

***Embodiment
Abstracted:
The Influence of
Yvonne Rainer***

**Curated by
Elise Archias**

***January 13 –
March 4, 2017***



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For an Art of Bodies in History

by Elise Archias

“No to spectacle,” Yvonne Rainer wrote more than fifty years ago, and we will say it again today.¹ But the artworks in this exhibition suggest the list that follows that initial negation in Rainer’s format, might look something like this now:

No to spectacle,
to stylish formulations of the new,
to cool fugitivity and escapes into defensive vagueness,
to macho staring into the abyss of social death,
to retraumatizing the audience,
to manic proliferation of signs that mimic a day of clicking,
to dwarfing sublimity, to entropic spinning out into clouds of particles, to networks that think mere extension is enough.

Yes to bodies in history,
to relationships that take work,
to making sure the audience feels something that they will want to put into words,
to the poetic labor of an old body that has encountered new tasks before,
to living with disease, and together demanding better care,
to significant gestures, to breaking them down until they are less and then more significant, to making them signify differently with a different physicality and psyche,
to taking control of one’s own distortion,
to the reinterpretation of old stories, to the repurposing of old spaces,
to the formation of a collective voice built of particular suffering and particular desire,
to artists who want us to understand what has allowed them to flourish in this unjust world.

¹What has come to be known as Rainer’s “No Manifesto” is a paragraph on page 178 of the following text: Yvonne Rainer, “Some retrospective notes on a dance for 10 people and 12 mattresses called ‘Parts of Some Sextets,’ performed at the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut, and the Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965,” *The Drama Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 168-178.



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Artist Bios

Yvonne Rainer (b. 1934) is one of the most influential artists of the past few decades. Working in multiple disciplines such as dance, choreography, filmmaking, and writing, her work has served as a foundation in various mediums and for many movements – to name a few: feminism, minimalism and postmodernism. Her work has transitioned to a more personal form of expression while continuing to address political issues. This can be observed in her experimental feature films that utilize complex

theoretical thinking to criticize notions of power, privilege, and inequality.

Natalie Bookchin (b. 1962) is known for her work in multi-media and technology that explores how the virtual manifestations we present about ourselves and our surroundings are affected by the digital age. Her latest projects focus on the adaptation and transformation of identity, particularly through the dynamics of “participatory culture” in the public sphere and private space. “

the fields of music, dance and performance. He is well known for his collaborative (cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary) projects concerning social and political issues.

Gregg Bordowitz (b. 1964) is a video artist, filmmaker, writer and AIDS activist. After he dropped out of the New York University in 1987, Bordowitz became a full-time video artist, or more accurately, video activist. In 1990s, his documentaries mostly convey his own personal feelings towards the disease, despair, struggle, and fear. His recent work focuses on performance.

Simon Leung (b. 1979), works in various forms, including rethinking psychologically and philosophically the work of Marcel Duchamp, and meditating on sociopolitical critical moments of the Vietnam-American war and “squatting projects” located in various cities. Recently, Leung’s video and film work emphasize the formation of a subject through the use of language.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (b. 1960) studied dance in both Brussels and New York; later becoming a dance choreographer and a dominant figure in a dance company called Rosas. Her work constructs a unique perspective on how the body functions in time and space while drawing from geometry, numerical patterns, and social structures.

