

**VISITOR
INFORMATION**

**VISITOR
INFORMATION**

Lise Beaudry
Michèle Pearson Clarke
Martie Giefert
Morris Lum
Jeff Thomas

Curated by Linda Jansma
and Jayne Wilkinson

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

CONTENTS

07	FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS Donna Raetsen-Kemp
08	OSHAWA: PAST/PRESENT/FUTURE Linda Jansma
12	PLATES
74	IN WHOSE HANDS, A CAMERA? Jayne Wilkinson
78	LIST OF WORKS
79	ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery has chosen to celebrate its 50th anniversary in various ways. As the gallery was founded by local artists in 1967, work by over seventy artists from Durham Region was included in the exhibition *Durham Reach*. As the RMG’s first mandate focusses on collecting work by Ontario’s first abstract painting group, Painters Eleven, space was given to historic and contemporary abstract practices from across the country, while important work from the gallery’s permanent collection was included in other exhibitions during the year.

By looking inward, we have chosen to engage with narratives that have, and continue to have relevance to our institution’s past, present, and future. But what of those narratives created through other voices? *Visitor Information* gives us an opportunity to look at Oshawa through the work of artists who are less familiar with the city, its history, and its residents. As Linda Jansma writes in her catalogue essay: “the work in this exhibition serves to reflect the complex changes it [Oshawa] has seen through political, social and aesthetic lenses.” Lise Beaudry, Michèle Pearson Clarke, Martie Giefert, Morris Lum, and Jeff Thomas are lens-based artists chosen for their diverse practices and viewpoints. In her essay, Jayne Wilkinson asks questions to frame the work of these artists: “Who has the right to take photographs of whom? ...What is the relationship between an outsider’s view and an insider’s, when the outsider is the person with the agency a camera grants?” The answers are, of course, both complex and layered.

I would like to thank the artists for their willingness to engage with our various communities to enhance the narratives of this city. I would also like to thank co-curators Jayne Wilkinson—a curator with a particular interest in lens-based practices and one who happens to come from Oshawa—as well as the RMG’s Senior Curator, Linda Jansma. Advancing contemporary practices through dialogue can be particularly enriching as it has been with this project. Atanas Bozdarov has produced a publication that showcases the art beautifully, for which we are also grateful.

The exhibition *Visitor Information* not only enhances our programming year, it serves to enhance the RMG’s permanent collection as all work has been commissioned and purchased through a generous grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, to whom we are grateful. For support of RMG programming, we thank the City of Oshawa, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Ontario Arts Council.

Donna Raetsen-Kemp
Chief Executive Officer, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery

OSHAWA: PAST/PRESENT/FUTURE

¹ For additional information on these sites see: Patricia Reed, “The MacLeod Site (Algr-1-) and a Preliminary Delineation of the Lake Ontario Iroquois,” (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1990) and Shaun J. Austin, “Building Harmony: the Archaeology of the Grandview Site,” (Toronto: Archaeological Services., Inc., 1999).

² Steven Loft, “alt.shift.control,” *alt. shift.control: Musing on Digital Identity* (Hamilton, Art Gallery of Hamilton, and Native Indian/Inuit Photographers’ Association: 2000), 9-10.

³ Jeffthomas.ca, accessed February 27, 2017.

⁴ Morris Lum, interview with author, September 8, 2016.

⁵ Morris Lum, Artist Statement, February 21, 2017.

⁶ Martie Giefert, Artist Statement, www.mgiefert.com, accessed February 20, 2017.

Stories have an interesting way of converging. In one week, as I prepared to write this essay, the local *This Week* newspaper published a photograph of Unifor Local 222 President Colin James on its cover; three days later Bob White, the founding president of the Canadian Auto Workers (which is now Unifor), died. White, the fiery union leader, convinced Canadian membership to separate from the American United Auto Workers in 1984 while, over thirty years later, James was commenting on concerns about the potential for President Donald Trump’s economic policies to have a direct impact on the region.

The City of Oshawa is steeped in the histories of the automobile, General Motors, and the CAW/Unifor union. The sign leading into the city once stated that Oshawa was, “The City that Moto-Vates Canada”—yes, that really was on the city signs—but it has long since been replaced with “Prepare to be Amazed”—a bit more of a hopeful, future-oriented phrase. Fifteen years ago, the various auto plants employed over 22,000 people, now it is around 2,000. Where once the city was home to a single community college, Durham College, it now also hosts the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, has a satellite campus for Trent University, and a teaching site for Kingston’s Queen’s University. The city is changing, whether by design or necessity and as this transformation is underway we felt it would be interesting to seek “outsiders” impressions of one of the fastest growing cities in the country. We asked five artists to consider this post-industrial city, one that has historically had a distinct identity but which is now more often considered a bedroom community of Toronto. The responses by Lise Beaudry, Michèle Pearson Clarke, Martie Giefert, Morris Lum, and Jeff Thomas are as varied as their individual practices, serving to mirror the city back to its residents, and to those beyond its borders.

While I prefaced this essay with Oshawa’s storied connection with GM, its history goes back much further, and it’s a history that is marked by what isn’t there, as much as by what is. In 1967 and 1992 respectively, archeological digs were conducted that uncovered

the sites of two fifteenth century Wendat villages from the late Iroquoian Period.¹ Thousands of pottery shards, tools, ceramic pipes and bone fragments were uncovered, evidence of once-thriving Indigenous communities. Jeff Thomas, who identifies as an Urban Iroquois artist, and for whom “absence” informs his work, shifts personal history and memory, geography, and narrative to create a series entitled *Cultural Absence*. Curator and scholar Steven Loft writes: “An Indigenist perspective stresses a non-linear view of culture, an integrated spirituality and culture are embedded in ourselves and our art.”² There is something of the non-linear in this series of works, until Thomas points out the connections. The work, for Thomas, began with a serendipitous visit to Oshawa in 2005. While sitting in his car in a bowling alley parking lot, he photographed a hawk being chased by smaller birds, as well as images of the railroad tracks and a box-car. The piece is, fittingly, called *The Crossing Place*—which is one of the translations of the word “Oshawa” which is derived from the Ojibwa term ‘aazhaway.’ The triptychs that follow represent a weaving of narratives. *In Bird’s Eye View: Medicine Crow* Thomas combines two Edward S. Curtis photographs of an Indigenous man with an image of a hawk in the centre. Thomas has a long-standing relationship with Curtis’ historic photographs, frequently using them within his practice; the hawk is a reminder of Thomas’ Oshawa encounter with the bird, one which had landed on his arm long enough to be photographed. The connections to Edward S. Curtis are further reflected in the third triptych, one which marks a visit Thomas made to St. Louis, Missouri to study Indigenous earth mounds in that area. The mounds, reminiscent of the hilled train tracks in Oshawa, are here flanked by images of a sculpture, one possibly unearthed from such a mound. Positioned centre-and front-facing, the sculpture draws a visual parallel with Curtis’ Medicine Crow photographs. The final work in the series, *The Dancing Grounds*, shows an Indigenous earth mound in the centre surrounded by an artifact depicting dancing figures on the right and a contemporary Indigenous dancer on the left. The photographs were taken over a ten year period, combining and connecting various road trips and shifting both time and place.

