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Lara Kramer
Windigo, Festival TransAmériques, Montréal, 2018.
Photos : Frédéric Chais

Lara Kramer
Windigo

Mattresses have been on my mind a surprising amount recently. Over the past year or two, I've noticed ads for ostensibly innovative beds—hyper comfortable and shipped directly to your home in a box—punctuating podcasts and filling subway stations. The ensuing bed contemplation has been oddly immaterial. While I know there is memory foam involved, these new mattresses feel almost entirely conceptual. Their novel delivery tickles expectations, and their ubiquitous advertising props them up as something of a symbol: a discursive element of the media zeitgeist, more than something a body would actually sleep, sweat, stretch, or dream on.

Lara Kramer's *Windigo*, presented at Montréal's Festival TransAmériques, begins with a set of more immediately tangible mattresses. Strewn on the stage, some still covered in packaging plastic, they have immediate weight. It's a physicality that resonates in Kramer's intensely somatic choreography. Performers Jassem Hindi and Peter James move through body states, imposing on, and responding to, their material collaborators. Kramer looks on from the stage's margin, manipulating a soundscape of assembled fragments. The many-layered performance unfolds circuitously, in turns intimate and political, elegiac and grasping, opaque and vulnerable.

In a discussion with Elsa Pépin published in the program notes, Kramer comments on the objects that inhabit her stage: "I want to give that material the same value as the body." Indeed, it's an approach visible across the choreographer's practice. In *NGS ("Native Girl Syndrome")* (2013), two performers maneuver, covet, and disperse personal troves; meanwhile the stage space of *Tame* (2015) is claustrophobic in its material fullness.

As Kramer observes, objects, like bodies, are loci of transformation. The mattresses in *Windigo* change constantly: a result of both the very physical incursions the human performers make on them, and how we see these objects, themselves, perform. In one moment they are animals, being butchered, as an audience member suggested, by the knives of unskilled hunters. In another they are spaces of comfort—soft and enveloping—into which a body can climb.

Post-show, Kramer recounted experimenting with mattresses early in the working process, dissecting them in her backyard. She described feeling fascinated with the coils, the bones and viscera of these otherwise mundane things. *Windigo* applies this same gesture of excavation to land and memory. Culling from time spent in Kramer's grandmother's community in the Lac Seul reserve, and from the experiences of each performer, the piece listens to and amplifies the many violences that persistently impact this place, and its bodies.

In a workshop on the practice of land acknowledgement, professor and artist Jill Carter described how a condition of forgetting undergirds many colonial processes. This erasure intersects the systems of commodity and corporate consumption that Kramer views as current iterations of the Windigo, a dangerous and cannibalistic supernatural figure. These structures trade in silences, in gleaming patinas and thin veils. To dig, then, into felt memory, into the insides and the undersides, proposes transformative resistance. And this is precisely what *Windigo* does. The work tears at rote surfaces, literally and conceptually, exposing vibrant and often painful animacies, like so much upturned earth.

Fabien Maltais-Bayda

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