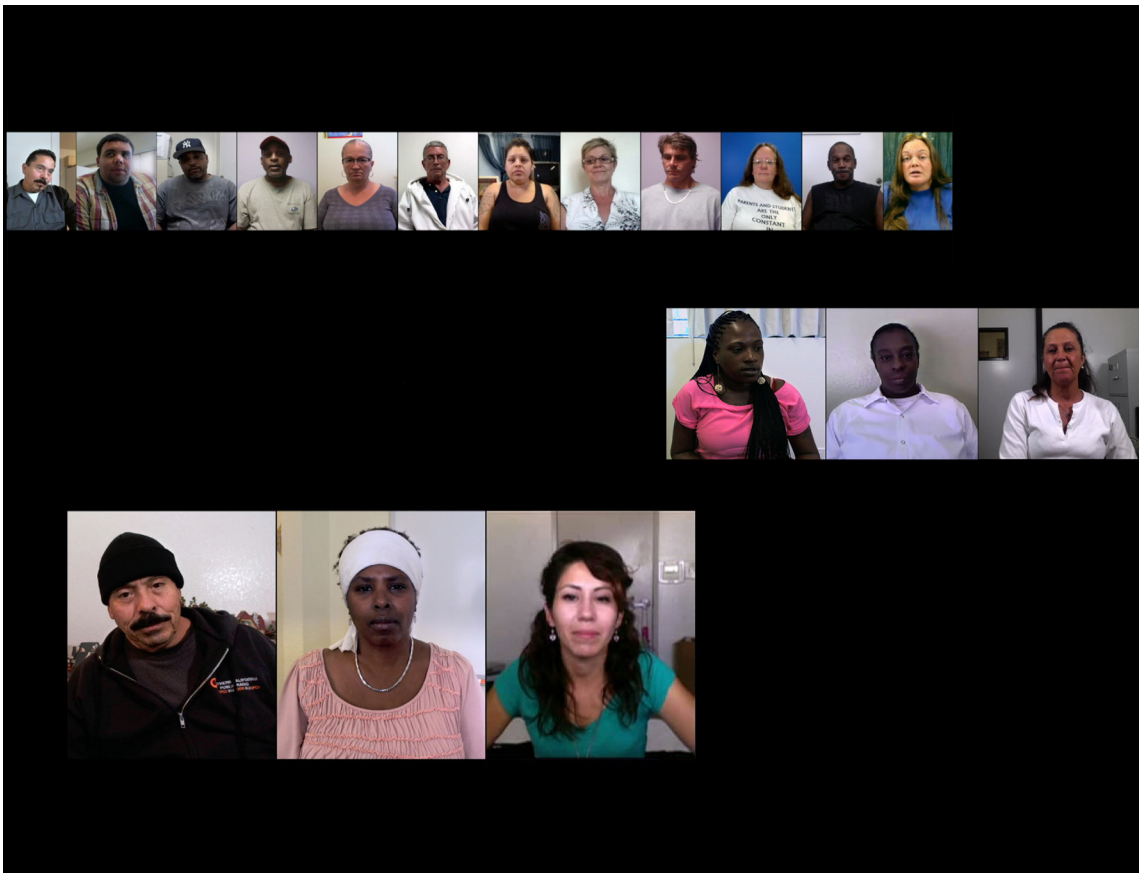
Jimmy Robert (b. 1975), born in Guadeloupe (an insular region of France) and educated in Europe, is interested in post-Colonialism, Feminism, and conceptualism. His artistic practice ranges from photography and drawing, to video and performance, and his collaborative works blur the boundaries among these mediums.

Ralph Lemon (b. 1952) is a visual artist, director, choreographer, writer, dancer and conceptualist. Upon his graduation from University of Minnesota in 1975, he has maintained active involvement in

Meg Stuart (b. 1965), born in New Orleans, began her exploration of simple movements in dance at a young age. Her work revolves around an ever-changing identity while traversing a wide range of scales and constantly undergoing reform. She never settles for the conventional form, as she is always seeking for new contexts to present her work and new territories to push the limits of her dance.



Back Image:
Natalie Bookchin, *Long Story Short*, 2016,
45 mins. (still).



Front Image:
Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, *Golden Hours*
(As you like it) a choreography, 2015.
Image by Anne Van Aerschoot

Related Programs:

- > Opening Reception with a performance by Elliot Mercer of Rainer's *Trio A*
Friday, January 13, 5-8pm
- > Voices Lecture: Simon Leung
Wednesday, January 11, 6pm
- > *The Everyday Extraordinary Body: **
a panel discussion
Tuesday, January 17, 6pm
- > *Movement from Life: **
a workshop with Victoria Bradford
Saturday, February 11, 2pm
- > Elliot Mercer performance of Rainer's *Trio A*
Wednesday, February 22, 6pm
- > Voices Lecture: Natalie Bookchin
Tuesday, February 28, 6pm

* In partnership with Chicago Dancemakers Forum and the New England Foundation for the Arts' Regional Dance Development Initiative.