Thomas links both the absence of and continued presence within different Indigenous North American communities as an act of personal recovery and agency, weaving like histories through both photography and narrative. Indeed, Thomas notes that, “My study of Indian-ness seeks to create an image bank of my urban-Iroquois experiences, as well as re-contextualize historical images of First Nations people for a contemporary audience.”³

Lise Beaudry’s visit to the archives of the Oshawa Museum informed her work in a particular way. Within the archives is the “Filing Cabinet collection” which contains photographs that do not represent an official history of Oshawa, but rather a collection of vernacular images that are subdivided into twenty categories. Interested in working with existing photographs of what might be deemed “insignificant moments,” Beaudry has created a sculpture entitled *The Stack* that transforms a photographic archive into a tangible thing: 7,412 photographs divided into twenty categories—each category represented by the number of images in that category (for example, the Arts and Culture category has 431 photographs and is represented by that many prints). The prints are threaded onto a central pole in a single stack that rises close to six feet in height. It’s a mathematical puzzle that allows the viewer to sense the weight and size of history without actually being able to see any of it.

A mesmerizing video piece shows a pair of hands (the artist’s) arranging photographs on a wooden table. A photograph of a plane in a hangar is slipped out of its archival sleeve first, followed by two historic images of a downtown plane crash. There is a pause to observe this artist-imposed triptych, and then each photo is carefully removed and replaced by images of downtown parades, one evidently more historic than the other. As we begin to wonder what Beaudry’s next juxtaposition will be, she places envelopes and file folders with archival numbers, but doesn’t show the imagery, and then archival envelopes, the shape of the photographs visible inside them, and finally she places photographs on the table face side down—only the writing on the back of

each image visible. This meander through the museum archives is both poignant and humorous. These are not images of the city’s industrialists, mayors, or religious leaders, but random events and people who have long been forgotten. The photographs aren’t particularly interesting, but then, neither are the daily details of most of our lives, even if it is those lives, and those events that constitute much of what a city is.

As this project, *Visitor Information*, unfolded, it became obvious that it would have something of an historic timeline, with Michèle Pearson Clarke dealing specifically with the legacy of General Motors and the community. Clarke’s practice is informed both by her training in documentary film practices and her MA in Social Work. For this exhibition, she invited residents of Oshawa to participate in a project that she entitled *I’m Thinking of Ending Things*. In her call for participants, she writes:

Whenever job loss is discussed, the emphasis is almost always placed on the economic impact for the community, and with this project, the goal instead is to tell the story of the emotional impact for Oshawans at a personal, familial and community level.

Loss and longing are part of Clarke’s practice, as she notes that “grief is a perpetual, life-long thing.”⁴ She was overwhelmed by the stories that she heard: stories of trauma, complex grief, inter-generational rifts, and breakups connected to job losses in Oshawa. Clarke notes that with this project she feels a tremendous amount of responsibility; it is imperative that it be both truthful and respectful of the Oshawa community. For her provocative two-channel video, she builds multiple narratives into a single voice that serves to reflect the anger and dysfunction of the stories that were relayed to her. The video’s score, composed by Mark Savoia is a multi-layered piece that mixes sound samples with musical elements to further convey the artist’s intent. The narrative appears as text on two screens, superimposed over a series of clips of cars on fire that she sourced on YouTube. Phrases like “If you had asked me then, I never would have believed I was going to

leave,” and “It’s not easy” repeated across both screens, are sobering. The connection—the destruction of cars—with the destruction of people’s lives through job loss, is poignant: the reduction of 22,000 jobs compared to 2,000, becomes more than just numbers.

Born in Trinidad and Tobago, Morris Lum’s practice has focused on the evolution of social spaces throughout metropolitan Chinatowns. He returns to these areas to further document changes as residents age, and both rent and taxes increase. In keeping with this practice, he visited Oshawa on numerous occasions, exploring different parts of the city each time. Lum notes, “I kept gravitating towards Simcoe Street, the main artery that connects the North and South. What fascinates me about Simcoe Street is how significantly different it is from the South to the North.”⁵ The exhibition includes five diptychs that move between north and south, east and west. The formal gardens of Oshawa’s Parkwood Estate are juxtaposed with an image of an abandoned store-front in a strip mall close to the 401 Highway. The paper-covered windows of the Island Paradise store reflect the artist’s tripod, with the semi-circle above its door showing the leaves and branches of a tree, which is the only living thing in the frame. The Parkwood fountain is, like the store, empty. Lum began his visits to Oshawa in the fall of 2016 and the fountain was drained by the time of his shoot. The Estate, once home to industrialist Sam McLaughlin, entertained dignitaries, politicians and artists alike (including members of the famed Group of Seven), yet Lum chose to photograph the most impressive part of the heritage gardens without water, seemingly stripped of its past glory. Similarly, a boarded and graffitied building that previously housed a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant, is shown beside an early twentieth-century stone house in the city’s north end. The latter is one of the last buildings remaining of the storied Winfields Farm that spawned one of the most successful thoroughbred racehorses in Canadian history: Northern Dancer, who is also buried there. The property is now part of a large suburban redevelopment in the city’s north end. In yet another pair, the Visitor Information building, which Lum happened upon when he took a wrong turn and

which, in turn, inspired the exhibition’s title, with its odd architecture that includes two sets of columns, is juxtaposed with a building in the Parkwood Estate gardens—equally odd with its columns, colonnade, and Asian-inspired roof. What ties these photographs together is a sense of nostalgia, of spaces once inhabited. Lum gives the viewer the opportunity to enter the image and imagine the narrative.

While Lum explores the exterior architecture of the city in his large-scale photographs, Martie Giefert concentrates his lens on interiors. He writes:

*The cultural importance of architecture and its significant role in human experience and memory are continuing themes in my work. Certain buildings call to mind important moments in an individual’s life, they remind us of our place in the present, and connect us to our past.*⁶

The *Unifor Union Hall* brings this essay back to its introduction. For his photograph in the newspaper, Unifor’s president, Colin James, stood in front of the union logo, in a space that Giefert has deliberately left empty in his work. Decorated for the Christmas holidays, the room’s central podium is framed by an even number of chairs and tables. The tree is the only thing that skews the balance while simultaneously lending a false sense of holiday cheer to a sterile setting. Similarly formatted, *Legion Hall* also makes an attempt at holiday spirit with a lone poinsettia plant on the corner of the stage, the partially opened drape revealing that which is usually hidden. Both of these works show gathering spaces for the community, but without people the emphasis lies in the examination of the architectural space. *Unifor Union Hall* and *Legion Hall* point to the past while the other three focus on Oshawa, the future, and technology. *ACE Facility Hydraulic Floor* with its reflected pool of water on the lower left corner is humming machinery, lights on, carts filled with seeming purpose. UOIT boasts that its Ace Wind Tunnel is the first testing and research facility of its kind in Canada. Giefert structures the image around the large, darkened, and somewhat foreboding

opening at the centre, as though one enters the future as entering space. A final interior—*UOIT Sound Room*—looks to have been digitally constructed, although it too is part of UOIT’s experimental ACE facility. But rather than feeling like promotional advertising for the centre, Giefert’s images serve as a hybrid between a standard documentary photograph and a deliberate messing with architectural space. The viewer is confronted with images that are neither familiar nor particularly inviting: Giefert’s photographs reveal the evolution of a city in transition, linking, as he notes, “architecture and collective memory.”

