

Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art

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*Bugs And Beasts Before The Law*  
Bambitchell

14 September – 2 November 2019  
Opening Reception: 13 September 2019, 7PM

Curated by Julia Paoli

Working under the moniker Bambitchell since 2009, the research-based practice of artists Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Kyle Mitchell re-imagines nationalist histories through the clever recycling of official state documents and institutional archives to produce moving image, installation and performance works.

The centerpiece and eponymous work of this exhibition, is a newly commissioned experimental film installation that explores the history and legacy of the “animal trials” that took place in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, and its extended network of colonies. During this period, animals—and other non-humans such as insects and inanimate objects—were made culpable of trespass, theft or vandalism, and prosecuted for these crimes along with more serious accusations such as assault, rape and murder under the same criminal justice system that governed their human counterparts. Commissioned by Mercer Union, this new work is installed within a site-specific environment that conjures a medieval amphitheater, featuring materials representing the artists’ substantial research into this history and its resonance with contemporary conditions and practices of exacting power.

The trials that underpin *Bugs and Beasts Before the Law* have been documented in the legal histories of Europe and researched extensively by American scholar, E.P. Evans. Taking its title from the first chapter in Evans’ most notable work on the subject, Bambitchell’s film investigates the histories of sodomy laws and perceptions of property, to draw attention to the vacillating target of beings subsumed by the criminal justice system. Structured into five distinct chapters with each focusing on the documented trial of an animal/object/insect, the film re-imagines common perceptions of legal history to produce a world where past and present, fiction and non-fiction, human and animal intermix. Throughout the work, an undercurrent persists to suggest how these histories demonstrate the long legacies of colonial power structures that have lent significantly to ongoing forms of oppression and punishment. In this way, these animal trials showcase how power continues to be performed on and through parallel subjectivities.

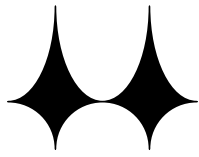
*Bugs and Beasts Before the Law* is Bambitchell’s first significant commission in Canada. The project was developed in collaboration with the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle and produced with support from Fonderie Darling, Montréal. The exhibition is curated by Julia Paoli, Director at Mercer Union.

Leading Support for *Bugs and Beasts Before the Law* is provided by Partners in Art.



In-kind sponsorship for *Bugs and Beasts Before the Law* is provided by the Panasonic partnership program for cultural institutes.

**Panasonic**



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### **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Bambitchell** is the artistic collaboration between Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Kyle Mitchell. Exhibitions of their work have been mounted with Gallery TPW Toronto; (2018); Articule, Montreal (2015); The Art Gallery of Windsor (2015); and Images Festival, Toronto (2014). Bambitchell's work has been included in such festivals as the Berlinale Film Festival, Berlin; BFI London Film Festival, UK. Their works have been the subject of writing in Canadian Art, C Magazine, the Los Angeles Review of Books, and as part of the anthology *Contemporary Citizenship, Art, and Visual Culture* published in 2017 by Routledge. Bambitchell have held fellowships with the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany, 2016-17; and The MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, 2018.

Sharlene Bamboat and Alexis Kyle Mitchell would like to acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.

### **Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art, Toronto**

Mercer Union is a non-profit, artist-centred space in Toronto. We have a unique track record of presenting innovative exhibitions by diverse Canadian and international artists in formative and established stages of their careers. We are dedicated to supporting the production of new and experimental work, assisting artists in realizing pivotal projects.

Mercer Union has the will and flexibility to take on ambitious projects. We foster an intimate and supportive space for artists to develop and take risks with their work. In turn, their exhibitions play a role in shaping the cultural landscape of Toronto, Canada and beyond.

Mercer Union. Cultivating artists and challenging audiences since 1979.

**Please send all requests for images and interviews to:**

[press@mercunion.org](mailto:press@mercunion.org)

**For more information please visit:**

[mercunion.org](http://mercunion.org)

Mercer Union acknowledges the support of its staff, volunteers and members, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Arts Council and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.

Admission is free and all are welcome.