

Basic Detail Report



I Was Here

Date

2018

Primary Maker

Jeffrey Gibson

Medium

Single-channel video

Description

Featuring Macy, a trans woman living on the Choctaw reservation in rural Mississippi, *I Was Here* (2018) explores the protagonist's challenges and triumphs as she negotiates daily life on the reservation. The first part is unscripted, following Macy engaged in everyday activities. The latter half, written by Gibson, takes a mystical, otherworldly approach. Filmed on location in Choctaw, Mississippi, the video opens with a tattered American flag waving against an overcast sky, which then transitions to an exterior view of Macy's house, an ordinary suburban home that could be anywhere in the United States. Cutting to the interior, the video shows Macy occupied with the daily ritual of shaving, applying makeup, and dressing, reality TV a constant in the background. Macy drives to the local Piggly Wiggly to shop, then returns home and gets dressed for work, donning a less feminine tailored shirt. As night falls, we accompany Macy in her white pickup truck en route to the casino where she works a waitress. We see the casino, an orb atop a spiral, an anachronistic architectural anomaly distinct against the night sky and so different from the other spaces Macy has traversed in the film. Cut to daytime. Through a windshield spotted with raindrops, we observe, from Macy's perspective, the secluded road she drives along, bordered on both sides by trees. Macy parks in a clearing, and we view her getting out of the truck through reeds blowing in the breeze. She walks through the woods, navigating the dense forest, the tall trees providing dappled shade. Here, she removes her clothes and changes into a white shift dress designed by Gibson, its shape inspired by the Lakota Ghost Dance shirt. Macy then proceeds barefoot, treading on fallen pine needles that have carpeted the forest floor. She enters a murky lake, and although the film is cut to make it appear as though she immerses herself in the lake once, she wears three different colored garments—white, black, and red, all colors of significance to the Choctaw people—disrupting any clear sense of time. This fantastical sequence, scripted by Gibson, continues as Macy emerges from the water, her face turned toward the sky, having undergone a kind of self-baptism. She then returns to the woods, her clothing, now wet and heavy, trailing behind her. The accompanying original soundtrack features vocals by experimental Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq. Adapting the indigenous musical custom of Canadian throat singing for a contemporary context, Tagaq, like Gibson, draws from and expands upon a traditional creative form. Made as an improvisational response to the film, Tagaq's dramatic, breathy vocals add a visceral and emotional dimension. Gibson titled the video after one of Macy's favorite songs, "I Was Here" by Beyoncé. The lyrics of the ballad include such phrases of empowerment as, "I will leave my mark so everyone will know, I was here." We can take this as a personal anthem for Macy living as a trans woman in a conservative community, sharing her story for the first time through this video. For Gibson, "[Macy] represents strength to me, and the fact that she is not afraid to stand out is inspiring. . . . She accomplishes a great deal, on my behalf, by simply being her." (SOURCE: Tracy L. Adler, JEFFREY GIBSON: THIS IS THE DAY, 104.)

Dimensions

8 minutes, 15 seconds