
28/04 - 02/07

Confluences

River rights Rites de rivière

SBC

GALERIE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN
GALLERY OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Sebastián Calfuqueo
Carolina Caycedo
Mei-Kuei Feu
Genevieve Robertson
Daniel Torres

Curator : Gwynne Fulton

*The river is a voice / that refuses / to stay silent /
What opens / in the language of / the waters ?
Río Herido/ Wounded River, Daniela Catrileo*

In recent years, the Atrato river in Colombia and the Magpie/Muteshekau Shipu river in Québec have been recognized as the subject of rights. In Colombia's transitional justice framework, the Atrato is acknowledged as victim of the armed conflict, rather than a stage on which the conflict unfolded, while the Muteshekau Shipu, "the veins" of the ancestral homeland of the Innu, has the right to take legal action. What does it mean for rivers to participate in legal and restorative justice processes? How do they bear witness to histories of conflict and colonization and what strategies of listening can we develop to hear what opens in their plural languages?

Taking as its starting point the political rights of rivers, *Confluences* brings together works by Sebastián Calfuqueo, Carolina Caycedo, Mei-Kuei Feu, Genevieve Robertson and Daniel Torres that engage struggles for water across hemispheres and legal systems. The exhibition is concerned with the political ecologies and ontologies of water, the social histories of waterways and ongoing legacies of hydrocolonial violence that link Canada to the Global South through extractive and hydroelectric projects.

Confluences negotiates tensions between rites and rights: between, on the one hand, everyday acts of walking, drawing, and collective organizing as forms of resistance beyond the state—and, on the other hand, juridical acts that extend human rights to nature. River rights are a strategic mechanism for conferring protections of rivers and the communities that defend them. Yet, they need to be critically questioned. Delving into submerged knowledges, the works presented here agitate for what Ariella Aïsha Azoulay calls "nonimperial rights," that flow not from document-based declarations extended by imperial state apparatuses to nonhuman subjects, but from rivers themselves¹. Through film and video, photography, drawing and performance, the artists stage

discrete drawings record both the presence and loss of lifeforms occupying the river and marshlands. These drawings depict flora and fauna that presently thrive, those precariously clinging to the endangered species list, and those that are vanished from the Upper Columbia because of flooding in what was once fecund wetland region. The project reasserts this lost geography, while exploring the narrative space between taxonomic order and disorder, documentary and imaginary, microcosm and ecosystem.

The project is a contribution to *River Relations: A Beholder's Share of the Columbia River*, a two-year interdisciplinary artistic research project undertaken by a collective of artists, poets and geographers in response to the extensive damming of the Columbia River and the current renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty, a watershed governance agreement between Canada and the United States.

4_ Sebastián Calfuqueo, *Kowkülen* (Liquid Being), 2020

Video, 1920×1080, HD, 3 minutes.

The work goes through a bodily, personal and poetic journey regarding the water, wetlands, lakes, oceans, rivers and springs. The work addresses the concepts of body, binarism, gender, sexuality, the historical relationship between water and life, as well as their potential as a living space, necessary to the relationship of all territories.

5_ Mei-Kuei Feu, *Flux*, 2018

Two channel synchronized video installation, HD, stereo, 5 min.

Flux establishes a dialogue between nature and humans based on observations of the St. Lawrence River and environments built for water. It all begins with a sunrise on a lake in summer, the water tames itself, follows and undergoes a metamorphosis to end with a sunset behind an ice rink. Between light and dark, the oscillating water carries creative inspiration from one place to another. It reveals a perpetual change of the world from which springs a regenerating energy.

1_ Daniel Torres, *Superficies/Surfaces*, 2020,

22min, 16mm & Video

Exploring the Colombian supreme court's decision to declare the Atrato river a subject of rights, *Superficies* is a personal travel diary that asks the question: «How do you interview a river?» Filming the city of Quibdó, Colombia and its surroundings with a cellphone and a bolex, it approaches the river as a landscape that exists beyond its riverbanks, asking the people who live next to it how they would feel and what they would do if they were the river.

2_ Carolina Caycedo, *Serpent River Book*, 2017

Artist book, 72 page accordion fold, offset, printed canvas hardcover

Serpent River Book is an artist-book that combines archival images, maps, poems, lyrics, satellite photos, with the artist's own images and texts on river bio-cultural diversity, in a long and meandering collage. The fluctuating publication can frame many narratives. As a book it can be opened, pleated and read in many directions, and has a performative potential to it, functioning as a score, or as a workshop tool. *Serpent River Book* gathers visual and written materials compiled by the artist while working in Colombian, Brazilian, and Mexican communities affected by the industrialization and privatization of river systems.

The book is part of the ongoing body of work 'Be Dammed', that investigates the effects of extractivism on natural and social landscapes, exploring the power dynamics associated with the corporatization and decimation of water resources.

3_ Genevieve Robertson, *Study of a Lost Shoreline*, 2017–2019

Handmade silt-based watercolour and ink on paper, 150 drawings, 11"×11" each, (174×725cm).

Study of a Lost Shoreline is an elegiac drawing installation informed by human-caused ecological change along the Columbia River, which begins in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia and empties into the Pacific Ocean in Astoria, Oregon. Comprised of 150 individual drawings produced using silt from the Columbia's Roosevelt, Wanapum, McNarry and Kinbasket reservoirs, this collection of small,

poetic and political gestures that help make audible the rivers' own jurisdictional authorities and responsibilities. They reflect on what it means for a river to have memory, but also *to be a voice that refuses to stay silent*. By listening to the language of rivers, they ask us to consider our own obligation to place.

