

LEGENDS ARE THE RIVERS THAT TAKE US HOME

JAN. 17 ≈ MAR. 15, 2020
THAMES ART GALLERY
CHATHAM, ONTARIO



CURATED BY: CARA EASTCOTT

“What has not been taught to us, nor revealed, we’ve made our own affairs”
Zab Maboungou

EXHIBITION FEATURING:
CLAIRE PRIETO, ROGER MCTAIR, NEP SIDHU, STERLING TOLES
CHEMICAL VALLEY PROJECT, GREAT LAKES SECONDARY SCHOOL
ZOE GORDON, ZAB MABOUNGOU, ELLI MILLER MABOUNGOU
CHATHAM-KENT SECONDARY SCHOOL, BRYAN PRINCE, SHANNON PRINCE
KHARI WENDELL McCLELLAND, BUXTON NEXT GENERATION



LEGENDS ARE THE RIVERS THAT TAKE US HOME

"In 1854, Buxton was a thriving, all-Black settlement...self-supporting. They had established a sawmill, a potash factory and a brickyard and products were being sold in Buffalo and Detroit. The people of the settlement were interesting themselves in all things for their own betterment and for the abolition of slavery."¹





Malcolm's Smile 7A, 2015. Nep Sidhu in collaboration with Todd Westendorp

In 1849, the town of Buxton, formerly known as the Elgin Settlement, was founded. Located 80 kilometres east of the Detroit-Windsor border, Buxton and the surrounding area was a natural point of settlement for Black pioneers on Turtle Island.² On both sides of the Canadian-American border, enslaved Black people were escaping life-threatening conditions of a pro-slavery society. Though acts of seeking freedom and resistance to slavery were extremely precarious, they were, at the same time, the only chance of survival for many.

By utilizing a network of people and safe houses known popularly as the Underground Railroad, Black settlements began to emerge in Southwestern Ontario towns such as Amherstburg, Dresden, Chatham, and Buxton. These areas became known as key points of relative safety when selecting places of migration. Blatant rejection amongst white civilians, media, and politicians called against the formation of these Black communities, however, despite the inherent racism of Canadian society, the growth of Black-owned businesses, educational institutions, and media outlets managed to persist within these communities. For example, the Black-focused newspaper *The Provincial Freeman of Chatham* was founded by Mary Ann Shadd³ disseminated contemporary stories relevant to many Black communities cross North America.

In 1987, Trinidadian-Canadians Roger McTair and Claire Prieto, created the documentary *Home to Buxton*⁴ in 1987. At the time, Buxton was celebrating its 62nd Homecoming; an annual Labour Day reunion calling home hundreds of people. *Home to Buxton* follows the yearly efforts of the Buxton descendants responsible for preparing the annual gathering and provides a history of the town's development.

Prieto and McTair, were the first wave of Black filmmakers in Canada, and created work rooted in diligent research and relationship building, as well as a search for understanding and documenting the history of Black people in Canada. The film *Home to Buxton* brings the town's culture to life and captures the storytelling inherent to the Buxton residents and the celebration of freedom and family.

¹Dorothy Shadd Shreve, Buxton resident, historian, and author featured in the film *Home to Buxton* (1987).

²Turtle Island is another term used to describe North America.

³Mary Ann Shadd, the first black North American female editor and publisher

⁴The film was aired on PBS stations across the U.S.

The film also shares a small fragment of Black Canadian history to the public. It acts as an entry point for those who do not understand the connection between slavery and the colonization to Canada. Though this history is well-known to the local Buxton residents, as they continue to live it, it is not common knowledge for the wider public to understand our country's own connection to this history. As the living history of Black communities are not mandatory in the Canadian education system; a work that shares these stories is a valuable social and educational resource. McTair and Prieto remain influential storytellers who have contributed to the Black arts momentum in Canada, encouraging following generations to root to place, listen to community, and add to stories in ways that nurture and regenerate the people of the African diaspora.



Film still from *Home to Buxton*, 1987. By Claire Prieto and Roger McTair.

