

All Seeing Work, Forever Work (2023) by Kamika Peters Exhibition essay by Vince Rozario

What does it mean to live and act in solidarity? Beyond a vague notion of supporting one another, how can a call to solidarity transform the way in which we live and relate— to the world, and to each other? How can a call to solidarity de-centre the extractive desires and colonial impulses which have resulted in the destruction of land, water and Indigenous ways of life on Turtle Island? Most importantly, how can solidarity be felt as an embodied impulse, a realization of our collective interdependence?

Kamika Peters takes up these questions in the installation, *All-Seeing Work, Forever Work* (2023). As a self-identified outsider artist whose first discipline was movement, Peters activates the body in a variety of mediums encompassing sculpture, installation, ceramics, and performance. Each of their works is incomplete until a body interacts with it and brings it to life.

Questions of solidarity were central to Peters' work with *Rising Tide Toronto*, an organization which uses direct actions to challenge political bodies, companies, and institutions engaged in mining, tar sands and other extractive industries. Their work seeks to disrupt the ongoing colonization of Turtle Island and the displacement of Indigenous communities. In particular, *Rising Tide* has been agitating against financiers behind the Coastal Gas Link pipeline and other pipelines trespassing unceded territory of the Wet'suwet'en. *Rising Tide* has been providing legal aid and logistical support to land defenders on the ground and organizing actions at key sites of power in Toronto.

Revolution, for Marx, is a mole which burrows through history, making elaborate tunnels and preparing to surface, unexpected and triumphant.^[1] Much of the work of building strength in a movement is done hidden from view to outsiders. Carefully cultivating networks of support, advocacy, action and sustenance to allow the revolutionary moment to break through to the surface. Echoes of the mole's infinite underground channels can be found in the undulating contours of Peters' installation. The protected and sensitive nature of *Rising Tide's* work presents a challenge to any artist who seeks to represent it. Documentary storytelling can only reveal so much truth. The conventions of viewing documentary images often place the audience in a complacent position, passive in their relationship to what is a life-threatening crisis for all of us. Instead, Peters offers a point of contemplation to focus the viewer towards thinking about how their own position connects to the larger struggle.

Tinged with the colour of flesh, scintillating like water, Peters' installation pulsates in its sensuality. It invites touch, captures the eye with its iridescent sheen. The beauty of this radiating form is more than a visual distraction. It relates deeply to Peters' exploration of collective and personal justice, both within their own practice and as an organizer and facilitator within various political movements and grassroots community groups.

In this installation, Peters deploys abstraction to break down human-centric, colonial, and binary ways of thinking. Audre Lorde argues, in *The Uses of the Erotic*, that the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is false, and that the erotic serves as an important bridge between the two. To Lorde, "the erotic, the sensual, those physical, emotional and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us being shared."^[2] Thinking alongside Lorde in *Pedagogies of the Crossing*, Jacque Alexander states that colonialism

fragments our innate and embodied entanglement with the world, in forms human and non-human:

To this process of fragmentation we gave the name colonization [...] linked in minute ways to dualistic and hierarchical thinking: divisions among mind, body, spirit; between sacred and secular, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual; in class divisions; and in divisions between the erotic and the Divine. We saw its operation, as well, in creating singular thinking: the mistaken notion that only one kind of justice work could lead to freedom.[3]

While it makes tactical sense to focus our struggles on specific pressure points, Alexander's claims echo what many organizers know— that sustainable movements are holistic in their worldview. In *Rising Tide's* words: "our resistance will be in rooted in gardens as well as on the streets." [4] Their coalition recognizes that the struggle for climate justice also intersects with migrant rights, racial justice, Indigenous sovereignty, disability rights, and economic inequality. Hence, the work of solidarity, especially for those looking into the movement from outside, is not limited to attending rallies or donating to legal defence funds. It is to show up and care for our communities, to divest from notions of scarcity, and to cultivate mutual aid networks which safeguard each other's survival.

Standing in front of Trinity Square Video's vitrines at 401 Richmond, we are thousands of miles removed from the traditional territories of the Wet'suwet'en, and from their ongoing struggle for sovereignty. Beneath our feet, is stolen land and rivers which have been silted up and paved over. The ways in which these waters once brought life have been negated by their erasure from the landscape. What might it mean to connect once more with this living impulse, so imperceptibly within reach? Would this awareness translate to an obligation to sustain life in all forms around us, as these waters once did? This text, much like its accompanying work, moves through a series of metaphors to make sense of the vast interconnected networks which inform climate justice. The stakes involved, however, are very real. Writing for the Yellowhead Institute, Jeffrey Ansloos argues that "Water is Life" is not a metaphor, especially for First Nations communities in Ontario where water insecurity is directly contributing to adverse mental health crises and suicide.[5] Decolonization, similarly, is not merely a metaphor for the Wet'suwet'en land defenders.

While solidarity demands the contribution of material and labour support to people protecting their ancestral territories and ways of being, it also precludes a fundamental shift in how we envision our relationship with these movements. Can we recognize how our own survival is intertwined with calls for Indigenous sovereignty? Can we surrender the acquired habits of extraction, over-consumption, and detachment that colonial modernity has embedded so deeply in our psyches? *All-Seeing Work, Forever Work* is an invitation to feel the connection between our professed politics, our embodiment and our desires. It invites us to name the contradictory feelings that arise when the work of decolonization requires us to cede our colonial entitlements. Most importantly, it asks us to think, feel and move together toward a liberated horizon for all.

[1] Estes, Nick. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, 27. London; New York: Verso, 2019.

[2] Lorde, Audre. *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. Crossing Press, 1978.

[3] Alexander, M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Perverse Modernities, 306. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2005.

[4] "About | Rising Tide Toronto." Accessed Apr 1, 2023. <https://risingtidetoronto.noblogs.org/sample-page/>.

[5] Ansloos, Jeffrey. "Nibi onje biimaadiiziiwin is not a metaphor: The relationship between suicide and water insecurity in First Nations in Ontario" *Yellowhead Institute*. 3 May 2023. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2023/05/03/suicide-and-water-insecurity/>