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AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE

Inexhaustible present 2013, dance developed and choreographed by Brooke Stamp, digital video (dual channel, silent, colour, 13:48), fabric, rope, travertine weights, metal fixings, brass plaque, dimensions variable

Final score 2013, Posca pen on board, 42 x 29.7 cm, framed

What happens happens mostly without you (decorative bust) 2013, laser print of jpg sourced from AGNSW collection online, 29.7 x 21 cm, framed

BIOGRAPHY

Agatha Gothe-Snape's practice relates closely to improvisational performance. Her work tracks our relationships to each other, to art and art contexts, and takes many forms: pedestrian performances, endlessly looped PowerPoint slide shows, workshops, diagrams, visual scores and collaboratively produced art objects. In 2013 she held solo exhibitions at The Commercial Gallery, Sydney; The Physics Room, Christchurch; and as part of *Inexactly THIS*, Kunstvlaai: Festival of Independents, Amsterdam. Recent group exhibitions include: *Contemporary Australia: women*, QAGOMA, Brisbane and *Volume 1: MCA Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (both 2012).

Brooke Stamp is a Melbourne-based dance and choreographic artist whose work draws on improvisational movement practices to investigate linear and spatial experiences of time. She is acclaimed for her body of work and history of collaboration with experimental contemporary dance company Phillip Adams BalletLab.

READING.VIEWING LIST

- André Lepecki, 'Exhausting dance: themes for a politics of movement', *Live: art and performance*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004
- Len Lye, *Rainbow dance*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRPOAWhxnQ> [accessed 18 July 2013]
- Patrizia Pallaro, *Authentic movement: essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chowdraw*, Jessica Kingsley Publishing, London, 1999
- Roy Sorensen, *Seeing dark things: the philosophy of shadows*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008
- Jan Verwoert, 'Living with ghosts: from appropriation to invocation in contemporary art', *Art & Research*, vol 1, no 2, Summer 2007

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SRIWHANA SPONG

The Stranger's House 2013, calico, paint, 1200 x 440 cm

Rocks in the Sky 2013, paper, seven A3 sheets

Hair, Pastry, Tobacco 2013, marble, clay, dimensions variable

BIOGRAPHY

Sriwhana Spong's practice attempts to find form within the complex nature of everyday experience. Her recent work explores a movement between the disciplines of dance, film and sculpture, forming a dialogue with other artists, dancers and choreographers. In 2012 she held solo exhibitions at Neuer Kunstverein Wien, Vienna; Auckland Art Gallery (Edmiston North Sculpture Terrace commission); and Michael Lett, Auckland. Recent group exhibitions include *The Walters Prize* 2012, Auckland Art Gallery; *All our relations*, 18th Biennale of Sydney; and *Artists Film International*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo, Italy; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Ballroom Marfa, Texas.

READING LIST

- Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, Penguin Classics, London, 2000 (first published in 1928 by the Hogarth Press)
- T S Eliot, 'The waste land', *Collected poems 1909-1935*, Faber & Faber, London, 1936
- Beatriz Colomina, 'A house of ill repute: E.1027', in Johanna Burton, Lynne Cooke, Josiah McElheny (eds), *Interiors*, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson and Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2012, pp 110-19
- Simone Forti, *Handbook in motion*, third edition, self-published (first published in 1974 by The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Canada)

Sriwhana Spong thanks Anneke Jaspers, Agatha Gothe-Snape, Michael Lett and Andrew Thomas at Michael Lett, Auckland, Tina Pihema, Benjamin Ord, Russell Carey at Scenographic Studio and Chris Spong.

Sriwhana Spong's visit to Australia was supported by



Cover image: Agatha Gothe-Snape *What happens happens mostly without you (decorative bust)* 2013 and *Inexhaustible present* 2013 [detail]



TAKING FORM

AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE | SRIWHANA SPONG

#2.13

18 JULY - 1 SEPTEMBER 2013

AGNSW CONTEMPORARY PROJECTS



In 1939 a young Sidney Nolan was commissioned to create the scenery and costumes for a production of *Icare*, based on the myth of Icarus, by a visiting Ballets Russes company. A formative moment in his fledgling career, Nolan took up the invitation with vigour. His initial concept defied convention by creating a unified space in which the scenery and performers would visually merge, echoing the assimilation of Icarus's falling figure back into the landscape after he flies too close to the sun.¹ Nolan devised a graphic, encompassing black-and-white set with matching striped costumes which the choreographer Serge Lifar rejected on the grounds it would disrupt the clarity of his lines.² Forced to pursue a more orthodox design, which was eventually executed in 1940, Nolan's earlier intentions are now consigned to the margins of history.

