



ANNIE MACDONELL
THE LEVELLERS

MAY 4 – JUNE 18, 2017

AGM
ART GALLERY OF MISSISSAUGA



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The AGM is thrilled to present Annie MacDonell's solo exhibition *The Levellers*, in the AGM's Freeman Gallery. Continuing her ongoing research and exploration into acts of political resistance, with a focus on gestures of refusal/withdrawal, MacDonell expands on previous work in the media of collage and sculpture, creating an exhibition that is both topical in our current political climate, and nuanced, intimate. We are pleased to showcase her work alongside two exhibitions also featuring found photographs – *The Family Camera* and Vivek Shraya's *Trisha*.

Thank you to Annie MacDonell for her powerful work, to Kendra Ainsworth for curating this exhibition, and for the collaborative support of AGM staff members Sadaf Zuberi, Laura Carusi, Melanie Lowe, Sharada Eswar, Rhéanne Chartrand, and Jessica Palada, and our incredible roster of volunteers.

ARTIST BIO

Annie MacDonell is a visual artist whose practice includes photography, film, installation, performance and sculpture. MacDonell's work questions the constitution, function, and circulation of images in the 21st century. She received a BFA from Ryerson University's School of Image Arts in 2000, followed by graduate studies at Le Fresnoy, Studio National des Arts Contemporains, in France. Recent performances have been presented at le Centre Pompidou, in Paris, and the Toronto International Film Festival. Recent solo shows have been held at Mulherin New York, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Art Gallery of Windsor and Mercer Union, in Toronto. She has participated in recent group exhibitions at la Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, The Power Plant, Toronto, the MOCA Cleveland, the Daegu Photo Biennale in South Korea and Le Grand Palais, Paris. In 2012, 2015, and 2016 she was long-listed for the Sobey Art Award. In 2012 she was short-listed for the AGO AIMIA prize for photography.

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Taking to the streets in protest has long been the most visible mode of agitating for a cause, for social change, the levelling of political or ideological imbalances and inequities. Over the past two years Annie MacDonell has focused her research-based interdisciplinary practice on images and acts of political resistance, working with a series of photographs of protest from various archives and online sources. *The Levellers* presents the most recent work arising from these explorations.

The choice of title here is illuminating. To level is to make even, to redress an imbalance; one who levels works towards these ends. No doubt the protesting figures in MacDonell's source photographs would view themselves in this light, and it is in this sense that MacDonell's work with this subject matter has always been political, although not overtly so. Now, in a time when the world is in the throes of some of the most virulent ideological conflict in recent memory, MacDonell makes more explicit the political impetus of her work in the oblique reference to the levellers - an activist faction in England during the civil wars of the 1600s. Balancing the scales is a continuous process.

MacDonell is most interested in the ambiguous implications of some of the interactions that play out in these scenes of civil protest. Protest participants are taught to let their bodies go limp upon being physically apprehended, to use their own weight against the active counterpart of those attempting to remove or restrain them. It is an effective mode of resistance, and yet it is inherently passive. Protestors are able to physically embody the principles of non-violent protest, and yet they place a physical and psychic burden on their aggressors; in being forced to bear the full weight of these bodies, those who would restrain and remove them must hold them close in a strange embrace, forcing intimacy in an otherwise antagonistic interaction. The images of these encounters are powerful, and yet bizarre, prompting the question – who yields, and who is unyielding?

In her first work with these images, MacDonell abstracted them from their original context. In the video *Holding Still/Holding Together*, which was originally presented at the Ryerson Image Centre in 2016 as part of an exhibition of the same name, dancers recreate scenes from source images that are never shown, holding, pulling and intertwining each other's bodies in an ethereal, almost meditative series of compositions. Earlier versions of *Untitled Collages* featured only detached limbs, suspended against blank backgrounds. These works isolated the body as a vessel – something to hold and be held. The new works that make up *The Levellers* seem to signal a return to context and connection. By presenting her exploration of these images across video, collage, and sculpture, MacDonell compels viewers to be more active readers of the images, to parse them across different forms, creating opportunities to activate the archive in different modes, bringing these abstracted bodies into relation with our own.

In the collage works, by breaking up the singular documentary image, MacDonell encourages a closer, more critical engagement with these already fraught scenes. The images undergo a kind of levelling themselves, taken from the public sphere to a more private one, becoming as intimate as the pages of a scrapbook, perhaps instilling a previously absent sensitivity to the circumstances of the conjoined figures. The points of juncture between figures in these images – hands grasping hands, wrists,

Continued...

and ankles – also create a nexus of bodily response from the viewer in the form of cast cement sculptural forms. What might at first glance call to mind the broken remains of Greek and Roman statuary are contemporary relics of the intersections of violence and intimacy made manifest in these interactions. How does the weight of our bodies compare to that of their stone counterparts?

What does it mean to use one's body, in its weight alone as a tool of change? That one must go soft to accomplish something difficult, make oneself passive in order to subvert an act of violence, lie still in order to fight back? But a body, however lifeless, is not a stone, and when held it cannot help but create a connection with its counterweight, a balance, however tenuous.

Kendra Ainsworth
Curator of Contemporary Art

IMAGE CREDIT

Cover

Annie MacDonell, *Untitled Collage*, 2017, collage on paper, 16 x 20 inches, courtesy of the artist.

Inside

Annie MacDonell, *Untitled Collage*, 2017, collage on paper, 16 x 20, image courtesy of the artist

Annie MacDonell, *Holding Still // Holding Together*, 2016 (video still), image courtesy of the artist

Thank you to our Community Partner Trinity Square Video for their support of this exhibition.



THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS



First. New. Next. The AGM provides platforms for exhibitions, collections and experimentation in contemporary culture with a recent focus on artists and cultural producers from Indigenous, newcomer and youth communities. Through a broad range of educational programs, artist projects and other forms of critical dialogue, the AGM seeks to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, foster community, and provide spaces where alternative modes of thought are supported and activated in tangible ways.

Staff:

Mandy Salter – Director | Curator
Kendra Ainsworth – Curator of Contemporary Art
Melanie Lowe – Marketing and Communications Coordinator
Sadaf Zuberi – Business Operations Manager

Laura Carusi – Curatorial and Collections Coordinator
Sharada Eswar – Community Activator
Rhéanne Chartrand – Cultural Animator
Jessica Palada – Gallery Animateur

Address: Art Gallery of Mississauga, 300 City Centre Drive, Mississauga, ON L5B 3C1

Tel: 905-896-5088 **Web:** artgalleryofmississauga.com

ISBN: 978-1-927595-31-2