

GALLERY 101
JUNE 10 - JULY 16 2022

Laurena Finéus • Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman

LE DERNIER DES TOURISTES

Exhibition Essay by Emilie Croning



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People... places.. fragments.. memories.. piecing together to make whole

TEXT BY EMILIE CRONING

In *Le dernier des Touristes*, Haitian visual artist, Laurena Finéus, and Somali-Indian multidisciplinary artist, Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman, present a collection of paintings that thoughtfully explore culture and identity. The exhibition demonstrates rich perspectives of Haitian and Somali-Indian diasporas through visual storytelling, the re-working of historical events, and personal familial archives.

Spanning across the two floors of the gallery, the bodies of work presented capture the essence of their respective artistic practices as they consider oral and written histories. The manipulation of literal and symbolic fragments through the use of collage in their creative processes speak to the research and reflection they are both aptly exploring.

Working predominantly at a larger scale, their paintings command space and provide unique points of entry for critical interpretation that acknowledge their own identity within these modes of representation. Through materiality, colour, texture and scale, their practices complement each other's – their voices creating a beautiful duet that echo within the gallery's walls.

ALL PHOTOS BY FRANCOIS MITTINS

Upon entering the space we are greeted by Finéus's *Péralte sighting's / Birth of an Idol* (2022), where the painting's protagonist, rendered in shades of green, rests lifeless, fastened upright to a door-shaped frame. Behind the central figure, a vibrant and lush site emerges in which other figures are seen bathing around a waterfall.

Portrayed in the style of a vignette, purple and pink hues of botanicals frame a scene of three more figures blending into the foreground.

Finéus creates a window into the past, speaking to the 1930s American occupation in Haiti by visually collapsing elements of history as a way to renegotiate a sacred site for both spiritual and religious practices – a site of resistance for colonized Black Haitians.

Compositionally and historically layered, her depiction of Haitian nationalist leader Charlemagne Péralte, honours a symbol of opposition and resistance. Finéus uses the oppositional gaze as a mechanism to shift the dominating power structures that colonizers exercised over "the Other".

Here – and as a recurring element in the exhibition – the painting extends beyond its borders and directly onto the gallery's white wall. Purple trees on either side of the canvas are obstructed by orange life-like silhouettes of human figures: tourists...travelers.

These shadows emphasize the presence of visitors in the space and act as stand-ins when they are absent. They serve as an extension of oneself, symbolic of the soul, and a sign of humanity as the artists reflect on the powerful effects of displacement and the physical, as well as emotional, negotiation of place.



Across from *Péralte's sighting / Birth of an Idol*, we are introduced to Abdourahman's *Mundane as My Sheed*, a familial domestic scene. Two women are seated in a living room, one reads a newspaper, the other grasps a mug – their company is kept by four children occupying different parts of the canvas. The artist makes a choice to only reveal the melanated skin tones of a few figures, rendering the others in shades of blue and green. Behind them lies a sea of plants bordered by framed photographs and bookshelves. As the title suggests, Abdourahman extracts elements of beauty in the mundane, while embracing aspects of her identity by referencing the long garment worn by Somali women. The artist uses colour to address memories (or lack thereof), by rendering her figures in hues of green or blue, where her own family album serves as a treasure trove of inspiration. She is working through her own personal history to contribute to true and formative representations of marginalized communities.

The collage-like overlay of elements are indicative of the painting's conception: a transformation from digital composites to brush strokes on a canvas. This process, shared by Finéus, of consciously selecting subject matter, demonstrates the ways in which the artists are connecting deeply with, and honouring, these histories.

