

MARISSA NEAVE is a writer and researcher currently based in Montreal, where she is completing her Master's in Art History at Concordia University. Her thesis is concerned with the convergent histories of cultural policy and artist-run centres in Canada. Neave has a BFA in Criticism and Curatorial Practice from OCAD University.

ASHLEY GUINDON received a Bachelor of Fine Arts with specialization in Studio Arts from the University of Western Ontario in 2008. She participated in both the Independent Studio Residency at Toronto School of Art and in the Vermont Studio Residency in Johnson, Vermont. Guindon was a recipient of an Emerging Artist's Grant from Toronto Arts Council in 2009, as well as a 2010 recipient of the Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Assistance Grant. She is currently based in Toronto, Ontario.

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THE DISCONTINUOUS MADE CONTINUOUS¹

BY MARISSA NEAVE

■ If ritual can be defined as “a series of actions or type of behaviour regularly and invariably followed by someone,”² it is not far-fetched to describe the process of viewing art in a gallery as being ritualistic—a performance of etiquette, conduct and rules. Carol Duncan did exactly that in her 1995 book, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside the Public Art Museum*, noting that art museums are embedded with ritualistic features in two general ways. First, through “the achievement of a marked-off, ‘liminal’ zone of time and space in which visitors, removed from the concerns of their daily, practical lives, open themselves to a different quality of experience; and second, the organization of the museum setting as a kind of script or scenario which visitors perform.”³

This is the script that quietly instructs us on how to meander through a space and *look*. It is why we walk slowly and contemplatively, in a particular spatial order, through the architectures that house art, in a search for visual clues that might aid interpretation and understanding. Although these dictates are largely implicit and ultimately vary depending on where you are and what you are seeing, clear codes of conduct are embedded within us as soon as we enter a space intended for viewing art.

Walk, don't run. See, don't photograph. Whisper, don't yell. Look, don't touch.

Ashley Guindon's video installation, *A Great Mystery*, turns the most pertinent of museum rules—don't touch—on its head, while simultaneously willfully abiding by it. Walking into the Z Gallery, we encounter six screens, where videos depicting fuzzy movement, undulating shadows and abstracted vignettes—all captured by Guindon at a ritual event—are favoured over immediately recognizable, representative forms. Doubling the abstraction of the videos' content are the multiple projections—each ‘screen’ is constituted by two, overlapping projections, establishing a

visual clash that we are invited to unuddle. Standing in front of any one projector erases the doubling from the screen, leaving just one video for us to interpret, making clearer (though not necessarily articulating) the meditative images at hand.

If ritual is indeed a way for the discontinuous to be made continuous—a way to make sense of one's world and one's self; a transformative process of discovery—then Guindon's *A Great Mystery* makes the symbolic literal. By simply performing the ritual of the gallery—walking, looking—we, with our physical presence, unscramble the work, opening up new spaces for interpretation, understanding and transformation. The ritual—without breaking any of its rules—clarifies fragments, reveals new evidences, makes sense not only out of us encountering the images, but out of the two images encountering each other.

The ritual both presented and upended by Guindon is dotted with a tension that remains electric while viewing the work. The whole idea of ritual implies repetition; comfort in the routine. And yet Guindon's ritual allows for an innumerable amount of possibilities—*A Great Mystery* can never be the same twice. Which moments do you erase when you choose a projector to stand in front of? Which moment is made clear? What do you miss when you make your choice?

Guindon remains careful not to reveal too much. Although familiar tropes repeat themselves throughout each channel of video, uncertainty—the mystery—still persists. The sound that accompanies each screen, each pair of projections, discloses something, but not everything, about what we're looking at, and serves as yet another layer of meaning to decode. Guindon's interest, here, is to suggest, not dictate, leaving the experience of the viewer (both within this ‘liminal’ zone, as Duncan calls it, and within their daily, practical lives,) to guide their elucidation (or not) of what it is

they are seeing and manipulating. As such, viewers enact a metamorphic process—both with the projections, as they are revealed and hidden, and with their own, corporeal selves, as they attempt to clarify what they think they see.

Emphasizing the viewers' interactions with her work and, in particular, facilitating their ability to respond to and alter the construction of implied narratives, is a highlight of Guindon's practice. Her 2008 installation, *Can I Be Big*, featured large, sketch-like wall drawings of figures in various poses. Over five days, Guindon photographed individual participants' poses that would be added to the drawing—the photographs of these bodily shapes were projected onto the walls and traced. How one posed, of course, was based on how others posed before you—how the drawing of your body could respond to and play with the drawing of someone else's body. In this constantly shifting, constantly evolving installation, the viewer is transformed into the viewed, but not without their own hand in how they are represented.

Guindon's *What's Going On Here* installation not only inserted the viewer into the artwork through its material treatment, but allowed the visitor to play an even more active role in engineering the story that was being told (or, rather, created). In this installation, done in collaboration with Lurissa Kelland, drawings of figures appeared on large sheets of acetate, with each panel being hung from its own track. Visitors were able to slide each figure across a plane, altering the order of things: where the viewer was situated amongst the figures, which figures were being watched and by which other figures, which figures engaged with one another, which figures receded into the background—which relationships survived or died.

A Great Mystery allows us a similar role, giving us the power of erasure and restoration, clarity and ambiguity, abstraction and

detail. But the method by which Guindon accomplishes this interaction is unique, as it is achieved by facilitating a completely non-tactile intervention. This touching-without-touching requires no physical demand beyond the existing ritual of the gallery in order to alter the narrative and sharpen the view. There is no material, tangible participation. The immaterial transformative process, at once ethereal, ephemeral, and tenuous, is as much about presence as it is about ritual—simply being there, is enough.

ENDNOTES

1. The phrase, “the discontinuous made continuous” is borrowed from Don Handelman's paraphrasing of Claude Lévi-Strauss's thoughts on ritual. From Handelman, Don. “Introduction.” *Ritual in Its Own Right: The Dynamics of Transformation*. Eds. Don Handelman and Galina Lindquist. New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2005. 2.
2. “ritual”. Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford University Press. 11 January 2011 <http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0713120>.
3. Duncan, Carol. “The Art Museum as Ritual.” *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*. London: Routledge, 1995. 20.