

This publication accompanies the exhibition The Sunshine Eaters presented at Onsite Gallery, OCAD University, Toronto.

EXHIBITION:

The Sunshine Eaters January 10 to April 15, 2018 Onsite Gallery 199 Richmond St. W. Toronto, Ontario Canada M5V 0H4

PUBLISHER: OCAD University CURATOR/AUTHOR: Lisa Deanne Smith

DESIGN: Tom Chaggaris

PRINTING: Warren's Waterless Printing Inc.

ISBN: 978-1-77252-007-1

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Thanks to the Collection of Bruce Munro Wright (Vancouver), Collection of Dr. Paul Marks (Toronto), Catriona Jeffries, Casey Kaplan, Alexandra Kehayoglou Studio, Marlborough Contemporary, Monique Meloche Gallery, National Film Board of Canada, Jack Shainman Gallery, Erin Stump Projects, Archives of Ontario, Queen's University Archives, Robert Sangster Surface Design, Jeff Crews, Linda Columbus, Francisco Alvarez and of course all of the artists and designers.

Cover:

Winnie Truong, *Helping Hands, Big or Small* (detail), 2017, coloured pencils and paper collage, 32" x 24" framed. Courtesy of the artist and Erin Stump Projects.

Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2015, mixed media including vintage toys and globes, wire, fabric, metal and mannequin, 104" x 50" x 44", © Nick Cave. Photo by James Prinz Photography. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

It is that plant we have all seen, growing through the cracks of the sidewalk, determined to live, to reach up and eat some sunshine.

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The Sunshine Eaters

By Lisa Deanne Smith

As a child and teenager, I spent my summers at my grandparents' home in a small village in rural New Brunswick. Their house, barn, garden and fields were surrounded by old-growth forest. Our family had settled in the area after emigrating from Ireland in 1832. The pine, birch, maple, hemlock and spruce trees created an environment that fascinated me and I learned much from it. Seeing new growth alongside decomposing tree trunks filled me with calm. I became sensitive to the sounds of the wind; of snowfall dropping from an overburdened branch and of loud cracks that may mean an animal is nearby. I spent many hours with my grandfather in the woods fishing, following trap lines and listening to his stories. My memory easily pulls up the rich smells, sights, sounds and textures of that place. As a teen, I struggled with what felt like crisis after crisis. People close to me died in car accidents and by suicide. There was much in society I hated, but I did not know how to change or accept any of it. My anger at the world grew and I became very self-destructive. Luckily, when all fell apart I was able to muster enough hope to turn things around and thrive. Spending many hours alone in the woods was part of the process.

Although the world is amazingly beautiful in so many ways, we are living in a time of multiple global crises. Faced with extreme weather events, climate change and water crises;



2017, two-channel video installation.

Jessica Karuhanga, being who you are there is no other (still),

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increased income and economic disparity; the rise of populism as an ideology that "pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice"; and, a way for world leaders to work together to address these crises: it is hard to feel hopeful.

The Sunshine Eaters exhibition highlights how contemporary artists and designers look to the land, plants, flowers and trees as a means to imagine and conjure hope in the face of crises. The artists and designers in the exhibition come from different cultural milieus and have distinct objectives and concerns with their work.

Alanis Obomsawin's documentary film *Trick or Treaty?* inspired the curatorial premise for **The Sunshine Eaters** and is featured in the exhibition. *Trick or Treaty?* discusses Treaty No. 9, an agreement made in 1905 between the Canadian government and Indigenous people in Northern Ontario, which is currently under legal challenge. Historians at the Queen's University archive uncovered information in the personal diary of Daniel MacMartin, treaty commissioner for the Government of Ontario in 1905, that suggests "First Nation leaders may have been misled by government

Alanis Obomsawin, *Trick or Treaty?* (still), 2014, video, 1 hour 24 minutes. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.

Nick Cave, Soundsuit, 2011, mixed media including beaded and sequined garments, fabric, metal and mannequin, 99" x 26" x 15." © Nick Cave. Photo by James Prinz Photography.

