

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Vancouver Art Gallery Presents Conceptions of White

The new exhibition explores the concept of Whiteness and its impact on modern society.



September 8, 2023, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm), Squamish (Sḵwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw) and Tsleil-Waututh (salilwataʔt) Nations.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is pleased to present *Conceptions of White*, a thought-provoking exhibition that examines the idea of Whiteness as a concept and a racial construct—an idea invented by humans to organize and enforce power relationships. Organized by the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, and co-curated by John G. Hampton and Lillian O'Brien Davis, the exhibition examines the relatively recent idea of a distinctive "White race," and the various ways in which this construction has shaped the modern world.

"*Conceptions of White* is the product of extensive research on the part of the curators and artists, and the resulting exhibition prompts thoughtful consideration of the show's relevant themes," said **Vancouver Art Gallery CEO & Executive Director Anthony Kiendl**, "This exhibition asks us how our history and contemporary moment have been built with the aid of mobilizing visual information, sometimes with very specific and effective ends. This exhibition contributes to the Gallery's extensive history of presenting exhibitions that connect art to ideas in the realm of visual culture and social history. We believe the Gallery is a vital space for our public to engage with challenging ideas and to be a safer space for debate and learning."

Collectively, the assembled artworks in *Conceptions of White* elaborate on the origins and effects of Whiteness. The exhibition establishes a timeframe which begins in ancient times and includes reproductions of historical artworks which figured within narratives about race in the 1700s and 1800s. Other featured artworks point to the ways that Whiteness has been prized within gallery and museum settings—in both the convention of the “white cube,” and within art movements such as minimalism. Many of the other pieces in the show are recent works produced within the last 10 years. These contemporary artworks explore the varied ways that visual signifiers—and specifically the colour white—contribute to racial identity and structural inequality.

Exhibition co-curator John G. Hampton expands on the thinking behind the project: “Western society has been built on top of the concept of a White identity. Whether it is the cultural mosaic or the melting pot, the blending of fair-skinned peoples from various cultural backgrounds into one unified monolith is not a natural state of things, it is an invention of the seventeenth century. Although racial categorization is an invented concept, it has very real consequences, many of which are there by design. As we take stock of our current cultural climate, these artists help us take on the important task of examining how we got here, the ongoing impacts of ‘race science,’ and the complex realities of present articulations of Whiteness.”

Conceptions of White features work by 15 artists, largely from Canada and the US, in a wide range of media including sculpture, photography, installation and video. The artists include Jeremy Bailey, Deanna Bowen, Jennifer Chan, Nicholas Galanin, Ken Gonzales-Day, Arthur Jafa, Ryan Kuo, Michèle Lalonde, Barbara Meneley, Robert Morris, Nell Irvin Painter, Howardena Pindell, Hiram Powers, Fred Wilson and Artist once known, after Leochares. Many of the works are being shown in Vancouver for the first time.

Conceptions of White will be on display at the Vancouver Art Gallery from September 9, 2023 to February 4, 2024.

Organized and circulated by the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, in partnership with Art Museum at the University of Toronto and curated by John G. Hampton and Lillian O’Brien Davis. Circulated with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

For more information, please visit www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/exhibitions/conceptionsofwhite.

IMAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

The Vancouver Art Gallery is grateful to its exhibition supporters and sponsors:

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Image: Deanna Bowen, *White Man's Burden*, 2022 (installation at MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2022), giclée prints on paper and selected works from the MacKenzie Art Gallery permanent collection, Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Gift of the Artist, Photo: Carey Shaw

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MEDIA CONTACT

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ABOUT THE CURATORS

John G. Hampton is the Executive Director and CEO of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina. A curator, artist and administrator, Hampton joined the MacKenzie team in 2018. They hold an MA in Curatorial Studies from the University of Toronto, a BA in Visual Arts from the University of Regina, and a diploma in 3D Animation and Game Design from New Media Campus, Regina. Hampton is a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, the United States, and Canada, and grew up in Regina. Their curatorial work and writing have been recognized with honours and awards including the Hnatyshyn Foundation – TD Bank Group Award for Emerging Curators in Contemporary Canadian Art and several Ontario Association of Art Galleries Awards. Hampton is the former Executive Director of the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon; Artistic Director of Trinity Square Video, Toronto; and Curator of Neutral Ground, Regina. In addition to their role at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Hampton is also an Adjunct Curator at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto and is the Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Board of Directors.

Lillian O'Brien Davis is the Curator of Collections and Contemporary Art Engagement at the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto. O'Brien Davis previously held the position of Curator of Exhibitions and Public Programs at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, Toronto, and Curatorial Assistant, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina. She has curated projects at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto; Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto; MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina; Support, London; and the School of Art Gallery at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. Her writing has appeared in *BlackFlash*, *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Peripheral Review* and *Insight Magazine*.

ABOUT VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's innovative exhibitions, extensive public programs and scholarship focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to artists from the Asia Pacific region—

through the Institute of Asian Art founded in 2014. The Gallery's exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture. The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. The Vancouver Art Gallery is situated on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and is respectful of the Indigenous stewards of the land it occupies, whose rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Vancouver and to the work of the Gallery.

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