

THE COUNTER/SELF

January 11—

March 25, 2023

Art
Museum

Works by

2Fik, Helio Eudoro, Julius Poncelet
Manapul, Meryl McMaster,
Sasha Shevchenko, Adrian Stimson,
Stacey Tyrell, Laakkuluk Williamson
Bathory and Jamie Griffiths

Curated by Mona Filip

We gratefully acknowledge additional
project support from Yvonne and David
Fleck, Debra Campbell, Janice Lewis,
Catherine Barbaro, Judy and Craig Jarvis,
Jane L. Thompson, and Tim Murphy.

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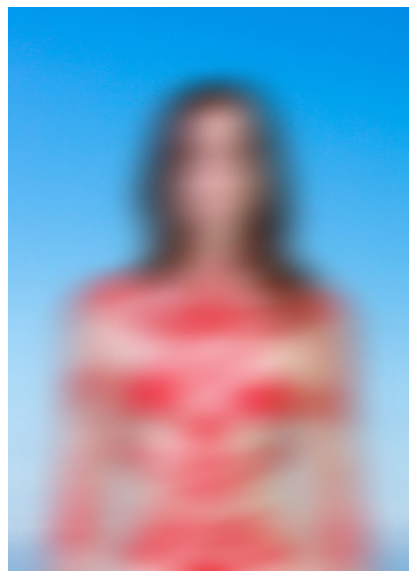
THE COUNTER/SELF

Cover: Adrian Stimson, *New Born Buffalo Boy*, 2022.
Exhibition prints, 60 x 40 in.
Courtesy of the artist. Photo
by Blaire Russell.

Right: Stacey Tyrell, *Canada*,
from *Pour La Victoire*
series, 2016. Digital C-print.
Courtesy of the artist ©
Stacey Tyrell.



In a new exhibition, Indigenous and diasporic Canadian artists explore the radical potential of the alter-ego in subverting dominant narratives.



Left: Sasha Shevchenko, *Twice Bound, Once removed, Born Quick, Born Tangled*, 2021–22. Digital print on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Middle: Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory & Jamie Griffiths, *White Liar and the Known Shore: Frobisher and the Queen*, 2021. Photography on stretched canvas, hat, flagstaff, fool's gold. Courtesy of the artists.



Top right: Meryl McMaster, *What Will I Say to the Sky and the Earth II*, 2019. Digital C-prints. Courtesy of the artist.

Bottom right: 2Fik, *Sur le Bord*, 2019. Digital prints, Dibond mounted. Courtesy of the artist.

Next page: Julius Poncelet Manapul, *Whitewashed Bakla in the Presence of the Rice Queen* (triptych detail), 2017. Digital

collage print, 36 x 24 inches each. Courtesy of the artist.

Helio Eudoro, *Manto Nº5 – BATTLE AGAINST DESTINY – Moirai's Fate Armour* (detail), 2021. Mixed-media textiles sculpture with assorted attached elements; video, 10:05 min; audio, 46:28 min. (Fernando Pessoa, *Ode Marítima*. Recited by the artist). Courtesy of the artist.

Navigating the complexities of selfhood, agency, and representation, artists transform their appearance and stage complex images, videos, and installations that expose and disrupt prejudices with regards to gender, race, ethnicity, and nationhood. Informed by personal and cultural histories entwined within the artists' life experiences, their counter/selves advance divergent perspectives that upend deceptive national legacies and social expectations.



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To a certain extent, every self is performative—a cast of characters we can summon or shape to serve our needs as we face the world. We each contain potential multitudes that can express or withhold different sides of ourselves, adapt to specific contexts, determine or respond to a boundless range of human interactions, surmount or succumb to inner drives and outside pressures. Navigating the complexities of selfhood, agency, and representation, this exhibition brings together a group of Canadian artists who create and embody imaginative alter-egos to examine, perform, and subvert identity constructs. Transforming their appearance and staging complex images, videos, and installations, they expose and disrupt prejudices with regards to gender, race, ethnicity, and nationhood. Informed by cultural histories entwined within the artists’ life experiences, their counter/selves advance divergent perspectives that undercut deceptive national legacies and social expectations.

A member of the Siksika Nation, Adrian Stimson unsettles colonial narratives through humour and counter-memory, confronting historical oppression with fierce irreverence. Shattering stereotypes through transformative gestures that merge real and fictionalized notions, Buffalo Boy and The Shaman Exterminator are two recurring, intertwined alter-egos central to Stimson’s performance work. Derived from the artist’s ancestral worldview and honouring the centrality of the bison to Blackfoot spirituality and survival, they function as devices to dislocate, dispel, and alter entrenched oppressive outlooks. Upending colonial nostalgia, Stimson’s personas bring forth absented narratives, creating space to shape a new reality.

