

‘Resist, Resist, Release’

Presented at The Shoe Factory in Norwich over a four-week duration, the exhibition ‘Resist, Resist, Release’ – a collaboration between the two contemporary artists Brian J. Morrison and Emily Warner – was constantly changing; I don’t mean in the obvious sense in which humans are said to never step in the same river twice: more that, although sometimes barely perceptibly, the works recomposed themselves or were recomposed by the artists. This was an exhibition in-progress, a choreography of human and non-human actors.

Bridging a free-standing plasterboard sheet and a circular clay object atop a low floor-based plinth, the torsion of a latex strip slackened over weeks (as the clay object dried out so it increased the latex surface tension); a latex skein pulled over a stretcher skews the frame, as if, we imagine, it might clack and drop to the floor (nearby, flappy latex gashes, exhausted breakages, hang from stretchers); metallic spray-painted swathes of latex process from the factory’s iron trusses like some herniated spillage.

Latex is a metaphorically-loaded material frequently used by Morrison in his sculpture to explore tropes of embodied masculinity, specifically that muscular vestige of the bodybuilder. ‘The thing with bodybuilders,’ Morrison explained in conversation at The Shoe Factory with the curator Kim McAleese, ‘is that they’re really good at doing flexes but they’re not actually very good at doing other things. They’ve decided on very singular actions designed to build one specific aspect of the body.’

This is where Morrison’s sculptural practice intersects with Warner’s performance practice: the notion of the rehearsal (rips and pulls – forms of rehearsal and maintenance – prepare one for the flex – the final performance).¹ Previously, Warner had participated in a series of ‘engagements’ with different dance practitioners and workshops using the ‘Skinner Release’ technique, a series of preparatory exercises carried out in partner work, with connections to yoga and authentic movement, developed by the American choreographer Joan Skinner. Warner used these preparatory movements as a resource for choreography, displacing the ‘final performance’ with what comes before it. This foregrounding of rehearsal over ‘final performance’ performs a series of revealing inversions, between on-stage and off-stage, the test and the event, between work and non-work. Precisely, all ‘final performance’ or art exhibition conceals the preparatory labour invested in it.

Before SAVORR invited the artists to exhibit as part of DOMINO, the two, both based in Birmingham, had initiated a conversation about the role of dance and movement practice

¹ See, for example, Lisa Baraitser’s ‘Touching Time: Maintenance, Endurance, Care’ delivered at Bad Vibes Club, Open School East, September 2016: <http://badvibesclub.co.uk/upcoming-archive/>.

in contemporary art and more specifically in their own work. From my first conversation with Morrison and Warner it was clear that The Shoe Factory would provide a compelling space to realise an exhibition (SAVORR, like many artist-led projects of its kind, parasitically occupied this space in its transitional state before redevelopment into luxury homes).² Over three intense days leading up to the exhibition opening the artists produced work in situ, in dialogue with the scale of the architecture and, of course, one another's work. Discussing the exhibition with McAleese, Warner spoke of how, once installed, the different assemblages of objects were intended to function as sites for experimentation, so that the gallery space would, in effect, become an 'index' for ideas they'd been discussing.

There are other forms of indexing throughout 'Resist, Resist, Release', too: while spray paint applied to latex surfaces registers movement in the way it cracks and flakes, the various negative impressions of Warner's objects testify to displacement. At the exhibition opening Warner gave a performance located around a selection of these sites, moving and recomposing arrangements of clay objects and flexing latex strips. The 'liveness' of this performance was emphasised by Warner's 'real time' vocalisation of her actions:

'This is the start. Ready? Let's start. This is the start.'

'All we have to do here is wait.'

'Okay, right just move to the next bit.'

And, most compellingly, at the performance's conclusion:

'Okay guys if you wanna go get a drink we'll take it from the top in five minutes.'

Except, of course, there was no taking it from the top. So we stood in anticipation, until five minutes became ten, and this queering of a dramaturgical device made it clear there would be no repetition.

Since last seeing 'Resist, Resist, Release' I've been wondering exactly what kind of exhaustion all the snaps, clacks and spillages, the breakages and displacements, speak to. Perhaps it's the unrelenting horror of the new world order – Brexit, ultra-nationalism, Donald Trump – that so easily fell into place? In this case, the denial of the final performance speaks to the precarity of human existence. However, the contradiction in 'Resist, Resist, Release' between, on the one hand, the display of rehearsal and, on the other, the denial of repetition by Warner in her performance is cause for optimism. The denial of repetition produced readiness in the audience: anticipation, attention, engagement – hardly fatigue.

² See *Work in Progress* in this publication.

