

Art Museum
University of Toronto
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Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
University of Toronto Art Centre

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Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H3
artmuseum.utoronto.ca

Art Museum

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For the first time in its history, the storied Simcoe Hall at the University of Toronto hosts an installation of contemporary photography foregrounding some of today’s most respected Indigenous artists from across Canada

Toronto, Ontario (September 19, 2023)—Under the leadership of the Office of the President, the Art Museum at the University of Toronto is pleased to present *acknowledging the land*, a long-term installation of works from the university’s permanent collection honouring Indigenous continuity, resilience, and self-determination. Presented at Simcoe Hall, the project features works by **Rebecca Belmore, Catherine Blackburn, Lori Blondeau, Dana Claxton, Caroline Monnet, Katherine Takpannie, and Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory with Jamie Griffiths.**

For the first time in its history, the storied Simcoe Hall hosts an installation of contemporary photography foregrounding some of today’s most renowned Indigenous artists from across Canada, spanning several generations. Traditionally, Simcoe Hall displays portraits of leaders who shaped the University of Toronto’s development over nearly two centuries. In a significant gesture acknowledging the importance of making space for Indigenous voices and presence, these portraits have been moved aside to make way for works of art that honour

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Indigenous continuity and resilience in confronting the colonial occupation of the land. These works bear testimony to the past and persistent intentions of colonization, its imprint on the land, reverberations in the body, and impact on contemporary life. Summoning matrilineal lines of solidarity and fortitude, they also attest to indomitable Indigenous resistance and resurgence.

Drawing strength from familial, social, and beyond-human relations, some of the artists create self-portraits that emphasize their inextricable community connections. Dana Claxton's (b. 1959, Hunkpapa Lakota) backlit 'firebox' features the artist adorned with beadwork displaying Indigenous symbols and mementos that connote the artist's network of relationships. Including herself in a group portrait, Caroline Monnet (b. 1985, Anishinaabe/French) brings together three generations of Indigenous artists and community activists centred around renowned Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, wearing futuristic regalia fashioned by Monnet from building materials inlaid with Anishnaabe traditional geometry, suggesting a future of reconfigured power. An equally central motif is the reckoning with the depths of historical and ongoing trauma. Rebecca Belmore (b. 1960, Anishinaabe) photographs her sister wearing a majestic mantle of red roses, alluding to colonial violence surmounted by summoning an enduring and restorative love among community. Catherine Blackburn's (b. 1984, Dene/European) image of a back-turned figure donning a cream, unsmoked deer hide bearing a bruise stitched in iridescent beadwork evokes long-carried wounds and healing

through the restorative potential of ancestral love, strength, and knowledge.

Throughout the exhibition, portraiture elicits a re-imagining of Indigenous self-determination and strength in defying settler oppression. With transformational strategies, Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory (b. 1979, Inuk) draws on *uaajeernej* (Greenlandic mask dance) as a device for decolonizing and finding true expression as an Inuk woman, transgressing imposed boundaries and articulating a call to action. Lori Blondeau's (b. 1964, Cree/Saulteaux/Métis) regal figure atop sacred rocks and glacial boulders enacts a fierce reclamation of agency, invoking stories held by ancestral sites of ceremony, battle, and witnessing to proclaim an irrefutable connection with the land. Upholding Indigenous ways of life, generations of defenders have opposed colonization, advocating and standing in unity for Treaty Rights across territories. Katherine Takpannie's (b. 1989, Inuk) portrait of Inuk/L'nu/Scottish community activist Ma Myriah Peace recognizes her frontline work in support of Mi'kmaq fishers' rights and pays tribute to a determined and dedicated community organizer.

Together, these works harness the power of symbolic redress within the photographic image, offering layered accounts of the land upon which the University of Toronto operates and the vaster territory that continues to be the home and meeting place of Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island. As chroniclers, creators, and interpreters, artists bring to light important stories, disrupt dominant discourse, and reframe the

understanding of history. In these artists' hands, the camera becomes a world-making instrument, linking narratives across time and place, and offering new points of engagement and connection.

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acknowledging the land

Location:

Simcoe Hall
27 King's College Circle, Toronto, ON M5S 1A1

Visiting and Public Programming Information:

The installation is accessible to the public by appointment. Please contact Melody Lu at mel.lu@utoronto.ca to plan group tours or to register for scheduled guided visits.

