



2019

# T.M. Glass: The audible language of flowers [Exhibition catalogue]

Glass, T. M. and Alvarez, Francisco

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T.M. Glass

The Audible  
Language  
of Flowers

May 8 to August 18, 2019



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A red circular logo with white text.

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This publication accompanies the exhibition  
*T.M. Glass: The Audible Language of Flowers*, presented  
at Onsite Gallery, OCAD University, Toronto.

**EXHIBITION**

T.M. Glass: The Audible Language of Flowers  
May 8 to August 18, 2019  
Onsite Gallery  
199 Richmond St. W.  
Toronto, ON, M5V 0H4

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Cover: Detail from *Azaleas and Tulips in a European Vessel*, 2018

Opposite: Detail from *Blue Poppy in a Blue and White Chinese Vase*, 2018

All images by T.M. Glass, archival pigment ink on archival cotton rag paper fused  
to Dibond, 58" x 58", unless otherwise noted







## The Audible Language of Flowers

When I first encountered T.M. Glass' large flower photographs, I responded strongly to the hyper-reality of the images. The intense colours, the dramatic and simple composition on a black ground, and the pairing of the particular flower species with its vessel captured the very essence of both the plant and the container. The oversize scale also revealed details that one cannot always perceive in a small plant in a garden or in a vase within a room full of furniture and other décor.

The next thing that drew my attention was the texture of the plants and vessels. The velvety petals of one flower against a shiny porcelain vase, or a woody stem against a rough clay vessel. Moving to another photograph, I was surprised to notice obvious digital "painting" strokes clearly made by the photographer. I went back to the first image and realized that the brushstrokes were there too, albeit less thickly applied, but they were everywhere, on the flowers, leaves, branches and the rich and varied vases that contained them.

T.M. Glass loves to talk about cameras. In a typically pleasant, soft-spoken manner, Glass explains this camera's incredible number of pixels, what year that camera was first issued, and which company produced the one on this tripod. Many high-end cameras dot the studio, each with unique features (and limitations) that Glass eagerly describes. The type of camera and lens, each camera's photo finishing software and the latest digital printers all play important roles in the creation of the final image.

What happens after shooting the photograph? How does Glass prepare the raw image for printing on the huge Epson printer in the studio? On this point, Glass talks of extensively working the pixels across the entire image, using the powerful software that is specific to each type of camera. A long, slow process using these advanced digital tools in extreme close-up controls the luminosity, sharpness, colour scale and many other factors of the incredibly high-resolution images (up to 100 megapixels, for now). In the digital cameras that most people commonly use, these parameters are pre-decided, even when we cleverly add that sepia filter to add a vintage feeling to a selfie.

Instead, Glass undertakes the painstaking process of deciding from among thousands of options before selectively working areas of pixels. This sends the resulting image into an “in-between world” connecting hyper-realistic photography and painting.

All digital photographers make similar decisions to produce an image for printing. Glass takes this process further by reworking the entire surface of the image, sometimes making it intentionally *less* realistic. We see the artist’s hand, working over the picture, sometimes creating an impressionistic effect, especially in the earlier works shown in the exhibition, and more recently reinforcing the crispness and clarity of the images.

By adding this detailed hand embellishment, Glass imbues each image with the specific memories and sensations experienced while making the image. The final image represents what the artist saw *and* felt, not just what was physically before the camera, and is akin to a portrait that attempts to capture the personality of its subject. This widens the definition of the artist’s photo-based work from an objective recording to a subjective dreamlike interpretation of remembrance and seeing.

“I am a digital painter,” the photographer declares.

As a student at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Glass focused on sculpture and learned the classical techniques and theories of art. However, after graduation, life led Glass into a completely unrelated, and successful, professional career as a writer and producer in film and television. After being drawn back to art through digital photography around 2010, Glass studied the history and representation techniques of flowers in painting, and experimented with various cameras and printers for years, before feeling that the tools were sufficiently advanced to represent an imagined vision. Along the way, Glass arrived at the formal, large-scale square-format composition with a black background and dramatic lighting that is typical of the work in the exhibition, all produced in a burst of creativity since 2017.

