

Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything
The Jewish Museum
April 12 – September 8, 2019

Exhibition Wall Texts

A world-renowned novelist, poet, and singer/songwriter, Leonard Cohen has inspired generations of writers, musicians, and artists. He was an extraordinary poet of sorrow and the human condition, giving voice to what it means to be fully alert to the complexities and desires of both body and soul. We are privileged to have Cohen's music, words, and life inhabit the Jewish Museum for six months, offering a critical celebration, loving tribute, and quiet commemoration of a vast artistic achievement and inspiring life.

The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal commissioned more than forty visual artists, filmmakers, musicians, and performers to revisit Cohen's magnificent oeuvre. This exhibition offers contextual multimedia installations—immersive multiscreen archival montages highlighting five decades of Cohen's concert performances, an installation devoted to Cohen in interviews revealing the workings of his mind, and yet another that gathers newly commissioned covers of his musical repertoire—as well as a variety of artists' responses to Cohen's art and life.

As we delve into the many pathways that emanate from Cohen's work, a major participatory installation invites visitors to play an organ keyboard, with individual keys summoning audio files of his poetry, recited by Cohen himself. Another installation centers around Cohen's amazing comeback album, *I'm Your Man*, featuring ardent fans singing the entire record, accompanied by the choir from the Cohen family's synagogue.

Leonard Cohen's thinking, writing, and music are a thing of beauty and despair. For decades, he tenaciously supplied the

world with melancholy but urgent observations on the state of the human heart. With equal parts gravitas and grace, Cohen teased out a startlingly inventive and singular language, depicting both an exalted spirituality and an earthly sexuality. He set the blunt but brilliant instrument of his famous voice—a "velour foghorn," deep and cavernous, or more recently his raspy, chantlike whispers—to beautiful melodies and simple arrangements that belied a great musical intelligence. His interweaving of the sacred and the profane, of mystery and accessibility, is such a compelling combination that it becomes seared into memory. Our exhibition explores how this important exploit affected and inspired artists, how it entered the cultural conversation, how it cut deep into the marrow of the body politic.

For all of Cohen's reputation as a gloomy, depressive figure, he had levity, a wry humor, a lightness of touch. Cohen charted the darkest byways of emotion; he saw prayer in the carnal and acknowledged, at every turn, the inevitability of pain and disappointment. "There is a crack in everything," he memorably wrote. For Cohen this was a demonstrable fact supported by widespread evidence, both personal and social, something we need always factor in. But there is also the compensating counterargument concluding that line: "That's how the light gets in."

John Zeppetelli and Victor Shiffman
Exhibition Curators
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

LEONARD COHEN: MOMENTS

COMPILED BY CHANTAL RINGUET

SEPTEMBER 21, 1934

BIRTH OF LEONARD NORMAN COHEN IN WESTMOUNT

Born into a Westmount Jewish family that was part of Montreal's Anglo elite, Leonard Norman Cohen was the second child of Masha Klinitsky-Klein and Nathan Bernard Cohen. Lyon Cohen, Leonard's paternal grandfather, a well-known businessman and philanthropist, was an important figure in the Jewish community. He started the Freedman Company, one of the largest clothing manufacturers in Montreal, and cofounded the *Canadian Jewish Times* (1897), the first English-language Jewish newspaper in Canada. Lyon Cohen was also president of several organizations, including the Canadian Jewish Congress and Congregation Shaar Hashomayim. He helped Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire settle in Canada—among them, from Lithuania, the learned Rabbi Solomon Klinitsky-Klein and his family. Lyon's son, Nathan Cohen, a lieutenant in the Canadian army and World War I veteran, later ran the family business. From his father, the young Leonard inherited a love of suits; from his mother, Masha, who trained as a nurse, he received his charisma and his love of songs.

Cohen's well-to-do family was quite different from the Jewish masses who arrived in Montreal in the early twentieth century. Many of these immigrants spoke Yiddish as their native language and worked in garment factories. Despite his extensive travels and his residence in Los Angeles, Cohen always returned to Montreal to “renew his neurotic affiliations,” as he often repeated in interviews.

JANUARY 12, 1944

DEATH OF NATHAN COHEN, LEONARD'S FATHER

Nathan Cohen died when Leonard was nine years old. Grief-stricken, the boy wrote a message that he placed secretly in a bow tie that had belonged to his father, which he then buried in the garden. Later he said that this was his first act as a poet, adding two things: first, that had he been able to climb a mountain at the time, he would have become a mountain climber, and second, that his entire body of work was no doubt an extension of that original gesture, the burying of the bow tie. His father's death affected Leonard Cohen's life and work in many ways. It was a huge loss, from which he derived a feeling of solemnity that became his hallmark.

