

qaʔ yəxʷ – water honours us: womxn and waterways

ReMatriate Collective

qaʔ yəxʷ is a hənqəmiñəm expression that means “water honours us.” Water connects us all through the seas, rivers, and clouds, and is not bound by human-imposed borders. It is a crucial element for all of creation.

In this exhibition we celebrate womxn’s reciprocal and respectful relationship with water as life givers, healers, and doulas. We explore water’s intelligent and sacred cycles, water’s historical uses for survival, and the excessive resource consumption of today that threatens sensitive environmental and coastal ecosystems.

ReMatriate Collective acknowledges the work of Indigenous womxn, past, present, and future, and aspires to build upon these deep knowledge systems as we move forward with our work. In light of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and two-spirit folk, there is an urgent need to support womxn’s knowledge and authority and to educate the broader community about matriarchal systems.

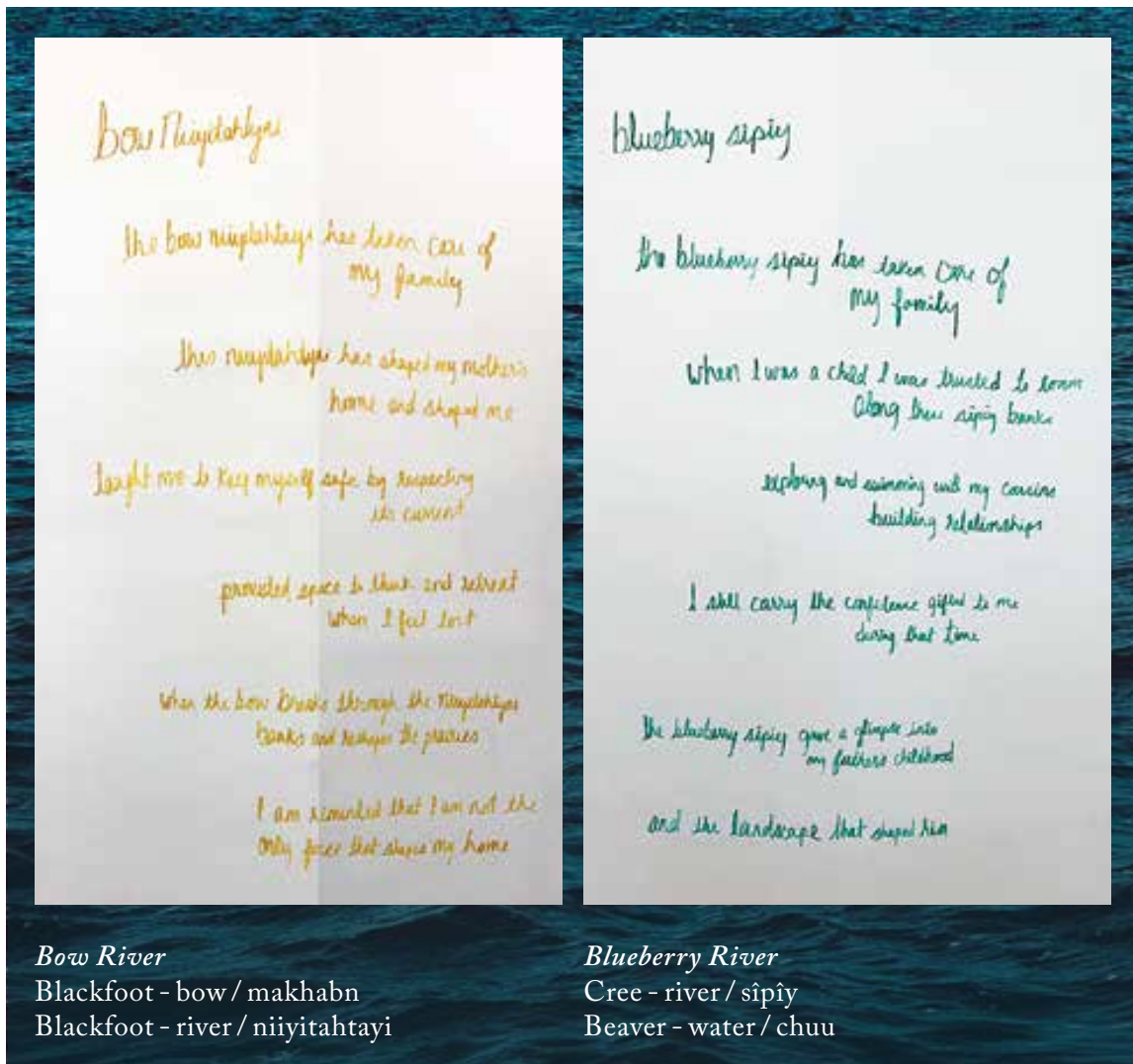
Our intention is to present these artworks in relation to the often male-dominated world of carving, to challenge notions of “traditional” and “gendered” art practices, and to elevate the hidden work of contemporary Indigenous womxn artists. As part of this effort, we acknowledge, with gratitude, the vital work of water protectors and land defenders everywhere, and honour Audrey Siegl for her advocacy work as an environmental activist, artist, and Water Keeper.

