

Art Museum
University of Toronto
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Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
University of Toronto Art Centre

7 Hart House Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3
artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Art Museum

For Immediate Release

The Art Museum at the University of Toronto presents *Variations in Black, Queer, and Otherwise: Works by Abdi Osman*

(Toronto, May 23, 2019) **Abdi Osman** is a Somali-Canadian multidisciplinary Toronto-based artist whose work focuses on questions of African-ness and Black-ness in the diaspora. In the multi-part exhibition ***Variations in Black, Queer, and Otherwise***, curated by **Dina Georgis** and **Sara Matthews**, the artist incorporates sound, narrative, still and moving image, and fabric into his works that offer complex iterations of subjectivity. The exhibition will take place at the **Art Museum at the University of Toronto** from **June 5 to July 27, 2019**. Join the Art Museum for the opening reception on **June 5 from 6-8pm**. The artist and curators will be in attendance.

Osman is an internationally recognized artist. His practice is documentary in nature, with a focus on portraiture. This exhibition at the Art Museum will include works from his extensive body of work focused on diaspora and histories of cultural mis-representation, including earlier photographic works from 2007 to his more recent video work in 2018.

In the *Discovery Series* (2007) the viewer is presented with a series of photographs that challenge how 'Muslim' and 'homophobic' are imagined. The subjects are not static and photographed in different contexts and realities and the representation of the African Muslim body in this series of portraits is multi-dimensional. While Islamophobic discourses fix people, these images present the African queer as a protean and hybrid subject.

Passport (2017) is a series of self-portraits of the artist, printed on

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paper and linen, that highlight the complications of moving through a securitized world as Black and Muslim. The hanging fabric in the gallery creates a spatial installation that the viewer navigates through, intending to highlight the boundaries of nation and movement. Technologies of reproduction such as the camera and passport documents both trace and produce these border and boundaries, which the artist appropriates and reconfigures.

In the video *Gardens of the Mediterranean* (2018), Osman collaborates with the Somali-Italian writer Ubah Christina Ali Farah to consider the silenced histories of Black/African Europe in the movements of sea crossings and migration. By bringing images of the Mediterranean – in this case Venice, a city influenced by Islamic architecture that is often not remarked upon, denied or simply silenced – together with a narration of Ali Farah’s short story “A Dhow Crosses the Sea”, this video work creates a visual dialogue about place, migration and landing as situated in the waterways through which the artist travels and works.

In her essay that accompanies the exhibit, writer Ellyn Walker suggests that “[r]ather than focusing on common photographic narratives of historical or contemporary oppression that fetishize trauma and pain—and that have particular relevance to representation(s) of Black life—Osman’s work portrays seemingly simple yet incredibly nuanced scenes of joy, belonging, and re-discovery.”

In *Variations in Black, Queer, and Otherwise: Works by Abdi Osman* the artist asks the viewer to reflect on ideas of African-ness and Black-ness as it intersects with Muslim, queer, and trans identities by using a photographic lens of care and community.

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Variations in Black, Queer, and Otherwise: Works by Abdi Osman

June 5 – July 27, 2019

Curated by Dina Georgis and Sara Matthews

University of Toronto Art Centre

Opening Reception

Wednesday, June 5, 2019, 6-8pm

Christina Sharpe in conversation with Abdi Osman

Wednesday, July 17, 6:30-8pm

Drop-In Tours

Tuesdays, 2pm

For more information, please visit:

<https://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/exhibition/variations-in-black-queer-and-otherwise-works-by-abdi-osman/>

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For high resolution images please visit:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mqda2m3wnv0qflg/AACz0j9uqjDr3AwjzbPRfYfXa?dl=0>

About Abdi Osman

Abdi Osman is a Somali-Canadian multidisciplinary artist whose work focuses on questions of black masculinity as it intersects with Muslim and queer identities. Osman's video and photographic work has been shown in Canada and internationally in both group and solo exhibitions. Osman holds an MFA in Documentary Media from Ryerson University, and a B.A. in African Studies from the University of Toronto. Previous work has been supported by grants from the Ontario Arts Council. His photographs are also housed in private collections and the Art Bank of the Canada Council for the Arts and his video art is housed at VTape. Osman was an artist-in-residence at the McColl Centre for Visual Arts in Charlotte North Carolina in 2010. In 2012, he was a fellow at The Interdisciplinary Center for Culture and Creativity (ICCC) at the University of Saskatchewan. Osman Lives and works in Toronto.

About the Curators

Sara Matthews is writer, researcher and educator based in southern Ontario. Working primarily in the field of research-creation, her projects explore the relations between visual culture, nation-building, colonialism and martial politics. Her critical art writing has appeared in *PUBLIC*, *FUSE Magazine* and in exhibition essays for the Robert Langen Gallery, Circuit Gallery, the Ottawa Art Gallery, the Doris McCarthy Gallery and as a blog for Gallery TPW.

Dina Georgis is an Associate Professor at the Women & Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Her work, which is situated in the fields of postcolonial studies and queer theory, explores how aesthetic and cultural expressions are affective responses to political and social urgencies. Her writing appears in *International*

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Journal of Middle East Studies, Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society and Studies in Gender and Sexuality.

About the Art Museum at the University of Toronto:

The Art Museum is comprised of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (Hart House) and the University of Toronto Art Centre (University College). Located just a few steps apart, the two galleries were federated in 2014 and began operating under a new visual identity as the Art Museum at the University of Toronto, one of the largest gallery spaces for visual art exhibitions and programming in Toronto. Building on the two galleries' distinguished histories, the Art Museum originates and organizes an intensive year-round program of exhibitions and events that foster—at a local, regional, and international level—innovative research, interdisciplinary scholarship, and knowledge of art and its histories befitting Canada's leading university and the country's largest city.

Our Supporters

The Art Museum gratefully acknowledge operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council.