

Charlene Vickers

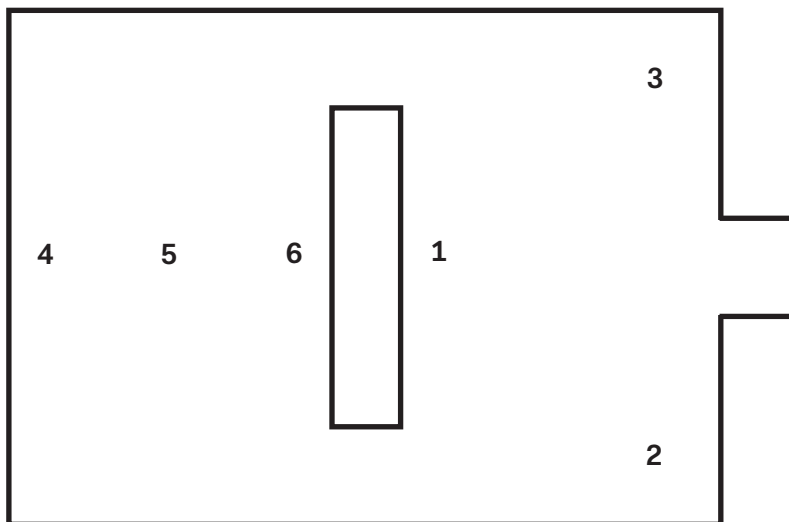
Ancestor Gesture



Encompassing a wide range of media—including painting, sculpture, performance, and installation—the practice of Charlene Vickers operates as a visionary expression of what the artist terms *embodied territory*. Giving vital form to the lands, histories and relations of her birthplace in Wauzhushk Onigum as they are felt, imagined and carried across distance, Vickers' works lucidly manifest ancestral connections, cultural reclamations and her territorial presence as Anishinaabe Kwe, while responding formally to the Coast Salish land she has resided upon for the past thirty years.

In *Ancestor Gesture*, Vickers brings together a selection of new and recent works covering more than ten years of output. From rhythmic abstractions inspired by the quillwork embroidery of her forebears, to a monumental cedar bone bead rendered as a teaching, to a suite of shimmering line drawings that index energy, spirit and breath, the exhibition highlights Vickers' engagement with a broad spectrum of concerns, spanning meditations on power, protection, kinship, and healing. Presented together for the first time, the works on view reflect the intimacy and insistence of Vickers' practice, speaking expansively across time, territory and tradition.

B.C. Binning Gallery



1 **Diviners Grasses** 2009-2010 marker on paper

The drawings of *Diviners Grasses* emerge from a practice of daily mark-making Vickers undertook a number of years ago, amidst a period when she was working a day job. Beginning each morning with the act of putting marker to paper, the works channel a range of persistent forms, including fire, grasses, hair, and bulrushes.

2 **Big Blue Smudge** 2021

cardboard, canvas, paint, tin jingles, wooden buttons, shell buttons, glass beads, craft foam, felt, yarn, twine, t-shirts, yoga mat, hair scrunchies

These vessel-like sculptures are exemplary of Vickers' engagement with what she terms cultural gestures, manifesting connections to ancestral motifs, materials and practices throughout her work. Building form here through processes such as binding, braiding, beading, and sewing, Vickers has painted the resulting compositions with both a series of expressive marks—including references to pictographs that appear in the teaching scrolls of the Midewiwin (Grand Medicine Society)—and in blocks of varying blues. Evoking natural elements like sky and water alongside material forms such as Wedgwood china, these latter colours nod in part to the artist's longtime reflections on cultural frameworks of beauty and value.

3 *The Jingle House* 2021

cedar, painting (acrylic on canvas), felt, tin jingles, sculpture (wood, felt, camp blankets, work pants, beer cases, packing foam, cotton, bamboo, twine, tape), reproduction of a Susan Ross etching, Okanagan tea gifted from Krista Belle Stewart in glass jar, copper mug with tin jingles, yarn, family heirloom vase, brass bell, deer antler

The Jingle House finds its root in a recurring dream of the artist's, one in which she sees the silhouette of a woman unknown to her through a cabin window at night. Rendering the scene here in three dimensions, Vickers offers two ways of looking: a view from the outside—a likeness rendered on canvas—and an interior perspective more complex in character, accrued through traces of a life lived.

