

News Release

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The Jewish Museum to Present Contemporary Art Exhibition Inspired by Global Icon Leonard Cohen

Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything
April 12–September 8, 2019

New York, NY, April 9, 2019—The Jewish Museum presents ***Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything***, a contemporary art exhibition devoted to the imagination and legacy of the influential singer/songwriter, man of letters, and global icon from Montreal, Canada. The exhibition will be on view from April 12 through September 8, 2019.

Organized by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MAC), where it debuted, the exhibition is curated by John Zeppetelli, Director and Chief Curator at the MAC, and Victor Shiffman, Co-Curator. *Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything* will embark on a tour, with the Jewish Museum as its first stop. Following its New York presentation, the exhibition will travel to Copenhagen and San Francisco.

Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything includes commissioned works by a range of international artists who have been inspired by Cohen's life, work and legacy. The New York presentation will include Kara Blake, Candice Breitz, Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, Christophe Chassol, Daily tous les jours, Tacita Dean, Kota Ezawa, George Fok, Ari Folman, Jon Rafman, and Taryn Simon. The exhibition will also include a video projection showcasing Cohen's own drawings, as well as an innovative multimedia gallery where visitors can hear covers of Cohen's songs by musicians such as Lou Doillon, Feist, Moby, The National with Sufjan Stevens, Ragnar Kjartansson, and Richard Reed Parry, among others.

A world-renowned novelist, poet, and singer/songwriter who inspired generations of writers, musicians, and artists, Leonard Cohen (1934–2016) was an extraordinary poet of the imperfection of the human condition, giving voice to what it means to be fully alert to the complexities and desires of both body and soul. For decades, he tenaciously supplied the world with melancholy and urgent observations on the state of the human heart, in songs such as "Suzanne," "Bird on the Wire," and "Hallelujah." With equal parts gravitas and grace, Cohen teased out a startlingly inventive and singular language, depicting both an exalted spirituality and an earthly sexuality. His interweaving of the sacred and the profane, of mystery and accessibility, was such a compelling combination it became seared into memory.

Among the large-scale, immersive works in the exhibition is *Passing Through* (2017) by George Fok. The work celebrates Cohen's singular voice, his music, his charismatic persona, and his inimitable stage

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presence. Drawing on a vast archive of audiovisual material, Fok pays tribute to Cohen's monumental five-decade-long career as a singer/songwriter and performer. Visitors experience an extraordinary time-travel journey through a collage of collective memories, musical moments, and emotions that have enchanted generations of fans around the world.

I'm Your Man (A Portrait of Leonard Cohen) (2017), a multi-channel video installation by Candice Breitz, brings together a community of ardent Cohen fans to pay tribute to the late legend. Each of the 18 participants was offered the opportunity to perform and record his own version of Cohen's comeback album *I'm Your Man* (1988) in a professional recording studio. At Breitz's invitation, the album's backing vocals were reinterpreted by the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue Choir, an all-male choir representing the congregation in Montreal, Canada, that Cohen belonged to all his life.

Kara Blake's multichannel video projection titled *The Offerings* (2017) forms an immersive environment in which Cohen's singular voice envelops participants and engages them in an intimate conversation. Sourced from decades of archival material, the images and video construct a composite portrait of the artist as he muses on a variety of subjects ranging from his personal writing practice to universal themes of love, humility, and spirituality.

In the video *Cuba in Cohen* (2017), Christophe Chassol remixes, sets to melody, and harmonizes an excerpt of Cohen reciting his 1964 poem "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward," using a clip from the National Film Board of Canada's 1965 documentary film *Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen*. During his residency at Xavier Veilhan's "Studio Venezia" at the French pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale, Chassol scored the poem and invited several singers to reinterpret this newly melodized work. The artist created what he calls an "ultrascore" by applying speech-harmonizing techniques to the excerpt of Cohen's poetry reading. Isolating and synchronizing each syllable spoken by the poet, Chassol forms melodic arrangements, which are then harmonized with bass lines and drumbeats.

