

PERFORMANCE//PROXY II

A curatorial project from

Rachel Pontious and Finn Schult

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Our second iteration of Performance//Proxy has been in the works for many months now, and it is strange that its premier date is during the international COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent quarantining. The idea has always revolved around how to engage remotely, at a distance, and how that endeavor can either fall short of expectations or open up new avenues, how the proxy alters the way we form meaningful relationships and find mutual understanding in the present. However, we feel that this unique circumstance adds a new, urgent layer of meaning to our theoretical foundation. With the public openings for the show being cut altogether, it asks how we will continue to engage with exhibitions, installations, even institutions beyond the physical? In what ways have these proxy performances acted as a dress rehearsal for this exact scenario? Can they help us rethink former structures and methods of engagement?

An important aspect of this show is a conversation around how the proxy alters time and space, constantly renegotiating the definition and concept of 'live.' Philip Auslander expands this understanding in his essay *Live and Technologically Mediated Performance* stating that:

...the experience of liveness is not limited to specific performer-audience interactions; it is the feeling of always being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated co-presence with others known and unknown. Understood in this way, the experience of liveness to which [Nick] Couldry points are not easily assimilable to a simple performer/audience model; in such interactions, each of us functions simultaneously (or perhaps alternately) as performer and audience member. It operates primarily in the temporal dimension rather than the spatial one; its main affect is the sense that one can be in contact with others at any given moment regardless of distance.[1]

Here Auslander expands popular conception of 'live' beyond an absolute condition, beyond the binary of live or not live to include complex combinations of temporal, spatial, and emotional proximities. He points to a Walter Benjamin quote about how human sense perception evolves alongside historical circumstances, implying the possibility of our sense of 'liveness,' of an intimate or connected experience, is changing with emergent technologies and under new cultural conditions.[2] Each artist in this series embraces this new position and continues to expand our conception of both mediated performance and the proxy—simultaneously expanding and collapsing time through engagements with past selves or invented personas; pushing the boundaries of the intimacy of shared space through acts of love, storytelling, and making; and exploring loneliness within the space of collectivity or celebration, or connectedness within the space of solitude. There are various levels of engagement for viewers of the works, complicating the roles of audience and performer. We are constantly recalibrating to new technologies, locating the shortcomings of one to expand new ways of connecting with another.

The decision to go through with this exhibition was not necessarily an easy one to make. With so many variables rapidly morphing, we weren't sure if it would be possible to not only execute, but execute at a caliber that would meet our personal standards and do the work justice. We questioned the accessibility

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10 April 2020

[3] Arundhati Roy, "The Pandemic is A Portal," *Financial Times*, 3 April 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

In my piece, "All He Ever Wanted," I re-materialized my past male body before I began medically transitioning as a transwoman. The 3D printed body is confronted with a video that strives to seduce my old self by confronting his past desires of wanting sexual contact with a transwoman. In retrospect, there is a question of how much he wanted to sleep with a transman or how much he wanted to become one. I am providing for a desire that he never

had. He always wanted to sleep with a “tgirl”, so I have chosen to provide him that pleasure as I use a performance video to seduce my reborn male body. He never would have thought the transgirl he would have sex with would be me. Over the next few years I plan to slowly manifest his body into a “Real Life Sex Doll” that I will develop a sexual relationship with. I have already begun this intimacy with my past self as we both grow and develop in unison. The installation has a performance video of my current self in a sexualized context that shifts her gaze to the camera to seduce the 3D printed body through a confrontational placement of bodies. In this perception of themselves I call to the audience in how they perceive the sexualization of transgender bodies in the sex industry. The two selves are locked in confrontation of seeing their past, and their futures, in a singular moment. I ask for the audience, by the very nature of them witnessing this connection, to perform an introspection on what it means to find pleasure in the futurity of digital bodies.

BIO: Wanbli Gamache

Wanbli Gamache (b.1989) is a Chicago based new media performance artist. She uses video, performance, and technology to reconstruct dynamics of spectacle and intimacy through eroticized mediation of body. In ritualized actions, Gamache addresses consumption and voyeurism through forms of reconstruction of her body. She is an alumni of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Film, Video, New Media, and Animation Department and currently lives and works in Chicago. Gamache has exhibited work at Links Hall (Chicago, IL), Sullivan Galleries, Zhou B Art Center, and ACRE Gallery (Chicago, IL); the Supernova Digital Animation Festival in Denver, Colorado, and recently a MANA Contemporary New Media Artist-in-residence.

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PROJECT STATEMENT: William E. Jones + Mark Flores

I hate “performative.” It’s a word I’d like to leave behind in the ’teens and not use at all in the ’twenties. But here I am, like some kind of douchebag, doing a performance for a gallery. As if they’re clairvoyants, Finn and Rachel asked my boyfriend, Mark Flores, and I to do a performance via Skype (or FaceTime or that malware Zoom) awhile back. At the time, I wondered what we could do, but now I realize that we will be doing the only thing we can do during these days of “sheltering in place.” In a recent article, *Art in America* called us “roommate artists”—a euphemism I hadn’t encountered in this century—but I suppose it’s true, we are roommates, and we have spent almost every hour since the end of February together in our apartment. And we haven’t killed each other!

Since I am no longer able to visit the barber, Mark has very kindly agreed to give me a haircut and beard trim. Why not do this on camera for the enjoyment of folks in another state? No

masks will be worn during the performance, but we suggest spectators wear masks while they are out in public.

