FIGURATIVELY
SPEAKING

A note from the curator

Back in 2015 I co-curated an exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Photography entitled *Lit from the Top: Sculpture through Photography,* which, as the title suggests, looked at the intersection of sculpture and photography in contemporary art. Three years later, a continued interest in the relationship between the camera and other artistic media led me to devise *Figuratively Speaking.* An exhibition that similarly examines the crossing of disciplines, it brings together seven local and international artists whose work incorporates the body, performance and photo media.

In considering these artists' work and the various ways in which they employ the body (whether their own or others'), a recurrent set of themes emerged. Among them: the semantics of gestures; the body's role as art-subject; and – perhaps most fascinating of all – the disparate agencies of the body once viewed through a lens. So what began as an exploration of the body and its connection to video and photography soon became an enquiry into the body as a communicative conduit.

Stripped of speech, bodies speak with movements, forms, and repetitions. But they also converse in groups, and in socio-political, art-historical, and temporal contexts. Straddling art and reality, they emulate human experience and, in other cases, distort it. In this way, *Figuratively Speaking* is not so much about 'body language', per se, though naturally it touches on the concept. Rather, it asks: How does the body act as medium *for* language – that system of conveying multifarious ideas and meanings – in contemporary art?

It is with this framework we arrive at the work of Ross Coulter, Laura Hindmarsh, Mira Loew, Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano, Mira Oosterweghel and Eugenia Raskopoulos, whose practices variously engage performance and the body through lens-based media. Whether as archival document, a call to action, a tool for translation, historical subject, or as a mode of language itself, the works in *Figuratively Speaking* come together to consider how our bodies communicate without words.

Laura Lantieri, January 2018

Laura Hindmarsh
[B. Miri, Malaysia 1987, lives and works Cambridgeshire, UK and Australia]

Working across performance, film, photography and moving image, Laura Hindmarsh's two-channel video, *Viewing Copy* (2016)*,* co-opts the body as a vehicle for mimicry and translation. The work cites avant-garde American choreographer Yvonne Rainer's famous dance sequence*, Trio A* (1966-78), wherein a performer enacts a series of everyday movements such as tapping, walking, and kneeling, in a continuous flow. Compelled by the original and the distribution of its subsequent re-performances, Hindmarsh (a non-dancer) set about learning the sequence. Despite Rainer's insistence that the choreography is taught and passed on only by qualified instructors, the work has continued through repeated but varied performances by both dancers and non-dancers alike. In *Viewing Copy,* Hindmarsh approximates Rainer's performance through copying and mirroring its documentation – a

low-resolution digitisation of Sally Banes' 1978 recording she found on YouTube. She then enlisted Aya Kobayashi (a trained dancer unfamiliar with the original) to mirror and repeat her versions. Much like a round of Chinese Whispers, the choreography gradually degenerates as it is passed between them, with each movement – including the additional mistakes and hesitations – reinterpreted as intended.

Ross Coulter
[B. Melbourne 1972, lives and works Melbourne]

From 2013 to 2016, Ross Coulter engaged more than 850 participants and over 90 galleries across Melbourne to produce *Audience,* a vast photographic series that documented groups of people within empty galleries, watching a performance that did not exist. A record of Melbourne and its art-scape during this period, Coulter amassed an archive of over 400 hand-printed, black-and-white silver gelatin prints. In lieu of an actual performance the photographs direct our gaze towards the audience, who have now become observers-cum-performers. The selection of photographs in this exhibition considers the observable patterns between participants, as well as the gestural disparities between children and grown ups, individuals and crowds. Serial and loosely shot, the project was inspired by performance art from the 1970s – specifically, the documentary photographs that served as records and usually long outlasted the original event. In *Audience,* the people of Melbourne's art world themselves function as a sort of archive. We can imagine future audiences viewing Coulter's audience as historical subjects, their bodies' posture, colour and form telling a story about a community, place and time.

Mira Loew
[B. Vienna, Austria 1984, lives and works London, UK and Vienna]

Mira Loew addresses the juncture between performance and photography, motion and stillness, feeling and action in her series, *On Movement and Sculptures* (2016-18). Typically working with the body, movement and dance, in these photographs Loew's headless figures appear caught in mid-movement, rendered static by the camera as they fold and contort atop plinths. Adopting sculpture's traditional support as her base, the body – with a weightless yet marble-like appearance – takes on the permanence and aesthetic of classical sculpture, calling attention to the figure's historical place as art subject. Concerned with the emotional language of movement, in this series Loew explores the correlation between somatic experience and feeling; how feeling can be expressed in physical form, and vice versa. Her minimal photographs are tempered with a subdued palette of greys, whites, blacks, and flesh, imbuing the figures with a sense of lyricism and shades of mood.

