



ERIKA DEFREITAS
**THE WORK OF
MOURNING**

FEBRUARY 26 – APRIL 12, 2015

AGM
ART GALLERY OF MISSISSAUGA



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Erika DeFreitas is an emerging conceptual Canadian artist. I am energized by the focus of her work exploring the influence of language, loss and culture on the formation of identity through performance, public interventions, relational exchanges, photographic documentation. I learned about this artist through Curator Andrea Fatona with a presentation at *The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation* in 2014 at the Harbourfront Centre. What intrigued me about the artist was her ability to explain complex issues with an unusual clarity, gravitas and passion. This same drive is present in her work at the AGM, thoughtfully curated by Assistant Curator Kendra Ainsworth. DeFreitas examines the rituals surrounding grief and mourning. The gestures in the photographs allow us to think about our own embodiment of loss, grief and even jubilation. It is a gift and a pleasure

The exhibition is possible with the collaborative support of AGM staff members: Tina Chu, Sadaf Zuberi, Shellie Zhang, Laura Carusi, and Alexandra Hartstone.

Stuart Keeler

Director | Curator

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Taking its name from a collection of essays of the same title by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* presents a powerful new body of work by conceptual artist Erika DeFreitas. Often exploring the notions of absence and loss in her practice, in this exhibition DeFreitas investigates the most profound form of absence – that created by death. By examining the rituals that surround death and grieving, DeFreitas illustrates how the act of mourning can bridge the chasms between absence and presence, private and public, singular and universal.

Each of the four artworks in this exhibition is composed of smaller, serialized components, echoing the format of the book that so inspired the artist. Each essay in Derrida's anthology was written after the death of a friend or colleague, and was, individually, a way for Derrida to work through his grief, to create a record of each person's impact on his life, to eulogize them. Simultaneously, however, grouped together the collection is emblematic of the fact that we must all somehow reconcile within ourselves the conflicting ideas that while each death is a singular trauma, death itself is a constantly recurring event. As a result, we invoke rites and rituals that can both provide a comforting familiarity for mourners, but conversely, give significance and ceremony to individual instances of an event that is so common.

Any of the traditional rituals and practices surrounding death and mourning can essentially be seen as a way to make tactile, comprehensible, and present the ultimate intangible – the loss of a person from this world. DeFreitas takes the results of these practices as her reference points, in the form of information and images in the public domain, such as photographs of bodies at crime scenes and obituaries. *In lieu* consists of alphabetized stacks of obituaries cut from newspapers, and painstakingly dipped in layer after layer of beeswax. In this act of performance, in sealing and preserving these records of lives, DeFreitas not only commits herself to a process that involves thinking about those whose lives are documented in these objects, but that builds up a physical residue, making these artifacts of loss more than they were.

Although not personally affected by any of the deaths depicted in the found images and texts, DeFreitas spends time with these deceased strangers, enacting labour intensive processes that could be equated with rituals of grieving. Her practice and the exhibition of these works imbricate the personal and public aspects of mourning. She takes in the very public evidence of death and mourning, and undertakes a very personal interaction with it – embroidering the forms of bodies under blankets at crime scenes, re-enacting the hand-gestures of people racked with grief – and these artistic products are once again made public in the form of an exhibition. It is this labour, this *work of mourning*, which gives these documents potency – even in their ubiquity – and which also gives us hope for the possibilities of catharsis.

Kendra Ainsworth
Assistant Curator

IMAGE CREDIT

Cover

Erika DeFreitas, *A Visual Vocabulary for Hands in Mourning*, 2013 – 2015,
Installation of 64 30.5 x 45.7 cm c-prints. Photo by Daniel Ehrenworth.
Image courtesy of the Artist.

Inside

Erika DeFreitas, *so buried in it that we only see them when pulled out in abstractions*, 2014
– ongoing, cotton, embroidery thread, 61x 90.4 cm each. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid.
Image courtesy of the Artist

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Engage. Think. Inspire. This phrase opens the dialogue at the AGM. The Gallery connects with the people of Mississauga through the collection and presentation of relevant works from a range of periods and movements in Canadian art. Expressing multiple ideas and concepts, this visual art translates into meaningful cultural and social experiences for all audiences. The AGM employs innovative education, artist projects and other forms of dialogue to advance critical enquiry and community connection to the visual arts.

Staff:

Stuart Keeler – Director | Curator
Tina Chu – Engagement Officer
Kendra Ainsworth – Assistant Curator
Shellie Zhang – Communications

Sadaf Zuberi – Membership Coordinator | Animateur
Laura Carusi – Volunteer Coordinator | Curatorial Assistant
Alexandra Hartstone – Animateur

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