BIOS: William E. Jones + Mark Flores

William E. Jones is an artist, filmmaker, and writer born in Canton, Ohio, in 1962 and currently living in Los Angeles. He received a B. A. from Yale University in 1985 and an M. F. A. from Cal Arts in 1990. Jones's films have been the subject of retrospectives at Tate Modern, London; Anthology Film Archives, New York; and the Austrian Film Museum, Vienna. His work was included in the 1993 and 2008 Whitney Biennials and the 2009 Venice Biennale. He is the author of several books, including *Halsted Plays Himself* (2011), *True Homosexual Experiences: Boyd McDonald and Straight to Hell* (2016), and the novel *I'm Open to Anything* (2019). He has written for periodicals such as *Artforum*, *Bidoun*, *Frieze*, *Mousse*, *Osmos*, and the *White Review*. Jones has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Foundation for Contemporary Art Grant, a City of Los Angeles (COLA) Grant, and a Creative Capital/Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writer's Grant. He lives in Los Angeles.

Mark Flores is an artist born in Ventura, California, in 1970. He received a B. A. from UCLA in 1999 and an M. F. A. from Cal Arts in 2002. Flores has had solo exhibitions at UCLA Hammer Museum; Alison Jacques Gallery, London; Cardi Black Box, Milan; and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California; Patricia Faure Gallery, Santa Monica, California; California State University, Los Angeles; Vox Populi, Philadelphia; and the Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University, Orange, California. He has recently had two-person exhibitions with his partner William E. Jones at Nothing Special, Los Angeles; and Private Places, Portland, Oregon. Reviews and articles about Flores's work have appeared in Art in America, Artforum, Flash Art, the Los Angeles Times, Frieze, and the New York Times. Flores has received a California Community Foundation Fellowship. He lives in Los Angeles.

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PROJECT STATEMENT: Emmy Bright

I make drawings, prints, writings and performances which navigate relationships, ideas and states of feeling. How do we be there for each other? For ourselves? Where is this “there”? I write on paper a lot, and pull from my various notebooks. I read with pen in hand and consistently have 3 or more notebooks on me. It’s a habit, I think, from trying to be a proper academic. Somehow notetaking promises understanding. Whether this is a problem of orientation (being a know it all) or cognition (being super forgetful), I’m not sure.

I'm interested in image and language and how they work differently, at different speeds and tenors, and together triangulate new spaces for thinking and feeling. What are the qualities it takes to constitute a "thing", an identity, or an object? And what happens when one of these slip into a place between – a this and a that, a me and a not me, a closeness and distance. These paradoxes, short circuits and gaps are all part of what is real.

I think a lot about opposites and how intimately they are related. I think about the self and other, the good and bad, not me and me, the smart and stupid, man and woman, homo and no homo, the happy and sad, and how there are all of these relationships and tensions between them. Good sense would have us accept these opposing categories and be done, but I make things which have feet on both sides of the issue. I'm looking for something more complex, gnarly and real.

Emmy Bright is an artist working with drawing, writing, print and performance. She uses art history, psychology, comedy and philosophy to investigate the problems of connection and the problems of boundaries. She earned a BA in Art History from University of Chicago, an M.Ed from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and an MFA in Print Media from Cranbrook Academy of Art. She has recently held exhibitions at the Visual Art Center in Richmond, VA, the Distillery Gallery in Boston, MA, and at Ditch Projects in Portland, OR. She has held fellowships and residencies at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Penland School of Crafts, Vermont Studio Center, OxBow School of Art, Alfred University, and at University of Hawaii at Manoa Valley. She is currently an Artist in Residence and co-head of the Print Media Department at Cranbrook Academy of Art. She lives in Detroit where she is represented by David Klein Gallery.

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PROJECT STATEMENT: Jova Lynne

I create photo, video and sculptural installation works that speak to moments of cultural transgressions in imagined landscapes. My work describes the code-switching that I encounter as I move through the world as a first generation American navigating my position as both "of" and "other." I am interested in the complexities and dualities that exist within the paradigms of Black-identity particularly as it relates to the Caribbean diaspora. My video work is largely centered around endurance-based performance and the limitations of the femme body in terms of the supply and demand of our labor as well as the humor of mundane daily activity. In my sculptural work, I play with materials that explore the intersections between soft/hard, feminine/masculine, joy/pain, both/and, sharp/dull, delicate/expendable, fake/real. The sculptural works that I create are largely shown in installation or photograph form and are influenced by vintage advertisements from post-colonial promotional materials.

BIO: Jova Lynne

Jova Lynne is a multidisciplinary conceptual artist and curator based out of Detroit, MI, of Jamaican and Colombian heritage born and raised in New York City. Lynne graduated from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA in 2010 with a Bachelors of Arts in Video Art and Education. She has worked at the Museum of Moving Image in Queens, NY as well as the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, CA. Lynne is a grantee of the Astraea Foundation's Global Arts Fund, which has supported her work on media based projects in Kingston, Jamaica and Berlin, Germany in addition to her work in Detroit. As a co-founder of both BULK SPACE and Black Artists Meetup-Detroit, Lynne is dedicated to creating space for artists to offer each other support, and address their needs. Lynne moved to Detroit in 2015 to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts in Photography at Cranbrook Academy of Art which she completed in May of 2017.

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