The work in *Visitor Information* is this: the artist as visitor giving information to those of us on the inside. There are places that we pass by daily and that hardly register, and there are places that we simply don’t have access to and, thus, have never seen. Some of Oshawa’s residents have been open to having their thoughts and feelings explored, while other projects embrace personal experiences that relate, in shifting fashion, to the city’s history. And that photographic history informs and allows us to view not only the present but also the future, differently. As the RMG enters its sixth decade as the centre of contemporary artistic practice in the City of Oshawa, the work in this exhibition serves to reflect the complex changes it has seen through political, social and aesthetic lenses.

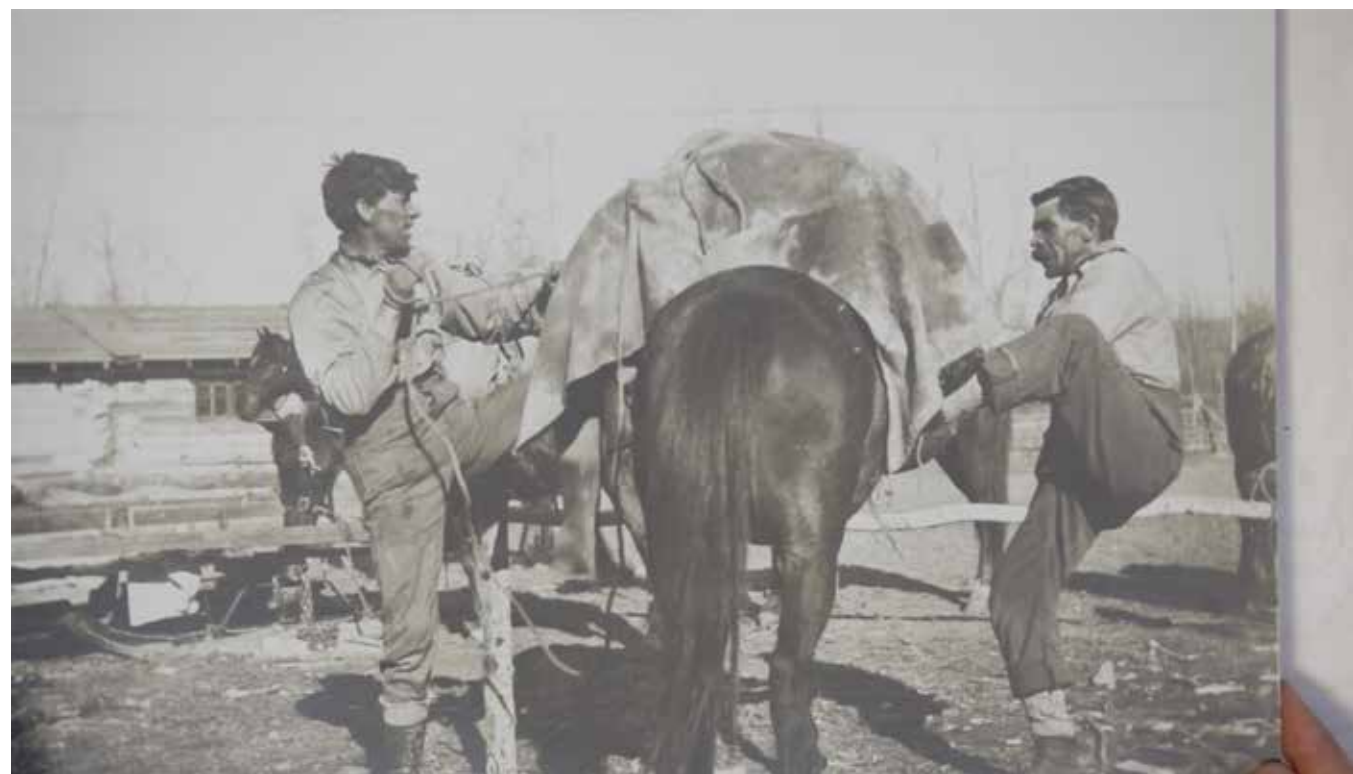
Linda Jansma
Senior Curator, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery

