

SELECTED PRESS

Kelly Rauer
Shaping Sequence

6 August - 19 September 2010

“Kelly Rauer @ New American Art Union: the body electric, unplugged.”

**by Richard Speer
The Willamette Week
August 11, 2010**

It may have been the quietest First Friday opening ever: hushed gallery-goers huddled in a darkened room, watching Kelly Rauer’s high-definition video installation, *Shaping Sequence*. The piece had no soundtrack, and there was hardly a cough or whisper to be heard in the audience—which is exactly the way Rauer must have wanted it. Her work has always been quietly subversive, and it almost always concerns the human body. Recall her deflating balloons at Beppu Wiarda in 2008, a deceptively simple piece that flirted with gender and sexuality. In a 2009 video installation at Milepost Five, she methodically swallowed a line of sewing thread, which spelled out the word “Aggression.”

Now Rauer unveils *Shaping Sequence*, a video installation in which she bares both her body and conceptual agenda. For this 20-minute piece, she videotaped isolated quadrants of herself in unforgiving close-up, while she moved in excruciatingly slow, yogalike poses. The images, which are in color, are projected onto the gallery wall in shifting configurations of between two and six frames: swatches of skin and shadow, wrinkles and hair, sweat, veins, moles, freckles, tube-sock indentations, and goose pimples. She avoided showing any overtly sexual flesh, explaining that she was hyper-aware of what the frame contained, did not contain, and came oh-so-very-close to containing but not quite. This was her way of testing her own physical and psychological comfort while engaging the purity or prurience of the viewer’s expectations.

Some viewers thought the piece dragged on too long, while others embraced its minimalism. My own reactions butted up against one another. I thought the piece would have looked better in black-and-white, but then realized that the nuances of the body’s pigmentation would have been lost. I thought the video would have looked more polished if it had been processed into slo-mo, yet the jerky irregularity of Rauer’s movements are exactly what telegraphed the work’s performative, endurance-test rigor. I wished the piece had reached in more radical directions in positing the body as a transgressive vehicle, but Rauer is not Yoko Ono or Marina Abramovic, nor should she strive to be. Ultimately, her *Shaping Sequence* is about accepting, not smoothing over, the tragicomic topographies that hold us in.

“Kelly Rauer’s Shaping Sequence at NAAU.”

**by Jeff Jahn
PORT - www.portlandart.net
August 17, 2010**

“There is a point where in the mystery of existence contradictions meet; where movement is not all movement and stillness is not all stillness; where the idea and the form, the within and the without, are united; where infinite becomes finite, yet not” - Rabindranath Tagore (Nobel Prize for literature 1913)

Consisting of numerous videos of isolated slow moving body parts Kelly Rauer’s *Shaping Sequence* at NAAU is a fleshy tribute to Kandinsky’s compositional technique of having convexities answering concavities. It’s even more obviously related to Georgia O’Keeffe, another Kandinskyite. Even more related is the work of O’Keeffe’s husband, Alfred Steiglitz, whose incredibly loaded photos of O’Keeffe’s hands set up a dialogical art historical conversation between both photography and video art here. In fact *Shaping Sequence* acts quite a bit more like an installation of photographs rather than a single video piece or a dance performance.

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Still it lacks the drama of Stieglitz or Mapplethorpe and maybe it's more in the droll ilk of Fischli and Weiss's *Busi (Kitty) lapping up milk?*

Still, Rauer's piece is essentially deconstructed choreography though without the otherworldly polish of a strong professional dancer. Instead (because it utilizes only the artist) its effect is more informal and familiar, like a sun filled Sunday morning in bed with a lover or perhaps a mother nursing a child. Also, instead of the often dehumanizing effect of deconstruction it has the interesting effect of multiplying the humanistic inferences. On a technical level It doesn't have Martha Graham's focus on contraction and release either, so it doesn't have the tension of modern dance. This can put some viewers off who have been groomed for entertainment and shaping sequence is a lot more like observing sand dunes than a performance.

The fact that it's more akin to landscape photography also underscores the well tamed technical component of the piece. The 3 channel video piece is streaming uncompressed video off of hard drives rather than the digital artifact laden compromise of using inferior DVD's as a playback material. This is very important since the large areas of negative space here would look like they were infested with blurry digital maggots if a DVD were used. The fact that Rauer has done something technically demanding without calling much attention to the fact is a testament to the exhibition. It's what I expect from any video installation artist, never let the geeky technology component override the heuristic experience.

The work is most reminiscent of Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead: Real Time*, which featured the fleshy expanse of a slow moving Indian Elephant... though *Shaping Sequence* lacks his wit, technical command and kinesthetic mastery. There is room for Rauer to grow still and Gordon is at the forefront.

That critique withstanding, *Shaping Sequence* is one of the strongest solo shows up this month of uninspired group shows. Still, I wonder how Rauer can further develop these ideas without resorting to gimmicks or using professional dancers, which would obliterate some of *Shaping Sequence's* charm? Then again watching an artist develop is half the process by which they are measured.

In this case *Shaping Sequence* is a break out show for Kelly Rauer, who in the past merely showed promise. For example, last year's installation at Manor of Art tacked on additional installation elements that hamstrung the whole effect of the otherwise competent if somewhat academic video piece. It's was a BFA level mistake but suddenly Rauer isn't making them anymore. In fact *Shaping Sequence* is a solid, even inspired show by anyone's standards with a quiet hard won maturity you don't see from recent MFA grads either.

In short *Shaping Sequence* doesn't look so "art school" like it once did... the question is, can she find a more original angle to continue the momentum of this show?

