

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Carlos Avendano

“Quite Visceral and Quite Unusual”: Adrian Heathfield on “Ally”

by Ellen Chenoweth

[Pictured above and on homepage: Janine Antoni and Stephen Petronio, 2016. Photographed by Carlos Avendaño. Courtesy of the artists and The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia.]

Ally is a multi-year collaboration between visual and performance artist Janine Antoni, movement artist Anna Halprin, and choreographer Stephen Petronio, on view at the Fabric Workshop and Museum.

I'm aware of how inadequate the labels are for these expansive artists. Petronio is a choreographer with his own company in New York, but also a writer and a dancer; here in Philadelphia where we've been steeping in the work of Trisha Brown thanks to [Trisha Brown: In the New Body](#), it may have particular resonance that he was the first male member of Brown's company. Antoni is also based in New York, working with sculpture, video, and performance art, often investigating issues of embodiment. Halprin is a living legend, nurturing her branch of the dance world from her famous dance deck in Kentfield, California, at the base of Mount Tamalpas. She'll be 96 in July.

I spoke with British curator Adrian Heathfield, who was brought into the process as a collaborator and editor of a book emerging from the work. I gingerly perched on a wooden crate containing a work of Antoni's as he discussed the components and concepts of the exhibition. I was struck by the concern for the experience of the viewer, and by the thoroughness and depth that has been brought to each element of the complex project.

There are four inter-locking exhibitions, each resonating across the different floors of the museum. Themes of invisibility, absence, translation, transformation, and regeneration intertwine and manifest in different forms and volumes. My advice is to get to the Fabric Workshop as quickly and as often as you can, as the exhibit rewards multiple viewings.

Paper Dance

The installation and performance of *Paper Dance* is a dialogue between the work of Antoni and Halprin, as Antoni improvises using the brown paper used in Halprin's 1965 work *Parades and Changes* amongst an assembly of her own works, packed in crates. Each week there is a performance, and another work is unpacked from its crate. In a way, it is an appropriately unorthodox retrospective for each artist. Heathfield calls this a "slow-time retrospective" as only one of Antoni's works is revealed each week. In speaking of the hidden works, Heathfield notes, "it's all about the power of something that's implicit or waiting. The works are not totally invisible, we all know they are there; so it's a strange form of semi-presence. We're looking at how two artists' histories can touch each other, and the associative relations between the works. Every performance is different and remakes their relation."



Anna Halprin, 2015. Photo: Hugo Glendinning. © Janine Antoni; Courtesy of the artist and The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia.

Rope Dance

"This is a participatory event drawn from a previous performance, which was a collaboration between Anna, Janine and Stephen. They worked on the original piece on Anna's Dance Deck in California, but here Janine and Stephen rework part of the piece as a process with participants. It's a work that deals with bound relations, experimenting with movement and with binding in space. The event is accompanied by a film, in which we

see Anna's face as she watches the dance that Stephen and Janine were making. We do not see the dance as such. What we see is the translation of the dance into her face: her feelings and expressive responses to it. In a way this is a kind of micro-choreography of affects, emotions and intensities. But the visible choreographic work is not there. We get to see the way watching and responding are bound into every performance event."

The Courtesan and the Crone

"This piece is a collaboration between Stephen and Anna, and is based on a short work of Anna's which is now effectively being translated or transferred across genders and across generations. Courtesan is a playful piece about aging and appearance: two huge issues in relation to dance, since the discipline is so founded on young bodies. Anna is in her 90s and Stephen is a queer artist in his 60s. Stephen will dance Anna's role, so the differences between them play across his interpretation."

Swallow

"This is a collaboration between Janine and Stephen. They performed an action for 12 witnesses. The installation contains various

transformed artifacts derived from this event. We don't get to see that performance, but we hear the testimonies of its witnesses in an audio environment. Each witness is a specialist of one kind or another, so we hear very different takes on the act. Of course what you also realize is that the event is told completely differently, so it is now 12 different things.

Part of the charm of the space is that you know everything there is from an event, but you don't know the details of what took place. What took place is evidently quite unusual and visceral. So there's a secluded and imagined element that has a very powerful force. "

On the role of the curator

"Janine invited me to be involved as an editor of the book arising from the project, but also as a curatorial advisor. Working with artists from distinct disciplines this becomes a complex and hybrid role: perhaps closer to dramaturgy and artistic research. It's a daily surprise to me when you work with artists with such different practices. We are working in the meeting space between forms and between three very different sensibilities. Something gets produced that isn't wholly within the sensibility of any of the collaborators."

Ally, Janine Antoni, Stephen Petronio, and Anna Halprin. Fabric Workshop and Museum. April 21 – July 31. Performances throughout.
<http://www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org>

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