

# Didactic and Artwork Descriptions for Lori Blondeau: I'm Not Your Kinda Princess

On view June 6 to August 30, 2024 at McMaster Museum of Art  
Curated by Luther Konadu

## Levy Gallery – Exhibition Didactic

*I'm Not Your Kinda Princess* is the first solo exhibition by the multidisciplinary artist, Lori Blondeau in Hamilton. This exhibition is a survey of works that evinces the nuanced breadth of the artist's three-plus decades career. An artistic career whose vigour and cultural relevance continues to grow retrospectively. The oldest work featured in this survey exhibition dates back to 1996 while the latest is from 2023.

With Cree, Saulteaux, and Métis ancestry from Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan, Blondeau's oeuvre has flourished out of a multifaceted performance-centered practice several of which manifested in front of live audiences. Aside from starring with other artist collaborators or in some cases family members, she also directed her live performances which included an intricately organized production. They often included music, set and lighting design, spoken-word narration, props, and costumes. Many of these performances were given longevity as video works, and few are featured in this exhibition. Her performance work also evolved to take the form of staged photographic works as well as installations. All of Blondeau's performance-based works have been a vehicle for either enacting invented personas, critical storytelling, or translating her Indigenous matrilineal knowledge through ritual-making. Throughout the exhibition, we see Blondeau using her body to embody different roles that astutely challenge colonial narratives and distorted Western media representations of Indigenous women. The artist often uses satire and irony as a destabilizing cover for communicating hard truths like in the video *COSMOSQUAW*, the photographic work *Lonely Surfer Squaw*, and her other persona-driven performances. The title of the exhibition itself is also a send-up to one of the many prevailing stereotypes projected onto Indigenous women, 'the Indian Princess'.

In her other projects, the artist's work takes a more elegiac, introspective and poetic resonance like in *Asiniy Iskwew* and *States of Grace*. Blondeau often foregrounds the self-determined women she grew up around as a re-representation of Indigenous women's identity in spite of the atrocities of colonial intervention. An example of this matrilineal acknowledgment can be seen through the work, *Sisters*. Moreover, what's especially significant in centering matrilineal presence in work is a way of keeping their stories and cultural rites alive. In doing so, she emphasizes the endurance of their power and knowledge within herself. The eclectic selection presented here serves as a portrait of the artist across time testifying personal histories as an act of imperative service to larger social histories.

Blondeau's curatorial work and activities as co-founder and Executive Director of the Indigenous art collective TRIBE has helped shape Indigenous art and knowledge production in Canada. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), and the 2007 Venice Biennial among several others. Blondeau has participated in panel discussions and given lectures at the AGO, the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon), the IAIA Museum of Contemporary

Native Arts (Santa Fe) and the 2020 Sydney Biennale. Since 2018, Blondeau has been an Assistant Professor at the University of Manitoba School of Art. Blondeau was a recipient of the 2021 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts.

– Luther Konadu, curator

## Artwork Descriptions

### Levy Gallery – Front wall

Lori Blondeau, *In Tune with the Times*, 2000.

Alt Text: A diptych – two frames – of prints in sepia and blue tones depicting the artist in a persona of a western cowgirl named Belle Sauvage. The artist is standing against a starry-printed backdrop while wearing fringed western garb, a gun holster, and holding the gun in one hand and a cigarette in the other. A text written at the bottom of the image in cursive says: *"The more they were in tune with the times the more they drank..."*

### Levy Gallery – Right wall

Lori Blondeau, *Grace*, 2006.

Alt Text: Fourteen unframed photographic prints displayed in a long horizontal row. The artist creates portraits of herself, her friends, and her family – making it one of the very few times the artist is joined with a group as part of her artwork. Each figure is photographed shirtless against a black background, centered within the frame, covering the face with alternating inward and outward-facing hand gestures.

### Levy Gallery – Left wall, front

Lori Blondeau, *A Tribute to Demasduit*, 2021.

Alt text: A portrait of monumental scale printed on fabric, portraying the artist in a regal standing pose, looking away from the camera into the far distance above. Wearing a long garment in a dark blue navy fabric that overflows into a mermaid-like shape.

### Levy Gallery – Inside the interior room, back wall

Lori Blondeau, *Lonely Surfer Squaw*, 1997.

Alt text: A photographic print produced on translucent film displayed in a lightbox. The artist is standing in a snowy landscape of the plains, in front of a river, wearing a brown faux-fur bikini, knee-high moccasins, and 60's style voluminous hairdo. A surfing board of light pink color is leaning against her back as she holds it with one arm.

## Levy Gallery – Back wall

Lori Blondeau, *Bison Jump #1*, 2023.

Alt text: An installation of two large-scale unframed photographs with two flag poles on opposite sides of the display. The photographs depict a prairie landscape, from two high vantage points of the South Saskatchewan River. In the photo on the left, bands of colorful ribbons are flowing in the wind. In the photo on the right, the colorful ribbons are laying on the grass. Two poles carry white flags and thin colorful ribbons with emblems of gold eagles on the tops. Mounds of soft grey stones are placed at the base of both poles.

## Levy Gallery – Left wall, back

Lori Blondeau, *Sisters*, 2006.

Alt text: A video recording of the artist doing a performance in a gallery in front of a live audience. The video's duration is 17 minutes, showing the artist sitting on the floor, cutting red fabric with scissors, crushing berries between rocks and prepping hunted fish with a knife.

## Tomlinson Gallery – Left to Right

Lori Blondeau, *States of Grace*, 2007.

Alt text: A video recording of the artist doing a performance outdoors in Venice, Italy. The video's duration is 29 minutes, showing the artist sitting on a throne-like seat, encircled by candles, wearing an overflowing gown in a golden-color. The video is narrated by the artist as she tells seven stories about life, death, and the passage of time. As the artist narrates, she turns her palms inward and outward away from her face.

Lori Blondeau, *States of Grace (Venice)*, 2007.

Alt text: A large-scale photograph from the *States of Grace* performance at the Venice Biennale. The artist is photographed from behind, sitting in a throne-like seat, wearing an overflowing gown, and encircled by candles. In front of her is a body of water and the cityscape of Venice. Next to the photograph is vinyl text of dictionary definitions of the word 'grace'.

Lori Blondeau, *Cosmosquaw*, 1998.

Alt text: A video recording of a performance by the artist in her invented persona of Betty Daybird, granddaughter of Belle Sauvage – another invented persona by the artist – performing in front of a live audience in a gallery that was transformed into a 19-century style Wild West set. The video is 20-minutes in duration and includes the soundtrack of Doris Day's songs "Que Sera Sera", "It's Magic", "I Get a Kick Out of You", and "The Black Hills of Dakota".

Lori Blondeau, *Asiniy Iskwew*, 2016-2018.

Alt text: Four monumental-scale photographs of the artist standing on large boulder rocks. She is wrapped in crimson red velvet drapery, looking away from the camera into the far distance. In three of the four photographs, the artist is standing in a landscape of trees, while in the fourth photo there is a body of water behind her.

Lori Blondeau, *COSMOSQUAW*, 1996.

Alt text: A small photographic print displayed in a light box, portraying the artist as her persona Betty Daybird on the cover of 'Cosmosquaw' a reimagining of the magazine Cosmopolitan. Betty Daybird is photographed against a red backdrop, while wearing a red strapless bustier dress and voluminous hair. She is playfully holding her chest and pouting her lips as if to blow a kiss at the viewer.