

TOURING *Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental*

FEBRUARY 21, 2020 – MAY 31, 2020

This touring packet emphasizes experiential inquiry-based learning by asking questions to help visitors first connect personally to the work which then leads to deeper thinking about the exhibition.

Blue text can be spoken. **Blue** text are questions & quotes.

**There is material in this exhibition that could lead visitors to make biased or stereotypical interpretations of the work. Remember to use conditional language to help visitors understand their own perspectives and biases. If controversial or hurtful interpretations arise, here are some optional tools:

- “From your personal perspective, you are assuming...”
- “You are making an assumption based on your own understanding about...”

WITH VISITORS

DIRECT: In this exhibition, Rebecca Belmore presents images that “**speak to the urgent issues of our time**” (reference intro text on the wall).

ASK: **What is something you consider to be an urgent issue of our time? Why do you consider that an urgent issue?** (pair share)

INFORM: At times, we discuss “**urgent issues**” as something distant that we don’t have to face every day. Other times, we constantly navigate these issues. Belmore’s works addressing current social issues are grounded in specific stories, specific people, and historical and modern events that convey concerns central to the lives of Indigenous peoples. Some of these issues are:

- Climate change
- Water access
- Land use
- Homelessness
- Human displacement
- Migration
- Violence

Belmore presents these issues through bodies (people, symbols, structures, etc.), land, and language (written, spoken, and unspoken). All of these elements can be, have been, and continue to be taken from Indigenous peoples. While Belmore does address these urgent issues in various ways, she also “**believes in the ability of art to have its own language and its own way of leading us to somewhere new**” (Wanda Nanibush, Art Gallery of Ontario Curator of Indigenous Art). Belmore strives to allow visitors to make their own connections to the work to contextualize these issues from a variety of perspectives.

DIRECT: Walk around this space (Steiner) and explore the way in which Belmore presents bodies, land, and language to address urgent issues that Indigenous peoples face.

- Give visitors time to view the video, the photographs, and the wall texts in the entry and west hallway.

ASK: **How does Belmore present bodies, land, and or language in this first space?**

- Ex of bodies: Because we can't see the faces of many of the figures, their identity becomes somewhat ambiguous, or open to multiple interpretations.
- Ex of bodies: In "Sister", the woman who has her arms outstretched makes us question her positionality; is she in a position of power, vulnerability, passivity, etc.?
- Ex of land: In "artist (no. 2)", the figure is standing in front of a huge, unidentifiable structure, which adds to the ambiguity of what "facing the monumental" means.
- Ex of language: The poem on the wall uses language that speaks to the violence enacted towards the unnamed Indian Woman.

INFORM: In this first space, we could see various ways in which figures are ambiguous, often leaving them without a face or a name, reflecting a loss of identity. Belmore further presents this ambiguity in response to urgent issues and personal stories in this next space.

DIRECT: Walk through the north El Pomar gallery and build upon some of these ideas of identity paired with bodies, land, and language.

ASK: How does Belmore build upon and/or change your perspective of bodies, land, and language in this space?

- Ex of bodies: There is a similar presentation of ambiguity within the figures because their faces are still obstructed.
- Ex of bodies: There is representation of intersectionality in identity with the figure on the floor. The unification of "Artist" and "Indian" on the sweatshirt reflects that identity entails many aspects of an individual.
- Ex of land: Belmore uses natural materials such as wood; this could reflect the deep connection of those lost to the land.
- Ex of language: The names on the wall paired with the video give back the identities of the murdered and missing Indigenous women.

INFORM: In these spaces, Belmore addresses urgent issues in a multitude of ways, including ones that have persisted through time and others that are more newly arisen, often as a result of historical injustice. As an artist, she considers it her responsibility to "**carry the past and look towards the future**" (Rebecca Belmore from Candianart).

DIRECT: Look in both the middle and south El Pomar galleries and notice the ways in which Belmore uses both historical and modern presentations of injustice.

ASK: How does Belmore present both historical issues in connection to modern issues?

