



Flux (2017) 105cm x 76cm mixed media. Collection of the Artist.

Flux forms part of a series in which Barry Ace addresses climate change and its impact on water. In *Sacred Water 1* and *Sacred Water 2* (2016), in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ace used circular graphs drawn by machines that measure water flow to form the basis of two compositions—one that symbolizes a world in balance, the other a world out of balance. In *Sacred Water 1* the outline of the measurements resembles the petals of a flower which Ace has accentuated with beadwork. In Anishinaabe material culture, floral motifs are commonly used to represent medicinal healing plants. In *Sacred Water 2*, the outline is broken and without form. Ace has again beaded the measurements, and this time they are small, curved lines that fail to connect.

In Flux, the third work in the series, Ace concentrates the beadwork within the centre of the circular graph. Here, inside the watery blue outer circle of beadwork, the same blue beads trickle into an inner black disk resembling a circuit board. The meandering estuaries mimic the metallic pathways traced onto the surfaces of a board. It is through these pathways often made of copper—an element of spiritual importance to the Anishinaabe—that energy currents flow, making the connections required to power our 21st century devices.

The effect calls to mind a landscape, as witnessed from above, yet it is also an intentional insertion of a common motif by Ace referencing, as well as incorporating, the refuse and e-waste of our digital age.

In Anishinaabemowin beads are called manidoominens, meaning “little spirit berries,” as beads were understood to be the conductors of healing energy. When animated, for example by the motion of a dancer in their regalia, the energy is then transferred. The dancer enables the modification from a diseased state of being to one of health. As with materials with electrical conductivity—copper and other metals, water molecules as well as our cells—when there is an obstruction in the flow, the interruption can create imbalance, even illness.

Ace comments that much of his work deals “with the notion of systems.” When there is ease of flow and connectivity a system can function fully, in a state of well-being. The verb flux implies movement or flow as well as a change of state, as with water’s ability to transform to vapour or melt from a solid state of ice. “The earth’s water is always in movement,” Ace observes, however with water’s current state of flux—extreme weather, flooding, and pollution—for that, he adds “we are responsible.”

In all three of the works a long strand of beads stretches down from the top of the archival paper to intersect the circle. Another motif of Ace’s is to use either a line of paint or hand stitched beadwork to represent “the sharp and poignant point” he wishes to make. This work, for Ace, represents the “story of water” and the critical role it plays for the earth as well for our own biological systems. Flux is a call for a restoration of balance as well as a signal to course correct the flow.

Works from this same series are in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada.