

# BÉATRICE BALCOU

## To Maintain the Silence

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Beatrice Balcou's first solo exhibition in Québec brings together works that are associated with each of her main series: *Cérémonies sans titre* [Untitled Ceremonies], her *Placebo* works, and *Pièces assistantes* [Assistant Pieces]. The Musée d'art de Joliette invited Balcou to select a piece from its collection in order to create a new ceremony and an accompanying placebo sculpture. The exhibition also provided the impetus to further develop the element of sound in her work; since the pandemic forced us all to rethink our daily movements, it also affected Balcou's way of working. Presented for the first time, this audio piece will be followed by a series that will involve the MAJ's participation.

Each of the ceremonies Balcou has performed since 2014 involves the creation of a placebo: a wooden replica that copies, as closely as possible, the characteristics of another artist's work. The placebo allows her to prepare for a ceremony that consists of exposing the original work after having practiced the various movements that are associated with unwrapping and manipulating the object. This silent performance allows Balcou to paradoxically erase herself by directing the audience's attention toward the "ritual of exhibition." Although she is still essential to the process, she becomes secondary to the work of another as it emerges from the darkness of the vault to make a brief appearance before being stored away once more.

Balcou's ceremonies partly stem from her fascination with the Japanese tea ceremony, whose movements incorporate slowness, attention, and concentration—qualities she has identified in the patient and meticulous work of technicians, restorers, or conservators who are responsible for the preservation of art works. Combined with these careful and respectful technical manipulations are Balcou's more personal gestures that outline the work's details and direct the viewer's gaze. These ceremonies are never documented,

except in the minds of the people who witness them. The wooden placebo sculpture is presented in a room adjacent to where the ceremony took place, and serves as a kind of memory of the event. The audio work composed of sounds from the ceremony, among other elements, plays a similar role while offering other modes of consideration that help deepen our appreciation of a work of art.

*Pièces assistantes*, presented in the gallery that is devoted to the MAJ's permanent collection, were created by Balcou to complement works not currently on display. Contrary to the placebos, these sculptures are not replicas, but respond to a need expressed by their creators. They seek to support—both physically and conceptually—another artist's process. Presented on their own, autonomously, they help us reflect on the invisible work of artist's assistants and other collaborators whose labour often goes unrecognized. By willingly occupying a background position in her practice, Béatrice Balcou creates works that offer encounters with institutions, artists, and the public, and whose objective is to promote a quality of attention that goes against today's speed- and spectacle-obsessed reality. This aspect is what makes her work so remarkable.

Anne-Marie St-Jean Aubre, Curator of Contemporary Art

The artist thanks Wallonie-Bruxelles International, the Consulat général de France à Québec, and the Museum of Ixelles in Brussels for their support.

Translation: Jo-Anne Balcaen

# BÉATRICE BALCOU

Tréguier, France, 1976

## **1. *Huit crochets à cadre pour quatre dessins de Annie Pootoogook*** **[Eight frame hooks for four drawings by Annie Pootoogook]**

2022

Cherry wood

3,6 cm x 3,4 cm x 1,1 cm

Property of the artist

Béatrice Balcou's handmade hooks are among the *Pièces assistantes* [Assistant Pieces] intended to provide support for a selection of drawings by artist Annie Pootoogook (1969–2016). It was the formal quality and composition of Pootoogook's work, discovered in catalogues found at the MAJ, that first drew Balcou's attention. She then observed that, like Muusuti Ittuq Uqaittuq (1939–2005), Pootoogook was an Inuit artist. Her work has been recognized as a forerunner of a new artistic current that shows contemporary ways of life in northern Québec. By highlighting the traditional and contemporary aesthetics of Inuit art through Uqaittuq's and Pootoogook's works, Balcou underlines the resiliency and richness of these communities, which she is still in the early stages of researching.

Balcou thanks Atelier Clark for its assistance in creation of the work.

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**2. *Impression Placebo V (d'après une sculpture du début du XVIe siècle d'un artiste anonyme, Italie du Nord)***

**[Placebo V Print (Based on an Early 16th Century Sculpture by an Anonymous Artist, Northern Italy)]**

2016

HDR pigment inkjet print on cotton paper

50 x 40 cm

Property of the artist

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**3. *Impression Placebo IV (d'après une œuvre d'Ann Veronica Janssens)***

**[Placebo IV Print (Based on a Work by Ann Veronica Janssens)]**

2016

HDR pigment inkjet print on cotton paper

53 x 40 cm

Property of the artist

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**4. *Impression Placebo III (d'après une œuvre de Bojan Šarčević)***

**[Placebo III Print (Based on a Work by Bojan Šarčević)]**

2016

HDR pigment inkjet print on cotton paper

50 x 40 cm

Property of the artist

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## **5. *Oiseau noir Placebo (d'après une œuvre de Muusuti Ittuq Uqaittuq)***