GALLERY 400

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Chicago, IL 60607
312-996-6114
gallery400.uic.edu
Tues.—Fri. 10–6, Sat. 12–6

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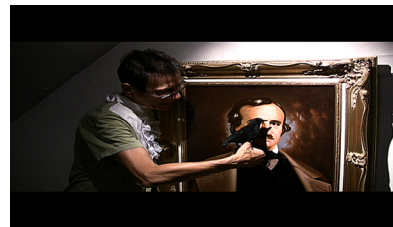


Natalie Bookchin
Long Story Short, 2016
Video, 45 min.
Courtesy Icarus Films



In *Long Story Short* over 100 people at homeless shelters, food banks, adult literacy programs, and job training centers in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area discuss their everyday experiences of poverty. Employing the intimacy of webcam video, Bookchin offered the interviewees control over their image and voice by offering them: prompts, not direct questions; a live feed of themselves so that they could monitor their image and words; and opportunities to redo sections, skip over questions, or address topics of their own choosing. "From the start," Bookchin said, "I knew I wanted to make a film where those experiencing poverty were the subjects, not the objects, of the film, where they were the experts and decided what was important. Poverty and homelessness tend to be emotionally isolating experiences, and are often judged harshly by outsiders. My film seeks to address this by giving those on the inside an opportunity to address outside perceptions." The artist edited these varied accounts so that at moments when the speakers address the same subject matter, their voices join together in a kind of chorus, what she calls "an imaginary collective yet to materialize."

Simon Leung
POE, 2007/2010
Three channel video, 35 min.
Courtesy the artist



Inspired by 20th century artist Robert Smithson's interest in 19th century author Edgar Allan Poe's only full length novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, POE's densely sedimented references accumulate in segments filmed in three cities. In New York Rainer performs as Poe on site at two of the writer's former residences, allegorizing the politics surrounding the preservation of literary history in the city. In Poland (or as Leung has said, "Poe-land"), where performer Warren Niesluchowski studied performance with experimental director Jerzy Grotowski in the late 1960s, composite versions of Poe stories are acted out, exploring the gothic style as a form of camp. The Los Angeles segment includes a distant relative of Poe's, Gregory Poe, as well as Leung's students retelling *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a sea adventure with racist undertones, as a story of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, linking the "green zone" in Baghdad to the green screen in video production.

Performers: New York: Yvonne Rainer, Hong-An Truong; Poland: Warren Niesluchowski; Southern California: Gregory Poe, Michael Ano, Sandy de Lissovoy, Sean Sullivan, Marcus Civin, Lara Odell, Grant Komjakraphan, Kristine Thompson, Nils Schirrmacher.

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About the works in the exhibition
(from the south side of the main gallery, moving clockwise,
and then into the smaller galleries)

Yvonne Rainer
We Shall Run, 1963
Video, 11:35 min.
Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York



We Shall Run, seen here in a performance from 2012 at Dia:Beacon, is performed to Hector Berlioz's *Requiem*, allows the twelve performers to wear their own clothes, consists solely of the simple act of running or jogging, and can be performed by anyone, dancer or non-dancer, able to recall and enact the sequence of floor patterns, though many performers have described the patterns as complex and challenging to remember.

Rainer has said about *We Shall Run*, "I have rarely used the kind of repetition that causes "one thing to go on forever... the constantly shifting patterns and re-groupings of runners were as essential to the effect as the sameness of the movement. The object here was not repetition as a formal device but to produce an ironic interplay with the virtuosity and flamboyance of the music."

Yvonne Rainer
Spiraling Down, 2008
Video, 30 min
Courtesy Performa



Described by Rainer as "a kind of melancholic pedagogical vaudeville," *Spiraling Down* is a dance for four women in four different decades of their lives. It includes both the task-like choreography that Rainer invented in the 1960s and imitations of movement from 20th century popular culture—such as Sarah Bernhardt films, the comedic movements of Steve Martin, ballroom dance, and in sports like fencing, tennis, and soccer—as well as repurposed texts from newspapers and Haruki Murakami's memoir about running and writing. The second half of the dance, set to Maurice Ravel's *Boléro*, is a structured improvisation, in which dancers have a defined set of movements, but choose when to begin and end them in response to the group.

