

Lenzi on Marking Time Utah

Marking Time by Marilyn Arsem, November 10, 2012, Salt Lake City, Utah, NOX Contemporary Gallery, 10:00 AM-6:00 PM.

I am awake at 4:30 AM, November 11, 2012. This is the first piece of such duration that I have ever watched completely. It is one of two performances that I have seen live of Marilyn's. Her work is deeply moving, intense, methodical.

By this morning, I am beginning to comprehend the piece as a drawing. The space with its mid-tone grey walls, white floor and white attired body, and darker marks on the floured floor. Mid-tone, lightest light and darkest dark. Almost a well rendered charcoal drawing, bathed in its own light source of high hanging, evenly distributed fluorescent light.

As for content; I watched a figure leave behind an alluded to figure (an empty chair.) I watched this process for 8 hours. Felt it, became psychologically consumed by it.

From a technical performance perspective, I watched Marilyn make use of various levels of space: sitting in a chair, kneeling on the floor, standing on a chair, walking forward, walking a figure eight so many times and so slowly that it became infinity. She used sound. The sound of the chairs dragging along the floor. And she gave us just enough time to absorb (dare I say,) the narrative. She made us look into a space that we could not enter. A sacred space, moving away from us in a way that forced the notion of linear perspective. And, she provided the notion that performance is indeed visual art. A visual art accompanied by the smell of raw flour.

My body, my physiology followed along with Marilyn's like a great, long opera. Mimicked it until I resided in this territory of otherworldliness that she was conveying. I sat at first for two hours watching Marilyn sit in a chair and look around. All the while, listening to the clock she had placed on the lobby wall tick its, at times, bloody guts out, and at times tick in order to lull me into deep connection with the artist. I was was both disturbed by it and comforted by it.

My thoughts slowed down and I became more contemplative than on most days. A day of simultaneous meditations, like at the sangha, or Rinpoche's retreats. More centered, focused on the moment. So very aware of the essence of time passing, and the ramifications of that process. I believe most viewers at least tasted time in this way.

At times, there were 20 people in that small lobby, peering around the wall, not wanting to disturb the boundary line of flour on the floor. There were always

several witnesses there. Many took pictures like they were somehow capturing a morsel or a treasure, but I think they knew they were only getting to the surface of the experience; for they stayed too long to have just stopped by for a picture. I am, however, always fascinated by this need to document. I do it too.

The best part about the photograph or the video is that it does help the performer to recollect what s/he has done. A way to reframe the experience, perhaps even get some closure. A way to distance oneself from the intensity, all consuming, internal nature of it. These experiences are too much to contain for too long. The mind must rest. And the body.

For now, I sit emailing myself on my smart phone in the cold darkness of a winter early morning in Salt Lake City. I hold the realization that life is precious, complex and fleeting.

Thank you for this performance, Marilyn. Thank you for pioneering this field.

Kristina Lenzi