Glass admits to being deeply inspired by northern European still life flower paintings of the 17th and 18th centuries, in which painters often created “impossible” bouquets combining blooms from different times of year and even diverse geographic locations. In the exhibition, we present a wonderful example of this painting tradition loaned by the Art Gallery of Ontario. The still life painting is presented beside four of the actual vessels from the Gardiner Museum and Royal Ontario Museum that appear in Glass’ works. (Might this be the first time all three institutions appear together in a single exhibition?)

The artist’s interest in emerging technology also led to pioneering experiments in 3D scanning and printing, new techniques that are extensions of photography, in Glass’ view. “Until 3D printing,” Glass says, “there was no adequate way to represent accurately the shape of a flower in three dimensions.” During a residency at OCAD University in the summer of 2016 and working with technician John Deal, Glass began experimenting with 3D scanning and printing. The exhibition includes four remarkable 3D “prints” of flowers in vases, further complicating the relationship between photography and sculpture in the space of quickly evolving new digital technologies. The scans could be called a type of photograph, and the “print” stitches together thousands of photographs created by scanning the flowers and vase from all angles. Presenting a stark contrast to the profusely vibrant photographic images, Glass foregrounds the highly constructed and fragile nature of a deceptively simple subject.

This and other dualities are always at play in Glass’ work, from the tension between the digital images’ high-definition photo-realism and their painterly abstraction, to the tragically short life of an individual cut bloom nestled within a centuries-old, seemingly eternal artifact, or the eloquent contrast of textures and geometries of the flower and its container.

Most recently, Glass’ interest in experimenting with technology has led to the creation of a new video work, *Plantasia* (2019). Inspired by the title of the exhibition, Glass researched the ways in which plants might “speak” and discovered the Midi Sprout, a machine that translates a plant’s natural electromagnetic vibrations into sound via electrodes placed on the plant’s leaves. Bob Ezrin is a celebrated Canadian music producer and musician who has been inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame and worked with bands such as Lou Reed, Alice Cooper, Kiss, Pink Floyd, Deep Purple, and Peter Dinklage. In his recording studio, Ezrin jammed with music produced by a pansy plant, resulting in a composition titled *Duet with Pansy*. Overtop, Glass has created a surreal expression of the language of flowers with time-lapse images of flowers blooming.

“The most beautiful thing on the planet is a flower,” says Glass, “and people have always looked for the most beautiful ways to display them.” The artist brings attention to the beauty of nature and the nature of beauty. In particular, Glass’ digital portraits celebrate the unique geometry of flowers and plants, calling to mind the organic shapes and natural structures that inspired the great Catalan architect, Antoni Gaudí. In *The Audible Language of Flowers*, T.M. Glass shows how flowers often speak for us in times of celebration or sorrow.

Francisco Alvarez  
Curator, *The Audible Language of Flowers*  
Dorene & Peter Milligan Executive Director, OCAD University Galleries



Each photographic series advances Glass' understanding of the meaning of flowers in contemporary cultures and the artist's exploration of technique, using ever-evolving cameras, software tools and printers.

### The Artist's Garden, 2017 – ONGOING



Glass' first digital photographs were images of flowers from the artist's own meticulously recreated Arts and Crafts style garden in Toronto. Inspired by a late Emily Carr painting of flowers in a bowl, Glass tried to preserve the freshness of fresh cut flowers that might only bloom for a few days each summer, mixing blooms from different times of the growing season, while building a personal collection of interesting vases that matched the personalities of the flowers.

### The Museum Series, 2017



Looking for more interesting vessels, the artist approached the Gardiner Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum, obtaining permission to photograph vessels from their permanent collections. Because it was impossible to place flowers inside these fragile and unique artifacts, Glass digitally paired them with separate flower photographs from the garden, skillfully creating the illusion of flowers arranged inside the historic containers. For the exhibition, we have been fortunate to borrow some of the same vessels that Glass used in The Museum Series pictures.