Video documentation of the performance at the Baryshnikov Arts Center on November 16, 2009 as part of Performa 09. Originally commissioned by J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Research Institute and World Performance Project at Yale. Performed by Pat Catterson, Emily Coates, Patricia Hoffbauer and Sally Silvers. Video by Julia Kläring.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker/Rosas
(video by Gerard-Jan Claes and Olivia Rochette)
Golden Hours (As you like it), 2015
Video, 10:16 min.
Courtesy the artists



With Shakespeare's queer comedy *As You Like It* and Brian Eno's album *Another Green World* as its basis, this dance balances choreography and improvised movement. Interested in what happens when Shakespeare's complex spoken expression is translated into movement alone, De Keersmaecker asked the dancers to memorize all of the text in their scenes (not just their own lines) in order to perform both "speaking" and listening. As the play's narrative of attraction, repulsion, masquerade, and misunderstanding plays out, the movement flows back and forth between concretely legible gesture and unique abstract shapes, giving form De Keersmaecker's belief that "the body is the most individual and the most global thing."

Performed January, 2015 at the Kaaaitheater, Brussels, co-produced by Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels. Danced by Aron Blom, Linda Blomqvist, Tale Dolven, Carlos Garbin, Tarek Halaby, Mikko Hyvönen, Veli Lehtovaara, Sandra Ortega Bejarano, Elizaveta Penkova, Georgia Vardarou, Sue-Yeon Youn.

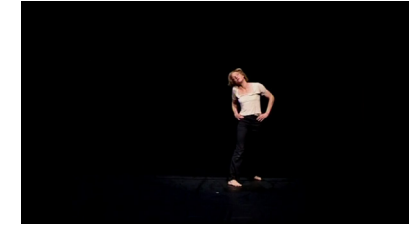
Ralph Lemon
(*the efflorescence of*) *Walter*, 2006-2008
Video, 19:30 min.
Courtesy the artist



This video's central figure, Walter Carter (1907-2010), is a former sharecropper, carpenter, and gardener from Bentonia, Mississippi with whom Lemon worked creatively for eight years. Lemon and Carter were introduced in 2002 at one of the few remaining juke joints in the Mississippi Delta. The two continued to meet twice a year to collaborate in Carter's house and locations nearby. They discussed and acted, and documented and filmed their actions. If asked, Carter would likely describe it as strange "work" that he enjoys. Over time, Lemon got to know Carter's wife, extended family, and neighbors, who in turn became involved in the art-making.

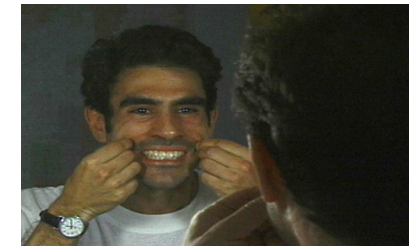
Lemon's video is part of a larger mixed-media work composed of drawings, text, sculptural elements, projected videos, and animations that reference sources such as the writer James Baldwin, conceptual artist Bruce Nauman, African-American folktale character Br'er Rabbit, and Lemon's 45rpm records.

Meg Stuart (in collaboration with Varinia Canto Vila
as part of Highway 101 at Kaaithheaterstudio's,
Brussels; music by Bart Aga and Stefan Pucher)
Soft Wear, 2000
Video, 14:53 min.
Courtesy the artist and Damaged Goods, Brussels



Soft Wear's impetus was the term 'morphing.' Stuart's solo dance explores not only fluid movements but a liquid identity. As Stuart describes the piece, "An image is projected and dissolved as soon as it resonates. Every single movement proposed a different body, and the results were some frightening mutations of figures irritatingly familiar." These familiar figures include clichés of femininity and pop culture.

Gregg Bordowitz
Habit, 2001
Video, 52:48 min.
Courtesy Video Data Bank



This autobiographical documentary (featuring artists Claire Pentecost and Yvonne Rainer) traces histories of the AIDS epidemic along two pathways: the daily routine of the videomaker, a veteran US AIDS activist who has been living with HIV since the late 1980s and the efforts of South Africa's leading AIDS activist group, Treatment Action Campaign, to gain access to AIDS medications for their constituents. As the videomaker moves through his day, recurring memories of a recent trip to South Africa interrupt his routine, raising questions about privilege, ethics, responsibility, futility, solidarity, hope, and struggle. A highlight of the film is a conversation with Rainer about their emotional responses to extreme bodily change as a result of disease and aging and, in spite of this, the older artist's persistent turn to the grounding reality of her own body.