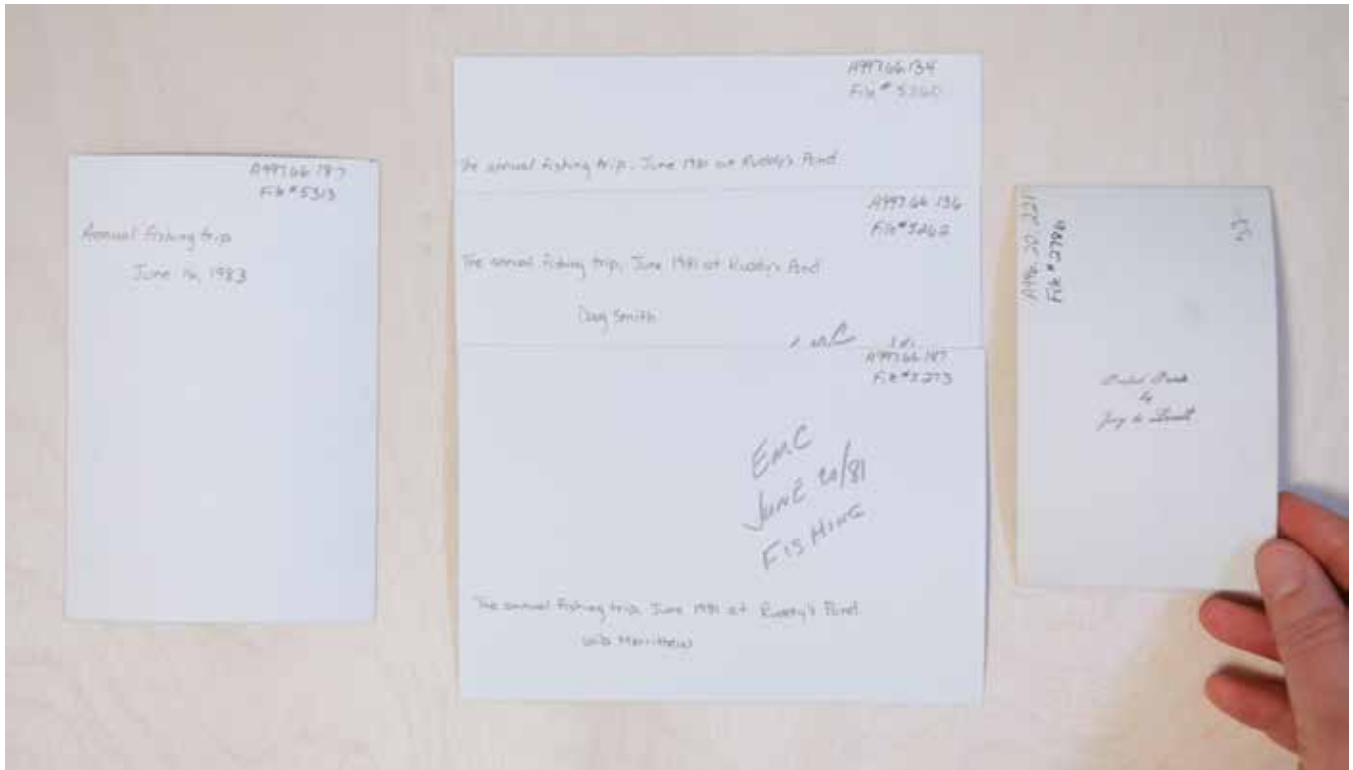
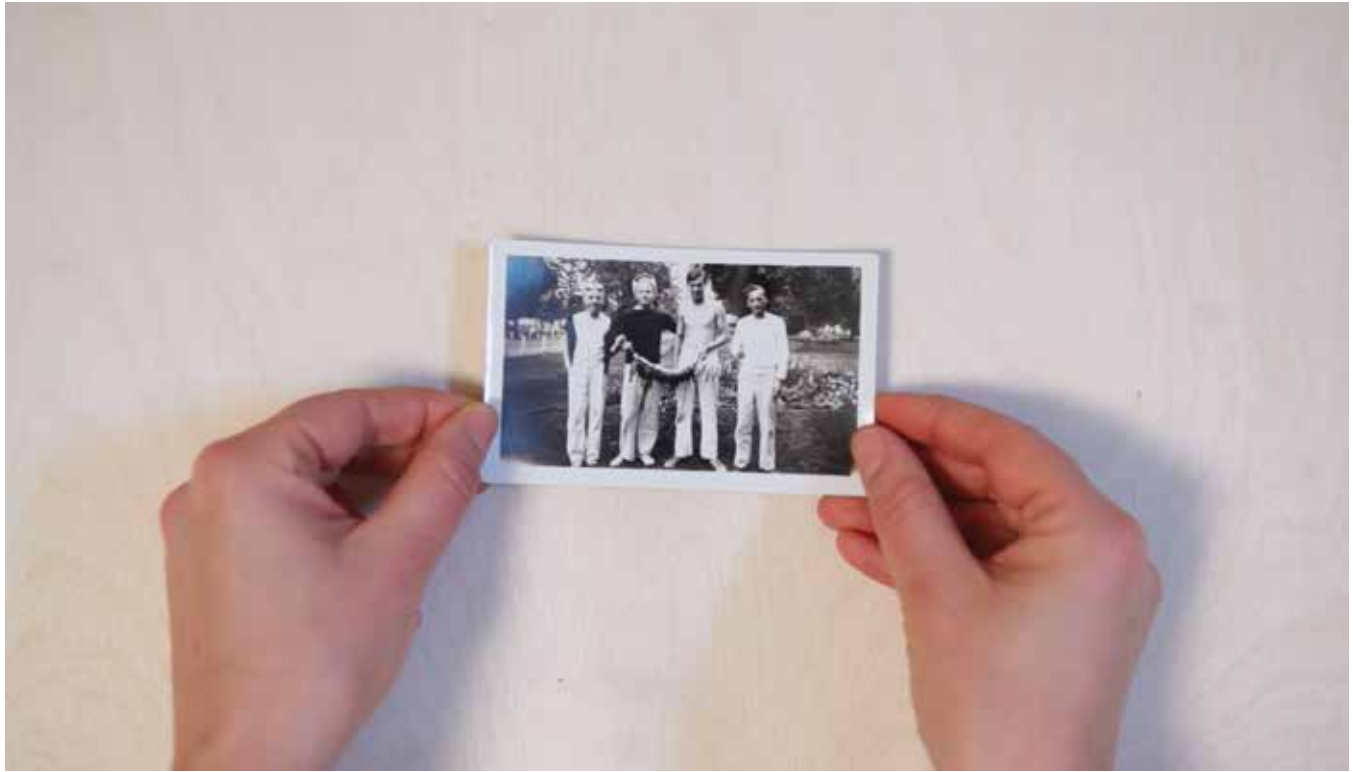
**LISE
BEAUDRY**

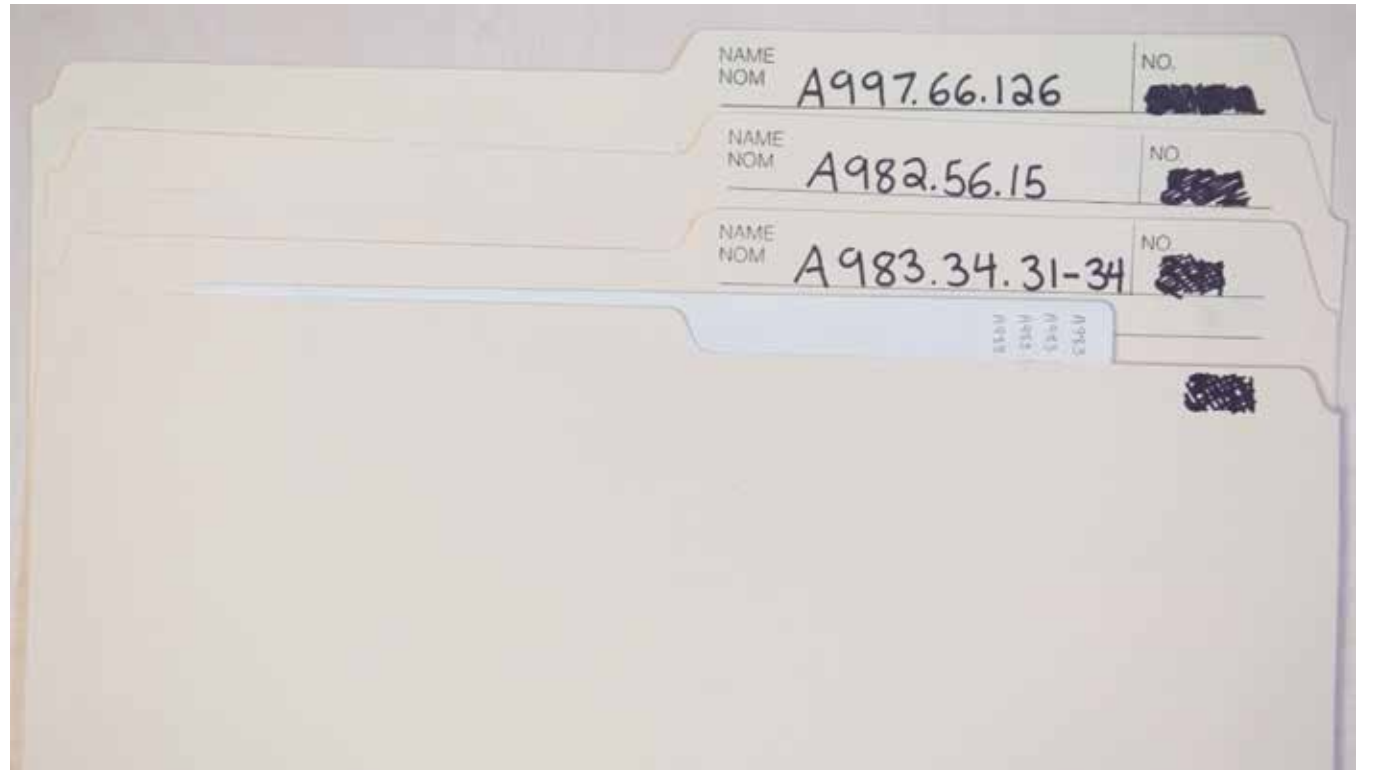
*From the Filing Cabinets
The Stack
People & Dogs*

