



ART, MODERNISM, NEW YORK, RECONSTRUCTION, REVIEW

## EVENTS BETWEEN A PLACE AND CANDY: TWO REVIEWS OF SPRING IN NEW YORK

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**"Event," Robert Swinston and Compagnie CNDC Angers**

It begins with a ripple of silk. Thirty or so panels in white, brown, pink yellow and red tossed out into the air as if an unseen dancer had suddenly run behind.

Perhaps, in that moment, much of what needs to be said about Merce Cunningham's work has already been said: elegant, random, playful and vivid – evocation without signification. And the dance is just beginning.

Initially I was wary of Robert Swinston's *Event* at the Joyce, a combine of various Cunningham repertory works on the Compagnie CNDC-Angers, or at least I went with my reconstructionist head on and a lot of questions to ask. What was he trying to do? Was this a Merce Cunningham work or a Robert Swinston? To what extent would he play on the (to my mind) very particular performance circumstances implied in the combination of "Cunningham" and "Event" in the same program?

The silk, to some extent, put my mind at rest, as did the sumptuous score emanating from John King and Gelsey Bell, tucked into the bottom left corner of the auditorium. The music existed, a crystalline thing of its own, creating synchronous moments with the movement of the stage and yet never narrating, or making the textual experience overly rich. And still, the dance is just beginning.

The eight dancers slowly form a diagonal line across the stage, rising to demi-point as they join hands to arrive en tableau. The opening of the piece says "duets" perhaps too loudly for my taste – with an emphasis on paired relationships and partnering, and more than a passing focus on centre stage. Several sequences are screamingly slow, while others sneak into virtuosity even as you admire the ease of their flow.

But over time, everything relaxes. Solos and group sections flourish in counterpoint, the technique and the dance settle more softly into each other. This is the repertoire of Cunningham's I best enjoy: the play within the smaller things, the trio with linked arms who gallop and jump in parallel around the space like children, without at all becoming childish. I am particularly drawn to Flora Rogeboz, whose timing has both a softness and a surety, and who cannot help but smile as she yet again arrives to make the connection to her partner just so.

It is not an uncommon practice to take sections of Cunningham pieces and make of them something other, the wonderful *Bride and the Batchelor's* exhibition played on a similar theme in London's Barbican, but *Event* succeeds uniquely in being a work, and the works, and the work simultaneously. It is watchable in and of itself; to those in on the joke the individual pieces of repertoire come smiling to the light; the whole reassures you that the project of Cunningham, and Swinston, is out there, alive and well.

The silk panels by Jackie Matisse blow over Anna Chirescu in a delightfully unchoreographed moment of interaction. The dancers fill the space, prehensile feet flicking the floor, grasping it to bounce rhythmically in fourth position, the lights go out... and yet the dance is just beginning?

**"between a place and candy: new works in pattern + repetition + motif."** Is a new exhibition at 1285 Avenue of the Americas, curated by Jason Andrew and organized by [Norte Maar](#). The title comes from a poem by Gertrude Stein, who sought in her prose to "articulate a conscious presence where writing recreates itself anew in each successive moment." ...I must confess that for weeks I have been calling the exhibit "between my brain and candy," so I excited was I by the number of elements in the event description that promised to render the experience absolutely delicious.

I was not disappointed. While individually distinctive, each work deeply explores some facet of pattern, repetition and/or motif, bringing an harmonious sense of curiosity to the collection. Resonant is the impression that pattern is both natural and human, micro and macrocosmic, its investigation fruitful, rich and yet strikingly simple. Mary Judge's *Bacio* takes inspiration from decorative architectural motifs to bring us geometric flowers with the aged patina of stone, while Kerry Law's *Empire State Building Series* draws back and watches a single building over time, using the stability of architectural repetition to track an ever-changing perception of the New York sky.



Many of the pieces have a vibrant kinetic energy, frequently through the play of optical illusion: the simplest of patterns, such as Joan Witek's *Massai* confounding our mind's attempt to render them static and comprehensible. Meanwhile the work that is most conceptually movement-oriented, Julia Gleich's *Combinatorics: a study of infinite or countable discrete structures* becomes a meditative contemplation of atomic space, and the variation in cellular replication: a dancer's feet tracing pathways like electrons around a nucleus, the gesture at once always the same and yet never duplicated.

I was gratified to see textiles emerging as a theme within the selection of works. While obviously generative, practices of knitting, weaving etc have only recently begun to be deemed creative, and their inclusion in several pieces added another layer of repetition to the overall design. Fiber arts, with their cultural link to the feminine, offer a hint of transgression to fine art practices, a challenge to the hierarchy of the traditional gallery; in this exhibition we do not forget that the canvas itself is an act of pattern.

The public opening of "between a place and candy" was bustling, making it hard to get as up-close and personal with some of the works as I'd have liked. My personal favourite, Libby Hartle's *Untitled #21 (Arrow)* requires a close in viewing to truly appreciate the finesse with which graphite shading has been applied to create the concentric diamonds of the collage – I urge the viewer to take the time to find the units of the pattern, and consider them as individuals even as each work is enjoyed as a whole. In my mind the gallery becomes a living dialogue with the artworks: people stepping in and away, moving on to repeat the motif, recreating the experience of the works anew in each moment of changing space, between this place and candy.

Exhibition runs through June 12<sup>th</sup> 2015 at 1285 Avenue of the Americas Art Gallery