

Regards,

Catherine Sullivan
Redress Workbook, Vandal Studio
September 20 - November 9
Opening Reception: Friday, September 20, 5 - 8 PM



Catherine Sullivan
Redress Workbook, Vandal Studio
2024
16mm film transferred to digital media, black and white with sound
40 minutes

With performers Kristin Van Loon and Arwen Wilder (HIJACK), Carolyn Benjamin, Assaf Abraham Hochman, Manuela Rentea and Bob Wilson, Catherine Sullivan imagines the decommissioning of Pioneer Mother monuments in a black and white film segmented into three parts.

VANDAL'S PROTÉGÉ: I am the voice in the darkness breaking my silence.

VANDAL: You are a child of the grief she tries to grasp through all of this... artistic murk.

VANDAL'S PROTÉGÉ: What are these songs?

VANDAL: Psalters, communal singing which organizes the Puritan mind.

VANDAL'S PROTÉGÉ: You want me to go with her to the riverbank?

VANDAL: Yes, return her to her narrative of captivity. Go animate her past, I will make sure she manually encounters her crimes. You expose the transactions, and I'll keep her mind moving forward and her body back.

At the feet of these poor prisoners, their Abenaki captors bow'd, they fell, they lay down; at their feet they bow'd, they fell; where they bow'd, there they fell down dead.

VANDAL'S PROTÉGÉ: It's like a serpentine line for a ride, it moves forward and back!

VANDAL: Yes, the statue of Goodwife Duston is blurring, bisecting, dragging, lingering in retrograde.

VANDAL'S PROTÉGÉ: You're building a genre.

VANDAL: It phases in and out. An amalgam of possible structures with different iteration points, rules we can break anywhere, until she holds her past in her present and remains perfectly still.

VANDAL'S PROTÉGÉ: And goes soft?

VANDAL: Or hard, set to be cracked open again and again.

VANDAL'S PROTÉGÉ: Was she home schooled too? Thank you for helping me learn.

VANDAL: Keep it disorganized. Strike a balance between stream of consciousness and historical fact. And don't let them take your picture.



Redress Workbook, *Vandal Studio* imagines forms for dismantling monuments and the distorted virtues and alibis they claim. The films depict an encounter between a vandal and an archetype based on a Puritan woman abducted by the French-allied Abenaki people during the wars for control over the North American fur trade in the late 17th century. Several monuments were erected to this woman, Hannah Duston, throughout New England in the 19th century. In one she holds a tomahawk, the weapon used to slay her captors before she escaped. In a separate monument she holds the ten scalps she subsequently returned for. Both monuments are in the process of reinterpretation and continue to attract acts of defacement.

The film's three components cast a Hannah Duston stand-in into realms conjured by the Vandal, who directs her toward acts of redress for her crimes and the alibis they have been assigned. He offers her a score to play where she must move her mind forward and her body backward through

a sequence of “bloody devastations”. For every life that she took, she must hold her past in her present until she is completely still, productively idling in a state of redress. Her redemption is interrupted by the intrusion of the fact that after subduing her captors and escaping, Hannah Duston made the decision to return to collect their scalps and was eventually compensated for them. This act of capitalization explodes the Vandal’s studio into black farce forcing his Protégé to animate the transaction repeatedly through surrogate objects in new scenes and different styles. Devotional singing drawn from *The Music of Pilgrims* accompanies all of the scenes.

The films bring performers Carolyn Benjamin, Bob Wilson, Kristin Van Loon and Assaf Abraham Hochman who I’ve worked with for many years together with Manuela Rentea and Arwen Wilder who I am working with for the first time. Long-time cinematographer Raoul Germain helped shape the anachronistic mise en scène in 16mm black and white film, rendering the presences of these distinct performers through disparate temporalities and transient washes of grain.

Van Loon and Wilder work as collaborators in the Minneapolis-based choreographic project HIJACK and bring their own particular techniques for improvisation and contact to these films. We worked to create a vocabulary of physical states rooted in equine anatomies that refuse assimilation into the archetypes suggested by the costumes they wear. Work with Carolyn Benjamin focused on the “accounts” of the story of Hannah Duston, Henry David Thoreau’s in particular which proposes an American landscape shared between European cultures that flourish and Native cultures in decline. Assaf Abraham Hochman established the terse emotional tone for the Vandal, and Manuela Rentea created the expectant innocence embodied by his Protégé. Bob Wilson appears in multiple guises as the Vandal’s negative instrument of authority.

The films were made at the First Presbyterian Church on Chicago’s South Side and in the Forest Preserves of Cook County, on the acknowledged “lands of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi—as well as the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk and Meskwaki peoples.”

The installation consists of two, ten-minute films downstairs which each play twice. These are synchronized with one twenty-minute film upstairs which plays once. The sound design was conceived for all three playing simultaneously.

- Catherine Sullivan

Born in Los Angeles (1968) and based in Chicago, Catherine Sullivan works in film, theatre and installation. With ensembles of performers and regular collaborators, her work is often concerned with aesthetic behaviors in historically conditioned contexts. Solo exhibitions include the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Metro Pictures, New York; Tate Modern, London and Kunsthalle Zürich. She has exhibited in the Lyon, Whitney, Moscow and Gwang Ju biennials, Berlin International Film Festival and International Film Festival Rotterdam. Theatre works have been staged at venues including Opéra de Lyon; Volksbühne, Berlin; Cricoteka, Krakow and Trap Door Theatre, Chicago. Awards include a Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, DAAD Artists-in-Berlin residency, a United States Artists Walker Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. She holds a BFA in Acting from California Institute of the Arts and an MFA in Fine Art from Art Center College of Design. She is a professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago.