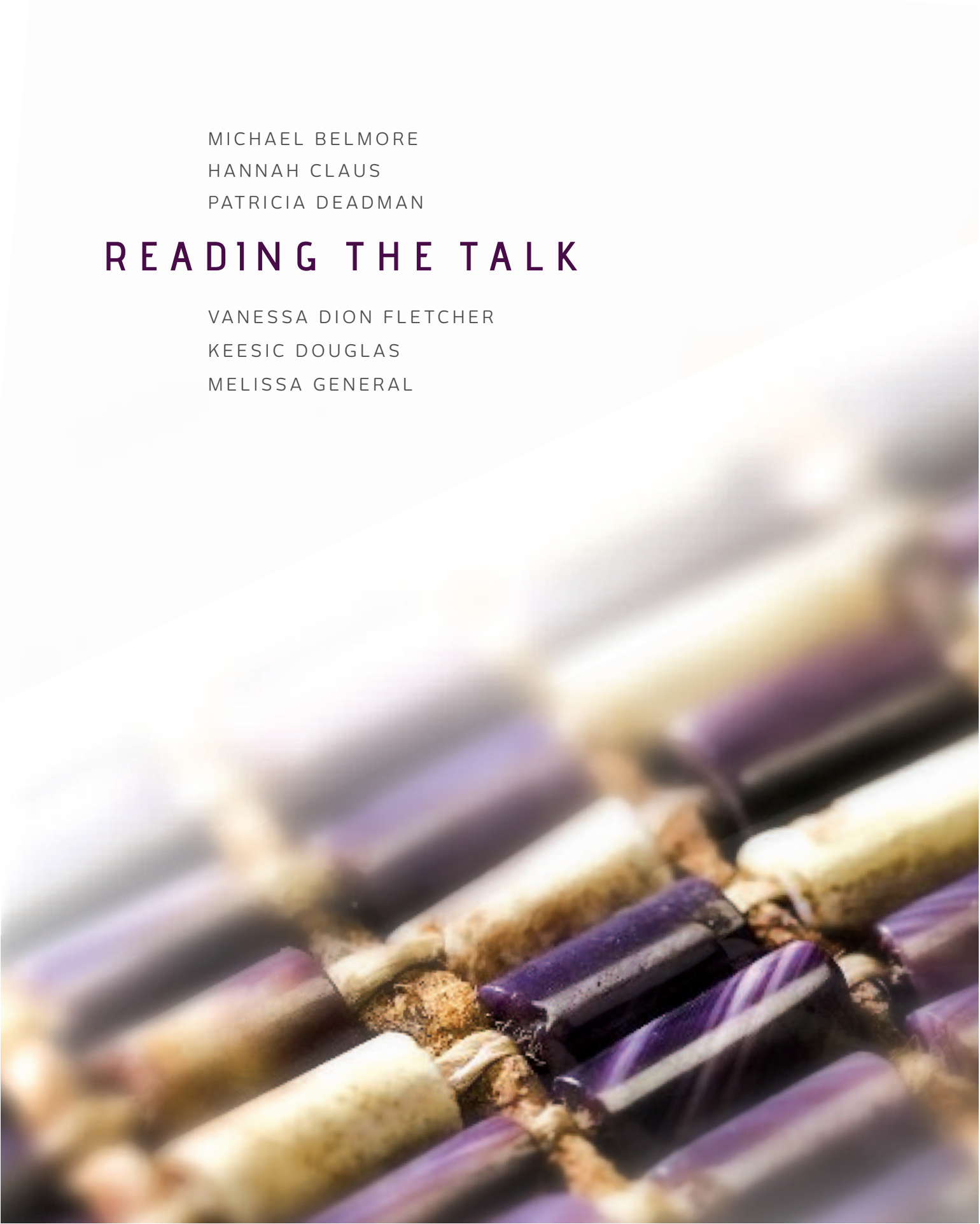


MICHAEL BELMORE
HANNAH CLAUS
PATRICIA DEADMAN

READING THE TALK

VANESSA DION FLETCHER
KEESIC DOUGLAS
MELISSA GENERAL



READING THE TALK

MICHAEL BELMORE
HANNAH CLAUS
PATRICIA DEADMAN
VANESSA DION FLETCHER
KEESIC DOUGLAS
MELISSA GENERAL

CURATED BY
RACHELLE DICKENSON + LISA MYERS

READING THE TALK

THE ROBERT McLAUGHLIN GALLERY, OSHAWA
MUSEUM LONDON, LONDON
ART GALLERY OF PETERBOROUGH, PETERBOROUGH
MACLAREN ART CENTRE, BARRIE

READING THE TALK:
MICHAEL BELMORE, HANNAH CLAUS, PATRICIA DEADMAN,
VANESSA DION FLETCHER, KEESIC DOUGLAS, MELISSA GENERAL
© 2014

THE ROBERT McLAUGHLIN GALLERY
72 Queen Street, Civic Centre
Oshawa, ON L1H 3Z3
www.rmg.on.ca

MUSEUM LONDON
421 Ridout Street North
London, ON N6A 5H4
www.museumlondon.ca

ART GALLERY OF PETERBOROUGH
250 Crescent Street
Peterborough, ON K9J 2G1
www.agp.on.ca

MacLAREN ART CENTRE
37 Mulcaster Street
Barrie, ON L4M 3M2
www.maclarenart.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Rob Gray, DesignWorks Studio, Toronto
PRINTING: Laser Reproduction, Toronto
PHOTOGRAPHY: All photography by the artists, except pp. 9,10,15 by Lisa Myers,
pp.14, 50-55 by Keesic Douglas, pp. 17, 42 - 43 by John Tamblyn

Catalogue of exhibitions held at:
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 20 September, 2014 – 4 January, 2015
Museum London, 9 May – 30 August, 2015
Art Gallery of Peterborough, 11 September – 1 November, 2015
MacLaren Art Centre, 28 November, 2015 – 6 March, 2016

CURATORS: Rachelle Dickenson and Lisa Myers

DISTRIBUTED BY: ABC: Art Books Canada
327 Ste. Catherine West, Suite 229
Montréal, Québec H3B 1A2
www.abcartbookscanada.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Reading the Talk : Michael Belmore, Hannah Claus, Patricia Deadman,
Keesic Douglas, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Melissa General / Rachelle Dickenson,
Lisa Myers, Lee-Ann Martin.

Co-published by: Museum London, Art Gallery of Peterborough, MacLaren Art Centre.
Catalogue of an exhibition of multi-media work by Indigenous Canadian artists held
at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery from September 20, 2014 - January 4, 2015.

ISBN 978-1-926589-84-8 (pbk.)

1. Native art--Canada--Exhibitions. 2. Art, Canadian--21st
century--Exhibitions. I. Martin, Lee-Ann, writer of added commentary
II. Myers, Lisa, 1969-, writer of added commentary III. Dickenson, Rachelle,
1976-, writer of added commentary IV. Art Gallery of Peterborough, issuing
body V. Robert McLaughlin Gallery, issuing body, host institution
VI. MacLaren Art Centre, issuing body VII. Museum London (London, Ont.),
Issuing body

N6549.5.A54R42 2014 704.03'97071074 C2014-904971-4



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
GABRIELLE PEACOCK, BRIAN MEEHAN CELESTE SCOPELITES, CAROLYN BELL FARRELL	

CURATORS’ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
LISA MYERS & RACHELLE DICKENSON	

INTRODUCTION	11
LEE-ANN MARTIN	

LAND USE	15
LISA MYERS	

ARTIST WORKS	25
--------------	----

ALL OUR RELATIONS SOVEREIGNTY AND THE TALK	64
RACHELLE DICKENSON	

LIST OF WORKS	73
---------------	----

BIOGRAPHIES	74
-------------	----



INTRODUCTION+ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GABRIELLE PEACOCK, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, THE ROBERT MCLAUGHLIN GALLERY
BRIAN MEEHAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MUSEUM LONDON
CELESTE SCOPELITES, DIRECTOR, ART GALLERY OF PETERBOROUGH
CAROLYN BELL FARRELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MACLAREN ART CENTRE

We are pleased to present *Reading the Talk*, an exhibition that has allowed us to engage two talented emerging Indigenous curators, Rachelle Dickenson and Lisa Myers, who have worked together over the past two years to organize an exhibition of the work of six contemporary artists. Through the art of Michael Belmore, Hannah Claus, Patricia Deadman, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Keesic Douglas and Melissa General, Dickenson and Myers have explored and reflected on the historic concept of the wampum and the *Dish with One Spoon Treaty* as a means to investigate the relationship between Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee Nations. They have done this with intelligence, sensitivity and humour, which are evident in their relationship with the artists they have chosen for the exhibition, as well as their erudite essays in this publication. We thank both of them, along with the artists, for bringing contemporary explorations to important aspects of Indigenous history.

Independent curator Lee-Ann Martin has acted as mentor to the curators during this project and we are grateful to her for the guidance that she has provided. At The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Senior Curator Linda Jansma

was instrumental in organizing the exhibition and its tour. Jaime Kobel has provided an educational program outline to accompany the exhibition and its tour, allowing for greater youth engagement, and we thank her for her contribution, as well as Rob Gray who designed this publication with sensitivity to both the words and work.

This exhibition and publication have been made possible with the assistance of an Ontario Arts Council Aboriginal Curatorial Projects grant, a program that recognized the “artistic merit, impact and viability” of *Reading the Talk*. This grant allows public institutions to expand their programming while assisting the development of Aboriginal curators and exhibition infrastructure in Ontario and we are grateful to them for their support.

The grant also encourages a connection between galleries and their audiences and, to that end, this collaboration between our four institutions is particularly satisfying. We are grateful to the various agencies that support our respective efforts, including the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and the cities of Oshawa, London, Peterborough and Barrie.



CURATORS' ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rachelle Dickenson and Lisa Myers would like to extend a heartfelt Chi Miigwech, Nia:weh, and Thank You to the many people whose support, contribution and sharing of their knowledge and expertise extends beyond this exhibition. We are thankful for the conversations with Bonnie Devine and Jan Longboat that inspired this exhibition.

It has been a humbling and enriching experience to work with and learn from artists Michael Belmore, Hannah Claus, Patricia Deadman, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Keesic Douglas and Melissa General. Nia:weh and chi miigwech for all your work that led to incredibly thought-provoking art.

We would also like to thank the Indigenous Visual Culture Program at OCAD U for hosting the *Wampum Language and Symbol Symposium*, where Bonnie Devine, Alan Corbiere and Rick Hill shared their research and knowledge. Chi Miigwech to Brian Charles for sharing the wampum belts he makes.

Nia:weh to Lee-Ann Martin for being our mentor on this project.

And finally, we'd like to say Thank you and Nia:weh to Laura Pitkanen and Steve Loft and the rest of our families and friends for their love and unwavering support for our work, research and projects.

BRIAN CHARLES
Dish with One Spoon Treaty Belt, 2014 [detail]
recreated belt, clay beads with acrylic coatings



INTRODUCTION

LEE-ANN MARTIN, CURATORIAL MENTOR

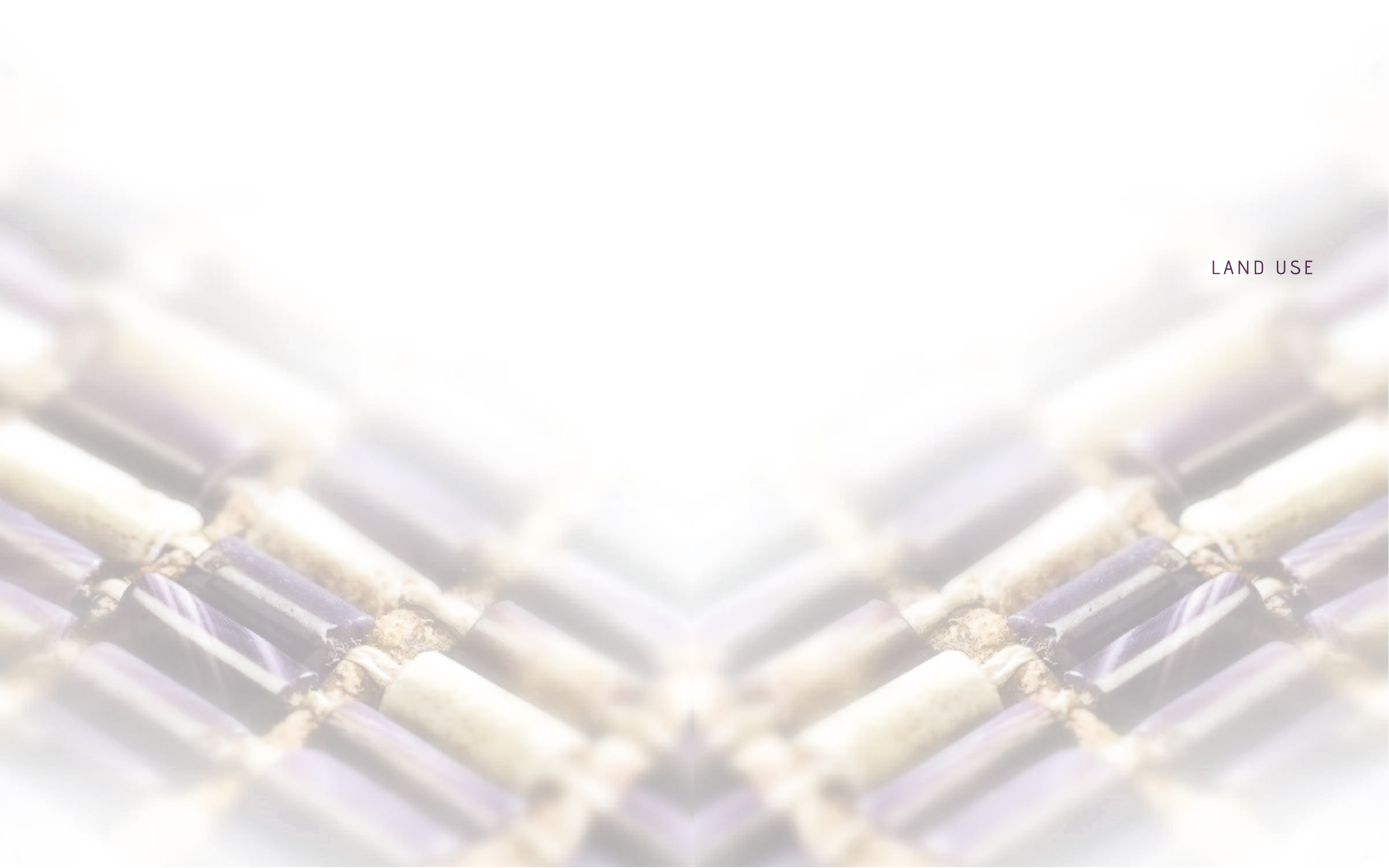
When invited by Rachelle Dickenson and Lisa Myers in 2012 to act as mentor for their curatorial project, my reactions were twofold. First, I was happy to work with two Indigenous women whose integrity and intellectual rigour informs their emerging curatorial practices. Then, my curiosity and imagination were stimulated by their curatorial premise based upon the *Dish with One Spoon* treaty. I hadn't been aware of this important treaty between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg Nations to share the “hunting grounds in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Valley region” throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. While the dish denotes the land and all that the land encompasses, the treaty then outlines sharing the bounty of the land among Nations.

Both the breadth and originality of the curatorial premise reveal contemporary Indigenous perspectives on understandings and treaties among nations, as well as interpersonal relationships of the individuals who inhabit the land. The astute selection of artists and works for this

exhibition underline what Rachelle Dickenson calls the “synergies between medium, symbolism, customary practice and critical theory [that] are key strategies used to assert the principle of interrelationship at the core of Indigenous ontology.”

Each bead of a wampum belt is carved individually and meticulously from quahog and whelk shells. Symbolic language embedded within each belt carries a set of promises for negotiation and understanding among nations, to be read by the wampum keeper. Michael Belmore, Hannah Claus, Patricia Deadman, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Keesic Douglas, and Melissa General create precise works that become the talk of a metaphorical wampum belt to be read and shared with a wide audience.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the curators, the artists and to Linda Jansma and the staff at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery for their commitment to this ongoing dialogue with the community.



LAND USE



LISA MYERS

LAND USE

Since I am just learning about wampum, I will start by writing that a wampum belt is a belt-like object weaved together with two kinds of beads made from quahog and whelk shells, and its materials and iconography create meaning through symbols. As a mnemonic device, leaders ‘read the talk’ embedded in the wampum to establish and renew agreements between nations.¹ The *Dish with One Spoon* treaty was negotiated between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to share the sustenance of the *bowl*, the land north and south of Great Lakes. The wampum connected to this treaty has imagery depicting an octagonal shape that represents the dish and a rectangle inside the dish symbolizing the beaver tail as the sustenance from the land.²

The conceptualization of land as a bowl, compared to the ownership of property, signifies a marked difference in the use and value of lands today. The artworks in this exhibition lead me through contemporary indigenous perspectives on treaty that reveals land use beyond resource extraction and private interest. I am interested in thinking about these artworks in terms of value related to treaty and lands through history and the present.

Tuscarora curator and writer Rick Hill explains that along with the dish treaty there were also three rules to abide by: take only what you need; leave something for others; and keep the dish clean.³ From an indigenous perspective, the philosophy of non-interference and respect in the ‘dish’ resonated through all treaties, including those with the British crown and Canadian state. Indigenous scholar and



writer Leanne Simpson expresses these ideas as “precolonial Nishnaabeg diplomatic relations” in the form of a living treaty renewed every year, which also involved respecting “separate jurisdictions within a shared territory.”⁴ In other words, wampum elucidates how lands will be used and valued, which differs from the value of land as private property.