A995.42.7

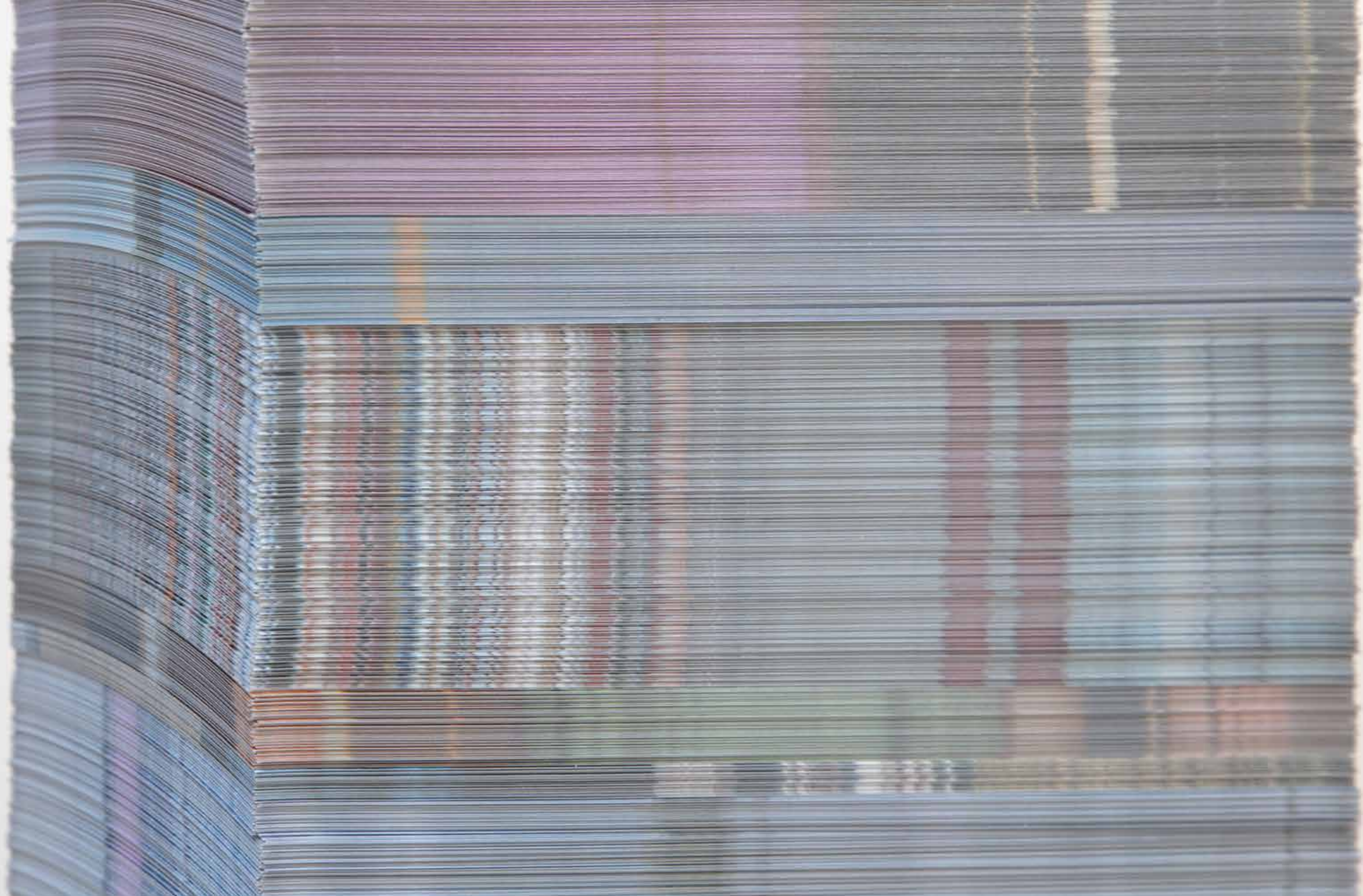
A901.15.25













**MICHÈLE
PEARSON CLARKE**

I'm Thinking of Ending Things





It's not easy.



It all just fell like a house of cards.



Everyone worked there.



Now it's so quiet when I come home.

The silence is disturbing.



Nobody will talk about
how we've been destroyed.



I feel a huge sense of loss
for what should have been.





MARTIE GIEFERT

ACE Facility, Hydraulic Floor
Unifor Union Hall
ACE Facility, Wind Tunnel
Legion Hall
UOIT Sound Room











MORRIS LUM

Untitled Diptych 1
Untitled Diptych 2
Untitled Diptych 3
Untitled Diptych 4
Untitled Diptych 5











JEFF THOMAS

Travelogue
Crossing Place
Birds Eye View: Medicine Crow and the Birdman
Mississippian Earth Mound & Birdman Figurine
The Dancing Grounds

**1. Travelogue: Oshawa, Ontario.
September 21, 2005, 11:34am,
parking lot of Leisure Lanes Bowling**

I made an unplanned stop this morning to photograph a train idling on a bridge over Highway 401. While waiting for the train to move, I had an unexpected encounter. I was watching a flock of small birds fly towards me and I just happened to click the shutter release on my camera as they passed by. After landing in a small tree near me, a small hawk flew into the tree and came out with one of the birds in his talons. The hawk landed by my feet, but when I moved I frightened the hawk and it lost its grip on the bird. Both birds flew away. I also noticed a crow flying overhead, maybe waiting to steal the hawk’s meal. There was a message in this encounter and it inspired my journey to find the Birdman.

**2. Travelogue: Coaldale, Alberta.
June 6, 2006,
Alberta Birds of Prey Foundation**

While in Lethbridge, Alberta, my wife and I made a side trip to nearby Coaldale to visit the birds of prey sanctuary. The image shows a red-tailed hawk landing on my arm. Now I have an image to use with the Edward S. Curtis 1908 portrait of Medicine Crow. I want to make tangible the distinctive relationship that men like Medicine Crow had with birds of prey.

