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TWO NEW EXHIBITIONS AT MACKENZIE ART GALLERY EXPLORE ARTISTS' RELATIONSHIP TO STRUCTURES OF POWER

Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada - Wednesday, October 17, 2018: This fall, the MacKenzie Art Gallery will present two new exhibitions that show different approaches to artists confronting the power of the state, and the ways in which those states can determine people's perceptions about the world around them. The October premiere of a new work by Garry Neill Kennedy focuses on the artist's large-scale text paintings addressing the extra-judicial detention of Canadian Omar Khadr, drawing on the phrase "ya ummi, ya ummi," Arabic for "oh mother, oh mother," which Khadr repeated during his interrogation. In November, the MacKenzie will present *Punk Orientalism*, the first show to explore in depth the nonconformist contemporary art and artists of Central Asia, Caucasus, Iran and the Middle East, featuring more than 27 works from the late 1970s through today. *Ya Ummi, Ya Ummi ...* opens October 20, 2018, and *Punk Orientalism* will open November 10, 2018.

"These two exhibitions embrace an essential part of our mission as an art museum, providing a place to examine and discuss challenging social issues through art, whether those are rooted in Canada or much further afield," said Anthony Kiendl, the museum's Executive Director and CEO. "Both the *Ya Ummi, Ya Ummi ...* and *Punk Orientalism* exhibitions address issues around colonization and imperialism. Garry Neill Kennedy's moving paintings speak to this in a very Canadian context, while the many artists in *Punk Orientalism* bring to bear a set of experiences that are both foreign and yet also instantly relatable, drawing on the experiences of Indigenous people and colonization across the globe. We are grateful to guest curator Sara Raza for her collaboration with us on *Punk Orientalism*, and to Garry for working with us to premiere these new pieces."

Garry Neill Kennedy: *Ya Ummi, Ya Ummi ...*

20 October 2018 to 7 January 2019

The thirteen large-scale canvases of Garry Neill Kennedy's *Ya Ummi, Ya Ummi ...* are the artist's response to the power of the state over the life of a young man and serve to highlight the injustices that were at the centre of this young man's arrest, detainment, and interrogation. This monumental work runs 28 metres (91 feet) from end to end. Individual letters are rendered in Chisel font and painted in sober greys and black using latex paint.

In 2002, Omar Khadr, a Canadian, was arrested and charged in the death of U.S. Army Sergeant Christopher Speer and the wounding of U.S. Army Sergeant Layne Morris following a firefight in Afghanistan; he was subsequently taken to the American military prison base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. During his interrogation by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the then-15-year-old Khadr repeated the words "ya ummi, ya ummi", meaning "oh mother, oh mother" in Arabic. In 2010, under duress, Khadr confessed to the charges in exchange for transfer to Canada, whereupon he sued the Canadian government for infringing his rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He ultimately settled in 2017, receiving a \$10.5 million payment and an apology from the Canadian federal government for the violation of his rights as a detained youth suspect.

Ya Ummi, Ya Ummi ... will be exhibited along with two earlier works that also demonstrate Kennedy's longstanding concerns about the violation of human rights during the global war on terrorism. Introducing the exhibition are the screen-print *Quid Pro Quo* (2012) and the screen-print series and wall installation *An Eye for an Eye* (2014), works based on the illegal detention of Syrian-Canadian Maher Arar in 2002–2003. Kennedy alludes in these works to the exchange of information between the RCMP and the CIA that led to Maher Arar's mistaken identification as a terrorist, and his subsequent rendition to Syria by the CIA, where he was tortured at the hands of the Syrian government. The colours of the works are based on Arar's description of his ordeal as posted on his website: fluorescent orange (recalling the jump

suit which the CIA forced Arar to wear); black (referring to the electrical cable which his Syrian captors used to beat him); and red, blue, and yellow (the colours of the bruises produced by the beatings). According to Kennedy, “the Arar case is emblematic of the Canadian government’s collusion with the CIA in the post 9/11 era of high suspicion of persons of Middle Eastern descent and the willingness to suspend their basic rights as Canadian citizens.”

“Kennedy’s text-based paintings and screen-prints make a powerful statement to the viewer. Using simple phrases, the artist cuts to the heart of the matter, compelling audiences to consider the ethical underpinnings of our government’s actions,” said Timothy Long, Head Curator of the MacKenzie Art Gallery. “An outspoken respondent to our country’s moral and political challenges, we are excited to premiere Garry Neill Kennedy’s *Ya Ummi, Ya Ummi* . . . at the MacKenzie.”