Thank you to the Musqueam Language and Culture Department for their thoughtful assistance in selecting the exhibition title *qaʔ yəxʷ*.

—excerpted from the Bill Reid Gallery text

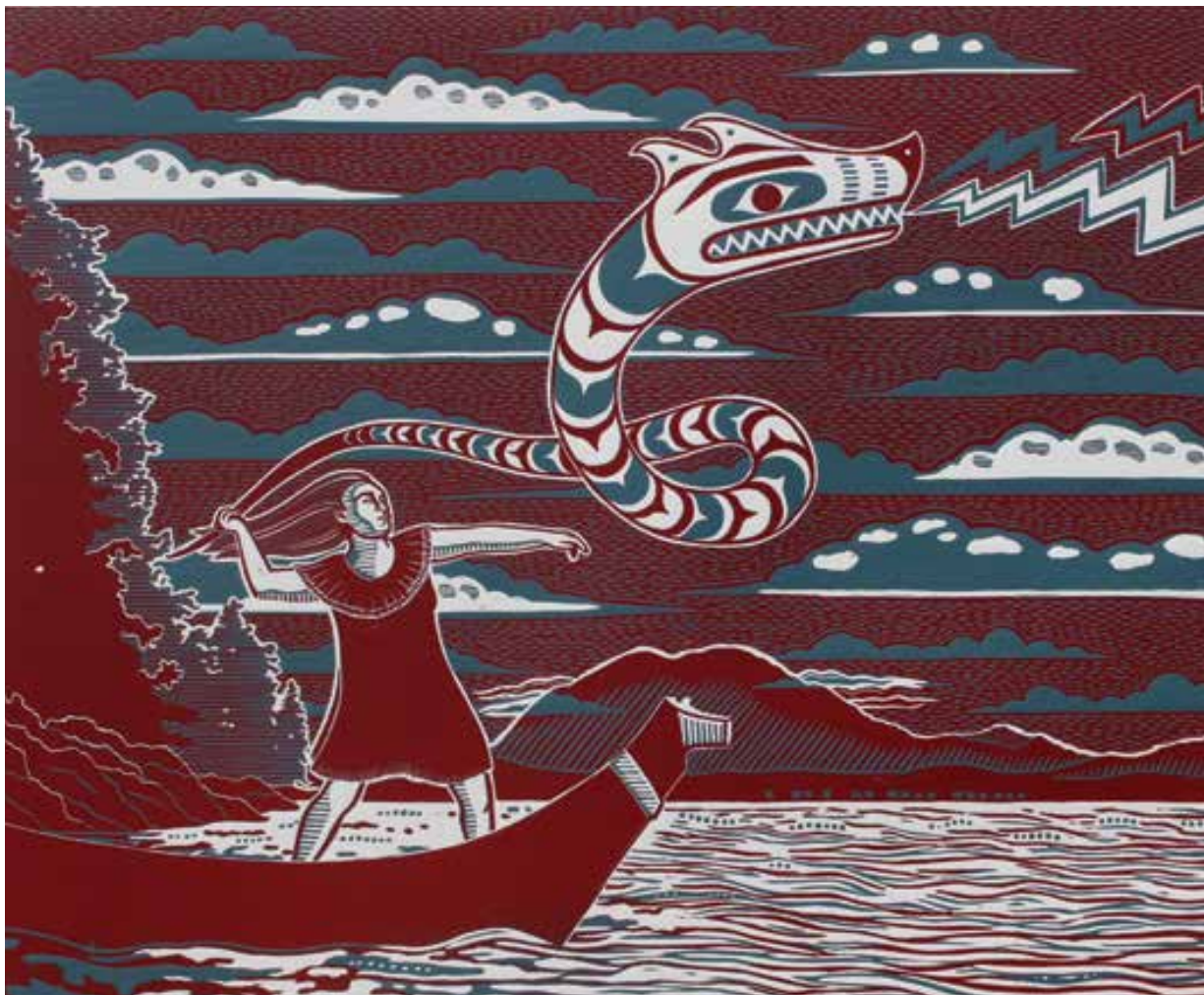
The exhibit qaʔ yəxʷ – water honours us: womxn and waterways was curated by ReMatriate members Tšēmā Igharas, Tiffany Creyke, Angela Marie Schenstead, Denver Lynxleg, and Beth Carter of the Bill Reid Gallery. Of the nine artists featured in the exhibit, three are showcased here.