With similar strategies of dismantling colonial tenets, Stacey Tyrell examines identity, race, and heritage in the context of post-colonial societies and the Caribbean Diaspora. In her series *Pour La Victoire* (2015–17), she wears make-up and costume to pose as allegorical personifications of European and North American nations. Tyrell’s images perform a radical subversion, substituting her racialized body for the Eurocentric ideal, any signs of difference concealed. An irreconcilable disjunction lies beneath these symbols of nationhood, unmasking an effort to protect

privilege and power under the cover of lies. Tyrell further transforms herself in *Mistress and Slave* (2018) to highlight opposing sides of her dual ancestry, Caribbean and European, creating a provocative image that lays bare constructed racial concepts and challenges the pervasive fiction of whiteness.



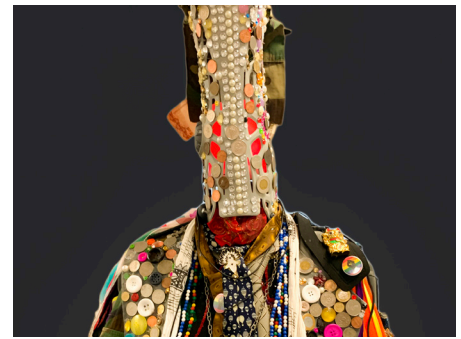
Julius Poncelet Manapul’s triptych *Whitewashed Bakla in the Presence of the Rice Queen* (2017) evokes acts of self-transformation, erasure of difference, and ornamental representation of Filipino queer identities under a whitewashing, homonormative gaze. The paper costume of the Rice Queen, adorned with gay porn cutouts and a mask of Asian influence, references Spanish royal garments; the two flanking figures combine Indigenous Ifugao, Igorot, and Ilocano attire, designed from paper templates of butterflies indigenous to the Philippines, crafted in turn from images of gay porn. The figures are framed by patterns composed from ads for skin-whitening products blended with queered butterfly motifs. Inhabiting both colonized and colonizer personas that tackle Spanish dominion over the Philippines, Manapul examines the multi-leveled displacement caused by colonialism, sexual normativity, and Eurocentric hegemony.

Exploring related concerns in a Québécois context, 2Fik deploys a group of recurring characters stemming from his experiences and inner tensions. Born in Paris to a Moroccan Muslim family, he later moved to Montréal, finding an environment that inspired him to examine identity and its socio-political ramifications. 2Fik’s performance as his main alter-ego, Ludmilla-Mary, a stylish, gender-bending character sporting a hijab and an

abundant beard, asks viewers to confront their apprehensions and biases. Challenging cultural and social norms, Ludmilla-Mary strolls silently through public spaces raising questions about difference, otherness, and belonging, as captured in the *Fanion* (2019) panels. In a related series produced in Matane, she wanders the rural Québec landscape alone, searching for an elusive connection to her environment. Evoking a loneliness that may seem either sought as respite or inflicted by social rejection, the images remain ambiguous.

Informed by her nêhiyaw (Plains Cree), British, and Dutch ancestry, Meryl McMaster’s work uses intricate props, sculptural garments, and performance to create contemplative images that invite introspection. She brings viewers along on a journey of reflection, examining the inextricable entanglements of the self with the land, lineage, history, culture, and the more-than-human realm. In her prints from the series *As Immense As The Sky* (2019), the artist, spurred by the urgency to address our collective impact upon the environment, seeks wisdom in places of ancestral life and community. She shares her acquired understanding through a transformative, embodied process, articulating an urgent call to restore the precarious ecological balance that sustains our world.

Equally focused on ancestral histories, Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory (Inuk) and Jamie Griffiths (Canada-UK) expose the colonial influence that perpetuates inequity for Inuit in their own homelands. In their work *White Liar and the Known Shore: Frobisher and the Queen* (2021), the two Iqaluit-based collaborating artists examine the impact of European incursions on Nunavut, adopting the personas of Sir Martin Frobisher and Queen Elizabeth I. Griffiths embodies the English explorer all dressed in white, exposing him as a White Liar upholding the fallacies of those in power. Williamson Bathory performs the Queen, donning white face to mimic her famous make-up while alluding to whitened bones—an Inuit mark of respect for ancestors. Her red and black flagstaff (colours significant to Greenlandic mask dance), Frobisher’s hat, and a piece of his “fool’s gold” complete the installation. The concept of Terra Nullius, the Doctrine of Discovery, and Elizabeth’s naming of southern Baffin Island as “Meta Incognita” (The Unknown Shore) established a fictional reality that allowed explorers to callously claim Indigenous lands.



