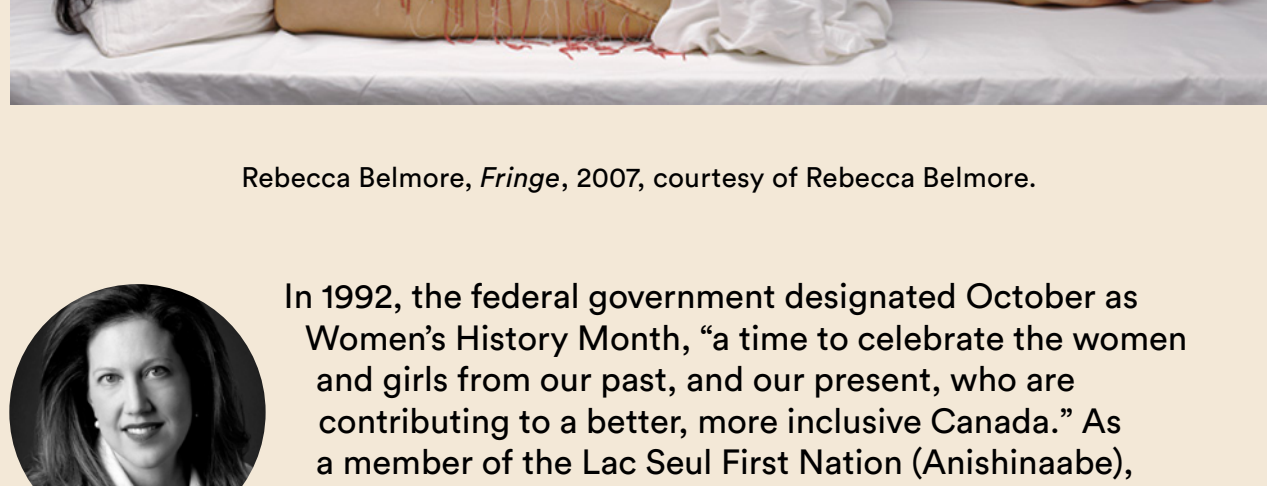


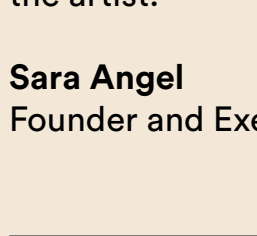
OCTOBER 6, 2023

# THE CLOSE-UP: *FRINGE* BY REBECCA BELMORE

*October is Women's History Month in Canada. To mark the occasion, we're spotlighting renowned contemporary artist Rebecca Belmore and her powerful work *Fringe*, 2007, which honours the resilience of Indigenous women past and present.*



Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*, 2007, courtesy of Rebecca Belmore.



In 1992, the federal government designated October as Women's History Month, "a time to celebrate the women and girls from our past, and our present, who are contributing to a better, more inclusive Canada." As a member of the Lac Seul First Nation (Anishinaabe), multidisciplinary artist Rebecca Belmore (b.1960) is known for a thought-provoking practice that uses performance, installation, and photography to address the experiences of Indigenous women. In this newsletter, we take a close look at one of Rebecca Belmore's most revered works, *Fringe*, 2007, as well as other related works by the artist.

**Sara Angel**  
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

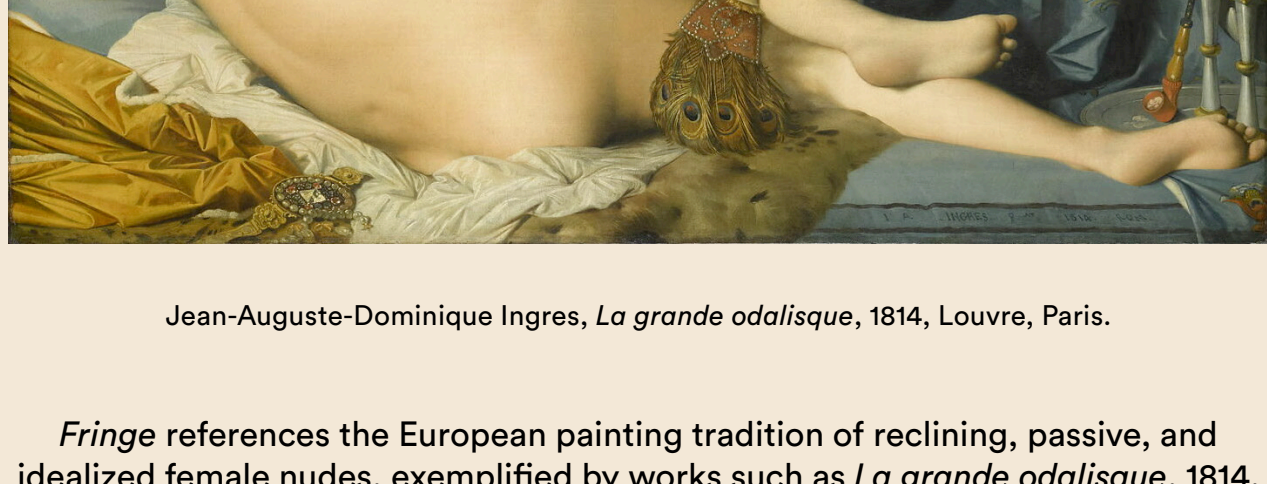
## THE INDIGENOUS FEMALE BODY



Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*, 2007, installed at the Fonderie Darling, Montreal.

