

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Lisa Kraus

habitus

by Lisa Kraus

Some art expands the mind, inviting the viewer to drift forward and backward in time, zooming in on the exquisite products of human labor and dreaming into vast open playfulness, all the while feeling the elements. *habitus* is like that.

Ann Hamilton, the visual artist behind *habitus*, has designed environments animated by choreographers like Liz Lerman and Meredith Monk. Here the choreography is supplied by visitors to Pier Nine, a vast and worn space with vestiges of its ship-loading past, high clerestory windows and sides open to the Delaware River. In it Hamilton has placed a dozen forms, 19'-tall cylinders of synthetic white cloth, some tinted a faint blue, gathered and ruched at their tops like so many 18th-century ballgowns. They blow in the river breezes and twirl as visitors, young and old, pull the ropes descending from the pulleys that spin them into action. Each moment yields fluid beauty rivalling old master depictions of drapery.

At the far end of the installation, two live actors perform making and unmaking--one unravelling yarn to create holes in a sweater, the other spinning a mountain of fleece into yarn. Alongside them, the words of Susan Stewart's poems *Channel* and *Mirror* unspool in a scratchy video projected onto a shipping container. Her language locates us. We are on a river:

rain on the grass

rain on the sea

salt to sweet

sweet to salt

salt to sweet.

The sister exhibition at the Fabric Workshop underscores the alchemy of image and language. Text is stitched onto a blanket, obscured in a small book by tiny pebbles, erased on video in elegant retrograde calligraphies by a disembodied finger, scratched onto parchment with a quill. One of Stewart's poems is printed on a strip of fabric we can crank, film-reel style. Favorite quotes about cloth from authors like Rushdie, Creeley, Flaubert have been gathered from the public and lie printed, ready for our eyes, and for the taking. Wall text helps orient us, illuminating the presence of the many exquisite historical pieces on view. We are reminded of cloth as "a material record of the work of hands."

The Fabric Workshop excels at inspiring artists to engage big ideas. Scale here, between the show on the pier and the three floors of the sister exhibition in the FW building, ranges from the monumental to the most refined of stitching, the tiniest of pebbles, reminding us that we are all that too--grand and tiny, part of a flow, like the river.

habitus, Ann Hamilton, Municipal Pier Nine, 121 North Columbus Blvd., organized by the Fabric Workshop and Museum in partnership with FringeArts through October 9 <http://fringearts.com/event/habitus/>. A free performance of Jungwoong Kim's *SaltSoul Speaks to habitus* will be performed within the installation at Pier Nine on Sunday, Oct. 9 at 7 pm.

habitus installations are at the [Fabric Workshop and Museum](#) through January 8, 2017.

By Lisa Kraus
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