“The passing of every old man or woman means the passing of some tradition, some knowledge of sacred rites possessed by no other; consequently the information that is to be gathered, for the benefit of future generations, respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once or the opportunity will be lost for all time. It is this need that has inspired the present task.”
—Edward S. Curtis

**3. Travelogue: East St. Louis, Illinois.
April 20, 2015,
Drive-By Mound Tour**

Hidden in a clump of brush on Collinsville Avenue is an ancient, Mississippian-era earth mound, which was built sometime between the 10th and 12th centuries. The mound is part of what was a massive urban complex, known today as Cahokia. I photographed the site from my tour guide’s SUV. My trip to the St. Louis area was to learn more about the Mississippians, their artists, and the revered Birdman figure: a mythological figure that was a synergism of warrior and bird of prey.

Although the Birdman figure in this panel was probably not discovered in this particular mound, this was the Birdman’s homeland. While looking around the depressed urban landscape of East St. Louis, my thoughts returned to Oshawa and the hawk that visited me—did the hawk lead me here?

**4. Travelogue: Collinsville, Illinois.
April 18, 2015,
Cahokia complex**

I am sitting in the parking lot of Monks Mound, the largest indigenous earth mound north of Mexico, and imagining what it must have looked like in the 11th century. Some archaeologists estimate that Cahokia was home to as many as 20,000 people. Since Monks Mound was the central ceremonial area, I wonder if the Birdmen carried out their rituals here.

Nearby is Mound 34, where excavations revealed the remains of a copper workshop. The copper Birdman plates from the area remind me of a photograph I made of powwow dancer Jack Moore in 1982, shown here.









IN WHOSE HANDS, A CAMERA?

¹ One example: a popular app, called 1 Second Everyday, allows users to document every day of their lives, one second at a time. The app then collages these one-second video segments into a composite that presents your life as a videographic totality. See <http://1se.co/>.

² Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 11.

³ Ibid, 16-17.

⁴ Teju Cole “A Photograph Never Stands Alone,” *The New York Times Magazine* (New York), March 19, 2017. MM14.

⁵ Jan Verwoert “Research and Display: Transformations of the Documentary Practice in Recent Art” in *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, eds. Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 201.

A title that is a question is also a provocation: Who has the right to take photographs of whom? To take a photograph is to inaugurate a relationship, however brief, with a subject who may or may not be aware of the camera’s presence. Even this phrase—to *take* a photograph—is suggestive of an asymmetrical action. Who claims the right to make images? What is the relationship between an outsider’s view and an insider’s, particularly when the outsider maintains the agency granted by a camera? The responses to such questions have much to do with the relationships between people, places, subjects, and histories and, ultimately, rest upon an ethics of process and production.

For the five artists exhibiting together in *Visitor Information*, these questions cut across practices that include established methods of documentary photography, conceptual approaches to digital and analogue archives, and the critical appropriation of historic, ethnographic and often problematic photographs. Presented with varying degrees of abstraction, these projects make claims for the continuing power of images to record, to document, and to depict places and people. Marking fifty years of institutional life at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery may be a somewhat arbitrary premise for commissioning the work in this exhibition, but the strategies apparent in these artworks reveal as much about our current moment as they do about the much longer history of settlement, industry, social life and occupation in this region.

In those same fifty years, photographic technology has changed in sweeping and dramatic ways, and the once rarified experience of having one’s photograph taken has been replaced by the ubiquitous imaging culture of the present. The power of the camera is dispersed, even democratized, and we have all become the choreographers of our personal narratives and the editors of our memories.¹ In my own image archive I have relatively few photographs of Oshawa, even though I spent the first eighteen years of my life there. As a teenager in a just pre-Internet era, I recall taking a camera around with me, loaded with a roll of twenty-four exposure film, saving up for the right moment to take a picture. This very modern

idea of photography—waiting for light, subject, and scene to coalesce in a decisive moment—has now been entirely usurped by the powerful automation that digital photography offers. Complex software and algorithmic intelligence means that phones need only the tiniest lenses to record as much of our everyday experiences as we like. Life has never been more thoroughly documented, and what it means to live within this hyper-imaged world is yet to be determined.

Against the backdrop of self-documenting technologies, the artists in this exhibition each engage with documentary photography as an organizing principle, but do so through very different methodologies, producing work that is aesthetically, even dramatically, varied. As “outsiders” to the City of Oshawa proper, their works implicitly present a view that is not conditioned by lived experience but instead by questions of exploration, curiosity, social engagement, and representational capacity. Asked to produce images of, for, or about Oshawa in the broadest sense, their works eschew official civic narratives of industry and innovation and instead tease out unexpected relationships, juxtapose incongruous histories and unfamiliar spaces, and present and re-present images of the city back to its citizens.

A guiding question: in whose hands is the camera, and how does the agency of the photographer condition the ways we see the various spaces, sites and civic relationships depicted? In some cases, as in the photo-documentary work of Martie Giefert or Morris Lum, the camera is exclusively in the hands of the artist. In others, as in the work of Jeff Thomas, it is partially with the artist and partially in the hands of a colonial photographer whose work the artist appropriates and critiques. Even farther removed from an original photographer are artists Michèle Pearson Clarke and Lise Beaudry, whose respective projects incorporate found video footage, archival photographs, and audio sources that contest the dominant power relations between artist, viewer, and subject. The question of authorship in these works is ambiguously conspicuous: who is the driver of the car recording his or her dashboard view? Who is the drone operator surveying a suburban landscape? Who is the

family that donated their photo albums to a civic museum for posterity? And what do such images tell us about both their subjects and their previous owners or creators?

One approach is to regard still and moving image production as a process, as a set of relations inaugurated by an artist but which do not end with an image. Photography is not simply the story of an individual photograph, it is an act of production and a process of translation that transforms lived experiences into documents with open, multiple and often contested interpretations. Photography involves actors and apparatuses, thinking and conceptualizing, random accidents, and highly staged situations. It is, as theorist Ariella Azoulay has argued, more than simply an event that records the imprinting of an image. A photograph is a trace of the meeting between the photographed subject and the photographer, neither of whom can determine, a priori, how meaning will be inscribed in the results.² Further, Azoulay suggests that the act of looking at a photograph inaugurates a contract between the spectator, the photographer and the subject—a civic responsibility that includes those who look at photographs as much as those who take them.³ The role of the viewer, then, is as important as the role of the artist. Still and moving images triangulate a powerful relationship between subject, viewer and artist, and with the pleasure and act of looking comes a responsibility towards the image.