At the same time, the passing of his father sealed his connection with Judaism. He was now the man of the family, the one responsible for presiding at the seder during the Jewish festival of Passover. In his second album, *Songs from a Room* (1969), Cohen alludes to Judaism in the song *Story of Isaac*. This was inspired by the biblical story in which God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son, and then, at the last moment, God sends an angel to stop him. In Cohen's song the incident is told from the point of view of the son seeing his father enter his room: "The door it opened slowly / My father he came in / I was nine years old / And he stood so tall above me." The reference to the father's name appears in the poetry collection *Book of Mercy* (1984) and in the song *Lover Lover Lover* (1974): "I asked my father / I said, 'Father change my name' / The one I'm using now it's covered up / With fear and filth and cowardice and shame." In Judaism, the name Cohen indicates that the bearer is a *kohen*, belonging to the *kohanim*, a prestigious lineage that served as priests in the Temple in Jerusalem.

1956–1964

EMERGENCE OF THE YOUNG POET

At McGill University Cohen studied poetry with Louis Dudek and prose with Hugh MacLennan. He met the poet Irving Layton, who became his friend and mentor. Layton introduced him to the city's literary circles, and Cohen took part in various poetry readings, accompanied by jazz music, in nightclubs downtown.

In 1954 Cohen published his first poems in the well-regarded, dynamic literary magazine *CIV/n* (1953–1955). After earning his degree in English literature in 1955, he published his first poetry collection, *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956), in the McGill Poetry Series founded by Dudek. This collection is made up mainly of Cohen's early writings and contains themes that recur in his work: love, religion, and poetry. In 1956 Cohen began studies at Columbia University in New York, but did not find them worthwhile and returned to Montreal the following year.

Rebellious and drawn to war, Cohen traveled to Cuba in 1959, as the Revolution there was in full swing. Armed with his guitar and a large penknife and speaking only English, he passed himself off as a spy, then as a Cuban on the lam. He could have gone to prison, but returned safely to Montreal. In December he settled in London, bought an Olivetti 22 typewriter, and began writing his first novel. In the spring of 1960 he arrived on the Greek island of Hydra, where he bought a house a few months later. In the five years that followed, he spent many months on the island. There he met Marianne Ihlen, the companion who inspired him to write the song *So Long, Marianne*. His years on Hydra proved to be prolific: while living there he published the poetry collections *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) and *Flowers for Hitler* (1964), as well as two novels, *The Favourite Game* (1963) and *Beautiful Losers* (1966).

1963–1966

BIRTH OF THE NOVELIST

Cohen’s novel *The Favourite Game* was published in 1963. The book follows the adventures of Lawrence Breavman, a young Jewish poet whose life bears certain similarities to that of the author. After a sheltered childhood marked by the death of his father, Breavman develops a taste for hypnosis and an unconditional love of women. Already we recognize the lover who later produced such works as *Death of a Ladies’ Man* and *Tower of Song*. The same year Cohen translated Claude Jutra’s film *À Tout Prendre*, released in English as *Take It All*. He was turning out to be a cultural mediator between francophone Quebec and English-speaking Canada, a role he adopted on a number of occasions.

In 1965 the National Film Board of Canada released *Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen*, a documentary directed by Donald Brittain and Don Owen that paints a portrait of the thirty-year-old Cohen in his hometown. The following year his second novel, *Beautiful Losers*, was released. Set in Quebec it tells the story of a love triangle between an English Canadian folklorist, his Indigenous wife, and his best friend, a French Canadian leader of a Quebec separatist movement. The story intertwines the adventures of the protagonists with the life of Kateri Tekakwitha, a seventeenth-century Mohawk woman who became a Catholic saint. Mysticism, sexuality, drug use, and sensory excesses intermingle. Fragmented in form, it is an experimental novel in which the three founding peoples of Canada meet: Indigenous, Québécois, and English Canadians.

Beautiful Losers did not sell well and aroused controversy. One critic described it as “the most revolting book ever written in Canada,” but also “the most interesting Canadian work of the year.” Not until the following generation did the book gain true recognition in literary circles. Today it is considered a key English Canadian postmodern novel.

1966–1969

ARRIVAL OF LEONARD COHEN, SINGER / SONGWRITER

After the commercial failure of his second novel, *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen moved to New York City in 1966. A year later John Hammond, the man who had discovered Bob Dylan in 1962, signed Cohen to a contract with Columbia Records. *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, the artist's first album, was released in 1967 and featured titles that became his signature: *Suzanne*; *So Long*, *Marianne*; and *Sisters of Mercy*. Cohen's music, expressing the art of the troubadours along with an existentialist vision, can be described as postfolk. However, its ties to the folk-revival tradition of the 1960s—associated with Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Phil Ochs, among others—related more to the way it incorporated various musical influences than to any spirit of protest. His music actually had more in common with the art of inward-looking singer/songwriters such as Tim Hardin and Joni Mitchell.