Garry Neill Kennedy has been a leading figure in the Canadian art world for nearly five decades, as both an innovative arts administrator and a critically recognized conceptual artist. As an artist, his work has focused on how art world practices—most importantly painting—are conditioned by place and implicated within social power structures. Kennedy has exhibited extensively across Canada and abroad, and in 2000 he was the subject of a major four-decade retrospective co-organized by the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. In 2012, the National Gallery of Canada published *Garry Neill Kennedy: Printed Matter, 1971 –2009*, a book by Peter Trepanier looking at printed matter designed by, or in collaboration with, the artist. He is professor emeritus in the Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Punk Orientalism

10 November 2018 to 17 February 2019

The artists in *Punk Orientalism* challenge outdated perceptions about the geography, territory, and personal and political identities of those living in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iran and the Middle East and their International diasporas. Long seen either as societies subsumed by the former Soviet Union, or serving as its client states, the exhibition uses the theme of non-conformity—the “punk” rejection of state authority—to investigate and explore a changing society and its evolving norms in the post-Soviet period. Through works in photography, video, sculpture and installation pieces, text-based art, and other new media, the exhibition demonstrates how these artists create or engage with approaches to modernism that is rooted in the customs and cultures of the region or draw on both Soviet and “Oriental” influences. In particular, given the wide range of countries and cultures swept up by the former Soviet Union, the show explores the concept of one East looking at another East.

One thematic component at play in many of these works is a wry sense of humour, essential to any critique of institutional authority, particularly in an authoritarian context. For example, the artist collective “Slavs and Tatars” incorporates humour alongside geopolitics, as in their mixed-media sculpture *Kitab Kebab (Sarmats and Tsars)* (2013), which shows a literal skewering of different books from cultures around the world.

Another essential component to these works is the use of *bricolage* or bringing together different discarded materials in a collage-style format that creates something entirely new. Aikaterini Gegisian’s works use this method, creating what the artist calls “photographic ready-mades”, drawing on separate and unrelated images that convey a different meaning when linked. Gegisian’s *Falling Tight I* (2014), showing what may be a ballet dancer or circus performer’s arm linked to a rocket launchpad by the water, ties together the enforced veneration for the “space race” with the idea of human performance and control. Rokni Haerizadeh uses this approach, too, with the series *Subversive Salami in a Ragged Briefcase* (2013-2014), adding distorted, rebellious figures onto staid landscapes or streetscapes that explores ideas around protest and resistance.

Critiques of power, an essential element of a punk aesthetic, are embedded in works such as the site-specific installation by Uzbek-born Vyacheslav Akhunov whose constructive style embraces both Cyrillic and Oriental mantras as a form of protest against Soviet instated strictures leading up to the Afghan invasion of 1979. As exemplified in the large-scale work “Breathe Quietly” (1976-2018) a sequence of eight large scale Cyrillic characters made from plywood that serve as a monument to the artist’s long-time struggle with state and authority.

“*Punk Orientalism* presents artists who work addresses issues of colonialism and Soviet imperialism, revealing new avenues into history and geopolitics that are timely and relevant to understanding the current social and political climate,” said Sara Raza, the exhibition’s curator. “Bringing together an array of critical voices that slice through oversimplified narratives of history and place, these artists also speak to the wider influence of the former Soviet Union in Iran and parts of the Arab world, to shape a different understanding of the ‘East.’”

In addition to the exhibition, there will be many opportunities for visitors to learn about and experience these works through study, reflection and dialogue, including: a curator-led tour of the exhibition, English, French and Russian language tours and conversations, an Educator workshop, and a rotating series of artist films in the Gallery’s Shumiatcher Theatre.

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About MacKenzie Art Gallery:

The MacKenzie Art Gallery is Saskatchewan’s original public art gallery: an immersive centre for engaging people through transformative experiences of the world through art, with an ongoing focus on Indigenous culture and diversity. The MacKenzie is located in Regina’s Wascana Park, Canada’s largest urban park and home to the Provincial Capital Commission. It is located within Treaty Four territory, the traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and Metis, and a home to the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people. The permanent collection, which includes the University of Regina’s extensive collection, contains over 5000 works of art spanning 5000 years of art history.

The MacKenzie is grateful for the support of the South Saskatchewan Community Foundation; Canada Council for the Arts; Saskatchewan Arts Board; SaskCulture; the City of Regina; University of Regina.

About Sara Raza:

Sara Raza is an independent curator and writer based in New York City. She is a specialist on global curatorial knowledge, with an academic focus on performance-based practice and architectural art history from Central Asia, Caucasus and the Middle East and North Africa. Most recently she was the Guggenheim UBS MAP Curator, Middle East and North Africa based at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, where she led the third and final phase of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative and curated the exhibition *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa*, which debuted in New York (April-October 2016) and travelled to the Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Milan (April-June 2018). Formerly, she was the head of education at Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Baku, Azerbaijan, founding head of curatorial programs at Alaam Art Space, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and curator of public programs at Tate Modern, London (2006–8). She was an educational advisor to Edge of Arabia’s CULTURUNNERS US tour (2013–14) and a jury member for the 2017 Vilcek Foundation and New York Culture (2016) and previously the 2014 Akbank Contemporary Artists Prize, for which she also curated the shortlist exhibition (2014).



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