Artworks that draw from existing image archives perhaps best articulate this embedded, contractual relationship, since the person who once held the camera—or phone, computer, drone, or device—is several steps removed. In Lise Beaudry’s project, the original photographers are, in nearly every instance, unknown. Working with the archive of the Oshawa Museum, Beaudry reorganizes collections of photographs that depict the working and social lives of Oshawa’s inhabitants through much of the twentieth century. Realized through a video, a bookwork and a sculptural installation, the artist compiles and compares, reprints and reorders, stacks and stations images in ways that question the authority of the archive. In *The Stack*, photographs representing each category of the museum’s archive are printed, the total equal to

the number of photographs in the entire archive. Moving the collection out of horizontal storage cabinets and into a vertical stack makes the entire archive visible as a totality, but it is only its edges and captions that reveal information about the images contained therein. In the video *From the Filing Cabinets*, Beaudry's anachronistic groupings of images based on the museum's arbitrary categorization demand the viewer consider the contents of each photograph at a much slower pace. Using the very means of documentation—the collecting, preserving, and archiving of photographs—as her medium, Beaudry reminds us that no photograph is neutral, that no image can exist outside of its relationship to other images. And with a beautiful sleight of hand that supplants one image for another, she highlights the power of abstraction to help us see images in different contexts.

If we accept that photography itself is a relational process, then projects like this can help us to think through what images actually do, to consider how images operate together to frame certain subjects. In his regular column in the *New York Times*, photography critic and writer Teju Cole claims that, “All images, regardless of the date of their creation, exist simultaneously and are pressed into service to help us make sense of other images. This suggests a possible approach to photography criticism: a river of interconnected images wordlessly but fluently commenting on one another.”⁴ This is a provocative claim for two reasons. One, it suggests that images exist outside of the temporal context in which they are produced, creating the speculative possibility that once a photograph exists as an image, it exists in and with all other images. Two, it suggests relations of wordlessness, intimating that words are not required to analyze or interpret images and implying that it is the spaces *between* images in which meaning is produced.

Making images speak to each other through direct proximity is a practice Jeff Thomas has critically employed throughout his career. Since the early 1980s, Thomas has been engaging with the photographic archive of 19th century American photographer Edward S. Curtis, an early documentarian whose photographs of Indigenous peoples in North America have been widely critiqued for

the ways that they staged, stereotyped, romanticized, and exoticised Indigenous cultures. Thomas' longstanding interest in Curtis' body of work involves questioning the dominant and pervasive depictions of “Indian-ness” as codified by Western photographers and media, particularly for someone who, like Thomas, has lived his lifetime in cities and identifies primarily as an urban Iroquois. His work in and with this archive of photographs not only addresses the problematic depictions of Indigenous peoples as a lost culture, a narrative that Curtis' work very much constructed and continues to uphold, but it serves to contextualize the distance between images, suggesting that photographic subjects maintain an agency that is powerfully distinct from their relationship to the original photographer. The collapsing of temporal and spatial difference here allows the viewer to see colonial power from a different perspective, and provides a new point of entry into an archive that exists in the cultural imaginary as much as it does in reality.

Michèle Pearson Clarke likewise mines a type of archive—the freely accessible online archive that is YouTube—in order to produce a unique kind of documentary film. The two-channel projection, *I'm Thinking of Ending Things*, combines a range of appropriated videos shot through the windshield of a car. This first-person, driver perspective mimics the point of view of first-person video games, and the images of cars on fire, clouds of smoke, and 3D renderings of car models all contribute to an aesthetic that confuses reality. Overlaid upon the images are text fragments taken directly from interviews conducted by the artist with Oshawa residents affected by layoffs and job loss at General Motors. Clarke was interested in taking the temperature of the widespread, civic turmoil that results from mass layoffs: What is the emotional geography of job loss? Where are the places where collective trauma might be felt most acutely?

By pairing first-hand accounts from Oshawa's citizenry with images depicting car-related fires and accidents, Clarke equates the loss of livelihood with a perceived loss of life, reminding viewers of the emotional toll that job loss takes. In words that recall the familiar agony of a relationship gone sour, or the darker urgency of

one whose hope in life is gone, the collective responses of anger, resentment, nostalgia, and remorse can be detected. While the economic implications of mass layoffs are frequently reported upon, the slower and less quantifiable effects of job loss on one's social relations are easily over-looked. Clarke's project asks us to think specifically about the emotional context of Oshawa's historic dependency on General Motors and telescopes out to larger questions of collective trauma, social wellbeing and the networks required to sustain life within civic space.

Industry, and its effect on civic architecture, is taken up in works by Martie Giefert and Morris Lum, who have each approached their subjects through the familiar methodologies of a documentarian: exploratory research, travelling and scouting locations, and gaining access to hidden, private, or inaccessible spaces. Lum's work charts the different land uses that span the recognizable thoroughfare of Simcoe Street, from the shore of Lake Ontario in the south to the farmland that is quickly becoming housing tracts just north of the city. Using this axis to chart the geographies of industry, tourism and suburban growth, his unusual pairings inform and alter our practices of looking, rendering sites familiar to Oshawa's residents as unfamiliar. Buildings in disrepair are contrasted with rapid suburban expansion; the hidden garden of Oshawa's famous former estate home is revealed in the same light as an abandoned strip mall, and perhaps most notably, the people that propel the city across this axis and through these spaces are noticeably absent.

In Giefert's work too, the subjects who typically occupy a space are eliminated in order to see the structure of the space itself. But instead of clear contrasts, Giefert's work is focused, singular, and hyper detailed, finding nuances that are invisible to the naked eye but become apparent in photographic representation. His sharply focused interiors reveal architectures related to the still-pervasive auto industry, from the high-tech capacities of UOIT's Automotive Centre of Excellence (ACE) testing facilities to the aging and seemingly underutilized spaces of the Legion and Union Halls. Upon close inspection, these

images reveal strange internal incongruities, and invite us to continue looking, to find information within an image that would otherwise be made invisible by the architecture of the space itself. The public here is one step removed, their view mediated by the hands of the photographer and the relationship of camera, artist, space, and viewer.

Images have a way of following us; they remain just as fiercely embedded as projections in the mind as they are visible as documents in the gallery. Once seen, certain images can never be unseen. Such visual stickiness might be caused by the indeterminacy and contingency of meaning itself, since images rarely have a single interpretation. Photographs, videos, films—documents of all sorts—are always temporally disjointed from their scenes of origin. And artists too are always just slightly outside the scene, their cameras a device of deferral that excludes them from the interior of the frame. As critic and writer Jan Verwoert has claimed, “...the act of taking the photograph turns [artists] into visitors, or even tourists on their own premises. No matter how close a photograph comes to the space it records, the interaction between the photographer and the space always resembles the act of scratching on a solid surface.”⁵ All artists then are visitors, of a sort. While it may be the case that representation nearly always fails when it isn't grounded in context, the artists here bring such a breadth of scope to their investigations into the sites, cultures, industries, and long histories of the region that, as visitors, their multiple perspectives and framing devices bring multiple interpretations, particularly for viewers who will find fragments of the familiar in these de-familiarized images. As viewing subjects, these projects call us to consider the changing social fabric of Oshawa's civic space in light of the ever-accelerating pace of technological and industrial shifts within contemporary society.