*Fringe*, produced in 2007 as a photograph as well as a billboard installed at Montreal's Fonderie Darling until 2011, immediately attracted attention for its arresting depiction of an Indigenous woman with her back to the viewer, on which a deep scar is decorated with a fringe of red beads. Playing on the ever-politicized nature of the Indigenous female body, Belmore's layered work invites a multiplicity of interpretations. [For art historian Julia Skelly](#), Belmore's work invokes "the centuries of material violence enacted upon Indigenous women's bodies, including, but not limited to, the epidemic of domestic violence and murder that Indigenous women continue to experience in the 21st century in Canada." Offering another perspective, [Anishinaabe curator Wanda Nanibush says](#), "Looking at *Fringe*, some people see the image of the scar, and they can't get past the pain. But, for me, it's always been a healing image."

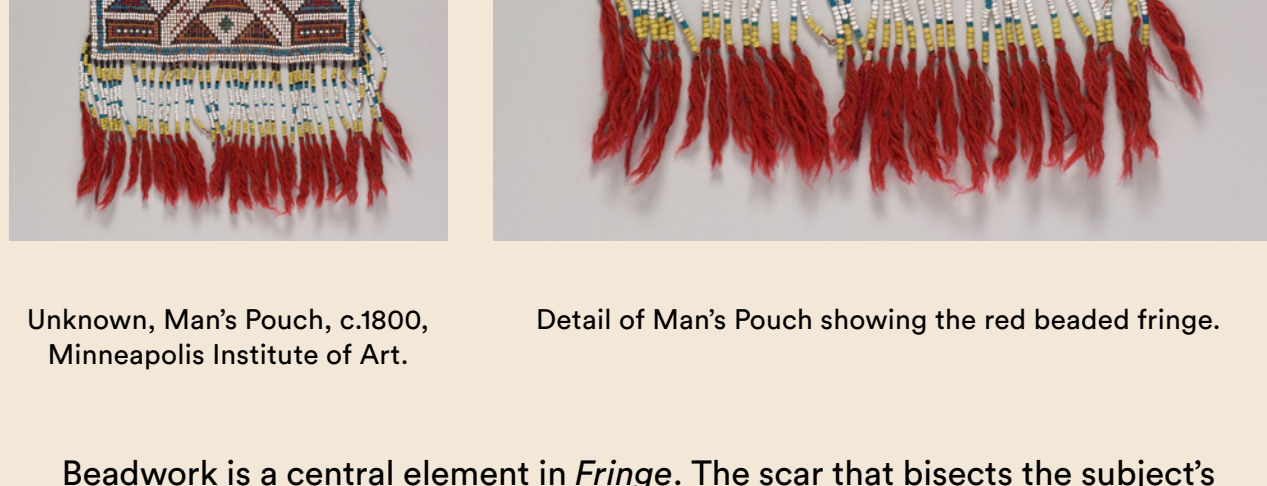
## A COMMENTARY ON THE FEMALE BODY IN WESTERN ART



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La grande odalisque*, 1814, Louvre, Paris.

*Fringe* references the European painting tradition of reclining, passive, and idealized female nudes, exemplified by works such as *La grande odalisque*, 1814, by Neoclassical French painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867). As in Ingres's painting, the woman in Belmore's work reclines on a bed with her back to the viewer. However, while Ingres's model looks back over her shoulder in a seductive manner, Belmore's subject has turned away completely, forcing viewers to face the stark reality of her long, thick scar and the traumas that Indigenous women bear in colonial society.

## ANISHINAABE BEADWORK



Unknown, Man's Pouch, c.1800, Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Detail of Man's Pouch showing the red beaded fringe.

Beadwork is a central element in *Fringe*. The scar that bisects the subject's back—created using special-effects makeup—is sewn together with red beads and dangling thread, recalling traditional Anishinaabe objects such as this fringed man's pouch, c.1800 (above). Belmore's piece also references a disturbing 1980 incident where a St. Boniface surgeon added beads to the suture of a Cree woman without her knowledge. In the artist's work, the fringe of beads evokes dripping blood, but it also functions as stitches and as a kind of treatment—the act of beading is a medicinal and healing practice for many Indigenous communities.

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## REFUSING THE GAZE



Rebecca Belmore, *sister*, 2010, courtesy of Rebecca Belmore.

