

Beth Stuart

Length, Breadth, Thickness and—Duration

September 15 – December 30, 2018

Curator: Justine Kohleal, 2017-2018 RBC Curatorial Fellow

The Power Plant presents a new body of work by Beth Stuart.

The exhibition *Length, Breadth, Thickness and—Duration* by Toronto-based artist Beth Stuart presents a body of new work that expands from the inside of the gallery towards Lake Ontario. Her built spaces, sculptures and paintings are often described using corporeal language—they hang back like wallflowers or stand together defiantly in cliques, their materiality grounded in the physical world of bodies and their associative or ‘gut’ responses. Stuart works with overlooked material techniques, little-known historical figures and esoteric spiritual practices to create objects and spaces that lack fixity, prompting a consideration of what exists between inside and outside, past and present, rational and spiritual.

At the core of the exhibition is a critical engagement with the Victorian-era Bathing Machine, which emerged as members of the European gentry began to take to the seaside. These cumbersome wagons were driven into the water by horses, humans or winches. Inside the structure a fully clothed person was expected to change into heavy swimming garments before emerging—in relative modesty—into the water. There, they would often be greeted by a ‘Dipper’ (female) or ‘Bather’ (male) who would enable them to swim in modest protection without drowning. The placement of Stuart’s *Bathing Machine* (2018) next to Lake Ontario refers to its original purpose and further connects the gallery to the public realm. Stuart is interested in the reclamation of space by unruly bodies and ideas that push back against established norms, and where the Victorian Bathing Machine represents an oppressive architecture of control, the artist’s *Bathing Machine* becomes a reflexive, self-critical structure open to new uses and interpretations.

The exhibition puts the *Bathing Machine* in dialogue with the garment designs of Madeleine Vionnet. Most famous for the invention of the bias cut, Vionnet’s clothes were designed to cling to, rather than squeeze, the body. She was also responsible for developing some of the first transitional beach fashion for women, referred to as *pyjamas de plage* (beach pajamas). In

conjunction with the outdoor sculpture, Stuart's re-worked designs of Vionnet ask us to reconsider the aesthetic and moral codes from the past and how they persist in the spaces we inhabit today.

Beth Stuart (born 1979 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan) lives and works in Toronto. Recent solo exhibitions include Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax (2017); Battat Contemporary, Montreal (2017); and Esker Foundation, Calgary (2014). Her work has been shown in group exhibitions at Cooper Cole, Toronto (2017); Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal (2013); and The Power Plant, Toronto (2013). In 2010 she was shortlisted for the RBC Painting Prize and in 2011 she received an honorable mention.