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## Contact Festival brings photography out in open

A sampling of Contact's public installations: Rebecca Belmore, Dana Claxton, Owen Kydd, Richard Renaldi and Annie MacDonell

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VIEW 5 PHOTOS

REBECCA BELMORE

From Rebecca Belmore's X series, to be seen on billboards at Front and Wellington Sts. throughout May.

By: **Murray Whyte** Visual arts, Published on Fri Apr 25 2014

For the past decade or so, the [Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival](#), that great big warm hug of visual culture that welcomes anyone and everyone in the realm of photographic endeavour, has been taking the inside out.

Its public installation series, which puts works on billboards, bus shelters and a handful of other inventive venues, only makes sense: if you're going to be a populist, public-friendly festival, then getting outside the gallery walls is a no-brainer.

But it works in ways both obvious and not. Photography surrounds us, whether in magazines and newspapers, on iPhones, but particularly along the urban byways where bus shelters and billboards expose us to so many pictures that we get a little numb to it all. Contact's public programs provide a little shakeup to that, restoring colour to the visual white noise, at least for a little while. Following are a handful of what you'll see, and where, over the next month.

**X: Rebecca Belmore**

**Belmore**, an Anishinaabe Indian born in Northern Ontario, is one of this country's best known artists, both here and around the world, and with good reason. Since the '80s, her powerful performance work, laying bare social disparities and lingering colonial traumas, has been disarming audiences with its frank critiques of contemporary power. At Contact, Belmore presents *X*, a series of photos mounted on billboards that torque the anonymity of a working underclass with faceless workers marked, overtly, for safety — the X is from the ubiquitous, reflective vests worn by construction workers — but implicitly as the taken-for-granted caretakers of urbanity's moving parts. *At Front St. W. and Spadina Ave., May 1 to 31*

**Indian Candy: Dana Claxton**

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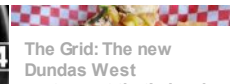
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[Claxton](#), of Lakota descent, has worked in photography for years, using it to hyperbolize and dismantle clichés around First Nations culture to often blackly hilarious effect. Here, she presents images culled from hours of Internet surfing that fit neatly into her practice: off-the-rack Wild West imagery, which Claxton has gleefully violated with electric colour treatments, will appear on billboards across Canada. Putting them up as sales pitches, all candy-coloured and glowing, torques up her critique to the absurd: a sales pitch for Indian culture, manipulated, commodified, used up and thrown away. *On Dundas St. W. at the intersections of Ossington Ave., Rusholme Rd. and Lansdowne Ave., May 1 to 31*

#### Retail Compositions: Owen Kydd

The Vancouver-based [artist](#) calls his near-still video works “durational photographs” and fair enough. So little happens in them that you’re challenged to find the space between moving and still. This is exactly why they’re so beguiling and in Brookfield Place they’ll be put to that test. Kydd’s recreations of rundown storefronts in downtown L.A. will be positioned at kiosks through the busy financial district conduit for hurried bankers to contemplate — or not. How subtle is too subtle for a public installation? We’re about to find out. *At Brookfield Place, 181 Bay St., April 30 to May 30*

#### Touching Strangers: Richard Renaldi

The title of this series makes [Renaldi](#) a literalist. Travelling around America, the New York-based artist searched for pairs of people willing to be photographed in some kind of clinch with the other: holding hands, head resting on a shoulder, a gentle embrace. No problem for parents and kids or couples, but Renaldi sought out complete strangers who were game and the clumsy intimacy that results in most of his pictures is an awkward delight. *In Metro Hall, King St. W. and John St., April 30 to June 1*

#### Pictures Become Objects, Objects Become Events: Annie MacDonell

The name is a mouthful, but here’s the deal: [MacDonell](#), a Toronto artist, will spend May sifting through the photo collection at the Toronto Reference Library, a trove of images and information if there ever was one. Accumulating pictures since 1920, the collection sits at more than a million. So now what? MacDonnell’s idea, and it’s a good one, is that the collection, built and organized by an overwhelmingly female staff of librarians, represents an inadvertent feminist archive, built by circumstance, not intent. MacDonnell’s ad hoc, evolving assemblages will be on display in a vitrine on the fifth floor and a mural on the third floor. I can’t guess what they’ll be, but their implication — of an accidental history that’s still part fiction and recorded in reverse — is dizzyingly alluring. *At Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge St., May 5 to 30*

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