Brazilian-Canadian artist Helio Eudoro investigates the layers that envelop and reveal aspects of the self related to gender, sexuality, body image, diasporic experience, and social exclusion. His *Mantos* (2017–21) are a series of sculptures, performances, and installations made from deconstructed pieces of clothing stripped of associations with class, gender, sexuality, or body size. They reframe garments as fluid tissue freed from the pressures of industry and society, restoring and releasing the body. The sumptuous ceremonial robe in *Manto N°5 – BATTLE AGAINST DESTINY – Moirai’s Fate Armour* (2021) is a protective stand-in for the body on Judgment Day. The elements composing the vestment reference a multiplicity of rituals and roles.

With a similar intention to protect and mend, Sasha Shevchenko’s work stems from her experience of displacement as a Ukrainian immigrant. Her iterative installation *Twice Bound, Once Removed, Born Quick, Born Tangled*, (2021–22) is an object-based reflection on imagination as a tool for diasporic becoming. The work centres on a fragile alter-ego, Lyusterko (little mirror), who gradually emerges within the displays, taking shape at the cusp of presence and absence. Materializing from fragments, Lyusterko begins to articulate new origin stories, creating spaces of healing. Her recursive apparitions become a tribute to resilient hope, to trans-locality, and to persistent creation in times of tragedy that feel timeless.

Audacious or enigmatic, probing power structures, asserting belonging, or obscuring presence, the counter/selves reclaim space, protect the vulnerable, and reveal the deceptions of dominant discourses, counteracting their harmful sways. In all their incarnations, they epitomize resilience, resistance, and renewal. —Mona Filip, Curator

Public Programs

Opening Reception:
Winter 2023 Exhibitions

Wednesday, January 11, 6pm-8pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and
University of Toronto Art Centre

Celebrate the opening of *THE COUNTER/SELF* at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery in Hart House and *Conceptions of White* at the University of Toronto Art Centre in University College.

Curatorial Tour with Mona Filip

Saturday, January 28, 2pm-4pm
Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Join Mona Filip for an in-depth curatorial tour examining the themes and artistic strategies in the new exhibition, *THE COUNTER/SELF*.

All programs are free and open to all.
For more information and to register,
visit artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs/

Exhibition Tours

The Art Museum offers in-person guided exhibition tours for classes and groups.
For more information or to book a tour,
email artmuseum@utoronto.ca.

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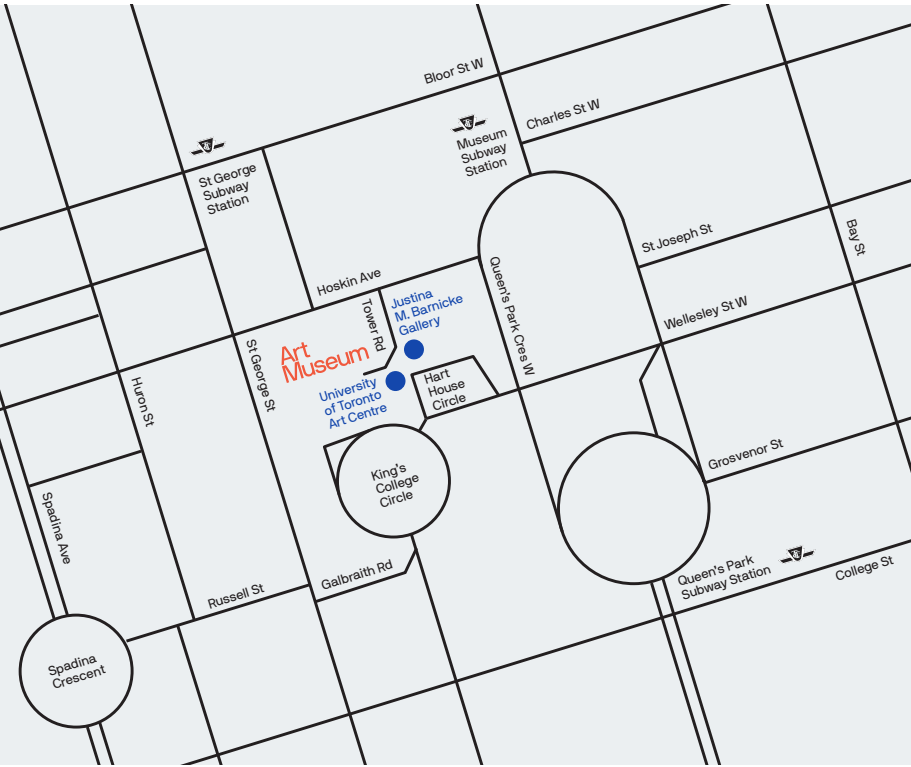
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416.978.8398

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Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7
416.978.1838

Tuesday	12 noon-5pm
Wednesday	12 noon-8pm
Thursday	12 noon-5pm
Friday	12 noon-5pm
Saturday	12 noon-5pm
Sunday	Closed
Monday	Closed

Closed on statutory holidays.
Admission is FREE.

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