In 2020, Buxton prepares for its 97th annual Homecoming. The Buxton community continues to preserve the heritage of the region, its scholars, and its farmers, and several of the people shown in *Home to Buxton* continue to assist in organizing the weekend's activities. The annual weekend hosts educational lectures, a church service, a baseball tournament, and an outdoor party in the park attracts over a thousand visitors each year. It is through these preservation efforts that an aspect of Black Canadian stories and community live on, acting as a blueprint for a new wave of storytellers.



Malcolm's Smile 7B, 2015, Nep Sidhu.

A similar intention of building on structures of old while creating new forms, exists in the sculpture work of Nep Sidhu. A self taught artist who comes from a line of storytellers and metal workers. Sidhu's work creates living legacies that reveal a time passed, while proposing movement in constant evolution. Grounded in the public past of Malcolm X, while defining a reality for newness; this portrait titled, *Malcom's Smile*; is a large scale tapestry series in 3-parts. The work demonstrates the practicality and transcendence of the legend el-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and illuminates a call for the collective awakening of communities combating opposing forces. Working seamlessly in collaboration with others in a relationship building method grown over several years - this portrait meditates on the idea of the pillars to be transferred when considering the ideas of Malcolm X's legacy. These 3 equal parts of guiding principles are varied and can be considered simultaneously or one on one.



Resurget Cineribus Ashes converted to Visuals by Sterling Toles, Wesley Taylor

The act of unearthing records by our modern day storytellers helps to shape the current environment and is a co-dependency worth having, so long as creative problem solving is at the fore. The city of Detroit has demonstrated the supreme ability to innovate through community-building and group planning, and can stand as a worldly example of how to transcend challenges and create new models of rebuilding. The resilience of the city serves as inspiration for Sterling Toles' work *Resurget Cineribus*, which is titled after Detroit's official motto adopted in 1805 that states, "We hope for better things; it shall rise from the ashes." The sound-collage journey weaves together audio excerpts from the artist's father Dennis Edward Toles with soundbites of archival news reports that cover the tumultuous events of 1967 that raged within the streets of Detroit.



And 70 miles from the Detroit River, just off the St. Clair River, is Aamjiwnaang First Nation. Rage and urgency pours through this community on the outskirts of Sarnia, Ontario. This area has been deemed to have the most polluted air in all of Canada⁴. Vanessa Gray and Beze Gray who belong to Aamijiwnaang are part of a lineage of voices who have been concerned with the over 60 chemical plants that endlessly pollute their land and water, raising serious health implications for the people of this area since 1942. Known as the 'Chemical Valley', where 40% of Canada's petrochemical industry is packed into 15 square miles, these Water Protectors are calling for a systemic operational shift. As a response, a multi-media piece by the *Chemical Valley Project Collective* has been created for the exhibition.

Toronto-based theatre makers Julia Howman and Kevin Matthew Wong collaborate with Vanessa and Beze Gray to present to us how we all can have a role in supporting environmental racism in Canada as people who are being directly effected and those who are not.



Buffalo China by Megan Devogelaere, Alec Johnson, Marisa Park, Tyson Vanoverbeke (CKSS)

The creative team behind *The Chemical Valley Project* have also visited with high school students from Chatham-Kent Secondary School (Chatham) and Great Lakes Secondary School (Sarnia) as part of the Grade 11 course titled "The Ontario Curriculum: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies" offered by the Lambton-Kent District School Board. This course provokes students to develop their own sense of Indigenous history, rights, and reconciliation essential for students to become global citizens and critical thinkers. This course provides students with the opportunity to cultivate a deeper understanding of their own relationship to their surrounding environment and the Indigenous peoples therein. The students enrolled in this course attended a series of art workshops with artist Jay Soule (Chippewar) to creatively reflect on important issues and make visual responses to them. The artworks created by these students are exhibited in the show to provide a space for young people as they realize their role in their communities and beyond.



