

PRIMING THE SOURCE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

STUART REID



ABOVE
The Source participants in Banff, Alberta, April 2013
left to right: Patrick Mahon, Gautam Garoo
Soheila Esfahani, Nadine Bariteau, Raymond Boisjoly,
Robert William Sandford, Gu Xiong, Colin Miner.
(not shown- Elizabeth Chitty, Lucy + Jorge Orta)

Water seeks water, finding its own level as it flows. Our bodies, being mostly water, are sensitive to the call of the source. A longing for reunion pulls one to the edge of the level surface, only to recognize our reflection in its mercurial mirror. Like Narcissus, we find it hard to look away. We learn about ourselves when we contemplate water. Its essence pervades our physical life, our spirituality and our imagination. Water forms cultural ties that bind people, and informs our stories, myths, beliefs and customs.

As much as water makes up our physical bodies, it pervades and surrounds us, comprising our earthly environment and atmosphere. From an ocean wave to a snowdrift to a rainbow, water interacts with energy and transforms itself into phenomena, both majestic and sublime.

Our inextricable links with fresh water as a life source prompt much anxiety in our fast-changing world. Our era, marked by rapid climate change, destructive hydro-climatic weather events, loss of polar ice and rising global sea levels, is witness to shifting shorelines, borders, migration patterns and lines of economic and cultural exchange. In decades to come, water will be the source of redefining our global community based on the collective interests of humanity.

Although many believe access to fresh water is an essential human right, it is now a valuable global commodity that is bottled and traded, fast becoming scarce. In 2015, we saw the massive metropolis of São Paulo, Brazil, tap into its final reservoir¹ and we witnessed the catastrophic drought and wildfires that ravaged California in the United States. As I write this, the Government of Canada has just appointed a minister dedicated to climate change, indicative of the growing sense of urgency we feel at this moment, what scientists call the eleventh hour. This season, we saw the warming Pacific spawn the superstorm Patricia – the strongest land-falling Pacific hurricane ever recorded. Social media is abuzz with stories about scientists' concern over the fast-occurring bleaching of coral reefs as the temperature of our oceans rises. An acidifying ocean due to increased carbon dioxide could mean the collapse of the entire marine food chain because of the negative impact on shelled creatures. Changes to water cycles alter the life cycles of every species on our planet.

The Source: Rethinking Water Through Contemporary Art was an ambitious assemblage of artists who came together to discuss, explore and learn from one another. The resulting exhibition was constructed around those individual explorations and a new understanding of water. This shared focus spurred investigations that were far-reaching, divergent and informed by individual interest, cultural perspective and geographic viewpoint.

It was important to the spirit of the project that there was no summary or didactic messaging – fluidity and the changing course of questioning were important to show in their true states. Although there was a collective understanding that the topic of water spilled over into the political sphere, and issues are pressing and global in nature, a definitive stand on these issues did not arise. Instead the show opened up a cascade of ideas and directions that mirrored the intangible nature of the material we were discussing. *The Source* contemplates water from a nationless, borderless perspective that is altogether human.

The following pages serve to introduce each artist's practice and their contribution to *The Source*.

¹ Claire Rigby. "São Paulo's water crisis: In the Favela do Moinho, 2,500 residents rely on one impossibly thin blue pipe," *The Guardian, Cities*, April 15, 2015.