Mira Oosterweghel
[B. Melbourne 1987, lives and works Melbourne]

Mira Oosterweghel's performance and object-based practice tests the parameters of the body and investigates its relationship to structure and site. Her video installation, *Uncomfortable Gesture* (2015), presents the artist's own body hanging upside down on one screen, while on another, a pair of feet shift uncomfortably on a tightrope. Her upturned face slowly reddens, as each foot battles with its shaky support. Through the video reproduction of the original performance, looped with no reprieve, Oosterweghel effectively emulates and incites physical discomfort in the viewer, highlighting how bodies can speak in visceral terms. The two monitors are suspended in the gallery within freestanding scaffolding, as a reference to the structures, norms and systems of power that inform and inhibit our bodies, movements and behaviour in everyday life.

Eugenia Raskopoulos
[B. Czech Republic 1959, lives and works Sydney]

Eugenia Raskopoulos's practice is concerned with ideas of identity, translation, language and the body. Her large, black-and-white *Diglossia* prints of 2009 result from a process of wiping vapor off mirrors to produce letters from the Greek alphabet (relating to the artist's heritage) and photographing them before they are once again engulfed by steam. The three prints shown here each depict a single letter, however even in the full suite of eight the letters do not make up a word and resist translation. 'Diglossia' refers to the coexistence of two languages within one speaking community, where one is considered 'high' (formal and literary), and the other 'low' (everyday and colloquial). Through a synthesis of text, memory and her own body, Raskopoulos explores the notion of diglossia, with language itself shifting, slippery, and temporal. Her fleeting text is combined with the naked body glimpsed through the wiped sections of mirror. Equally ephemeral, Raskopolous's figure simultaneously appears and disappears in the photograph, caught in momentariness and mistranslation.

Gabriella Mangano & Silvana Mangano

Gabriella Mangano [B. Stanthorpe, Australia 1972, lives and works Melbourne]
Silvana Mangano [B. Stanthorpe, Australia 1972, lives and works Melbourne]

Twin sisters and artistic collaborators Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano create documented performances using the body and simple materials to emphasise gesture, process and sculptural form. In *There Is No There* (2015), the artists play on the body as a political and social medium, deliberately engaging a cast of female performers placed in uniform clothes and a non-descript setting. Inspired by a found image of the Blue Blouse agitprop theatre collective active during the early Soviet Union, the black-and-white video depicts the group enacting a series of gestures in unison. Their movements are based on pictures the artists sourced from media and news outlets – specifically, "images depicting gestures that captured [their] current social and political environment".[1] In this work, they focus on the body as a collective and how gestures can become a universal language, further fortified *en masse*. The performers do not speak but they are not silent; their movements are sure and concise, their bodies empowered. *There Is No There* presents the body in an act of dignified protest, which resonates all the more powerfully in 2018 as women continue to strengthen their voice and speak out.

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[1] The artists in conversation with Nicholas Forrest, '8th Asia Pacific Triennial Q&A: Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano', 16 December 2015, http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1298115/8th-asia-pacific-triennial-qa-gabriella-and-silvana-mangano, [accessed 13/12/17].

LIST OF WORKS

1. Laura Hindmarsh
Viewing Copy, 2016
two-channel digital video installation,
24 minutes 55 seconds, sound
Performers: Aya Kobayashi and Laura
Hindmarsh, Camera: Wilf Speller
edition of 5
courtesy the artist
$1,500

2. Ross Coulter
Audience, 2015 (selected prints from the
series)
silver gelatin print
20 x 25 cm
edition of 5
courtesy the artist
$500 (each)

3. Mira Loew
Double Release, 2016
C-Type Print, Diasec
edition 1/5
60 x 40 cm
NFS

Small Jewel, 2017
C-Type Print, Diasec
edition 1/5
40 x 30 cm
NFS

Core-Initiation, 2016
C-Type Print, Diasec in white shadow
frame
edition 1/5
60 x 90 cm
NFS

Ascend-Descend, 2016
C-Type Print, Diasec in black shadow frame
edition 1/5
60 x 90 cm
NFS

Counter-tension, 2016
C-Type Print, Diasec
edition 1/5
40 x 60 cm
NFS

The New Jewel, 2018
C-Type Print, Diasec
edition 1/5
40 x 30 cm
NFS
all courtesy the artist

4. Mira Oosterweghel
Uncomfortable gesture, 2015
two-chanel video installation, scaffolding,
monitors, HD video, continuous loop
courtesy of the artist
POA

5. Eugenia Raskopoulos
Diglossia #2, 2009
archival pigment print
edition of 5
140 x 93.5 cm

Diglossia #4, 2009
archival pigment print
edition of 5
140 x 93.5 cm

Diglossia #7, 2009
archival pigment print
edition of 5
140 x 93.5 cm

All courtesy the artist and ARC ONE Gallery
Sales enquiries: mail@arc1gallery.com

6. Gabriella Mangano & Silvana Mangano
There Is No There, 2015
single-channel High Definition video, 16:9,
black and white, sound
10 minutes 27 seconds
edition of 3, 2 APs

Courtesy the artists and Anna Schwartz
Gallery | Sales enquiries:
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