

ON ANIMATING ARTHUR GOSS' HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

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In suggesting to our team that we “animate” the two key photographs in this exhibition, both by renowned Toronto photographer Arthur Goss, a number of considerations were at play I thought. Conceptually, these two photographs reflect in their content the trajectory of our exhibition title, From Streets to Playgrounds.

The 1912 image pictures the corner of Louisa and Elizabeth Streets that would have been situated where Toronto’s “new” City Hall sits today. Children appear almost randomly on the street (and, in fact, in many of his street photographs), raising questions about Goss’ approach. Since he used a cumbersome view camera, exposing one plate at a time, these children would almost certainly have been allowed to remain in the photograph and, in fact, would likely have been told to hold still, given the not particularly fast film speeds available in the early 20th century. The second 1913 image of the demonstration day at the new Elizabeth Street playground is an epic image that offers a sweeping view of hundreds of adults and children, dressed for the most part in their best, playing or watching various organized activities. Interestingly, even in this image, in the midst of the seeming spontaneity captured by the image, there are three young girls clearly aware of being photographed by Goss standing together and looking back at him (and, by extension, back at us from the past).

Both images are fascinating to look at and a sustained examination of each rewards the viewer with a plethora of detail. However, in an exhibition situation viewers often don’t have the time or inclination to contemplate an image for more than a few seconds. The animation of the image was seen as a way of taking the viewer on a “guided tour” of the two key photographs of our exhibition, gliding through and sometimes stopping to examine telling details. The animation, achieved via a process known as “2.5d” or the “parallax effect” creates the illusion of three dimensionality in a two dimensional image. This, along with the addition of the evocative soundscapes created by Nicholas Dywelska produces a slightly uncanny sensation at times and, I believe, can extend a viewer’s interest in the image. In relation to this point, a sizable segment of visitors to the Archives happen to be school groups – a demographic for whom information increasingly comes via screens. A relatively short looping three-minute video based on the original still photograph may be more likely in the end to have more attention paid to it than a similarly-sized but motionless 2D image.

It is also worth considering that Goss’s photographs were not produced as authorial “art” but for the ongoing use of the city, which meant that they could (did and still do) appear in multiple contexts over time. Here in this exhibition, as a “moving image” is just the most recent of those uses.

SOUNDSCAPES – NICHOLAS DYWELSKA



Portrait by Mary Anderson

INSTRUMENTS

Hammond S Series Chord Organ
Upright Bass
Korg MS20
Pine Train Whistle
Pine Bird Whistle
Wine Glass
Jewelry Box

FIELD RECORDINGS

Saint Helen Separate School
St. Lawrence Market
Toronto Island Ferry Terminal
Our Lady of Lourdes Parish
Sunnyside Park