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

The Sunshine Eaters exhibition highlights how contemporary artists and designers look to the land, plants, flowers and trees as a means to imagine and conjure hope in the face of crises.

negotiators as they were signing Treaty No. 9, says Murray Klippenstein, legal representative for Mushkegowuk Council."²

The film profiles Indigenous leaders who "aim to raise awareness about issues vital to First Nations in Canada: respect for and protection of their lands and their natural resources. and the right to hunt and fish so that their societies can prosper."³ In watching this film, I was moved by Cree teen, David Kawapit, his five friends and an experienced guide, who walked 1,600 kilometers along the traditional trade routes of the Algonquin, Mohawk and Cree, from Whapmagoostui, Québec (on the east side of Hudson Bay) to Ottawa, Ontario, in support of the Idle No More Movement and Teresa Spence. Walking the paths of their ancestors, they travelled cross-country by snowshoe and on foot, and many additional Inuit, Métis and First Nations people joined them along the way. The trek lasted 69 cold days, from January 16 until they arrived in Ottawa, as a group of 300, on March 25, 2013. The walk became known as The Journey of Nishiyuu (Nishiyuu is Cree for people). David Kawapit discusses the walk in Trick or Treaty?: "This journey has rekindled a spirit of our people... not only to each other but to honour and respect the land." I became fascinated with how this walk deeply inspired Indigenous youth, rekindled their spirit in the face of attempted erasure, outstanding land claims and poisoned lands and waters. Obomsawin, one of Canada's most distinguished documentarians, captures the hope and strength of Turtle Island's Indigenous peoples and their importance in all our lives as custodians of the land.

Spirit, people, land. Moved by this deep gesture — the need to walk, understand and protect the land and the resulting hope it inspired — I began to think about what hope is and searched out other artists and designers that used motifs



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of flowers, plants, trees and the land to conjure hope.

Hope theorist and psychologist Charles R. Snyder studied the importance of hope. He hypothesized that, "simply put, hopeful thought reflects the belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use those pathways. We also proposed that hope, so defined, serves to drive the emotions and well-being of people."

All of the works in **The Sunshine Eaters**, directly and indirectly, reference crisis:

- "1. a stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or for worse, is determined; turning point.
- 2. a condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political, or international affairs, leading to a decisive change.
- 3. a dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life." 5

Upon entering **The Sunshine Eaters** exhibition, the viewer encounters a bouquet of lilies. These flowers, stargazer lilies, are so beautiful, light and airy I can almost smell them. The flowers are upside-down,

draws our attention to the thought and feeling processes in which wonder, sadness, empathy and hope are formed.

Shary Boyle has the ability to evoke deep complicated feelings in her viewers that, I believe, result from our negotiation of living within a capitalist, colonial context. Referencing European porcelain figurines which were fashionable banquet table decorations for royalty in European courts in the mid-1700s and went on to be collected by the middle class as a symbol of prestige and refinement, Boyle draws us in with her sculpture's delicate exquisiteness. Refined and beautiful, they also reveal fleshy humans and animals, lush flora and fauna often configured in surreal crises of feelings that reference our cultural past and its struggles with nature. Hope blooms through divulging the repressed.

Boyle insightfully suggested exhibiting her sculptures within artist Jim Holyoak's drawing titled, *The Thicket*. It is a floor-to-ceiling drawing in black ink inspired by time spent observing banyan fig trees in India. The tangled vines, branches and roots that engulf the viewer are both realistic and abstract and present no specific focal point.

Spirit, people, land.

delicately balancing on one bud that has not sprung open yet. Then I have a moment when I understand it is not a real bouquet of flowers welcoming us to the gallery but a sculpture. It is during this moment, when you perceive the flowers as one thing and then you understand them as something else, that artist Tony Matelli is interested in. Through *Arrangement 6*, and his many other awe-inspiring hyper realist sculptures, he is creating a psychological situation that

Banyan trees spread laterally through aerial prop roots which resemble thick woody trunks and are one of the earth's oldest trees with specimens dated between 200 to 500 years old in India, Cambodia and Indonesia. Banyan trees and Holyoak's *The Thicket* present a visualization of deep time that highlights how time on earth is experienced much differently by plants and trees as well as pointing to vegetation's persistence to grow.

Shary Boyle, *The Rejection of Pluto*, 2008, porcelain, china paint, lustre, mirror, LED lights, 7.9" x 9.8" x 14.2. For the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, in response to the Florentine artist Giovanni Battista Foggini's (1652-1725) bronze sculpture from the AGO collection, *The Rape of Proserpine by Pluto*.

