

An exhibition about Carnival at photography festival

By Neil Armstrong

Lovers of photography and enthusiasts of Carnival have until May 30 to view “Play Mas: A Portrait of Carnival,” a solo exhibition by Wayne Salmon at Gallery 1888 in Toronto as part of the 30th CONTACT Photography Festival.

Having heard of the one million-plus people who usually attend Caribana, he decided to attend 27 years ago and has spent 25 of those photographing Carnival, not as spectacle, but as a sustained cultural practice across the diaspora.

Three years after starting this work and talking to people here who shared interesting stories, he decided to visit Trinidad and Tobago.

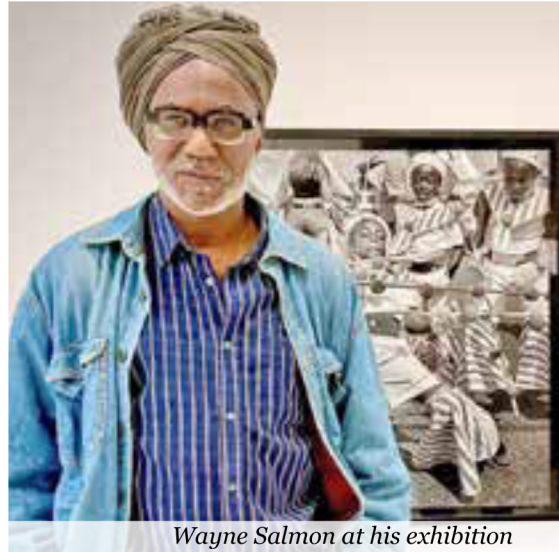
Salmon had read

the book, “Samba,” by Mexican writer Alma Guillermoprieto who spent one year living in Manguiera, a village near Rio de Janeiro, to learn the ritual of samba and to participate in Rio’s carnival parade.

He said Guillermoprieto looked at the things that made carnival possible, but she did not stay for it so the cultural practice was not seen in her book.

“I went to Trinidad about a month before carnival started trying to photograph what leads up to it. And in that time, I began to interview a lot of the older people about carnival and saw from their recollections that this is a very powerful thing.”

Salmon said carnival contains so much of their history and memories



Wayne Salmon at his exhibition

that engaging them sharpened his understanding of how to approach what carnival means to a community.

He said in carnival the body is the text and “the body tells you what is happening and what has happened; what we have survived. Carnival is that space where we’re showing how we’ve handled this pressure across centuries.”

Tracing the relationship between Carnival in Toronto and Trinidad, the work centres those who build, inhabit, and carry the form across generations. Rather than locating Carnival solely within the rupture of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, these images attend to deeper continuities -- presences, gestures, and modes of being

that persist across time and place, notes a description of the exhibition.

It underscores that “Play Mas” holds Carnival as living, lived culture: not only performed, but embodied, remembered, and continually re-formed.

Born in Jamaica, Salmon immigrated to Canada in the early 1980s and works in photography, film and installation.

His interest in photography started at a young age when his mother emigrated from Jamaica and a passport photograph she left behind became a prized keepsake -- it maintained her presence. Salmon’s work is concerned with Black sociality, particularly issues around history, migration, and memory.

He has an MFA in Documentary Media from Toronto Metropolitan University and was the founding editor of “Umoja Urban Culture Magazine,” and a co-founder and curator at Brickhouse Studio & Gallery.

Salmon teaches courses on the history of photography and alternative darkroom printing at Centennial College and Humber College. His writings have appeared in “The Great Black North: Contemporary African Canadian Poetry” and “The Unpublished City, Volume II.”

He is the director of Shut Out, Locked In, and Freedom--films that reflect on Black life in Canada. His photographs have been exhibited in galleries and museums in Canada, China and the US.