

Collective Critiques on the 2019 Images Festival

On the Forum

- There was effort made to increase the number of Forum participants of color, particularly Black participants. It has been mentioned that there were no Black applicants to last year's Forum, and so efforts were made to specifically recruit from this community this year. However, it should be known that our presence here is not for your optics or quota-reaching. We are living breathing humans, who expect our histories and lived experiences to be acknowledged, and our interests in mentorship and development to be respected. Despite efforts to get us here, the Forum programming failed to translate this interest into intention. The Festival featured the works of prominent and innovative Black filmmakers, scholars, writers, activists and elders; we met with one of them. Facilitation of meetings, conversations, meals and other types of exchanges between Black Forum participants and Black festival participants should not fall on the shoulders of participants or other cultural producers who are Festival adjacent; this should be done by Forum leaders and the Festival if their pursuit of Black bodies to fill these spaces is to be considered respectable and non-exploitative.
- Participants who came from out of town had to pay for our own travel to the city. Images promised to organize mentorship, but that did not happen. For example, since this is a film/video-based festival, there should be intentional meetings with people working at film and video based centres in the city. (Charles Street Video, Dames Making Games, Trinity Square Video, CFMDC, VTape, ImagiNative, BAND Gallery, etc.) — the Forum lead should be a local person from Toronto, who can responsibly organize these types of opportunities for us.
- The breadth of critique that we - as precarious BIPOC workers - have prepared here is egregious. We expected to engage with an overall higher caliber of work, instead of educating filmmakers on racial politics. This should be compensated.
- We do not want to meet with white men. We would like to have more sessions with BIPOC filmmakers, curators and organizers.

On Black Filmmaking

- We deeply applaud the beauty and breadth of Black films programmed at this year's festival. At the same time, we want to caution against the very American lens on Blackness present in these films. As a group that is composed of several Black Americans, we push back against Black American cultural imperialism, and acknowledge that our strength and nourishment and that of other Black communities relies on a widening of the aperture on Blackness. Program films by Black Canadians, as well as from other diasporic communities present here in the GTA, Canada and across the globe. Through this suggestion, we strive to make space for the inter and intra-cultural understanding and unity that will be so crucial to our world-making.
- There needs to be more care and intention around how Images opens stories, bodies, and lives of color up to white consumption. We want to see more work going towards creating privileged, protected and/or sacred spaces for representatives of those communities present at the festival through endeavors such as: Q&A facilitation that de-centers whiteness, audience development and community building with local communities + organizations and activists doing work with

these communities, and the creation of dedicated contemplation, meditation and healing spaces, especially when there are films that depict Black death/murder, contemplate the destruction of sacred sites, and so on.

On the Artistic Direction

- The point of the Forum is to engage substantially with the curatorial vision and on-screen programming of the festival, interrogating its politics. We saw that there were two curatorial visions that didn't speak to each other, but rather detracted from each other in unproductive ways. More conversation needed to make on-screen programming more syncretic.
- A number of community members noted that the Artistic Director designed programs that predominantly featured white and East Asian people based in Vancouver, who she had collaborated with and has relationships with. A lot of this work that was programmed was problematic. We expect transparency about programming decisions and we expect to see work by other people working in other contexts on screen.
- We are appalled that we need to speak on the level of representation politics. There were many works by white filmmakers programmed by the Artistic Director about people of colour and the places that they come from which were blatantly racist. We advocate for self-representation by people of colour.
- We want a film festival that programs works that bring together anti-racism, Black futures, gender liberation, indigenous ways of being and knowing, global sovereignty, sexual freedom, and a clear-cut end to corporate environmental violence. Also, there are large immigrant and refugee communities in the GTA — you wouldn't know that by attending this festival.
- Do not program works where the filmmaker does blackface. It is blatantly racist.
- Hold filmmakers to ethical practices. If a film engages in extractive voyeurism, do not program the film. Filmmakers should be substantively engaged with the communities they are making work about. Encourage filmmakers to find ways to pay their subjects/collaborators.
- There were depictions/performances of rape, assault and suicide that were screened without warning.

On Access and Allocation

- There needs to be more thinking and work around accessibility at this Festival. Where is the care for people who are photosensitive, vision-impaired and hearing-impaired? Where is the celebration of body diversity? Lastly, where is seating that considers the body diversity? Both the Aisha John and Lido Pimienta should have accessible seating (chairs!). A lot of people have back pain because of capitalism.
- Transparency about budget resources; why was our travel not covered but money was easily spent on lavish meals and after parties? What is the point of the party? Intentional, meaningful community-building doesn't require these resources.

This document was collectively prepared by the QTBIPOC participants of the 2019 Research Forum. The Images Festival is a longstanding institution with a lot of power and resources, and it is the responsibility of the people guiding that institution to act in alignment with their stated political principles.