



Appointment of City of Toronto Photo Laureate

Date: April 3, 2019

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to appoint Michele Pearson Clarke as the second City of Toronto Photo Laureate.

The position of the City of Toronto Photo Laureate honours a photographer who is recognized by their peers for artistic excellence and for making a major contribution to photography through their work. Toronto's Photo Laureate serves as an advocate for visual culture, art photography, photojournalism, and uses their unique perspective to create a dialogue on contemporary issues.

Michele Pearson Clarke is a Trinidad-born artist who works in photography, film, video and installation. In recommending Clarke's appointment, the selection panel cited her many artistic accolades, the opportunity to advance important community dialogues through work, and their confidence that she would excel as an ambassador for the arts across stylistic, geographic and demographic boundaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, recommends that:

1. City Council appoint Michele Pearson Clarke to the position of City of Toronto Photo Laureate for a term beginning April 18, 2019 until April 17, 2022, or until a successor is appointed.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The Photo Laureate receives an annual honorarium of \$10,000. The 2019 honorarium of \$10,000 is included in the 2019 Approved Operating Budget for Economic Development and Culture.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In May 2014, recognizing the great success of Toronto's Poet Laureate program, Council created a complementary position of Photo Laureate, to celebrate the craft of photography, the leaders in the field of photography in this city, and the contributions of photographers and photography in telling Toronto's story.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.MM51.1>

In October 2015, City Council approved the terms of reference for the Photo Laureate, which were developed based on the advice of a panel of leaders in the field of photography.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.ED6.5>

In April 2016, City Council appointed Geoffrey James as Toronto's first Photo Laureate.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.ED10.1>

COMMENTS

Toronto is recognized as a leading global centre for photography, home to internally-renowned artists and institutions like the Contact Photography Festival and Ryerson Image Centre, among many others. The position of Photo Laureate is the first and only of its kind in Canada, and combines the tradition of arts laureates with a form of artistic practice and storytelling which is evolving with new digital technology and increased global connectivity.

In 2016, City Council appointed Geoffrey James as the first Toronto Photo Laureate. During his three-year term, Geoffrey James photographed and curated two exhibitions for Doors Open Toronto, including a spotlight on Yonge/Dundas Square (2017) and a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Prince Edward Viaduct and the photographic work of Arthur Goss (2018). He delivered a series of public talks at Toronto Camera clubs, the McLuhan Centre, and the Aird Gallery, as part of a show celebrating "An Enduring Wilderness". He also worked with Poet Laureate Anne Michaels on a book project that mixes photos and fiction that will serve as a legacy project for both Laureates.

In keeping with the notion that the position of the Photo Laureate is an honour bestowed rather than a position of employment, photographers are not invited to apply for the position. As such, in January 2019, an expert selection committee was assembled from the local visual arts/photographic community to select a candidate, including:

- Alyssa Bistonath (Photographer/filmmaker, Gallery TPW board member)
- Kotama Bouabane (Photographer, Instructor, OCADU)
- Geoffrey James (Toronto Photo Laureate)
- Darcy Killeen (Executive Director, Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival); and
- Gaëlle Morel (Exhibitions Curator, Ryerson Image Centre).

By continuing the honorary position of City of Toronto Photo Laureate, Council reinforces support for the photographic arts and the city's cultural community as a whole. It is the intention that through this confirmation, the City of Toronto can look forward to dynamic legacy project for the city.

Recommended Appointment of Toronto's Second Photo Laureate

Michele Pearson Clarke (b. 1973) is a Trinidad-born artist who works in photography, film, video and installation. Using archival, performative and process-oriented strategies, her work explores the personal and political possibilities afforded by considering experiences of emotions related to longing and loss. Recent exhibitions and screenings include *Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art* at Le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (2018); *All That is Left Unsaid* at ICA Los Angeles (2018); *Black Radical Imagination* at Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2016); *Parade of Champions* at Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto (2015); and a solo exhibition, *A Welcome Weight on My Body* (2018) at Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Art, Toronto.

Based in Toronto, Clarke holds an MSW from the University of Toronto, and she received her MFA from Ryerson University in 2015, when she was awarded both the Ryerson University Board of Governors Leadership Award and Medal and the Ryerson Gold Medal for the Faculty of Communication + Design. From 2016-2017, Clarke was artist-in-residence at Gallery 44, and she was the EDA Artist-in-Residence in the Department of Arts, Culture and Media at the University of Toronto Scarborough for the 2018 winter semester. Clarke's writing has been published in *Canadian Art*, *Transition Magazine* and *Momus*, and in 2018, she was a speaker at the eighth TEDxPortofSpain. Clarke is currently a contract lecturer in the Documentary Media Studies program at Ryerson University, and she is a finalist for the Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts 2019 Artist Prize.

In recommending her appointment, the panel pointed to the strength of Michele's artistic practice, her significant laurels, and strong connections to institutions like Gallery 44, the University of Toronto and Ryerson University. They cited the challenging political and personal themes explored in her work, and believed that she could advance important community dialogues through the Laureate role. Michele, noted one panelist, "is having a moment right now".

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Mike Williams
General Manager, Economic Development and Culture