

THIS SENTENCE

By Public Fiction at China Art Objects, Los Angeles

Public Fiction curator Lauren Mackler approaches exhibition-making like writing an essay, proposing a central idea and using artworks and event programming to ruminate on it. At China Art Objects, 'This Sentence' unfolded over three months, each of its nine artists joining week-by-week alongside a selection of screenings, performances and conversations acting as historical and contemporary 'citations'. The exhibition's conclusion was an opening of all nine artists' works.

The thesis of this exhibition was speculative: to articulate the space between choreography and language, as seen through the screen. Beginning with a concept as broad as this was to ask her audience to jump through several hoops, risking losing them along the way. However, following its line of thought was worth the effort. Mackler was inspired by two video works that were shown during the first screening: experimental filmmaker John Smith's *Associations* (1975), a wry semiotic pun of a video turning word-to-image linguistics back on itself, and Merce Cunningham's *Points in Space* (1986), a work by the choreographer exploring what the two-dimensional screen could do for dance. Mackler argued that 'language and choreography are alike in their economy, in how they build their fluidity on segue, on "association": the articulation of ideas, through phrases structured to carry unexpected, and yet connected, turns.'

Each week, referred to as a chapter, explored a different angle of this central concept, such as the bodies as sculptures in space, objects and animation, animation as objects, or language and syntax. The exhibition included many video-based works, several sculptures, a few performances and a small number of paintings. The first pieces to be installed room were by Becket Flannery, a series of metal sculptures strewn on the floor including a glove and a cane (*Unfreedom,*

2015). His accompanying essay nearby gave an abstract context for the objects; they were props from the story he tells of a food caterer – yes, a food caterer – on a horse passing through a field. The works set a tone for the exhibition by tying together disparate points through association and repetition.

In a later chapter, Tamara Henderson's sculpture *The Scarecrow's Holiday* (2015) joined the group. It was a hulking mass of taf-feta and fringe, emanating the energy of a moving figure without resembling a body. The same week included a conversation between Mackler and writer Alexander O'Keefe on the iconic dancer and choreographer, Viola Farber, and her early involvement in these conversations on the translation of dance. The screen as a stage became a more explicit idea with the early animation *A Computer Generated Ballet* (1965) by Bell Telephone Laboratories programmer A. Michael Noll, which featured stick figures pirouetting up and down the Pong-like screen.

The first live performance, *Index* (2015) by Emily Mast, came several weeks into the programme. Mast is known for her colour-saturated and humorous choreography using theatrical props that often stay as installation. Here, she presented a series of live vignettes from past performances, frozen tableaux by performers throughout the gallery. Cunningham saw sections of his choreography as phrases, implying building them up into a sentence, articulating an idea. From this came maybe the most interesting aspect of this essayistic style of curating, how Mackler enacted the thesis while proposing it. Putting out parts to piece together, a set of signs building a structure and getting stronger, clearer with each repetition.

The first of Mackler's weekly press releases for the show was in the form of a letter, a set of open-ended speculations. Her sign off: 'Yours in comedy and error.' The hedging was understandable; curating is thinking in public. There is nowhere to hide the rougher edges of the argument. Often a group exhibition is judged on how strictly it fits a particular theme, but here, like her subject, it is not about a tight fit but more of a fluid movement, set of trials or choreography of ideas.

SUMMER GUTHERY