Production support: Andrew Curtis

4 *Diviners Spears* 2010

cedar

In *Diviners Spears*, Vickers offers a series of sharply imposing forms, carved by her own hand. Another expression of a cultural gesture, these objects extend not just from the act of carving, but from a meditation on the natural defense armour of the porcupine quill. Standing resolutely upright, these spears lie seemingly in wait of action, of protections yet to come.

5 *Cedar Bone Bead (for Faye HeavyShield)* 2021

cedar, yarn

This larger-than-life bead form manifests for Vickers a teaching, one that reflects both on adornment as an act of armour—making one's body powerful, special, sheltered—and on the shifting role of cedar in her life, a material she grew up surrounded by, though absent any sense of its deeper cultural contexts. What was once simply the wood panelling the walls of her childhood living room is now an element of significant resonance—one recurrent throughout this exhibition—embodying land, medicine and ancestral connection.

Production support: Phil Gray

6 *Diviners Grasses* 2010

grass, bamboo, cotton, human hair, jute, thread

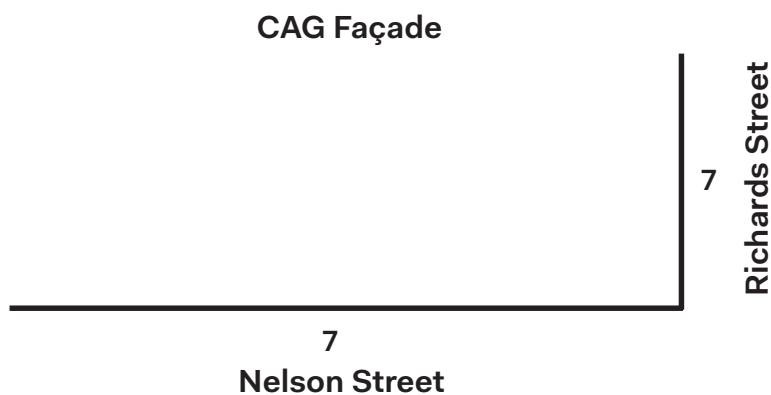
These sculptures originally took shape as part of a larger installation of Vickers', one commemorating the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Carefully wrapping dried grasses, plants and lengths of her own hair in cloth and thread, the artist references an array of forms—quills, bandages, smudges—redolent of protection or healing, giving physical shape to ideas of shelter, recovery and remembrance. Presented here in Vancouver for the first time in more than ten years, the work remains acutely relevant for Vickers, speaking to the vulnerabilities and violences to which Indigenous communities continue to be subjected.

7 Accumulation of Moments Spent Underwater with the Sun and Moon 2015-2016
watercolour, gouache and coloured pencil on paper
[digital reproductions]

On the exterior façade of the gallery, Vickers presents a series of outsized reproductions of her iconic zigzag paintings, branching across both storeys of the building. Working with a vivid visual language that takes its inspiration in part from the quillwork embroidery of her ancestors, Vickers kaleidoscopically renders the rhythms and patterns of the landscapes she moves through, both natural and urban. Whether conjuring elemental forms (mountains, suns, moons, water) or experiential ones (sound, energy, movement), these works manifest presence, persistence and territory.

8 Felt Ovoids 2019-2021
felt, shell buttons, glass beads, watercolour, paper, cotton, embroidery thread
[digital reproductions]

For a number of years now, Vickers has prodigiously produced small mixed-media fibre works that reinterpret the ovoid shape traditional to Northwest Coast art. A form familiar to the artist since her childhood—and an early point of connection to Indigenous iconography—Vickers draws on the ovoid as the foundation for a broad range of vibrant designs, both abstract and representative. In *Felt Ovoids*, Vickers reproduces several dozen of these pieces in vinyl on the façade of Yaletown-Roundhouse Station, inserting them into the everyday life of the city. A scene evocative of vitality, community and exchange, the presence of these forms is both insistent and watchful, looking back at the city knowingly as it passes them by.



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Cover image: Charlene Vickers, *Diviners Grasses* (detail), 2010

All works courtesy the artist and Macaulay & Co. Fine Art