

Rebecca Belmore:
sister, 2010, inkjet
on transparencies,
84 by 144 inches
overall; at the
Justina M.
Barnicke Gallery.



wooden deck bordered by stately pines. Vacant chairs in the background suggest a genealogy: one pair on each side for grandparents, one central pair with table, red fruit or flowers, and trusty/lusty dog for the imagined scene of the parents' communion. The mystery for all of us once was "Where do I come from?" Those who preexisted us know. Silver-whispered, this universal family secret forms the latent content of Attoe's deeply compelling paintings: the haunting enigma of life itself.

—Sue Taylor

TORONTO REBECCA BELMORE

Justina M. Barnicke

A black-haired, denim-clad woman stands with her back to the viewer and arms out to her sides in Rebecca Belmore's *sister* (2010), a single photograph split between three backlit transparencies that was included in this exhibition, titled "KWE," at University of Toronto's Barnicke Gallery. She initially appears empowered, but then doubt creeps in: is she being searched by police? In a booklet accompanying the show, curator Wanda Nanibush notes that the woman is Aboriginal and that the ambiguity of the image is typical of Belmore's works, whose subjects seem forever caught between "self-possession and dispossession."

The 54-year-old Belmore, who represented Canada at the 2005 Venice Biennale, is best known for her interventions at sites where colonial power structures still operate. Co-organized by Toronto's Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival, "KWE" consisted of 12 works—comprising sculpture, photography, performance and video—made between 1991 and 2013. "Kwe" is the Anishinaabe term for "woman" and carries broader connotations. While both Belmore and Nanibush are Anishinaabe-kwe, the title also refers to Aboriginal cosmologies where nature is no less powerful for being feminized. In one of the early works on view, from 1991, Belmore politicized these cosmologies in response to Quebec's Oka Crisis of 1990, in which a Mohawk community clashed with the government over plans to develop sacred land. Titled *Ayum-ee-aarwach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, the work is a 7-foot-long electric megaphone that Belmore brought around the country, installing it outdoors, mainly in First Nations communities. The megaphone provided her and others with an opportunity to communicate their hopes and grievances to the natural landscape, the "mother" of the title.

Belmore draws attention to those whose very existence is criminalized. In *Vigil* (2002), a live performance not represented in the exhibition, she carried out a series of ritualistic actions on the streets of Vancouver's drug-ridden Downtown Eastside, memorializing the mostly Aboriginal sex workers who have gone missing or were murdered. *X* (2010), which appeared in the show through video documentation, also commemorated a disappearance. To the

mournful accompaniment of a trumpet, Belmore used a roller to paint enormous X's with milk on a grocery store's wall in Peterborough, Ontario—a futile pursuit, since an assistant was there to obliterate each one with a hose. X marked the absence of the name belonging to an indigenous person whose 2,000-year-old remains were unearthed during construction of the store's parking lot.

An X also appears in *Perimeter* (2013), a video beautifully shot by filmmaker Darlene Naponse. In Sudbury, Ontario, Belmore was denied access to the local nickel mine. She trespassed on the property anyway, anonymizing herself with a silver-and-red X on the back of the fluorescent yellow jacket she wore (the video never shows her face). In one indelible shot, Belmore holds a long piece of red tape, letting it stream in the wind as she walks alongside an industrial pipe carrying contaminated runoff to a nearby body of water. In this work, the X becomes a multivalent symbol, recalling more than just the high-visibility gear worn by workers who perform largely unnoticed maintenance tasks. It also refers to historical land treaties between European settlers and First Nations groups, whose representatives often signed with an X without being fully told the agreements' terms. Even as it marks a loss, the symbol suggests potential empowerment: nothing less than the right to visibility is at stake.

—Milena Tomic

LONDON

GED QUINN

Stephen Friedman

Ged Quinn's latest pictures at Stephen Friedman Gallery stacked up a kind of bonfire of the painterly vanities. On view were several of the luscious and swarming scenes that have become his hallmark. Sweeping coastal landscapes—bearing a passing resemblance to the pastoral visions of Claude Lorrain—appear littered with odds and ends from the scrapheap of (art) history and cinema, whether Op art riffs or fragments of Pasolini and Godard.

Quinn's work has tended, until now, to harbor a guiding tension. A macrocosmic image (echoing the style of one or another old master) has been countered by the mass of smaller viral interpolations nestling within it. Certain new works uphold this dualism: in two fantastical portraits, stylistic interjections (Cubist facets or a Bacon-style “space frame”) furl around the core subjects without knocking them off-center.

But we also see Quinn dismantling the familiar opposition, as if chucking his own pictures into a pyre of competing references. In three of the largest works, the representational superstructures (landscapes or a seascape thronging with intricate and incongruous motifs) have been assailed by broad stripes of orange or lilac that traverse the canvas as bold redactions.



Quinn's work remains a postmodern “art about art.” In *Tarsus, From a Distance* (2013)—the only large painting not overlaid by abstract bands—a grid of colored tiles is poised weightlessly on the shoreline: akin to Richter's color charts, although strangely faded and spattered. A checkerboard pagoda at the center seems to be morphing as if under a distortive lens.

The title of the painting refers to the Turkish trading hub where Antony and Cleopatra first met. In this muddled stage set, Quinn dramatizes the way in which we view such sites from a remove that is both historical and imaginative. His scene shares something with Freud's concept of Rome as a palimpsest, with all its edifices from different epochs piling up (a metaphor for a mind incapable of forgetting). Perhaps there is a metaphor here for painting as an unforgetting medium, a Babelian throng of voices.

The most innovative works were a series of smaller pieces in which Quinn has turned his back on his usual “less is a bore” credo. They collapse together two discordant pictorial voices: hard-edge lozenges of color (copied from drug packaging but also echoing austere abstraction) are coated in a glaze riddled with the craquelure of a far fustier genre. Modernism has been mothballed.

It could be claimed that Quinn is sounding a death knell (albeit a sumptuous one) for his medium, as has been claimed of other painters who cut their teeth in the 1980s, such as Currin, Condo and Yuskavage. But these compositions are too compellingly deranged and too frenetically ranging to be swan songs, suggesting affectionate satires rather than valedictory elegies.

Their target seems to be not so much the medium itself as its long association with high-flown ideologies. Once-serious styles have been demoted to the status of window dressing in Quinn's art historical caprices. (We

Ged Quinn: *Tarsus, From a Distance*, 2013, oil on linen, 78¾ by 104¾ inches; at Stephen Friedman.