In 1969 Cohen released his second album, *Songs from a Room*, which also garnered great commercial success. It opened with *Bird on the Wire*, another seminal song. His career as singer/songwriter took off immediately with the release of his first two albums. From then on, it became necessary to differentiate between Leonard Cohen as writer and as cultural phenomenon.

Another major title on *Songs from a Room* is *The Partisan*. Its original French version, *La Complainte du Partisan* (1943), written in London by Emmanuel d'Astier de La Vigerie (lyrics) and Anna Marly (music), experienced a resurgence in popularity thanks to Cohen. This song had originally been broadcast during World War II by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) to radio audiences in occupied France. Cohen's version introduced him to France, where he quickly became a star.

In literature Cohen won the Canadian Governor General's award for *Selected Poems* (1956–1968), his first anthology, in 1969, at a time when he was already celebrated in Europe. The author refused the award on the grounds that “the songs forbid it absolutely.”

1968–1978

CONQUERING THE WORLD

The late 1960s and the 1970s were characterized by Cohen’s deepening involvement in the New York artistic milieu and, internationally, by his increasing fame. He frequented the Chelsea Hotel in Manhattan, which was a haunt for artists and writers, including Andy Warhol, Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, and many others. In 1968 an amorous encounter with Janis Joplin inspired him to write the song *Chelsea Hotel No. 2*, which was released in 1974 on the album *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*. In 1972 a tour took him to several countries in Europe and to Israel. He also composed *Lover Lover Lover*, another song that appeared on the record. *Leonard Cohen: Live Songs* was released by Columbia Records in 1973; it was followed in 1975 by the album *The Best of Leonard Cohen*, then by a tour of Europe, the United States, and Canada. During this period the artist bought a row house in a working-class neighborhood of Montreal, which he kept for the rest of his life.

With the release of the album *Death of a Ladies’ Man* (1977), followed by a collection of poems of the same name (1978), the artist experienced a turning point in his thinking. He began to develop the idea that light—and joy—penetrated through cracks in the soul. This thought was clearly expressed in a line from the song *Anthem* (1992): “There is a crack in everything / That’s how the light gets in.”

1988–1992

I'M YOUR MAN: A MAJOR MUSICAL COMEBACK

In the early 1980s Cohen stepped away from the music scene. Aside from the two world tours he undertook in 1980 and 1985, he devoted himself mostly to writing. In 1984 he published a new poetry collection, *Book of Mercy*, which won the Canadian Authors Association literary award for poetry. That same year the album *Various Positions* was released, featuring *Dance Me to the End of Love* and the hit *Hallelujah*, which became the most famous song in Cohen's repertoire. In the 1990s the latter was popularized by John Cale, a musician in the experimental rock group the Velvet Underground, and then by Jeff Buckley.

The 1988 release of *I'm Your Man* heralded Cohen's highly successful comeback to the music scene. This album possessed a mix of geopolitical considerations, social concerns, and relationship and religious issues, intermingled with a touch of humor. The work indicated his shift to a more modern style, thanks to the use of synthesizers in some of the songs and Cohen's improved singing. Several titles went on to become huge successes, including *I'm Your Man*, *Ain't No Cure for Love*, *First We Take Manhattan*, *Tower of Song* (a pivotal song on the album), and *Everybody Knows*. The album was a major commercial hit. A few examples of its triumph on the international music scene: *I'm Your Man* went silver in Great Britain and gold in Canada and held the number-one spot in Norway for sixteen weeks. It figured prominently on various lists of top albums of the 1980s.

Four years later the album *The Future* helped introduce the singer to younger generations. Three of its songs were featured on the soundtrack of *Natural Born Killers*, directed by Oliver Stone, and contributed to the film's commercial success.

1994–1999

TRANSFORMATION: THE LIFE OF A BUDDHIST MONK

In the early 1970s Cohen traveled to Mount Baldy in California and to various Zen centers to practice in the Japanese Rinzai tradition. In the 1980s he became more deeply involved with this philosophy, helping to establish a Zen magazine called *Zero* and a Zen center in Montreal. In 1994 he decided to devote himself full-time to life as a Buddhist monk, alongside his teacher, Kyozan Joshu Sasaki. For five years he was absent from the music scene altogether. He gave up his suits and fedoras for monastic dress—long robe, shaved head, and austere demeanor. The objective of this stay was not to have a mystical experience but to enact a process to regain a normal life, free from dependency on alcohol, medication, and women.

During this time Columbia Records continued to promote the artist with the release of his album *Cohen Live: Leonard Cohen in Concert* (1994), followed by *More Best of Leonard Cohen* (1997). In early 2001 the live album *Field Commander Cohen: Tour of 1979* was launched. The record paved the way for the release of *Ten New Songs* (2001), cowritten and produced by the singer Sharon Robinson, which brought Cohen's nine-year silence to an end. With its intimate ambience and calm—and music composed with the help of synthesizers and a drum machine—*Ten New Songs* broke stylistically with *The Future*, his previous album. The singer had reached a turning point in his career: he now presented a mature image, different from that of the poet with the folk guitar. Five years later he returned to writing, releasing the poetry collection *Book of Longing* (2006), accompanied by his own drawings.

