

Rebecca Belmore
Turbulent Water

25 March - 19 June 2021

Exhibition
Labels

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Turbulent Water is the first solo Australian exhibition of internationally acclaimed artist Rebecca Belmore. A member of the Lac Seul First Nation (Anishinaabe), Belmore was born in 1960 in Upsala, Canada, and currently lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Turbulent Water brings together several key installations from the artist's multidisciplinary practice that address social and political issues faced by Indigenous communities, as well as connections between bodies, land and language. Works in *Turbulent Water* use the medium of video innovatively, questioning official narratives and highlighting the labouring, struggling or missing body. They draw us in with images that are visually seductive and allegorically resonant.

Water is a central motif in this exhibition, carrying both the symbolic power associated with the cycle of life and death that frames human experience and its material power as a precious natural resource required to care for the land.

In this exhibition, the viewer is positioned as a witness to the universal truths of empathy, hope and transformation.

The artist's body is a constant presence, enabling her to explore boundaries between public and private; power relations in contemporary society; and the effects of colonisation on Indigenous people, especially women. These themes also parallel in many ways the historical and contemporary experiences of Australian Indigenous peoples.

Canada and Australia have many things in common, including a Westminster-based parliamentary system of government and membership of the Commonwealth. They also share a history of colonisation and the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples.

Turbulent Water is co-curated by Wanda Nanibush, Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and Angela Goddard, Griffith University Art Museum Director.

Fountain 2005

Video projection on falling water, 2:23 minutes

Collection: Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Gift of Rebecca Belmore, 2018

First presented at the Canadian Pavilion of the 2005 Venice Biennale, *Fountain* captures a transformative gesture where water turns into blood.

Water, a precious resource in much of the world, is abundant in Canada. Inspired by the many decorative fountains throughout Venice and Vancouver, the artist chose Iona Beach as the Vancouver site for this work. This bleak industrial area is located just outside the city, with a sewerage treatment plant nearby.

Fountain, like many of Rebecca Belmore's installations, uses video sculpturally as just one element of a viewing experience. In this work, the video is projected onto a screen of rushing water. Belmore was thinking about a future time when we might go to war over water.

In her own words:

If you look at current politics, brutality and colonisation continue to go on. So my idea is that between water and blood, we repeat all these acts against one another. It's endless. I question how civilised we are. I question our civility.

The Named and the Unnamed 2007

Video projection, screen, light bulbs, 38:21 minutes

Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance program and the Morris and Helen Belkin Foundation, 2005

In the video installation *The Named and the Unnamed*, Rebecca Belmore makes the invisible visible. This work transforms documentation of the performance *Vigil* into a media installation, where a screen is embedded with lightbulbs. The performance took place on 23 June 2002 at an intersection in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, where women were going missing, many of whom were Indigenous. In February 2002, a serial killer had finally been arrested for murdering women from this area. When you look through the lightbulbs in present time to the candles being lit in the video, you are joined to the audience witnessing the vigil. By screaming out the names of the women, Belmore remembers them while also pointing to all the names we don't know.

There are still thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women whose families are fighting for justice.

Perimeter 2013

Video projection, wall text, 22:24 minutes

Video credit: Darlene Naponse

Soundtrack: Julian Cote

Courtesy of the artist

Perimeter traces physical and conceptual lines through the urban landscape of Sudbury, Ontario. Using florescent flagging tape, Rebecca Belmore surveys Indigenous land and all it has lived through. She wears a surveyor's vest to point to the history of mining in the area.

Belmore has often made interventions at specific sites where colonial power structures operate.

In this video, she walks across imaginary borders between a private nickel mine property, the city, and the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek (Whitefish Lake) First Nation. These spaces are linked by water through lakes, rivers and streams, yet are subject to widely differing cultural and legal relationships.

Apparition 2013

Video projection, paint, 4 minutes

Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, gift of the artist, 2016

Apparition is an artwork that reflects my understanding of the loss of our language. More, it is an illustration of the potential for its disappearance. I do not speak Anishinaabemowin even though I grew up within it and around it. Sadly, I am well aware of the devastating effects of the residential school system, particularly the deliberate role it played in the silencing of our languages. For this reason, *Apparition* is an image of myself, a silent portrait of this loss.

—Rebecca Belmore

Indian Residential Schools were Canadian government-sponsored religious schools that stole First Nations children from their communities for over 150 years. In Australia, churches were also involved in the 'Stolen Generations', where Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families from 1905 to the 1970s.

Creation or Death: We Will Win 1991

December 1991, Castillo de la Real Fuerza, Havana, Cuba

Materials: Red rope, sand

Video duration: 3:15 minutes

Videographer: Domingo Cisneros

Presented at the 4th Bienal de la Habana, curated by Domingo Cisneros

Courtesy of the artist

This performance took place in the 16th century Castillo de la Real Fuerza (Castle of the Royal Force), a star-shaped fort in the Havana harbour, Cuba. The title of this work reveals its intention to have the viewer experience the piece as the struggle of Indigenous people to reclaim their territories and culture.

X 2010

10 June 2010, Price Chopper exterior, 181 Brock St, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

Materials: Black truck, bags of milk, four buckets, water, four cushions in the colours used in Robert Houle's *Mohawk Summer*, four stones, brick wall, black hose, red band leader outfit, black clothes

Video duration: 34:13 minutes

Audio: Charlie Glasspool (trumpet)

Assistant: Daina Warren

Videographers: Nick Ferrio, Jessica Rowland

Editor: Nick Ferrio

Presented at *Mapping Resistances*, an exhibition curated by Wanda Nanibush, part of the Ode'min Giizis Festival

Courtesy of the artist

X responds to the Kanehsatà:ke Resistance of 1990, a 78-day standoff between protesters, Quebec police, and the Canadian Army over a proposed golf course to be built on Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) lands in Oka, Quebec. The artist and assistant perform repetitive actions of marking, erasing, marking, and erasing large X's on the wall of a Price Chopper grocery store in Peterborough, Ontario. At the same time, Curve Lake First Nation peoples hold a ceremony across the street to rebury the 2,000-year-old body of an Indigenous man that was uncovered when the parking lot was created. A ritual of return—a reburial of what was disturbed and removed—is taking place.

Victorious 2008

14 June 2008, Centre for Digital Media, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Materials: Newspaper, honey, photocopy of Queen Victoria, video montage of bees, wood pallet, plastic patio chair, black pails

Video duration: 3:20 minutes

Audio: "God Save the Queen", Thomas Arne (composer), Henry Carey (lyricist)

Assistant: Daina Warren

Videographer: Elisha Burrows

Presented at Hive 2, Magnetic North Theatre Festival, curated by Glenn Alteen

Courtesy of the artist

The Canadian Prime Minister's Statement of Apology on 11 June 2008 was the impetus for this tribute to Indigenous survivors of the Indian Residential School system, which separated over 150,000 children from their families and communities.

Facing the Monumental 2012

1 July 2012, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Materials: 150-year-old red oak tree, kraft paper, wig, water, black and tan clothes

Video duration: 1 hour 1:19 minutes

Audio: Pre-recorded Canada Day 21-gun salute performed in Queen's Park

Assistants: Cherish Blood, Francisco-Fernando Granados, Hilary Wear

Videographer: Alex Williams

Presented at *House of Wayward Spirits*, an exhibition curated by Wanda Nanibush

Courtesy of the artist

This 150-year-old indigenous red oak tree, located in Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, is a living witness to colonisation. In this work, the tree becomes a temporary monument to the Earth, to women, and to life.