

# DONIGAN CUMMING



MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY  
CANADIAN ART • TORONTO

## Donigan Cumming

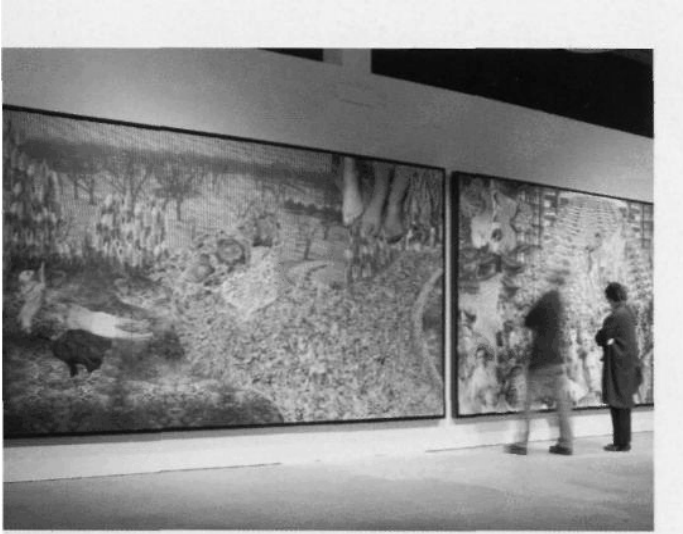
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In this show, the curator Peggy Gale addresses the Montreal artist Donigan Cumming's use of photography and video to simultaneously lie and tell the truth. Gale selects two major video/DVD installations, a series of large-scale black-and-white photographs and a mesmerizing encaustic photomontage diptych; together, they present a hallucinogenic river of humanity surging toward the viewers' eyes.

Photography, from its inception, implied the capture of the widest possible range of subjects: as a social rite, as defence against anxiety and as a tool of power. Cumming has clearly internalized these paradigms and, through them, seeks to question the act of seeing. Cumming is renowned for his striking photographs of disenfranchised men and women distinguished by age and neglect. He turned to video in 1995, but his artistic enterprise predates reality television by 20 years. The effects of drugs, alcoholism, aging and illness have always been his subject matter.

In "Moving Pictures," the artist tests the conventions of documentary by confusing his roles—he is at once director, witness and participant. Cumming collapses the form by using both real and contrived narratives performed by a community of both actors and non-actors. He presents his audience with images that typically offend, showing us senior citizens who are often physically disabled, alcoholic, homeless and/or mentally ill. He subverts his documentary to the point of creating uncertainty in his viewers, reminding us that the representation of reality achieved in documentary realism is suspect.

Cumming's pictures of the aged living in depressed conditions refuse singular analysis. His moving depictions raise more questions than they answer about a social stratum that is usually sanitized when presented in the mainstream media. His methods insist that viewers question what lies outside the frame of his images. Cumming photographs his subjects because, in his words, "They carry with them the evidence of experience, of a life lived." His uncompromising work forces viewers to confront the abject without the glamour and humour found in the installations of more celebrated artists working in the same terrain: the Chapman brothers, Mike Kelley or Paul McCarthy. In his large-screen projections, Cumming seems to embrace glamour, but then turns it back on itself. He captures the magic of cinema but turns it into a vehicle that engages us in what we would otherwise turn away from. CARLA GARNET



Installation view of Donigan Cumming's "Moving Pictures" 2005