2008–2014

MAJOR RETURN TO THE STAGE AND WORLD TRIUMPH

After a fifteen-year absence from the stage, Cohen set out on a grand world tour, his second major return to the music scene. Begun after the artist was defrauded by his longtime manager, this first tour (2008–2010) turned out to be a total triumph.

Acclaimed from the start by critics, Cohen’s much-anticipated return to the stage took place in Canada, and the tour went on to Europe. The singer performed at various music festivals, including the Big Chill and the Glastonbury Festival, both in the UK, and the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal. The following year the tour continued on to New Zealand and Australia, as well as Israel and, once again, Europe. In total Cohen gave 246 concerts. Among the most famous was his 2009 London appearance, which formed the basis of *Live in London*, the first DVD of his career.

After the release of the album *Old Ideas* (2012), Cohen set out on the Old Ideas World Tour (2012–2013), the singer’s last. The tour took him to Europe, North America, New Zealand, and Australia, and his sets included several new songs as well as older ones.

For his eightieth birthday on September 19, 2014, Cohen launched his thirteenth studio album, *Popular Problems*, which featured mostly new songs and was very warmly received by critics.

NOVEMBER 7, 2016

A KADDISH FOR LEONARD COHEN

Shortly after the October 21, 2016, release of *You Want It Darker*, his fourteenth and final album, Cohen passed away. Produced by his son, the singer Adam Cohen, it was recorded at Leonard Cohen's home in Los Angeles on account of his precarious health. Offering a more acoustic sound, the album features Eastern European musical influences as well as the choir of the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue in Westmount, Quebec, where he had attended services throughout his childhood. From the start the record was universally acclaimed by critics. Nineteen days later Leonard Cohen died at his home. His death left the public heartbroken.

In retrospect *You Want It Darker* gives the impression that Cohen was reciting his own Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead. Indeed the Hebrew word *hineni* (here I am), which he repeatedly utters in the title song, as well as the words "I'm ready, my Lord," evokes a somber prophecy. With his own unique way of expressing melancholy and beauty, his remarkable ability to reinvent himself through poetry, song, and prayer, and his distinctive voice, Leonard Cohen produced a luminous body of work that has been celebrated worldwide for decades. Today the man who became one of the greatest singer/songwriters of his time continues to inspire a host of artists for whom his memory lives on.

FIRST FLOOR

KARA BLAKE

CHRISTOPHE CHASSOL

KOTA EZAWA

GEORGE FOK

ARI FOLMAN

TARYN SIMON

SECOND FLOOR

CANDICE BREITZ

JANET CARDIFF AND
GEORGE BURES MILLER

DAILY TOUS LES JOURS

TACITA DEAN

JON RAFMAN

THIRD FLOOR

LISTENING TO LEONARD

KOTA EZAWA

BORN IN COLOGNE, GERMANY, 1969

LIVES AND WORKS IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

Cohen 21, 2017

Single-screen video installation

Digital animation, black-and-white with sound

2 min., 30 sec., looped

Collection of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

In his cinematic work *Cohen 21*, Kota Ezawa reanimates the opening two and one-half minutes of the National Film Board of Canada's 1965 documentary film *Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen*. This re-created black-and-white scene portrays Cohen at age thirty on a visit to his hometown of Montreal, where he came "to renew his neurotic affiliations." Ezawa has created a derivative work, painstakingly animated frame by frame and overlaid with semitransparent geometric forms inspired by Hans Richter's 1921 abstract silent film *Rhythm 21*.

Ezawa's work explores the appropriation and mediation of current events and images. He translates found film, video, and photographic images into drawings and animations that reduce complex imagery to its most essential, two-dimensional elements. In so doing the artist debates their validity as mediators of actual historical events and personal experiences.

Ezawa has shown work in solo exhibitions across Canada and the United States and in group exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, among other venues.

Commissioned by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal

A transcript of the audio component of this work is provided.

CHRISTOPHE CHASSOL

BORN IN PARIS, 1976

LIVES AND WORKS IN PARIS

Cuba in Cohen, 2017

Single-screen video installation, black-and-white with sound
15 min., 19 sec., looped, with annotated musical scores
Courtesy of the artist

In the video *Cuba in Cohen*, Christophe Chassol remixes, sets to melody, and harmonizes an excerpt of Leonard Cohen reciting his 1964 poem “The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward,” using a clip from the National Film Board of Canada’s 1965 documentary film *Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen*. During his residency at Xavier Veilhan’s “Studio Venezia” at the French pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale, Chassol scored the poem and invited several singers to reinterpret this newly melodized work. The artist created what he calls an “ultrascore” by applying speech-harmonizing techniques to the excerpt of Cohen’s poetry reading. Isolating and synchronizing each syllable spoken by the poet, Chassol forms melodic arrangements, which are then harmonized with bass lines and drumbeats.

