5 Editors' Picks for the Images Festival

Heung-Soon Im, (still), 2014
Sarah Anne Johnson, *The Kitchen* (video still), 2016
Chantal Akerman, *News from Home* (film still), 1976
The Images Festival, North America’s largest festival for experimental and independent film, opens on April 14 in Toronto for 10 days of screenings, installations, talks, tours and performances. Now in its 29th year, Images has a long history of premiering groundbreaking works of art (such as Matthew Barney’s Cremaster cycle) in Canada. Here, our editorial team selects their best bets from the festival program.

Heung-Soon IM's Factory Complex
Heung-Soon IM’s *Factory Complex* was screened at the far rear of the Venice Biennale’s Arsenale building last year, in a low-slung, curtained room. This seemingly inconspicuous work—notably embedded in the middle of a former factory—was one of the best and most powerful at the biennale, eventually winning a Silver Lion for its director. The film recounts the history of factory labour and labour-rights action by women in Korea and elsewhere since the 1960s, mixing documentary footage, abstract reenactments and first-person accounts to create a work uncompromisingly devoted to the perspectives, intelligence and accomplishments of working-class women. Many are as funny as they are determined: one woman relates a slogan from underpaid Nike factory workers (“We want to wear Nike shoes too!”); another movingly likens being laid off by Samsung to being dumped by someone she truly loves. An unusual, challenging and impressive choice for Images’ opening-night film.—*David Balzer, editor-in-chief*

**Emily vey Duke and Cooper Battersby’s Spotlight Screening**

**Saturday, April 16, 7 to 8:30 p.m., Jackman Hall**

Emily vey Duke and Cooper Battersby have come a long way since their 1998 breakthrough video work *Rapt and Happy*. *Rapt and Happy* opened with a hand-drawn vignette that read “There’s something wonderful about feeling sad, lonely or mad at times, but really everybody likes feeling happy the best,” and in true low-budget fashion, it starred the artists (and their cats) mostly at home in a run-down Halifax apartment. The duo’s 2015 work *Dear Lorde*, by contrast, focuses on a 14-year-old teenage girl looking for validation from her heroes Jane Goodall, Bishop Tutu and Lorde, and it features much higher production values, not to mention a cast. Yet over 20 years, vey Duke and Battersby have stayed true to their interest in emotion, empathy, failure, awkwardness and the self—or what the European Media Arts Festival jury recently called “the honest exploration of an artist’s vulnerability.” See both works, and a couple more, at this spotlight screening. —*Leah Sandals, managing editor, online*

**Sarah Anne Johnson’s *The Kitchen***

**April 1 to 23, Gallery 44**

In 1950s Montreal, Sarah Anne Johnson’s grandmother, Velma Orlikow, checked herself into a treatment centre to seek help in combatting her post-partum depression. Instead of helping Orlikow to get better, her psychiatrist subjected her to destructive experimental treatments (such as sleep deprivation, electroshock therapy and other “de-patterning” methods more suitable to CIA interrogation) that left her with an inability to concentrate,
deep-rooted phobias and walloping bouts of depression. Johnson continues her own interrogation into her maternal family history (a subject she has tackled previously in *House on Fire* [2009] and *Dancing with the Doctor* [2011]) in two works on view during the festival: the performance *Hospital Hallway* (2015) and the video-installation *The Kitchen* (2016). Visually, *The Kitchen* recalls Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielmann, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (1975), which presents the precise daily ritual performed by a woman who is keeping herself from unravelling by maintaining an exacting routine. Johnson flips the script by binding her character (who wears a mask on the back of her head and performs all actions blind, with her hands behind her back) into total ineptitude in her attempt to cook a simple meal for her family. She can’t crack an egg properly, and slices the loaf of bread all wrong. Alone in the kitchen, she stamps her feet and cries out in despair—then, she rolls her shoulders back, collects herself, smooths her hair back and tries again. It’s frustrating and heartbreaking, and it’s courageous work.

—Rosie Prata, managing editor

**Chantal Akerman’s News From Home**

*Saturday, April 23, 7 to 8:30 p.m., Jackman Hall*

Writing in the *New Yorker* last October, the day after the news of the death of Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman by suicide at age 65, film critic Richard Brody recounted his first encounter with Akerman in Paris in 2000. In the Q and A that followed a screening of her Proust adaptation *La Captive*, a young woman posed a complexly analytic question to Akerman, to which the filmmaker briskly responded, “Is that how you talk to your friends?” The lesson here—for the questioner, Brody and anyone else approaching Akerman’s work—is that despite her legendary appeal to cinephiles and academics as an icon of existentially poetic structuralist and feminist filmmaking, Akerman was first and foremost interested in how the moving image could tell a story of real life. Shot in New York in the early 1970s, *News from Home* is one of her earliest forays into this narrative realism with long takes of the city’s streets, storefronts, parking lots and subway platforms (Akerman was heavily influenced at the time by the work of Michael Snow, Yvonne Rainer and Jonas Mekas) set against Akerman’s voice reading increasingly distraught letters from her mother. It’s a lulling, autobiographical portrait where home becomes an everyday ideal fraught with a sense of intimacy and alienation, longing and loathing, resignation and denial. Not to be missed. —Bryne McLaughlin, senior editor

**Juliana Huxtable’s There Are Certain Facts that Cannot Be Disputed**

*Saturday, April 23, 9 to 10 p.m., Harbourfront Centre*

If you don’t know Juliana Huxtable’s name, you may know her image: she was 3-D printed
by artist Frank Benson to form the most iconic piece in the New Museum’s 2015 Triennial, firmly ensconcing Huxtable in the institution’s annals. *There Are Certain Facts That Cannot Be Disputed*, Huxtable’s hour-long, three-part work, tackles related territory. How do you make a place for yourself, or find yourself, in history when most sources focus on the Western, the white and the straight? Huxtable approaches the question in monumental fashion, combining clips of whitewashed period pieces with musical performances, lasers and odes to defunct websites like Geocities and Encyclopedia Africana, mounting a reflection on the vicissitudes of history that’s anything but nostalgic. —Caoimhe Morgan-Feir, associate editor