

Reflection of Marilyn Arsem's *Bodies in the Land*

From the very beginning of being informed about visiting The Momentary I was exuberant about experiencing the full expression of Marilyn Arsem's visual performance with the piece *Bodies in the Land*. Particularly, when it comes to visual performances. I always feel like I have a dual perspective, I can look at things from an artistic eye while remaining objective to the piece itself as a viewer. Going into visual performance I purposely chose not to dive too deep into the study of Marilyn Arsem's works; I wanted to have my emotions take a backseat to see where the performance really would take me organically. Entering the visual performance with the way that I conceptualize objects, I immediately took stock of the buildup of rocks at the base of the floor supporting the wooden desk where Arsem sat reading. On the desk I noticed multicolored books with two black binders and the rest being environmental history of Arkansas related books. Walking into the room, it filled with Marilyn Arsem's voice matched with a somber tone. As she spoke, I noticed that her diction was not necessarily being produced with expressing a certain perfection, but more so an expression of sorrow. I could tell early on that Arsem was carrying out a heavy type of task in the visual performance. Marilyn voiced these sorrows steadily as her human nature shined through as well through short pauses to express grief, drink water and stretch. Gradually, I felt more compelled to hold my composure due to how deep the stories she shared moved me. I did not know how much bloodshed colonialism actively implemented on marginalized groups of people but specifically, indigenous people. As Arsem mentioned that the indigenous people "lived, fought, and died on this land" from a death notice I began to tear up. Eventually I had to take a break from viewing the piece due to how the ancestral experiences were parallel to the period of Transatlantic Slave Trade and myself. To know that Indigenous people who walked the Trail of Tears that runs right here through Fayetteville hit home for me. To suffer from that type of fate is an amount of pain I do not think I could personally conceptualize in the most politically correct way. As Arsem took a short break to walk on the rocks and touch them, that personified the Indigenous people's troubles in ways that I could only create an image about in my mind at first. Whenever I have had this discussion amongst others about the mistreatment of Indigenous people on this land by the end of conversation the shared experience was more emotional than anything. However, with the visual aspect of the performance piece Marilyn gave us all a tangible addition to only a portion of what kind of suffering had gone on. Colonialism will try to wipe away these experiences, but by Arsem using her own body to demonstrate the difficulty in just walking along those rocks in a steady manner created room for a more interactive piece. As I saw this happening, I started to ask myself questions like "how would walking like this be under the pressure of fear?" and "what extent of that fear can you feel now even for those have succumbed to it?" Directly after these questions it had become clear to me that I was overwhelmed with heat in my body. Asking myself those questions encouraged me to continue further with my journey of truth seeking because stories like those Indigenous peoples' lives need to be told. This is the exact moment where change meets us in the present, as lifetimes streamline into one moment serving as the catalyst for unveiling the truth to offer a new perspective of thinking about how our stories are told.