In June 2014, Anishinaabe historian Alan Corbiere invited artist Vanessa Dion Fletcher to intervene during a brief talk he was presenting for the Law Society of Upper Canada located at Osgoode Hall in Toronto. During this Aboriginal History Month event, Corbiere explained the 1764 Covenant Chain wampum’s (a component of the Royal Proclamation in the Treaty at Niagara) importance as part of the main agreement between the British crown and Indigenous Nations.

Corbiere described the crown’s fiduciary responsibility as part of the Treaty at Niagara negotiated by Sir William Johnson aimed to create alliances with the twenty-four Chiefs from Indigenous nations of the western lakes. In the midst of his talk, Dion Fletcher entered and, between the podium and audience, she placed a large bundle on the floor and began to undo the binding ropes, unfurling a forty-inch wide by twelve-foot long wampum.

In this performance, Dion Fletcher deployed her artwork into the law institution at Osgoode Hall. The title *Relationship or Transaction* (2014) emphasizes opposing understandings of treaty either as building relationships between nations, or as a transaction in power and monetary

PREVIOUS PAGES LEFT & RIGHT:
VANESSA DION FLETCHER
Relationship or Transaction, 2014
Intervention at the Upper Canada Law Society
at Osgoode Hall, Toronto, June 2014

RIGHT:
KEESIC DOUGLAS
Trade Language, 2013 [detail]
Photographs on fibre paper
50 x 60 cm each of 28, 2 x 4.2 metres installed



terms. Professor of law, John Borrows explains this discrepancy as “Britain was attempting to secure territory and jurisdiction through the [Royal] Proclamation, while First Nations were concerned with preserving their lands and sovereignty.”⁵ Understanding this difference, Dion Fletcher reassigns the iconography of the treaty of Niagara wampum and weaves the belt out of a combination of rolled up Canadian five-dollar bills and faintly silk-screened bills of creamy pink on white paper, signifying the quahog and whelk shells customarily used for wampum belts. Dion Fletcher also references the pay out on treaty day, which entitles each member of the treaty to five dollars, a practice still instituted in numbered treaty regions, and a questionable value placed on treaty land. The incomplete diamond shapes cut off at each end and connect when the ends of the belt meet, taking the form of a circle symbolizing an ongoing agreement.⁶

Agreements to share hunting grounds took place within the context of an active fur trade economy, and subsequently hunting and trapping for fur rather than food and competition for the use of land increased. The *Dish with One Spoon* treaty proved a useful way to formally negotiate shared hunting grounds between Indigenous nations.⁷

Keesic Douglas’ photo series *Trade Language* (2013) humorously proposes communication without words, but with subtle gestures. For many Indigenous people in North America, pointing with ones lips is a common practice and joked about. Douglas isolates these gestures in a sequence of black and white portraits presenting the motion of the

head, lift of the chin and an exaggerated extension of the lips. The four poses of each portrait references the photo strips dispensed from photo booths yet Douglas’ images possess a clean commercial look. The photo booth, perhaps an early version of the ubiquitous “selfie” of today, similarly provides a platform for self-representation and self-design.

This work engages with a discourse of nineteenth and early twentieth century portraiture history where photographers such as Edward Curtis and Will Soule sought to document vanishing cultures, but also as argued by scholar Margo Francis, made a platform for Indigenous people to be seen and recognized.⁸ Beyond merely sub-verting these romanticized and objectified images, Douglas’ sitters address and communicate with the viewer. They reveal agency as their lips are pointing at the viewer and directing them either in or out of the picture. Along with this series of photographs, Douglas creates a textless how-to-booklet using a self-portrait to illustrate this lip pointing gesture, relaying communication tools for negotiation without written language.⁹

An account of surveying the land in the 1700s on the north shore of Lake Ontario around Oshawa describes surveyors traversing hundreds of kilometres literally staking the coordinates with a compass and fixed lengths of chain.¹⁰ Surveyed space overlaid across trap lines, and trade routes privileged land that was ‘settled’, sold and assumed for future procurement. This colonial overlay of the land serves as a metaphor for how the value of measuring, dividing, categorizing and cultivating took priority.



ABOVE:
PATRICIA DEADMAN
Giardino dei Semplici, 2013 [detail]
Colour photographs
black and white 33mm negative printed on Fujicolour Crystal Archive Matte,
laminated, dry mount on dibond
37.5 x 58 cm each of 36; 2.3 x 3.5 metres installed

OPPOSITE PAGE:
PATRICIA DEADMAN
Giardino dei Semplici, 2013
[left: Botanical Garden, Florence, Tuscany
right: detail]

BELOW:
MELISSA GENERAL
Satahónhsatat, 2014
[detail, video still]



Patricia Deadman's earlier work involved hiking around Banff National Park to photograph lookouts not marked by the park service. In this act, Deadman aims to document the views she finds worth experiencing. Her *Blanket series* continues this line of inquiry questioning what landscape reflects about society. Deadman's recent photo work *Giardino dei Semplici* (2013) assembled meticulously in a seamless grid of thirty-six photographs, creates an abstract design made from the documentation of the Giardino dei Semplici garden in Florence, Italy. Deadman documents the gardens on black and white film and then hand processes the images in the colour darkroom, methodically planning every detail before working in complete darkness to develop colour prints. She makes these composed designs of rhythmically patterned compositions, saturated and simmering with magenta and lemon yellow, into wall blankets.

Deadman explains that the blanket is a metaphor for displacement, and she views these formal gardens as reflections of social values, wealth, ownership and community.¹¹ Deadman's blankets complicate a composed sense of order as she distorts landscape by reassembling fragments of formal gardens. The iconography on the Ojibwe Friendship belt created by the Haudenosaunee shows a rectangle at either end joined by a white stripe that runs through the middle of the belt. The rectangle or mat signifies a nation, region or territory.¹² Similarly, Deadman's blankets remind me of a place or space she has gathered and created for herself, as valued sustenance.

I listened as Melissa General shared stories with me of her home reserve at Six Nations of the Grand River. Her Uncle Dave then explained that these stories constitute their connection to traditional territory, and as artists, they access and explore these stories in their work. Oratory presents one way of taking up the story of a place but General delves further as she collects the sound, voice and song of the Grand River to signal another form of telling. Incorporating the river also references the as yet unfulfilled Haldimand Proclamation where six miles on either side of the Grand River were allotted and guaranteed to the members of Six Nations by British officials. The value of knowing a place or considering it home suggests an emotive connection to that land even if that area embodies trauma, or an oppressive history.

General places microphones under the surface of the Grand River and uses the resonating sound of rushing water as audio for her video *Satahónhsatat* (2014). The video opens with the artist walking hand in hand with her niece as they enter a lush green Carolinian forest clearing. An aged woodpile sits in the middle of the clearing and provides a surface for General to lay a deer hide. Facing each other, with the woodpile between them, the girl gestures towards a place on the ground, and General responds by digging at the ground until she unearths medicines. She dusts off sweetgrass and sage then places it on the deer hide. General continues to dig as directed by her niece and continues to uncover various meaningful objects, and creates a bundle for the future. Digging up each item calls to mind the deep roots



PREVIOUS PAGE:
HANNAH CLAUS
our minds are one, 2014
[detail]

RIGHT:
MICHAEL BELMORE
Investment, 2012
[detail]

General maintains in her home region and I recognize these deeply personal narratives reflect the value of this place.

Similarly, the concept of land encompasses everything that exists on and around the land, including water. The title of Hannah Claus’ installation *our minds are one* (2014) comes from the Thanksgiving Address. This Haudenosaunee oratory acknowledges being in relationship with land, and gives thanks to all of creation and its interconnectedness. Claus’ hovering ten-foot wide dome made of an arrangement of suspended small printed disks with images of sky, descending to treetops, then birch tree trunks, and down to pictures of pavement and cracks in the sidewalk, suggests the respect required as many small parts together create a strong form.

This four-tiered visual canopy represents a Haudenosaunee worldview reflective in form and concept to the dish or bowl valuing every small part. Threads, akin to threads that weave together beads for wampum or embroidered bead designs, secure the small-suspended disks creating a hollow between the dome and the floor of the gallery for the audience to enter. The installation *our minds are one* immerses the viewer and raises the important point that the idea of land includes human life, along with all that lives, grows, flies and swims in and around the land and water. Claus explains the thread in this work represents relationships or connections between matter, and the energy that connects us all. These threads shift and sway with the movement of air in the gallery space. The value of this interconnectedness stands in contrast to a hierarchy that singles out one particular resource or privileges one life form over another.