Ari Folman's *Depression Chamber* (2017) allows one visitor at a time into a darkened room, where they are confronted by the demons of depression, a theme that can be traced throughout Cohen's body of work. After the visitor lies down, Cohen's "Famous Blue Raincoat" plays while the song's lyrics are projected on the walls, slowly morphing into letters and icons that symbolize Cohen's multifaceted thematic universe.

Heard There Was a Secret Chord (after the 2017 work of the same title, 2018) is a participatory humming experience by the art and design studio Daily tous les jours that reveals an invisible vibration uniting people around the world currently listening to Cohen's



Hallelujah. The work is an exploration of the metaphysical connection between people on a common wavelength. At the Museum, real-time online listener data is transformed into a virtual choir of humming voices. The number of voices played back in the gallery corresponds to the current online listener count, which is visible on the hanging numerical display. Participants in the exhibition are free to sit or lie down on the octagonal structure, and by humming along with the choir into the microphones, low-frequency vibrations are generated, closing the circuit of collective resonance with their bodies. The project comprises this participatory audio installation and a website. The website, asecretchord.com, operates as a one-song radio channel allowing people anywhere to tune into the same perpetually fluctuating choir of humming *Hallelujah* voices and to connect to the universal Cohen magic.

The Poetry Machine (2017), an installation by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, is a vintage Wurlitzer organ surrounded by various old speakers and gramophone horns. When a visitor presses an organ key, they hear Cohen's voice reading a poem from his *Book of Longing*. Each key on the organ contains a different poem from the book. When numerous keys are pressed at once, a cacophony of Cohen's voice surrounds the visitor.

In his cinematic work *Cohen 21* (2017), Kota Ezawa reanimates the opening minutes of the National Film Board of Canada's 1965 documentary film *Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen*. This re-created black-and-white scene portrays Cohen at age 30 on a visit to his hometown of Montreal, where he came "to renew his neurotic affiliations." Ezawa has created a derivative work, painstakingly animated frame by frame and overlaid with semitransparent geometric forms inspired by Hans Richter's 1921 abstract silent film *Rhythm 21*.

Jon Rafman's *Legendary Reality* (2017) is a science-fiction essay film that portrays the recollections of a solitary narrator imprisoned in his own mind. Using a nonlinear structure that weaves together dreams and memory, Rafman creates a stream-of-consciousness meditation on art, identity, and time that draws on the work of Cohen. The film, shown in a 21-seat sculptural theater installation, intercuts digitally processed found photos and 3D landscapes sourced from video games to tell the enigmatic voyage of one man's soul.

Ear on a Worm (2017) by Tacita Dean is a film projected high up on a wall. The title plays on the German expression *Ohrwurm* (earworm), which refers to a song or a catchy piece of music that continually repeats in one's head after it is no longer playing. Earworms can be triggered aurally as well as associatively. The film shows a house finch sitting on a wire for three minutes and 28 seconds before flying off.



Taryn Simon's piece, *The New York Times*, Friday, November 11, 2016 (2017), is an encased copy of the paper. Leonard Cohen died on Monday, November 7, 2016, one day before Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States. *The New York Times* published Cohen's obituary on the front page of the newspaper on Friday, November 11, 2016, below an article and photograph describing the first face-to-face meeting between Barack Obama and then-president-elect Trump.

In celebration of Leonard Cohen as a songwriter and recording artist and in recognition of his vast catalogue of music produced over the past half-century, the exhibition will include *Listening to Leonard*, a room where visitors can hear 18 recorded covers of Cohen songs produced, arranged, and performed by international musicians and vocalists. In listening order: Feist, "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye"; Half Moon Run, "Suzanne"; Aurora, "The Partisan"; Douglas Dare, "Dance Me to the End of Love"; Mélanie De Biasio, "There for You"; Brad Barr, "Tower of Song"; Leif Vollebekk, "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye"; Dear Criminals, "Anthem"; Ariane Moffatt with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, "Famous Blue Raincoat"; Moby, "Suzanne"; Julia Holter, "Take This Waltz"; Socalled, "I'm Your Man"; Chilly Gonzales and Jarvis Cocker with Kaiser Quartett, "Paper Thin Hotel"; The National with Sufjan Stevens, Ragnar Kjartansson, and Richard Reed Parry, "Memories"; Basia Bulat, "Dance Me to the End of Love"; Little Screem, "I Can't Forget"; Li'l Andy and Joe Grass, "Democracy"; and Lou Doillon, "Famous Blue Raincoat."