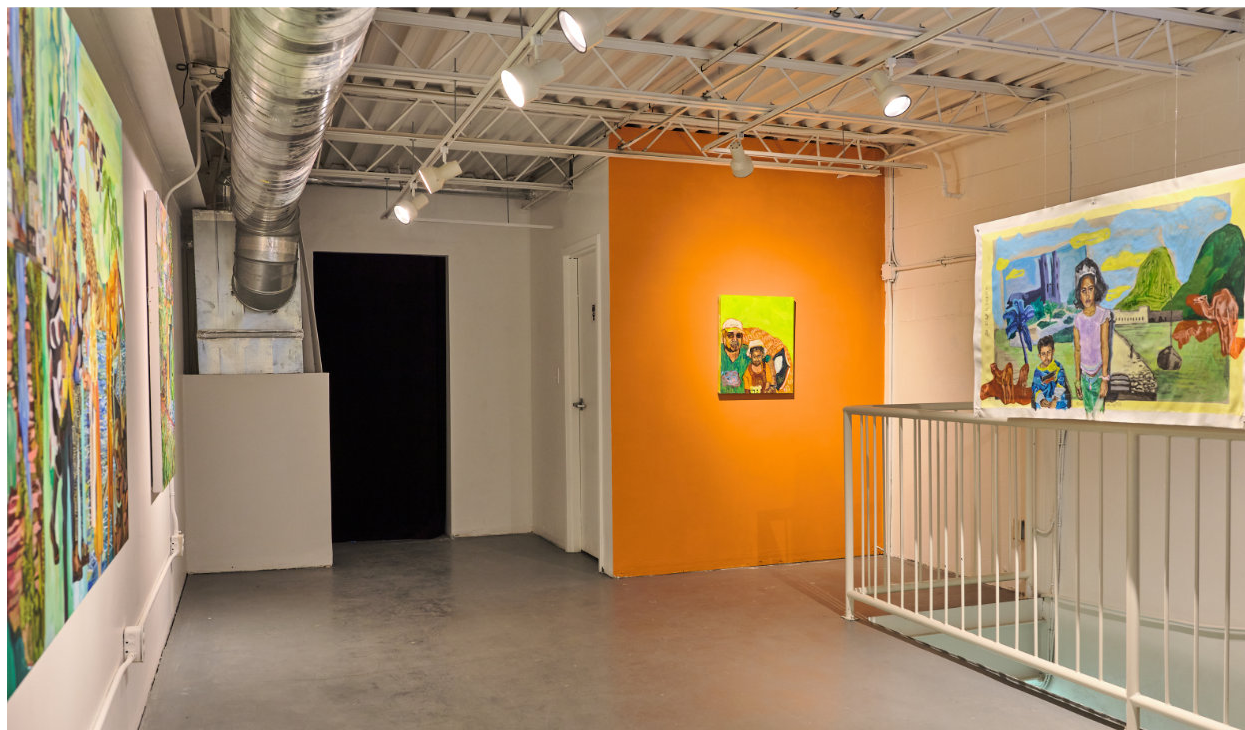


PREVIOUS:
Péralte's sighting / Birth of an Idol
Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 55"x84"
Laurena Finéus

Mundane As My Sheed
Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 48"x84"
Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman

As we navigate through scenes juxtaposing labour, dignity, and decadence, we are met by another orange shadow; the traveller is guided to the second floor of the gallery, where the duet continues. The artists grapple with navigating a constant state of hybridity as daughters of the diaspora. This awareness reaches a crescendo in *It is and isn't my home* (2021), a painting of a young Abdourahman in a t-shirt and overalls with her grandfather whose Canadian pride shines through as he dons a baseball cap with the country's name. As a child of immigrant parents, the artist showcases the duality of their stories through their facial expressions: content paired with a granddaughter's discomfort. Scrawled around the young figure is a quote from British-Somali poet Warsan Shire's *Home*, "No one leaves home unless home chases you". In this context, these words resonate with feeling like a tourist or an outsider where the notion of "home" is called into question.

Abdourahman's more intimate renderings seek to investigate issues of discrimination at the intersection of race, gender, religion, and social class, cherishing the simple moments of Black families simply existing. By contrast, Finéus' work is heavily situated within a political context to not only identify issues as they relate to representation, but to overcome the limitations and prejudices sought to impose exoticized depictions of Haitian cultural identities. *Le dernier des Touristes* reveals the ways in which both young women are creating space where boundaries can be transcended – where both work and artist can grow as they consider nuanced diasporic experiences.



