

Start with stillness.

First stay until . . .

Then do a phrase not in words,  
as slowly as you can.

You are not a lump of clay,  
or without grace,  
or an animal in the wild.

Try not to lose any of the moments  
between the beginning and the end.

And then stop.

# x for staying here with us now

Sherri Hay



Two performances  
February 16 & 24, 2018



This interview is a score.

Talk about audience engagement.

Talk about time.

Talk about material.

Talk about choreography.

Say something about structure.

Say something about shape.

Say something about time.

Say something about freedom.

Tell us about the end.

Ok, score.

It sounds easy though it's really far from it—to attend to what is actually going on here, right now, unadorned by self-criticisms, congratulations and the imagined dramas of friends both fictional and actual. Where's your phone? When was the last time you thought about it? What about committing to a very slow half an hour, or so, of just being here?

When humans talk about time they mostly talk about the measuring of it. That, and its structuring into past, present, and future. Imagine for a minute that you were the kind of thing that couldn't care less about minutes, or, never once thought about the past or the future. What kind of thing would you be?

The material I am made of is related to time. Like a tree trunk is made of rings and the rings are made sequentially by the tree, but when you see a tree you see the whole thing all at once, all of the rings at the same time.

Choreography might have something to do with dance. Someone else's dance, which I shape from the outside. Or my own dance—which someone else has made for me, on me, with me.

Structure is the rigid part of something. The unmalleable part. Which gives something a shape.

Whether it is accidental or intentional, shape justifies itself, as if it could only ever be that way.

A performance is physically expressed time.

The dictionary says that freedom is 'the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.' It sounds frighteningly libertarian. Everything will always have an effect on everything else, so to think I can or should act without recognizing my participation in the ecosystem is the worst kind of damaging. So how much freedom is the right amount?

If everything goes as planned, the end will be very similar to the beginning.



Photo credit: Anneli Salo

**FADO:** In your previous work, there are instances in which the sculptural objects replicate performative actions, gestures, or postures. Tiny human figures fly around an apartment building in a snow dome; a waveform of weighted 'x's undulates in perfect formation in the breeze of the gallery's AC; and tiny faceless leaf figures sit in repose seeming to stare down the viewer. In *Time and Empathy* (the precursor to *x for staying here with us now*) the installation revealed itself to be a performance—a discovery made through the engagement of the audience—over a long duration of time. Can you talk about the differences in the conceptual and material concerns between a sculpture that performs and a performance that utilizes sculpture? In *x for staying here with us now*, if the object is the performer, are you the choreographer?

**SHERRI:** It's a matter of agency. If you want to say 'sculpture that performs' then it's the sculpture that is doing something; whereas if you say 'performance that utilizes sculpture' what you're saying is that the sculpture is getting used. In the first phrase, you could say that the sculpture is the subject; in the second, it's the object. There are instances in my work where sculptural objects replicate performative actions, yes. And more instances, more recently, where the sculptures aren't replicating something, they are actually doing something. This is the conceptual concern. Material concerns in this project issue from the conceptual concern: a material needs a certain weight or fluidity or size.

The concern is why we as humans insist on seeing ourselves as the doers, and the objects around us as the done-to. As if your favorite sweater can't seduce you just as your highschool crush did. If you're making a sculpture, a thing, there's some chance you are spending a lot of time getting to know that thing, feeling some reciprocity. Innovation comes from you but it also comes from the thing you're working with. The thing does things that surprise you, that you learn from and respond to. This is what I imagine a choreographer does too.

**FADO:** A score is the composition that tells the musicians what notes to play. In visual performance art, a score is a set of action instructions meant to be interpreted by the performer. A score is also, simply, "a notch or line cut or scratched into a surface." Charles Basualdo writes, "The cut of the score, while splitting open the surface on which it is inscribed, fuses action with abstraction, making them indistinguishable. It inscribes a temporal dimension on that surface; the very act of inscription alchemically turns space into the physical expression of a certain duration." Does the performance score provide the structure to the performance, or does the performance give shape to the score? How are they interrelated? How much freedom of interpretation do you allow the 'performer' with the score for *x for staying here with us now*? Do you know how the performance is going to end?

**SHERRI:** Wow, a cut! Like a mark or notation, but one that lets the juices out. And making action and abstraction indistinguishable, that's beautiful. Actions are so often overlaid with drama, and this drama can rob them of a certain purity. But FADO, how do you think Basualdo thinks the score makes action and abstraction indistinguishable?

**FADO:** The cut is the action. The way the juices flow out is the abstraction. This abstraction can also be read as the interpretation of the performer, which is beyond the control of the artist who wrote the score, in the moment of the cut at any rate. In *x for being here*, the artist provides the object with a score that once the performance begins, the artist no longer has control over. The performer performs. The score is interpreted. Is agency obtained? Or granted? How is agency performed?

**SHERRI:** Yes, I don't know if agency is obtained. Or granted. It is an open question, and central to this work for sure. How much agency does a human performer have during a performance, would you say?

In the case of this work agency begins prior to the performance, in the reciprocal nature of its creation. And the score was created at the same time as the object. The object has a 'memory' of the score, an embodied understanding of the actions to perform. But once it starts the performer can choose not to do any, to do only part, to interpret the time differently.

I don't think that agency is performed. I hope what is performed is presence. I hope that through time this object will become present to us the audience in a way that objects usually aren't in daily life.

**FADO:** In performance, process and presentation are indistinguishable—performance is as much a tool for research as it is a way to present outcomes; whereas (gross generalization) in the theatre, a finished product is re-interpreted over and over again. These being two (hardly opposite) poles, where does your practice as a sculptor making performance sit?

**SHERRI:** The conventional way a sculptor sees her work is more like the way you describe theatre—before any audience can see it and the process is embedded in the product. This process of sculpting is not meant to be seen in time. In *x for staying here with us now* the focus is really not on the product, but on the process. The questions posed are about time, behavior, and empathy.

**SHERRI HAY** is a Canadian artist who splits her time between New York and Toronto. With a wide-ranging practice that includes video and performance, her sculpture and installations have been exhibited internationally, at the Art Gallery of Toronto and the Museum of Canadian Contemporary Art in Toronto. She is also an occasional collaborator in experimental theatre and dance. Since 2012, her practice has focused on movement and time, relationships and change, exploring the quality and the extent to which she can give over voice as an artist — how she can be the instigator of a process instead of the Creator-from-nothing, proposing a certain kind of sentience for objects as performers. [sherrihay.com](http://sherrihay.com)



**FADO PERFORMANCE ART CENTRE** is a not-for-profit artist-run centre based in Toronto, Canada. FADO provides a stage and on-going forum in support of the research and development of contemporary performance art practices in Canada and internationally. As a year-round presentation platform, FADO exists nomadically, working with partner organizations and presenters, and utilizing venues and sites that are appropriate to individual projects. FADO presents the work of local, national and international artists who have chosen performance art as a primary medium to create and communication provocative new images and perspectives. [performanceart.ca](http://performanceart.ca)



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