Image courtesy of Zoe Gordon for Cold Waters sound work

And as we remember the future, we are given a reflective sound bath created by sound-based artist Zoe Gordon of Thunder Bay, titled *Cold Waters*. Gordon brings us into the seasonal transformations experienced by water through ice cracking and melting. This change from one form to the other reminds how water restores our shores in a cycle that we are living in direct relation to.



Film still from *Home to Buxton*, 1987. By Claire Prieto and Roger McTair

The collection of work reflected in this exhibition presents storytellers whose intentions are solution-oriented, acting as an homage to the persistence of the Buxton storytellers who reinforce the role that history has in maintaining place-connections and activating intersecting identities. These methods of reflection-based storytelling create environments capable of addressing the immediate needs of a community, as well as a long lasting, clearly defined visions of home.

⁴ World Health Organization (2011).

ARTISTS BIOS

CLAIRE PRIETO-FULLER

Claire Prieto-Fuller began her career in film and television as a partner in Prieto-McTair Productions in the '70's and '80's. Ms. Prieto was producer, co-director, production manager and researcher on a number of award winning documentaries which explore the lives of Blacks in Canada. Included among them are: *Some Black Women* (1977) – director Roger McTair - which has the honour of being one of the first films made by independent Black filmmakers in Canada and *It's Not an Illness* (1979). Winner of the Red Ribbon at the American Film & Video festival. Produced and co-directed with Roger McTair, *Home to Buxton* (1987) re-visited the southern Ontario community of Buxton settled by Blacks fleeing slavery in the American south. In 1991, Prieto produced Jennifer Hodge: *The Glory and The Pain*, a journey through the work of Black Canadian filmmaker Jennifer Hodge. The film was screened at the Toronto International Film Festival and aired on T.V. Ontario, Vision T.V. and CBC Newsworld.

Claire Prieto has built a remarkable reputation for consistently putting her skills to work developing the talents of new and emerging filmmakers of colour in Canada's film and television industry. As producer of the New Initiatives in Film program at the National Film Board of Canada in the mid-nineties, she helped launch the careers of many Women of Colour and Aboriginal women.

In addition she was the architect of The Special Mandate Team of Cultural Diversity at the NFB, which placed producers of colour within the NFB ensuring that that filmmakers of colour had a portal directly into the organization. The Special Mandate Team remains one of the most effective initiatives created thus far for implementing diversity in a large media organization. Claire's unwavering belief in "passing it on" is also shown in her consistency in building diversity through mentorships, apprenticeships and hiring on all her productions.

In the early 90's as Founding President of the Black Film & Video Network, Claire approached the Canadian Film Centre about partnering with that organization to offer advanced training for filmmakers of colour. The Fall Lab was born from those conversations and became one of the CFC's most successful initiatives launching the careers of some of Canada's most successful, award winning filmmakers and producers - Clement Virgo, Stephen Williams, Joan Jenkinson, Karen King, Mina Shum, The Adetuyi brothers Alfons & Rob, Damon D'Olivera, Midi Onodera, Michael Jenkinson to name a few.

1996 saw Claire acting as co-producer on *Love Songs*, a movie-of-the-week written and produced by Charles Fuller for Showtime Networks in the U.S. Since then she has worked as

director's mentor and production manager on *Raizin' Kane* for the National Film Board – director Alison Duke, production supervisor on the dramatic shorts at the Canadian Film Centre in 2001 and production manager on two years of *Exhibit A – Secrets of Forensic Science* a docudrama series produced by Kensington Communications for the Discovery Channel.

Ms. Prieto's dramatic work began in 1991 when she Co-Produced with Director Alfons Adetuyi a short drama on AIDS – *Survivors* – for the Black Coalition on Aids Prevention. The piece aired on the CBC, won the Golden Sheaf Award for Best Drama over 30 minutes at the Yorkton Film & Video Festival and the Chris Statuette – 1st Place at the Columbus International Film Festival. From 1988 through 1990 Claire took a sojourn from her company to co-direct the award winning *Black Mother Black Daughter* and direct *Older Stronger Wiser* for the NFB. They were both broadcast and screened at festivals internationally.

