

Laura Paolini
MFA Thesis Work, 2021
Title: *Footage*
Length: approximately 24 minutes
Artist Statement

The title of the work straddles two meanings. Footage can mean a “film or videotape that shows a single event or place.” Footage also refers to how the size of rooms and buildings are measured, i.e., square footage. Scales of distance and time are conflated in this work through the melting of ice and the shifting of my body, in addition to the empirical measurement of time offered by the clock.

My work operates in a tradition of body-based endurance art. Much performance work from the 1960s - 70s has a reputation that proceeds it with an explicit, sensual, and violent execution. However, the planned affliction, the strategic, surgical cut, is often regarded as more painful than what is perceived as more banal: The hours of sitting, the miles of walking, the conditioning of a body through habit and space.

For example, in the work *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)* 1967–68, Bruce Nauman performs a series of movements that blend aesthetic and functional gestures (dance and exercise) around a square shape made from tape on the floor of his studio. A metronome keeps time and as he follows through on the actions, there are missteps, errors, and fatigue sets in. According to Ruth Burgon, “The artist reveals that the production of an object, however immaterial, always also produces a trained body...Nauman trains himself as the output of his own artistic experiments.”¹

This example above contextualizes further that my piece is an endurance performance, a video, and a site-specific response to a locale, all mediated through my body and subsequent recordings. The visceral impact of historical works, whether they involve direct bodily harm or not, is typically experienced after the fact and therefore negated through documentation. While I am doing this work, and including all the tasks needed for its creation, I recognize the physical and temporal distance between seeing the piece on screen and the sensations that are experienced in real time.

All my works have a performative element – and video is a tool I employ to mediate how that is understood. *Three Weeks in Quarantine* (2020) and *It's Like Talking To A Wall* (2021) use video to investigate the connections between systems, objects, and subjectivities. The presence of my body in these pieces oscillates between absent and seen, pointing to where I find myself within a space and with the objects at hand. The objects in *Footage* are placed in proximity, and their uses overlap to create the work. This methodology follows my practice of using objects, coordinated with the body, to create scales. I have also made installations using objects that trace the presence of my body, such as in *Sitting In A Chair* (2019) and *Documentation Study (Make Your Bed)* (2020). Both these works involve an object becoming the centre of a performative action.

As *Footage* progresses, the ambient sounds from the hallway, people walking, doors opening, etc., permeate through the speaker into my setting. The telephone room, curiously named, beeps at a consistent rhythm and frequency. This sound may also remind the viewer of a more clinical setting, such as the heart or oxygen monitor used in a hospital. The beep permeates my video at regular intervals, acting as another measurement of time passing in addition to the clock ticking and the ice melting beneath me.

¹ Ruth Burgon “Pacing the Cell: Walking and Productivity in The Work of Bruce Nauman” Tate Papers. No.26 Autumn 2016. Accessed July 10, 2021.