For more information, please visit
artmuseum.utoronto.ca/programs/

About the Art Museum at the University of Toronto

The Art Museum is one of the largest gallery spaces for contemporary visual art exhibitions and programming in Toronto. The Art Museum organizes and presents an intensive year-round program of exhibitions and events that foster—at a local, regional, and international level—innovative research, interdisciplinary scholarship, and knowledge of art and its

histories befitting Canada's leading university and the country's largest city.

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About the Artists

Rebecca Belmore (b. 1960, Upsala, ON) is a member of the Lac Seul First Nation (Anishinaabe) and an internationally recognized multidisciplinary artist. Rooted in the political and social realities of Indigenous communities, Belmore's works make evocative connections between bodies, land and language. Solo exhibitions include: *Facing the Monumental*, Art Gallery of Ontario (2018); *Rebecca Belmore: Kwe*, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (2014); *The Named and The Unnamed*, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, (2002). In 1991, *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* was created at the Banff Centre for the Arts with a national tour in 1992 and subsequent gatherings took place across the Canada in 1996, 2008, and 2014. In 2017, Belmore participated in documenta 14 with *Biinjiya'iing Onji (From Inside)* in Athens, Greece and Kassel, Germany. In 2005, at the Venice Biennale, she exhibited *Fountain* in the Canadian Pavilion. Other group exhibitions include: *Landmarks2017 / Reperes2017*, Partners in Art (2017); *Land Spirit Power*, National Gallery of Canada (1992); and the IV Bienal de la Habana (1991). Belmore received the Jack and Doris Shadbolt Foundation's VIVA Award (2004), the Hnatyshyn Visual Arts Award (2009), the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2013), and the Gershon Iskowitz Prize

(2016). She received honorary doctorates from OCAD University (2005), Emily Carr University of Art + Design (2018), and NSCAD University (2019).

Lori Blondeau (b. 1964, Regina, SK) is a Cree/Saulteaux/Métis artist from Saskatchewan. Since the 1990s, Blondeau's artistic practice in the fields of performance, photography, and installation, along with her curatorial work and activities as co-founder and Executive Director of the Indigenous art collective TRIBE, has proved decisive to the ever-increasing centrality of Indigenous art and knowledge production in Canada. With her performances as well as her photographic work, Blondeau's practice, both as a solo artist and in collaboration with fellow visual artists including James Luna, Rebecca Belmore, Shelly Niro, and Adrian Stimson, demonstrates a clarity of focus which is remarkable for its precision, humour, and strength. Her photographic and installation work has been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Windsor (Ontario), Kelowna Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton) and Remai Modern (Saskatoon) among numerous others. Her performance pieces have been showcased at Nuit Blanche (Saskatoon and Winnipeg), VIVO (Vancouver), Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto) and the 2007 Venice Biennale. Blondeau has participated in panel discussions and given lectures at the AGO, the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon), the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (Santa Fe) and the 2020 Sydney Biennale. She sat on the Advisory Panel for the Canada Council, Visual Arts program and served as a member of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective. Blondeau was a recipient of the 2021

Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. Since 2018, Blondeau is an Assistant Professor of Indigenous Art at the University of Manitoba School of Art.

Catherine Blackburn (b. 1984, Patuanak SK) is a member of the English River First Nation of Dene and European ancestry. She is a multidisciplinary artist and jeweller, whose common themes address Canada's colonial past, often prompted by personal narratives. Her work merges mixed media and fashion to create dialogue between historical art forms and new interpretations. By utilizing beadwork and other historical adornment techniques, she creates space to explore Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization, and representation. Her work has been exhibited in notable national and international exhibitions and fashion runways including BorderLINE: 2020 Biennial of Contemporary Art, Àbadakone: National Gallery of Canada, Santa Fe Haute Couture Fashion Show, and Art Encounters on the Edge, Bonavista Biennale, Newfoundland. She has received numerous grants and awards for her work, including the Saskatchewan RBC Emerging Artist Award, the Melissa Levin Emerging Artist Award, a publication in Vogue online magazine, as well as her inclusion on the 2019 Sobey Art Award longlist.

