against unfair fishing regulations, earned Obomsawin international recognition.

It features a tense interview between Obomsawin and then-provincial minister of fishing Lucien Lessard, in which she bats away his disparaging comments about Indigenous peoples' rights and eventually extracts an apology for his government's actions. Stills courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada and the artist

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Alanis Obomsawin Filming Richard Cardinal: Cry From a Diary of a Métis Child, 1986: This 1986 documentary recounts the tragic story of a neglected youth whose suicide received national media attention. The film will play on the wall opposite *Poundmaker's Lodge: A Healing Place*, Obomsawin's 1987 documentary about Indigenous healing practices. Viewing the films side by side, says Fischer, encourages audiences to consider the "recovery of traditions that believe in healing, as opposed to systems of health care that have often been waged against Indigenous people."

***Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, 1993:** Considered Obomsawin's most important work, *270 Years of Resistance* recounts the confrontation at Kanehsatake, a Mohawk reserve near Montreal that put up fierce resistance when the neighbouring town of Oka sought to build a golf course on their burial grounds. "Alanis was behind the barricades with Mohawk warriors, recording what it was like to face the police and the military," says Fischer.

***Sigwan*, 2005:** *Sigwan* tells the haunting story of a young girl's ostracization from her community and subsequent encounter with forest spirits. It's set in the Bear Clan, of which Obomsawin is a member. "It's a recovery of the idea of the relationship between humans and animals in Indigenous culture," says Fischer. Masks created by children featured in the film are displayed at the entrance to the exhibition. "It's a way of looping back to the beginning, connecting Obomsawin's work to where she started."

Photo by Sven Hoppe / Picture Alliance via Getty Images

An intimate night with an iconic conservationist

7 More than 60 years after revolutionizing the study of chimpanzees, legendary British primatologist Jane Goodall is coming to Toronto as part of her global mission to keep momentum going in the fight for a sustainable world. Goodall spends 300 days a year touring, talking about the early days of her career working alone in the African rainforest and her hope for humanity's peaceful coexistence with the natural world. *October 12, Meridian Hall*

A refugee reflects on a life divided

8 Can the story of a country be told through one person? How about two countries? In his new memoir, *A Man of Two Faces*, Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen reflects on his family’s flight from Vietnam to the US and his subsequent identity crisis as the two countries went to war. Combining wicked wit with poignant criticism, Nguyen captures the cultural currents and contradictions flowing through his life. When his parents are shot on Christmas Eve at their grocery store in suburban California, he’s left questioning the safety and sunny self-image of his adopted country. *Out October 3*

A play that links past and future

9 Toronto artist and playwright Nikki Shaffeeullah is interested in ancient pasts and hopeful futures, and by spanning 200 years and three continents, her latest show encompasses both. *A Poem for Rabia* follows three queer women from one bloodline: Rabia, an Indian domestic worker who is abducted in 1853 and sent to the Caribbean; Betty, a secretary for the colonial governor in 1953 British Guiana who is caught between her work and the independence movement; and Zahra, a disillusioned activist in 2053 Canada who has abolished the prison system. It’s an epic trip across time, space and political history. *October 17 to November 12*

A Barrie alt-rocker’s embrace of country

10 Known as Bahamas since releasing his first album in 2009, Barrie native Afie Jurvanen has become a staple of the airwaves thanks to early 2010s alternative rock hits like “Lost in the Light” and “All the Time.” With crisp guitar tones, precise production, and intimate vocals and harmonies, he’s carved out a place in the Spotify-friendly-alt-folk niche. For his sixth studio album, *Bootcut*, Jurvanen goes full country, adopting a southern twang backed by slide steel—but bursts of the musician’s trademark fuzzed-out guitar keep the sound current. *October 29, Massey Hall*

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