

## First Major Retrospective of Shelley Niro work opens at the Art Gallery of Hamilton

*Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch* highlights Mohawk artist Shelley Niro's expansive art career with over 136 pieces on view



Shelley Niro. *Abnormally Aboriginal*. 2014-2017. Colour Inkjet prints on canvas. Collection of the artist

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The Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH) proudly announces the much-anticipated opening of [Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch](#), the first major retrospective exhibition of the multi-talented Mohawk artist Shelley Niro, based in Brantford, Ontario. This extraordinary exhibition, organized by the AGH, showcases the full breadth of Niro's prolific career, bringing together over 70 works (some in series, equating to 136 pieces). The exhibition will be open February 10 through May 26, 2024. Join us for the Opening Celebration with the artists on Saturday, February 24, 2024.

"We are thrilled to be presenting the ground-breaking retrospective *Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch*," says Shelley Falconer, President and CEO at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. "We would like to thank the support of our generous sponsors for their contribution to the success of this important exhibition and its tour across North America. Most importantly, we would like to thank Shelley Niro for her extensive practice which continues to push the boundaries of multiple mediums while exploring Indigenous identity and history with complexity, nuance, and her signature wit."

Spanning four decades of Shelley Niro's photography, film, painting, installation, beadwork, sculpture and mixed media practice, the exhibition highlights themes she constantly returns to: Matriarchy, Past is Present, Actors, and Family Relations. Her persistent vision is to represent Indigenous women and girls, advocating for self-representation and sovereignty. Her highly empathetic approach moves viewers to understand the issues at hand through her visually impactful and politically powerful manner. She uses parody, feminism, and spirituality to examine identity, and in turn, brings political power to the realm of the personal.

*Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch* is currently on a multi-year tour across North America, with its first stop having been at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in New York City in 2023. The AGH version is not only the first Canadian stop but will also feature new pieces making their debut in Hamilton.

**"Many people are familiar with Shelley Niro's iconic photographs, like *The Rebel*, which features her mother," says Melissa Bennett, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art. "But this exhibition showcases decades of her work, spanning large-scale painting, beadwork, installation, and sculpture. Niro has an incredible ability to impart wisdom and empowerment through symbolism and storytelling and visitors of all backgrounds will learn through her conveyance of Indigenous knowledge. Ultimately, she advocates for unity and peace."**

Alongside this exhibition the AGH will also be featuring emerging artist Alex Jacobs-Blum with her exhibition [Living and Lost Connections](#). In her first museum solo exhibition, Hamilton-based artist Alex Jacobs-Blum (Gayogohónq' German) uses photography and video to explore themes of continuity and legacy embedded in the ancestral knowledge within her body. *Living and Lost Connections* will be on view until May 20, 2024.

### **Key Dates:**

[Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch on view February 10 - May 26, 2024](#)

[Alex Jacobs-Blum: Living and Lost Connections on view February 10 – May 20, 2024](#)

[Winter Exhibitions Opening Celebration: February 24, 2024, 3:00 – 5:00 pm](#)

[Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch Curators & Artist Talk: February 24, 2024, 2:00 – 3:00 pm](#)

### **Media Preview**

We invite media representatives to preview the exhibitions before its public opening on February 10. If you are interested, kindly contact [Megan Olynik](#) directly, and we will coordinate the necessary details.

### **Media Kit**

[Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch \(AGH\)](#)

## Accompanying Publication

*Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch* is accompanied by a meticulously crafted 304-page publication designed by Barr Gilmore. This publication features contributions from esteemed authors and curators, including Lori Beavis, Sally Frater, Adrianna Greci Green, Bryce Kanbara, Madeline Lennon, Nancy Mithlo and Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie. [Available for purchase at the AGH Shop.](#)

## Exhibition Tour Dates & Locations

*Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch* is currently on a multi-year tour, visiting five prestigious venues across North America:

- May 27 – December 31, 2023: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, New York, NY, USA
- February 10 – May 26, 2024: Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario
- June 14 – August 18, 2024: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario
- September 21, 2024 - February 2, 2025: Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia
- Spring 2025: Remai Modern, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

## Acknowledgements

*Shelley Niro: 500 Year Itch* is organized and circulated by the Art Gallery of Hamilton in collaboration with the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), with curatorial support from the National Gallery of Canada (NGC). Major support for this project is provided by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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**About Shelley Niro:** Born in Niagara Falls, New York, in 1954, Shelley Niro is a member of the Turtle Clan of the Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) Nation, from the Six Nations of the Grand River territory. Her visual art and film works have been featured across Canada and internationally. In 2009, her first feature film, *Kissed by Lightning*, premiered at Toronto's imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival and won the Santa Fe Film Festival's 2009 Milagro Award for Best Indigenous Film. Her short film *The Shirt* was presented at the 2003 Venice Biennale and the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. Films include: *Honey Moccasin*, *It Starts with a*

*Whisper, The Incredible 25th Year of Mitzi Bearclaw* and a feature film released in 2023, *Café Daughter*.

In 2019, Niro received an honorary doctorate from the Ontario College of Art and Design, where she completed her undergraduate studies; she was also the 2019 Laureate of the Paul de Hueck and Norman Walford Career Achievement Award for Photography. In 2017, Niro received both the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts and the Scotiabank Photography Award, two preeminent contemporary art awards in Canada. In 2017, Niro also received the Hnatyshyn Foundation REVEAL Indigenous Artist Award, and the Arts and Culture Award from the Dreamcatcher Charitable Foundation. She was the inaugural recipient of the Aboriginal Arts Award presented through the Ontario Arts Council in 2012. She completed her Master of Fine Arts at the University of Western Ontario.

**About Alex Jacobs-Blum:** Alex Jacobs-Blum (she/her) is a Gayogohó:nq' (Cayuga) and German visual artist and curator living in Hamilton, ON. Her research focuses on Indigenous futurities and accessing embodied Ancestral Hodinöhsö:ni' knowledge. The core of her practice and methodology is a strong foundation in community building, fostering relationships, empowering youth, and Indigenizing institutional spaces. Her creative process is rooted in storytelling and challenging hierarchical power structures. Alex endeavours to facilitate transformative change infused with love and care.

Alex Jacobs-Blum received a Bachelor of Photography at Sheridan College in 2015, where she was awarded the Canon Award of Excellence for Narrative Photography. Her artistic work has been exhibited at the University of Ottawa, Centre[3] for Artistic + Social Practice, Woodland Cultural Centre, Critical Distance Centre for Curators, and most recently in a group exhibition at The Robert McLaughlin Gallery November 18th, 2023 – April 7th, 2024. She is a member of the Bawaadan Collective.

### **About the Art Gallery of Hamilton**

Founded in 1914, the Art Gallery of Hamilton is the oldest and largest public art gallery in southwestern Ontario. Its permanent collection, which is focused on historical Canadian, International, and Contemporary art, numbers more than 10,000 works and is recognized as one of Canada's finest. The AGH is a vital creative hub and centre of lifelong learning that enables people of all ages to enrich their lives by gaining a deeper understanding of art.

### **For more information, interview requests and images please contact:**

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