"Myth of Olympia: Kelly Rauer's *Shaping Sequence* at NAAU."

by Victor Maldonado

ULTRA - www.ultrapdx.com

September 12, 2010

Great work emerges from the problems that confront and confound us as individuals and as a society. It's a rich quandary when the artists' own human body is at the center of inquiry as is the case for Kelly Rauer's first solo exhibition at New American Art Union, *Shaping Sequence*, through September 19.

The female figure is not a new subject for works of art. It's one of its most enduring motifs from Venus figurines dating back 25,000 years, Renaissance Sibyls, and Modern Olympias to simulated film still self-portraiture of Cindy Sherman' as in "Untitled" (1993). In the 21st Century, the feminine figure abounds in any kind of media, making the human body just another mutable ready-made.

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The body as ready-made is also not new and very much at play in Marina Ambromovic's recent performance "The Artist is Present" (2010) at her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art the artist self-presents at scale, seated at a table across from the viewer. By contrast, in Rauer's "Shaping Sequence," the artist self-represents larger than life as a multiple channel video projection—complex, exposed and at a distance. Any passing glance, psychic exchange or intentional embrace possible in Ambromovic's, intensely public, hot-blooded performance in Rauer's is cold in its electric screening, completely unavailable, images of skin slipping as they do into a dehumanizing abstraction or order. Why has Rauer crafted "Shaping Sequence" (2010) as such an exotically stretchable mass of flesh?

"Shaping Sequence" picks and chooses from eight months of staged footage—close up and cropped—of Rauer's skin gleaming with Vermeer-like natural light basking in from windows just off camera. Features multiple picture planes synced in an engrossing, surreal installation elegantly evoke nature's multiple perspective where form slips structure while transgressing the familiar confines of the female figure in art. These formally recombinant windows reveal and obscure de-contextualized physical examination seemingly intent on discovery and deconstruction through repetition. As if protecting the tenuous subject by distracting our over-stimulated eyesight with a very slow dance, "Shaping Sequence" creates a fractured enclosure for a giant reminiscent of Damien Hirst's embalmed shark "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living" (1992).

Broken up permutations of rectangles, harvested and stacked, hover together in silent violence. Departing greatly from Manet's once shocking "Olympia" (1863) with video Rauer paints an altogether different kind of composition, or at least, the myth of the artist's own exposed body begins to hazard. Aesthetically appealing balances of negative and positive space, flesh, wall and light stretch out on every surface fading handsomely into black. Whoever it is filling the breathing picture planes, Rauer is defiantly trying not to repeat herself, in this case forcing her language and text-based practice into a "dirty yoga" as Dan Cameron coined the term to describe the interdisciplinary, free abstraction and appropriation he witnessed first hand as curator for the Eighth Istanbul Biennial (during his last lecture at the Portland Art Museum back in 2007).

As was evident in the language-based, critique of science and gender politics of Rauer's single-channel video "Aggressive" (2009), that she showed using a monitor installed in the middle of an empty suite at the Manor of Art last year at Milepost 5, she focused on and made exclusive use of her resting head in profile. In "Aggressive" we witnessed pink string emerging from Rauer's mouth "spelling it out for us" in silent exhortation.

"Shaping Sequence" tracks Rauer's self-aware body language, deploying her figure study as the means by which to question and analyze her body of work—a creative self-exam reinforcing the piece's inner dialog between scenes of destruction and re-enforcement. Rauer's editing is effective when it capitalizes on the desire for spectacle and the speculation of a strip tease.

For all of the extreme close-ups and panning disfigurements in "Shaping Sequence" (nothing a celebrity would ever allow for release) it never includes discernible cracks, crevices or obtrusions. No gender specific organs make passing cameos, no faces, either. We are left to witness the extraordinary portrayal of torso, arm and thigh matter Rauer's stream-of-consciousness re-animates.

Rauer's monumentally scaled salon of flesh conceptually recalls Byron Kim's, "Synecdoche" (1991), a skin-toned grid of paintings, of the shade and variance that human flesh carries. Appendage and expanse of skin each acclimatize to it's micro-climate—farmer tanned arms, sock-indented ankles, goose-bumped back, erect hairs on the nape of neck, constellations of moles. For Kym, as for Rauer, each of the alternatives represents the whole (of which multiple version may exist) relaying the diversity inherent even within one's own notion of skin color. This provokes consideration of the inaccuracies inherent in the genetic stew from which humankind emerges that sometimes flies in the face of hard and fast considerations of ethnic borders and racial profiling. Rauer represents the human body not as monochrome but rather as a rich collage adapting and responding to an occasionally abrupt and catastrophic existence.

Where Kim's "Synecdoche" is a variable series of traditional easel paintings, rigid on the wall, Rauer's pulsating intervals of video footage are fluid and just as well layered and juxtaposed in her masterful handling of light spanning the duration of multiple seasons—it's all about color balance. Along the way magnified crumbs of humanness expand and visually recall Walker Evans' photographs free of frame and glass enclosure, shuddering and shivering.

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Transitioning away from pure spectacle “Shaping Sequence” transmits images of a living autopsy and delivers video as a kind of latter-day art of taxidermy. Distorting the bounds of time and space by working outside the relative traditions and laws of nature. In “Shaping Sequence” there are no heads or tails to the story and we are free to walk in, sit down, recline or leave as we please. Unencumbered and un-obliged to sit through anything at all, the choice is ours, and by extension, the burden to negotiate an active relationship in engaging complex existence.

As an exhibit Shaping Sequence derives from, but is not tied to, familiar notions of time—epic in its monstrous sensibilities, a body of knowledge obsessed with choices. Starring into the light, focused on the wall, blind to the periphery of a darkened context, Rauer’s subject is an anatomy lesson on the ironic power and decentralized autonomy of the artist. Self-revelation, relative and morphing amidst dissonance and symbiosis, is the work of art.

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