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## **Submerge yourself in underwater WAVE**

### **Toronto artist Janet Bellotto explores changing nature of environment**

By Felicia Pacentrilli

Janet Bellotto wants people to think about the various waves that surround us. From electrical waves to natural waves, Bellotto hopes to capture and question the changing nature of our environment and propel viewers outside of the real. The artist's new exhibit, WAVE, which will be shown at the Red Head Gallery in Toronto until Nov. 28, exposes viewers to a disorientated, upside down underwater world using video and lenticular photography. Bellotto's previous art exhibitions have been shown in Venice, Beijing, Mexico City, New York, and Dubai, where the Toronto-born artist currently lives and works.

What was the inspiration for your latest exhibit WAVE?

"The exhibition all started from this one image of Lake Resia, a man-made lake on the border of Switzerland, Austria and Italy. A Swiss energy company paid Italians to help construct a dam that flooded the town in exchange for energy. Today, the only remnant of the old town is a 14th century tower that remains above the floodwaters.

"The second inspiration came from thinking about where I was and the place I was exhibiting, and how to communicate through these distances. We travel and weave our daily messages through virtual postboxes and travel along virtual conduits through cell phones and new technology. I was also looking at our natural environment and what we construct and see as natural."

What do we construct and see as natural?

"The Internet is more of a natural sea to us now because it's the way we are connected to the world. For explorers, the sea was the way they connected to the world, so we've stepped into a whole other dimension without realizing it. Oceans and distance are no longer barriers for communication. We now communicate with text messages and we're disconnected from the natural world, which made me question what's real and how do we connect to the world around us now?"

How long did it take to complete WAVE?

"It took about eight months between research and the physical construction of the work. I visited the gallery a few times to draw inspiration, and then this image that my artist friend Stan Denniston took, had popped back into my mind. I truly spent almost three months working out the physical details and bringing the piece together."

Do you have a favourite piece from the exhibit?

"Because this exhibition is made up of several parts in a very particular space, it's hard to choose one piece. However, the most exciting part of WAVE was collaborating with two modern dancers from Toronto, Olivia Davies and Aaron

Water, during the opening reception at Red Head Gallery. The dancers were able to promote the ideas of floating, buoyancy, and being underwater and also made the exhibition a more interactive space. Also, combining my brother's song 'Eel's Lake' with one of the videos, so I guess I'm attached to the video 'Buoyancy.' ”

What is it like to live and work in Dubai after having lived in Toronto? [Janet is currently a teacher and co-chair of the Department of Art and Design at Zayed University in Dubai.]

I've lived in Toronto all my life, always in transit. Although I'm in Dubai, Toronto is still home as much as Cordenons, Pordenone, Italy, is, although I've never lived there – these are places that are important to me. Dubai is a place that has to be visited at least once; it is something to be experienced. I've traveled a lot, but there was a state of culture shock as it is a place of different traditions and culture. I've learned a lot and it has dispelled some myths that I had, which I think were primarily constructed by the media and governments. It first reminded me of L.A., where you can't do much without a car. The main element I miss, which is what I love about Toronto, and other world cities, is that you can just walk around the whole downtown, in and out of stores and cafes. In Dubai, there are lots of little pockets, nothing really centralized, and lots of malls. But it's a booming part of the world especially in terms of architecture.”

What projects are you currently working on?

“Currently, I am working on a new body of work that is still in the research phase but involves the nautilus. Also, in January I will be exhibiting in a group show at Gallery Stratford, Ontario, curated by Carla Garnet. I'm also working on some art exchange projects with places in Dubai, and a little mobile gallery project that I hope to launch by the end of this year.”

Visit [www.redheadgallery.org](http://www.redheadgallery.org) for more information on WAVE, which will be showing at the Red Head Gallery until Nov. 28. For more information on the artist visit [www.janetbellotto.com](http://www.janetbellotto.com).

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