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THE NEXT 7 DAYS: **EVENTS (13)** + **OPENINGS (9)** + **DEADLINES (11)** + **CLOSINGS (7)**

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OUROBOROS AT ST. ANNE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH
 October 03, 2018

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 Oct. 3, 2018
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If you were looking for an exhibition space as far from a white cube as you could get, a church might just be it. Neither cubic nor stripped of colour, a hall of worship comes laden with stories and symbols, fraught with beliefs and burdened by an overriding narrative that tends to elicit deep-seated reactions. My prejudices about religion have softened over the years and rather than dismiss it as a misguided and conservative doctrine, as I did in my youth, I can now see it as a potential forum for shared meaning, community, and the possibility of transcendence. **St Anne's Anglican Church** in Toronto's west end provides an excellent model for such a conception of spirituality with its regular exhibitions of contemporary art installed within the functional spaces of the building – from pews to alter – and its open arms approach to drawing in visitors. The afternoon I visited *Ouroboros*, the current exhibition, there was a singalong that I initially mistook for a choir practice happening. The massed voices made for a unique accompaniment to my viewing of the exhibition and I had to politely decline a couple invitations to join in.



Ellen Bleiwas, *Handhelds*, 2018, natural latex, pure gum rubber, beeswax, cotton string, copper steel, aluminum, mirror

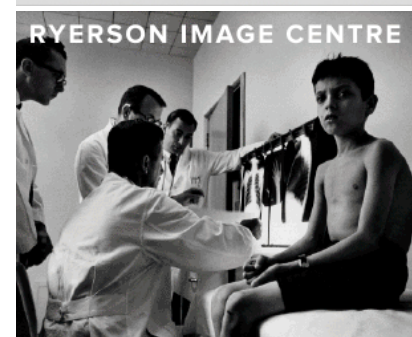
This welcoming gesture was echoed by the integration of the assorted works within the space of the church. The congregation must be used to exercising tolerance for the unexpected and new, but I imagine even their receptivity was tested by some of the interventions. In particular, I would have loved to see the reactions of the Sunday regulars to **Ellen Bleiwas'** rubbery beeswax and wire tubes distributed amongst the hymnbooks along the back of each pew. These alien objects are designed to be held and the tiny mirrors within serve as a handy tool to aid in the reflection of the praying adherents.

Twin sunsets from two corners of the planet (one the nearby intersection at Bathurst and Bloor) lift the viewer/parishioner out of their individual meditations to consider their place on the planet, under the heavens, and part of a larger cycle of time and space. These videos are by **Emily DiCarlo** and her Dutch collaborator **Hanneke Wetzer**. Overhead, **Marian Wihak's** chandelier rotates like a celestial mobile that catches the ambient light and draws eyes upward. The church's own art – including murals by three members of the Group of Seven – enters into dialogue with the visiting artists and shifts any presumptions to what's contemporary with the introduction of the building's history and the even older story of Christianity.

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Gunilla Josephson, *I Love You*, 2016, video installation (photo: Ken Woroner)

Closer to the front, surrounding the baptismal font, **Adrienne Trent** has assembled a wall of icons that give pets the same status as saints. Including these companion animals within the domain of spirit expands the scope of community at the same time as it revises our understanding of ethical responsibility. If this is truly a place of love than that love and all the attendant reciprocity that follows should be extended to all living things.

On the subject of love, **Gunilla Josephson's** *I Love You* is situated front and centre on the church's altar and as such engages in the most direct appropriation of this sacred environment. The video depicts two children whose heads have been spliced together and then made to rotate as they whisper assertions of happiness and loss. The whole dynamic of "here, not here" is shared by the worlds of religion and art. The ways in which each discourse often speaks in cryptic murmurs that intrigue and confuse, but promise something greater is evident throughout this space. While contemporary art galleries isolate their works in a vacuum of white, churches are infused with an overwhelming noise of competing contexts. It's a testament to the artists involved and the care in curation that this exhibition survives that combination and perhaps even transcends it.

Ouroboros continues until October 14.

St. Anne's Anglican Church: <http://www.saintanne.ca/events/ouroboros>

The venue is [partially accessible](#).

Terence Dick is a freelance writer living in Toronto. His art criticism has appeared in Canadian Art, BorderCrossings, Prefix Photo, Camera Austria, Fuse, Mix, C Magazine, Azure, and The Globe and Mail. He is the editor of Akimblog. You can follow his quickie reviews and art news announcements on Twitter [@TerenceDick](#).

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