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Art Opens

Vancouver
Artgallery

The Vancouver Art Gallery Presents
The Children Have to Hear Another Story: Alanis Obomsawin

The first exhibition to survey the lifework of the iconic Abenaki filmmaker and activist is accompanied by rare artworks, documents and ephemera.



April 7th, 2023, Vancouver, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands, including the Musqueam (xwməθkwəyəm), Squamish (Sḵwxwú7mesh) and Tsleil-Waututh (səfilwətaʔ) Nations.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is pleased to present *The Children Have to Hear Another Story: Alanis Obomsawin*. The exhibition surveys the lifework of Alanis Obomsawin from the 1960s to the present, demonstrating her remarkable achievements in education, music, documentary cinema and activism that have mobilized Indigenous voices and ideas to transform society.

“The exhibition presents an in-depth view of one of Canada’s most significant and influential figures in filmmaking”, said **Anthony Kiendl, CEO and Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery**. “We hope to inspire audiences of all ages to grow and engage through Alanis’ powerful messages of activism, justice and education”.

As a teenager, Obomsawin was struck by the realization that, for Indigenous sociopolitical conditions to improve, children from all backgrounds needed to hear a different story than the dominant narrative provided by Hollywood cinema and the educational system at that time. Her entire lifework to date has followed from the commitment to creating opportunities for Indigenous people to change the world by telling their own stories in the public sphere. Her first film, *Christmas at Moose Factory* (1971), is told exclusively through the voices and paintings of children. Her commitment to children and the power of education has persisted throughout her lifework.

Organized chronologically by decade, the exhibition includes films, artworks, prints, and music along with ephemera, documents and media coverage that provide new insight into her work. Obomsawin is best known for the documentary films she has created during her long tenure at the National Film Board (NFB). The Gallery worked closely with the NFB on this exhibition to deliver audiences with unprecedented access not only to Obomsawin's films, but also the archives related to their production. The best-known of these is her feature documentary, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, which she shot behind the military barbed wire during the Oka Crisis of 1990.

"What an honor to feel recognition and respect towards our people, who are a part of this exhibition that tells of the history of our nations, their culture, and the stories of their lives", said **Alanis Obomsawin**. "Our people are so beautiful and I know that if you hear and see them, you will realize the knowledge they bring to the rest of the world".

Even before moving behind the camera, Obomsawin regularly appeared in newspapers and in CBC/Radio-Canada programs as early as the 1960s. A selection of her media appearances in each decade enriches our understanding of her public influence and provides vivid evidence of changing attitudes toward Indigenous Peoples in the wider society. Taken together, they provide a picture of an artist with broad and generous concern for humanity and an unwavering commitment to Indigenous Peoples. Many of the featured materials have never been seen before or since their first airings. The exhibition also includes a portrait mask of Obomsawin carved by her close friend, renowned Haida artist, Bill Reid.

The Children Have to Hear Another Story opens to the public on April 7th, 2023, and will be on view until August 7th, 2023.

The exhibition is accompanied by a free Exhibition Guide as well as a major hardcover publication, *Alanis Obomsawin: Lifework*. This retrospective monograph features fifteen new essays and reflections on her lifework, as well an extensive interview with Obomsawin. It is richly illustrated with film stills, production and performance photographs, artworks and other documents.

Organized by Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Art Museum at the University of Toronto and the Vancouver Art Gallery, in collaboration with the National Film Board of Canada and through the generous support of Canada Council for the Arts and CBC/Radio-Canada. Curated by Richard Hill, Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art, and Hila Peleg.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

A member of the Abenaki Nation and one of Canada's most respected artists, Alanis Obomsawin is an activist filmmaker and producer at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). She was born in 1932 in Lebanon, New Hampshire, and spent her early years in Quebec, on the Odanak reserve, whose songs and stories she continues to tell. Obomsawin began her artistic life as a singer, writer and storyteller in 1960. Her performances, which include stories and songs in Abenaki, English and French, have been

presented in universities, residential schools, prisons, museums, art centres and folk festivals across North America and Europe to aid humanitarian causes. In 1988, she released her singular musical album, *Bush Lady*, featuring traditional Abenaki songs as well as original compositions. First hired as a consultant for Indigenous filmmaking at the NFB in 1966, Obomsawin went on to prolifically write, direct and eventually produce her films, beginning with *Christmas at Moose Factory* (1971). Her body of work includes her groundbreaking *Incident at Restigouche* (1984), a behind-the-scenes view of the Quebec police raids on a Mi'kmaq reserve, and the acclaimed film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), a feature-length documentary on the 1990 Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawk) uprising in Kanehsatà:ke and Oka, which received eighteen international film awards and catalyzed her four-film cycle on the Oka Crisis. She recently concluded a cycle of films focusing on the rights of Indigenous children with *Jordan River Anderson, the Messenger* (2019).

Obomsawin has also been making engravings and prints for over four decades and exhibiting these works on paper in Canada and Europe. For her lifetime contribution to enriching the human condition through the arts, Obomsawin was awarded the Glenn Gould Prize in 2020. She was named a Companion of the Order of Canada in 2019 and has been a Grande Officière of the Ordre national du Québec since 2016. She is also the recipient of over fifteen honorary degrees from universities and colleges across Canada and the US. Recent awards include the Iris Homage, Gala Québec Cinéma in 2020; DGC Honorary Life Member Award, Directors Guild of Canada in 2018; and Commander of the Ordre de Montréal in 2017, for her exceptional contribution to the city's cultural life and commitment to the community. Obomsawin was also named Outstanding Canadian of the Year by Maclean's magazine in 1965 for spearheading the construction of the municipal pool in Odanak, which is still in operation today.

ABOUT THE CO-CURATORS

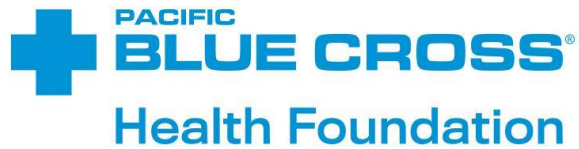
Richard Hill, Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art, has worked as a curator, critic and historian of Indigenous and Canadian art for nearly three decades. His Cree heritage and lifelong interest in Indigenous art and questions of transcultural experience are often themes in his research and exhibitions. Currently, he holds a Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Studies at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Prior to this, he was Associate Professor at York University teaching courses in art history, curatorial practice and graduate research methods. Hill also worked at the Art Gallery of Ontario, where, with Dr. Anna Hudson, he oversaw the museum's first substantial efforts to collect Indigenous North American art and display it in the permanent collection galleries.

Hila Peleg is a curator and editor based in Berlin. She curated interdisciplinary cultural events in public institutions internationally, including: HKW, Berlin, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Iniva, Institute of International Visual Art, London. Peleg was a curator of documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel (2017), of the 10th Shanghai Biennale (2014) and of Manifesta 7 in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol (2008). In 2010 she founded the Berlin Documentary Forum, a biennial event devoted to the production and presentation of contemporary and historical documentary practices in an interdisciplinary context. Peleg is the co-editor of the books 'Documentary Across Disciplines' (2016, MIT Press), 'CP138: Gordon Matta-Clark' (2020, Walther König), 'Alanis Obomsawin: Lifework' (2022, Prestel Verlag), 'Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving Image' (2022, MIT Press) and 'Ein jüdischer Garten' (2022, Hanser).

For further information, please visit www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/exhibitions/alanisobomsawin

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Alanis Obomsawin at Mariposa Rock Festival, 1970, Courtesy York University Libraries, Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, Toronto Telegram fonds, ASC05824