



## The Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival unleashed

A look at five of the 200-plus exhibits that are part of Toronto's annual photographic free-for-all.

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The Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival is an unruly beast and that's part of its charm.

Over its 18 annual instalments to date, the sprawling photo fest has grown and matured, surely, but still strained at the bridle festival organizers looped over its head.

Well, no more. After several years of best efforts to direct what is, at its heart, a photographic-free-for-all — organizers, well-intentionedly, have offered some broad thematic guidance to the inevitable chaos in recent years, only to see it fall largely by the wayside — the festival has loosed the bit. And Contact, with its 200-plus shows popping up everywhere from corner cafés to major museums, is off the chain once more.

That, not to mention sheer volume, makes the word “preview” something of a red herring, but we can still steer you to some worthy efforts before the starting gun May 1.

1. Part Picture, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art: It's a semi-tradition that Contact's anchor exhibition takes place at MOCCA, but all good things must come to an end. With its lease up in August and its destination unknown, this year's offering will be the last at MOCCA's Queen West digs. So maybe this year's annual, enormous photomural in the parking lot heralding the festival's arrival is not irony unintended: Jiyhun Jung's "Demolition" shows a hyperreal building gutted from the outside-in — appropriate, given the pending fate of MOCCA's decade-plus home as a site for (what else?) a condo development.

2. Chris Curreri, So Be It, Gardiner Museum: 2014 Sobey finalist Curreri works in photography, for the most part, and part of his project seems to be translating the sensual world to the confines of often-chilly two dimensions. I've never seen him more successful in that than with this series, where he photographed the various failures of neophyte potters attending classes at the Gardiner. Slumped and deflated, the collapsed vessels have a visual lure that prompts contemplations of a very visceral kind.

3. Mark Ruwedel, Ryerson Image Centre: Ruwedel won the annual \$50,000 Scotiabank Photo Prize last year and this is the show that comes with it, a career survey at the RIC and a catalogue of works by the fancy German photo publisher Steidl. Ruwedel, an American who studied at Concordia in Montreal, is best known for his eerily unpeopled images of landscapes scarred repeatedly over time by our busy little species and left for dead. As a result, the emptiness he captures overflows nonetheless, haunted by days past.

4. Generations, Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Royal Ontario Museum: Matthew, who was born in England and raised in India, takes as her starting point the convention of the family photograph, gently unpacking its content and the memories they both preserve and deny.

5. Island Projects, Artscape Gibraltar Point: Because it's spring, or at least supposed to be, I'm a fan of this exhibition out on Centre Island, and not only because of the bracing ferry ride it'll take to get you there. For some years, Artscape has been operating a free and easy artist residency program out on the island — yes, they get to sleep there — and when it comes to shaking up a worn-down urbanite's world view within an eight-minute boat ride, this is hard to beat. There's some liberating stuff to be found here (literally, if you look at Claudette Abrams' photo of a performance by Holy Jackal) and who knows? You might come back feeling a little refreshed yourself.

The Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival kicks off May 1.

-Whyte, Murray. "The Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival Unleashed",  
Toronto Star, April 27, 2015.