

DREAMING

with Dana Claxton & Winston Xin

The Dreaming:

Dana Claxton's video art.

Curated by Winston Xin

I have been Dana's editor for close to 30 years, and we have produced and created these works on the unceded traditional territories of the **x̣m̄əθk̄'əȳə m̄** (Musqueam), **Sk̄wxw̄** **ú7mesh** (Squamish), and **səlilwətał** (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Below are segments of interviews about her work and the individual video art she has created.

WX: I've always found it interesting when we would come to a problem while editing, and you would say, "Let's meet next week. I have to dream about it."

I always found it really interesting; that's how you worked. So, can you tell me a bit about what dreaming means to you?

DC: Some of my cultural teachings is that the dream world is the real world. And that dreams come to you; your ancestors come to you; teachings come to you - when you're having a dream that you need to pay attention to. The dream world will show you all kinds of things, visitations, and art. And so, I have brought my dreams forward in some of my artwork.

WX: Okay. Like an ancestor will come to you, and would they tell you specifically what to do?

DC: No. No. It's not like, you know, this ghostly being going the footage from here and tell me where to put it, over there. It's just your dream world will show you images. It's just images. I've never had anybody speak to me. It's always showing me through images.

I Want To Know Why

Dana Claxton. 1994. 06:20 min

DC: If you think of the complications of colonial history, criminalizing indigenous culture, and becoming a fugitive on your own land, those kinds of things. The impact colonization had on my own family and the women in my family. I.. I wanted to know why. I wanted to know why.

The Red Paper

Dana Claxton. 1996. 14 min

DC: Well, of course, thinking about Trudeau's White paper and again, forced assimilation, forced sterilization and forced taking of your children. All of these things are still being revealed, and to some folks who don't know all about Canada's history, I was thinking about the white paper. So I called it The Red Paper, but I was also thinking about Shakespeare because it's mostly in broken Elizabethan and that indigenous people weren't getting cast in anything.

The Hill

Dana Claxton. 2004. 03:49 min

DC: That's, again, thinking about Canadian politics and going to the Parliament buildings. I worked with Michelle Thrush on that work. There wasn't any dialogue, but we just went around. We were at a conference in Ottawa, and I had a Super-8 camera and a film camera. We walked around the Parliament buildings, and it was gorilla and directing her at the same time, saying, "Let's try to get into the Parliament buildings. Let's try to get in there. So she'd go in the big elaborate doors, knocking on them trying to get in or going up to a large statue of John A. McDonald, sitting on his knee and kissing him and (laughs). So it was just being spontaneous and looking at this political

power apparatus and having an indigenous woman who was kept out of it and engaging with it.

10

Dana Claxton. 2003. 07:20 min

DC: Oh, 10. We love 10. Well, thinking about the stereotype, which is so entrenched and if we think about the fugitive pose that Gerald Vizenor brought forward specifically in literature, but it's been transferred to many different disciplines. Then academia brought it forward through their research and how it spilled out into public knowledge, then people believed in that "fugitive pose." So, I was inspired by that concept. And so, 10 little Indians and the vanishing of them. We edited that together, those three or four different iterations of it. I loved making that film (laugh). And that was done really quickly. I mean, there's some stuff that we do quickly, and others take, you know, quite a long time.

Anwolek Regatta City

Dana Claxton. 2006. 04:37 min

DC: Anwolek is Kelowna spelled backwards. Regatta City. It was a commission from an Artist-run centre. I've had a long history with Artist-run centres. I just wanted to think about what backwards people are in Lakota. We have the backwards people, but also, it was quite a violent work. It's had this subtlety of violence in it, of these falling bodies, and then the pageantry of, the parades that were in Kelowna. It's a very haunting work. But it does look at the takeover of indigenous land through pageantry.

Say It's Ok

Dana Claxton. 2006. 02:11

DC: Working with Neil Eustace, the writer, was a piece looking at indigenous healing from residential schools. And so it was this young boy, Ben Paul, who played the young fellow and talked about...his reciting this lovely oration that Neil wrote that was okay for him as a young indigenous boy, to be a young indigenous boy.

Her eyes have seen many worlds.

Dana Claxton, 2005, 03.15 min

DC: This figure who has seen suffering and she's seen healing and the beauty in both of those. We have indigenous healers out there that can heal you and you can heal yourself as well.

