

St. James Guide to

NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN ARTISTS

*With a Preface by
Rick Hill*

*And an Introduction by
W. Jackson Rushing*

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should be accessible to all people and that the marketplace should not determine an artist's content. Clairmont is not concerned that a work sell to a popular audience, he is instead dedicated to promoting Native American art and artists and ensuring opportunities for their self expression. To this end, Clairmont has spent the last 15 years at the Salish Kootenai College in Ronan, Montana. He has served as professor and administrator as well as mentor for many young artists and non-artists alike. His advocacy for American Indian people is expressed in his lifestyle as well as his art work.

—Jennifer Complo

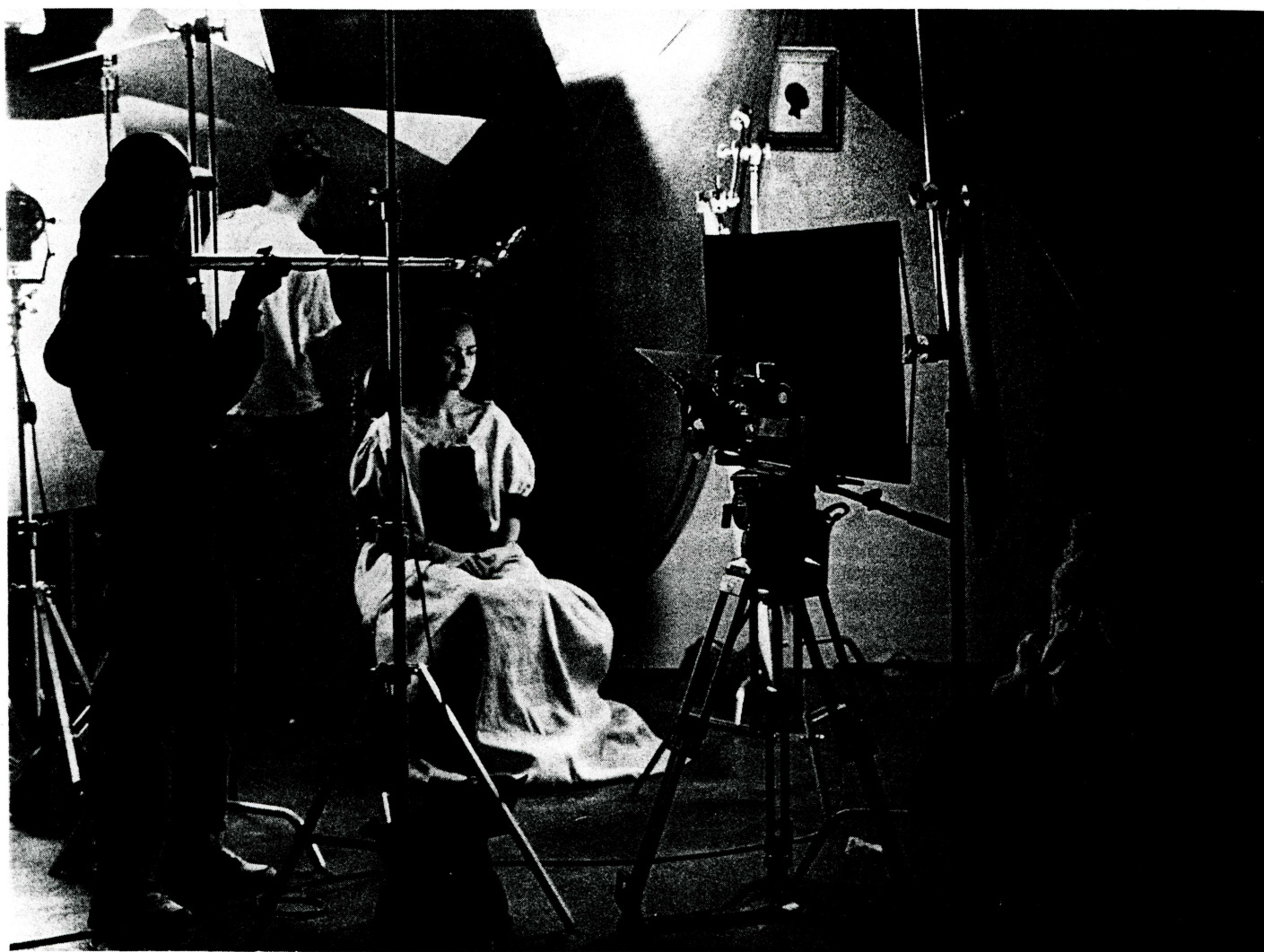
CLAXTON, Dana

Tribal affiliations: Lakota Sioux
Performance artist and filmmaker

Born: Yorkton, Saskatchewan, 1959. **Education:** General Studies (part-time), Simon Fraser University. **Career:** Photographer, filmmaker, illustrator, and performance artist.

Performances and Screenings

- 1991 *Ten Little Poems*, Neo-Nativist Pitt Gallery, Vancouver
- 1993 *Tree of Consumption*, Grunt Gallery, Vancouver
- 1994 *SA (revisited)*, Treaty 4, Standing Buffalo, Saskatchewan
Bench Remarks, Public Art on Bus Benches, Society for Non Commercial Art, Vancouver
Twentieth Anniversary Screenings, Video In, Vancouver;
 Video Screenings, EM Video, Calgary
Racing Thru Space, Artspeak, Vancouver
Walking with the Ancients, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1995 *New View 95*, Media Arts Centre, Columbia, South Carolina; Herland Festival, Calgary Status of Women; Women's International Film and Video Festival, Winnipeg
- 1996 *Reviewing Canadian Video*, Open Space, Victoria
Urban Fictions, Presentation House, North Vancouver
Topographies, (film installation) Vancouver Art Gallery



Dana Claxton: Production still from *The Red Paper*. Photograph by Cliff Andstein; courtesy of the artist.

Publications

On CLAXTON: Book—*Topographies: Aspects of Recent B.C. Art*, exhibition catalog by Grant Arnold, Monika Kin Gagnon, Doreen Jensen; Vancouver Art Gallery, 1996.

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Claxton represents a generation of young native artists, many of them women, whose work is not easily separated from their social concerns and their community roles. Their work is as likely to be made for audiences in shopping malls, on public transit or on television as in an art gallery, for they are concerned to break down the distinctions between high and popular art forms, perceived as one of the legacies of a hierarchical colonial system.

