

## **The Art Historical Context of Nicole Garneau's Work**

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One might argue that the roots of Garneau's work can be traced to Neolithic humans' ritual activities using instruments embellished beyond the role of functionality. These practices were often meant to strengthen the community, and Garneau's performances echo the ancient history of aestheticized rituals.

The early performance activities of Dada, along with their political motivations and commentary, are clearly part of the historical base from which Garneau draws as an artist. Garneau's work is actively engaged with issues of social justice, and builds upon the foundations of early 20<sup>th</sup> century political performance with special attention paid to race, sexuality and gender. Her personal experiences with the theater in Russia also influence the socio-political aspect of her art. Garneau's interest in public engagement beyond the closed spheres of art or theatrical spaces can also be linked to Russian realism, as well as to the happenings of 1960s-70s, especially Fluxus, and more recently, artists like the Guerilla Girls and Marina Abramovic.

Like the feminist artists of the 1960s-70s, Garneau is interested in education, history, collaborations, and performance as a primary mode of communication. Her work often serves as a continuation of the dialogues around women's art and bodies over the last fifty years. Garneau is able to use her body and the bodies of her collaborators as sites of simultaneous specificity and universality. Just as Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, and Carolee Schneemann before her, Garneau conjures a dynamic reconsideration of gender, performance, and ritual in the context of early 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. Garneau's work differs from many of these earlier artists and movements with regard to her focus on our common humanity and individual power.