

THE FRONT

MARIANNE NICOLSON

Confluence, 2022. Carved glass, cedar, light mechanism, shadow, 85 cm wide × 85 cm long × 76 cm high. Photo by Eva Broekema.

Confluence speaks to water and our current changing relationship due to climate change and catastrophe. It speaks to survival, well-being, healing, and rebirth through an Indigenous lens which looks back at ancient knowledge to provide the path forward into the twenty-first century.

The house refers to the rebirth of Dzawada'enuxw Nation, of which I am a part. It reflects on the flood story from our origins, which tells of survival through foresight and the creation of a catamaran of canoes that when anchored to the top of a mountain, enabled our ancestors to survive a great flood. In contemporary times, we also experienced a catastrophic great flood in 2010. This flood was of such magnitude that the community was evacuated by helicopter and required rebuilding. This flood was brought on by a combination of climate change and massive clear-cut forestry, which has heavily impacted the river we live by.

The glass house's fragility is a symbol of our own human fragility under contemporary circumstances as climate change creates more and more extreme weather events, fires, and potential conflicts over water. Despite this fragility, the carved images refer to an original Dzawada'enuxw house whose stars represent that house as the land itself. On the sides of the house are carved two canoes and two human figures who rise up amid the regrowth of crabapple and clover, two traditional food staples of the Dzawada'enuxw. A light mechanism set within the roof of the house rises and lowers like the sun or the tides. This light projection spills from the house onto the floor and up the walls of the gallery until it reaches its full height, pauses, and begins to lower. The shadows implicate viewers in a performance repeated over and over that reflects on the past and the present, the individual and the collective, as well as Indigenous and colonial relationships.

Marianne Nicolson (Dzawada'enuxw) holds a PhD in linguistics and anthropology from the University of Victoria and is an internationally recognized visual artist. She utilizes her academic and artistic practice as a platform to advocate for Indigenous linguistic and cultural resurgence. Notable monumental public works include the Vancouver International Airport, the Canadian Embassy in Amman, Jordan, and the Canadian Embassy in Paris, France.