Michael Belmore acknowledges that his use of copper connects his artwork both materially and conceptually to the mineral rights that motivated the establishment of Treaty #3 where Belmore comes from in North Western Ontario.¹³ Treaty #3 was established in 1873 after the Royal Proclamation and confederacy. The Canadian state promised

British Columbia a railroad and this treaty was integral to continued infrastructure development.¹⁴ Belmore has a deep understanding of copper and carefully considers its origins and qualities as a material in his artwork.¹⁵

Belmore’s sculpture *Investment* (2012) is made of an arrangement of Haliburton fieldstone carved to fit each adjacent stone’s contours. Spaces between these closely placed forms glow with the refraction of light from copper leaf surfaces. Luminosity emanates like the embers of a fire. Observing the way these rocks fit together has a meditative affect and evokes the idea of investing time while visiting around a fire. The idea of sharing a fire relates to ‘one fire’ being the same as ‘one bowl’ symbolizing lands. The one fire also signifies the one bowl or pot and reinforces the idea that there would be mutual respect in drawing from a single vessel.¹⁶ Dividing one shared pot and fire into multiple individual pots expresses social shifts and the changes in sharing space and sustenance.¹⁷ Metaphorically this shift suggests a change in land use wherein the idealism of sharing the bowl (land) is overshadowed with the reality of unfulfilled treaties and unused wampum, capitalism, neo-liberal and corporate interests.

The conceptualization of land as a bowl compared to the ownership of property signifies a binary between two perceived receptions of land. Although I aimed to avoid such a binary in this essay, I realize that acknowledging this in many ways reflects the negotiations of treaty in the past and present, wherein two sides come together with different and often opposing objectives. Michael Belmore’s newest work, *Bridge* (2014) created for this exhibition offers an appropriately unresolved reflection of this scenario. Using binary code (ASCII) as a way to tell stories, Belmore creates a wampum belt from aluminum and copper beads weaved together with copper wire ‘threads’. As with all treaties, the talk in this wampum is something intended to reconcile or connect two seemingly incompatible things.



NOTES:

¹ Rick Hill explained quahog and whelk oppose each other in their ocean environment. The whelk will defeat the quahog. He also explained that the symbolism of the white shell of the Whelk means peaceful relations and the purplish shell connotes challenging times. From presentation on Saturday, February 8, 2014 at OCAD University during the panel "Wampum: Language and Symbol" as part of the talk series *Conversations About Indigenous Visual Culture* presented by the Indigenous Visual Culture Program.

² Treaties involving the Dish with One Spoon were established and renewed throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries between the "Algonquin" and "Iroquoian" nations. See Victor P. Lytwyn. "A Dish with One Spoon: The Shared Hunting Grounds Agreement in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Valley Region" *Papers of the 28th Algonquin Conference* ed. David H. Pentland, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1998), 210.

³ From presentation by Rick Hill at OCAD University during the panel "Wampum: Language and Symbol" as part of the talk series *Conversations About Indigenous Visual Culture* presented by the Indigenous Visual Culture Program, Saturday, February 8, 2014.

⁴ Leanne Simpson, "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationship. *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2, (Fall 2008): 38.

⁵ John Burrows, "Wampum at Niagara." In *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equality, and Respect for Difference*, ed. Michael Asch (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 161.

⁶ Alan Corbiere, "Their own forms of which they take the most notice: Diplomatic metaphors and symbolism on wampum belts," *Anishinaabe Niiwin: Four Rising Winds*, ed. Alan Ojiig Corbiere, Mary Ann Maokwegijig Corbiere, Deborah McGregor, and Crystal Migwans, (McChigeeng, Ontario: Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, 2014), 60.

⁷ Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 52.

⁸ Margot Francis, "Reading the Autoethnographic perspectives of Indians Shooting Indians" *TOPIA*, no. 7, (Spring 2002), 6.

⁹ Note that pointing with your lips can also be useful for asking your sister to pass the zhiitaagan (salt) at the dinner table.

¹⁰ Grant Karcich, *Scugog Carrying Place – A Frontier Pathway* (Toronto: Dundurn Press 2013), 23.

¹¹ See a passage quoted from Patricia Deadman in Josephine Mills, *Land Matters* (Lethbridge: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2007), 32.

¹² Alan Corbiere, "Their own forms of which they take the most notice: Diplomatic metaphors and symbolism on wampum belts," *Anishinaabe Niiwin: Four Rising Winds*, 51.

¹³ "Michael Belmore—Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation3: Museum of Arts and Design, New York," YouTube video, 3:28, posted by McMichael Canadian Art Collection, MPEG video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HJT1YaM8Bs>

¹⁴ David T. McNab, *Circle of Time: Aboriginal Land Rights and Resistance in Ontario*. (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press: Waterloo, 1999), 78.

¹⁵ In 2012, Michael Belmore consulted for the National Museum of American Indian in the collection of copper tools.

¹⁶ Alan Corbiere explained that one fire also means one pot. Sharing fire is similar to sharing a pot as it also relates to using land. From a presentation on Saturday, February 8, 2014 at OCAD University during the panel "Wampum: Language and Symbol" as part of the talk series *Conversations About Indigenous Visual Culture* presented by the Indigenous Visual Culture program.

¹⁷ Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot*, 52.



ARTISTS' WORKS

Michael Belmore

Investment 2011

Haliburton fieldstone, copper leaf
25 x 110 x 110 cm

Bridge 2014

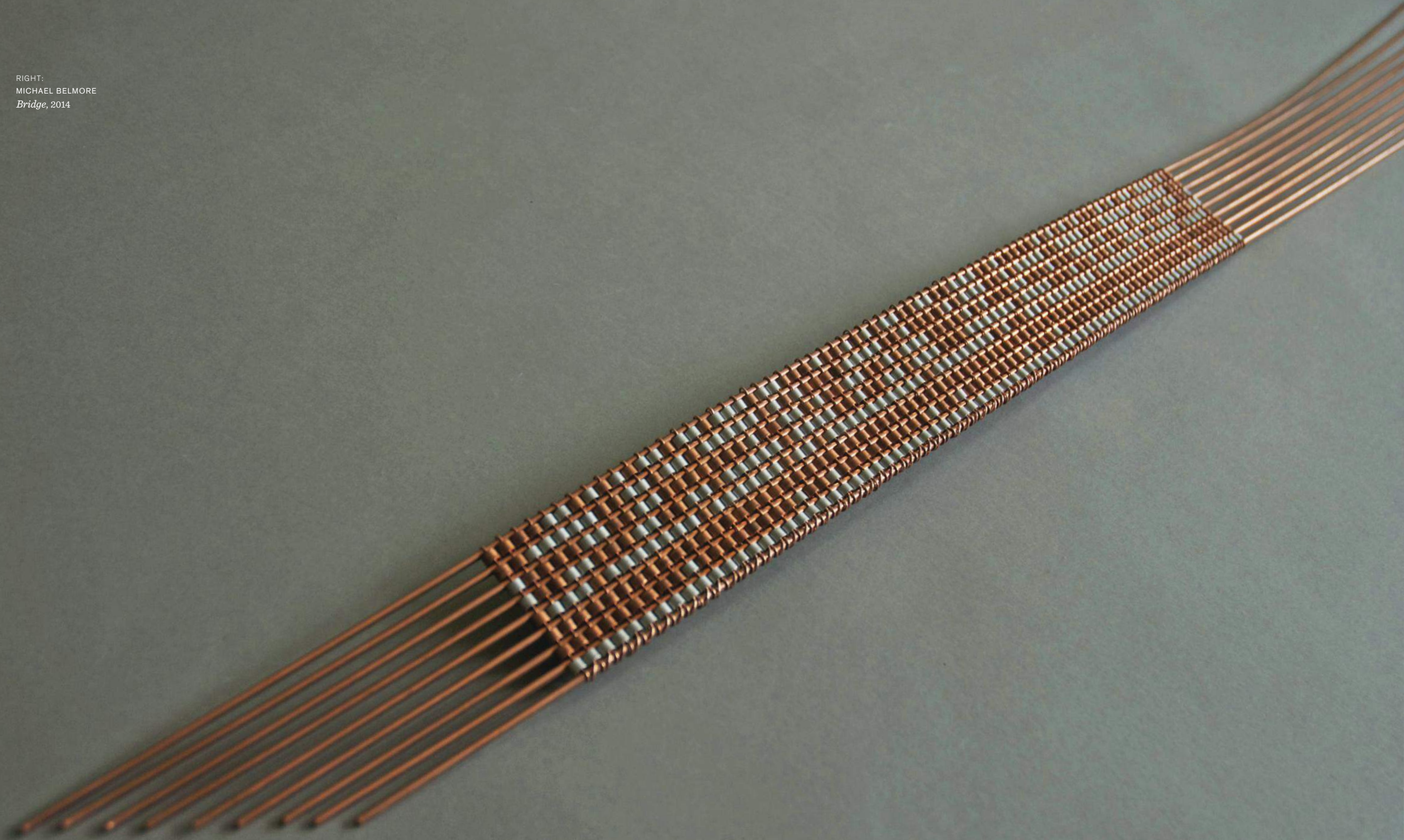
copper, aluminum
22.5 x 22.5 x 140 cm



ABOVE:
MICHAEL BELMORE
Investment, 2011

LEFT:
MICHAEL BELMORE
Investment, 2011 [detail]