- Use some of the following words to support visitors of various possibilities within these spaces (definitions cited from various sources – use hyperlink to access). These definitions provide a framework for these terms, but are not exclusive definitions:
 - Fragility: the quality of being easily damaged or broken
 - Erasure: The under-representation of members of a particular social group within a medium, genre, or text (or in particular social roles or contexts within these)
 - Ambiguity: capable of being understood in two or more possible senses or ways
 - Censorship: to remove parts of something, such as a book, movie, or letter, that you do not want someone to see or hear
 - Intersectionality: the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups

DIRECT: Returning to a quote we began with today, Wanda Nanibush states: “[Belmore] believes in the ability of art to have its own language and its own way of leading us somewhere new.” Returning to our idea of urgent issues presented through bodies, land, and language, find a work in this exhibition that you would like to engage with more deeply and think about how this piece leads you “somewhere new.” Spend time with this piece and consider some of the topics we addressed throughout this tour.

ASK:

- **What urgent issue(s) is Belmore addressing in this piece?**
- **How does she use bodies, land, and/or language to present the issue(s)?**

INFORM: This is a process you can engage in with any of the pieces in this exhibition and throughout the museum. Take as much time as you need in this space exploring these ideas more deeply. If you are interested in further exploration, numerous scholars have provided a variety of interpretations of Belmore’s work. We hope you research these on your own and then return to the works with other perspectives.

QUOTED

“The world will be a different place in twenty years, and we have no idea what that looks like. I think that’s why we have conversations, that’s why we have to listen, that’s why we make art.” - Rebecca Belmore

“The world of an artist is a worker, art-making is a job...I am the artist among my people. Every society has its artists, and we have the responsibility to speak about how we are collectively in this moment in time. We have the responsibility to carry the past and look towards the future.” - Rebecca Belmore

“They are not history lessons, but rather experiences and provocatives.” - Wanda Nanibush

“...our people have experienced injustice since the beginning of colonization, at the hands of the state, courts, and police.” - Wanda Nanibush

“She believes in the ability of art to have its own language and its own way of leading us somewhere new.” - Wanda Nanibush

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental

February 21, 2020 - May 31, 2020

This major solo exhibition of Rebecca Belmore shows that she is one of the most important contemporary artists working along the border of art and politics. One of Canada’s most celebrated contemporary artists, Belmore creates artworks that respond to the pressing concerns of our time with beauty, sensitivity and resilience. The exhibition is the largest survey of Belmore’s work ever presented, featuring photography, sculpture and media installations from the past three decades.

“Belmore’s powerful works reveal a compelling duality: her lyrical representations of human dignity, the beauty of youth, a sleeping subject, the power of water or the quieting effect of snow are all images that exist in contrast to the turmoil of our world. Her art asks us to consider where we are, and what we face in our future,” said Nanibush. “These works, seen in isolation, are beautiful. The facts they address, the questions they ask and the violence they reflect on—that is what is political.”

The exhibition is organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and curated by Wanda Nanibush (Anishinabe), AGO Curator of Indigenous Art. The FAC presentation is organized by Polly Nordstrand (Hopi), Curator of Southwest Art.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

A member of Lac Seul First Nation (Anishinaabe), Rebecca Belmore is an internationally recognized multi-disciplinary artist. Rooted in the political and social realities of Indigenous communities, Belmore’s works make evocative connections among bodies, land and language. Her group exhibitions include: *dOCUMENTA 14* (2017), Athens, Greece, *Echigo-Tsumari Triennial*, Niigata Prefecture, Japan (2015); *Global Feminisms*, Brooklyn Art Museum, New York (2007); *Land, Spirit, Power*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON (1992); and *Creation or Death: We will Win*, Havana Biennial, Cuba (1991). Belmore was a recipient of the Gershon Iskowitz Prize in 2016 for her

outstanding contribution to the visual arts in Canada, Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2013, the Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Award in 2009, and Honorary Doctorates from the Ontario College of Art and Design University in 2005 and Emily Carr University in 2018.

"The world will be a different place in 20 years, and we have no idea what that looks like," said Belmore. "I think that's why we have conversations, that's why we have to listen, that's why we make art."

RELATED EVENTS

Interested visitors should also look out for other exhibitions related to *Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental*:

ARTIST AND CURATOR DIALOGUE WITH ARTIST REBECCA BELMORE AND CURATOR WANDA NANIBUSH

February 21 @ 5:30 pm

This artist and curator dialogue is Free and open to the Public

The Fine Arts Center is proud to present the US debut of *Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental*, a major solo exhibition of works by internationally recognized multi-disciplinary artist Rebecca Belmore. Join us for a conversation with artist Rebecca Belmore and exhibition curator Wanda Nanibush.

