

MYFANWY MACLEOD SHANNON OKSANEN Playtime



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About the Work

“Civilization arises and unfolds in and as play” wrote Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1938). In understanding that play is a key condition in the generation of culture, we can locate play in education, law, health, science and art. And in its freedom, play is, according to Huizinga, not “ordinary” or “real” life, but offers a space of potential that moves us out of the quotidian.

Playtime, located on the grounds of the BC Children’s Hospital and BC Women’s Hospital and Health Centre, is a constellation of painted concrete objects that could be simultaneously described as a playground and a sculpture park. The hybrid familial grouping is a public artwork by Myfanwy MacLeod and Shannon Oksanen that takes up the question of play in relation to the mind and the body.

Described by the artists as a site of transition between the everyday and the extraordinary, *Playtime* offers an unrestricted space for not only childhood imagination, but also creative thought and experience by users of all ages and abilities. Through a tactile approach, the artists encourage an interactive engagement that conjures playgrounds of the postwar period, gardens and parks that are home to corporeal modernist sculptures, as well as the literal bodies of families.

Above *Playtime (The Magic Stones)*, 2016. Photo: Scott Livingstone

Playtime has five components that allow for an open-ended interpretation of the idea of the family. The organic forms, patterned in black and white, are arranged in a semicircle to delineate a space of divertissement, contemplation and respite. The site is peppered with picnic tables, bounded by hedges and a wellness walk, and sits between Queen Elizabeth Park, with its crowning Henry Moore sculpture, and Van Dusen Botanical Garden, with its landscape design by Cornelia Oberlander.

The largest components of *Playtime* are tall “sister” forms entitled *Two Figures in Orbit*. They evoke the collaboration between the artists and their nod to modernist sculptor Barbara Hepworth, from whom they borrow the titles for *Playtime*’s individual groupings. The cluster’s second largest figure, *Dryad*, is a striped single form that belies its title’s reference to the tree nymph. In between these strong female forms are other familial components: *The Family Man* (a checkered form that reads as a stationary seesaw or an object from the ancient game of “jacks”), *The Magic Stones* (four molded sculptures that small bodies might curl around or leap between) and *The Musician* (a large-scale knuckle ring that bodies can climb and fit into).

Playtime’s groupings point to the ways in which family is constructed, how it can include more or less than is expected and how its configuration can be ever-shifting. In doing so, it offers a kinship model for children, adults, patients, visitors, workers and passersby. As the rounded forms connect to the human body in wholeness and in gaps (the healthy body and the unhealthy body), the overall site is a contemplative place where one can step away from stress and find quiet, or step into the unknown and find fun.

Here the rules of the order are undefined; play and playgrounds can be read as cultural critique against authority. The ludic—spontaneously playful—is critical for human civilization past, present and future. In a moment when play is often programmatic, *Playtime*’s hybridity—its in-betweenness—offers a necessary space of openness, creativity and free play.

— Melanie O’Brian, Director/Curator, SFU Galleries

Opposite *Playtime (The Family Man)*, 2016. Photo: Scott Livingstone

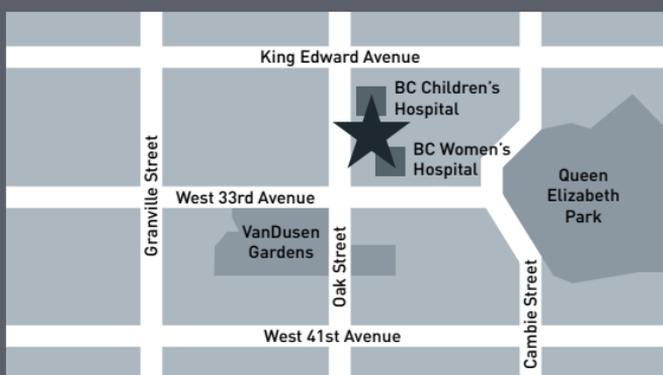


About the Artists

Myfanwy MacLeod (born 1961) and Shannon Oksanen (born 1967) are established artists who live and work in Vancouver. Bringing together modernist art histories, popular culture and material exaltation, their work traces a line between compassion and wryness, formality and surprise, anonymity and kinship. Both artists have independent practices that have been exhibited nationally and internationally. MacLeod's work considers the individual within capitalism and consumer culture, often to devastatingly humorous affect. Her public sculpture *The Birds*, from 2010, is located in Vancouver's Olympic Village. Oksanen's practice often references a stylized past, including Modernism, or takes up the representation of already overly represented images. This is their first public art collaboration.

Above Shannon Oksanen and Myfanwy MacLeod.

The City of Vancouver Public Art Program commissions contemporary art for public spaces. The program supports excellence in art making by emerging and established artists, in new and traditional media and from stand-alone commissions to artist collaborations. Projects at civic buildings, greenways, parks and other public spaces are funded through annual civic capital budgets. Private sector projects are funded by developments in the rezoning process. Learn more about this and other public artworks in the Public Art Registry at www.vancouver.ca/publicart; subscribe to the Public Art Listserv to be notified of upcoming artist opportunities.



Playtime, 2016, was commissioned by the BC Children's Hospital and BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre as part of the BC Children's and BC Women's Redevelopment Project as their participation in the City of Vancouver Public Art Program.

Cover image *Playtime (Two Figures in Orbit)*, 2016. BC Children's Hospital and BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre, 4480/4500 Oak Street, Vancouver, British Columbia. The sculptures are located at Heather Street and 30th Avenue. Photo: Scott Livingstone



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Playtime (Detail), 2016. Photo: Scott Livingstone