

# The **Requickening** Project

Lori Blondeau | Shelley Niro

Nancy Marie Mithlo and Ryan Rice, Curators  
Elisabetta Frasca, Project Director



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Università di Venezia, Palazzo Cosulich, Zattere Dorsoduro 1405  
5, 7, 8, 9, 10 Giugno | Proiezione video dalle ore 21.00  
Performance all'alba (5.50) e al tramonto (8.25)  
[www.myspace.com/requickeningproject](http://www.myspace.com/requickeningproject)

The *Requickening Project* represents a significant continuation of long term collaborations between Native North Americans and the city of Venice. Our host, University of Venice, Department of Post-colonial Literature, offers the recognition of global relationships, mutually defined by a concern with environmental and human rights issues. Through poetry, public art, film and performance, we explore together how we relate to each other, and by extension, the earth. This collaborative project is enabled by the mutual respect exemplary of indigenous global wisdom.

*Elisabetta Frasca*  
*Project Director*

The *Requickening Project* is an effort to enhance international partnerships that have developed around issues of commercial exploitation, lack of legitimacy and enforced invisibility of contemporary aboriginal and indigenous arts of Native North America. Against tremendous economic and organizational handicaps, a body of artists, intellectuals and curators has organized over the past decade to ensure that the wisdom and beauty of indigenous communities is recognized in the global platform of the Venice Biennale. This movement

has eschewed institutional sponsorship and control, preferring instead to make long-term meaningful connections with committed partners in Italy, Canada and the States. These efforts have resulted in a continuous presence at the international arts table of the Venice Biennale under the banner of the Indigenous Arts Action Alliance (IA3, previously the Native American Arts Alliance).

Our success has depended upon the personal investments of many people in time, resources and emotions. We have experimented with processual exhibition techniques, intellectual platforms, varying forms of inclusivity, and modes of mentorship. The first exhibit in 1999, a group show titled *Ceremonial*, explored how a communal response is needed as a witness to important life events. The 2001 exhibit *Umbilicus* considered what is the center of the center, how does life orient itself, to what references spiritually and physically? In 2003 we adopted the notion of Red Skin Dreams or *Pellerossasogna* to think about identity issues, exploitation, survival and the female presence. These actions are our dissertation theses, our court claims, our chants to the universe, our contributions for all those that

came before. Drawing upon our rich creative resources, we create a platform whereby the urgent issues of Native communities may be discussed and made relevant via the productions of our artistic legacies.

Our ability to continue these important conversations relies not only upon our dedication and desire, but also the support of an extended community of allies. In 2007, these discussions centered on the incredibly productive arts manifestations of the Canadian aboriginal community with the participation of Lori Blondeau of TRIBE, Ryan Rice of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, and Shelley Niro, exhibiting artist of the IA3 2003 Biennale. Interns Liz Hood, Miles Miller and Erin Russo were indispensable to the success of the project.

The *Requickening Project* is a reference to the Iroquois condolence ceremony that rectifies states of fragility, ensuring life continues to flourish. This cycle of grief and restoration speaks to larger concerns of global warfare and peace, colonial histories, memory, and importantly, healing. The *Requickening Project* agenda calls upon indigenous knowledge to contribute to the conversation initiated by the Biennale curator

Robert Storr. In response to Storr's curatorial reference "the fragility of culture in violent times," our statement speaks to indigenous concepts of resilience; acknowledging spirituality, memory and the essence of life

In Niro's film *Tree*, a young Earth Mother is witness to the travesties of capitalism, consumerism, warfare and spiritual trauma that are manifest in contemporary Western society. We experience her loss, her reverberations of grief and ultimately, her ability to manifest life. Reappropriating the famous "Keep America Beautiful" ad campaign of 1971, Niro inverts the staged "The Crying Indian" performance of actor "Chief Iron Eyes Cody," by adopting a young Native woman as the personification of Native environmentalism. In contrast to the original ad campaign, there are no voice-overs, no dramatic symphonies playing background. Niro's earth mother is allowed to grieve and then become reborn as a tree, embodying the spirit of death and reclamation. Branches sprout from the young woman's body while a meditative lapping of water is heard as audio accompaniment. The piece is contemplative, measured and, in many essential ways, female. The nightly screening of *Tree* in Venice outdoors

along the zattere provided opportunities for neighborhood Venetians to pause and watch or as a group of school children did one evening, simply shout and run past. This interactive public art performance was also on view for passengers on the vaporetto water buses that regularly traversed by the exhibit at night. *Tree* became a part of the Venetian world and in doing so, the Venetian world became part of us.

*Nancy Marie Mithlo*  
Co-curator

Lori Blondeau's *States of Grace* performance evolved daily along the stone walkway of Venice's zattere. Amid the constant sound of water lapping against the city's concrete shore, the hustle and bustle of water taxi engines shrugging by, and Italo-dance music spewing out of the outdoor café, Lori Blondeau sat herself upright, steadfast and regal on a traditional European style chair throughout her performances. Her poised presence staked claim for her and her work to be witnessed and acknowledged in a foreign city thousands of miles away from her home. Through the *Requickening Project*, Blondeau declared Venice her stage to which she would act as a conduit to channel fate/faith

in order to honor the universal weight of spirituality, memory and the essence of life. Quietly and conceptually, Blondeau reverses the cycle in which time passes—beginning with birth through to death and the all of the moments in-between—as life experiences that unravel and maneuver about the human condition.

Dressed in a bronze colored satiny top and an oversized skirt draped several feet in front of her, Blondeau would take her mark each morning at sunrise (5:30am) and sunset (8:15pm). Raising her hands and placing them in front of her face was an indication the performance began. Her hands covered her face from our view and created a barrier—a space between her and us. The space between was personal, vulnerable and private. As she lay her hands down upon her lap, she opened the space to all. Through such a delicate move, Blondeau exposed everyone to his or her own vulnerabilities that the human condition grants. In doing so, *States of Grace* enlightens our global state of consciousness. By accepting Blondeau's invitation to witness the relevance and criticality of honoring and remembering the past, the process of healing begins.

Her presence, re-assembled

and disassembled over 10 days, speaks not only to the fragility of life, it invokes prayer, ritual, and habit in which forms of thanksgiving can be (or need to be) addressed. *States of Grace* is also a process in which indigenous traditions, and notions of community and home are presented as narratives with passionate subtle gestures that expose suffering and pain, healing and hope. Interwoven with confrontations of the colonial histories, *States of Grace* acts as a decolonizing mechanism to balance fate and the disrupting tensions that continue to shift the reality of a Native North America diaspora for all to consider.

In the spirit of requickening *States of Grace* spoke a universal language to all who witnessed the performance, reminding us that we are all okay.

*Ryan Rice*  
Co-Curator

*In 2007, we honor a founding member of IA3, the acclaimed artist Harry Fonseca of Santa Fe, New Mexico who died December 28, 2006. For more on his legacy see: <http://www.harryfonseca.com/news/index.htm>*

*This event is made possible through the generous support of the Canada Council for the Arts Aboriginal Peoples Collaborative Exchange, the Institute of International Education New York, NY (USA), Ontario Arts Council and Smith College, Northampton, MA (USA). For details in Venice please contact: Studio dal Ponte at: (041) 523-9315 or [studiodalponate@libero.it](mailto:studiodalponate@libero.it)*