Top to bottom: *Hydrangeas in a Dutch Tulipière*, 2017; *Magnolias in an Ancient American Vessel*, 2017 (vessel from the Gardiner Museum) Opposite (top to bottom): *Red and White Bouquet in a Sèvres Vessel*, 2018; *Orchids in a Gold-Coloured Ceramic Vase*, 2018; *Buttercups and Other Wildflowers in a Japanese Vase*, 2018

### The Royal Lodge Series, 2018



When Sarah, Duchess of York, met T.M. Glass at tea with business associates, she asked to see the artist's work. Impressed, she invited Glass to photograph flowers and vessels at The Royal Lodge at Windsor, where the Duchess lives with Prince Andrew, The Duke of York. Planted by the late Queen Mother, this "spring garden" was designed with plants that bloom for just two weeks each spring, remaining green the rest of the year. Glass set up a photography studio in the Victorian conservatory and photographed flowers arranged by the Assistant House Manager (former Butler to the Queen Mother) in vessels from the Royal Lodge Collection.

### The India Series, 2018



Having received an invitation to photograph in India, Glass created The India Series, shooting at the City Palace and Museum in Jaipur, Delhi's Presidential Palace and the final home of Mahatma Gandhi, among other locales. In each setting, Glass used typical local ceramic vessels. The India Series explores how flowers in India have deep symbolic meanings and are present at every important occasion. The exhibition presents four images from this series, the most diverse pictorially in that they expand beyond the more typical "flowers in a vase" subject and composition.

### Les Jardins de Métis Series, 2018



This series was photographed in the summer of 2018 at the renowned Les Jardins de Métis, two hours northeast of Québec City, at the invitation of the Director. English-born Elsie Reford started the Reford Gardens, as this large park of 15 gardens is also known, in 1926. Opened to the public in 1962, today it is a Canadian National Historic Site. Using vessels from the Gardens' museum, rather more modest than the previous Museum and Royal Lodge series, the artist explores the wilder tangle of foliage that characterizes this hardy garden nestled among Québec's rugged forests. T.M. Glass will present a parallel exhibition at Les Jardins in the summer of 2019.



## European Flower Painting in the 17th Century

The 17th century was the golden age of still-life painting, of which flower pictures were the most revered category. Their appearance resulted from a growing admiration for and the progress of botany, captured in Europe's new botanical gardens and princely cabinets of curiosities exhibiting rare plant specimens.

Although flower paintings were created across Europe, Flemish and Dutch artists were considered the genre's highest standard. Accomplished "foreigners," such as the French painter Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636-1699), trained in Antwerp and ensured a fashion for flower still lifes among French and English royal courts.

The stylistic evolution of 17th-century flower pictures is divided between the first and second half of the century, in which a progression from often crowded and stiff compositions to loose and shaded multi-dimensional paintings occurs. Still lifes consistently demonstrate the Dutch penchant for realism, while capturing the artist's ingenuity, tools and knowledge of historic symbolism. Actual blooms or related books, drawings and prints were the preferred references of flower painters.

When generally portrayed, flowers could represent the transience of life or conversely an eternal spring, while specific blooms like tulips might suggest nobility or wealth. Flowers of a particular season or origin were imaginatively depicted with blooms of another, resulting in a more surreal garden of the artist's mind than one of the earth.

Although most well-known 17th-century flower painters were men, the genre did attract women. Flower painting continued into the 18th century through the genius of Dutch painters like Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750), whose brilliant work provided inspiration for artists well beyond her time.

Jennifer Franks, Art Historian

## The History of Flower Vessels in the West

Ancient flower vessels were primarily reserved for gardens. The earliest depiction of arranged cut flowers in a container occurs in second-century C.E. Rome. In the Middle Ages, cut flowers filled silver, glass and ceramic vessels. As gardens became decorative extensions of the house, the use of flower containers increased. Large Renaissance pedestal vases and tin-glazed earthenware apothecary jars called *albarelli* held cut flowers. Enlightenment advances in botany and technology prompted specialized flower vessels. European ceramics illustrated the West's fascination with Chinese porcelain, and 17th-century Dutch earthenware, known as Delftware, exhibited Chinese blue-and-white decoration in new shapes like the *tulipière*, a tulip vase.

