

REBECCA BELMORE OSVALDO YERO Adrift



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About the Work

Rebecca Belmore and Osvaldo Yero's collaborative artworks are primarily conceived relative to the geography of the land of a particular place, the contemporary and enduring histories of its lands, waters and peoples. *Adrift* is a 5.2-metre-long assemblage of driftwood from the west coast of British Columbia cast in steel and resin; the bonelike resin parts are attached to either side of a polished stainless steel trunk of a tree. Viewed from below, this long and narrow part of the structure—its bottommost part—may be perceived as the spine of a large marine mammal, or the keel of a boat, rising in a slight curve from its stern to the bow (back to front). Viewed from above, the polished steel branches and shoots of the tree trunk function as armatures for the bone-shaped resin. In some cases, metallic branches jut up and out of the resin sleeves revealing small nodes, as if breaking through.

Before the artists' work in the studio began, in early December of 2018, driftwood was gathered on the West Coast and was limited to the ones that looked like bones. The search was further restricted because there is little driftwood on the beach during the late fall months. It is the darker winter months that bring storms strong enough to loose a log boom or carry felled tree trunks, branches, stumps, root-balls

through rivers and streams, and to blow them across the mouth of a delta or beach to the ocean. This entire journey is an eco-system that evolves through changing environments, an organic process that enriches living organisms in forest streams and rivers through which it travels, a journey in which driftwood becomes a thriving environment for other forms of life until it sinks to the bottom of the ocean.

Visitors may imagine a space craft, like *Voyager I*, which moved through space for nearly thirty-five years before leaving our solar system; or a 19th century canoe on the lakes of Ontario; the Viking boat buried in Uppsala, Sweden; or the *Titanic*, rusting at the bottom of the sea, which, with the help of single cell bacteria, will eventually become a pile of iron ore on the ocean floor. While the work may be interpreted by a viewer, at the same time, the sculpture's rough skeletal outline is not ambiguous. The work clearly references what is left of something, of something that has disappeared, something not completed, or as the process of decomposition itself. Its narrative possible past need not be resolved or imagined except in contrast to an *emerging reality*; here aspects of the past are no longer relevant. The title, *Adrift*, suggests movement without direction. For a water vessel to be adrift is to be without anchor or power and carried by the same ocean currents on which driftwood travels.

These visual quotations of ocean, tree, driftwood, boat, travel, wreck, marine and human life, death, movement, stillness, may collide, merge and come apart. Or they may appear as an image so poetically concise that its possible narratives, within literature or art or history or place, or any other known references, become an inseparable totality—an intensification, or a bellwether—of what we know about oceans and climate change, refugees and rafts, or sunken ships.

— Marcia Crosby

Marcia Crosby is a Tsimshian-Haida writer, curator, researcher and art historian. She holds a doctorate in art history from the University of British Columbia.

Images *Adrift*, 2019. Photos: Henri Robideau



About the Artists

Rebecca Belmore, a multi-disciplinary Anishinaabe artist from Lac Seul First Nation, and Cuban born Osvaldo Yero have had a working relationship for over 20 years and have lived between Canada and Cuba since 2003. They lived in Vancouver between 2001 and 2012, during which time they became familiar with the West Coast and its waterways. Both are recognized international artists who work from the cultural and political histories, experiences and knowledge bases specific to the places in which they were born. This limited biography addresses collaborative works, mediated by their mutual interests in the material nature of art and references to the classical elements of fire, earth, water and air, taking such forms as ice, rust and ceramic beads. Recent works include the 2019 Hart House Centennial Commission at the University of Toronto and *O-ween du muh waun: The time of being told is over*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2018 and *Upriver*, East/West Greenway, Richmond, British Columbia, in 2016.

Above Rebecca Belmore and Osvaldo Yero. Photo: Henri Robideau

The City of Vancouver Public Art Program commissions artworks and supports critical artistic explorations that reflect on the complexities of place, publics, and culture. The program prioritizes artist-centred approaches and respectful relations in pursuit of the vision of a city where the work of artists is integrated into daily life. Artworks are commissioned by the program for public sites and through private development rezoning requirements. Vancouver's public art collection includes over 300 artworks created since the program began in 1991. Learn more about the program and other public artworks at vancouver.ca/publicart. Sign up for Arts and Culture information at vancouver.ca/culture.



Adrift, 2019, was commissioned by the City of Vancouver through the Public Art Program and with the assistance of the Vancouver Public Library and located in the vaulted space between the 8th and 9th floors, Vancouver Public Library, Central Branch, 350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, British Columbia. Photo: Henri Robideau

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