Sriwhana Spong traffics in such peripheral narratives, drawing on residual traces, memories and allegories to conjure works that reflect on the passage of ideas and actions through time. In *The Stranger's House* 2013, Spong revives Nolan's original design for *Icare* on a grand scale, ushering it into view more than 70 years after it was abandoned. The thick line work and stylised imagery of one of Nolan's remaining studies stretch across the surface of a large theatrical backdrop, adapted to fit the proportions of the gallery. An eye, wing and pillars bear down on the viewer, illuminated by the imagined light of a high sun.

Spong's backdrop designates the gallery as a performative space, although the design itself does not perform as Nolan intended; rather than colonising the three dimensions of the stage, it remains in the two-dimensional field of painting. Within the hard edges and flat verticality of the backdrop's surface, Spong replicates Nolan's sketch in its entirety, including parts that refer

to the stage wings and floor. She is not 'realising' Nolan's design but invoking it in its final thwarted form as a fragment of artistic process and a failed idea.³ Her incarnation is not the thing itself but its spectre, translated and transformed through an act of appropriation. Spong speaks of this act as producing a form of entanglement between two strangers, and as an incursion into the creative space of another.⁴

To be out of place is to be confronted by one's body in relation to its surroundings and to register those surroundings more acutely. As a child, Spong remembers visiting a friend and taking her shoes off at the entrance to their house, carefully placing these beneath a Colin McCahon painting from his 1976 series *Rocks in the sky*. For Spong, the memory of crossing this threshold is inextricably tied to the gesture of removing her shoes and her encounter with McCahon's loaded allusions to the natural world. Spong extrapolates on this remembered ritual in a series of text-based choreographic scores titled after McCahon's painting, which resonate with her evocation of Icarus in *The Stranger's House*, suspended between earth and atmosphere.

In structure and tone, two of these scores recall Bruce Nauman's well-known instruction piece *Body pressure* from 1974 and address the viewer directly. The others read more like speculative narratives and refer to the gardens that surround the Gallery, arousing the prospect that Spong's choreographies might bleed out beyond the exhibition space. Certain motifs quietly ricochet between the texts, focusing our attention on particular embodied sensations and actions – processes of expansion and contraction, transitions between mental states and between physical spaces, as well as those qualities we might

The dancer leaves the gallery and walks through the garden. She stops to observe an object—a tree, a rock, a bench. She walks away from this object then finds a route back to it, observing it from a second angle. She walks away from the object then finds a route back to it, observing it from a third angle. She repeats this eleven more times. The dancer performs at her own pace. The routes she picks can be long or short. The performance could last (a day) (weeks) (or even a year).

associate with the rocks and clouds of McCahon's absent image: hard, dense, contained; weightless, yielding, amorphous.

A cluster of fragile sculptural objects – evocatively titled *Hair, Pastry, Tobacco* – expands on the iterative sensibility of the scores and their association with matter and memory. Fashioned from marble and air-dried clay, they hover on the gallery walls, softening into the white surface. Spong calls these objects 'utterances', thereby locating them in the realm of language, although they do not resemble roman text.⁵ Their shapes refer loosely to forms of dance notation, a language of the body which, like the written scores, bears an instructional relationship to action.

Dance is always in excess of choreography and language, manifesting in the physicality of performance.⁶ This fundamental breach between instruction and action is negotiated through a process of translation within the body. The score is an instigator, a kind of fixed 'object' from which multiple fleeting interpretations can be generated.⁷ One way or another, Spong's work attends to the ideas encompassed by this set of conditions: the undefined limit between movement and language; the interplay between external and embodied phenomena; the processes by which ideas find physical form; and the question of what endures and what tends towards disappearance.

This constellation of ideas is also woven into Agatha Gothe-Snape's *Inexhaustible present* 2013, which comprises a dance and its visual traces. The work has its genesis in a process of improvisation guided by Gothe-Snape's friend and collaborator Brooke Stamp, from which Stamp developed a choreography and score. This score – a set of codified prompts that trigger a sequence of specific movements – exists in the realm of language and also resides in Gothe-Snape's memory. The dance it elicits

is decidedly non-virtuoso; its vocabulary of ordinary gestures, like that described in Spong's scores, recalls the minimalist choreography of the 1960s advanced by the likes of Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown.

Each time Gothe-Snape performs the dance it is made anew, briefly materialising before dissolving again into the ether. For *Taking form* this will occur twice: once (privately) in the gallery during the installation period, and again (publicly) to mark the end of the exhibition. In the interlude between, two videos of the first performance occupy the space in proxy. These projections capture Gothe-Snape's shadow as she dances in the brightly coloured glow of a rotating theatre light – reaching and pacing, leaning and pressing, moving and stationary. In its moments of stillness, her ghostly profile evokes the sculptural form of monuments, but nonetheless it remains insistently immaterial.