Chassol is a pianist, film-score composer, and audiovisual maverick. His compositions combine voice, music, sound, and image into new audiovisual objects—ultrascores—which he duplicates and reedits to create a visual motif through the harmonization of sounds. His most recent ultrascore, *Big Sun* (2015), was produced in his family’s birthplace—Martinique—and closes a trilogy begun in New Orleans with *Nola Chérie* (2012) and continued in India with *Indiamore* (2013).

Commissioned by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal

A transcript of the audio component of this work is provided.

GEORGE FOK

BORN IN HONG KONG, 1969

LIVES AND WORKS IN MONTREAL

Passing Through, 2017

Multichannel video installation, black-and-white and color with sound
56 min., 15 sec., looped
Courtesy of the artist

Passing Through, an immersive video work, celebrates Leonard Cohen’s singular voice, his music, his charismatic persona, and his inimitable stage presence. Drawing on a vast archive of audiovisual material, George Fok pays tribute to Cohen’s monumental, five-decade-long career as a singer/ songwriter and performer. This composite portrait of Cohen recalls and reconstructs various pivotal stages in his career—from the early years in bohemian 1960s Montreal to his later life, when he was recognized as a global cultural icon. Visitors experience an extraordinary time-travel journey through a collage of collective memories, musical moments, and emotions that have enchanted generations of fans around the world.

Fok received his design education at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which provided him with an eclectic blend of traditional British art instruction and progressive Eastern philosophy. Upon his arrival in Montreal, he cofounded Epoxy Communications and established himself as a creative director capable of crossing over into various visual communication platforms, from graphic design, photography, film, and video to visual effects. He is currently creative director of the Phi Centre, a multidisciplinary cultural institution in Montreal.

Commissioned by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal

KARA BLAKE

BORN IN CAMBRIDGE, CANADA, 1974

LIVES AND WORKS IN MONTREAL

The Offerings, 2017

Five-channel video installation, black-and-white and color with sound
35 min., looped
Courtesy of the artist

Kara Blake's multichannel video projection forms an environment in which Leonard Cohen's singular voice envelops participants and engages them in an intimate conversation. Visitors commune with images of Cohen, sourced from decades of archival material, that construct a composite portrait of the artist as he touches on a variety of subjects, ranging from his personal writing practice to universal themes of love, humility, and spirituality. Issuing from a life of observation and introspection, these offerings present Cohen in his own words and invite visitors to spend time in his contemplative world.

Blake is a Montreal-based filmmaker whose creative projects range from short films and music videos to live performance visuals and installation pieces. Interested in fusing fact with fiction and past with present, the artist often works with archival materials to construct new narratives that encourage a reexamination of the world around us. Her films have been shown internationally at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Telluride Film Festival, Colorado; and CPH.DOX, Copenhagen, among others. They have also been seen on the broadcast TV stations Bravo and the Independent Film Channel.

Commissioned by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts

TARYN SIMON

BORN IN NEW YORK, 1975

LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK

The New York Times, Friday, November 11, 2016

The New York Times newspaper (dated November 11, 2016) in glass display cabinet
Courtesy of the artist

Leonard Cohen died on Monday, November 7, 2016, one day before Donald Trump was elected the forty-fifth president of the United States. *The New York Times* published his obituary on the front page of the newspaper on Friday, November 11, 2016, below a photograph and article describing the first face-to-face meeting between Barack Obama and then-president-elect Trump. Other front-page items include “The Market Rises With Trump,” “Russia and Trump’s Allies,” “Climate Policy Faces Reversal By New Leader,” and “The Women Who Helped Trump to Victory and Those With Dreams That Were Crushed.” Visible on the paper’s underside is a full-page advertisement for Bernie Sanders’s book *Our Revolution*. In the picture that accompanies his obituary, Cohen lifts his hat in a gesture of greeting or farewell.

Taryn Simon is an artist who works in photography, text, sculpture, and performance. Her projects direct our attention to familiar systems of organization—bloodlines, criminal investigations, mourning, flower arrangements—making visible the contours of power and authority hidden within.

Simon’s work has been exhibited with Artangel in Islington, London (2018); and at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, Massachusetts (2018–2019); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark (2016–2017); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2016); Albertinum, Dresden (2016); Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2016); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2016); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2015); Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2013); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Tate Modern, London (2011); Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2011); and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2007). Her work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, all in New York; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunstmuseum Lucerne; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art and was included in the 56th Venice Biennale (2015). Simon’s honors include the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Photography and a Photo London Master of Photography award.