Dana Claxton (b. 1959, Yorkton, SK) is a critically acclaimed artist who works with film, video, photography, single/multi-channel video installation, and performance art. Her practice investigates Indigenous beauty, the body, the socio-political, and the spiritual. Her work has been shown at the Museum of

Modern Art (NYC), Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC), Walker Art Centre (Minneapolis, MN), Sundance Film Festival, Salt Lake City (UT), Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis (IN), Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney, AU), Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Bentonville, AR), Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University (Durham, NC), Memphis Brooks Museum of Art (TN) and the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MN). Claxton's work is held in public, private and corporate collections including the National Gallery of Canada, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery, Mackenzie Art Gallery, Audain Museum, Eiteljorg Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Forge Project, Minneapolis Institute of Art, University of Toronto, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art and the Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery. She has received the VIVA Award (2001), Eiteljorg Fellowship (2007), Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Award (2019), YWCA Women of Distinction Award (2019), Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2020), the Scotiabank Photography Award (2020), and Best Experimental film at the IMAGINATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival (2013). *Fringing the Cube*, her solo survey exhibition, was mounted at the Vancouver Art Gallery (2018) and the body of work *Headdress* premiered at the inaugural Toronto Biennial of Art, Toronto ON (2019). Claxton is Professor and Head of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia. She is a member of Wood Mountain Lakota First Nations located in SW Saskatchewan and she resides in Vancouver Canada.

Caroline Monnet (b. 1985, Ottawa) is an Anishinaabe/French multidisciplinary artist based in Montréal, Québec. She studied Sociology and Communication at the University of Ottawa (Canada) and the University of Granada (Spain) before pursuing a career in visual arts and film. Her work has been programmed internationally at the Whitney Biennial (NYC), Toronto Biennale of Art, KØS museum (Copenhagen), Museum of Contemporary Art (Montréal), the National Art Gallery (Ottawa). Solo exhibitions include Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Arsenal Contemporary (NYC) and Centre d'art international de Vassivière (France). Her films have been programmed at film festivals such as TIFF, Sundance, Aesthetica (UK), Palm Springs and Cannes. In 2016, she was selected for the Cinéfondation residency in Paris. Her work is included in numerous collections in North America as well as the permanent UNESCO collection in Paris. Monnet is recipient of the 2020 Pierre-Ayot award, the 2020 Sobey Art Award, the Merata Mita Fellowship, and the REVEAL Indigenous Art Awards. She is represented by Blouin-Division Gallery, Montreal.

Katherine Takpannie (b. 1989, Montréal) is an urban Inuk born in Montréal, whose family is originally from Nunavut and continues to hold strong ties to its land and community. Takpannie is an alumni of Nunavut Sivuniksavut program in Ottawa, which focuses on the Nunavut Agreement and its implementation, Political Science, Research, Inuit-Government Relations, Contemporary Issues, Inuit history, and Inuktitut. As an emerging photographer, Takpannie honours the Inuit

worldview through her lens; asserting a vision that is strongly grounded in social accountability and unity. To her, photography is the best medium to reclaim her identity and explore her experiences as an urban Inuk. Takpannie's photographs have been exhibited nationally and are published in several art magazines. She has recently exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada, Biennale d'art contemporain autochtone (BACA), City of Ottawa Art Collection, Art Gallery of Guelph, PAMA Peel Art Gallery + Museum, and the Olga Korper Gallery. Her photographs are featured in Inuit Art Quarterly, Canadian Geographic, and Canadian Wildlife Magazine. In 2020, she received the New Generation Photography Award from the National Gallery of Canada. She is represented by Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto.

Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory (b. 1979, Iqaluit) is a Kalaaleq (Greenlandic Inuk) performance artist, poet, actor, curator, storyteller, and writer. She is known for performing *uaajeerneq*, a Greenlandic mask dance that she infuses with a feminist and decolonizing expression. Based in Iqaluit, Nunavut, she performs internationally, collaborates with other artists, and advocates for Inuit artists. In 2017, Williamson Bathory was the recipient of the inaugural Kenojuak Ashevak Memorial Prize, and in 2021 she was awarded the prestigious Sobey Art Award. Williamson Bathory's work has been featured in many exhibitions across Canada, and was recently included in programming associated with the 2022 Venice Biennale. *Naak silavit qeqqa?*, a two-sided video installation produced in collaboration with Jamie Griffiths, was featured in a permanent

collection exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2022-23. Williamson Bathory's long-time collaborator, **Jamie Griffiths**, is a digital artist, performer and filmmaker hailing from South London, England. She immigrated to Vancouver, BC in 1989, where her performance and photographic work focused on outsider cultures and LGBTQIA communities in the 1980's and 90's. In later years, she began using experimental digital technology, live performance, and film to explore issues of colonialism, cultural conflict, and displacement through a critical and autobiographical lens. Since 2015, she has been based in Iqaluit, Nunavut, where she often collaborates with Williamson Bathory. She is a co-founding member of the Ikumagialiit Performance Art Band with Williamson Bathory, Cris Derksen, and Christine Tootoo. Williamson Bathory and Griffiths are represented by Marion Scott Gallery, Vancouver.

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Our Supporters

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