Tony Matelli, *Weed*, 2016, painted bronze, 21" x 11" x 8." Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough Contemporary.





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As time is a necessary social construct to humans, so is language. Nina Leo and Moez Surani have collaborated with professional perfumers on their *Heresies* series, an olfactory-centred project that explores smell as the only sense to reach the memory and emotional centres of the brain before reaching the language centre. The viewer will sniff scents before having an explanation of what they are smelling, leaving room for them to freely associate the scents to their memories and experience. After they have encountered the scents, the viewer learns that perfumers,

Jim Holyoak, *The Thicket*, 2016, ink on paper, 11'4" x 100.' Photo by Paul Litherland.

Alexandra Kehayoglou, *Stele*, 2015, wool hand tufted textile, 90.5" x 153.5." Photo by Francisco Nocito. Nina Leo and Moez Surani, *Heresies*, 2018, a line of custom scents. who grew up in a city that carries an international stigma, created each scent to represent their city. **The Sunshine Eaters** presents Hiroshima and Waco. Our perception radically shifts with provided language associations.

Designer Alexandra Kehayoglou creates hand-tufted wool rugs made entirely from discarded thread from her grandparents' carpet factory in Buenos Aires. *Stele*, the work included in **The Sunshine Eaters**, is extremely lush in its many shades of green and brown and its tufts of growth. It is difficult to resist the desire to lay our body on it. However, it is not a perfect patch of grass but an artwork hanging from the wall, draping across the floor in a gallery. We know it is documentation of nature. Kehayoglou intends the viewer to remember their real experience touching grass, value it and ultimately move them to protect the land we all live on.

Integral to Jessica Karuhanga's art practice is experiencing and expressing through both the body and mind. For this exhibition, her multi-channel video installation presents a series of vignettes and live online movements or performances that are "a meditation on land, earth and land-scapes through movement centering black femme bodies." In our mythologies on the Canadian landscape, there is an absence of blackness, very little urban life and vast swathes

of untouched wilderness. Karuhanga places herself physically in the Canadian landscape and challenges: "Who paints the landscapes here literally and figuratively? Who gets to experience, witness and revel on the earth here? In what ways can blackness as urbanity be called into question?"⁸



In 1992, in reaction to seeing video footage of the Rodney King beating and subsequent riots in Los Angeles, Nick Cave created his first fantastical *Soundsuit* from sticks. In an interview he remembers "the intensity of what I was reading about and experiencing with the L.A. riots was so difficult for me, particularly as a black male, and it made me start to think about ideas of feeling devalued, less than,

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When all hope is gone spending time alone in the woods, laying on the grass, digging in the earth, smelling the musty decay and feeling the rough texture of tree bark can shift things.

dismissed and so I started to think about materials in that same sort of way."9 That Soundsuit helped Cave process his experience of racism and over the next 25 years, his Soundsuits have taken many shapes. Some are assemblages made with materials found in thrift stores and flea markets that reference cultural stereotypes through consumer products. Some, such as one included in The Sunshine Eaters, are guilted bright fabrics and seguins sewn in disturbing shapes that reference the pope and the Ku Klux Klan. The suits are joyous and challenging, they aim to transport people to a hopeful, playful place within themselves to gain the resilience needed to address crises of race, gender and class.

Also playful but complicated upon closer examination are Winnie Truong's delicately reassembled cut paper and coloured pencil drawings of female and plant forms. She invents scenes that in her own words, "...disrupt the idealized female form and examine the parallels between anatomy and botany, grooming and landscaping."10 There is pleasure found in these bodies and fantastical flowers as they merge into and from each other. The figures look away from us or are masked as they dance, relax and play. There is a delightful fuck you about them. They are brown, yellow, black and cream. They are pretty, private and some show rolls of fat. Although the pencil crayon drawings present a childlike light-heartedness, the characters are slightly fallow and do not behave.

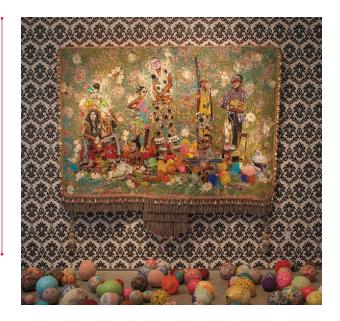
Against a backdrop of floral wallpaper, a bedazzled tapestry captures eight black children and teens, freeze frame, during a birthday party in Ebony G. Patterson's Bad Pickney from the Fambily series. The work is bright, colourful and shiny with balloons, toys, guns and cupcakes in the scene. The figures have different expressions and stances. They are simultaneously depicted as sweet everyday children and as racist stereotypes. In discussing the inclusion of children in her work, Patterson says, "ephebiphobia is the fear of youth. When watching the news reports where youth of colour are often victims of violent killings, these children are often described as adults. Their blackness renders them victimless and incapable of innocence. The black body has always been a site of contention, it is feared. policed, restricted in public spaces,"11 The bling, florals, sequins, tassels and balloons that surround and decorate these children aim to make them visible, to illuminate them and drive home the point that "they are children too, filled with the same sense of optimism, play, insecurities, curiosities and pain as other children."12

In contrast to the use of bright florals and bling that illuminate the children in Patterson's work, Robert Holmes' drawings and watercolours of Canadian wildflowers Ebony G. Patterson, *Bad Pickney* from the *Fambily*series, 2013, mixed media on
hand-embellished, jacquard
woven tapestry with 56 fabric
balloons, dimensions variable.

© Ebony G. Patterson.

Collection of Dr. Paul Marks,
Toronto. Image courtesy of the
artist and Monique Meloche
Gallery, Chicago.

Winnie Truong, Libra Season, 2017, coloured pencils and paper collage, 32" x 24" framed. Courtesy of the artist and Erin Stump Projects.





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from the 1880s to 1920s are passive as they depict local specimens. His drawings are accurate with an artistic component that reveals his love of line, form and colour. These beautiful drawings serve as a colonial expression of perceived discovery of the land and the practice of capturing that knowledge through cataloguing it. The drawings on exhibition are from OCAD University's Collection. Holmes taught at the university from 1912 to 1930.

Rather than capturing the land, Brian Jungen is concerned with protecting it. Inspired by patterns found in nature and traditional Indigenous beading designs Jungen drilled holes in ready-made plastic jerry cans rendering them useless of their intended purpose to carry water. The tiny bead-like holes in the sculpture, Seed, follow the arrangement in which sunflower seeds grow. Known as the Fibonacci

sequence or the Golden Ratio, its frequency in nature and its astounding functionality suggests its significance as a central characteristic of life highlighting the intelligence of plants, flowers and trees.

When all hope is gone spending time alone in the woods, laying on the grass, digging in the earth, smelling the musty decay and feeling the rough texture of tree bark can shift things. In watching Obomsawin's film, *Trick or Treaty?* and in various ways through all of the works in **The Sunshine Eaters**, I am reminded of that subtle shift, difficult to fully comprehend, in which hope rises. It is that plant we have all seen, growing through the cracks of the sidewalk, determined to live, to reach up and eat some sunshine.

Robert Holmes, Port Hope,
1927, pencil and water
colour on paper, 13.9" x 10".
OCAD University Permanent
Collection. Image courtesy of
OCAD U Visual Resources &
Special Collections / IMG3446

Notes

- 1 Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Populism on November 5, 2017.
- 2 Grech R. (January 11, 2011). *Treaty Challenge*. Retrieved from *http://www.thesudburystar.com/2011/01/07/treaty-challenge* on November 8, 2017.
- 3 Trick or Treaty?. Dir. Alanis Obomsawin and David Kawapit. National Film Board of Canada, 2014. DVD.
- 4 Snyder, C. R., Rand, K. L., & Sigmon, D. R. (2002). Hope theory: A Member of the Positive Psychology Family. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), Handbook of positive psychology (pp. 257-276). New York: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from https://teachingpsychology.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/hope-theory.pdf on September 20, 2017.

Brian Jungen, Seed, 2012, carved gallon jerrycan, 19.5" x 13.5" x 6.5." Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York. Photo by Jean Vong.

