

The Great Lakes **A Group Exhibition**

Opening Reception: Thursday, July 9, 5-8 pm

Remarks: Thursday, July 9, 6:30 pm

Exhibition Dates: July 9 – August 29, 2026

Stephen Bulger Gallery is pleased to present *The Great Lakes*, a group exhibition of work by artists **Michael Belmore, Robert Burley, Bonnie Devine, and Shelley Niro**, curated by Penelope Smart, Curator, Thunder Bay Art Gallery.

In sculpture, images, installation, and film, these artists express their connection—deep and enduring—to water. The Biinaagami map of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence watershed, a collaboration between Canadian Geographic and Swim Drink Fish, invites us to do the same. Visible from outer space, the Great Lakes form a network of lakes and rivers that speak to, and contain, the depths of our collective story. Without water, there is no story.

The Anishinabek called the largest of the five Great Lakes *Gichigami* (Lake Superior), which translates as “the big lake,” or “the great shining waters.” In Indigenous languages across the watershed, the names for these lakes are often prefaced by variations of the word *gichi*, or great. These bodies of water have always been part of something bigger, immense, and staggering.

In the gallery, five belts hang from a birch frame. Woven by Devine, these works signal her good tidings as a traveller along this vital and interconnected waterway. For Belmore, four granite stones, laboriously transformed by hand-carving and hammered copper, are touchstones to home, the north shore of Lake Superior. Hazy and eerily calm, a series of photographs by Burley places the viewer on shorelines of sand, rock, and concrete barriers. In a new film by Niro a birdbath becomes an allegory of conflict. Her films read as cycles of grief and renewal for loved ones, including the Great Lakes.

Belmore is a member of Lac Seul First Nation in Northern Ontario. He resides within the Oak Ridges Moraine, a region comprised of natural, cold-water streams, wetlands, and kettle lakes, whose water eventually finds its way to Lake Ontario via the Rouge River. As an artist and sculptor, he employs a variety of materials that speak clearly and powerfully about the environment, land, water, and what it is to be Anishinaabe. Belmore is a nationally and internationally recognized artist and is represented in the permanent collections of various institutions, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Museum of the American Indian – Smithsonian Institute, and the Canadian Chancery in Paris.

Burley is a photographer. He grew up in Prince Edward County, encircled by the waters of Lake Ontario, the Bay of Quinte, the North Channel, and Adolphus Reach. As an adult, he has lived along the urban shores of Lake Ontario in Toronto and Lake Michigan in Chicago. In his practice, Burley has sought to visualize, describe, and interpret the built environment in which he lives. Burley’s photographs have been extensively published and exhibited and are found in numerous public collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, Musee de l’Elysee, George Eastman Museum, Canadian Centre for Architecture, and Musee Niepce.

Devine is a visual artist, writer, curator, and educator. She has lived her whole life near the Great Lakes. As a child, on the North Channel of Lake Huron and as an adult, on the north shore of Lake Ontario. Born in Toronto and raised as an off-reserve member of the Anishinabek of Serpent River First Nation, Devine's work emerges from the storytelling and object-making traditions that are the root of Anishinaabe culture. Her most enduring learning came from her grandparents, who were trappers in Northern Ontario. The recipient of numerous awards, grants, and institutional recognition, Devine's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, the Smithsonian Institute's National Gallery of the American Indian, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the 2026 Venice Biennale.

Niro is a Bay of Quinte Mohawk and a member of the Six Nations of the Grand River, Turtle clan. She lives near the Grand River, which flows into Lake Erie, which flows into Lake Ontario, which flows into the St. Lawrence River, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean. As an innovator of film and photography, Niro's work is known for its intimate, fearless, and humane qualities. Exhibiting globally, she is the recipient of numerous national awards, grants, and institutional recognition, receiving honorary doctorates from the Ontario College of Arts and Design University (2019), Western University (2023), and Wilfrid Laurier University (2024). Niro's nationally touring retrospective, *500 Year Itch*, was curated through the National Museum of the American Indian, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Remai Museum of Art.

Following this exhibition, *The Great Lakes* will travel throughout Northern Ontario during 2026–2027, with scheduled stops at Thunder Bay Art Gallery; Art Gallery of Algoma, Sault Ste Marie, Art Gallery of Sudbury; and The MUSE | Douglas Family Arts Centre, Kenora.