

# Somewhere Else

## Rebecca Belmore

September 12 – October 17, 2015

### Action Over Time

In the exhibition *Somewhere Else*, Rebecca Belmore explores the endurance of an image over an action. She draws upon video documentation of four of her past performances: *Creation or Death: We Will Win*<sup>1</sup>; *Bury My Heart*<sup>2</sup>; *Vigil*<sup>3</sup>; and *Omaa*<sup>4</sup>.

The images endure but let's not forget the actions that went into making them.

The first video, *Creation or Death: We Will Win*, is set in Havana's Castillo de la Real Fuerza, an historical fort in Havana. The artist, bound and gagged, struggles to move a pile of sand up several flights of stairs. We are left with a lasting image of her struggle.

In the commemorative performance *Bury My Heart*, which references the massacre of Oglala Sioux at Wounded Knee, the artist in a white dress digs in the Montana clay, first with a shovel then with her hands. She partially buries a chair which she washes in blood to the music of a solo violin. The image is of the artist performing a respectful symbolic burial.

In *Vigil*, after first methodically scrubbing a sidewalk in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, Rebecca stops and dons a red dress. She then proceeds to nail it to a telephone pole. Viewers watch as she frantically struggles to escape until she is free.

Finally, in *Omaa* we see the artist pound nails into a photograph of *pakwâwi-mostos asiniy*<sup>5</sup> on a winter's day at Wanuskewin, Saskatchewan. The image of an impossible task persists.

For Rebecca, the act of making art is not a leisurely endeavour—it is hard work. The physical actions of the artist are repetitive, mechanical and relentless. Common to each of these four performances is a demonstration of the sheer physical effort involved in the creation of images and the commitment of her body to the creation of her art. We watch the artist struggle to create a line of sand, to dig up the earth to bury a bloodied chair, to nail a dress to a pole while wearing it then tear at it to get free, to repeatedly pound nails into an image of a stone. It's what Rebecca means when she speaks of "the artist as worker, the artist as a labourer."

In the new sculptural works presented in *Somewhere Else* we see materials, repetitive actions, and gestures that Rebecca has used before and mastered: a chair, placed on a large plane/plain; nails, hammered into a photograph or a dress on pole; black hair; cloth; a pail. Only the remnants of Rebecca's original performed actions remain; the performing body is absent.

With *Somewhere Else*, Rebecca brings actions forward in time, re-purposing them in new ways to speak to the ideas that she asks us to consider: time, memory, the artist, and the making of art.

Florene Belmore

1. *Bury My Heart*, 2000, Performance, Material Culture, Paris Gibson Square Museum, Great Falls, Montana.
2. *Creation or Death, We Will Win*, 1991, Performance, Castillo de la Real Fuerza, IV Bienal de la Habana, Havana, Cuba.
3. *Vigil*, 2002, Performance, 2002 Talking Stick Festival, Full Circle First Nations Performance, Firehall Theatre, Vancouver, BC.
4. *Omaa* (which means 'here' in the Anishnaabe language), 2014, Performance, Stronger Than Stone: Re(Inventing) the Indigenous Monument, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
5. *pakwâwi-mostos asiniy* (which means 'buffalo stone' in the Cree language) are stones which were rubbed smooth by generations of buffalo to remove winter coats or relieve the itch of insect bites.

This exhibition is part of the  
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