Richelle Bear Hat, *Call me home*, 2019
 Tempera paint marker, each 6 x 3 feet



The Bow River that flows through the Alberta prairies has always provided for my Blackfoot family, and the Blueberry River that flows through Northern British Columbia has always provided for my Dane-zaa Cree family. My memories, family histories and relationship with these rivers continue to help me make sense of how my Blackfoot/Dane-zaa Cree culture lives within me. How do I acknowledge these landscapes and myself with others? I've watched my father introduce himself, and instead of using the Western ways I've grown accustomed to, he instead describes the rivers that surround his home: Blueberry River, Halfway River, and Prophet River. I am always struck by the simplicity and the weight of his words. His introduction offers a bridge to connect the land he calls home with himself. I want to learn from that experience and adapt how I introduce myself to others by acknowledging my relationship with specific sites. The choice of colour in my work reflects the land around the rivers: the golden yellows of the Prairies shaped by the Bow River, and the deep greens of the forests lining the Blueberry River. Through this work, I introduce myself with the rivers that flow through me just as they flow through their landscapes.

—Richelle Bear Hat



Marika Echachis Swan, *Your Power is Yours*, 2019
Limited edition reduction woodblock print

This piece was created through a prayer to refine the larger vision for my own life. By sending it out into the world I am calling on you to consider what you have to offer this moment in humanity. How can we free ourselves from the distractions and internal dramas that do not serve our greater purpose? What can we call on to fortify us so that we can move forward with decisive action? This print was created through a print mentorship with Lee McKay at Malaspina Printmakers on Granville Island with the financial support of a Mid-Career Scholarship from the YVR Arts Foundation.

Marika Echachis Swan, *Becoming Worthy*, 2013
Limited edition reduction woodblock print



When our people were whaling they prepared their whole lives spiritually to be worthy of a gift as generous as a whale. Everyone in the community had to work in unity to ensure the hunt was successful and done safely. Each whale was such a bountiful offering of food for the community and each part of the whale was utilized and celebrated. As a Tla-o-qui-aht woman there are many gifts I am hoping to bring home to my community and I understand that I am on a journey to spiritually lay the groundwork so that I am ready when they arrive. Pook-mis, the drowned whaler, lies at the bottom of the sea floor and offers a warning that things can go horribly wrong if you are not properly prepared. Becoming Worthy is a part of a series of woodblock prints exploring my people's natural and supernatural relationship with whales.

—Marika Echachis Swan



Audrey Siegl and Kali Spitzer, *Two Portraits of Audrey Siegl*, 2019
Tintype photograph

We created these images to honour Maria and all of our stolen women. We held space for Maria's spirit to be with us. Safe spaces for our women are non-existent unless we build them. By doing this work together we fostered a safe space for each other. We are both working in our communities to expand these spaces. With our work we are creating visibility and voice where there has only been silence and oppression, whether it is through photography, activism or being on the land gathering medicine, trapping, or hunting. As Indigenous women we are inseparable from the land and the water. As we rise to protect our women we inherently protect our water and the land from which we all come.

sx̣temṭana:t, St'agid Jaad, Audrey Siegl (Musqueam), an independent activist from the unceded lands of the Musqueam, has been active in grassroots environmental and social justice-political frontline movements. Audrey has worked on raising awareness on MMIWG and Downtown Eastside issues including housing, the fentanyl crisis, displacement, and the connection between extractive industry projects and violations of FN Land and human rights. She has been travelling with the medicines with the MMIWG National Inquiry since September 2017.

—Audrey Siegl & Kali Spitzer