Ms. Prieto has also received various awards for her work in Canada. The "Award of Merit" from the City of Toronto. She is a "Woman of Distinction – Arts & Entrepreneurship" – YMCA Toronto. She also received "The Industry Angel Award" from the Reel World Film Festival. In 2010 she received a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Caribbean Tales Organization. Women in Film – Toronto awarded Ms. Prieto-Fuller their "Award of Distinction" for her work in the film/television industry in Canada.

Ms. Prieto is presently a member of the Director's Guild of Canada and has been a member of The Academy of Canadian Cinema and Women in Film and Television - Toronto.

ROGER MCTAIR

Roger McTair taught writing at the School of Communication Arts at Seneca College at York 1996 to 2014. He is a short story writer and documentary film director. From 1992 to 1999, Roger McTair appeared regularly on the Toronto Star's Opinion page as a writer on the Diversity column. He has written for newspapers in the Caribbean and has published short stories and poems.

He has directed documentary film. His last film, *Journey to Justice*, focused on the role of Blacks in Canada's civil rights movement. His films have been shown at a number of North American festivals and screenings. *Journey to Justice* received the Black Film and Video Network's award for best documentary film. It was a finalist in the Best Documentary Category in the 2002 Gemini Awards, and has been shown at universities across Canada. *Journey to Justice* was aired on February 25th on TVO.

Roger is a practicing poet and short story writer. His poetry has been published in the Caribbean, Canada and in the United Kingdom. His short stories have been published in *Critical Strategies* and the *Faber Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, and have been aired on CBC and BBC radio. He was a panelist on Vision TV's *Arts Express* for the four-year duration of that show which explored arts and culture in a political context.

At Seneca at York Roger taught Media Ethics and Issues, Basic and Advanced Media Writing. In his courses he has emphasized grounding in journalism as a foundation for all television, radio, public relations, and new media writing. Since the 1970s, he has been active in cultural and educational activities in the Black and larger Toronto communities. He was involved with the Black Educational Project and the Library of Black People's Literature. He directed the Afro-Caribbean Theatre Workshop, and served on the Board of the Caribbean Cultural Committee. He is a founding member of the Black Film and Video Network.

In 1993, Roger received the Award of Merit from the City of Toronto for his contribution to the life of the city. Roger is a Ryerson graduate, with a degree in Film Studies. He has taken additional academic credits from the University of Toronto and has participated in, and given, numerous writing workshops. He is a past-president of the Ryerson Afro-Caribbean Association. His first collection of short stories, *My Trouble With Books*, was published in 2018 to critical acclaim.

NEP SIDHU

Nep Sidhu is an interdisciplinary practitioner who works through the metaphysics of form and spatial rhythm within the infinite arcs of community and self expression. Through material investigations of textile, sculpture, painting, video and sound, Sidhu's work seeks symbolic pathways that help to realize the formlessness of the divine through endless possibility and search.

Sidhu has previously shown works at exhibitions with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto; Art Mûr, Montréal; Heard Museum, Phoenix; Art Gallery of York University, Toronto; Aga Khan Museum, Toronto; Aichi Triennale, Nagoya City Museum, Japan; and The Frye Museum of Art in Seattle among others. He is a member of the Black Constellation collective, designs the non-commercial clothing line Paradise Sportif, and helps to run Sher- E- Punjab.

STERLING TOLES

Sterling Toles is an east-side-bred, Cass-Corridor-educated Detroitier who views himself as a healer using sound. Initially a rapper in hip hop groups, Sterling transitioned into music production in 1997, and has since worked with the likes of *Invincible*, *Boldy James* and *Finale*.

Sterling holds open space in his home studio for Detroit artists to experiment and express themselves in the rawest of forms. Sterling sees this space as a fitting room for artists to try on their truth within the elastic walls of compassion.

