

Torrance Art Museum

ZOOM 2, 3 Groups of Performances at The Torrance Art Museum

2011

By Marcus Civin

Group art shows where most of the art is live have been appearing more frequently in and around Los Angeles. In these group shows there are multiple, simultaneously active performing stations, surprise pop-up performances, artists responding live to the architecture of the space, and artists responding live to an installation or visual element they or a collaborator bring into the space. The performances are informed by and exist within an at-times contradictory mishmash of impulses: Fluxus, Happenings, Installation Art, Judson dance, interventionism, Body Art, Drag performance, Relational Aesthetics, underground music, electronic music, and experimental poetry.

Individually, each of the works in these shows tend to be structured around their own central, guiding directive: a unique, extended variation of pre-selected material, colliding materials, pre-determined behavior, or scores. Heather Cassils, for example, costumed, elevated and spot lit, in her piece, *Hard Times*, holds deep muscular contractions for extended periods, which causes her to shake involuntarily. Cassils has performed *Hard Times* with and without an accompanying droning base soundtrack by Kadet Khune.

The Torrance Art Museum, 20 miles South of Los Angeles, hosted 3 groups of performance exhibitions last summer, collectively titled ZOOM 2.

1. Presence, curated by Volume, June 26, 2010

Sound artists and sound collaboratives created ambient layering of sound situated to intersect or build with solo performances, moving images, and roving performances. Participating artists Mem1, i8u, and Yann Novak locate some of their inspirations for this work:

We are inspired by artists and musicians who approach sound as sculptural material rather than music for dramatic effect – Mem1 (Mark and Laura Cetilia)

... Anything from Mahler to Satie, Hendrix to Miles Davis, sounds of everyday life, and it changes on a daily basis depending on my mood. – France Jobin aka i8u

Richard Chartier, William Basinski, Ryoji Ikeda, Steve Roden – Yann Novak

2. FLOOD, July 3, 2010 Gallery A. Program of sound performances including sound that bled out. One group from Gallery A invaded Gallery B with a sound intervention.

Gallery B. Collaborative of artists worked independently but passed among them material and ideas related to bubbling oil; these materials and ideas moved through various trials, generating: the sculptural, the personal/photographic, a figure tied to the wall, and a raised figure knitting down. Shelley Rugg-Thorp provides this performance narrative:

Quite lucky for me that the museum's painting ladder was the perfect platform for me to do my performance. It gave me the height I needed to be able to knit with my 8ft knitting needles. It also gave the impression that I was rather tall and wearing a huge gown knitted of caution

tape... It was important to me that I put on glamorous make-up and long black gloves for the mundane task of knitting, albeit with giant needles... Knitting enough paper towels to sop up the Gulf oil spill would take some time... needless to say, I ran out of time.

3. *Love Letters To a Surrogate*, curated by Warren Neidich, July 10, 2010 17 ongoing simultaneous performances... 17 artists sent instructions for performances to other artists who performed those instructions.

To create a new logic of the performative event as multiplicities involved in a distributed network... – Warren Neidich

I asked: “How many collaborators did you work with on the performance at Torrance?” Lee Welch replied:

Well over half of them do not, and I lack the discipline/fortitude to work for very long on something that feels dead, so they get abandoned, or put in a trunk, or stripped for parts for other things. It's all rather chaotic, or feels that way to me.

Note: For this essay, I sent a survey by e-mail to as many of the participants in *ZOOM 2* as I could. The artists who responded to my survey and/or sent substantial documentation include: Heather Cassils, Mark Cetilia, Laura Cetilia, Richard Chartier, Ryan Conner, Vanessa Conte, Shea M Gauer, Bryan Gee, Micol Hebron, Monique Jenkins, Jose Juarez Jr., France Jobin, Kadet Khune, Mark Manning, David Marato, Emily Mast, Yann Novak, Adam Overton, Taisha Paggett, Shelley Rugg-Thorp, Mark Soden Jr., Lee Welch, and Jenny Yurshansky. In person, I separately interviewed Robert Crouch (director of Volume) and Marco Schindelmann (a representative from the group FLOOD which also includes Kamran Assadi, Frauke von der Horst, Shelley Rugg-Thorp, and Shea M Gauer). I interviewed Warren Neidich via Skype.

