

## **University of Michigan Museum of Art to Open Exhibition Exploring Significance of Great Lakes to Broader Discussions About Culture, Environment, and Policy**

### ***Watershed* to Feature New and Recent Works by 16 Contemporary Artists, Including Seven Commissioned Installations**

**On View June 4 – October 23, 2022**

**Ann Arbor, MI (June 2, 2022)**— On June 4, the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) will open an exhibition exploring critical environmental and socio-political issues relating to water through the complex history and contemporary experience of the Great Lakes. The exhibition, titled *Watershed*, will feature the work of 15 international and regional artists, including new commissions by Khaled Al-Saa'i, Michael Belmore, Andrea Carlson & Rozalinda Borcila, Bonnie Devine, Kate Levy, and Meghann Riepenhoff, as well as new and recent installations and works by Dawoud Bey, Matthew Brandt, LaToya Ruby Fraizer, Doug Fogelson, Cai Guo-Qiang, Shanna Merola, Pope.L, and Senghor Reid. The exhibition captures the impact of water scarcity, pollution, and economic and cultural displacement on the communities of the Great Lakes region, past and present, while also highlighting how those same challenges affect populations across the country. *Watershed* is curated by Jennifer Friess, Associate Curator of Photography at UMMA, and will remain on view through October 23, 2022. Admission to the exhibition is free.

“The subject of *Watershed*—the Great Lakes—is incredibly personal to me and one that I have wanted to address in an exhibition for some time as someone who grew up in this region. The Great Lakes are a way of life, and the communities here feel passionately about their social, economic, and cultural importance,” said Friess. “This is in part what makes the watershed such a poignant lens through which to consider many complex issues of our time. From widespread environmental disaster and the displacement of Indigenous communities, to contemporary water tragedies such as the one that continues to grip the town of Flint, the Great Lakes region is a microcosm of much more global discussions around resources. The incredible artists featured in *Watershed* examine the power of water and the ramifications of corporate and political wrongdoing, while fostering critical dialogues about our environmental and cultural futures.”

The exhibition will be organized around three themes: the impact of pollution on people and the environments in Michigan and throughout the broader region; the historic and contemporary displacement of Anishinaabe peoples from their ancestral lands; and the potential of water as a source of hope and transformation. Through the artists' works, which range from experimental

photography and video to painting and sculpture, the exhibition surfaces the intertwining personal and communal narratives related to the watershed and the political, corporate, and economic forces that influence them. To acknowledge the Anishinaabe lands on which UMMA sits and the significance of Indigenous voices and experiences within the dialogues explored in *Watershed*, the exhibition labels and texts will be presented in both English and Anishinaabemowin, marking a first in the museum's history.

"The artists represented in *Watershed* probe the ethical and moral dilemmas and potential futures of the Great Lakes region. They find novel ways of representing and helping us see the region's myriad histories and possibilities," said Christina Olsen, UMMA's Director. "The exhibition also reflects our wider vision for UMMA to offer critical support for artists to make new work, and to create space for our publics to engage with ideas and topics relevant to their lives and to national and global conversations. *Watershed* includes a rich spectrum of artists from our region, those with ties to the watershed, and from across the country further emphasizing a dynamic cross-pollination of ideas and artistic approaches."

#### **Exhibition Highlights:**

- Chicago-based collaborators **Andrea Carlson** and **Rosalinda Borcila** create multi-disciplinary installations that examine entrenched cultural narratives and institutions of authority, giving particular emphasis to the disruptive legacies of colonization. For their commission, they will be creating a five-channel video installation that explores government-sanctioned wetland banking practices in the watershed of Lake Michigan.
- **Kate Levy** is an American documentary filmmaker, photographer, artist, and activist, whose multimedia projects are grounded in advocacy for social and economic justice. For her *Watershed* commission, Levy will be furthering a longstanding project, titled *Along Line 5*, which tells two interrelated narratives about the Enbridge Line 5, a pipeline that passes under the environmentally sensitive Straits of Mackinac between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. The installation will feature photographs and audio recordings about the people living along the pipeline as well a wide range of research materials about the long-troubling history of 33 spills, that total over 1.1 million gallons of crude oil, spilled and threatening the Great Lakes, its wildlife, and the surrounding communities.
- **Bonnie Devine** is an Anishinaabe-Ojibway artist based in Toronto. Her artistic practice, which spans installation, painting, and writing, is rooted in a commitment to the storytelling and pictorial traditions that are core to Anishinaabe culture. For *Watershed*, she will be creating a mural onsite in the galleries, the creation process of which will continue through the opening week of the exhibition, allowing visitors to view and engage in her process. The mural will address colonial histories of mapping in the Great Lakes, especially those related to land and water rights in southeast Michigan.

- For Syrian-born and Dubai-based artist **Khaled Al-Saa'i**, Arabic calligraphy offers a means through which to explore how language mediates our experience of a place. For his *Watershed* commission, he will create two abstract paintings featuring texts about the Great Lakes watershed—a personal source of inspiration for his practice—that he has translated into Arabic. Al-Saa'i's combination of image and text evokes his joyful experiences swimming in both the Great Lakes and in the Euphrates River in his hometown of Mayadeen, Syria, using the fluidity of the script to suggest the movement of water.
- Detroit-based artist **Senghor Reid** explores the interactions between the human body and the environment in his evocative paintings. Reid will be presenting a selection of new paintings that represent his deep engagement with water, both as a reflection of his personal connectedness to the water and as an interrogation of pollutive industries and their effects on the well-being of communities, especially his own in Detroit. Memory, self-care, and vulnerability profess themselves in his paintings through a close examination of the human body's fragility in the face of water pollution.
- In his commissioned sculpture installation, *Resolve*, **Michael Belmore**, an Anishinaabe-Ojibway artist based in Toronto, draws on the material landscape of the Great Lakes region to explore the significance of copper to Anishinaabe culture. *Resolve* features water-worn stones that Belmore intricately carves and gilds with copper, which is a material native to the Great Lakes. Positioned together in patterns that might occur in nature, the stones seem to glow at the points where they connect, suggesting the embers of a fire and the relationship of natural elements.
- **Shanna Merola** is a Detroit-based visual artist, photojournalist, and legal worker. Her work as a human rights observer and activist deeply informs her dynamic photography collages. For *Watershed*, she will present new works from her *Love Canal* series, which foreground the experience of the Love Canal mothers who suffered from miscarriages, cancer, and birth defects as a result of unknowingly living and sending their children to school on land saturated with leaking dioxane containers.

## About UMMA

The U-M Museum of Art puts art and ideas at the center of campus and public life. Welcoming more than 250,000 visitors each year, UMMA creates experiences that enrich our understanding of one another, foster joy, and build a more just future. Through exhibitions, programs, research, and community partnerships UMMA is redefining what a campus museum can be.

The Museum is always free.

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