

Toronto: Get out there and take to the streets.



Ring of Fire

Commissioned by the **Art Gallery of York University**, and two-years in the making, *Ring of Fire* is a 300-person strong street procession by internationally renowned Trinidadian artist **Marlon Griffith**. Created for the people of Toronto and *staged* at the TO2015 Parapan American Games, *Ring of Fire* takes place on **Sunday, August 9 along University Avenue from Queen’s Park to City Hall**.

This groundbreaking large-scale, long-term participatory art project is the culmination of a transcultural and interdisciplinary collaboration between individuals, groups, and organizations from across the Greater Toronto Area and beyond. It is a constellation of social movements emerging from deep-rooted traditions. Interlocking circles of performative forms of colonial cultural resistance from across the Americas—from Pow-Wow to Capoeira to Spoken Word to Carnival—raise critical awareness around accessibility in solidarity with persons with disabilities. *Ring of Fire* is a living line and a symbol of endurance, solidarity, and social awakening.

Using the structural dynamic of Carnival “mas” as a working strategy, and the “mas camp” (collectively run production studios for the artistic component of Trinidadian Carnival) as a site of co-authored exchange, *Ring of Fire* brings together disability dancers from **Picasso Pro** and **Equal Grounds**, the **Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation**, members of Toronto’s **Capoeira Angôla** community, and **young spoken word poets** from **Jane-Finch, Malvern and Regent Park**. From May to July, collectively conceived and created “mas camps” (for costume production, spoken word, movement, and music) take place at some of Toronto’s leading arts organizations with strong community roots throughout the city: including **Art Starts, SKETCH, The Malvern S.P.O.T., COBA, and Success Beyond Limits**. These organizations are dynamic hubs for fostering inter-generational participation and unprecedented collaboration between youth from diverse neighbourhoods across the GTA.

***Ring of Fire* is made by Torontonians for Torontonians.**

Ring of Fire is inspired by the Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather Teachings: **Wisdom, Courage, Respect, Honesty, Truth, Humility, and Love**, which serve as the basis for the organizational structure of the procession (the “bands”) as well as guides the working principles of its making.

The procession features seven large-scale, elaborately costumed “Sentinel” characters, each dramatizing one of the teachings and “played” by some of the core collaborators of the project: Elder **Duke Redbird** (Nibwaakaawin), **Mark Brose** (Aakode'ewin), **Wanda FitzGerald** (Minaadendamowin), **Sheila Boyd** (Gwayakwaadiziwin), **Cathie Jamieson** (Debwewin), **Torrance Ho** (Dabaadendiziwin), **Melissa Addison Webster** (Zaagi'idiwin). These custom-made, complex structures are produced as part of the prestigious **Louis Odette Sculptor-in-Residence** program – a four-week intensive conducted by Griffith with advanced students in the **School of the Arts, Media, Performance & Design at York University**. A costumed “Entourage” of over 70 individuals accompany the main Sentinel characters, and are played by members of Picasso Pro, Equal Grounds,

the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, Capoeira Angôla, and youth-artists who have worked on the project at each of the community-driven “mas camps.” Designed by Griffith, the hand-made Entourage costumes are produced by aspiring fashion designers from the *Sew What?!* program at Art Starts (who run a free, *public* “mas camp” at the **Lawrence Mall** from June 15-20) as well as by emerging artists from the visual arts program at SKETCH. Spoken word poets play the roles of “Orators” in the procession, addressing the public as the procession weaves down University Avenue. For the past year these young poets have participated in a mentorship program across the city of Toronto at COBA (Regent Park), Success Beyond Limits (Jane-Finch) and The Malvern S.P.O.T. (Scarborough), where they have learned about the **Seven Grandfather Teachings** and produced new poetry inspired by them from their own point of view. Music in the procession is conceived by **Alternative Roots** (a First Nations youth group from New Credit) in collaboration with the **SKETCH Band**, while the choreographic sequences of the Entourage is a hybrid form of movements and gestures culled from a mixture of integrated dance, Capoeira, and Pow-Wow developed through workshops by Picasso PRO’s **Anna MacLean**, Capoeira Master **Marcio Mendes**, and members of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation respectively. Members of the public are invited to participate in the final procession.

Torontonians: stay tuned for more information on how YOU can get involved in this “mas” movement.

Ring of Fire is generously supported by the Ontario Arts Council, IGNITE Ontario and IGNITE Toronto, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Toronto Arts Council, The Co-operators, York University’s School of the Arts, Media, Performance & Design, and through the passion and commitment of every individual and organization involved in this project. “Mas camps” are produced in collaboration with Art Starts & The Lawrence Square Shopping Centre and SKETCH. Workshops in movement are produced in collaboration with SKETCH, Picasso PRO, and Capoeira Angôla. AGYU’s year-long spoken word poetry program was developed in partnership with the Malvern S.P.O.T, Success Beyond Limits, and COBA with the support from the Honey Family Foundation and the Vital Toronto Fund at the Toronto Foundation and the Toronto Arts Council: Targeted Enhanced Funding. Special thank you to Toronto Community Living for their incredible in-kind support of *Ring of Fire* and Strathcona Paper LP for donating the paperboard material for masks.

An exhibition of *Ring of Fire* takes place at the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU) from 23 September – 6 December 2015 and a book, generously supported by the Partners in Art, will be published in 2016.

Ring of Fire is curated by AGYU Assistant Director/Curator **Emelie Chhangur** with the loving support of project advisors **Rose Jacobson** and **Duke Redbird** and community arts innovators: **Allyson Adley, Sandra Brewster, Carleen Robinson, Katherine Earl, Liz Forsberg, and Michael O’Connell.**

Marlon Griffith has participated in residencies and exhibited extensively across the globe. Recent projects include new commissions for 7th GWANGJU BIENNALE (Gwangju, Korea, 2008), CAPE09 BIENNIAL (Cape Town, South Africa, 2009), MANIFESTA 9 Parallel Projects (Hasselt, Belgium, 2012), AICHI TRIENNALE (Nagoya, Japan 2013), TATE MODERN (London, England, 2014) and the ART GALLERY OF YORK UNIVERSITY (Toronto, Canada, 2015). In 2010, Griffith was the recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and of a Commonwealth Award.

The Art Gallery of York University (AGYU) is a public, university-affiliated, non-profit contemporary art gallery supported by York University, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Province of Ontario

through the Ontario Arts Council, the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, and by its membership.

AGYU: Out There in a whirl of a “mas” movement.

RingofFire.theAGYUisOutThere.org

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For more information on *Ring of Fire*, or to request images or interviews with the artists, please contact Emelie Chhangur, Assistant Director/Curator at Emelie@yorku.ca or 416 736 5169.