Commissioned by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal

ARI FOLMAN

BORN IN HAIFA, ISRAEL, 1962

LIVES AND WORKS IN TEL AVIV

Depression Chamber, 2017

Interactive computer-animated video installation, live camera, Kinect sensor,
black-and-white and color with sound

5 min., 10 sec., including resting platform

Courtesy of the artist

The fragility of the human psyche is a recurring theme in Leonard Cohen’s early albums and throughout his body of work. Addressing the debilitating nature of loss, suffering, and depression, the Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman has created a sensory “depression chamber.” Visitors are invited, one at a time, to enter a sarcophaguslike environment and are plunged into an otherworldly experience. The image of the visitor lying on a bed in the space, in total isolation and darkness, is projected onto the ceiling of the box as Cohen’s song *Famous Blue Raincoat* plays. The projected lyrics of the song begin to slowly morph, letter by letter through animation, into icons that symbolize Cohen’s multifaceted thematic universe. These images eventually flood the space, gradually shrouding the visitor’s image.

Folman is best known for his animated feature documentary *Waltz with Bashir*. The work won eighteen awards, including Israel’s awards for best film, best director, and best screenplay; the Directors Guild of America award for outstanding directorial achievement in documentary; and a Golden Globe award for best foreign-language film. It was nominated for multiple BAFTA awards, a Cannes Film Festival award, and an Academy Award for best foreign-language film. Folman’s live action/ animated feature film *The Congress* premiered in 2013 at Cannes and won the European Film Academy award for animated feature film. He is currently working on the feature-length animated film *Where Is Anne Frank*, which he has based in part on his recently published graphic-novel adaptation of Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*.

Commissioned by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, with the support of the Swiss Foundation for Arts and Culture Pro Helvetia and the Consulate General of Israel in Montreal

TACITA DEAN

BORN IN CANTERBURY, UNITED KINGDOM, 1965

LIVES AND WORKS IN LOS ANGELES AND BERLIN

Ear on a Worm, 2017

Single-screen film installation, 16-mm film, color with sound

3 min., 33 sec., looped

Courtesy of the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris;
and Frith Street Gallery, London

Ear on a Worm is a film projected high up on the wall. The title plays on the German expression *Ohrwurm* (earworm), which refers to a song or a catchy piece of music that continually repeats in one's head after it is no longer playing. Earworms can be triggered aurally as well as associatively. The film shows a house finch sitting on a wire for three minutes and twenty-eight seconds before flying off.

“Tacita Dean’s art is carried by a sense of history, time, and place, light quality, and the essence of film itself. The focus of her subtle but ambitious work is the truth of the moment, the film as a medium, and the sensibilities of the individual,” as the critic Adrian Searle wrote in 2009 when Dean received the Kurt Schwitters Prize for her contribution to contemporary art.

Commissioned by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal

The audio component of this work consists of a bird’s chirping.

JANET CARDIFF

BORN IN BRUSSELS, CANADA, 1957

LIVES AND WORKS IN GRINDROD, CANADA

GEORGE BURES MILLER

BORN IN VEGREVILLE, CANADA, 1960

LIVES AND WORKS IN GRINDROD, CANADA

The Poetry Machine, 2017

Interactive audio/mixed-media installation including organ, speakers, carpet, computer, and electronics

All poetry written and performed by Leonard Cohen from *Book of Longing*, published in 2006 by McClelland and Stewart

Dedicated to Leonard Cohen, 1934–2016

Special thanks to Robert Kory and the Leonard Cohen Family Trust

Courtesy of the artists; Luhring Augustine, New York; Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco; and Koyanagi Gallery, Tokyo

A vintage Wurlitzer organ from the 1950s stands in the middle of the gallery. Sitting on top of it and around the room are various old speakers and a gramophone horn. When a key is pressed on the organ, you hear Leonard Cohen’s beautiful, gravelly voice reading a poem from *Book of Longing*. Each key contains a different poem from the book and can be played one at a time or all at once. If you press one key and then another, the action creates different linkages between Cohen’s verses, almost like creating new poems from his words. Uncanny juxtapositions can take place. If you press many at once, a wonderful cacophony of Cohen’s voice surrounds you.

As the artists put it: “with this piece we were attempting to create a magical machine that would be a small monument to Leonard Cohen’s brilliance.”

Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller are known for their immersive multimedia sound installations and audio and video walks. They have shown at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Mexico (2019); Oude Kerk, Amsterdam (2018); 21st Century Museum, Kanazawa, Japan (2017); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2017); ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Denmark (2015); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2015); Menil Collection, Houston (2015); 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014); the Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2013); and Documenta 13, Kassel (2012). In 2011 they received Germany’s Käthe Kollwitz Prize, and in 2001 represented Canada at the 49th Venice Biennale, for which they received the Premio Speciale and the Benesse Prize.

Commissioned by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal

A transcript of the audio component of this work is provided.

You are welcome to play the organ.



Photography, recording, or filming of this artwork is not permitted.

LEONARD COHEN

BORN IN MONTREAL, 1934

DIED IN LOS ANGELES, 2016

Self-Portraits, 2003–2016, 2017

Projection of two hundred and twenty drawings documenting
Leonard Cohen’s self-portraits
Edited by Alexandre Perreault
Courtesy of and © Leonard Cohen Family Trust

*If there were no paintings in the world,
Mine would be very important.
Same with the songs.
Since this is not the case, let us make haste to get in line,
Well towards the back.
Sometimes I would see a woman in a magazine
Humiliated in the technicolour glare.
I would try to establish her
In happier circumstances.
Sometimes a man.
Sometimes living persons sat for me.
May I say to them again:
Thank you for coming to my room.
I also loved the objects on the table
Such as candlesticks and ashtrays
And the table itself.
From a mirror on my desk
In the very early morning
I copied down
Hundreds of self-portraits
Which reminded me of one thing or another.
The Curator has called this exhibition
Drawn to Words.
I call my work
Acceptable Decorations.*

—“If There Were No Paintings,” Leonard Cohen, 2007

Produced by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal

This work has no audio component.

DAILY TOUS LES JOURS

ART AND DESIGN STUDIO

FOUNDED IN MONTREAL, 2010

I Heard There Was a Secret Chord, after the 2017 work of the same title, 2018

Participatory audio installation, including an octagonal wooden structure, microphones, speakers, transducers, and digital display
Courtesy of Daily tous les jours

I Heard There Was a Secret Chord is a participatory humming experience that reveals an invisible vibration uniting people around the world currently listening to Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*. The work is an exploration of the metaphysical connection between people on a common wavelength.

Here real-time online listener data is transformed into a virtual choir of humming voices. The number of voices played back in the space corresponds to the current online listener count, which is visible on the hanging numerical display. Participants are free to sit or lie down on the octagonal structure, and by humming along with the choir into the microphones, low-frequency vibrations are generated, closing the circuit of collective resonance with their bodies. The project comprises this participatory audio installation and a website.

The website, asecreetchord.com, operates as a one-song radio channel allowing people anywhere to tune into the same perpetually fluctuating choir of humming *Hallelujah* voices and to connect to the universal Cohen magic.

Daily tous les jours creates large-scale, interactive installations driven by collective experiences. The art and design studio uses technology and storytelling to explore collaboration, the future of cities, and the power of humans. It is best known for its work in public spaces, in which passing crowds are invited to play a critical role in the transformation of their environment and their relationships. Daily tous les jours was cofounded by Melissa Mongiat and Mouna Andraos.

Commissioned by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the National Film Board of Canada, with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts

The lyrics to the song *Hallelujah* are provided.

JON RAFMAN

BORN IN MONTREAL, 1981

LIVES AND WORKS IN MONTREAL

Legendary Reality, 2017

Fourteen-seat sculptural theater installation, featuring video projection,
color with stereo sound
15 min., 45 sec., looped
Courtesy of the artist; Sprueth Magers, Los Angeles; and Galerie Antoine
Ertaskiran, Montreal

Legendary Reality is a science-fiction essay film that portrays the recollections of a solitary narrator imprisoned in his own mind. Using a nonlinear structure that weaves together dreams and memory, Jon Rafman creates a stream-of-consciousness meditation on art, identity, and time that draws on the work of Leonard Cohen. The film intercuts digitally processed found photos and 3D landscapes sourced from video games to tell the enigmatic voyage of one man's soul.

Rafman uses video, photography, sculpture, and installation to examine the place that technology holds in contemporary life. He draws inspiration from the Internet and video-game culture, as well as from modernism and the alienating effects associated with some particularly obscure subcultures found within the substrata of the web. He has had solo exhibitions at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2015); Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2015); Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (2016); and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2016). He has taken part in group exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2015); Fridericianum, Kassel (2015); Biennale de Lyon (2015); Berlin Biennale 9 (2016); and Manifesta 11, Zurich (2016).

Commissioned by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

CANDICE BREITZ

BORN IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, 1972

LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN

I'm Your Man (A Portrait of Leonard Cohen), 2017

Shot at Phi Centre, Montreal, May–June 2017

Nineteen-channel video installation, color with sound

40 min., 43 sec., looped

Featured on eighteen monitors and one single-screen projection

Collection of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

I'm Your Man (A Portrait of Leonard Cohen) brings together a community of ardent Leonard Cohen fans—each of whom has cherished Cohen's music for over half a century—to pay posthumous tribute to the legend. Each of the eighteen individuals performed and recorded his own version of Cohen's magnificent comeback album *I'm Your Man* (1988) in Montreal. At Candice Breitz's invitation, the album's backing vocals have been sumptuously reinterpreted by the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue Choir, an all-male choir representing the Westmount congregation to which Cohen belonged all his life. *I'm Your Man* is a tender farewell to a lost poet and musician, as well as a poignant celebration of late masculinity.

