

DUALITÉ / DUALITÉ

Leisure (Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley)

November 4, 2015 - January 23, 2016

Dualité / Dualité (2015) is a series of collage-based works by Leisure (Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley), produced as the result of a 2014 research residency at Artexte. These works form a new mise-en-scène for the investigation of Françoise Sullivan's choreography *Dualité*. First performed with Jeanne Renaud in 1948 and re-performed many times since, notably at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in 1988, *Dualité* is an intimate portrait of two natures intertwined in one being. Unfolding in a series of parallel gestures for two dancers, the action of *Dualité* is expressed in a space activated between them. *Dualité / Dualité* revisits multiple performances of the original choreography to understand how gestures are translated over time and how ephemeral events are experienced and re-interpreted through documentation. The resulting images forge new links between these performances, highlighting the formal and psychological implications of the mirroring and layering, doubling and repetition found within the original performances and the artists' re-interpretation.

Leisure (Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley) is a conceptual collaborative art practice based in Montreal. Working together under the name "Leisure" since 2004, Carruthers and Wesley engage with socio-historical narratives through conceptual research, conversation, intervention, published texts and exhibition making. Leisure has produced exhibitions and special projects in collaboration with venues in Canada and abroad, and participated in residencies in Banff, Dawson City, Haliburton and Vienna. Their current research on gesture and spatial narrative include *Dualité / Dualité* (2015) and *Conversations with Magic Stones* forthcoming in 2016 at EFA, New York.

ARTEXTE

Leisure (Meredith Carruthers and Susannah Wesley) in conversation with Artexte

Artexte: What role does research play in your practice?

Leisure: Research has always been a fundamental part of our practice. We are interested in many approaches to research – borrowing from a sociological or journalistic approach in gathering information through interviews, or an anthropological approach with site visits and the analysis of primary documents. For us, archives can be the holdings of a museum or library, but can also be our own “collection” of images, books and objects found in our travels or online.

We often explore historical female narratives, frequently associated with the idea of landscape. The cultural narratives we research often come from the margins – they are quite literally sidebars or footnotes, not just because the main characters are women, but because their work/projects/stories are peripheral in other ways, and this is what makes them so fascinating to us: the brevity, innovation, and avant-garde qualities of work that was often behind the scenes, overshadowed, or ignored.

Our choice to begin our research and exhibition-making with a historical reference presents a kind of overlap between our practice and a traditional art historical or curatorial strategy, in terms of an approach to history, to research, to archive and to narrative building. But whereas an art historical perspective seeks to elucidate or illuminate, draw out or verify a lineage, we attempt to inhabit or intervene in historical moments with the aim of transforming or challenging existing norms and canons. For us these distinctions are important.

Artexte: What does collaboration mean to you?

Leisure: Begun in 2004, we have described our practice as “a long conversation.” It is an ongoing collaboration between two like-minded people who find inspiration in unconventional (and at times ultra-conventional) places. Our conversation is full of moments that trail off... A series of unfinished thoughts, parenthetical leaps, intentional holes and open spaces. Our conversation is a slow relay – something that could be called research, but which is primarily a conversation – of leaving and filling in blanks, of searching, responding, selecting, accumulating, shuffling and re-shuffling. Working together for over ten years, collaboration has given us confidence to take creative risks, and on a practical level our process of taking turns has meant that we can follow multiple paths simultaneously, be they personal or professional.

Also, we appreciate collaboration as an ideological, feminist, working methodology. This is reflected in the content we are drawn to: narratives where women are exercising alternative methodological approaches in terms of both creative practice and perspective. Our subjects fashion new relationships with their subject matter and attempt to build radical possibilities beyond accepted forms. Some are inventing new ways of working, seeking collaborative creative thinking and/or interdisciplinary means, others are finding ways to unite child care and creative work, and all are working to articulate a more physically engaged, exploratory, and participatory understanding of the relationship between their life, work, and its content.

Our collaboration, the creative relationship between ourselves and our practice, ultimately becomes a third separate being named 'Leisure.'

Artex: What is the significance of repetition?

Leisure: Our interest for this project is about repetition as a kind of system of return and transformation. For us this relates to an idea of mirroring, or the creation of a third thing or space through multiple reflections. At Artex, we have been investigating the collaboration between Françoise Sullivan and Jeanne Renaud for the choreography *Dualité*. Of particular interest is how this dance has been performed and re-performed over time, and how these performances exist now for us as static images, frozen gestures, with some similarities and many differences – changing dancers, backgrounds, costume, attitude, etc.

As part of the research residency at Artex, we discussed *Dualité* with Françoise Sullivan. She told us about the inspiration for this dance: a dream in which two natures were intertwined within one entity. With her choreography she attempts to perform this state through the interaction of two dancers and most importantly through the space that is activated between them. We were fascinated by both of these aspects of the dance. When viewed over time and through the documentation of multiple performances, the gestures form an even more complex space, perhaps articulating boundaries that have a potential to cross time.

All of this resonates for us in a very personal way in terms of our own practice and way of working. As a collaborative duo we see this action as a metaphor for our own collaboration – as two entities who give up their independent individual authorship in order to gain something else... Our practice itself and the

work that results from it are our shared entity. Our work together exists in between us, it comes from us, but is different than both of us. At times we have referred to our work as a place that we can go, or as a shared leap of imagination or intuition. Our process and practice mirror, they draw apart and then return.

Artex: How did you first learn about Françoise Sullivan's choreography *Dualité*?

Leisure: Several years ago we discovered Patricia Smart's book *Les femmes du Refus global* (1998). There are many important narratives within that text, but the performances that took place while the artists were on a retreat in the countryside proved particularly interesting to us. That led us to look further into the work of Françoise Sullivan and Jeanne Renaud and the relationship between dance and performance art within the era of the Refus Global. Several of the documentary images in circulation from Sullivan and Renaud's performance at Maison Ross in 1948 are of the dance *Dualité*. We appreciated the lines and tension articulated between the two dancers within the choreography, and the title "Dualité" as connoting a relationship or parallel between two beings. The choreography also seemed to fit into a larger project we are working on, exploring mid-century female artists/designers' approach to their practice, and in particular looking at the importance of "choreography" or gesture in developing agency. From these points of interest, we began our research residency at Artex.