thINKingDANCE
Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Photo: Wim Winklewagon

Through an Aperture, On a Street Corner

by Kalila Kingsford Smith

On Google Maps, the corner of Wildey and American is an overgrown empty lot. In person, it's a newly constructed three-story building—a skinny isolated one you'd see often on Philadelphia blocks. With no "FringeArts" directives posted on the outside, I wander around the perimeter peering into the window, wondering if I'm in the right place. As if hearing my thoughts, Ashley Searles, choreographer and performer, appears and guides me across the street to look back at that same window which now flickers with the words *Project: Through an Aperture.* The whole building, now in view, frames the screen like a tall proscenium, and cars passing in the street block my view like latecomers at the movies.

This project consists of six short dance films—three by collaborators Searles and Wim Winklewagon, and three by Anne-Marie Mulgrew & Dancers Company with Carmella Vassor-Johnson. Only the crickets accompany the dancing images, occasionally joined by the blaring beats of passing cars.

The films featuring Searles are experimental and utilize time-lapse, making the subject's movement appear jilted and staccato. In "Project – Sections, Layers, Levels," (2014) Searles rolls her way up the stairs and tumbles back down. The time-lapse transforms her into a clumsy creature weighted by the burden of gravity. Through repetition, the images gradually overlay each other, blurring the lines between each frame. Her limbs become transparent and her red dress smears across the screen.

Mulgrew's films feature more concrete concepts and storylines. "The Kitchen Dance" (2001) evolves out of task-based movement—chopping, opening drawers—and into a swirling duet between Melissa Bessent and Joseph Cicala. In "Citrus Limon" (2003), the lens focuses on lemons—lemons alone, lemons together, lemons passed from one hand to another. Words describing the health benefits of citrus flash onto the screen—"cures" "cleanse" "contraceptive." With no music to accompany the film, my mind takes these words and fills the gap with commentary that sounds like a 1950's infomercial: "Lemons are anti-viral." "They can even be used as

a contraceptive!" "When life gives you lemons, make… a dance film."

After the reel ends, I speak with Searles about this project. She describes it as an experiment in transforming a large space into a layered canvas for dance. Her vision is to utilize all of the windows on the building to create a dance experience that engages with all of the surrounding architecture. This version of the project does not reach that scale, but I can imagine the direction it could go… three stories up.

Project: Through an Aperture, Exosphere with guest artist Anne-Marie Mulgrew & Dance Company, Surface Arts, September 12, 13, 19, 20. http://fringearts.com/event/project-through-an-aperture-09-20-14/

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September 15, 2014