This work expands upon Breitz's ongoing anthropology of the fan. Earlier works in this series have included *Legend (A Portrait of Bob Marley)*, shot in Jamaica in 2005, and *Working Class Hero (A Portrait of John Lennon)*, shot in Newcastle in 2006. Although these multichannel portraits mimic the flow and duration of the original albums they take as their templates, they specifically exclude the auratic voices and familiar musical arrangements of the original albums. Thus the musical icon ultimately remains present only through the a cappella voices of a devout amateur collective.

Breitz represented South Africa at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017). Solo exhibitions of her work have been presented at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, Kunsthaus Bregenz in Austria, and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek, Denmark.

Commissioned and produced by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, with the support of the Goethe-Institut Montréal. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg; Kaufmann Repetto, New York and Milan; and KOW, Berlin

Participants: Lew Auerbach, Sheldon Azimov, Thomas L. Bohan, Don Cummer, Jean-Pierre Ducharme, Shaun Fawcett (in memory of Ellen C. Fawcett), Marc Gian, Jerry Golland, Fergus Keyes, Richard Lahmy, Peter Lau, Victor Neufeld, Claude Ouellet, Philippe, Denis S. J. Shackel, Paul G. Shaw, Edward Lyon Singer, and Philip J. Taylor

Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue Choir: Ro'i Azoulay (music director), Cantor Gideon Y. Zelermyer (soloist), and Conor O'Neil (arranger). Choristers: David Buzaglo, Victor Chisholm, Gabriel Frank, Joshua Goldman, Isak Goldschneider, Conor O'Neil, David Packer, Lorne Shapiro, and Jake Smith

The song lyrics for Cohen's album *I'm Your Man* are provided.

FEATURING:

FEIST

HALF MOON RUN

AURORA

DOUGLAS DARE

MÉLANIE DE BIASIO

BRAD BARR

LEIF VOLLEBEKK

DEAR CRIMINALS

ARIANE MOFFATT

WITH THE ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DE MONTRÉAL

MOBY

JULIA HOLTER

SOCALLED

CHILLY GONZALES AND JARVIS COCKER

WITH KAISER QUARTETT

THE NATIONAL

WITH SUFJAN STEVENS, RAGNAR KJARTANSSON,
AND RICHARD REED PARRY

BASIA BULAT

LITTLE SCREAM

LI'L ANDY AND JOE GRASS

LOU DOILLON

Listening to Leonard, 2017

Multimedia audio environment with sound recordings of Leonard Cohen compositions

1 hour, 29 min., 22 sec., looped

Lighting design by Jocelyn Labonté

Recordings courtesy of the artists

In celebration of Leonard Cohen as a songwriter and recording artist and in recognition of his vast catalogue of music produced over the past half-century, *Listening to Leonard* invites visitors to experience eighteen newly recorded covers of Cohen songs produced, arranged, and performed by a group of international musicians and vocalists.

In listening order:

FEIST, *Hey, That’s No Way to Say Goodbye*, 3 min., 23 sec.

HALF MOON RUN, *Suzanne*, 4 min., 22 sec.

AURORA, *The Partisan*, 3 min.

DOUGLAS DARE, *Dance Me to the End of Love*,
5 min., 45 sec.

MÉLANIE DE BIASIO, *There for You*, 3 min., 29 sec.

BRAD BARR, *Tower of Song*, 3 min., 44 sec.

LEIF VOLLEBEKK, *Hey, That’s No Way to Say Goodbye*,
3 min., 21 sec.

DEAR CRIMINALS, *Anthem*, 5 min., 11 sec.

**ARIANE MOFFATT WITH THE ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE
DE MONTRÉAL**, *Famous Blue Raincoat*, 9 min., 8 sec.

MOBY, *Suzanne*, 5 min., 57 sec.

JULIA HOLTER, *Take This Waltz*, 6 min., 10 sec.

SOCALLED, *I’m Your Man*, 4 min.

**CHILLY GONZALES AND JARVIS COCKER
WITH KAISER QUARTETT**, *Paper Thin Hotel*,
4 min., 47 sec.

**THE NATIONAL WITH SUFJAN STEVENS, RAGNAR
KJARTANSSON, AND RICHARD REED PARRY**,
Memories, 7 min., 28 sec.

BASIA BULAT, *Dance Me to the End of Love*, 4 min., 10 sec.

LITTLE SCREAM, *I Can’t Forget*, 4 min., 13 sec.

LI’L ANDY AND JOE GRASS, *Democracy*, 6 min., 50 sec.

LOU DOILLON, *Famous Blue Raincoat*, 4 min., 24 sec.

Commissioned and produced by the Musée d’art
contemporain de Montréal

The song lyrics for this work are provided.

Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything is organized by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal.



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John Zeppetelli
Director, Chief Curator, and Co-curator of the Exhibition

Victor Shiffman
Co-curator of the Exhibition
Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal

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#LeonardCohen

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