The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA PRESENTS MAJOR EXHIBITION OF THE FILMS OF CANADIAN FILMMAKER ALANIS OBOMSAWIN

Documentaries Chronicle Customs and Struggles of Native Peoples over Past Four Decades

ALANIS OBOMSAWIN: A RETROSPECTIVE
May 14–26, 2008
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

NEW YORK, April 28, 2008—The Museum of Modern Art presents the most extensive U.S. retrospective of the films of Alanis Obomsawin, one of Canada’s most distinguished documentary filmmakers. Alanis Obomsawin: A Retrospective, which is presented May 14–26, 2008, in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters, is a comprehensive overview of the films and videos of the Canada-based filmmaker, who chronicles many of the struggles and the history of the First Nations of Canada. The filmmaker will introduce and discuss her films May 14 through 18. The exhibition is organized by Sally Berger, Assistant Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

A member of the Abenaki Nation, which originally spanned from New England northward to Quebec, Obomsawin was born on Abenaki Territory in New Hampshire in 1932 and raised on the Odanak reservation northeast of Montreal. Deeply absorbed in the history, traditional stories, and songs of her ancestors, she started her career as a singer, writer, and storyteller. In 1971 she made Christmas at Moose Factory, a short animated film about Indian children in residential schools, and since then she has worked with the National Film Board of Canada to make more than 30 documentaries on First Nations people and issues affecting their traditions, customs, and way of life.

Obomsawin first covered the conflicts over land and rights in Canada with Incident at Restigouche (1984). Her film Kanehsatake: 270 years of Resistance (1993), about the Mohawk protest against the expansion of a golf course into their sacred burial lands, received international acclaim, including the Best Canadian Feature Film at the Toronto International Film Festival that year. Her films—which utilize interviews, drawings, songs, and music—are marked by their original research, meticulous attention to historical detail, compassion for her contemporary subjects, and insights into the rights and lives of First Nations peoples. In May 2008 Obomsawin will receive the Governor General’s Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Achievement, one of Canada’s highest honors.

PROGRAMS

MoMA’s screening of Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance on Sunday, May 18 at 4:30 p.m. will be followed by a lecture by Audra Simpson, Assistant Professor, Anthropology and American Indian Studies, Cornell University, and discussion with Simpson and Obomsawin.
The National Film Board of Canada, which produced all of Obomsawin’s work, is marking her retrospective with the release of a DVD box set of four documentaries on the Oka crisis of 1990, including *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*. The box set will be available in the MoMA Stores and at www.nfb.ca

For downloadable high-resolution images, please register at www.moma.org/press

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**No. 48**

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For downloadable images, please visit www.moma.org/press and register for user name and password.

**Public Information:**

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

**Hours:**

Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday

**Museum Adm:**

$20 adults; $16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; $12 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs)

Target Free Friday Nights 4:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

**Film Adm:**

$10 adults; $8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. $6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

**Subway:**

E or V train to Fifth Avenue/53rd Street

**Bus:**

On Fifth Avenue, take the M1, M2, M3, M4, or M5 to 53rd Street. On Sixth Avenue, take the M5, M6, or M7 to 53rd Street. Or take the M57 and M50 crosstown buses on 57th and 50th Streets.

The public may call (212) 708-9400 for detailed Museum information. Visit us at www.moma.org

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**ALANIS OBOMSAWIN: A RETROSPECTIVE**

**SCREENING SCHEDULE**

[All films written and directed by Alanis Obomsawin.]

**Wednesday, May 14**

**6:00 Christmas at Moose Factory.** 1971.

Moose Factory, an old Indian settlement on the shore of James Bay, depicted through children’s drawings and the voice of a little girl who describes the daily life at Christmas. The soundtrack is filled with live recordings of children playing in snow and people talking, playing instruments, and singing. Slowly the drawings turn into photographic images of the children in the stories. The director’s first film reveals her devotion to children. 13 min.

**Waban-aki: People from Where the Sun Rises.** 2006.

After nearly forty years chronicling the lives of Canada’s First Nations, Obomsawin returns to the basket-making village of Odanak, where she was raised, to tell the story of the Abenaki culture. Elders and contemporary basket-makers tell the history of this
community and the larger Abenaki Nation that once occupied much of present day New England, the Maritimes, and southeastern Quebec. The story examines how the culture survives and challenges Canada’s outmoded Indian Act. 104 min.

**Discussion with Obomsawin.**

**U.S. Premiere.**

**Thursday, May 15**

6:00  **Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance.** 1993. On a hot July day in 1990, an historic confrontation propelled Native issues in Kanehsatake and the village of Oka, in Quebec, into the international spotlight and the Canadian conscience. Obomsawin endured seventy-eight nerve-wracking days and nights filming the armed standoff between the Mohawks, the Quebec police, and the Canadian army over a dispute about the development of a golf course on a sacred burial ground. The director’s first feature provides stirring insight into the struggle to protect Mohawk land. 119 min.

**Discussion with Obomsawin.**

8:30  **My Name is Kahentiosta.** 1995.
Kahentiosta, a young Kahnawake Mohawk woman proud of her centuries-old heritage, is arrested after the 1990 Kanehsatak/Oka crisis and detained because the prosecutor will not accept her native name. The film captures Kahentiosta’s willingness to die to protect what she finds sacred. 30 min.

**Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man.** 1997.
Randy Horne, a steel worker from the Mohawk community of Kahnawake near Montreal, was known as Spudwrench during the 1990 Kanehsatake/Oka crisis, a defender of his people’s culture and traditions. This documentary tells the little-known story of Horne and other Mohawks who travel the Northern Continent doing dangerous, unprotected high-elevation steel work on bridges and some of the world’s tallest buildings. 58 min.

**Introduction by Obomsawin.**

**Friday, May 16**

6:00  **Rocks at Whiskey Trench.** 2000.
Narrated by Alanis Obomsawin. In August of 1990 a convoy of seventy-five cars filled with women, children, and elders left the Mohawk community of Kahnawake in anticipation of an advance by the Canadian army. As they crossed Montreal's Mercier Bridge their vehicles were pelted with rocks by an angry mob. This fourth film in the director’s series on the 1990 Mohawk rebellions reveals the history of Kahnawake and examines the consequences of the appropriation of more than two thirds of Mohawk land over the last three hundred years. 105 min.

**Discussion with Obomsawin.**

8:30  **Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Metis Child.** 1986.
Richard as a young boy, Cory Swan; diary read by David Mitchell; dramatization: Pauline Kerik, Betty Smith, Leslie Miller. In June 1984, seventeen-year-old Richard Cardinal committed suicide. Separated from his family at four, by the time he died he had lived in twenty-eight foster and group homes, shelters, and “locked facilities” throughout Alberta. Based on his diary, the film describes the hardship, abuse, and neglect that he endured. The film’s release, along with the determination of his last foster parents, brought the story national attention, prompting changes in child welfare administration policies. Due in part to the Alberta Welfare Act, numerous tribes have taken control of their own social services. 29 min.

**Gene Boy Came Home.** 2007.
Produced by Alanis Obomsawin. Eugene “Gene Boy” Benedict was raised on the Odanak Indian Reserve east of Montreal, Quebec, in the 1960s. After leaving home at fifteen to
work in construction in New York State and spending several years adrift, he enlisted in the U.S. marines and was sent to the front lines of the Vietnam War. This is the candid and deeply moving story of his two years of service and his journey back to Odanak. 25 min.

Introduction by Obomsawin.

Saturday, May 17

2:00 Amisk. 1977.
Amisk captures a weeklong festival organized by a group of Montreal residents in support of the Cree Indians, who stood to lose their land because of the James Bay hydroelectric project. The film is comprised of stunning performances by Aboriginal and Inuit singers and drummers, along with footage of discussions among tribal representatives in the meeting halls of Mistassini. 40 min.

Featuring performances by Obomsawin, Willie Dunn, and others.

Incident at Restigouche. 1984.
On June 11 and 20, 1981, the Quebec Provincial Police raided the small Restigouche Reserve in Quebec, one of seven districts of the Micmac Nation located in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Gaspe Peninsula. Commercial fisheries and sport fishermen challenged the salmon fishing rights of the Micmac people. Because salmon has traditionally been—and remains—one of the few sources of food and income for the Micmac, the Quebec government’s decision to restrict fishing aroused consternation and anger among the Indians. This film provides historical perspective on the issue and examines the police raids through news clips, photographs, and interviews. 46 min.

Discussion with Obomsawin.

In the summer of 2000, federal fishery officers appeared to wage war on the Micmac fisherman of Esgenoopetitj, or Burnt Church, New Brunswick. Why would officials of the Canadian government attack citizens for exercising rights that were already theirs? Almost twenty years after shooting Incident of Restigouche, Obomsawin takes another look at the plight of the Micmac people. 97 min.

Introduction by Obomsawin.

Sunday, May 18

2:00 Christmas at Moose Factory. Waban-aki: People from Where the Sun Rises. See Wednesday, May 14, 6:00

4:30 Kanehsatake 270 Years of Resistance. See Thursday, May 15, 6:00
Followed by a lecture by Audra Simpson, Assistant Professor, Anthropology and American Indian Studies, Cornell University, and discussion with Simpson and Obomsawin. Audra Simpson is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and American Indian Studies at Cornell University. Her theoretical and ethnographic interests reside within nationhood, indigeneity, critical forms of history and contemporary colonialisms. In July, 2008 she will commence her tenure track position in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University.

Wednesday, May 21

8:00 Rocks at Whiskey Trench. See Friday, May 16, 6:00
Thursday, May 22

8:00  Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Metis Child.  
      Gene Boy Came Home.  See Friday, May 16, 8:30

Friday, May 23

8:00  Amisk.  
      Incident at Restigouche.  See Saturday, May 17, 2:00

Saturday, May 24

4:00  Is the Crown at War with Us?  See Saturday, May 17, 4:15

Sunday, May 25

2:00  Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance.  See Thursday, May 15, 6:00

4:30  Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man.  See Thursday, May 15, 8:30

Monday, May 26

2:00  Mother of Many Children.  1977. Narrated by Obomsawin.  
      This film portrays Native womanhood from birth to old age through the voices of women  
      from various matriarchal societies across Canada, including Agatha Marie Goodine, a 108-year-old Cree elder. 58 min.