RIGHT:
MICHAEL BELMORE
Bridge, 2014



Hannah Claus

our minds are one 2014

vellum, string, aluminum and plexiglas

3.0 x 3.0 metres installed





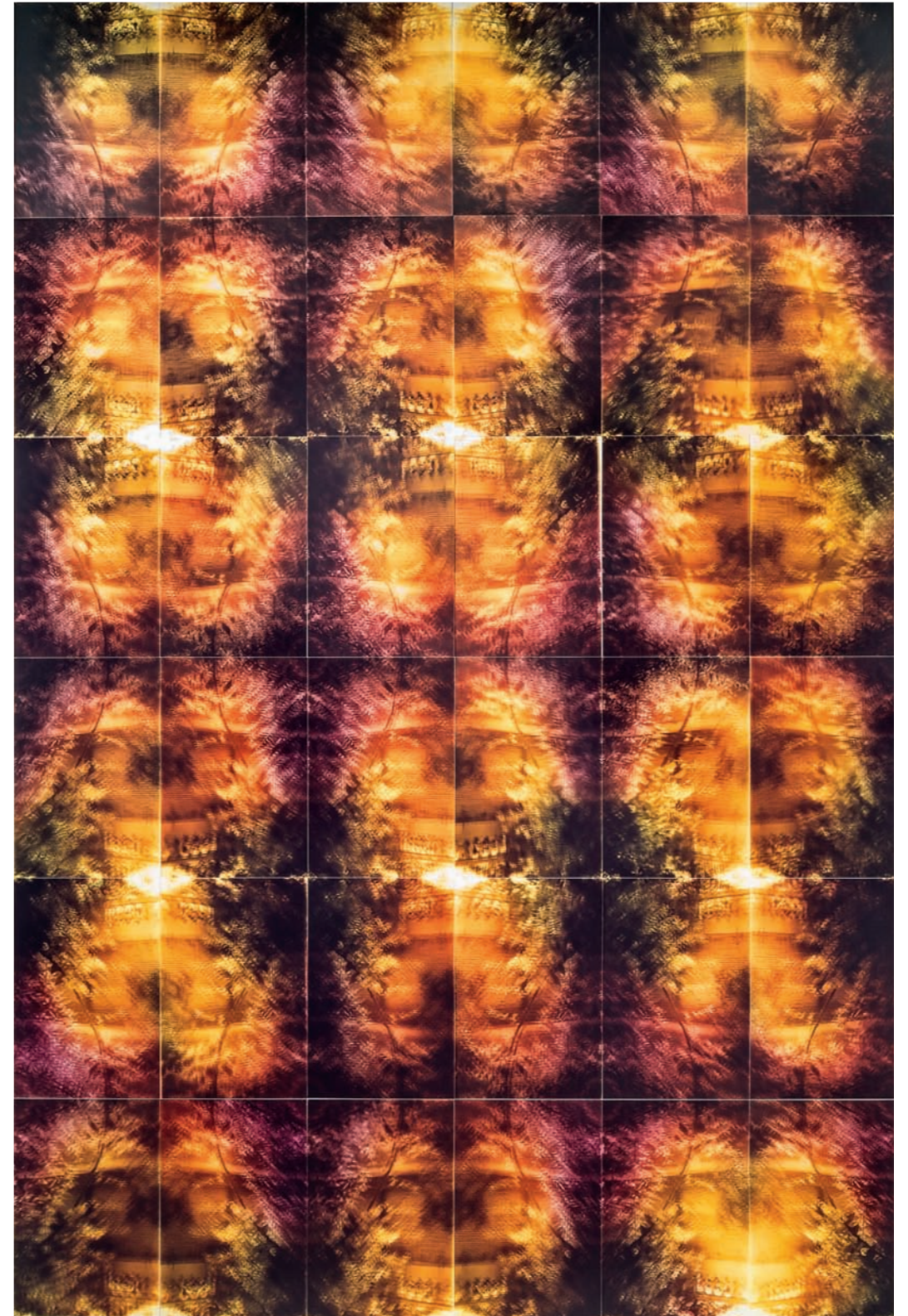
Patricia Deadman

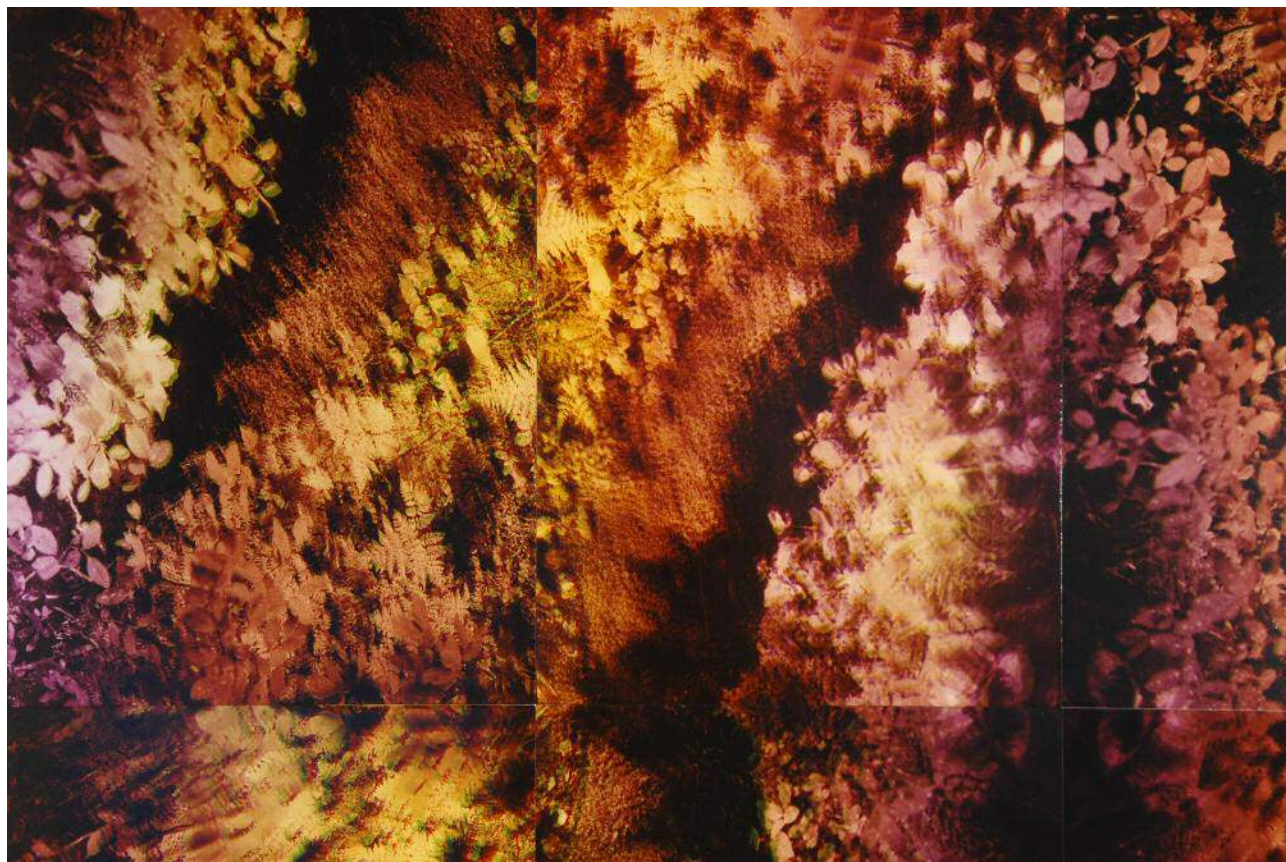
Giardino dei Semplici 2013 [detail]

Colour photographs

black and white 33mm negative printed on Fujicolour Crystal Archive Matte,
lamine, dry mount on dibond

37.5 x 58 cm each of 36; 2.3 x 3.5 metres installed





ABOVE AND RIGHT:
 PATRICIA DEADMAN
Glacier Ground Cover, 2011 [detail and installation view]
 25 colour photographs
 2.80 x 1.9 metres installed



Vanessa Dion Fletcher

Relationship or Transaction 2014

\$5 Canadian notes, screen prints, jute twine

97.5 x 390 x 2.5 cm



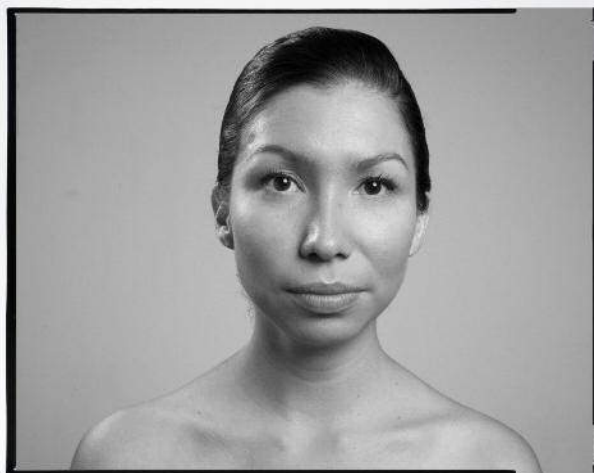


Keesic Douglas

Trade Language 2013

Photographs on fibre paper

50 x 60 cm each of 28, 2 x 4.2 metres installed





Melissa General

Satahónhsatat 2014

Deer skin bundle,
video 3 minutes, 40 seconds







ALL OUR RELATIONS:
SOVEREIGNTY AND THE TALK

ALL OUR RELATIONS: SOVEREIGNTY AND THE TALK

"[A]S PART OF AN ONGOING STRATEGY FOR SURVIVAL, THE WORK OF INDIGENOUS ARTISTS NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE CLARIFYING LENS OF SOVEREIGNTY AND SELF DETERMINATION, NOT JUST IN TERMS OF ASSIMILATION, COLONIZATION AND IDENTITY POLITICS."