The exhibition takes its title from Cohen's song "Anthem" from the album *The Future* (1992):

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

In this song, Cohen suggests that there is always room for redemption and hope, because that very crack is what lets in the light that allows life to flourish.

Organized by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MAC), the exhibition is curated by John Zeppetelli, Director and Chief Curator at the MAC, and Victor Shiffman, Co-Curator. The New York presentation is coordinated for the Jewish Museum by Kelly Taxter, Barnett and Annalee Newman Curator of Contemporary Art, and Ruth Beesch, Senior Deputy Director, Programs & Strategic Initiatives. The exhibition is designed by New Affiliates LLC (Jaffer Kolb and Ivi Diamantopoulou, with Audrey Haliman). Acoustic consulting by ARUP. Exhibition graphics designed by Topos Graphics.



Following its New York showing, the exhibition will tour to Kunstforeningen GL STRAND and Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, Denmark (October 23, 2019 – March 8, 2020) and the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (September 17, 2020 – January 3, 2021).

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by the MAC that details this unique exhibition by tracing the two years of preparation preceding its opening at the MAC in 2017 and includes texts by artists, curators, Leonard Cohen's biographer Sylvie Simmons, and author Chantal Ringuet. The catalogue is available in the Jewish Museum Cooper Shop for \$39.95.

During the run of *Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything*, the Jewish Museum will open one hour earlier than usual on Saturdays and Sundays, from 10am to 5:45pm. Shop hours will parallel museum hours (except on Saturdays and select Jewish holidays, when the Shop is closed). Advance tickets are available online at thejewishmuseum.org/buy/general-admission. For questions about ticket sales, please email boxoffice@thejm.org or call 866.205.1322.

Support

The presentation of *Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything* at the Jewish Museum is made possible by the Wilf Family Foundations, the Blavatnik Family Foundation, The Goldie and David Blanksteen Foundation, The TD Charitable Foundation, The Jaharis Family Foundation, Inc., Jane and Reuben Leibowitz, Nili Lotan, Rita and Charles Bronfman, Wendy Fisher, Goldman Sonnenfeldt Foundation, Brice and Helen Marden, and Wexler Dermatology PC.

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About the Jewish Museum

Located on New York City's famed Museum Mile, the Jewish Museum is a distinctive hub for art and Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds. Founded in 1904, the Museum was the first institution of its kind in the United States and is one of the oldest Jewish museums in the world. Devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, the Museum offers diverse exhibitions and programs, and maintains a unique collection of nearly 30,000 works of art, ceremonial objects, and media reflecting the global Jewish experience over more than 4,000 years.

Location: 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, New York City
Hours: **During the run of the Leonard Cohen exhibition, Jewish Museum hours will be:** Saturday and Sunday, 10am to 5:45pm; Monday and Tuesday, 11am to 5:45pm; Thursday, 11am to 8pm; Friday, 11am to 4pm.
Admission: \$18.00 for adults, \$12.00 for senior citizens, \$8.00 for students, free for visitors 18 and under and Jewish Museum members. Free on Saturdays and select Jewish holidays.
Information: The public may call 212.423.3200 or visit TheJewishMuseum.org

About the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal makes today's art a vital part of Montréal and Québec life. For more than fifty years, this vibrant museum has brought together local and international artists, their works and an ever-growing public. It is a place of discovery, offering visitors experiences that are continually changing and new, and often unexpected and stirring. The Musée presents temporary exhibitions devoted to outstanding and relevant current artists who provide their own, particular insight into our society, as well as exhibitions of works drawn from the museum's extensive collection. Every form of expression may be featured: digital and sound works, installations, paintings, sculptures, ephemeral pieces, and more. In addition to its wide range of educational activities familiarizing the general public with contemporary art, the Musée also organizes unique artistic performances and festive events. It is a window onto a myriad of avant-garde expressions that increase the exposure and awareness of art throughout the city and beyond. Visit macm.org/en/ for more information.

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