Jayne Wilkinson,
Guest Curator

LIST OF WORKS

Lise Beaudry	<i>ACE Facility, Wind Tunnel</i> 2016 digital C-Print 50 x 104 cm	Jeff Thomas
<i>From the Filing Cabinets</i> 2017 video 14:00 minutes	<i>Legion Hall</i> 2016 digital C-Print 50 x 169 cm	<i>Crossing Place</i> 2005/2017 pigment print on archival paper 74.5 x 203.5 cm
<i>The Stack</i> 2017 photographs 173.8 x 35 x 27.5 cm	<i>UOIT Sound Room</i> 2016 digital C-Print 50 x 102 cm	<i>Birds Eye View: Medicine Crow and the Birdman</i> 2009/2016 pigment print on archival paper 74.5 x 176.5 cm
<i>People & Dogs</i> 2017 artist bookwork 15 x 15 cm		<i>Mississippian Earth Mound & Birdman Figurine</i> 2015 pigment print on archival paper 74.5 x 211 cm
	Morris Lum	
Michèle Pearson Clarke	<i>Untitled Diptych 1</i> 2017 archival pigment print 60 x 150 cm	<i>The Dancing Grounds</i> 2016 pigment print on archival paper 74.5 x 211 cm
<i>I'm Thinking of Ending Things</i> 2017 2 channel video 7:04 minutes Original score: Mark Savoia	<i>Untitled Diptych 2</i> 2017 archival pigment print 60 x 150 cm	
Martie Giefert	<i>Untitled Diptych 3</i> 2107 archival pigment print 60 x 150 cm	All work purchased for The Robert McLaughlin Gallery with the financial support of the Isabel McLaughlin Acquisition Fund and the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program, 2017.
<i>ACE Facility, Hydraulic Floor</i> 2016 digital C-Print 50 x 109 cm	<i>Untitled Diptych 4</i> 2107 archival pigment print 60 x 150 cm	
<i>Unifor Union Hall</i> 2016 digital C-Print 50 x 158 cm	<i>Untitled Diptych 5</i> 2107 archival pigment print 60 x 150 cm	

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Lise Beaudry is a Franco-Ontarian artist originally from the rural region of Témiscamingue on the Ontario-Québec border. She holds a BFA from Concordia University (1997) and an MFA from York University (2006). Her photographic and video work has been presented across Canada and internationally, at venues including Les rencontres internationales de la photographie (Arles), Grant Gallery (Vancouver), ASpace (Toronto), Biennial of Young Artists (Romania), Ice Follies, (North Bay), Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Mississauga, and Pierre François Ouellette Art Contemporain (Montréal). In 2012, Beaudry won the BMW Exhibition Prize at the Contact Photography Festival. Now residing in Toronto, she is a professor in the Art and Art History program at the University of Toronto in Mississauga.

Michèle Pearson Clarke is a Trinidad-born artist who works in photography, film, video and installation. Using archival, performative and process-oriented strategies, her work explores the personal and political possibilities afforded by considering experiences of emotions related to longing and loss. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally including at the Ryerson Image Centre, Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery and Images Festival in Toronto; and International Film Festival Rotterdam, International Short Film Festival Oberhausen and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Based in Toronto, she holds an MSW from the University of Toronto and an MFA in Documentary Media Studies from Ryerson University. She is currently artist-in-residence at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography.

After studying and working as a graphic designer **Martie Giefert** earned his BFA in Photography at NSCAD University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and his MFA degree at the University of Guelph. As an artist, his interests have always been in architecture, perception, history, memory, and culture. His work has been exhibited in Toronto, throughout Canada, and the USA. Giefert currently lives and works in Toronto.

Morris Lum is a Mississauga-based artist whose work explores the hybrid nature of the Chinese-Canadian community through photography, installation and documentary practices. Lum continues to work on his cross-Canada project that looks specifically at the transformation of Chinatowns in various Canadian cities. He has exhibited internationally and in 2013 and 2015 was the recipient of a Canada Council for the Arts project grant for visual artists and Ontario Arts Council grant for emerging visual artists. He currently teaches at the University of Toronto in the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design.

Jeff Thomas is an urban-based Iroquois, self-taught photo-based artist, writer, pubic speaker, and curator, living in Ottawa, Ontario. He has works in major collections in Canada, the United States, and Europe. Thomas’ most recent solo shows were *The Dancing Grounds*, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, *A Necessary Fiction: My Conversation with Nicholas de Grandmaison*, University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta, and *Resistance Is NOT Futile*, Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto, Ontario

Thomas has also been in many group exhibitions, including *I:ke – Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989*, Art Gallery of Ontario, *Land/Slide: Possible Futures*, Markham, Ontario, SAKAHÀN, National Gallery of Canada, *UNMASKING: Arthur Renwick, Adrian Stimson, Jeff Thomas*, Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, France. In 1998, he was awarded the Canada Council’s prestigious Duke and Duchess of York Award in Photography, was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of Art, and in 2008 he received The Karsh Award in photography. Thomas was the recipient of a 2017 REVEAL Indigenous Art Award.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Visitor information (2017)

Visitor information:

Lise Beaudry
Michèle Pearson Clarke
Martie Giefert
Morris Lum
Jeff Thomas

Curated by Linda Jansma and Jayne Wilkinson

Catalogue of an exhibition held at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery
from April 29, 2017 to September 19, 2017
ISBN 978-1-926589-92-3 (softcover)

- 1. Beaudry, Lise—Exhibitions.
- 2. Clarke, Michèle Pearson—Exhibitions.
- 3. Giefert, Martie—Exhibitions.
- 4. Lum, Morris—Exhibitions.
- 5. Thomas, Jeffrey—Exhibitions.
- 6. Art, Canadian—21st century—Exhibitions.
- I. Jansma, Linda, writer of added commentary, organizer
- II. Wilkinson, Jayne, writer of added commentary, organizer
- III. Beaudry, Lise. Works. Selections.
- IV. Clarke, Michèle Pearson. Works. Selections.
- V. Giefert, Martie. Works. Selections.
- VI. Lum, Morris. Works. Selections.
- VII. Thomas, Jeffrey. Works. Selections.
- VIII. Robert McLaughlin Gallery, issuing body, host institution
- IX. Title.

N6545.6.V57 2017
709.71074'71356
C2017-901155-3

Visitor Information: Lise Beaudry, Michèle Pearson Clarke, Martie Giefert, Morris Lum, Jeff Thomas

© 2017

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery
72 Queen Street, Civic Centre
Oshawa, ON L1H 3Z3
www.rmg.on.ca

Design: Atanas Design
Editing: Linda Jansma, Jayne Wilkinson
Printing: Sonic Print
Photo credits: The Artists

Cover image: Lise Beaudry, *The Stack*, (detail), 2017
Photo credit: Lise Beaudry

Curators: Linda Jansma and Jayne Wilkinson

Distributed by:
ABC: Art Books Canada
327 Ste. Catherine W., Suite 229
Montréal, Québec H3B 1A2
info@ABCartbookscanada.com





The
Robert
McLaughlin
Gallery