



Ablakela

Ablakela is a new performance work by Dana Claxton produced as a live performance, a live Internet telecast and an enhanced audio CD with a CD ROM track. The work will be produced in October 1999 as grunt's contribution to the performance festival Live at the End of the Century. Ablakela, the word meaning calm in the Lakota language, employs a large video projection of the artist, live, braiding grass while accompanied by two singers of the Native American Church. The simple, 45-minute work explores Lakota spirituality within a performance art construct.

The singers, sounds of the water drum and rattle are a live element performed by renowned Peyote Singers Verdell Primeaux and Johnny Mike. Peyote songs are religious or social music used for healing and ceremonies of the Native American Church. During traditional peyote ceremonies the cactus peyote is ingested for ritual and religious purposes to bring individuals to states of higher consciousness.

The braiding itself while using bear grass is similar to the braiding of sweetgrass, used in many native communities across North America. Sweetgrass has religious and medicinal purposes and is considered sacred. The act of braiding for 45 minutes adds an endurance element to the work which she has successfully employed in the past though within Ablakela the mediative nature of the activity changes its meaning.

Claxton's previous work employs visual symbols and metaphor to focus on colonial double standards and destruction of first peoples, customs and environment. Her work in film and video establishes her as an important voice in contemporary media production. For her previous performance and installation Buffalo Bone China Claxton smashed bone china for 50 minutes highlighting the use of buffalo bones in colonial porcelain production. The production highlighted colonialist attitudes towards resources that have destroyed first nations economies but also the nature of class and consumption both past and present.

Claxton's earlier work often contained symbols of violence or threat; Ablakela attempts a more spiritual end. And while in earlier work Claxton focused on the past and present Ablakela projects itself onto the future. In it Claxton reconfigures the Western performance art medium within Lakota spiritual practice, blending traditional actions and music in a new ritual which speaks to healing at the end of the 20th Century.

Ablakela will be performed live in Vancouver on the evening of October 16, 1999 with a live Internet telecast. Ablakela is also documented through an enhanced CD containing

the music from the performance and a CDROM track featuring elements of video, photographic stills and texts by the artist, curator and two Native writers academic Bea Medicine on the significance of peyote rituals in Lakota culture and curator and writer Marcia Crosby placing the work into a context of contemporary practice. Dr Medicine's twin roles as cultural anthropologist and Lakota elder allow her insights into traditional spiritual practice particularly suited to this project. Marcia Crosby's work as a curator and scholar within British Columbia will allow her to situate the work within the context of contemporary production on this coast. The Internet broadcast will be carried out by technical director Jay Thompson and the CD will be programmed by Emily Faryna.

Live at the End of the Century is a month long festival of performance art in Vancouver during October 1999 focusing on Vancouver's history and practice of the medium. Organized through grunt by curator Brice Canyon it features a host of Vancouver art institutions including; Vancouver Art Gallery, The Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery (UBC), The Charles Scott Gallery (ECIAD), The Contemporary Art Gallery, The Video In, The Western Front, Artspeak, Or Gallery, Art Beatus, grunt, and HAVANA. The Festival will be accompanied by a book of the same title focusing on Vancouver's role in performance art over the past 30 years featuring 14 writers including; Scott Watson, Glenn Lewis, Judy Radul, Margaret Dragu, Lizard Jones, Paul Wong, Aiiyana Maracle, Archer Pechawis, Todd Davis, Glenn Alteen, Tanya Mars, Warren Arcan and Karen Henry.

As a venue for this project Live at the End of the Century will provide a highly visible profile with an extensive advertising campaign and enhanced media interest. Within the festival Claxton's work will enjoy a higher profile as this will be her first Vancouver performance in several years over which time her film and video work have gained increased profile and attention. grunts history of producing contemporary first nations work is extensive over the past 9 years and we have recently produced media projects for artists Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (video – An Indian Act Shooting the Indian Act), Laura Wee Lay Laq (video projection - At The Mercy Of), Neil Eustache (audio video – Indian Art for Sale) and are currently going to press on a CDROM for the project HALFBRED. We have maintained a gallery web page since 1994 as well as a Halfbred site. We are currently working on a project grunt – an oral history containing a chronology of gallery exhibitions, performances and events.

This project will produce the first solo publication on the work of Dana Claxton, though five other group exhibition publications have featured her previous work. The Ablakela enhanced CD is both an artist project and documentation of the artist's work. The live music by Primeux and Mike on the CD track and the CD ROM tracks of video, images and texts provide an innovative journey through Ablakela.