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I came into performance art by means of Rebecca Belmore. Her retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), Toronto, in 2018, influenced a paradigm shift in my art practice. Then, I was a young budding painter who just started art school the previous year. My exposure to Belmore's work made me realize the limitations of painting or any other conventional art form. Her installation, 'Fountain,' incorporates a video documentation of a visceral performance projected on a falling curtain of water. The video captures elemental processions, including blazing fires from burning logs on the coast. The artist fetches a bucket of water from the river, and she moves with a purposeful stride towards us, the viewer. She gets closer and closer, and finally, with full force, Belmore releases the bucket-filled water onto the screen. The water becomes bloody as it touches the surface of the screen we are viewing. It is as though a crimson fountain has drenched us.

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The veil of water that hosts the video projection is a collaborative performer, as it contextualizes and dramatizes a critique of the savagery of colonialism and the adverse effects imperialism imposes on nature. The same show consisted of the installation, 'Tower,' a series of shopping carts stacked up high around a clay monolith. In this sculptural assemblage, Belmore brilliantly explores the modernist repetition of identical forms to foreground the crises of homelessness and its exponential increase. Her unexpected utility of material and her juxtaposition of various mediums within a space to contextually accentuate provoking and stirring themes opened the floodgates of my interdisciplinary pursuits. When I returned to school in the fall to commence my second year, I registered for all the performance art classes available, one taught by Prof. Sharon Alward, who was then on the verge of retirement. The other performance class I took that semester was history-focused and was taught by Lori Blondeau, who at that time was a new teacher and the only visibly BIPOC instructor in the whole faculty. In my first class with Lori, I realized she was very close friends with Belmore, which made me think our encounter was an ordained follow-up to my eventful experience at the AGO. Lori quickly took an interest in my curiosity and enthusiasm; she introduced me to a canon of postcolonial performance artists, including James Luna, Coco Fusco, Augusto Boal, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, among others. She also took time to look at and give feedback on my performance projects from my other classes. Although only a second-year student at that time, I cultivated the courage to rally and lead a group of friends and artists to effectuate an intervention at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. The performance and intervention were to draw attention to the museum's lack of representation of minority groups in their collection, but also to call attention to its exclusionary practices as a museum situated in a city full of ethnic minorities.

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I subsequently took more classes with Lori Blondeau, spanning performance, installation, open media, senior studio, and seminar. As time went on, it became apparent that the care Lori puts into her pedagogical practice is unmatched. She was more than an instructor to her students, as she was also our friend and a mother figure. Her presence at the School of Art was fresh air in an environment polluted with the redundancy of flat Eurocentric art history. Her teachings centred on non-white scholars, essayists, and artists.

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It is impossible to separate Western academia from its sadistic legacy. At multiple junctures, I witnessed Lori bearing the brunt of her pushback to institutional aggression, putting her job on the line for at-risk international students. It quickly dawned on me that Lori's practice exceeds the glamour and sophistication of museum spaces; it, in fact, seeps into facets of her life. She lives and breathes her practice and is currently playing a key role in redirecting the University of Manitoba's School of Art from its dark ages.

Upon being asked to contribute to this urgent book, I revisited Lori's practice, and I admit it is quite humbling to engage with her career which spans almost three decades, while maintaining its hyper-contemporaneity. Particular themes stand out in Lori's pluralist praxis; amongst other works, Lori employs repetition in her photographic installation, 'Grace' (2006). The inkjet prints are spread in 14 components of gestural reels, the individual photographs act as film stock units; hence the images come alive as a motion picture performance. Lori has engulfed her interrogation with personal history. In addition, she implements detailed and relational storytelling of people around her throughout her practice. She is able to forge a myriad of complex alter egos and personas in different

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projects; these personas are often recalled or revived in other works.

The artist also engages in the theatrics of humour in the works 'In Tune with the Times' (2006), 'Cosmosquaw' (1998), and 'The Lonely Surfer Squaw' (1997) as a medium to challenge, tweak, and reverse derogatory stereotypes. In 'The Lonely Surfer Squaw,' Lori introduces functional satire as she holds up a pink surfboard that possesses a form that is both phallic and vaginal in front of a frozen lake, while wearing a fur bikini. In this lightbox installation, Lori plays the trickster, using parody as a tool to overturn ethnographic categories and colonial definitions. She therefore deconstructs and reconstructs notions of identity and narratives surrounding Indigenous women.

Lori occupies herself with the meaning, epistemology, malleability, subversion, and transformation of language, employing visual, material, and textual approaches. In 'Cosmosquaw' (1996), Lori conjures up a new word, 'COSMOSQUAW,' spreading across a light box that imitates a magazine cover. This fusion of the words 'COSMO' from *Cosmopolitan* magazine and 'SQUAW,' a derogatory and outdated word for Native women, coupled with her comedic pose and satirical subheading, sets the stage for a counter-mimicry of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, both poking at the editorials' exclusion of Indigenous women from its pages and the dreadful beauty standards such magazines uphold for women. Moreover, this conjunction of words also highlights what the ideal woman or 'it' girl should be; this undermines and complicates that invective in the present. In Lori Blondeau's 'Stones from My Kokum's House' (2021), she engages with a material index by sourcing rocks from her grandmother's compound; a place of significant formative memory.

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Lori's radical affinity for community input becomes evident in her co-founding and Executive Directing of the Indigenous art collective, TRIBE, which has proved decisive to the ever-increasing centrality of Indigenous artistic knowledge and production in Canada. Amongst other community members, her late mother and her grandmother are both seminal to her practice, as they introduced Lori to the oratory art of storytelling, and equipped her with a big portion of the historical context her practice is rooted. Lori's mother assisted in a myriad of her projects. I am fortunate to have studied under the 2021 Governor General Award recipient. We all have our heroes; Lori is one of mine.