“Who inspires you?” Multiple votes for: Bruce Nauman, Tino Sehgal, Marina Abramovic, Michael Clark, and Simone Forti. Many of the artists I surveyed list as inspiration other artists included in the three performances at The Torrance Art Museum. Many artists list other working Southern California area artists as inspiration.

In this essay, I want to try to give you a sense of the feel of the work I am describing through my approach to the writing. As much as possible, I have privileged the language of the artists that I find most interesting. In this essay, language that is not my own is indicated using *italics*.

Immersive, de-centered, durational... Artists working in concert—but not in order—for now, for a mobile, self-determined audience... Called: visual artist/performance artist/sound artist/musician/ installation artist/dancer/formless refusing category, their performances last anywhere from 3 minutes to 5 hours; the average performance is about 30 minutes; some performances repeat. The longer pieces, and even some of the shorter pieces, do not require of the audience that they watch the whole piece. Most of the artists work with at least one other collaborator; collaborators send instructions, operate video cameras, edit video, they are “shills,” they design make-up and lighting, or perform an accompanying score. Improvisation, or improvisation within a certain structure, accounts for at least 50% of these performances.

Some pieces have relics still knocking around: drawings made there and then, bottles of grey and black paint, a stained pink bikini, a length of knitted paper towels, a mask made from a photograph. The performances require: a ladder, some space that can get messy, desk, chairs, laptops, Ipods, cell phones, internet access, microphones, a good PA, projectors. A few artists hope for a silent and attentive audience.

Over 60 artists mostly from Los Angeles and Long Beach participated in *ZOOM 2*. Somewhere it might say on Facebook: come in anytime, out, see, talk, go, come back, stay.

One Piece Blurs into Another

Introducing Taisha Paggett, performing...

This is a dance, each gesture combined and re-combined. Eyes are closed, slight bunch dress with left hand at jut out left hip, eyes stay closed, take full fistful dress at hip with left hand. Full turn, right knee open, on ball of right foot, right hand claw. From hands, pull arms up, stomach out, all else to vertical, arms high behind head, head lean, head cranes towards floor, eyes still closed, knees now bend, down hands, head up, down elbows, down shoulders. Hug all in, bend at elbows. From there, lean to left, right hand claw extend, left hand hip.

There are chairs around, and bean bags, and people come up and sit for a moment, for five, for longer. Eyes closed, bunch of gray sundress. Skin painted the same gray as the dress. They are taking pictures with digital cameras and video. And you will notice, is it a stripe? It is a black vertical stripe at nose latitude. Lower half of the face painted, below the stripe. All else painted too. Painted Red bundle of hair tight to top of the head, look to side while reaching up. Release wrist. Balance without sight; push down on knees. Go for broke, slowly, raw energy rehearsed and played back in crawl time, a very precise murmur, slithery hunching, back in from reaching.

And though it's summer, hardly a sweat on Paggett. Paggett is a steel wire bending towards a 1970's painting, *The Sugar Shack*, by Ernie Barnes. Says Barnes of this painting: *We look upon each other and decide immediately: This person is black, so he must be... This person lives in poverty, so he must be...*

To that sugar shack, whoa! Uh, up, oh! To that sugar shack, yeah, to our sugar shack. I know the way.

Enter Adam Overton, in contrast, bearded on the periphery, in the breaks between—

Paggett continues performing... Your expression will not change. Stand comfortably, feet flat, planted hard. Remember: exquisitely sculpted, slight hunch, head comes up, right arm follows head, then left arm pulling up faster, spread fingers and point, wrist folded back. A grey person with a striped face, extending and contracting, pivoting from the waist, come up to balls of feet, get hung up, head to chin, extend arms, crotch out, one leg slightly extended, a shadow on the off-white floor, grey dress, a storm, wind whisper.

Enter Adam Overton and Mark So, they apart, they differently, having many graphic scores in mind and among others: The graphic score for *posture series (of haruko tanaka)*. The graphic score looks like thumb-sized ovals going down the page; the ovals do not touch,

equidistant to an eyelash apart. The ovals were drawn starting at the right and going counterclockwise. Overton:

... the creation of the initial presence series sketches involved a process of either watching or imagining a friend, their posture, etc, and then transcribing whatever movement or energy that I perceived, which might be literal (movement of someone's eyebrows) or more abstract (emanating from their personality in a particular direction). The resulting performances however are simply interpretations of the score, not the person.