In 1709, the Chinese secret of hard-paste porcelain was discovered at the German manufactory of Meissen; the medium, perfected by the French at Sèvres, spurred countless flower vases. Improved travel and horticulture in the 19th century increased the availability of exotic flowers, appearing in bud and tiered vases called *epergnes*. Potteries like Staffordshire produced transfer-printed vessels for a growing middle class. The Arts and Crafts movement countered the Industrial Age; William Morris describes this rebellion evoking contemporary flower vessels: "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."

In the 20th century, flower vases flourished due to advances in manufacturing and the demand for "art pottery" with unique shapes and glazes. Floral arranging became popular along with flower vessels, mass-produced or artist made, which graced most domestic interiors.

Jennifer Franks, Art Historian

## Horticultural Imperialism in the 19th Century

At the height of the British Empire, gardens were lush with specimens from around the world, plants whose cosmopolitan travels were propelled by ambitious nurserymen and new horticultural technologies. Some exotic species were planted as annuals in large, geometrical plots—a practice called "bedding out." In other cases, imported plants were naturalized in British soil. Rhododendrons discovered high in the Himalayas, for example, flourished in Cornwall, marking the spring landscape with their brilliant hues. And in the Himalayan foothills at Simla, British colonists cultivated English primroses, violets, buttercups and larkspur to remind themselves of home as they escaped the heat of Indian summers.

Horticultural proficiency grew exponentially throughout the 19th century: it was a period of unparalleled botanical innovation, driven by the British imperial impulse to acquire both commodities and knowledge. Colonial botanical gardens in Calcutta, India, and Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, traded seeds, specimens, and expertise with the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, outside London. This generated a vast network that extended even to working-class gardeners with but a potted geranium to tend. By the century's end, however, some gardeners were beginning to realize that botanical ambition came with a cost. The British demand for exotic orchids has "stripped whole provinces," lamented one prominent orchid fancier in 1893, predicting the extinction of several species from their indigenous habitats. Today, we live with the mixed legacy of British horticultural imperialism: monocultures that suppress biodiversity along with gardens whose abundant botanical profusion continues to grant immense aesthetic and emotional pleasure.

Lynn M. Voskuil, University of Houston



## The History of Digital Photography

Digital photography has existed since the late 1950s, when a lensless image was made by scanning a photograph into an early computer. In 1973, a Kodak engineer created the first digital camera by combining a CCD sensor that had recently been developed by Bell Labs with the lens from a movie camera, which saved a 0.01 megapixel image onto a cassette tape. It took until the early 1990s for digital cameras to reach the mass-market and the early 2000s for professional photographers, artists and the public to adopt digital photography widely.

While early digital photography was hampered by poor resolution, high cost, and fast obsolescence, it allowed its users to do things they could not do with analogue photography. They could immediately assess and manipulate their images, they could take and store almost unlimited numbers of pictures, and they could transmit them almost instantaneously. Digital photography also shifted the places where we view photographs, from physical prints to the electronic screen.

Because of these qualities, digital photography became rapidly and seamlessly integrated into contemporary art practice. Pioneers including Nancy Burson and Pedro Meyer used digital photography to explore the relationship between the image and truth. Others, such as Stan Douglas and Jeff Wall, use the photograph in a directorial mode, constructing elaborate tableaux that blur the distinction between photography, painting and cinema. As digital sensors and imaging software continue to evolve, artists are able to work with ever-increasing detail and scale, recording and constructing scenes that were previously unimaginable.

Amish Morrell, OCAD University





## 3D Printed Sculptures

Artists and designers are notorious for adopting emerging technologies and innovating new forms for their ideas. 3D scanning and printing have earned a cherished space in the innovator's toolbox since their invention by American Chuck Hull in the mid-1980s. Time has made these technologies increasingly accessible to the public. As makers leverage new technology, they build new aesthetic forms, shifting their paradigm in step with the zeitgeist.

While participating in the Digital Painting Atelier at OCAD U in the summer of 2016, T.M. Glass and I brainstormed project ideas. Since the artist is highly engaged with digital technology, we conceived of a project that would use emerging technology. Photogrammetry is the production of a 3D model using multiple photographs and triangulation to simulate a model. This fit the brief, so we started taking multiple photographs of hydrangeas in a tulipière. Having failed initially to create a good virtual model, we took a lot more photos.

After trial and error, we started to get some promising results. However, it was clear that our ambitions needed some extra help to produce tangible results. T.M. Glass found a production house to carry the project the last mile. They used a type of 3D printing that fuses layer upon layer of sandstone and resin in a complex pattern to reproduce the object from its digital file created by the artist. Finally, after negotiating many hurdles, we had realized our aims and brought into being these wonderful sculptures, in which technology, innovation, and ambition converge.

John Deal, OCAD University





## Artist Biography

T.M. Glass is a digital artist based in Toronto, whose practice explores the historical, technological, and aesthetic conditions of photography to stretch it beyond its traditional definition. The works have been showcased in multiple solo exhibitions and held in private collections in Canada, the United States, Britain, France, and Australia. Glass turned to photography as the primary mode of production after studying sculpture at the Ontario College of Art and Design and pursuing a distinguished career in writing and production for film and television. Glass uses rapidly advancing digital technology to celebrate the beauty of nature.

## Writers' Biographies

John Deal is an instructor at OCAD University in Toronto, and a technician specializing in digital technology, working with OCAD U digital programs including the Digital Painting Atelier and the Drawing and Painting Digital Suite.

Jennifer Franks is an art historian specializing in Decorative Arts, specifically Ceramics and Glass (1600 to present), with a MA in the History of Decorative Arts and Curatorial Studies via Parsons, The New School for Design (New York). She has worked for Christie's (New York), Waddesdon Manor (Buckinghamshire, UK) on behalf the National Trust and Rothschild estate, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among other leading art institutions as museum Researcher, Chief Curator, and Executive Director.

Amish Morrell is an educator, curator, editor and writer. He is currently Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences & School of Interdisciplinary Studies at OCAD University in Toronto. From 2008 to 2017 he was Editor and Director of Programs at *C Magazine*, one of North America's foremost visual arts magazines.

Lynn Voskuil is Associate Professor of English at the University of Houston, where she teaches Victorian literature, the Environmental Humanities, and Empire Studies. She is currently completing a manuscript entitled "Horticulture and Imperialism: The Garden Spaces of the British Empire, 1789-1914," which has been funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.



## FREE PUBLIC EVENTS

Developed by  
Linda Columbus, Programs & Community Coordinator

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**Tuesday, May 21 at 6:30 p.m.**  
**Digital Photography Portfolio Review**

Limited availability; advance registration required  
Tickets available on Onsite Gallery's Facebook page Tuesday, April 30 at 12 p.m.

An opportunity for amateur and professional photographers alike to have a selection of their digital photography work reviewed by professional lens-based artists Kotama Bouabane, April Hickox and Meera Margaret Singh. Each registered participant will be assigned a time slot with one of the three reviewers.

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**Sunday, June 9 at 2 p.m.**  
**Arts & Crafts Garden Visit**

Co-presented with the Toronto Botanical Garden

Limited availability; advance registration required  
Tickets available on Onsite Gallery's Facebook page Friday, May 24 at 12 p.m.

Join T.M. Glass, Onsite Gallery and the Toronto Botanical Garden for a special visit to T.M. Glass' traditional Arts & Crafts Garden. The artist and the Toronto Botanical Garden will lead a tour of the garden and speak about the flowers in bloom, gardening and the history of Arts & Crafts Gardens.

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**Thursday, June 13 at 6:30 p.m.**  
**Artist and Curator's Exhibition Tour**

Join T.M. Glass and Francisco Alvarez for a tour of *T.M. Glass: The Audible Language of Flowers*, while they discuss the artist's process, interest in flowers and travels to international museums and gardens.

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**Wednesday, June 26 at 6:30 p.m.**  
**The Language of Flowers: Workshop with Karen Azoulay**

Join Brooklyn-based artist Karen Azoulay for a talk and interactive experience that will explore the symbolism of flowers.

**Tuesday, July 9 at 6:30 p.m.**

**Oil Infusion Workshop with Kat Mahon**

Limited availability; advance registration required  
Tickets available on Onsite Gallery's Facebook page Tuesday, June 18 at 12 p.m.

Join us for a presentation on flowers throughout history, highlighting the specific uses of certain flowers then and now for their medicinal and therapeutic purposes. This will be followed by a hands-on workshop where participants create their own oil infusion. Everyone will leave with their artistic jar of flower-infused body oil to take home. All materials provided.

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**Thursday, August 8 at 6:30 p.m.**

**Complexity versus Simplicity: Historic Influences on the Contemporary Work of T.M. Glass**

Jennifer Franks will discuss the pendulum swing between complexity and simplicity throughout art history, while highlighting the historic influences in the contemporary work of T.M. Glass.

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**Wednesday, August 14 at 6:30 p.m.**

***A Man Named Pearl* Film Screening**

*A Man Named Pearl* tells the inspiring story of self-taught topiary artist Pearl Fryar. When Pearl Fryar and his wife sought to buy a house in 1976 in an all-white neighborhood of Bishopville, South Carolina, they were dissuaded with the explanation that "Black people don't keep up their yards." Instead of fueling bitterness and anger, this comment motivated Pearl to become the first African-American to win Bishopville's Yard of the Month award.

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**Date will be posted on our website**

**Talk with Bob Ezrin**

Celebrated Canadian music producer and musician, Bob Ezrin, will speak about his musical collaboration with plants and flowers, as featured in T.M. Glass' new video work, *Plantasia*.

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All events are free and at Onsite Gallery, 199 Richmond St. West, unless otherwise indicated. For more information, please visit our website: [ocadu.ca/onsite](http://ocadu.ca/onsite)

## UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

September 18 to December 8, 2019

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**Among All These Tundras**

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 Curated by Heather Igloliorte, Amy Prouty and Charissa von Harringa

Featuring: Asinnajaq, Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, Jade Nasogaluak Carpenter, Carola Grahn, Marja Helander, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Joar Nango, Taqralik Partridge, Barry Pottle, Inuuteq Storch, Couzyn van Heuvelen, Allison Akootchook Warden

*Among All These Tundras* presents contemporary artists from around the circumpolar world. Their works invite viewers to contemplate relationships between textual and embodied Indigenous knowledges, innovation and sustainability, humour and resilience, and our collective responsibility to northern life and land.

Produced by Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University

January 22 to April 12, 2020  
**CodeX: playable & disruptive futurist eArt**  
 Curated by Tom Barker

This exhibition of leading-edge digital art, or eArt, investigates the future of human society through technology, innovation and design. It encourages audiences to reflect on the symbiotic relationship between technology and human society, and the resulting possibilities for our future through algorithms, identity and the nature of reality.

May 13 to August 16, 2020  
**Fable for Tomorrow: A Survey of Works by Wendy Coburn**  
 Curated by Andrea Fatona, Associate Professor, OCAD U and Caroline Langill, Vice-President, Academic & Provost, OCAD U

Wendy Coburn had significant impact on the Toronto art community. *Fable for Tomorrow* will present the depth and breadth of her art, five years after her death. Coburn's prescient artworks foreshadowed so much of what we have dealt ourselves as human beings living within fragile ecosystems and within increasingly oppressive political environments. This exhibition will bring together four decades of sculpture, installation, photography and video and highlight her extraordinary ability to look to an unknown future and point our attention to what would soon preoccupy our minds and senses.

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**Onsite Gallery offers powerful, thought-provoking exhibitions of art, design and new media to stimulate conversations on critical issues facing Toronto and the world.**

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**Wednesday  
12 to 8 p.m.**

**Thursday & Friday  
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**Saturday & Sunday  
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