

Laura Paolini

Title: Make your Bed, 2020

Longer text on the content of the work

Make your Bed (2020) is a performance work that occurred October 21 2020 in the University of Ottawa's student gallery, Gallery 115. I had access to that space in order to accommodate studio visits while structural renovations were happening in my own studio.

This work's trajectory is linear, but not in the format of the hero's journey or monomyth. This piece aims to pursue a type of alchemy and create communion, broadly defined as "shared participation in a mental or spiritual experience."¹ The audience plays a vital role between bystanders (to borrow Fraser Ward's term²) and the recipient, accomplice and enablers. While I do much of the actions on my own or to myself, the fourth wall is destabilized when I ask for the kettles and when I enter the back room. This gesture is not theatrical, as it is needed to actualize the work.

Authenticity is often a given conceit in performance art; it separates the artist from an actor and mediates between the real and contrived. The gallery space reinforces that, as a site where 'finished' works are presented. The tradition of physically demanding performance art is found here, and other works that pursue a totality aiming towards the sublime. My actions can be understood in the performance art tradition, while they also connote images of firewalking or other feats of strength, meant to create transcendence and use the body as a conduit to overcome obstacles and fears. These acts are traditionally performed as a group for community building, but in new age spiritualism, it is an individual challenge to overcome personal failings.

Transitioning to the gallery's storage room serves to undermine the integrity of the main space, while still employing some gallery conventions. The storage room is colder than the gallery space. Opening the door allows the draft to come through, and in this attempted alchemy the viewer notes the temperature shift. The shift solidifies as the performance continues into the rear room; it IS colder. That shift offers some sense of how my own body is registering

¹ Oxford English Dictionary definition of Communion, retrieved from <https://www.lexico.com/definition/communion>

² Ward, Fraser. No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2012

temperature; transitioning from cerebral to physical, while contending with them both.

With that said, the storage room supports and maintains the gallery space, so and we have not left its shadow. The titling convention on the dividing wall brings some of that baggage into the back room. It changes and possibly confuses what is happening; shifts any metaphors that might have started to form. The text *THE FLOOR IS LAVA* evokes a childhood game where you must transverse a space without touching the floor. There is historical research suggesting this game emerged with the modelling of living rooms in family homes.³ There is an ontological confusion here because while the floor may be lava, I am technically not on the floor, but another hot surface.

The performance thus far can be understood as forces meeting and deterritorialization occurring through the dialectic between the two spaces. “One recognizes a great artist not by the violence with which he destroys and opens up existing structures, but by the care he gives to structuring what has been deterritorialized.”⁴ This quotes reviews Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that art requires both forces in its creation of a place in the world. The dynamics of the work change with the addition of the mirror ball and the song *Walking on the Moon* by the Police. The shadow of the disco ball on the wall suggests more dreamlike imagery and returning to a more playful ambience to end the work; perhaps that is the moon. While the song continues to play, I walk out of the storage room following the hot water bottle path back to the bench. In the most recent performance, I put an ice pack on my feet briefly before putting my socks and shoes back on. This gesture intends to address the echoes of endurance in the work, confirm the struggle was authentic, and provide a momentary reprieve.

³ Hwang, Tim, On the Architecture of the Folk Game: The Case of 'The Floor is Lava' (February 12, 2018). <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3122458>

⁴ Wambacq, J., van Tuinen, S. Interiority in Sloterdijk and Deleuze. *Palgrave Commun* 3, 17072 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.7>