

BLOUIN ARTINFO

Canada's Most Celebrated Indigenous Artists Hit Toronto for Series of Events



Betty Daybird by Lori Blondeau

by Sky Goodden, ARTINFO Canada

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Two events taking place across Toronto this week highlight (and interrogate) Indigenous culture through the performing bodies of some of Canada's most celebrated artists. The **Gladstone Hotel** predicted the future of indigenous practice, on April 16, with the popular **This Is Not A Reading Series** and Ryerson Image Centre launching the anticipated **Plug In** publication, "Close Encounters." The event featured the work of Cree performance artist and painter **Kent Monkman**; the storytelling of **Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair**; the films of **Rebecca Belmore**, **Maria Thereza Alves**, and **Tracy Moffat**; a Manifesto performance by **Steve**

Loft; and the curatorial presence of **Lee-Ann Martin**, **Steve Loft**, and **Candice Hopkins**. The book, "Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years," documents contemporary Indigenous art with artists from Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and South America. "Through a myriad of histories, trajectories, tensions, collisions, and self-images, 34 artists imagine the future within the context of present experiences and past histories," editor Sherry Farrell Racett writes.

Another iteration of indigenous and performative themes will be explored through the exhibition, "Sovereign Acts," curated by **Wanda Nanibush** at the **Justina M. Barnicke Gallery**, opening April 18. Featuring Belmore in tandem with celebrated artists, **Lori Blondeau**,

Robert Houle, Terrance Houle, Shelley Niro, Adrian Stimson, and Jeff Thomas, the exhibition promises to contend with the legacy of colonial representations. "The Indigenous performers known as 'Indians' faced the conundrum of maintaining traditional cultural practices by performing them on stage while also having that performance fulfill the desires of a colonial imaginary," Nanibush writes. Many of the listed artists are known for their performed resistance to ascribed indigenous histories, as well as those of sexual and gendered forms of representation. Both "Close Encounters" and "Sovereign Acts" can promise, within their reinscribed histories and portended futures, a certain measure of shock and intrigue.

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