



**ELLA COOPER
JAMES YEBOAH
JEFF BIERK
& TAU LEWIS**

UNMASKED

NOVEMBER 7, 2017–JANUARY 15, 2018
MISSISSAUGA CENTRAL LIBRARY

AGM
ART GALLERY OF MISSISSAUGA

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

To spark a discourse during Canada's highly symbolic sesquicentennial year, the AGM commits to providing a platform for those voices who have been excluded, and to spotlighting the problematic voices that have for too long been cherished and protected within the walls of the institution.

The contemporary artists presented within this exhibition have responded to selected works held within the AGM's Permanent Collection, and work to reclaim agency over their representations. They aim to expand upon and subvert a dialogue that was so rigidly enforced and perpetuated by problematic historical images, aesthetics and politics. For over a century people of colour, and the cultural objects they have created, have been positioned as a tool by western artists to convey a more "simple" and "pure" culture. These peoples and their aesthetics have been romanticized and even fetishized in an attempt to indicate an idealized independence from the problems that plagued "civilized societies" — while their own cultures were being annihilated under European colonialism.

The aesthetic of art produced within colonized nations has been and continues to be appropriated and misrepresented to further these ideas — bringing great wealth and status to artists and institutions who did so, while the works of Black artists have historically been plundered and relegated to the vitrines of natural history museums. Even in Canada, the history of collections and collecting practices is fraught with violence and erasure.

This exhibition aims to bring to light the fact that not only do these attitudes still persist, they are maintained literally and symbolically within galleries and museums. The AGM commits to unmasking these harmful and persistent ideologies, and to highlighting alternative voices in order to actively decolonize the Permanent Art Collection.

Laura Carusi
Curatorial and Collections Coordinator



ARTIST BIOS

Ella Cooper is an award winning independent filmmaker, photo-video artist, educator, impact producer, consultant and programmer based in Toronto who has been working in the arts and culture sector for over 17 years while emerging in her practice as a photo-video artist. Her creative work explores the diaspora, the creation of positive representations of the Black body in Canada, equity and arts for social change, community storytelling, contemporary dance and hybrid identity. She is also the founder of Black Women Film! Canada, a new initiative and leadership program supporting the development of emerging Black women filmmakers that she created with support from TIFF, CBC, CFC, the Nia Centre for the Arts and 40 local Black women filmmakers here in Toronto.

James Yeboah is a Ghanaian-Canadian artist based in Brampton, Ontario. His work focuses on themes of race, gender, and mental health. His pieces attempt to reach out to his viewers in order to create a sense of mutual vulnerability and understanding. Yeboah's work has been featured in publications such as *NOW* magazine and *THIS* magazine. His premiere solo show entitled *When Black Boys Cry* was displayed this past August at Magic Pony Gallery, and touched on subjects of Black masculinity and white supremacy.

Jeff Bierk is a self-taught artist who works in photography and video. He works at Downtown Camera, one of the last camera stores in Toronto. Bierk's work has been shown in group and solo exhibitions at A/C Repair, Art Museum at the University of Toronto, O'Born Contemporary, General Hardware, Fountain Contemporary, Mark Christopher Gallery, Toronto, Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, CRAM Gallery, St. Catharines, and Platform Gallery, Winnipeg, along with a public installation in Ponti di Breta, Italy. He has been published in *Flash Forward* (Selected Winner Canada, 2012, 2015), *Night Papers* (Night Gallery, LAABF), *Canadian Art*, *Carbon Paper*, *Four Poets* and *Editorial Magazine*.

Tau Lewis is a Jamaican-Canadian artist living and working in Toronto, Ontario. A self-taught sculptor, Lewis combines natural and synthetic materials to create simulations of living things. She considers the history and symbolism of each material, exploring the political boundaries of nature, identity and authenticity. Her work is bodily and organic, with an explicit strangeness and subtle morbidity. Her current practice relies heavily on her surrounding environment; she constructs sculptural portraits using found objects, repurposed materials and live plants sourced from urban and rural landscapes. She connects these acts of repurposing and collecting with diasporic experience and Black bodies. Her portraits are recuperative gestures that counter persistent tendencies to erase or peripheralize Black artists and narratives within Canadian art and history.

IMAGE CREDIT

Cover

Jeff Bierk & Tau Afryea Lewis, *Fourth Floor with Tau, Portrait, September 14, 2016 (II)*, 2017, Archival Pigment Print, Edition 1/1. Image courtesy of the artists.

Inside

Ella Cooper, *Body Land Identity*, 2014, Featuring Keiron Lyn, Idil Mire, Tya Zula & Whitney French. Images courtesy of the artist.

The Art Gallery of Mississauga gratefully acknowledges the Mississauga Central Library and the City of Mississauga for their generous support of this exhibition.

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First. New. Next. The AGM provides platforms for exhibitions, collections and experimentation in contemporary culture with a recent focus on artists and cultural producers from Indigenous, newcomer and youth communities. Through a broad range of educational programs, artist projects and other forms of critical dialogue, the AGM seeks to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, foster community, and provide spaces where alternative modes of thought are supported and activated in tangible ways.

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