- 5 "crises". Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. (December 6, 2017) Retrieved from http://www.dictionary.com/browse/crises on October 8, 2017.
- 6 Leo, N. & Surani, M. (2017) Retrieved from http://artandolfaction.com/a-wall-isnt-broken/ on October 22, 2017.
- 7 Karuhanga, J. Re: notes. Message to Lisa Deanne Smith (September 8, 2017).
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- 9 Cave, N. Art Talk: An Interview with Nick Cave at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston [video file]. (2015) Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndvl8L_a72A&t=15s on October 22, 2017.
- 10 Truong, W. Re: July re: The Sunshine Eaters. Message to Lisa Deanne Smith (August 1, 2017).
- 11 Patterson, E.G. & Ingrasciotta, C. "São Paulo Biennial from an Artist's Perspective: an Interview with Ebony G. Patterson" My Art Guides. (2016) Retrieved from http://myartguides.com/posts/interviews/sao-paulo-biennial-from-an-artists-perspective-an-interview-with-ebony-g-patterson/ on October 22, 2017.
- 12 Patterson, E.G. & Ingrasciotta, C. "São Paulo Biennial from an Artist's Perspective: an Interview with Ebony G. Patterson" My Art Guides. (2016) Retrieved from http://myartguides.com/posts/interviews/sao-paulo-biennial-from-an-artists-perspective-an-interview-with-ebony-g-patterson/ on October 22, 2017.



Biographies

Shary Boyle

Shary Boyle's practice integrates the personal and the political; the emotional and intellectual; the expansive and focused; and the abject and mainstream. A winner of the Hnatyshyn Foundation Award and the Gershon Iskowitz Prize, Boyle was shortlisted for the 2009 and 2011 Sobey Art Awards and has exhibited at the Centre Pompidou; the National Gallery of Canada; the Art Gallery of Ontario; the 2010, 2014 and 2017 Canadian Biennials; and represented Canada at the 2013 Venice Biennale.

Nick Cave

Nick Cave is an artist, educator and foremost, a messenger, working between the visual and performing arts through a wide range of mediums including sculpture, installation, video, sound and performance. Cave exhibits internationally and recently presented a massive immersive installation *Until* at MASS MoCA (MA). His works are found in many collections including the Museum of Modern Art and the Smithsonian. Cave is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery.

Robert Holmes

Robert Holmes (1861 - 1930), a botanist, flower painter and master of watercolours, spent a lifetime drawing and painting Canadian wildflowers. The collections of the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario include notable wildflower watercolours by Holmes. He taught for eighteen years at the Ontario College of Art.

Brian Jungen

A member of the Doig River band of the Dane-zaa First Nation, Brian Jungen employs repurposed materials with contemporary and traditional techniques. The resulting works often prompt viewers to consider the distances and proximities between cultures and between humans/nature. Jungen won the inaugural Sobey Art Award in 2002 and received the Gershon Iskowitz Prize in 2010. He has exhibited internationally including at the National Gallery of Canada, Art Gallery of Ontario and at dOCUMENTA 13. Jungen is represented by Casey Kaplan (NY) and Catriona Jeffries (BC).

Jessica Patricia Kichoncho Karuhanga

Jessica Patricia Kichoncho Karuhanga is an artist working through drawing, movement and video. She has presented her work at the Art Museum at University of Toronto (2017), Art Gallery of Ontario (2016) and Goldsmiths, London (2016). She has performed lectures for The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Royal Ontario Museum as well as Harvard University and Tisch School of the Arts at NYU's Black Portraitures Series. Her writing has been published by BlackFlash Magazine and C Magazine.

Alexandra Kehayoglou

Alexandra Kehayoglou creates wool carpets in large immersive formats. Her work investigates and documents the landscapes that the artist has once visited — forests, desert islands, Patagonian glaciers and pastizales (grasslands), which she desires to preserve throughout time. Kehayoglou has made a carpeted runway for fashion designer Dries Van Noten and has exhibited at NGV Triennial 2017 in Melbourne and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Her work became established worldwide as an outcry against deforestation and devastation, calling for environmental awareness, as well as a forensic document for massive landscape changes in the Anthropocene epoch.

Nina Leo

Nina Leo's work explores the sentient nature of the human condition and has been shown internationally in the Beyond/ In Western N.Y. 2010 Biennial, Kunsthaus Santa Fe (Mexico) and Lobby Gallery (IL). Over the past five years, her olfactory research has developed through associations with the Monell Chemical Senses Center (PA) and the Institute for Art and Olfaction (LA). This art and research has been presented/published in Canada and abroad.

