MOVING RIGHT ALONG
NICOLAS FLEMING
Co-curated by
Shani K Parsons and Oana Tanase
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This publication is produced in conjunction with the exhibition

MOVING RIGHT ALONG | NICOLAS FLEMING

cou-curate by Shani K Parsons and Oana Tanase
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Representing yet another milestone in our developing program, Moving right along is a first for TYPOLOGY in more ways than one. It is the first truly site-specific intervention by an artist into the architectural space of the gallery, one which challenges the conceptual framework of the white cube even as it supplants it with something even more seductive and disturbing. With this solo exhibition, also the first in Toronto to feature this recently arrived artist from Montreal, we are thrilled to welcome Nicolas Fleming to our vibrant city and our ever-expanding community of local and international artists and curators.

Speaking of the local and international, we are also very pleased to mark this as our first exhibition to be mounted in conjunction with the launch of our Curatorial Residency program, through which we have been privileged to work with Romanian-born, Toronto-based curator Oana Tanase. Her lyrical essay deftly connects us with two thousand years of architectural history in exploring the echoes reverberating within Fleming’s sculptural gestures toward the monumental—and the other side of that same coin, the personal. In their expansive and engaging conversation which follows, Fleming and Tanase go on to provide a uniquely in-depth and compelling perspective on his artwork-as-embodied-experience. In the absence of a physical encounter with one of Nicolas Fleming’s provocative interventions, we very much believe this to be the next best thing.

SHANI K PARSONS
TORONTO 2015
THERE ARE COUNTLESS ATTEMPTS to explore, contextualize, and reconstruct the troubling history of the Flavian Meta Sudans in Rome. While most historians and archeologists are still debating its original, innovative design, relying mostly on numismatic evidence and old drawings, recent scholarship has approached it from a rather critical perspective in order to discuss its form, meaning, and ideology.

There is a fragile consensus amongst researchers in designating the preceding Augustan type, entirely destroyed by the terrific fire of AD 64, as the inspiration for all later examples of conical fountains, even though no archeological remains of these freestanding monumental fountains set in wholly civic environments have been identified. But at least one thing is sure: during the Augustan period and onward, cultural, political, and social forces were carefully handled when it came to water usage and aquatic displays in Rome and other provincial cities. According to researcher Brenda Longfellow, in order to witness the transformation of this domestic symbol of residential luxury into a powerful statement of imperial control one had to wait for the Flavian emperors, and especially for Domitian: appropriating and transferring the engineering and artistic innovations behind these devices into a civic setting, they set in motion one of the world’s longest histories of erosions and excavations, recollections and renderings, removals and reconstructions.
Approximately 17 meters tall, the brick, concrete, and marble structure sitting in the middle of a round basin measuring almost 16 metres in diameter was completed only a few years after the amphitheatre that we know today as the Roman Colosseum. It is suggested that, by occupying a highly symbolic urban center, once again reclaimed to the public domain after being previously stolen by Nero to build the Domus Aurea, the *Meta Sudans* was also infused with the political ambition of restoring the memory of the long gone Golden Age of Augustus. As art historian Elizabeth Marlowe suggests in her essay, *The Mutability of All Things*, ‘the form and location of the new monument [were] carefully calculated to remind the viewer that something else had stood there previously, and thus, in a sense, to memorialize the act of erasure.’ Its engineering design included an inner pipe that carried water all the way up; ‘the water cascaded down the exterior of the cone, making it perpetually glisten and thus giving the fountain its ancient name, the *Meta Sudans*, or the sweating conical marker’ (Longfellow).

Up to a point, the new *Meta* recalled the function of an even older similarly shaped object in Roman sports performances: the turning point for racing chariots. Yet the new symbolic device was not only intended to mark the turning point of the triumphal processions along the Via Sacra, it also provided fresh drinking water. It thus quickly became the locus of a new topography, a landmark in the revitalized urban center, a symbol for Rome itself and marker of its dynastic imperial power. Its sensual silhouette, together with its visual and tactile qualities, spawned imitations and further interpretations, and ‘by late
In Conversation
OANA TANASE and NICOLAS FLEMING

OANA TANASE: I would like to start by challenging you to situate your own practice, as a conceptual artist rather than an abstract painter, keeping in mind, for instance, one of your first solo shows, in 2006, at La Galerie de l’UQAM, where by choosing the medium of performance, installation and painting you intended to question the very idea of painting. Would you like to recall for us that moment when you felt like abandoning a traditional format, by questioning its language and limits? What triggered the decision to go beyond it, and explore further the architectural or sculptural potential of your studio practice?

NICOLAS FLEMING: Interesting, I have, of course, been thinking of this for a while. Great opportunity to try to get my thoughts sorted out. After my grad show at UQAM, I ‘stopped’ doing art for 4/5 years. I felt the limits I defined for this project left no doors open to follow through in another direction. Of course, this is from a personal perspective as in hindsight several developments would have been possible. So it also might have been that somehow I felt this was an intensive project where I worked on the same idea continually for two and half years, and for that reason, I thought I had nothing else to say at the moment. I probably became very conscious of the fact that a lot of art is produced and a very small portion of that art will ever reach an interested audience. Therefore, a very sane questioning which I hope all artists have is: Why do art? My guess is that this question remains mostly unanswered from an absolute point of view, as art does not fulfill any primary need (such as eating, drinking, sleeping, etc.).