Laurena Finéus is a Haitian visual artist, educator and art administrator specialized in painting. She was born and raised in Gatineau, Québec, and is currently based between Ottawa and Toronto, Ontario. In her practice, Finéus has been concerned with representations of Haiti, relationality within its diaspora, and its growing archives across the globe through an array of figurative and painterly imagined landscapes. These elements are juxtaposed with personal memories of her life in so-called Canada. The teachings of Haitian scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot in 'Silencing the past' informs her understanding of visual narration in her practice. Finéus' strategies include the collapsing of history in order to question its production and its mechanisms.

Finéus is a graduate from the University of Ottawa with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a minor in Communication. Her work has been exhibited at the Ottawa Art Gallery (2021), Karsh-Masson Gallery (2021), the Ottawa school of Art (2021), Art mûr (2019) and Galerie 115 (2019-2020) among others and is part of a range of private collections internationally. She is the recipient of the Ottawa Arts Council IBPOC Emerging Artist Award (2022), the Edmund and Isobel Ryan Visual art scholarship (2020), and the Ineke Harmina Standish Memorial (2019). She is currently pursuing an MFA at Columbia University.

www.lvurena.com

Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman is an emerging Somali-Indian multidisciplinary artist based in Ottawa and Montreal. Her art practice involves both mixed media painting and video art. Through the re-working of family photo albums, Abdourahman's work addresses her cultural history, using her art practice as a means to connect with her heritage. Through this process, she explores concepts of migration, familial history, and discrimination. In 2020, Abdourahman received a BFA from Concordia University in Studio Arts. She has designed murals for the Vanier Community Service Centre in Ottawa as well as Lansdowne & the Glebe Park. In addition, her video work has been featured in the CBC Arts Documentary Series: Exhibitionists. In 2021, her collaborative mural work was displayed in a group exhibition titled "Filtered" at the Ottawa Art Gallery. Her work has also been exhibited at Wallack Galleries, Institut National Art contemporain, La Maison d'Haïti. And her work is a part of the Ottawa Art Collections.

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emilie croning is a toronto-based independent curator, artist, and art historian. her work explores issues and systems around representation and identity as they relate to visual language and diasporic narratives, working at the intersections of feminist theories and post-colonialism. her practice is grounded in creating space and advocating for emerging artists in a global context.

she received her bfa in art history & studio art from concordia university (montréal) and an ma in art history with a curatorial studies in visual culture diploma from york university (toronto).

she is currently working with toronto based nfp wedge curatorial projects.

www.emiliecroning.com/





Blood Writings

Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 36"x48"
Laurena Finéus



Decadent terror: Bal à Cité Soleil

Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 48"x72"
Laurena Finéus



Ma'naxe
Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 54"x72"
Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman



Awowo
Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 10"x10"
Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman



Nou deja gen kasav, nou deja gen kafe
Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 48"x72"
Laurena Finéus



Le Jardin de Mackandal
Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2022. 36"x48"
Laurena Finéus



No Mercy
Oil & acrylic on unstretched canvas, 2022. 27"x46"
Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman



It is and isn't my home
Oil & acrylic on canvas, 2021. 20"x24"
Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman

