

Tools for Learning
Toronto Biennial of Art

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WHAT IS A BIENNIAL?

A biennial is a large-scale, citywide contemporary art event that takes place every *two years*. The first was in 1895 with the inaugural Venice Biennale, an event that continues to showcase contemporary art in national pavilions from around the world. When effective, biennials can be sites of experimentation that offer artists, curators, and visitors an alternative to the traditional museum framework, all the while engaging flexibly with the local arts sector. There are now hundreds of biennials worldwide taking place in cities that include São Paulo, Berlin, Istanbul, and as of this year, the city of Toronto!

Toronto is not new to the grand exhibition. Exhibition Place, founded in 1879, has been home to many large-scale happenings within the city. This model has often showcased cutting-edge technological developments and industrial strength that proudly underscored the nation's role in the conquest of land and colonial empire-building. The grand exhibition therefore has a darker history that audiences tend not to connect with contemporary biennial frameworks.

As the first-ever contemporary art biennial in Toronto, the Toronto Biennial of Art has the opportunity to critically reflect on these exhibition histories, while challenging ourselves to respond to more recent biennial tropes such as the

COLOPHON

Tools for Learning Toolbox

Toronto Biennial of Art, 2019

Featured Artists: Maria Thereza Alves, Adrian Blackwell, Hera Büyüктаşçıyan, Judy Chicago, Dana Claxton, Jae Jarrell, Kapwani Kiwanga, Abel Rodríguez and Wilson Rodríguez, Arin Rungjang, Adrian Stimson, Susan Schuppli

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gentrification of neighbourhoods and amount of waste produced in the production of large-scale events. This has brought us to ask: can contemporary exhibitions be more sustainable and aware of our responsibility toward surrounding communities and ecologies? This question has driven the Toronto Biennial of Art team within both its exhibition-making and public programming to develop responsive approaches that work in relation to the diverse histories of the city, the communities within it, and the water around it.

With this in mind, the Biennial Exhibition, entitled *The Shoreline Dilemma*, seeks to address how industrial production and economic growth in Toronto have contributed to the historical and physical alteration of its waterfront due to dense condominium developments, active and decommissioned military bases, lost rivers, human-made spits, and rising tides. Following the Biennial's core question to artists, "What does it mean to be in relation?", humans or non-humans thinking and working in relation can reveal meaningful connections. Like the shoreline, the Biennial aims to move and shift in relation to its context, making space for flows of conversation and divergent experiences through exhibition-making and programming.

WHAT ARE TOOLS FOR LEARNING?

What tools do you need when visiting a biennial? Maybe a tool for making notes, for finding the way, for looking more closely, for resting. Tools can be used to help us make and repair, and sometimes also undo and break. Could a tool become part of making an experience? What tool would be useful for repairing a relationship?

The word “tool” has been used in other ways. In *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), philosopher Ivan Illich looked into practical and political strategies to find ways people can access information to guide their own learning. Concurrently, activist and writer Audre Lorde called for new tools, noting: “[T]he master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.” More recently, architect Hélène Frichot’s imagining of “power tools” that can amplify silenced voices and histories recalls Métis artist and scholar David Garneau’s recognition of silence and non-verbal forms of expression and resistance as potentially more effective tools than words in conciliation and healing.

Making, repairing, refusing, and undoing can take time. Tools for Learning adopts the approaches of these educators and thinkers, along with others inspired by Biennial participants

Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” Lecture delivered during “The Personal and the Political Panel” at the Second Sex Conference. New York, September 29, 1979.

Shamoon, Ilana. *Curatorial Framework*. Toronto Biennial of Art. 2018.

Sunshine, Fannie. “Canada 150: Toronto Traces Its Indigenous History Back 11,000 Years.” *Toronto.com*. June 21, 2017. toronto.com/community-story/7218897-canada-150-toronto-traces-its-indigenous-history-back-11-000-years/.

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and artworks. This growing toolbox includes tools for listening, agreeing or disagreeing, sharing and observing as a means to encourage learners to adjust, test, and experiment. Formed in response to the questions surfacing within the exhibition, these Tools offer a host of useful bodily, and collective activities, which invite visiting schools, community groups, and others to make and repair—even undo and refuse—relationships among their curricula, experiences of the Biennial, and one another.

WHERE ARE WE?

The first edition of the Toronto Biennial of Art takes visitors on a winding journey along Lake Ontario's shoreline from the Etobicoke Creek to the Port Lands. Spanning multiple indoor and outdoor sites, the Biennial's locations include established cultural institutions, emerging public spaces, beloved parks, and abandoned or repurposed heritage buildings situated mainly at the water's edge. This place where land and water cross each other marks an important meeting point of Indigenous, settler, and immigrant histories, together with the lived experiences and rapid development of the Greater Toronto Area today. The Biennial's route also happens to trace the shoreline boundary of the so-called Toronto Purchase, inviting visitors to ask, "What is our relationship to the land and water?" By considering this together, we can begin to understand that place is more than just a geographic location, containing vast, sometimes invisible, intersections of social, economic, and political relations.

This straightening was conceived by politicians to ease concerns due to pollution levels in the river and greedily stop the frequent costly floods and regular silt blockages around the port of Toronto that stood in the way of shipping. The impact was continued flooding and pollution, a loss of bio-diversity in the river, and the introduction of harmful and 9 invasive species.

The Don River (Evergreen Brick Works and Riverdale Park West) has a layered history. The river is one of several main arteries that for centuries brought Indigenous travellers south to the lake from up north. The Lower Don River itself once flowed right through Riverdale Park before it was radically straightened in the 1880s as a part of the City's Don Improvement Plan.

Selected Biennial Sites

Before 1923, the ground beneath 259 Lake Shore Blvd East at the border of Toronto's Port Lands did not exist. The area around it was created to make space for industry by bringing in sand, stone, and clay to fill in the harbour, disrupting an important ecosystem within the lake. This area was once Lake Ontario's largest marshland, home to migratory birds

and other wildlife. The Small Arms Inspection Building in Mississauga is a reminder of the region's military history and its complex representation in our imaginations today. Did you know that when the Small Arms was in full operation—manufacturing hand-held weapons for the Canadian and Allied forces during the Second World War—ninety percent of its staff were women?

The Toronto Purchase Treaty No. 13 (1805)

"The Crown, in the 1780s, recognized the need to secure communication and supply lines to their western outposts and to unite the settlements along Lake Ontario from Kingston to Niagara. In order to meet Crown objectives, Sir John Johnston, Superintendent General of the Indian Department, met in 1787 with a number of Mississaugas at the Bay of Quinte where the Mississaugas of the Credit purportedly sold the lands of

the Toronto Purchase Treaty. A supposed deed documenting the sale of the lands was found years later and raised serious questions about the legitimacy of the deal between the Crown and the Mississaugas. Problematically, the deed was found blank and had no description of the land "purchased" by the Crown. Also of concern was that the marks of the chiefs who had agreed to the sale were written on separate pieces of paper and then affixed to the blank deed. An attempt to survey the Toronto Purchase Treaty lands in 1788 met Mississauga opposition

indicating that there had been no clear delineation of land boundaries agreed upon by the Crown and the First Nation.

Crown administrators soon doubted the legality of the Toronto Purchase Treaty and were concerned that many settlers did not have legal title to their homesteads. Also disconcerting was the possibility that York, the capital of Upper Canada, was located on land of dubious legal title. For over ten years the Crown failed to act on the dilemma until a

new agreement was negotiated with the Mississaugas of the Credit. On August 1, 1805, the Crown purchased 250,830 acres of land for the sum of 10 shillings while the Mississaugas reserved for themselves the right to exclusively fish on Etobicoke Creek.

In 1886, the Mississaugas of the Credit filed a claim against the Government of Canada relative to the 1805 Toronto Purchase Treaty. The Mississaugas contended that the Crown had unlawfully acquired more land, including the Toronto Islands,

than had been originally agreed upon in the Toronto Purchase Treaty of 1787. It was further claimed that the Crown had not paid a reasonable sum for the land obtained in the 1805 agreement. In 2010, the Government of Canada settled the Toronto Purchase Claim and the Brant Tract Claim for compensation of \$145 million – at that time the largest claims settlement in Canadian history.

The cities of Etobicoke, Toronto, North York, York and Vaughan are located within the boundaries of the

Toronto Purchase Treaty lands. In 2016, a claim was filed against the Government of Ontario and Canada in which the MCFN asserted unextinguished title to all the water, lands under the water, and flood plains of their territory."

– *Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation: Treaties 1781-1820*. Darin P. Wybenga. Mississauga of the Credit First Nation, 2017.