Tony Matelli

Tony Matelli's sculptures exhibit a sophisticated technical execution and aim to create psychological spaces that draw our attention to the sentient where wonder, sadness, empathy and hope develop. He has had solo exhibitions at Leo Koenig (NY), Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), Palais de Tokyo (Paris), Uppsala Konstmuseum (Sweden) and a mid-career survey at the AROS Aarhus Kunstmuseum (Denmark). Matelli is represented by Marlborough Contemporary (NY).

Alanis Obomsawin

Alanis Obomsawin is one of Canada's most distinguished documentary filmmakers. Obomsawin's award-winning films address the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada from their perspective, giving prominence to voices that have long fallen on deaf ears. An Officer of the Order of Canada, she has received multiple Governor General's Awards, lifetime achievement awards and honorary degrees.

Ebony G. Patterson

In much of her work, Jamaican artist Ebony G. Patterson explores the use of feminine gendered adornment in the construct of urban masculinity within the dancehall community and in popular culture. She embellishes photographic tapestries by hand with beading, sequins, fabric and jewelry - the resulting works are visually seductive, while revealing underlying questions about beauty, performance, stereotyping and race. Patterson has been featured in publications such as *The New York Times, Frieze, Interview, Vogue*, and *The International Review of African American Art*. Patterson is represented by Monique Meloche Gallery (IL).

Moez Surani

Moez Surani's writing has been published internationally, including in Harper's Magazine, Best American Experimental Writing 2016, and the Globe and Mail. He has been an artist in residence in Burma, China, Finland, Italy, Taiwan and Switzerland. He is the author of three poetry books: Reticent Bodies, Floating Life, and most recently, Operations. In investigating language and perception, he is collaborating with Nina Leo on a collection of work, including their Heresies project.

Winnie Truong

Winnie Truong is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Chalmers Arts Fellowship, W.O. Forsythe award, the 401 Richmond Career Launcher prize and the BMO 1st! Art Award for Ontario. Winnie has exhibited internationally in galleries across Toronto, Los Angeles, Copenhagen and in New York where she was also featured VOLTA, NY Art Fair. She is in the collection of The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art (KA). Truong is represented by Erin Stump Projects (Toronto).

Free Public Events

Nick Cave and Ebony G. Patterson in Conversation

Wednesday, January 10, 6:30 to 8 p.m. 100 McCaul St., Auditorium, Room 190

All events are free and at Onsite Gallery, 199 Richmond St. W., unless otherwise noted.

Exhibition Opening Reception

Wednesday, January 10, 8 to 10 p.m. Many of the artists and designers will be present

Shary Boyle Artist Talk

Thursday, January 25, 1 to 2 p.m. 100 McCaul St., Room 230 Presented by the MAAD Speakers Series Light reception at Onsite Gallery following the talk

Tony Matelli Artist Talk

Wednesday, February 28, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Exile Series = Rising Sadness Ali Asgar Performance and Artist Talk

Wednesday, March 14, 7 to 9 p.m.

Presented by Art and Social Change, The President's Office and Onsite Gallery

Treaty No. 9 and Daniel MacMartin Diary Discussion with Alanis Obomsawin

Wednesday, March 28, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

True Stories Toronto

Wednesday, April 11, 7 to 8:30 p.m

Inspired by themes in *The Sunshine Eaters*, storytellers share true, personal stories. Part of the True Stories Toronto event series. Organized and hosted by Storytelling Coach Marsha (of YesYesMarsha.com).

Gallery Conversation with Brian Jungen

Confirmed date will be posted on our website:

www.ocadu.ca/onsite

I THE SUNSHINE EATERS Winnie Truong, The Gauntlet (detail), 2017, coloured pencils and paper collage, 38" x 46" framed. Courtesy of the artist and Erin Stump Projects.

Onsite Gallery offers powerful, thought-provoking exhibitions of art, design and digital media to stimulate conversations on critical issues facing Toronto and the world.

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Wednesday noon to 8 p.m.

> Thursday and Friday noon to 7 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday noon to 5 p.m.

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Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 153 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.