I would say that in what I do today, through architecture, I try to call out to a larger audience. Having architecture and design as a base in the

Moving right along (installation detail, TYPOLOGY Projects, Toronto), 2015
artworks allows more viewers to relate to the work, simply through being aware of their presence and movement in the space. The crawl pieces in canvas uniforms I did during my graduate studies were a very physical experience but I was the only one living that experience. This physicality was not transmitted to the viewer during exhibitions—they were simply witnesses to the work, as is the case with most visual art. I hope viewers have more of a participatory feel toward my work now. This notion of inclusion is important for me.

Also, using construction materials for different purposes from what they were intended (e.g., drywall and plaster to make chairs) will interest a construction worker as much as a design museum curator (true story, happened at Papier last year).

Your interventions and transformations are part of a long practice in appropriating spaces, yet your attitude doesn’t restrict others from taking ‘possession’ of your work in turn. For instance, when you shared the news that a musician is interested in using one of your installations as a set for a music video, I was inclined to ask if there are instances when you indeed project a space as a real or virtual stage for experiences to be consumed.

Yes, the idea of a stage is a project I continue to pursue, one which would literally consist of a stage built in a similar aesthetic to my installations using materials such as neon, drywall, plaster, varnish, OSB, and carpet. Ideally it would be in a space where artists (including at least some visual artists) are confronted by the structure on a daily basis on their way to class or studio (such as an art school campus or residency location). I would like to have people make any kind of intervention on the stage, which could include physical modification, destroying or even full removal.

We’re still standing (installation view, Papier15 Contemporary Art Fair, Montreal), 2015
Il s’occupait, c’est vrai, de nos intérêts et de nos biens (installation view, Aires Libres, Montreal), 2014

Everything is going swimmingly (installation view, Galerie Trois Points, Montreal), 2015
ABOUT THE ARTIST
Nicolas Fleming holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Studio Arts from Concordia University and a Master’s Degree in Visual Arts from University of Quebec in Montreal, and currently splits his time between studios in Montreal and Toronto. He has shown his work in several artist-run centers and galleries in Canada including Trois Points, McClure, and UQAM galleries in Montreal, and Axeneo7 in Gatineau, Quebec and has presented temporary outdoor sculptures internationally in Kassel, Germany, and Mexico City. In 2014 he exhibited work on a larger scale as part of the Aires Libres Festival in Montreal and the Feature Contemporary Art Fair in Toronto, and in a solo show at ISE Cultural Foundation in New York, where he created a monumental architectural installation. In 2015 his drywall monuments have been exhibited at Papier15 Art Fair in Montreal and Maison des Arts de Laval, Quebec, as well as at Feature in Toronto for a second year, concurrent with his exhibition at TYPOLOGY.

ABOUT THE RESIDENT CURATOR
Oana Tanase is a Toronto-based independent curator and researcher. She holds an MA in Art History and Theory from the National University of Arts in Bucharest, Romania and is currently completing her PhD thesis that aims at discussing documentary practices in contemporary art. Her latest curatorial projects in Toronto include Dan Perjovschi: As If All Yesterday’s News Should Be Rehearsed Today For A Better Tomorrow (YYZ Artists’ Outlet); Community (Love) Creates Change (with Denise Moraze at Peter MacKerritch Community Gallery); and Before and After: Celebrating 100 Years of The Barns (with Vid Ingelevics at Artscape Wychwood Barns). Previously, she worked as a curator at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest (2006-2012) and as an assistant curator at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig (2005-2006).
ABOUT TYPOLOGY

Providing opportunities for curators and participating artists to mount fully realized exhibitions within a critical framework, TYPOLOGY is a not-for-profit initiative which seeks to build curatorial community at the local, national, and international levels. Through a wide-ranging annual program of exhibitions supported by the production of original publications, editions, and related events, TYPOLOGY is an open platform for diverse curatorial practices and perspectives, and a forum for the exchange of ideas on exhibition-making as a way to engage and inform audiences from all walks of life.

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About the Founding Director

Shani K Parsons has pursued a multidisciplinary practice focused on exhibition-making—initially through the lenses of architecture and urban planning, then installation, graphic, and environmental design, and most recently through research, writing, curation, and collaboration. In the process she has produced an eclectic body of work ranging from intimate book works to immersive exhibitions for venues including the American Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the RISD Museum, the Museum of Chinese in America NY, and Mixed Greens, a contemporary art gallery in Chelsea. Bringing together her experience in all aspects of exhibition-making—as artist, designer, critic, and curator—she is building in TYPOLOGY a hybrid space for collaborative and cross-disciplinary experimentation, an independent venue for exhibitions on all forms of contemporary culture.
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PHOTO and IMAGE CREDITS

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CATALOGUE EDITING and DESIGN

Shani K Parsons

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