These works gathered here mourn flooded shorelines, disrupted ecosystems, and displaced communities. Caycedo's *Serpent River Book* snakes across the gallery floor, reactivating grassroots resistance to multinational hydroelectric projects along the banks of the Magdalena/Yuma. Robertson draws on the mineral memory of riverbed silt to reimagine a shoreline submerged by the Columbia river dam. Calfuqueo offers their body to the Violen estuary, in a performative ritual rooted in Mapuche cosmologies that challenges the Chilean state's neoliberal privatization of water. While Fie walks carefully on other peoples' land to cultivate gentle relations with river ecologies and communities, Torres self-reflexively questions how humans sense rivers and how the Atrato, in turn, might rise up to defend itself against human activity by proclaiming the flood as its cyclical birthright. Marking extended collaborations with rivers, these interventions unsettle our understandings of rivers, while holding themselves accountable to various forms of extraction—of images, knowledges, minerals and hydropower. This hydrocartography gives rise to multiple understandings of rivers: as a nonbinary territory that entwines human and nonhuman actors in a relation of asymmetrical reciprocity, a counter-archive of disappearances, a living form of memory, and subject of rights.

The exhibition's title pays homage to Tio'tià:ke, the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) name for Montréal which means "where the currents meet." It stages a meeting of the Cautín, the Atrato, the Magdalena/Yuma and Columbia on the largest island of the Hochelaga Archipelago located near the confluence of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers. This flowing together of rivers from different cosmopolitical contexts is a provocation for continued dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, bodies of water and legal bodies working to reclaim rights for the St. Lawrence river.

The unceded lands on which SBC gallery is located hold a long history of stewardship by Indigenous peoples, who are the traditional guardians of the waters known as Kaniatarowanenneh (big waterway) to Mohawk peoples and Kahnawákye to the Tuscarora². I honour their ongoing care of these waters. Mounting this work is one act in a larger commitment to conversations and actions that necessarily overflow the temporality of the exhibition. With *Confluences*, I acknowledge the *longue durée* of hydrocolonial capitalism in Québec—one of the largest global producers of hydro power—extending from the arrival of European settlers, through the expansion of industrial development and the imperial project of the seaway, which has dramatically reshaped the river's course as it winds through ancestral territories, as well as the targeting of gender queer bodies, Afrodescendent, Indigenous and *campesino* communities who organize in common defense of water across Turtle Island / Abya Yala.

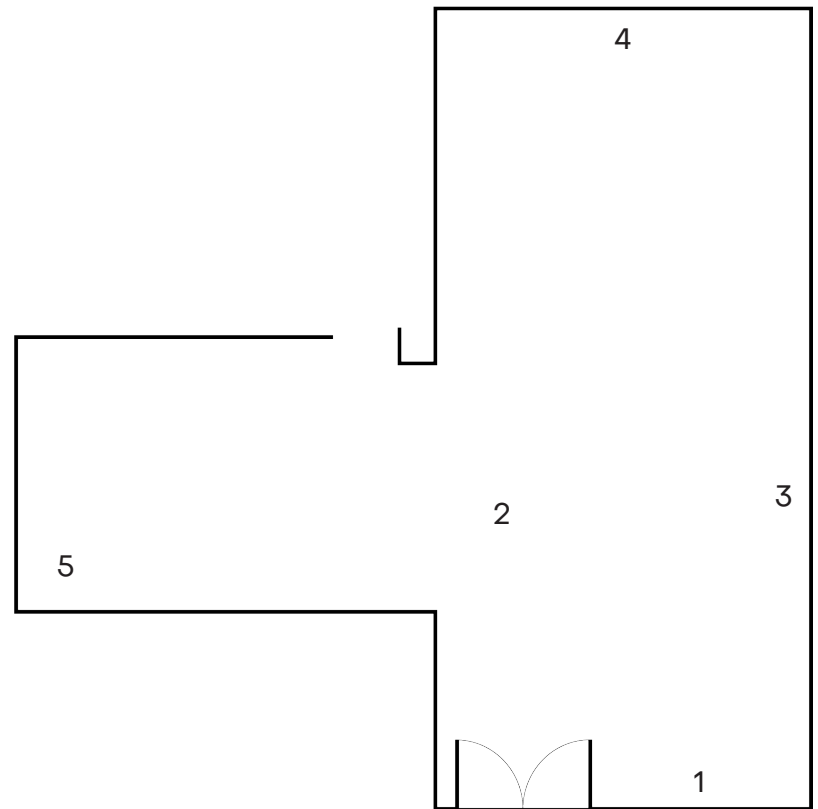
Gwynne Fulton

1 – Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, New York, NY: Verso Books, 2019.

2 – Darren Bonaparte, “Kaniatarowanenneh, River of the Iroquois.”, *Wampum Chronicles*, n.d. <http://www.wampumchronicles.com/kaniatarowanenneh.html>.

Gwynne Fulton is an image theorist and independent curator based in Tio'tià:ke/Mooniyang/ Montréal. Fulton holds a PhD in Philosophy and Art History from Concordia University. She has organized film programs and workshops about the carceral

state, illegalized migration, the visual geopolitics of oceans, and the targeted killing of land defenders in Colombia. Her writing appears in *Esse arts+opinions*, *Mosaic*, *In/Visible Culture*, *ARP Books*, and *Dazibao* editions.



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