A member of Lac Seul First Nation (Anishinaabe), Belmore has given voice in her work to social and political issues for over 30 years, employing a visual language that is both poetic and provocative to contend with subjects such as water and land rights, women's lives and dignity, and state violence against Indigenous people. Belmore was the first Indigenous artist to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale (2005).

EXHIBITION TEXT

Note: Some of Belmore's gallery text is presented in Anishinaabe (denoted in Purple)

Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental

"Niin wiigo, mzinbiigeng dbendizam, wii giig dang, wii naagdowendming miiwaa wii kwedweng." – Rebecca Belmore

Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe kwe, gii-ndaadzi 1960) giimaadnokii gii-bmaanjiina wiikaa gaani aawang mdaaswi-shizhaangswi-nshwaasmidna gaa-nso-bboongag. Maanda zhinoomaagemgag megwaa ezhwebag-k miinwaa temgad maanpii ni-aabjisemgad wgi gaanzmigwan nowanj gegoo ezhinokiid. Naasmigwaabwitming Gchi Gegoo waamndawem gaamaawn doongaadegin aani enmanjhong mzinaatesing – debaategin ezhi-wewiibendaagog nango bmi-yaaywing.

Belmore wdankiiwnan wiindmaagemgadoon kina gidkamig maanaadsemgag miinwaa neniizaankin mya-jiishkaagin maanda aandsemgag aki, nbiish ezhi-dgog, aki e-naabdag, ngoji endaasgog, miinwaa bemi gii-waadizijig miinwaa bi-aandkiijig. Miigaadaan ezhi-miigaading e-naangoondming aki,

ezgaabwimgag kwewag bimaadsiwniwa, zhaazhi gaabi zhizhwebak miinwaa ni aabjsemgag ezhi mji doodwindwaa Anishinaabe.

Belmore ezhi-mshkowi nokiid wiikdendmawnan niizhosenig, ezhnaagtood yaamndawejin bemaadsid waazhi mnaadenmind, gnaawjwang shkiniigwin, nebaad, e-piichiiwimgag nbiish maage ezhi-bzaanendaagzid wa agoon mii-go zhiwe kina ni-naagog shi naadag maanda aki. Miznibiigewin ka-gwejmigna ji- naagdowendmang aanii pii yaaying, miinwaa waani naasgaabitming niigaan.

Translation:

“For me, art is freedom: to speak, to think and to question.” – Rebecca Belmore

Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe, born 1960) began working as a performance artist in the late 1980s. This medium of immediacy and presence continues to influence her diverse practice. Facing the Monumental offers a collection of visceral images—in video, sculpture and photography—that speak to the urgent issues of our time.

Belmore’s works address global conflicts and crises driven by climate change, water access, land use, homelessness, and human displacement and migrations. She contends with our conflicting relationships with land, the state of women’s lives, historical events and continuing violence against Indigenous peoples.

Within Belmore’s powerful works is a compelling duality: her poetic representations of human dignity, the beauty of youth, a sleeping subject, the power of water or the quieting effect of snow are all in contrast to the turmoil of our world. Her art asks us to consider where we are, and what we face in our future.

#BelmoreAGO

Organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario.

“The world will be a different place in twenty years, and we have no idea what that looks like. I think that’s why we have conversations, that’s why we have to listen, that’s why we make art.”
– Rebecca Belmore

Ki nsadwaamdaming

Maanda Gchi-mzinbiige-gamig Ontario, gii-nokiimgad akiing e-aawang Anishinaabe e-zhimaamoosiwaad debendaagozijig miiniwaa gii-aawan Wendat miiniwaa Seneca gewiina gaazhi-maamooziwaad gii-aawan. Maanda bezhig naagan geye emkwaan Wampum Gchipizowin nendimoowin aawan maamowi giizhendamowwaadjin Haudenosanunee e-zhimaamowiziwaad miiniwaa dash Anishinaabe Nswi Ishkoden, bzandamowaad ji maamowi nakazwaad miiniwaa ji-maamowi gnowenjigaadeg kina gegoo eteg gaataaying Gchi-gimiing. Gewii maanda gchi-oodeno (Toronto ezhinikaadeg) pane gii-zhi-gimaakidaajigaade gchi-kwiinwin nji-sa gchi-gimaanaang mompii Canada miiniwaa giw Mississaugas odi New Credit Ntam Anishinaabeg. Toronto pane gii-ni-aawan giimeshtoonmaaged-enji maawnijiding nji sa giw Ntam Anishinaabeg.