**[Black Bird Placebo (Based on a Work by Muusuti Ittuq Uqaittuq)]**

2022

Basswood

23.5 cm x 15 cm x 19 cm

Property of the artist

To create her new *Cérémonie* [Ceremony] and the resulting *Placebo*, Béatrice Balcou wanted to highlight a work from the Musée d'art de Joliette collection created by an artist with little visibility in Europe, whose approach is closely associated with Quebec as a place. She quickly settled on the Indigenous and Inuit works in the MAJ collection and chose a steatite (soapstone) sculpture by Muusuti Ittuq Uqaittuq (1939–2005). To produce the placebo, Balcou carefully studied the shape of the source work. The *Cérémonie* establishes a context in which spectators pay sustained attention to the original object. Balcou's creations are titled in a way that links her work to that of the artists who inspire her and whose approach she appreciates. In this way, she helps to spread awareness of these works far and wide. In addition, Balcou's choice impelled the MAJ to find out more about the sculpture labelled in its database as being by an unknown artist. Through Avataq, the Musée was able to identify the creator.

Balcou thanks Atelier Clark for its advice in production of the work.

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## **6. *Cérémonie sans titre #20***

**[Untitled Ceremony #20]**

Presented at the Musée d'art de Joliette, on June 18, 2022, at 11 a.m. and at 1 p.m.

Performance

35 min

Property of the artist

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## **7. *Son de Cérémonie #19***

### **[Sound of Ceremony #19]**

2022

Audio piece, with *Un dimanche après-midi à Berlin* (1990) by Lili Dujourie, collection of Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium.

21 min 03 s

Property of the artist

This audio piece, created at the Musée d'Ixelles, in Belgium, is one in a new series of works by Béatrice Balcou. It allows visitors in Joliette, guided by the sounds caused by the manual work involved in mounting an exhibition, to have an intimate and material relationship with a work by Belgian artist Lili Dujourie. Although her work is well known in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, Dujourie has not received wide exposure outside of Europe. The formal (from object-work to audio-work) and physical (from Brussels to Joliette) shifts provoked by Balcou's approach suggest other ways to experience Dujourie's work.

Balcou thanks Benoît Police (exhibition manager) and Anne Carré (collection manager) for their assistance in the production of the *Cérémonie*, and Tom Heene and Christophe Albertijn for their assistance with recording and sound editing.

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## **8. *Protocoles des Cérémonies sans titre, extraits du livre monographique « Cérémonies & », Émilie Renard (dir.), Gand, MER, 2021***

### **[Protocols of the *Untitled Ceremonies*, excerpts from the monographic book « Cérémonies & », Émilie Renard (ed.), Gand, MER, 2021]**

2022

Prints on cotton paper

29.7 x 21 cm

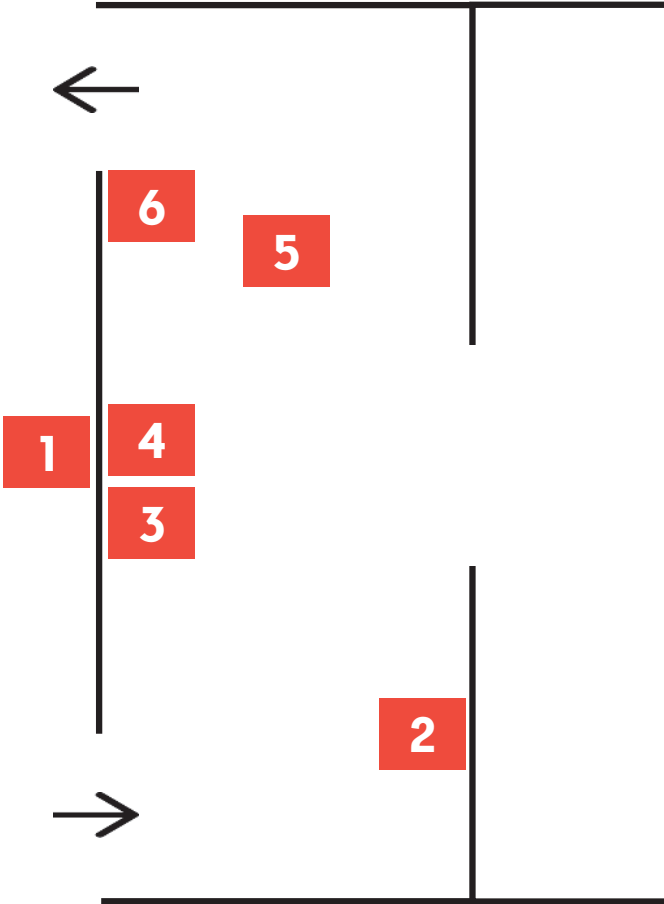
Property of the artist

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# FLOOR PLAN

2<sup>nd</sup> floor

Salle Harnois





7

8