You can perform these kinds of scores in any fashion. Some of Overton's performance suggestions:

seriously at any speed, esp. slowly and slower score may be viewed from any direction, and followed in any direction interpret with action(s), sound(s), thought(s), and/or movement(s) persist for as little as 1 minute or less, or for much, much longer don't be afraid to pause notice your own posture as you perform [though do not judge], and possibly let it influence your engagement with the score, and/or allow the performance to influence your posture.

Enter Marc Manning, guitar and video. Hear: Marc Manning, chorus echo over guitar, digital accordion window shades over guitar; the speakers are skyscrapers to a drapery ripple wall projection, Marc sitting in a chair bent over his guitar.

Writes Paggett of her experience performing with Volume in *ZOOM 2*:

Nothing was ABSOLUTELY essential. I believe there are multiple possibilities for how any single thing can be experienced, particularly so for this work. I was open to people sitting, lying, standing, pacing, returning to the piece in intervals or staying with it for a long time. I just tried to create the conditions for an audience member to want to spend time with the work... I knew that my silent performance was going to be immersed in sound work, that my piece would blur into someone else's (yeah!) so I wanted to create a kind of open audience experience to allow and acknowledge the potential crossover.

Enter Yann Novak. Hear: rising, a classical concert sped up and backwards, all similar sounds magnetized to each other then magnetized to opposite poles and then set to sync up on a quarter second delay, or on a rise, and played through the speaker re-assembled backwards this time too by someone who knows how to make the speakers of the future future future and therefore considers this speaker old.

Overton again:

What we were doing was independent of the other works, but existing on their periphery. Rather than being affected by the works themselves, we were affected more by the configuration of audience members milling around them, as we occasionally attempted to creep up to, around, and behind. Rapt attention in a particular direction led to wide areas in the space where we were free to move without many audience members immediately noticing. In contrast, breaks between pieces where folks' attention was scattered about the space occasionally limited movement, and sometimes led to "retreats" to darker areas, or behind things, or outside.

Fluxus Networks and Iteration

A great Fluxus Instruction:

Event for the Twilight Steep the piano in the water of a pool. Play some piece by F. Liszt on the piano. —Mieko Shiomi, 1963

Another great Fluxus Instruction:

Wounded Furniture This piece uses an old piece of furniture in bad shape. Destroy it further, if you like. Bandage it up with gauze and adhesive. Spray red paint on the wounded joints. Effective Lighting helps. This activity may be performed with one or more performers and simultaneously with other events. —Alison Knowles, 1965

For *Love Letters to a Surrogate*, Jerome Bel asked Emily Mast to perform herself. Emily performed a history telling her history as a performer:

Enter bare space (1 chair, spot lit). Set down “props” (water bottle, script, red journal, boom box). Sit down and take off shoes & socks. Acknowledge audience. Speak.

Hello. My name is Emily Mast...

Cue “This is the rhythm of the night”. Let it play all the way through while looking at each member of the audience in the eyes.

In 2006 I spent nine weeks in Maine at an artist residency. During this time I tried to infect my peers with this song by playing it repeatedly at social gatherings and by singing it wherever I went. At the end of the summer I organized a concert on the lake in which a trumpeter and a saxophonist performed an improvised duet of the song in two canoes moving in opposite directions on the lake. Audience members become performers the moment they succumbed to the song’s contagiousness. In spite of themselves, they sang it, whistled it, and passed it along. This project did not make me especially popular among my peers. I explored the idea further in a group show in LA recently. I cast an actor to come to the exhibition space every day and wander around whistling, “Will you still love me tomorrow” by the Shirelles. The actor was not marked as an actor, so the actor and the audience were on equal footing. The performance was therefore unannounced...

According to Neidich, *Love Letters to a Surrogate* is morphologically Fluxus, but Neidich underscores that things are different now than Fluxus moments circa 1965. Neidich: *Now we live at one stop in the global world of network information systems that create non-linear social relationships.*

I ask: “Why curate performance?” So the audience can physically move through a networked sensorium. This should be familiar and unfamiliar.