Translation:

Land Acknowledgement (for Art Gallery of Ontario)

The Art Gallery of Ontario operates on land that is the territory of the Anishinaabe nation and was also the territory of the Wendat and Seneca nations. The Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant is an agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Anishinaabe Three Fires Confederacy to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Toronto is also governed by a treaty between the federal government of Canada and the Mississaugas of the New Credit (Anishinaabe nation). Toronto has always been a trading centre for First Nations.

State of Grace, 2002

ink-jet on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Tower, 2018

shopping carts and clay

Courtesy of the artist

The Named and Unnamed, 2002

video projection and light bulbs

National Gallery of Canada, purchased 2009

42607

In 2002, Rebecca Belmore performed Vigil at the corner of Cordova Street and Gore Avenue in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. At the time, the disappearances of more than 60 women from this neighbourhood were being investigated. That same year, serial killer Robert Pickton was arrested for murdering some of these missing women.

Marlene Abigosis
Sereena Abotsway
Sharon Abraham
Elaine Allenbach
Angela Arseneault
Sherry Baker
Cindy Beck
Yvonne Boen
Andrea Borhaven
Heather Bottomley
Heather Chinnock
Nancy Clark
Wendy Crawford
Marcella Creison
Dawn Crey
Sarah de Vries

Sheryl Donahue
Tiffany Drew
Elaine Dumba
Sheila Egan
Cara Ellis
Gloria Fedyshyn
Cynthia Feliks
Marnie Frey
Jennifer Furminger
Catherine Gonzalez
Rebecca Guno
Michelle Gurney
Inga Hall
Helen Hallmark
Ruby Hardy
Janet Henry
Tanya Holyk
Sherry Irving
Angela Jardine
Andrea Joesbury
Patricia Johnson
Debra Jones
Catherine Knight
Kerry Koski
Marie Laliberte
Stephanie Lane
Kellie Little
Laura Mah
Jacqueline McDonell
Diana Melnick
Leigh Miner
Jacqueline Murdock
Lillian O'Dare
Georgina Papin
Tania Petersen
Sherry Rail
Dianne Rock
Elsie Sebastian (Jones)
Ingrid Soet
Dorothy Spence
Teresa Triff
Sharon Ward
Kathleen Wattley
Olivia William
Taressa Ann Williams
Mona Wilson
Brenda Wolfe
Frances Young
Julie Young

– Names of the missing women from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Missing Women’s Task Force poster, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1998

From the nearby lake comes a call of a loon.

The single, lonesome wail rises then falls, cutting through the night, travelling far and clear, carried by the water. The call is followed by another and is the opening that gives way to a chorus of call and response.

“I am here.” “Where are you?” “I am here.”

At Pelican Falls, 2017

video, sculpture, text and photographs

Organized and circulated by PLATFORM centre

Photography: John Macfie

Text: Florene Belmore

Videography: Scott Benesiinaabandan

Young boy played by Latrell Whiskeyjack

Black Cloud, 2001

charred wood and nails

Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen’s University, Kingston, purchase, Chancellor Richardson Memorial Fund and Canada Council Acquisition Assistance Fund, 2003

46-005.02

Mixed Blessing, 2011

hair, plaster of paris and hoodie

Musée des beaux arts de Montréal, purchase, Louise LalondeLamarre Memorial Fund

2017.52

1181, 2014

wood and nails

Courtesy of the artist

At the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto, Belmore hammered 1,181 nails into a log as part of a durational performance. The number is the total of murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada, as cited in a 2014 Royal Canadian Mounted Police report.

Quote, Misquote, Fact, 2003

graphite on cotton rag vellum

Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, gift of Rebecca Belmore, 2004

47-005

March 5, 1819, 2008

two-channel video installation, running time: 2:30 mins.