CHEMICAL VALLEY PROJECT BROADLEAF THEATRE IN COLLABORATION WITH VANESSA AND BEZE GRE

The Chemical Valley Project collective is Beze Gray, Vanessa Gray, Julia Howman and Kevin Matthew Wong. This team of artist-activists and water protectors initially gathered to create a multidisciplinary documentary theatre work, The Chemical Valley Project, which explores the impact of Sarnia's Chemical Valley on the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, as well as the duty of non-Indigenous settler allies to participate in solidarity with Indigenous water protectors and land defenders. The original work and collaboration inspires this installation. Vanessa Gray and Beze Gray are Anishinaabe siblings from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation located in Canada's Chemical Valley. They are co-founders of Aamjiwnaang & Sarnia Against Pipelines and lead the annual Chemical Valley Toxic Tour. Vanessa is a land defender and environmental justice researcher with the Technoscience Research Unit at the University of Toronto. Beze identifies as two spirited and studies Anishinaabemowin and traditional land use with Meesiingw. Julia Howman is a Tkaronto-based multidisciplinary artist and designer who works primarily with projection, often for the stage and live events. Kevin Matthew Wong is a Hakka Chinese Canadian performance creator, arts facilitator and producer, and is the Artistic Director of Broadleaf Theatre.

The Chemical Valley Project theatre production tours to Peterborough, Toronto, and Hamilton IN 2020.

broadleaftheatre.com
aamjiwnaangsolidarity.org/
<https://www.landandrefinery.org/>

ZOE GORDON

Zoe Gordon is a sound artist focused on listening. Her current practice focuses on field recording, community building and studio work. Professionally, she collaborates with artists and directors on film and media projects as a sound designer, recordist and sound editor. Current projects she is co-producing include a performance supported by the Ontario Arts Council that focuses on transformation and healing through friendship and a feature documentary about a young mother who's healing from drug addiction.

She is a founding member of Biizidun, a media arts collective that amplifies the voices of indigenous youth and emerging artists in Thunder Bay and area. She is also a co-producer of Flux City, a collective with Cara Eastcott that produces arts events highlighting diverse artists, which came out of their work creating programming in Thunder Bay with Tangled Art + Disability. In 2017 she was awarded the Chalmers Professional Development grant to work with her mentor, composer and sound artist Hildegard Westerkamp. And in 2018 she travelled to France to work with Chris Watson, renowned BBC field recordist to develop skills to produce new work.

BUXTON NEXT GENERATION

Established in 2003 and originally recognized as the "North Buxton Youth Committee", the group began with a \$500 donation from Bonnie and Mike Robbins. Proceeds from that donation went to sponsor entertainment for the first ever "Party in the Park" during our annual Homecoming Celebration. In 2011, the group officially changed its name to Buxton's Next Generation (BNG) and a Board of Directors was established.

The Board members are:

President - Michelle Robbins
Vice President - Rebecca Smyth
Treasurer/ Secretary - Heather Robbins
Members: Chris Prince, Melanie Prince, Jeral Lumley, Tessa (Shadd) VanZetten, Camryn Dudley,
Blair Newby, Quinn Munroe

Youth Ambassadors: Noah Lumley, Brooklyn Lumley and Layla Bardyla

KHARI WENDELL McCLELLAND

For six weeks in the summer of 2015, Khari Wendell McClelland went on a journey across Canada, from British Columbia to Nova Scotia. Khari traveled to historic sites associated with early African-Canadians in Nova Scotia and Ontario interviewing other descendants and digging into archives. On this trip, McClelland learned how his family journeyed along the Underground Railroad, a series of routes and safe houses created in the 1800s to help slaves escape to Canada. After conversations with elders and historians, and pouring over archives, McClelland couldn't gather many facts but what he did get was music. Songs that had been a part of the journey his ancestors took. These songs became a concert, and that concert became a play called Freedom Singer. Through this process, McClelland found parallels between himself and his great, great, great-grandmother, and more importantly, these themes of escaping painful situations and finding truth are more timely than ever. "It's very clear that we need to support music that is hopeful in the face of great challenge," McClelland notes.

BRYAN PRINCE

Bryan Prince is a respected historical researcher on the Underground Railroad, slavery, and abolition. His previous books include *One More River to Cross*, *A Shadow on the Household*, and *I Came as a Stranger*. Bryan is in demand as a presenter throughout North America, and he and his wife were awarded the 2011 prize for the Advancement of Knowledge by the Underground Railroad Free Press. He lives in North Buxton, Ontario.

