

For Immediate Release

## Richmond Art Gallery explores the power of daily rituals in new exhibition *A Practice in Gestures*

All women group show looks at how ordinary gestures can help process trauma, resist colonial narratives, and highlight urgent environmental issues

AUGUST 5, 2021 (VANCOUVER, B.C.) — The **Richmond Art Gallery** presents *A Practice in Gestures*, a new group exhibition on display from Sept. 10 to Nov. 7, 2021. The exhibition by gallery curator **Nan Capogna** features the work of six BC-based artists: **Farheen HaQ**, **Deborah Koenker**, **Bev Koski**, **Mitra Mahmoodi**, **Bettina Matzkuhn**, and **Barbara Zeigler**. The all women group show makes visible the invisible labour of domestic practices and the inherent power of daily rituals and gestures. Through works spanning beading, embroidery, ceramics, and more, the artists consider the ways in which these historically and culturally rooted practices can be used to process trauma, resist colonial narratives, and highlight environmental issues.

“Over the past year, Canada has been grappling with its colonial history and systemic racism — all against a backdrop of a global pandemic and accelerating climate change,” says Capogna. “*A Practice in Gestures* explores methods of resistance and resilience, turning to the subtle yet tangible ways in which we emotionally and physically work through personal — and ultimately universal — inquiries. At the start of the pandemic, we saw a collective turn inward toward the home and to making things by hand; more than a year later this exhibition provides perspective on what these kinds of simple practices can offer.”

The exhibition reflects on gestures and their impact. Are poetic gestures defined solely by what they denote? How do gestures and their references shift when they are complicated by new social contexts? The show studies the content of artistic practice itself, looking at both emerging and established artists to highlight the potential within their methodologies.

South Asian Muslim Canadian artist **Farheen HaQ** has a multidisciplinary practice that is currently focused on understanding her family history on Canadian territories, caregiving, and the body as a continuum of culture and time. For the exhibition, she will present two works, including *Drinking from my mother's saucer*, a video work that draws from her early childhood memories and features buffalo bone china. The work looks at trauma — that of her ancestors and the trauma of Indigenous peoples — and her own complicity in colonization in Canada.

Interdisciplinary artist and Emily Carr University professor emeritus **Deborah Koenker** will premiere two works: *Hanging by a Thread: Anonymous Re-Vision*, a long-term piece years in the making, and *Hanging by a Thread: Migrations*, a new work. The former is an extensive series of small hand embroideries based on photocopied details from 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century master landscape drawings by male artists. First begun in 2002, the series plays off of the notion of copying and the status of women's work. *Migrations* is a related series of prints taken from the reverse side of the embroideries, charting the fragile course of the winds of globalization and climate change.

**Bev Koski** is an Anishinaabe bead artist who worked for several years with the 7<sup>th</sup> Generation Image Makers, a youth-led Aboriginal community arts program run by Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. For the exhibition, she will present several pieces from an ongoing series of beaded figures. Sourcing souvenir figurines from her travels, Koski beads over the miniatures and highlights the ways in which Indigenous identities have been misrepresented through stereotypical depictions. She will also show a new work with the beaded text, *Are*

*you still watching?*, a humorous commentary on our COVID-19 stay-at-home habit of bingeing TV and the eerie omniscience of technology in our lives.

Iranian Canadian artist **Mitra Mahmoodi** will show *Aftabeh*, a collection of pitchers made of clay and traditionally used for handwashing or cleansing. The ceramic pieces investigate her Middle Eastern and Islamic heritage, and ongoing engagement with landscape, architecture, and language. Mahmoodi draws on the diversities and contradictions from the world of antiquity.

**Bettina Matzkuhn** uses embroidery to tell narratives of ecology, climate, and geography. For the exhibition, she will present several pieces, including *SOS*, comprised of seven embroidered life jackets. Drawing from her own family history, Matzkuhn highlights refugee crises caused by the effects of global warming. Her works present nature as something that needs to be rescued and ties humanity to that necessity.

UBC professor emerita of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory, **Barbara Zeigler** will premiere *Ritual and Change*, a series she has been developing over 33 years. For decades, Zeigler has carefully washed the shells of eggs she and her family consume. *Totally Cracked* is a sculptural floor work comprised of eggshells and river rock. The video installation *Passage II* demonstrates her repetitive ritual of washing of eggshells, referencing a process of transition from one state of consciousness to another. Living in a time of rapid transformation and population growth, coupled with an increasingly precarious environmental situation, Zeigler links processes of change on a personal level and on a collective, cultural scale. The works serves as a meditation on time and one's role in relation to change.

Information about public programming will be updated at [www.richmondartgallery.org](http://www.richmondartgallery.org). Upcoming events include:

### **Artist Tour | Sunday, Sept. 12, 2–3pm**

Join curator Nan Capogna and artists Farheen HaQ, Deborah Koenker, Mitra Mahmoodi, Bettina Matzkuhn, and Barbara Zeigler as they each discuss their works in an in-person tour. Limited spaces, pre-booking is required.

### **(Culture Days) Women's Work: Online Panel Discussion | Saturday, Oct. 16, 2–3:30pm**

Throughout the history of art, decoration and domestic handicrafts have been devalued as “women's work,” specifically because it was associated with the domestic and the feminine. Using the artworks in *A Practice in Gestures* as a launching point, curator Nan Capogna and artists Farheen HaQ, Deborah Koenker and Bettina Matzkuhn discuss this topic.

### **About Richmond Art Gallery**

The only public gallery in Richmond, the Richmond Art Gallery (RAG) is a municipal gallery supported by the non-profit Richmond Art Gallery Association (RAGA), a charitable organization. In operation since 1980, the gallery presents curated exhibitions by British Columbian, national and international artists, maintains a permanent collection, and presents innovative and diverse programming for children, youth, and adults. Since 1992, the gallery has been located in the Richmond Cultural Centre, and has evolved into a well-regarded professional contemporary art gallery that was awarded a Richmond Arts Award for leadership in 2010. RAGA supports the gallery through membership, fundraising, and advocacy.

### **Press kit and photos**

[bit.ly/RAGgestures](http://bit.ly/RAGgestures)

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