Gothe-Snape herself dances in the shadow of art history, drawing inspiration from the Gallery's permanent collection where it intersects with her own spheres of artistic influence. Her work reflects on the collection as a form of archive, 'a statement of public memory',⁸ and plays this against the idea of the artist's body as another vessel for art history, however personal and idiosyncratic such accounts may be. Two objects in particular provided 'cue points' for the development of *Inexhaustible present*: a conceptual text piece from 1990 by Lawrence Weiner titled *(THIS AND THAT) PUT (HERE AND THERE) OUT OF SIGHT OF POLARIS*; and a striking portrait sculpture by Rayner Hoff of the artist Len Lye from 1925, *Decorative portrait – Len Lye*.

Weiner works in the slippery domain of language. He uses words as a material that can be moulded into temporary 'sculptural' configurations, revealing the porousness of language and its relationship to meaning making. Gothe-Snape frequently works with language





in this way, producing statements in a range of formats – printed, projected, inscribed onto architecture – that explore the dynamic between general assertions and their specific ramifications. In *Inexhaustible present*, this approach is embedded in the choreographic score and also subtly introduced into the installation by way of a brass wall plaque that lists the date and time of each performance.

Hoff's sculpture of Lye is a conduit to an entirely different aesthetic lineage. A maverick figure in the modernist avant-garde, Lye's experimental films of the 1930s and beyond helped to redefine the medium. Underscoring all of his work was an interest in the energies intrinsic to everyday life, which he strove to embody in his art through mark-making, colour, sound and, above all, motion. For Lye, movement was a language and a medium in itself.⁹ This ethos was mirrored in his intuitive working method which prioritised a spontaneous process of 'thinking through the body' – a notion also central to Gothe-Snape's practice. In homage to Lye, *Inexhaustible present* echoes the vivid hues and twisting, leaping silhouette of the protagonist in his 1936 film *Rainbow dance*.

Invoking the legacies of Weiner and Lye in broad terms, Gothe-Snape's work unfolds at the intersection of language, movement and instinctive process. She describes *Inexhaustible present* as an attempt to mark out and inhabit a space 'between the monument and the moment' – to reconcile the ephemeral, embodied thrust of her practice with the museum's tendency to 'fix' and monumentalise works of art.¹⁰ As an annotation to the dance and projections, her brass plaque compresses this idea into a simple but highly suggestive object which serves the dual function of memorialising a past iteration of the performance and announcing a future one. It declares the work is in its destined time and place – a counterpoint to those objects in the museum's collection which have been isolated

from their context *in practice* and immobilised so that they might last in perpetuity.

In the end, *Inexhaustible present* is about endurance. Not the staging of physical resilience and exhaustion commonly allied to performance art, but the question of what survives through time and what can only be *in time* – something Spong's work also touches on. Both artists use choreography and the objects that accumulate around dance – from scenery and scores to documentary traces – as a lens through which to consider aspects of embodiment and transformation, history and memory, as well as various dimensions of artistic process. They approach these ideas in a manner alive to the elusive, provisional nature of movement, drawing this into dialogue with the stasis of painting and sculpture, as well as their own intuitive methods of art-making. Working fluidly between mediums, their projects converge around a consideration of things in suspended states of realisation, or in the precarious process of taking form.

Anneke Jaspers
Assistant curator, contemporary art

1. Sidney Nolan, 'Painting the stage' (excerpts), in Nancy Underhill (ed), *Nolan on Nolan: Sidney Nolan in his own words*, Viking, Melbourne, 2007, p 386.
2. Michelle Potter, 'Spatial boundaries: Sidney Nolan's ballet designs', *Bralga: an Australian journal about dance*, no 3, December 1995, pp 55–56.
3. Correspondence with the artist, 20 June 2013.
4. Correspondence with the artist, 27 May 2013.
5. Correspondence with the artist, 27 May 2013.
6. André Lepecki, 'Inscribing dance', in André Lepecki (ed), *Of the presence of the body: essays on dance and performance theory*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, 2004, p 126.
7. See William Forsythe 'Choreographic objects', in Markus Weisbeck (ed), *William Forsythe: Suspense*, Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal, Germany, 2008, p 6.
8. As characterised by the director of Tate Modern, Chris Dercon, public lecture, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 13 July 2013.
9. An idea explored in a 1935 article *Lye* co-authored with Laura Riding, 'Film-making', reproduced in Jean-Michel Bouhours and Roger Horrocks (eds), *Len Lye*, Centre Pompidou, Paris 2000, pp 223-25.
10. Correspondence with the artist, 27 May 2013.

