

Flora Wiegmann

Bio

Born 1976, Lincoln, Nebraska; lives and works in Los Angeles. Wiegmann is a graduate of Columbia College, Chicago (BA, 1998), and the University of California, Los Angeles (MFA, 2007). She has collaborated with artists Felicia Ballos, Amy Granat, Fritz Haeg, Drew Heitzler, Silke Otto-Knapp, Alix Lambert, Margo Victor, and Andrea Zittel. Her projects have been presented the ICA, Philadelphia; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions; the Kitchen, New York; Highways Performance Space, Los Angeles; Art2102, Los Angeles; Art Basel, Miami; the Banff Centre, Banff, Canada; and Le 102, Grenoble, France.

Practice: dance, choreography, performance

Interview with Chloë Flores

CF: Your project for the Biennial, Wandering (Still) and (Detail), involves thirteen performances. What is the inspiration for this work, and what is the significance of the

number of performances?

FW: Late last year, I began researching a modern dance pioneer who worked in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century, Mary Wigman—originally spelled Wiegmann, so it's quite possible that I'm related to her. Her technique and choreographic process piqued my interest because she utilized improvisation to translate things like emotion, subconscious drives, and the supernatural into movement. Dance was her language, and she was an extremely expressive and dramatic communicator. Her work also highlighted the changing relationships between a choreographer as soloist, as a leader of a group, and as a member of a group, all the while celebrating each dancer as an individual and artist, not as a Wigman replica.

The motivation for (still) and (detail) comes out of two photographic images from Wandering, part of Wigman's Scenes from a Dance Drama (1924). The contrasting images look as if they might illustrate two different dances. I liked that disjunction and wondered how the dance eventually traveled through one moment to reach the other. Utilizing these images and textual descriptions of the actual dance, I'm reanimating

these moments with my own choreographic choices (the present), while conjuring up the methods of Wigman (the past).

In the film I dance each role of Wandering; therefore, I attempt to embody various women with distinct histories, muscle memories, and physical patterning (again, the celebration of the individual dancer). The live performances extend into real space, without the limits of specific choreography. I will attempt to embody one character per performance to see if I can let go of my own habits to take on someone else's, demonstrating a lineage through movement from 1924 to now.

Lastly, I would just add that in this climate, in which reperformance of historical work (by its author or someone else) is popular, that is not my particular goal. I am trying to leave behind the idea of authentic reconstruction to emphasize a contemporary form. Disintegration of information through time, memory, and context disallows for a perfect redo and opens up the doors to appropriation and translation concurrently.

CF: Interpreting the gestural habits of a dancer through a

visual image is working under the assumption that one could read the body as a text—a text that is based in a language of movement. Can you talk a little about this in relation to this project?

FW: One can get a lot of information by looking at a body. Each person's history of movement is recorded and contained in the body as a physical translation of something experiential. It exists then as ephemera within the body, which can be read from the outside, so body as text is certainly an appropriate term. Body language is exactly that; mannerisms or postures convey unspoken information, whether purposefully communicated (gestures) or not (involuntary or habitual action). In addition, the bodily experience of the beholder interprets what is being seen. So we are all forming our own interpretation, based on how we inhabit the world. While I embody the gestures and postures of thirteen different women, I'm participating in the same process.

CF: You've described your work as being "place-specific"—as responding to and considering the context of a site, its architecture, and the social environment in which the performance takes place. When that context is a museum

setting, how do you see your work operating in relation to the other static art objects in the space that you are inhabiting—for example, a painting, drawing, or sculpture?

FW: It's rare for me to make dances that can be transported from site to site. I begin with specific conceptual structures for each project; therefore, aspects of the hosting space are integral and nontransferable. I think it differs from the term site-specific, which I link to a more social-historical-collaborative process with a site. Instead, I focus on the body in that particular space. In turn, my work is often made on site, so the architecture and other objects sharing the space influence the movement. I refrain from literally referencing artworks, but since it's all happening in the same place, viewers will naturally make visual connections to whatever else is around.

CF: So in a way you're embodying the movement, and the movement is embodying the specific place. Why is this methodology important to your body of work?

FW: I've formed my way of working out of a discomfort with performance as spectacle. I attempt to subvert this idea by

leaving out at least some of the elements that create a domineering scene, a flash, or something that calls out, "Ta-da!" at the end. Instead I tend to work with a more subdued sensibility to which "embodying the space" is much more applicable than "taking over a space." Again, the idea sharing is key to my work, as is specificity in the use of time. Past performances have ranged from five minutes to two weeks in duration. Of course, no one person will see a long-term work in its entirety, but he/she could visit on a few different days or might witness only thirty seconds passing through the room. That's why I often improvise, preventing any one moment from being precious or unmissable. I want an audience to be in control of their viewership, be it how long they might stay to watch or where they choose to place themselves in relation to the performing bodies.

Because a large percentage of people who come in contact with my work may not have prior experience with dance, or may feel that they don't have the tools to understand it, I hope to present work that might encourage a phenomenological reading, which validates both the viewer's bodily experience of the performance and my own.