

Weight of Light

May 2-26, 2018

Art
Museum

Works by

Bas Jan Ader, Brion Gysin, Lee Henderson,
Étienne-Jules Marey, Isabel M. Martínez,
James Nizam

Curated by Darryn Doull

This exhibition is produced as part of
the requirements for the MVS degree in
Curatorial Studies at the John H. Daniels
Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and
Design, University of Toronto.

2018 MVS Curatorial Exhibitions

"and I am the curator of this show!"

March 23 – April 14, 2018

Curated by Christophe Barbeau

Learning from the Lake

June 13 – July 7, 2018

Curated by Katie Lawson

The Island[s]

July 25 – August 18, 2018

Curated by Julie René de Cotret

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

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What do you see when you close your eyes?

Behind a thin veil of flesh, your eyes adjust to and regulate their darkened interiors. An afterimage appears — and slowly disappears — as photochemical activity continues in your retina. Electricity twitches through the eyelids in blinks and fits, threatening to produce an internal exposure once again.

It is possible to use the volume of the thinking brain to imagine (or project a view of) the eyes still trying to see; still seeing in the dark. Phosphenes begin to dance in a space that is hard to decipher. This volume of darkness waits to be exposed once again, to receive an image and crystallize a moment of light.

Light materializes the invisible and the impossible.

Ideas of light have been grafted upon fertile metaphorical, empirical and alchemical weights for millennia. The spark of illumination in a darkened volume has not only inspired philosophies of vision but also those of scientific research, the imagination, and spiritual transcendence. Increasingly, mediums of illumination can be controlled in degree and in temperature as well as channeled through a widening array of bodily and mechanical apertures. Our capacity to control light makes it an ideal medium to unlock some of the mysteries of our material world while opening vast new chambers of secrets and virtual geometries.

On the back part of the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance. At first I thought it was revolving; then I realized that this movement was an illusion created by the dizzying world it bounded. The Aleph's diameter was probably little more than an inch, but all space was there, actual and undiminished. Each thing (a mirror's face, let us say) was infinite things, since I distinctly saw it from every angle of the universe. I saw the teeming sea, I saw daybreak and nightfall; ... I saw all the mirrors on earth and none of them reflected me.¹

Borges' experience beholding the aleph in a cellar was a vision in artificial darkness. Amongst the shadows of the space, he witnessed a tiny sphere of unbearable brilliance. The cramped cellar expanded into a vast volume in which his body disappeared. He was looking outward at the aleph to see the infinite things of the world. He was seeing a universal largeness inside a small sphere of light, one that did not see him in return, but surpassed him altogether. Time collapsed into one moment with a simultaneous daybreak and nightfall.

In the late 19th century, artificial darkness became a site for scientific discovery, bodily immersion and observation of subjects that the eye alone could not see.

French photographer Étienne-Jules Marey was studying bodily mechanics by capturing numerous exposures on one plate negative. As subjects moved between his darkened sheds and the camera lens, their lit bodies appeared as ghostly apparitions in his photographs. Marey extracted valuable insight for his work in physiology through tracing increments of time on celluloid.

Around the same time, German composer Richard Wagner had his own opera house built in Bayreuth using exaggerations of perspective that became invisible in the dark. It was one of the first theatres to eliminate the social spectacle of a lit audience. Spectators sat in a darkened volume, watching the performance unfold on a lit stage framed by the backstage area. In this example, the audience replaces Marey's camera and the backstage area replaces his dark sheds — all to let the stage actors shine.

In *Weight of Light*, flashes and sparks of light meet volumes of artificial darkness as their interdependence affirms the revelatory capacity of human perception, including photography and the cinematic. In the work of each of the six artists, controlled measures of light and increments of time negotiate degrees of darkness. Flickers of light enable an approach to the unconscious, material permeability, spatial discovery and wondrous indulgences of mild hallucinations.



The exhibition is a site to appreciate how light projects meaning into our darkened volumes and to reverse the darkness that helps us to truly see.