Introducing Micol Hebron:

My collaborator, Lindsay August-Salazar, sat in the museum, waiting for visitors to draw on her back with their finger. When they did so, she translated what she felt onto paper with charcoal or pencil.

Visitors could collaborate by sending a text message to me (who was off site). In return, I would text them a phrase that equated to a drawing. The visitor was instructed to draw that image on Lindsay's back with their finger.

Vanessa Conte describing what she did to perform instructions from Christian Xatrec: *I considered the other performances as a positive space in a composition, and I drew my circle (did my performance) within the negative spaces they formed. I considered the museum floor—both indoors and outdoors—a canvas or a piece of paper that I was drawing on.*

David Maroto answers questions about performing instructions from Tif Sigfrids:

- 1. Name: David Maroto 2.*
- 2. The title of the piece you performed at Torrance: Reviewed CV. It is about a CV that comprises all of my failures and frustrated desires in a systematic way, year by year under different categories (education, solo and group exhibitions, publications, and so on), imitating the style of a conventional curriculum vitae, only that it records failures and not achievements. For the performance, my surrogate artist, Tif Sigfrids was asked by me to write her own Reviewed CV taking mine as a model. She had to read it in front of an audience. She adopted a stand-up comedian fashion.*
- 3. How did you document your performance at Torrance? Photography and video.*
- 4. What relics exist from your performance at Torrance? There are no physical remains.*
- 5. What was the duration of your performance at Torrance? I don't know exactly... 15 minutes?*

Jenny Yurshansky:

My collaborator was Mira O'Brien, she was my instructor and I was her surrogate. We are friends and we both studied at UCLA together. She currently lives in Berlin. The last time she lived in Los Angeles, she shared an apartment with a very close mutual friend of ours who had also been a classmate. This friend committed suicide a few years after both of us had moved out of Los Angeles. My instructions were to go and visit the apartment building they had lived in and describe what I saw (I'd never been there before). I had a set of photos that she had given me and I was asked to take photos of the same points around the building in the present. As audio segments, she edited her recollections of the building and the recordings of my on-site observations, these two segments were proceeded by my interrogation of the aim of the project in a pre-scripted (by her) conversation that happened between a recording of her and a live reading by me of her written words, and finally followed by a live un-scripted dialogue between us about the "success" of this piece overall...

Flood

Mark Soden Jr. aka Phog Masheen, and 6 collaborators disrupt the performance going on in Gallery B, Intercrossmisfertilization. Sound Terrorism? Circus? I hear: an elephant, crescendo banging on everything and wild yalooping!

Enter Marco Schindelmann, punning and playing with words, making poetic pneumatic devices and corresponding boot marks on the wall, pissed about our most recent oil tanker disaster. In a work suit, Schindelmann is tied by the wrist to the wall, black chord, boots on cinder block, paper towel dispenser spitting out black-and-white ballpoint pen spills of Kandinsky. Crazy eyes, photo mask by Kamran Assadi.

From Schnidelmann's performance notes:

Text shared with collaborators during the process...

-spOILed brat -pumpty dumpty -tar bay b. the original pictograms from which the letter "b" evolved represented cottage, house or a floor plan. So we merge several elements [tar, tarry bays, and houses] -the caution ogress knits a nonographic score -derricks = oil ladders - Pompeii and the vOILcano -Cirque du OILe -Locus iste...

Schindelmann asked me if I might consider letting some of the catalog space devoted to FLOOD, continue FLOOD's curatorial/artistic process and invited me to further the goals of their group, not just by writing about art, but in writing about art, to write creatively, to continue making art.

After considering Schindelmann's performance notes, and thinking abstractly in response to the three days of performance for *ZOOM 2*, here is my stab at a Fluxus Instruction, 2011... How might you want to perform it?

Cleaning the fetid tub Hold a light inside the bathtub: a cruddy string of plastic and the scars everywhere like roots. The bottom will be rusted and a significant chunk will be missing from the left top side. Still greasy under the lip at the top edge, you will find the tub will leak when you move it. The kids will have been cleaning their carbines in the tub with antibacterial, apple blossom, and dishwashing liquid. Little, greasy hairs will be stuck to the exterior edge of the tub, and the tub will bubb like a frog when you push in a side hard enough.