Collection of Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa, purchase, 2016, with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Grants Program

March 5, 1819 emerges from research on Beothuk artist Shanawdithit, and her drawings of the moment when settlers kidnapped her aunt Demasduit. (Demasduit was renamed Mary March after her capture.) Settlers also killed Demasduit's husband, Nonosabasut, while he was trying to protect her. Their still-nursing baby died a few days after Demasduit was taken away.

"You must remember that our hearts and our minds are like paper; we never forget." – Chief Manito-pen-sis, Saulteaux Anishinaabe (Chief Manito-pen-sis said this at the signing of Treaty 3, Lake of the Woods, October 1873, in the presence of treaty commissioner Alexander Morris.)

X mark, 2014

photograph

Courtesy of the artist

"I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from the hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A young people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream."

– Black Elk, Oglala Lakhóta medicine man, 1932

(Black Elk refers to the massacre at Wounded Knee Creek near Pine Ridge Agency on December 29, 1890. The 7th Cavalry of the U.S. Army killed approx. 300 men, women and children— nearly all of the 350 members of the band of Miniconjou Sioux led by Chief Spotted Elk [a.k.a. Big Foot].)

blood on the snow, 2002

fabric dye, cotton, feathers and chair

The Mendel Art Gallery Collection at Remai Modern, purchased with the assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Mendel Art Gallery Foundation, 2004

artist (No. 2), 2014

photograph

Courtesy of the artist

for decades

I have been working

as the artist amongst my people

calling to the past

witnessing the present

standing forward

facing the monumental

– Rebecca Belmore

sister, 2010

colour ink-jet on transparencies and fluorescent light

Courtesy of the artist

Indian Woman

I am a squaw

a heathen

a savage

basically a mammal

I am a female

only in the ability

to breed

and bear papooses

to be carried

quaintly

on a board

or lost

to welfare

I have no feelings

The sinuous planes

of my brown body

carry no hint

of the need
to be caressed
desired
loved
Its only use
to be raped
beaten and bludgeoned
in some
B-grade western
I have no beauty
The lines
cut deep
into my aged face
are not from bitterness
or despair
at seeing my clan destroyed
one by one
they are here
to be painted or photographed
sold
and hung on lawyer's wall
I have no emotions
The husky laughter
a brush of wings
behind eyes
soft and searching
lightly touching others
is not from caring
but from the ravaged
beat of black wings
rattling against the bars
of an insanity
that tells me
something is wrong here.
Someone is lying.
I am an Indian woman
Where I walk
beauty surrounds me
grasses bend and blossom
over valleys and hills
vast and multicoloured
in starquilt glory
I am the keeper
of generations
I caress the lover gently
croon as I wrap the baby
with quietness I talk
to the old ones
and carefully lay to rest
loved ones

I am the strength
of nations
I sing to the whispering
autumn winds
in the snow
I dance
slowly
filling my body
with powder
feeling it
knowing it
I am the giver of life
to whole tribes
I carry the seeds
carefully through dangerous
wastelands
give them life
scattered
among cold and towering
concrete
watch them grow
battered and crippled
under all the lies
I teach them the songs
I help them to hear
I give them truth
I am a sacred trust
I am Indian woman.

—Jeannette Armstrong

Jeannette Armstrong (Sylx, b.1948) is a writer and author. Rebecca Belmore selected Armstrong's poem Indian Woman to complement her work sister (2010).

Fringe, 2008

inkjet print transparency in fluorescent lightbox

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 2011

43408

Wave Sound, 2017

Installed at Banff National Park, Alberta; Pukaskwa National Park, Ontario; Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland

aluminum

Commissioned by Partners in Art for LandMarks2017/Repères2017

Courtesy of the artist

Belmore created these Wave Sound sculptures using the textures of the distinct rocky surfaces found at each work's original site: Lake Minnewanka's shoreline in Banff National Park (Alberta); Lake Superior's ridge at Pukaskwa National Park (Ontario, near Ojibways of the Pic River First Nation); and Green Point's seaside cliffs in Gros Morne National Park (Newfoundland). Wave Sound encouraged people to pause and listen to the sound of the wind and waterways at each location.

To hear original recordings from each site, please visit <https://ago.ca/belmore-wave-sound>