SHANNON PRINCE

Shannon is the Curator of the Buxton National Historic Site & Museum. She is also a Storyteller and participant in historical re-enactments which brings the history of Buxton and the Underground Railroad to life for many groups both here and further a-field. She is a descendant of the early fugitive families that came to Canada for freedom and opportunity. As such, she brings an insight and respect and a love for this chapter in our heritage.

ZAB MABOUNGOU

A choreographer, dancer, philosopher and writer of French and Congolese origin, Zab Maboungou is the artistic director of Zab Maboungou/Compagnie Danse Nyata Nyata, a contemporary dance company founded in 1987. It is based in Montreal and encompasses the creation of dance works, research and teaching. Her richly introspective and dynamic body language strike the spirit, with acute musical and rhythmic forms and articulated bodies interacting in the eloquence and brilliance of an art of dance, "something from nothing at a high level" (Deborah Meyers, Vancouver Sun). A pioneer of dance in Canada, she has also contributed to the development of dance in Africa.



Water and Land Protectors, Beze Gray and Vanessa Gray of Chemical Valley Project

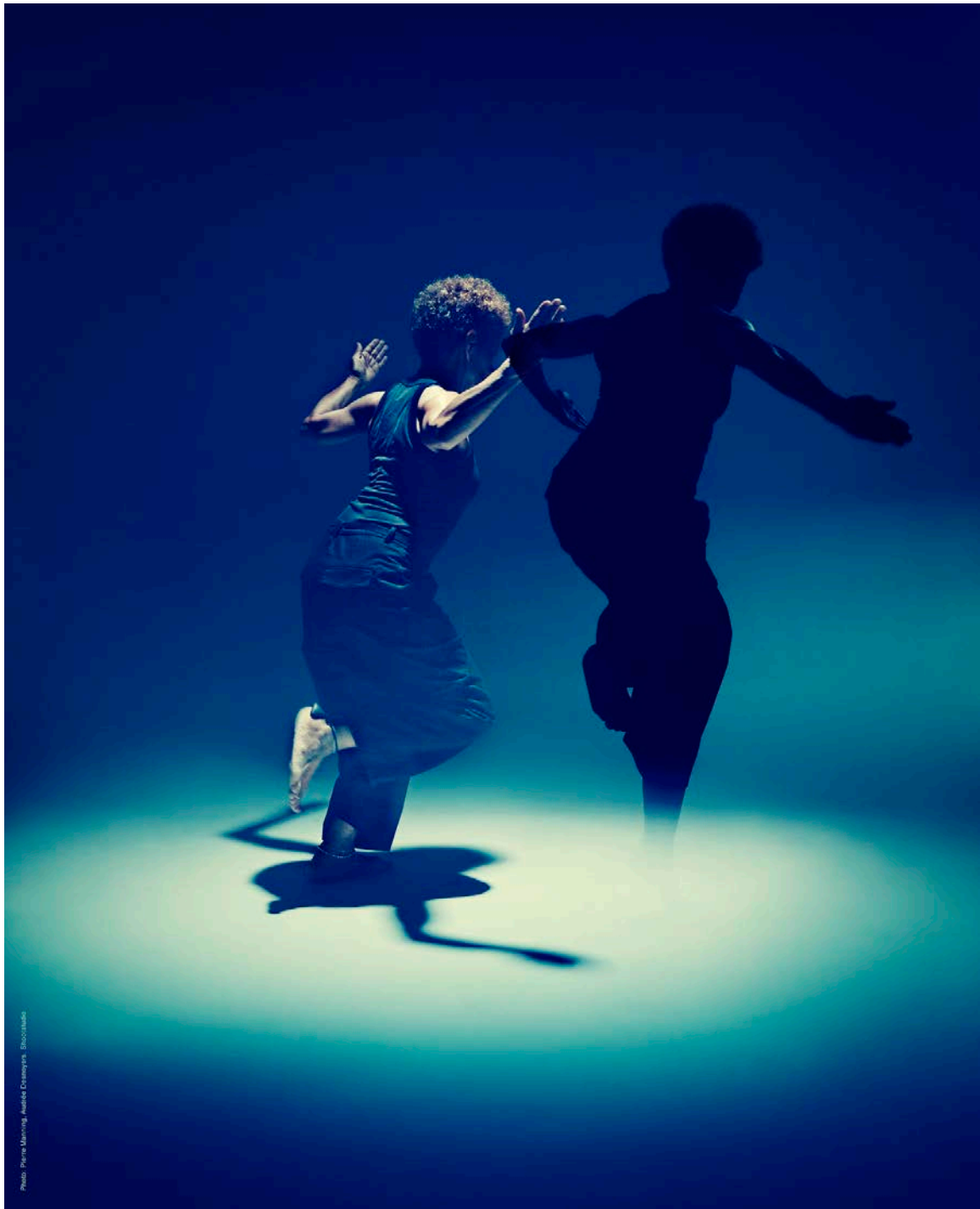


Photo: Pierre Manning, Auditeo Editions, Blois/Studio

Zab Mabougou in Wamunzo. Photo by Pierre Manning.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Zab Maboungou and Elli Maboungou

Solo dance and drumming activation of the works

January 17, 8:00PM, Thames Art Gallery

Home to Buxton film by Roger McTair and Claire Prieto

Post-screening talk with Shannon Prince and Bryan Prince.

February 29, 1:00PM–3:00PM

