

C New Critics Competition 2016

The winner of this year's New Critics Competition is Justina Bohach, for her review of Katie Lyle and Shelby Wright's performance *Movements for a Room*.

Katie Lyle and Shelby Wright: *Movements for a Room* Jenine Marsh's Studio, Toronto March 14, 2016 by Justina Bohach

Movements for a Room (2016), a live art performance hosted at artist Jenine Marsh's studio, begins with a shift: the audience is told to move back to make space for the performer-collaborators Katie Lyle (painter) and Shelby Wright (dance artist/choreographer). The 20 viewers sitting on the floor shuffle back, movement rippling through the crowd. The audience members look around – at the kitchen, bathroom, rod of clothing hanging on the back wall, couch full of coats, stacked artwork, supplies and shelves – and at each other. This moment reminds me that I am enclosed by walls in this private space made public and, sitting on the floor, I am struck by the mutability of space. Through choreography, collaboration and the contemplation of a room, Lyle and Wright actualize a meditation on what space is and can be within the context of live art.

A recording begins, and, in unison, Lyle and Wright step into the middle of the room. Their heads turn back sharply towards a partitioned wall centred in the middle of the stage. It is positioned close to the foundational wall and centred between two windows that overlook the city. This is the only

prop, and it acts as a communication device between the women: they move around it, falling in and out of unison. Over the speakers, a light hum reverberates: feminine, casual and untroubled. The two wear loose, white sleeveless tops, slinky, silver men's basketball shorts, white socks and white tennis shoes. Together, they evoke Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker's historic work *Fase* (1982): simple costumes that flow with movement, deadpan facial expressions, unconcerned sensuality, syncopated movements, isolation of various body parts, angular extensions and rotations, and patterns and repetitions. Despite this similarity, *Movements for a Room* is its own composition – with the artists interacting with the walls as if they were another dance partner or collaborator, the walls are not just a frame: they are a character within the performance.

This work has been performed three times, and was originally created for and influenced by the garden space that hosted the exhibition *What she is not, what she is, what she can be* (2015), which referenced Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. At Garden Avenue (Toronto), the performance was called *Movements for the Neighbouring Room*, and it kept this title for its presentation at Forest City Gallery in London, Ontario. At Marsh's studio, the title has changed in response to the new space.

Each iteration has remained firmly grounded in collaboration and choreography, both of which were new to Lyle. Her painting practice focuses on female portraits and depictions situated in historical and contemporary culture: personalities, stereotypes, and the recognition of these characters. In correspondence, she specified that the “dance/performance feels like a physical manifestation of those faces and bodies that are in the paintings.” In her recent exhibition *The End of Vandalism* (2015) at Erin Stump Projects, Lyle used a freestanding wall conceptually comparable to this performance's prop wall. She emphasizes the relationship of the painter to the wall, and questions what it is, outside of a



Katie Lyle and Shelby Wright, *Movements for a Room*, performance held on March 14, 2016 at Jenine Marsh's Studio, Toronto
IMAGE COURTESY OF ANGELA LEWIS AND RICO MORAN

support for her paintings, a place where femininity is elusively represented and acutely considered through the layering of meanings. By rethinking the walls and pronouncing them collaborators, she allows them to be more than just a foundation: they become an extension of corporeality, a respondent.

Wright's current work, minimalistic and non-narrative, focuses on the body as an archive, and explores how memory plays a role within choreography. The barrier between the audience and performer is acknowledged only at the beginning and end of the performance. Together, the pair approach choreography with a "looseness to timing and sequencing" with the "possibility for recognition, related to how [they] move outside in the world."

The women wear their historical posturing in and on their bodies: Wright is visibly trained; Lyle moves more naturally. Through a language of movement, each integrates her training and subjectivity. Their collaborative process unfolds through the observation of each other: a combination of mimicry, molding of formal relationships between the movements, and consideration of site specificity. It is not just a collaboration between Lyle and Wright, but also with the space itself: it too becomes a participant. The work morphs to fit each individual context where it is shown: the shape and characteristics of the space inform the movements and choreography. Definitions of space are individually authored: at times, we are aware of this; at others, we forget about the walls.

In a recent press release for a performance at MoMA PS1, dance artist Mårten Spångberg's work was framed as: "choreography as medium... considering the potentiality of dance as an object."¹ Doing so situates *character vs. author*, a theme Lyle explores in her work. In conversation about this performative dialogue, Lyle and Wright tease out the interfaces of choreography, performance and self, asking: "What is a performance of femininity? How do we naturally move? What is calculated or rehearsed?" Though they see this work as non- emotive and non-narrative, wondering: "Are we in character? Are we playing a role in a story? Is this performance?"

As enunciated through the work's changing titles, the artists dedicate the performance *for* each room, rather just performing *in* each one. Through these dedications, the spaces become eponymously part of the performance. The room is personified and becomes a character, performer, collaborator, participant, respondent and specimen: it is a living organism. And through choreography, Lyle and Wright make viewers aware of the space they inhabit – the use of it, the ways to be in it and the mutability of what it can be. Their performance underscores the changing definitions of locus, the forms and functions of private and public space, and the interplay between them. By changing the quotidian – moving a painting, or working with the body instead of a paintbrush – our thoughts about the way we inhabit space can be distilled, whether within a physical room or an artistic practice.

Justina Bohach facilitates various modes of cultural production within contemporary art. She is interested in experimental approaches to writing, including ficto-criticism. She received her BFA in Critical and Cultural Studies in 2016 from Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver. In 2015 she curated the exhibition *Matter-Trace* at CSA Space in Vancouver. She has published with *Blonde Art Books Blog* in Brooklyn, NY, and *The Mainlander* in Vancouver. From 2012 to 2015 she was Geoffrey Farmer's studio manager and worked as production assistant for Luminato's 2016 Arts Partners at the Hearn in Toronto.

¹ <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/marten-spangberg/>

**Aleesa Cohene, Derek Dunlop
and Deborah Edmeades:
The accursed share
Artspeak, Vancouver,
British Columbia
April 2 - May 21, 2016
by *sophia bartholomew***

Emitting a diffused scent from its place on the floor, Aleesa Cohene's *You, Dear* (2014), initiates entry into Artspeak's space on Carrall Street and presents a quiet reminder that entering this space constitutes crossing a threshold. Every morning, the gallery attendant performs a small rite, releasing scent into the room, and activating the exhibition as a slow and sacred space. Cognitively, reality is held together by the performance of small rituals, and the use of smell in particular keeps visitors rooted inside their bodies, as they enter the gallery. The smell of Cohene's work is strange and somewhat earthy: it is a compound of aluminum, cumin, cyprus, frankincense, and the Smell of Real Ass™, which dissipates throughout the afternoon.

Caught in the overcast light angling in from the storefront windows, a small pile of publications is stacked on the hardwood floor. The black ink on their cardstock covers is mottled and glossy. The eight non-chronological pages of Marina Roy's curatorial essay are creased, but unbound. This printed format is standard for Artspeak, but when placed in conversation with the exhibition, its loose tactility supports Roy's essay as an artwork in and of itself: one which speaks beside the other artworks, rather than speaking about them prescriptively. The writing moves playfully around ideas of excess and affect, sexuality and sacrificial offering, emphasizing the possibility of invoking altered, expanded modes of existence through the creation and presentation of