¹Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories*, 1933-1969. Translated by Norman Thomas Di Giovanni (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), 13.

Cover Image: Isabel M. Martínez, *Saw All the Mirrors on the Planet (and None of Them Reflected Me)* (from *The Eye Can't See Itself*), 2017. Chromogenic Print, 32 x 40" © Isabel M. Martínez, Courtesy of the artist.

Above Image: Bas Jan Ader, *Nightfall*, 1971. Black and white silent film, 16 mm transferred to DVD, 4' 16" (Copyright the Estate of Bas Jan Ader / Mary Sue Ader Anderson, 2018 / The Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles).

Opening Event

Reception

Wednesday, May 2, 6-8pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Exhibition Programs

Curatorial Tour

Saturday, May 5, 1pm
Artificial Darkness from Time to Time with
Darryn Doull

Drop-In Talks with the Curator

Saturday, May 26 at 1 pm, 2 pm, and 3 pm
20 minutes each

For more information on exhibition related
programming visit: artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Public Programs

Drop-In Tours

Malcove Collection
Last Wednesday of each month, 12 noon
Meet at University of Toronto Art Centre

Hart House Collection
Last Wednesday of each month, 2pm
Meet at Hart House Information Desk

Exhibitions
Every Friday, 2pm
Meet at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

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Visiting the Art Museum


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7 Hart House Circle
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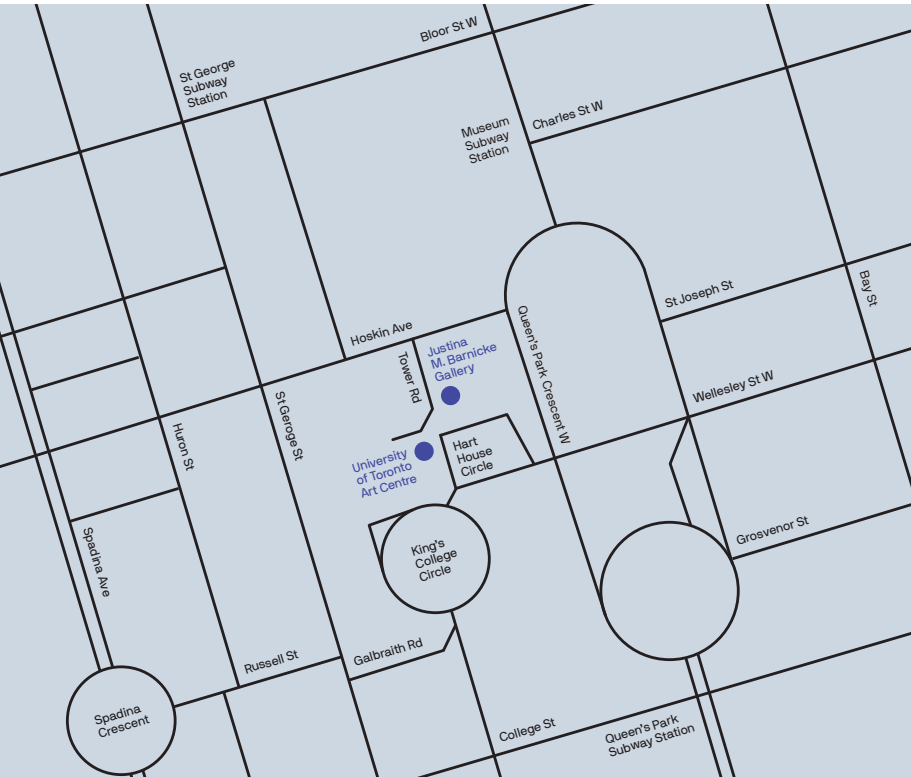
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Tuesday	Noon–5:00 PM
Wednesday	Noon–8:00 PM
Thursday	Noon–5:00 PM
Friday	Noon–5:00 PM
Saturday	Noon–5:00 PM
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

Closed on statutory holidays. Class tours and
group bookings by appointment.
Admission is FREE.

 The Art Museum is wheelchair accessible.



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