Patient Storm

Dana Claxton, 2006, 08 min

DC: Oh, that was another lovely work from an artist-run centre, Urban Shaman. There was a context where they were thinking about the cosmos. I thought about when I became a sundancer and dancing and some of the things that need to happen that are related to sky beings and Thunderbird beings. And so I wrote a piece in a bit of prose, a bit of rap, a bit of spoken word and of two beings, female beings up in the sky. And, they're waiting for different beings to appear in the sun to the Sundance. And, so she's patient, played by Samaya Jar, who I've worked with for many years. And that, she was being this patient storm (laugh) waiting. She was waiting for the storm to arrive, or she was waiting for rattling wings to come. But, you know, it's just also about patience. I loved making that work.

Her Sugar Is?

Dana Claxton. 2009. 02:36

DC: Well, that was so much fun making that with you and talking about the Dream World. I remember we were thinking about what we were going to call it. I said, "I'll go home and dream about the title." And then, of course, as you know, that was influenced by Madonna.

When Burlesque made this comeback, I remember going to a Vancouver burlesque show 'cause I thought, what is this stuff? Like, what is burlesque? And some of it was hugely political and feminist and traditional burlesque.

Of course, there are many traditional burlesque performers. I was intrigued by it and started researching it. All those headdresses, these women in these large headdresses and feathers and some dress like Pocahontas. However, they weren't; they weren't coming out being Pocahontas, but there was an implication of appropriation.

I found out that there were a few Native American burlesque dancers as well. I loved making it work. And then it was great seeing the cowgirls, too.

Hope

Dana Claxton. 2007. 09:51

DC: I am at an antique store. I was looking at things and immediately went to this bowl, grabbed it, and held it like this, and the man gave it to me. Wow. It was 300 years old, from the Ming Dynasty (laugh). He just wanted me to have it. You know, I have Chinese ancestry. I had it for a long time, and then some women were cleaning the house, my apartment, and they dropped it. Huh. And so it broke. I, of course, just saved it for a long time. Then, I decided to make a work called "Hope" of trying to put it back together - an investigation of putting what it...what it might be. It's a circular thing. It's clay, the earth, can represent environmental work and sociocultural relations and that things aren't irreparable.

In the Atrium:

The Making of Traditional Transformation: The Making of Cultural Belonging

Dana Claxton, 2015, 03:15 min

DC: Another commission by an American film company who were commissioning all Lakota filmmakers or aspiring filmmakers; I was working on another project of the first really large format photography of Cultural Belonging, which became my first fireboxes. I decided to document that process and look at a Lakota artist making Lakota work.

On Set: The Mustang Suite

Dana Claxton, 2013, 6hrs

DC: Mustang Suite was a commission from the Alternator Gallery; there are several commissions here from artist-run centres, which is significant. I'll always be indebted to them in a good way and always support them.

There wasn't a theme; my theme was thinking about Black Elk's horse dance. I remember that's how I started this. And then it went into all different areas, and then it became a photo shoot. I decided to document making those photographs, which became a foundational work to my large-format photography. So it's really looking at the process and then really wanting to share that; share that process.

Curator Bio

Winston Xin is a Malaysian-born artist and curator living in Vancouver. Xin was involved in the Toronto fanzine movement of the 1980s, along with Hal Kelly & Angela Ciavarella - they published The Trash Compactor zine about disposable cultures. Xin was also a writer for the Canadian indie music magazine Exclaim. Xin's artistic and curatorial practice revolves around the intersection of queerness and race.

Artist Bio

Dana Claxton is a critically acclaimed artist who works with film, video, photography, single/multi-channel video installation, and performance art. Her practice investigates indigenous beauty, the body, the socio-political and the spiritual. Her work has been exhibited and collected internationally. She has received the VIVA Award (2001), Eiteljorg Fellowship (2007), Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Award (2019), YWCA Women of Distinction Award (2019), Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2020) and the Scotiabank Photography Award (2020). She won Best Experimental Film at the IMAGINATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival (2013).

Fringing the Cube, her solo survey exhibition was mounted at the Vancouver Art Gallery (2018), and the body of work Headdress premiered at the inaugural Toronto Biennial of Art, Toronto, ON (2019). She is a Professor and Head of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia. She is a Wood Mountain Lakota First Nations member located in SW Saskatchewan and resides in Vancouver, Canada.

Dana comments, "I am grateful for all the support my artwork and cultural work has received. I am indebted to the sun and my sundance teachings – mni ki wakan - water is sacred."