—Jolene Richard, 1995

Three years ago, on a sunny patio in Toronto, Bonnie Devine, Ojibway artist, educator, curator generously shared with me the story of the 17th century *Dish with One Spoon* Wampum Belt. Bonnie described two conflicting Indigenous Nations—the Mississaguas of the Anishinabe Nation and the 5 Nations (at the time) of the Haudenosaunee who worked to establish a shared concept of geographical, economic, political and social space. The relational process of negotiation to move from discord to accord for the betterment of each group resonated with me long after Bonnie told me of the belt and its history. During my discussions with Lisa Myers, and in our early research, I thought often about that process. I appreciate that Bonnie's knowledge of the belt comes from her own careful research and experience and am honoured to have the opportunity to manifest it in another form—an exhibition of contemporary art.

Through Bonnie's story and this exhibition, I have had a chance to better imagine a process (informed by scholars such as Alan Corbiere, Rick Hill, Leanne Simpson, John Borrows and Lisa Brooks) that is integral to the negotiation of treaties. People coming together, an opening of eyes, ears and throats so that the necessary awareness, listening and words come forth and are symbolically embedded in each belt, the weight of each word as the speaker reads the message carried in the warp and weft of the belt and ears that hear its message generations after the belt was made.¹ The *Dish with One Spoon* belt, like all treaty belts, is a carefully designed physical repository of a process of responsibility to the land: one that describes the

interpersonal relationships integral to the wellbeing of those who inhabit the land.²

In working with the six Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe artists in *Reading the Talk*, I am reminded of Jolene Rickard's essay "A line in the Sand" where she states: "[a]s part of an ongoing strategy for survival, the work of Indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization and identity politics."³ Wampum was and is an expression of self-determination made more urgent as the colonial project advances and shifts. Similarly, each artwork in this exhibition is a socio-political, epistemic and ontological response to and articulation of these same principles. This connection is embedded in the production of the art wherein elements of self, community, territory and sovereignty are woven together to become carriers of Indigenous ways of knowing within contemporary art practices and theories.

Keesic Douglas' *Trade Language* (2013) is a great place to start this discussion. This installation of 'photo strip' images of Indigenous men and women pointing with their lips is a "nation to nation dialogue in the literal sense."⁴ The photo strip format is a nod to self-representation,⁵ while the treatment of the photographs creates a visual association that demonstrates "an actual language of gestures that was [and is] a universal tool of communication between different language bases."⁶ However, the identification of each participant and their Nation affiliation acknowledges the diversity of Indigenous Nations in this region. Satire, often

present in Douglas' works, is activated here with an 'instructional booklet' on how to point with lips and invites viewers to 'try it' themselves. As always, Douglas' photographs are elegant in their play. Drawing off documentary portraiture and challenging the photographic legacy of Edward Curtis, *Trade Language* is both a critical reclamation of Indigenous image making and a tongue in cheek homage to a primitivist fascination with Indigenous symbolism. *Trade Language* investigates the seemingly paradoxical relationships between Indigenous Nations in colonial Canada, presenting an ideal that reminds me of both wampum diplomacy and "openness". Walter Mignolo, noted Argentinean semiotician defines openness in this way: "[b]eing inclusive means that you want to keep control...being open means that you are open to built [sic] together, and not to include the other (white in this case) in your private territory."⁷

As a principle of negotiation in colonial contexts, openness describes and underlies both an Indigenous ontology and the terms on which wampum diplomacy and contemporary Indigenous art can function. Vanessa Dion Fletcher's *Relationship or Transaction* (2014), a reinterpretation of the Covenant Chain Wampum Belt, 1764, is a critical exploration of such terms.⁸ A large belt created with 5-dollar notes and screen prints of that note, this work questions the concepts of 'value' ascribed to the 'relationships' between Indigenous Nations and colonial governments. Dion Fletcher explains that while making the 'beads' from the notes, the value of those objects changed. This shift in meaning suggests that value is a shared responsibility, a process of investment by the people who negotiate its terms and physical manifestations. A significant aspect of this responsibility is the transmission of knowledge about the negotiation of values through the symbolic language woven into the belt. In Indigenous ontology belt making represents a repository of this process: the terms of

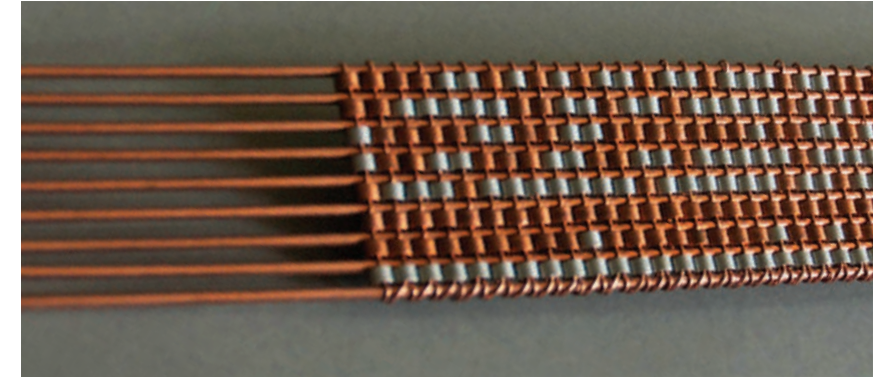


KEESIC DOUGLAS
Trade Language, 2013
[detail]



LEFT:
VANESSA DION FLETCHER
Relationship or Transaction, 2014
[detail]

RIGHT:
MICHAEL BELMORE
Bridge, 2014
[detail]



engagement are embedded and shared through reading the talk contained in each belt. On this 250th (2014) anniversary of the Covenant Chain/Two Row wampum exchange, *Relationship or Transaction* is a reminder that the British/Canadian Governments have neglected their responsibility in this foundational relationship.

An element of this responsibility is learning to read the symbolic language of the belts. Learning to read the language, or at least understand the specific context of wampum belts, is particularity important given that colonial oppression of Indigenous political engagement has destabilized wampum diplomacy in Canadian/Indigenous negotiations. Contemporary scholars, like Angela Haas⁹ and artists, such as Michael Belmore, are reactivating wampum diplomacy and belt making through careful research and technological innovation. Synergies between medium, symbolism, customary practice and critical theory are key strategies used to assert the principle of interrelationship at the core of Indigenous ontology. Belmore's *Bridge* (2014) is one such synergy. It is made with hand-rolled copper and aluminum beads and the talk carried in the belt is binary coding.¹⁰ Wampum as computer coding is an epistemology that shatters the stereotypical historicization of Indigenous knowledges while maintaining the integral values embedded in the process of making wampum belts.¹¹ The relationship between materials in the composition of this belt is both a synthesis of knowledges and an articulation of the work required to decipher the talk contained in the belt. The talk contained in the coding is not provided to us by Belmore since, for him, this work is "about learning to read, about learning to see what is in front of you, it is about discovery, it is about the past and about understanding the present."¹²

our minds are one (2014) by Hannah Claus, reflects the continuity between the past and the present through a synthesis of monumentality and delicacy in the form of an interactive dome, or inverted dish. Claus assembles the dome with glossy discs of acetate on which are printed images she took of the sky, treetops, tree trunks and the ground. In Haudenosaunee cosmology, the sky dome, or celestial dome is the Sky World out of which Sky Woman fell (or was pushed) thus creating Turtle Island. The Sky Woman story is a fundamental narrative that teaches many things, all rooted in the inexorable relationship between land, plants, animals and humans. The installation composition unites both the iconography of the *Dish with One Spoon Belt* and the Sky World, representing our shared responsibility to the land. The installation format and experience of *our minds are one* reminds us just how delicate our relationship is with the land by emphasizing the ease with which our actions affect it.¹³ Consistent with Claus' previous Cloud works, *our minds are one* responds to the disturbances our movement creates around and, in this case, within the work. However, *our minds are one* is a departure in that the viewer may enter the dome, Sky World, the Dish. This access implicates us and the ways in which we negotiate our connection to land, customary practice and the unique interrelationships embedded within Indigenous contemporary art.

The interlacing of customary practice, shared intimacy and future generations is also evident in Melissa General's video installation. *Satahónhsatat* (2014) relates land to a personal process of remembrance, reclamation and renewal in a complex layering of place, ceremony and technology—a mnemonic device. *Satahónhsatat* asks us to witness General's retrieval of buried objects, at her niece's direction,



and place them into a bundle that they then carry into the woods. The retrieval of objects buried on General's uncle's land, over-laid by audio track of the Grand River, emphasizes the ideological, physical and familial importance of this place as a site of remembrance for the artist and her family.¹⁴ General and her niece represent past, present and future generations who share the responsibility of honouring the relationships between family, territory and customary practice. The video of the retrieval and creation of the bundle is a meditative sharing of the movements and gestures that record General's "relationship to [her] past and present."¹⁵ General's openness with her process and the symbolism of each retrieved object are also reflected in the process through which mnemonic devices such as wampum belts are activated. Stories are shared and repeated to the following generations, attached always to a sense of place.

The sense of place embedded in wampum belts relates to specific territories while the belts themselves are epistemological sites, wherein systems of knowledge may be

stored. Patricia Deadman's *Giardino dei Semplici* (2013) represents the convergence of two such systems, euro-western and Indigenous. Consisting of 36 hand-developed photographs woven together into an immersive 'blanket', *Giardino* is a painterly installation where disparate epistemologies of land and art are intertwined. The *Giardino dei Semplici* (now called The Botanical Gardens of Florence) was so named for its production of botanical medicines in the 16th century. Its function changed when the Grand Duke Cosimo dei Medici purchased the land in 1545,¹⁶ when it was converted into an expression of Renaissance Rationalist ideology. An ideology rooted in classification systems, transplantation, collection, artifice and beauty that motivates colonialism and is embedded in art history. Deadman refers to her blanket series as possessing a "horrible beauty".¹⁷ In its entirety *Giardino* is beautiful and as we unravel the ideologies embedded within it, the horrific consequences of colonization are revealed. The colours achieved imply the aesthetics and classicism of the age, as well as monumental beauty. The overall patterning woven together is drawn from both Renaissance design and Indigenous blanket design and, as Deadman explains, represents the flux and dynamism of Indigenous Nations throughout colonization.¹⁸

Lee-Ann Martin, Curatorial Mentor for *Reading the Talk*, pinpoints contemporary Aboriginal art as "practices and individual identities that exist in the spaces between colonial critique and cultural continuity."¹⁹ And although she speaks of other Aboriginal contemporary artists in this quote, I feel the following statement resonates with the artists in this exhibition: "[t]hese artists inhabit their own territories of existence that, with critical acuity, they seek to redefine for the future."²⁰ In the context of Indigenous art history, the synthesis of Indigenous and Euro-Western epistemologies, customary and contemporary practices, materials, symbolic language and technologies is a deliberate strategy of continuity and critique. Patricia Deadman, Melissa General, Michael Belmore, Hannah Claus, Vanessa Dion Fletcher and Keesic Douglas each engage in this strategy in unique and complex ways, however, it is the interrelationships at the core of each work, which for me, connect to wampum diplomacy and the *Dish with One Spoon* belt. Much like belt making, these works relate discord and accord across time, mediums and epistemologies to create finely honed tools for critique and self-determination in today's colonial contexts.

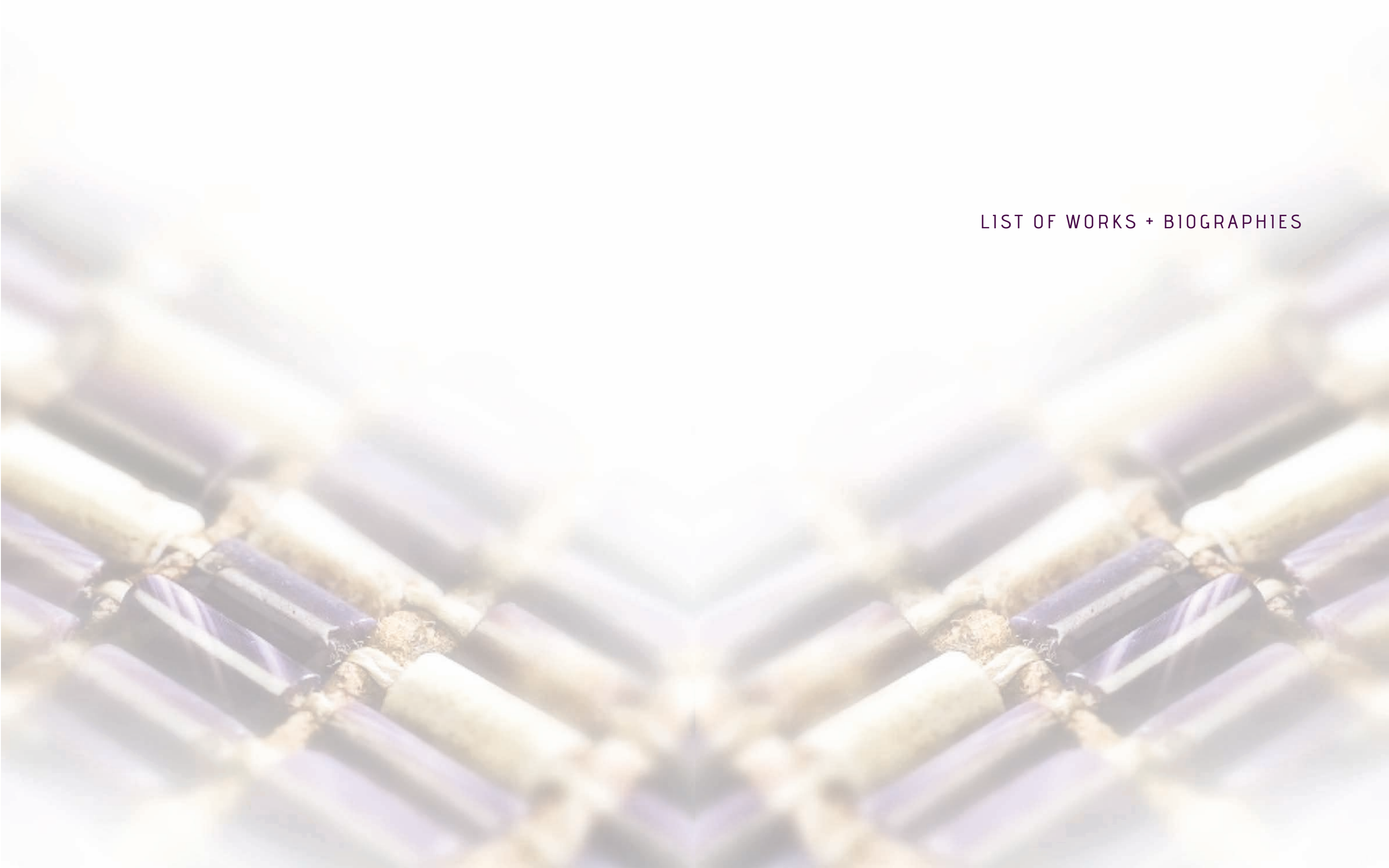
OPPOSITE LEFT:
PATRICIA DEADMAN
Giardino dei Semplici, 2013
[detail]

RIGHT:
BRIAN CHARLES
*Dish with One Spoon
Treaty Belt*, 2014
recreated belt, clay beads with acrylic coatings



NOTES:

- ¹ Language collaboration with Kahente Horn-Miller, New Sun Visiting Aboriginal Scholar, School of Canadian Studies, Carlton University. July 3, 2014.
- ² Inspired by Leanne Simpson, "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationships," *Wicazo Sa Review* Volume 23, Number 2, Fall 2008, 29.
- ³ Jolene Rickard, "Sovereignty: A line in the Sand" in *Aperture*, no.139: Summer 1995: 51.
- ⁴ Email correspondence with Keesic Douglas. July 1, 2014.
- ⁵ Refers to the self-operated photo booths, first developed in the early 20th century, which would generate a strip of photographs. (Näkki Goranin, The History of the Photo Booth." *The Telegraph*. March 7, 2008. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/donotmigrate/3671736/The-history-of-the-photobooth.html>. Accessed July 2 2014.
- ⁶ Email correspondence with Kessic Douglas.
- ⁷ Walter Mignolo, "A Reflection By Walter Mignolo." Blogpost: *BERLIN 2012: DECOLONIAL DIASPORIC AESTHETICS*: <http://waltermignolo.com/berlin-2012-decolonial-diasporic-aesthetics-2/>. June 28, 2012. Accessed July 2, 2014.
- ⁸ The Covenant Chain Wampum Belt is the document that ratifies the Royal Proclamation, 1763: the articulation of a foundational relationship between 24 Indigenous Nations and the British Crown. (Gehl, 2011) The symbolism in the Covenant Chain Belt, commissioned by Superintendent William Johnson, represents a shift in wampum making to accommodate European symbolic language and ensure that both parties have a full understanding of the obligations of the agreement (Corbier, Reading the Talk Artists Workshop, Dec 12, 2014). The 24 Nations acknowledged the relationship, through the presentation to Johnson of the Two Row Wampum, which he accepted—thereby signaling his agreement. The Two Row, like the Covenant Chain clearly illustrates the nature of British/Indigenous relations in perpetuity—open to moving forward together and building a future on the principle of non-interference. *Relationship or Transaction* demonstrates the contravention of these and many other foundational relationships. For more on the contemporary relevance of wampum diplomacy see: Lynne Gehl, "Indigenous knowledge, symbolic literacy and the 1764 Treaty at Niagara" Blogpost: *Federation Equity Issues Portfolio: 'Transforming the Academy: Indigenous Education'*, 2011. <http://www.ideas-idees.ca/blog/Indigenous-knowledge-symbolic-literacy-and-1764-treaty-niagarax>; John Borrows, "Wampum at Niagara: The Royal Proclamation, Canadian Legal History, and Self-Government." In *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equality, and Respect for Difference* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997). Leanne Simpson, "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationships" *Wicazo Sa Review* Volume 23, Number 2, Fall 2008.
- ⁹ Angela M. Haas, "Wampum as Hypertext: An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Volume 19, Number 4, Winter 2007, 77-100.
- ¹⁰ Aluminum is not a 'native' metal—meaning it does not occur in a single source and in its current state is relatively 'new'. Whereas copper is a single source mineral and has been mined by Indigenous people for centuries. Email correspondence with Michael Belmore, July 4, 2014.
- ¹¹ Haas.
- ¹² Email correspondence with Michael Belmore, July 4, 2014.
- ¹³ Telephone conversation with Hannah Claus. June 25, 2014.
- ¹⁴ Email correspondence with Melissa General, July 1, 2014.
- ¹⁵ Email correspondence with Melissa General, July 1, 2014.
- ¹⁶ *The Botanical Gardens of Florence*. Webpage: http://www.museumsinflorence.com/musei/Botanical_garden.html. Accessed July 2, 2014.
- ¹⁷ Telephone conversation with Patricia Deadman, June 30, 2014.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Lee-Ann Martin, "Contemporary First Nations Art since 1970: Individual Practices and Collective Activism," *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2007), 389.
- ²⁰ Ibid.



LIST OF WORKS + BIOGRAPHIES

LIST OF WORKS

all measures are height x width x depth.

MICHAEL BELMORE

Investment 2011
Haliburton fieldstone, copper leaf
25 x 110 x 110 cm

Bridge 2014
copper, aluminum
22.5 x 22.5 x 140 cm

HANNAH CLAUS

our minds are one 2014
vellum, string, aluminum and plexiglas
3 x 3 metres installed

PATRICIA DEADMAN

Giardino dei Semplici 2013
Colour photographs
black and white 33mm negative printed on
Fujicolour Crystal Archive Matt, laminate,
dry mount on dibond
37.5 x 58 cm each of 36; 2.3 x 3.5 metres installed

VANESSA DION FLETCHER

Relationship or Transaction 2014
\$5 Canadian notes, screen prints, Jute twine
97.5 x 390 x 2.5 cm

KEESIC DOUGLAS

Trade Language 2013
Photographs on fibre paper
50 x 60 cm each of 28; 2 x 4.2 metres installed

MELISSA GENERAL

Satahónhsatat 2014
video, 3 minutes, 40 seconds

BIOGRAPHIES

Michael Belmore is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and graduated with an A.O.C.A. in sculpture/installation from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1994. Belmore employs a variety of media in order to investigate our use of technology and how it has affected our relationship to the environment. It is through his use of materials that Belmore brings into account how we view nature as commodity.

Belmore's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is represented in the permanent collections of various institutions and numerous private collections. His most recent exhibitions include *Shapeshifting: Transformations in Native American Art* at the Peabody Essex in Salem, MA, *Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years*, an international exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art in Winnipeg, MB and *HIDE: Skin as Material and Metaphor* at the National Museum of the American Indian—New York, the George Gustav Heye Center.

Hannah Claus completed her undergraduate work at the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1997 and received her MFA from Concordia University in 2004. Her installations have been exhibited in artist-run centres and public museums throughout Canada, as well as in the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Chile and Mexico. In her work, she explores the relationship between the material and immaterial to speak of identity and community, memory and time. The installation for this exhibition was made possible through the financial assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Patricia Deadman is a visual artist, independent curator and writer. She studied Fine Arts, Fanshawe College, London and obtained her BFA from the University of Windsor. Deadman

has participated in numerous artist residencies including the Banff Centre, Alberta; Canada Council for the Arts, La Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France and in Merida, Pachuca and Oaxaca, Mexico.

Her lens-based work including installation, sound, video and photography has been significantly exhibited in solo and group exhibitions since the 1980's and collected in public and private collections throughout Canada, USA, Mexico, and the UK.

Deadman's curatorial experience includes numerous independent projects throughout Canada. She is a former Curatorial Intern at the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto; Canada Council for the Arts, Aboriginal Curator-in-Residence at Museum London; Acting Curator, Woodstock Art Gallery, Woodstock, Ontario and Curator at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan. She has also represented Canada as a member of the Canada Council for the Arts, Aboriginal Curators Delegation at the Venice Biennale and Basel Art Fair (2009) and the Sydney Biennale and New Zealand (2010).

Keesic Douglas is an Ojibway artist from Mnjikaning First Nation. In his photographic and video work, Douglas often uses humour and parody to cleverly examine issues of Indigenous representation to address racism, stereotypes and world views. His artwork has been included in national and international solo and group exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Urban Shaman Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Orillia Museum of Art & History, and the Berlin International Film Festival among others. In 2008, he received a BFA and the medal for photography from the Ontario College of Art and Design. Douglas completed his MFA in 2010 at the University of British Columbia, and now lives and works in Toronto, Ontario. www.keesic.com

Vanessa Dion Fletcher uses composite media to investigate the influence of culture and politics on the relationship between our bodies and the land. Being a unilingual English speaker with Potawatomi and Lenape ancestry, she considers how to communicate outside of written and spoken Language. Dion Fletcher's work has been exhibited at the Art Gallery of Peterborough: *Jiigbiing—At The Edge Where The Water and Land Meet* and at Art Mûr in Montréal: *A Stake in the Ground: Contemporary Native Art Manifestation*. Her work is held in the AANDC Art Centre Collection. She is currently pursuing an MFA at the School Of the Art Institute of Chicago. www.DionFletcher.com

Melissa General is Mohawk from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. She is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design where she studied photography and received an MFA from York University. Concepts involving memory, identity construction, relationship to land and her Indigenous heritage have been a focus in her practice. General has exhibited her artwork in shows at the Station Gallery in Whitby, Gallery 44 in Toronto and at the Art Gallery of Peterborough.

Rachelle Dickenson is of British, Irish and Cree heritage, and is an interdisciplinary PhD Candidate in the Department of Art History and Visual Culture at York University. She is currently the Curatorial Assistant, Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada. A member of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, Curate This! Collective and 2+1 Collective, Dickenson is interested in the dynamic relationships between Indigenous knowledges, art history and contemporary art.

Lisa Myers is of Anishnaabe ancestry from Beausoleil First Nation and the Georgian Bay region. She grew up in Milton, Ontario. Myers cooked for many years satisfying hungry stomachs at Enahtig Healing Lodge and Learning Centre. Her community work included coordinating and editing *This Food is Good for You*, the Enahtig community cookbook, and designing and facilitating an art and food program for youth at the Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre. Her MFA research in Criticism and Curatorial Practice at OCAD University investigated cultural agency and the encoding of food from diverse Indigenous perspectives, which resulted in the exhibition entitled *Best Before*. Myers has curated exhibitions at the MacLaren Art Centre, the York Quay Centre at Harbourfront in Toronto, and the Art Gallery of Ontario. She lives and works in Toronto and Port Severn, Ontario.

Lee-Ann Martin, of Mohawk and British ancestry, is an independent curator. She is the former Curator of Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal Art at the Canadian Museum of History (Civilization) in Gatineau, Quebec and the former Head Curator of the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina. She has curated, written and lectured extensively on contemporary Aboriginal art both nationally and internationally over the past twenty-five years. Her writing has been published by Oxford University Press, University of Washington Press, Banff Centre Press, and National Museum of the American Indian, among others. Martin's recent curatorial projects include *Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years* for Plug In ICA in Winnipeg and the nationally touring exhibition, *Bob Boyer: His Life's Work*, for the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



THE ROBERT McLAUGHLIN GALLERY
MUSEUM LONDON
ART GALLERY OF PETERBOROUGH
MACLAREN ART CENTRE

ISBN-10: 192658984X
ISBN-13: 978-1926589848



9 781926 589848