

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Vancouver Art Gallery to present first major survey of work by Canadian artist Rebecca Belmore

VANCOUVER, BC — *Rebecca Belmore: Rising to the Occasion*, on view at the **Vancouver Art Gallery** from **June 7 to October 5, 2008**, will be the first large-scale survey of artwork by the renowned Canadian artist. Comprising 20 works, the exhibition includes key examples of Belmore's practice from the past two decades, including a new sculptural installation specifically created for the exhibition and the North American premiere of the celebrated video installation *Fountain*, first presented at the 2005 Venice Biennale. Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, chief curator/associate director and Kathleen Ritter, assistant curator, the exhibition will be accompanied by the most comprehensive publication on Belmore's work to date.

"Rebecca Belmore is one of the most significant visual artists living and working in Vancouver," said Augaitis. "Her profound work addressing the politics of identity provides a strong and important contemporary voice that is resonating throughout the world."

Rebecca Belmore's art is known for dealing with difficult issues of trauma and violence, and has focused on the effects of colonization on Aboriginal people, specifically women. The exhibition draws connections between early performance work and later sculptures, photographs and videos, through recurring metaphors that are as provocative as they are poignant. The full breadth of her multi-disciplinary approach is presented, revealing a continued exploration of the politics of identity and representation through powerful images of the body, as well as performances that address history and memory.

The earliest work in the exhibition, *Rising to the Occasion*, is a dress created by Belmore for a performance staged in response to an official visit by the Duke and Duchess of York to Thunder Bay, Ontario in 1987. The dress, worn by the artist to greet the officials, brilliantly combines clichés from British and Aboriginal cultures. The fine Victorian outfit fabricated with embroidered velvet and satin is affixed with a buckskin fringe, beadwork and two porcelain saucers, while the bustle, resembling a beaver hut made of sticks, is embedded with trinkets and trade objects. Belmore's nimble use of the trappings from both Aboriginal and European cultures challenges the stereotypes of both, a tactic used throughout her work.

In 2001, Belmore created *Wild* for an exhibition of artists' interventions in the Grange, the Art Gallery of Ontario's first location, which has been restored as a colonial family home from the 1830s. After preparing dramatic coverings made of black hair and beaver pelts for the canopied bed in the master bedroom, Belmore arrived at several unannounced occasions to sleep in the bed—an unexpected and unwelcome guest in this historical context, in the most intimate room of the house. For the Vancouver Art Gallery installation of the work, Belmore will recreate the ornate bed she slept in, again evoking the presence of Aboriginal people who were the earliest inhabitants of the area where the Vancouver Art Gallery now stands.



Rebecca Belmore, *Rising to the Occasion*, 1987-1991, mixed materials, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift from the Junior Volunteer Committee, 1995

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Fountain, first exhibited to great acclaim at the 51st Venice Biennale, is comprised of a video projected directly onto a curtain of water. In the video, the camera pans across an industrial beach to a pile of logs which erupt into flames. Belmore struggles against the waves of a choppy ocean to come ashore carrying a heavy bucket. As she makes her way across the beach she heaves the bucket of water toward the camera and it transforms into blood, drenching the entire field of view in red. While the title *Fountain* sets the installation within a historic tradition of commemorative monuments, the work is ever-changing—a looping narrative of the body, water and blood projected onto an unstable and ephemeral surface.

Storm, Belmore's newest sculptural installation, was produced for the exhibition and emerged from an outdoor performance titled *Making Always War*, which took place at the University of British Columbia on March 13, 2008. Using nails, Belmore methodically hammered six military uniforms into a salvaged piece of timber. After completely covering it in camouflage, the timber was raised as a gesture alluding to military monuments as well as totem poles. The new sculptural work refers to the original performance, but also stands on its own as a reference to war, nature and our implication in both.

Rebecca Belmore was born in Upsala, Ontario, and is of Anishinabe descent. The artist has produced performances and installations nationally and internationally since 1987, including the solo touring exhibitions *The Named and the Unnamed* in 2002 and *33 Pieces* in 2001. She was Canada's official representative at the Venice Biennale in 2005, participated in the Sydney Biennial in 2006 and the Havana Biennial in 1991. Her installations have been included in numerous group exhibitions, including *Site Santa Fe*, Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1995, *Liaisons*, Power Plant, Toronto and *Houseguests*, Art Gallery of Ontario in 2001. In 2004, Belmore received the VIVA Award from the Jack and Doris Shadbolt Foundation.

Related Events

Curator's Tour

Saturday, June 7, 1pm, in the Gallery

Daina Augaitis, chief curator/associate director, leads a special exhibition tour. Free with Gallery admission.

Artist in Conversation

Tuesday, June 17, 7pm, in the Gallery

Rebecca Belmore and assistant curator Kathleen Ritter discuss the works in the exhibition. Free with Gallery admission.