Studio One, Chatham Cultural Centre

Khari Wendell McClelland Music Performance

February 29, 8:00PM–10:00PM

Studio One, Chatham Cultural Centre

Coffee with Cara

Curator's tour and chat

March 1, 11:00AM–12:00PM

Thames Art Gallery



Khari Wendell McClelland



Olive Olbey and daughter Michelle Eaton. Photo by Elwood Shreve.

EXHIBITING ARTISTS WORKS

Roger McTair; Claire Prieto

Home to Buxton, 1987.

[16mm film transfer to video (colour) and sound, 29 min 11 sec].

Nep Sidhu

Malcolm's Smile, 7A, 7B, 7C, 2015.

[cotton, wool, gold zari, aluminum].

7C in collaboration with Todd Westendorp.

Ishmael Butler

Ecdysis, 2015.

[sound, 24 min, 51 sec].

Sterling Toles

Resurget Cineribus, 2012.

[sound 67 min, 2 sec]

Julia Howman with Beze Gray, Vanessa Gray and Kevin Matthew Wong

The Chemical Valley Project, 2020.

[video, projection and sound, 7 min 6 sec]

Zoe Gordon

Cold Waters, 2020.

[sound and video projection, 10 min 33 sec]

Projections in collaboration with Shayne Ehman.

Great Lakes Secondary School (Sarnia), Chatham-Kent Secondary School Students

Cultural Transmission, 2020.

Lead by Secondary Special Projects Teacher in Indigenous Studies:

Denise Helmer-Johnston, (Lambton Kent District School Board)

[paintings, writing]

A photograph of a group of people outdoors, possibly at a community event. In the center, a woman wears a patterned headwrap and a white shirt with colorful embroidery. To her left, a man wears a white hat with a red and blue band. To her right, an older man wears a light blue cap and a white shirt. The background shows other people and greenery. Overlaid on the image is text in a bright green, bold, sans-serif font.