Exhibition Statement

BY LAURENA FINÉUS & SARAH-MECCA ABDOURAHMAN

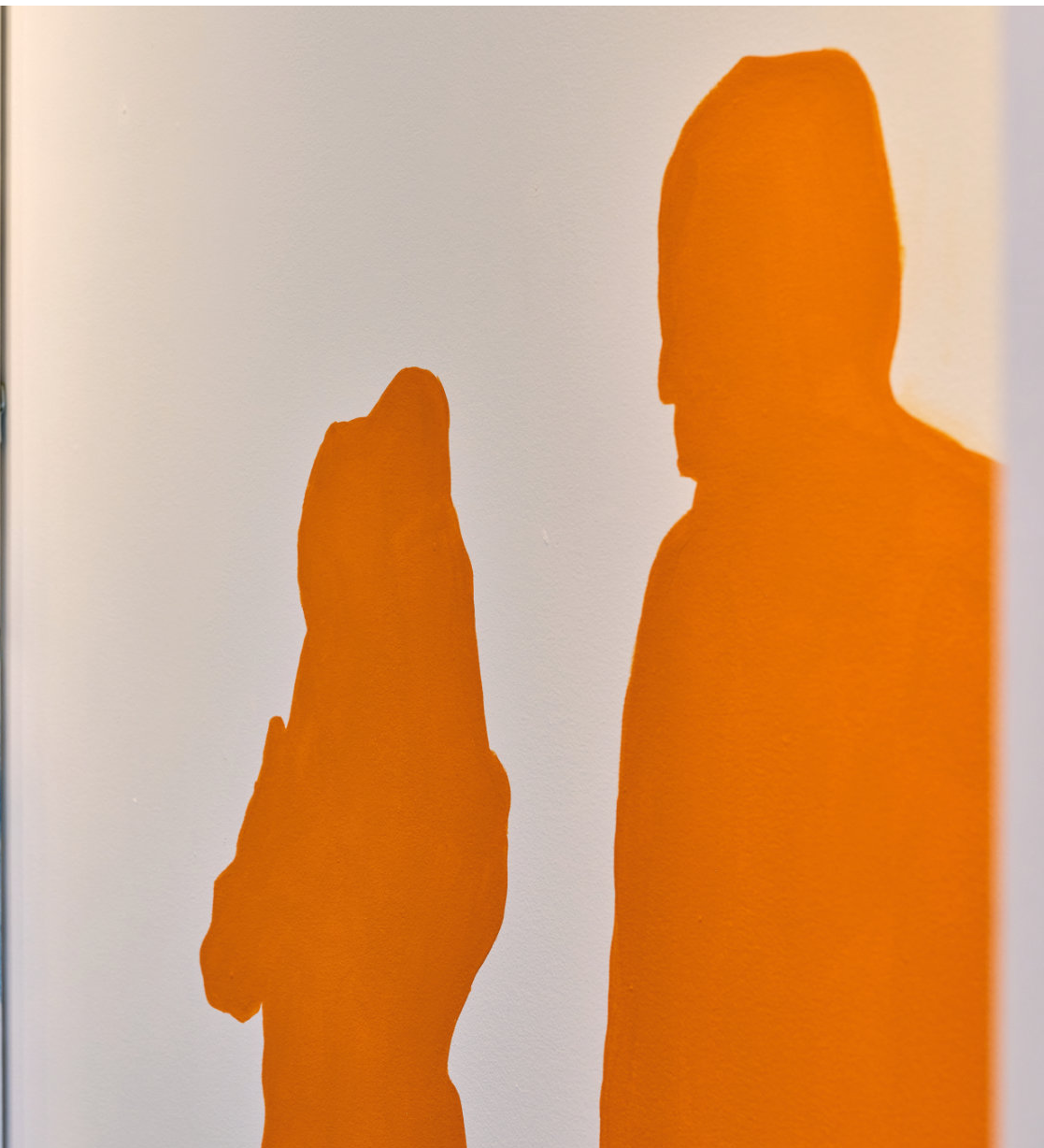
Le dernier des touristes is titled after a poem by Haitian author, Kettly Mars. In her poem, Mars describes the tourist gaze and its constant search for an "authentic" exotic experience, as she observes foreigners trying to wander into the darkest of slums looking to validate the prejudices of their conception of the "third world".

In this exhibition, Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman and Laurena Finéus counter preconceived touristic notions of exoticism and danger attached to their Haitian and Somali-Indian cultural and ethnic identities. By taking the standpoint of an 'oppositional gaze', as coined by bell hooks, the Black figures shown in their compositions are neither othered nor marginalized, but in power. The unapologetic use of Black figurative imaginings commands space, gaze, and narratives.

To the artists, a 'tourist' is an outsider who has yet to understand the essence of the communities in which they arrive. Each work explores their communities' essences as diverse points of 'contact' between north and south, western and other, seen throughout the combined communal histories of Somalia, India and Haiti. Compositionally, the essences meet with third-spaces in the foreground, layering the artists' third-culture lived experiences as children of immigrants in the Black-Canadian diaspora.

Le Dernier des touristes demonstrates rich, multifaceted perspectives through visual storytelling, re-working of historical events, and personal familial archives, deepening understandings of what it means to be honestly rooted in Haitian and Somali-Indian identity and history in so-called Canada.







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Gallery 101 exhibits contemporary visual, media, and performance arts that explore self-representations of decolonizing, feminist, intersectional counter-narratives.

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