

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Vancouver Art Gallery launches its Fall Season with the First Major Retrospective of Bay of Quinte Mohawk artist Shelley Niro

The exhibition spans almost four decades and over 70 artworks, infused with Niro's characteristic humour and heart



September 26, 2024, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the xʷməθkʷəy̅əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is pleased to announce the much-anticipated presentation of ***Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch***, a monumental retrospective that surveys the 40-year career of celebrated Bay of Quinte Mohawk artist **Shelley Niro**. Organized by the Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH) with the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian and with curatorial support from the National Gallery of Canada, this extraordinary exhibition showcases the full breadth of Niro's prolific career from her unique perspective as a Kanyen'kehá:ka (Mohawk) woman, bringing together works across painting, photography, sculpture, mixed media and film.

"We are honoured to be able to share this remarkable retrospective of Shelley Niro's career with Vancouver," says **Anthony Kiendl, CEO & Executive Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery**. "Niro has been fundamental in shaping the discourse around Indigenous representation, culture and ways of being."

From the 1980s to the present, Niro has created art that reflects contemporary life and builds upon Kanyen'kehá:ka (Mohawk) philosophies, deep understandings of history and a woman-centred worldview. Accessible, humorous and peppered with references to popular culture, this sharp-witted survey delves into the timeless cultural knowledge and generational histories of the artist's Six Nations Kanyen'kehá:ka community to make art that provides purpose, hope and healing.

“The Art Gallery of Hamilton is thrilled to be sharing this important project,” says **Shelley Falconer, President and CEO of the Art Gallery of Hamilton**. “We are confident that Shelley Niro’s incredibly poignant works will resonate deeply with Vancouver audiences. The artist’s talk will be an excellent chance to hear from the artist herself, along with the audio guide located throughout the exhibition.”

Spanning almost four decades and over seventy works—from painting to beading—the exhibition is organized into themes that Niro often returns to: Matriarchy, Past is Present, Actors and Family Relations. Each provides vantage points from which she probes ideas central to her experience and identity as a Kanyen’kehá:ka (Mohawk) woman. Niro’s persistent vision is to empower Indigenous women and girls, advocating for self-representation and sovereignty. Her highly empathetic approach moves viewers to understand the issues at hand through her visually impactful and politically powerful manner. She uses parody, feminism and spirituality to examine identity and, in turn, brings political power to the realm of the personal.

The exhibition title refers to the film *The Seven Year Itch*, released in 1955, the year after Niro was born. The film, starring Marilyn Monroe, portrays a marriage unravelling and refers to the concept of relationships waning after seven years. Niro explores this idea, suggesting that the relationship between colonizers and Indigenous peoples has always been uncomfortable, and there remains an itch. Niro created a self-portrait titled *The Seven Year Itch* in 1992, in which she imitates the famous scene of Marilyn Monroe standing over a subway grate with her dress blowing up.

“I remember seeing Shelley’s first solo show back in 1992 and slowly realizing, standing before *Mohawks in Beehives*, that I was witnessing a paradigm shift in contemporary Indigenous art,” says **Richard Hill, Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art at the Vancouver Art Gallery**. “It was fundamentally a change in how Indigenous identity was publicly presented. I had experienced a good deal of humour in Indigenous communities, but I hadn’t seen an artist treat identity as a space of riotous and inventive role-playing like Shelley did. It was liberating, opening a space for a rich, complex and often hilarious view of contemporary Indigenous experience. Any stereotype that got in her way was not so much overthrown as deftly pierced by laughter and left to deflate under the weight of its own absurdity.”

Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch runs from September 27, 2024, until February 17, 2025. The exhibition is accompanied by a glittering publication designed by **Barr Gilmore**, available for purchase [in the Gallery Store](#). This publication features contributions from esteemed authors and curators, including **Lori Beavis, Sally Frater, Adrianna Greci Green, Bryce Kanbara, Madeline Lennon, Nancy Mithlo** and **Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie**.

The exhibition is organized and circulated by the Art Gallery of Hamilton with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian and with curatorial support from the National Gallery of Canada. Curated by **Melissa Bennett**, AGH Senior Curator of Contemporary Art; **Greg Hill**, Independent Curator, formerly Audain Senior Curator, Indigenous Art, National Gallery of Canada; and **David Penney**, formerly Associate Director of Museum scholarship, Exhibitions, and Public Engagement at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. The Vancouver Art Gallery presentation is coordinated by **Richard Hill**, Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/exhibitions/shelley-niro-500-year-itch>

To coincide with National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a series of programs will take place during the opening weekend of the exhibition, including a public talk with **Shelley Niro** and a special edition of *The Making Place*. To register for these events, please email media@vanartgallery.bc.ca.

ARTIST TALK: SHELLEY NIRO

IN CONVERSATION WITH MELISSA BENNETT, GREG HILL AND DAVID PENNEY

SAT SEP 28, 2-3:30 PM | Room 4East and Rooftop Pavilion

A panel conversation with the artist **Shelley Niro** and co-curators **Melissa Bennett**, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Hamilton; **Greg Hill**, Independent Curator, formerly Audain Senior Curator, Indigenous Art, National Gallery of Canada; and **David Penney**, formerly Associate Director of Museum Scholarship at the National Museum of the American Indian. The event will include a brief introduction by **Anthony Kiendl**, CEO & Executive Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/artist-talk-shelley-niro>

THE MAKING PLACE WITH CHRISTINE MACKENZIE

SUN SEP 29, 11 AM, 1 PM & 3 PM | Vancouver Art Gallery

Join us for a special edition of the **Making Place** to honour National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, with one-hour eagle feather design workshops. Led by artist **Christine Mackenzie** of the Kwakiutl Nation, each workshop will include a demonstration, followed by a drawing activity.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/the-making-place-sept-29>

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VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

[Media Kit: Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch \(The Vancouver Art Gallery\)](#)

media@vanartgallery.bc.ca

Image: Shelley Niro, *The Rebel*, 1987/2022, hand tinted gelatin silver print, Courtesy of the Artist

ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's ground-breaking exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region. The Gallery's exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture. The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is situated on the ancestral and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəy^{əm} (Musqueam), S^kwx^wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and is respectful of the Indigenous stewards of the land it occupies, whose rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Vancouver and the work of the Gallery.

vanartgallery.bc.ca

