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## ARTIST IN THE SPOTLIGHT: REBECCA BELMORE

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### Who She Is:

**Rebecca Belmore** (born 1960) is an Anishinaabe-Canadian artist based in Winnipeg. Her multi-disciplinary work addresses history, voice and voicelessness, place, and identity through sculpture, installation, photography, video and performance.

For Belmore, subject matter is everything. Most of Belmore's projects have resulted from her response to specific sites and circumstances. Her work often blurs the lines of aesthetics and ethics as she works toward creating art that functions as a poetic political intervention for all anonymous dispossessed people. In particular, she focuses on building critical awareness of injustices done to First Nations people—from the distribution of smallpox-infected blankets to North America's Indigenous peoples in the 18th century, to the colonial legacy of items like the Hudson's Bay Company blanket.

### Interesting Fact:

In 2005, Belmore was the first Aboriginal woman to be Canada's official representative at Venice Biennale. The work she created for the Biennial, *Fountain*, was a video installation that projects a narrative onto a water screen. Her work has also been featured at the Havana Biennial and Biennale of Sydney, among other national and international venues.

### Best Known For:

Most of Belmore's pieces are as large in scale as they are in subject matter.

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([http://io.wp.com/blog2.culturegrab.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/1-ayum-ee-aawach-](http://io.wp.com/blog2.culturegrab.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/1-ayum-ee-aawach-oomama-mowan.jpg)

[oomama-mowan.jpg](#))

Among her best-known works is 1991's *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, a massive megaphone that toured from Parliament Hill to First Nations territories across the country, and was created in response to the Oka crisis.



(<http://i1.wp.com/blog2.culturegrab.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2-the-named-and-the-unnamed.jpg>)

Also well-known is *The Named and the Unnamed* (2002), a multi-part installation that commemorates women missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Hitting closer to home, you may remember from Toronto's first Nuit Blanche in 2006, where she and Osvaldo Yero created the sculpture *freeze* out of a huge block of ice. The work paid homage to Neil Stonechild and other First Nations people who were injured or killed when left out in the rural cold by police.



blanche-  
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Most recently, Belmore was commissioned by the *Canadian Museum of Human Rights* in Winnipeg to create a gigantic “blanket” out of 10,000-plus clay beads that will be shaped in part by members of the public including schoolchildren and elders.

### **Rebecca Belmore at CONTACT:**

While Belmore may have risen to fame with her installation and performance work, her photography is certainly not to be overlooked. Belmore’s photographs function as performances rather than recordings. She actively manipulates the scenes in order to produce provocative, beautiful images that challenge our habits of looking and thinking. At this year’s **CONTACT Photography Festival** (<http://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/>), you can appreciate Belmore’s work at three separate events; a live **performance piece**, and two exhibitions: “**KWE**” and “**X**”



(<http://io.wp.com/blog.culturegrab.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/4-x.jpg>)

**KWE** is the Anishinaabe word for woman and is a term of respect. This Primary Exhibition delves into the complicated and fertile relationship between Indigeneity, art, and colonization.

In **X**, the value of a symbol lies in its capacity to change meanings when relocated to a new context. The “X” on the back of workers’ safety gear becomes an exploration of anonymity. This billboard installation focuses on the everyday struggle involved in making a living creating things with one’s hands, as well as the connection between capitalism and colonization.

Finally, a tree in Queen’s Park near Justina M. Barnicke Gallery will be the site of a new **performance** exploring the complicated relationship between Indigeneity, art, and colonization.


### **WHAT, WHEN, WHERE:**

**Performance:** Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, *May 23, 8:00 pm*

**Primary Exhibition, "KWE":** Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, *May 15–August 9*

**Public Installation, "X":** Billboards at Spadina Ave and Front St W, NE corner, *May 1–31*

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