A refusal of the gaze is a hallmark of Belmore's work—she frequently features subjects who turn away from the camera or avoid eye contact with the viewer, as in *sister*, 2010. "If the model is facing away from you, you know they're looking to something, and you're looking at them looking, which adds a performative aspect to the image," said Belmore [in an interview with Anishinaabe curator Wanda Nanibush](#). "Because that's what, as a performance artist, I've always been aware of—being watched," Belmore added. Installed in the window of Simon Fraser University's Audain Gallery in downtown Vancouver, *sister* was meant to be seen by participants in the 2010 Annual Women's Memorial March for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

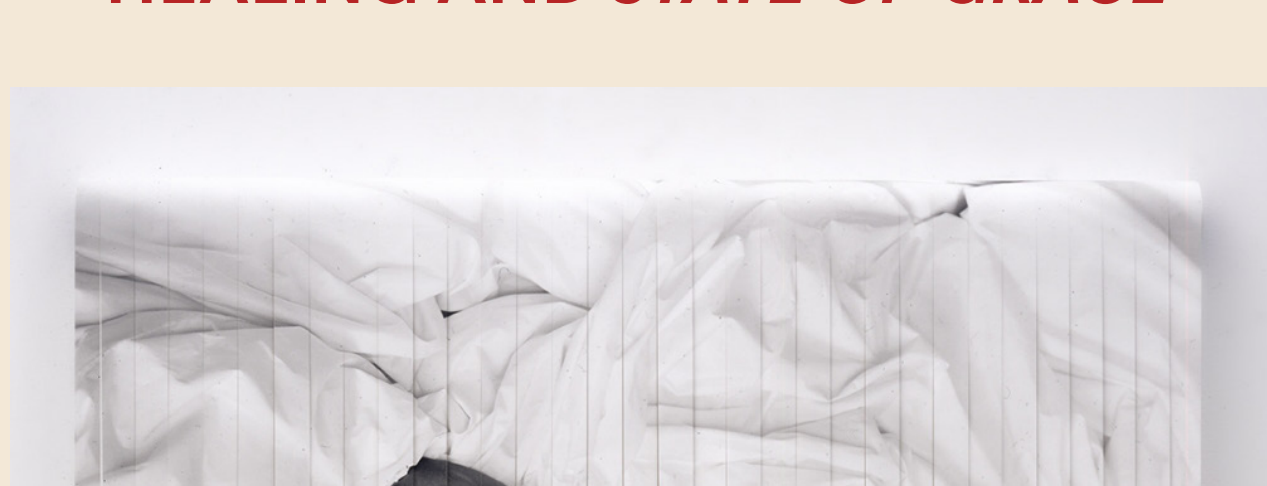
## VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN



Rebecca Belmore, *The Named and the Unnamed*, 2002, courtesy of Rebecca Belmore.

Belmore often uses her own body in her work. *The Named and the Unnamed*, 2002, is a video installation that documents Belmore's *Vigil*, 2002, a live performance on a street corner in Vancouver's Downtown East Side that commemorated Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women who have disappeared from the area. Belmore—whose arms were covered with the names of the women, written in heavy black ink—scrubbed the street, lit candles, and donned a red dress, which she nailed to a telephone pole. After ripping herself free, Belmore called out the women's names one by one, punctuating each proclamation by pulling a rose stem through her teeth.

## HEALING AND STATE OF GRACE



Rebecca Belmore, *State of Grace*, 2002, installed at Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, courtesy of Rebecca Belmore.

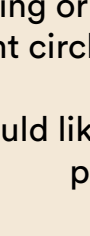
While the figure in *Fringe* is deeply wounded, she is also resting, recuperating, and healing. It's a theme that appears in many of Belmore's works, including *State of Grace*, 2002 (above). In this black and white photograph, a woman is captured in the midst of a deep sleep. To give the work a sense of movement, Belmore cut the photograph into strips and wrapped the upper edge around a tube, so that the entire work functions as a fringe. "*State of Grace* and *Fringe* are connected," she stated [in an interview with Anishinaabe curator Wanda Nanibush](#). "I think ideas can come back, and works can haunt one another."

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Image Credits: [1] Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*, 2007, photograph. Courtesy of Rebecca Belmore. [2] Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*, 2007, billboard, installed at the Fonderie Darling, Montreal. Courtesy of the Fonderie Darling. [3] Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La grande odalisque*, 1814, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 162.6 cm. Collection of the Louvre, Paris, Purchase, 1899 (RF-1168). [4] Unknown, Man's Pouch, c.1800, hide, beads, quills, wool, cotton, 34.6 x 18.6 cm. Collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Gift of funds from Duncan and Nivin MacMillan (2000.75.1). [5] Rebecca Belmore, *sister*, 2010, colour ink-jet on transparencies, 213 x 366 cm (overall). Courtesy of Rebecca Belmore. © Rebecca Belmore. [6] Rebecca Belmore, *The Named and the Unnamed* (still), 2002, video installation. Video credit: Paul Wong. Photo credit: Howard Ursuliak / Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. Courtesy of Rebecca Belmore. [7] Rebecca Belmore, *State of Grace*, 2002, photograph. Installed at Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver. Photo credit: Donna Hagerman, Howard Ursuliak / Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery. Courtesy of Rebecca Belmore.