Claxton's work in film and video is distinguished by its reliance on visual symbols and metaphors. Her target is the greed and hypocrisy inseparable from the words of the colonisers. Where text occurs it tends to be a formal and expressive device in itself, or to be parodic. For example, the native protagonists in *The Red Paper* speak a stylised, faux Elizabethan English, to match their clothes. This reversal of cultural roles, speech and costume serves to highlight the hypocrisy of so-called "civilized" values. The title makes reference to the 1969 Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (the infamous "white paper policy") that proposed assimilation as a solution to the country's 'Indian problem.' The 25-minute film tells through reversed roles, in mock-heroic manner, the conflicting values of sixteenth-century European explorers and their discoveries. The film is projected into an elaborate, gilded picture frame and viewed by an audience sitting on gilded, salon chairs—an installation that emphasises Eurocentric views of the Indian as a confection.

However, *The Red Paper*, with its complex but underdeveloped symbolism, does not reach its target with the same assurance as shorter videos, such as *I Want to Know Why*. Here images of Indians are taken from the architectural decoration of the Manhattan Savings Bank in New York. These computer-manipulated stone images come and go, filling the screen, while pulsating music and a voice-over tell again and again of the premature deaths of her mother and grandmother, and screaming the demand to know why. The brutal reality of these women's lives is in counterpoint to the idealised Indians who were at the same time decorating the monuments of capitalism that expropriated and destroyed their way of life. The effect is successful because there can be no argument.

The Shirt (1994) suggests that European dress-codes were a form of strait-jacketing, while *Tree of Consumption* (1994) uses environmental devastation as a metaphor for a society ravaged by the disease of consumerism. In *Buffalo Bone China*, which looks at the gentility that was one of the by-products of the extermination of the buffalo, Claxton has found a potent symbol of the way in which one social system preys upon and profits from another. With a film planned on Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, whose paintings also are aimed at a wide audience, it is clear that advocacy of First Nations' rights and causes is the driving force behind Claxton's work.