

# CANADA

P.O. Box 1856 New York, New York 10013  
212-925-4631 gallery@canadanewyork.com  
www.canadanewyork.com

“CCA Biennial launches with art projects across campus” Daniel Aloï, Cornell Chronicle. 4 October 2019.  
<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2018/10/cca-biennial-launches-art-projects-across-campus>

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## “CCA Biennial launches with art projects across campus”



Featured CCA Biennial artist Carrie Mae Weems discusses her Arts Quad installation “Heave” during a tour of Biennial art projects on campus. Jason Koski/Brand Communications.

The 2018 Cornell Council for the Arts (CCA) Biennial launched with a tour of outdoor projects on campus Sept. 28 and artist panels at a conference Sept. 29. The Biennial features Cornell and invited artists, such as Carrie Mae Weems and Xu Bing, with 18 project installations and performances on the theme “Duration: Passage, Persistence, Survival,” curated by CCA director Timothy Murray.

In her lecture Sept. 29, featured artist Carrie Mae Weems discussed appropriation and the role of pop culture and interpretation in her work. She said the Biennial was an occasion for the artists “to use our power to speak to the moment.”

Her two-part multimedia installation on the Arts Quad, “Heave,” is centered on “a push toward deeper democracies at a moment when it all seems to be up for grabs, and the way that violence has shaped who we are and how we think about ourselves,” she said on the project tour.

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One part is “a space of contemplation and consideration,” she said, in which “performers are invited into the space at half-hour intervals. They have a choice – they read books or look at historical materials, watch a television or play games, such as ‘Fortnite’ or ‘1979,’ a game based on the Iranian revolution.”

Gamers and performers can sign up online, Weems said. “Heave” is open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday through Nov. 5.

“One of the tasks for contemporary artists is to explore the problems we now have, while conjuring a future,” Xu Bing, Biennial artist and A.D. White Professor-at-Large, said at the end of his public lecture Sept. 28 at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.

Xu discussed his work related to Chinese writing including the 17-minute, five-channel video “The Character of Characters,” at the museum through Dec. 23. He showed Chinese-looking characters containing English words, an installation of fake characters, and a newer project with emojis and icons telling a story in the pictographic tradition.

“A lot of my works that are about writing are actually about creating obstacles for people,” he said. “I carefully made up 4,000 fake characters, and made books. If you see the books, they look like they contain important information. It looks like Chinese, but actually you can’t read it.”

Xu showed his latest project, “Dragonfly Eyes,” a film culled from 11,000 hours of surveillance camera footage downloaded from the internet and edited to tell a story. “I like to invest my energy in things that are partly fictional,” he said. “I am making a parody of a blockbuster, imitating a classical love story. Our ‘protagonist’ is played by several people. From a Buddhist perspective, what we have and who we are goes beyond our physical bodies.”

Several Biennial artists presented their work Sept. 29 in Milstein Hall on the themes of sound and duration, ecological duration and social survival and persistence.

Ruby Chishti, designer in residence in the Department of Fiber Science & Apparel Design this fall, showed a video of her 2016 sculpture, “The Present is a Ruin Without the People” – recycled textiles, wood and wire with a musical score played through speakers. The work considers the “homelessness” of migration, and immigrant survival, “with layers of cloth functioning as sediment, a visual marker of time,” she said. Motion sensors trigger the sound when a viewer approaches.

“In 2016 I traveled to Sri Lanka and the city of Jaffna, where there are still traces of 35 years of war,” Chishti said. “There are homes covered in dust, and an atmosphere of deep silence. I realized there was an element missing from my work. Sound contextualizes the sculpture, further augmenting the emotion of the viewer.”

Chishti’s Biennial exhibition incorporating fabric sculpture and sound, “Narratives of Memory: A Conversation With Time,” is Oct. 22 to Nov. 4 in the Jill Stuart Gallery, with a closing reception Nov. 2.

Joanna Malinowska, assistant professor of the practice in the Department of Art, describes “The Emperor’s Canary,” her sonic sculpture with artist C.T. Jasper, as “a darker version of the Voyager Golden Record.”

Originally conceived in 2017 for the High Line in Manhattan and dedicated to then-Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt, the piece – two wooden gramophone horns and motion-activated sound units situated near the Johnson Museum entrance and in the Sesquicentennial Grove – plays sounds reflecting extinction and loss.

Sounds include the breathing of a person with black lung disease; an 800-year-old language spoken only in one small town in Poland; chainsaws cutting trees in a surviving remnant of Europe’s primeval forest; Krzysztof Penderecki’s “Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima”; an endangered Peruvian diving petrel; and a wolf howling near the Chernobyl nuclear plant.

Associate professor of music Kevin Ernste discussed his project, “New Instruments of the Future Past.” Sixteen intonarumori instruments will be played by Ernste, the Cornell Avant Garde Ensemble (Ernste and senior lecturers in music Annie Lewandowski and Chris Miller) and several graduate and undergraduate students, Oct. 20 at the Johnson Museum, along with “newly designed/newly imagined instruments built for the event,” incorporating motors, sensors and electronics, he said. The reconstructed experimental instruments – replicating those created ca. 1910-13 by Futurist composer Luigi Russolo and lost during WWII – are here as part of a residency by composer Luciano Chessa’s Orchestra of Futurist Noise Intoners.

“My own work has always been invested in objects and phenomena,” Ernste said. “This project has an educational mission, bringing these instruments here in August and having them out of their crates longer than they’ve ever been. They’re being used in my courses and in Annie Lewandowski’s improvisation class.”

Lewandowski and Lab of Ornithology bioacoustics researcher Katy Payne have created “Cetus: Life After Life,” a performance of recorded whale songs, Oct. 19, 6-6:30 p.m. at McGraw Tower, in a duet with Sarah Hennies on the Cornell chimes. Payne played recordings and said her research found that whale songs evolve over time, with variations influencing each other’s songs.

“The songs they make are long, complex and ever-repeating,” she said. “You will have phrases, themes, the same kind of structure humans use in song. But it never ends – some will sing without a pause for 24 hours.”

Biennial opening weekend events included “ATGC,” a collaborative Cornell project with LEDs depicting genome sequences in human DNA, displayed Sept. 28-29 on McGraw Tower.

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