**DEDICATED TO
THE PEOPLE OF BUXTON**

Producer

CLAIRE PRIETO

Directors

ROGER McTAIR

CLAIRE PRIETO

Writer

ROGER McTAIR

LEGENDS ARE THE RIVERS THAT TAKE US HOME

JANUARY 17 - MARCH 15, 2020

Guest Curator: Cara Eastcott

Essay: Cara Eastcott

Design: Todd Westendorp, Donna Nolan

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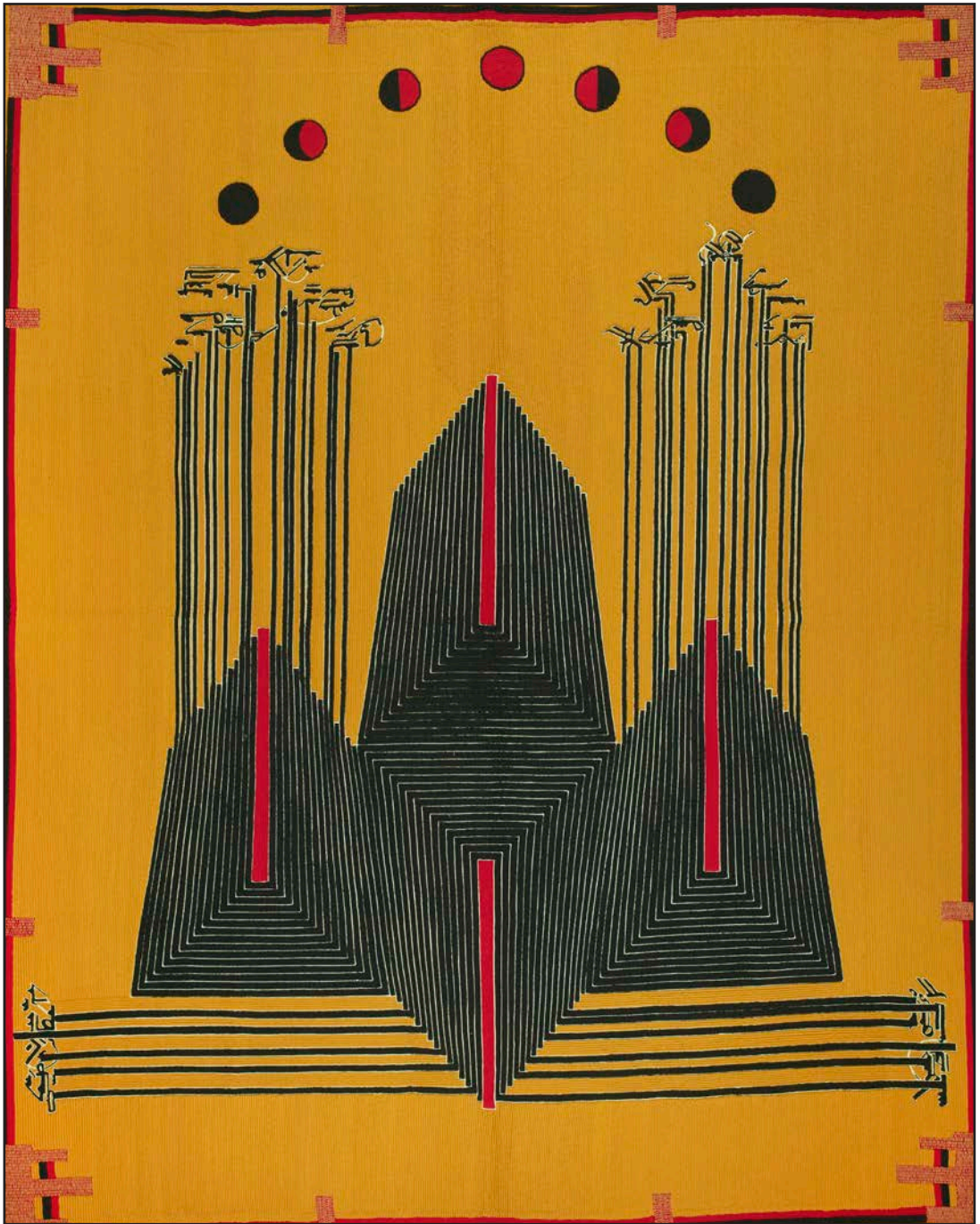


75 William Street North
Chatham, Ontario N7M 4L4
519.360.1998
www.chatham-kent.ca/TAG

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Malcolm's Smile 7C, 2015. Nep Sidhu in collaboration with Todd Westendorp