

Sonia Boyce, *We move in her way*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, U.K.

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Sonia Boyce
We move in her way, 2017.
 Photos : George Torode

Sonia Boyce

We move in her way

Within two rooms—the walls of which have been papered floor to ceiling with dark, enigmatic, kaleidoscopic images of bodies and limbs and crimson-coloured fabrics—a group of women move together in a different room. Five women, to be precise, in one room, here in these two rooms, across seven screens, each a different vantage point, playback sequence, angle, lighting, focus, close-up, pull-back. Moving images are inverted and placed next to each other so that they seem to reflect and telescope, to accordion through space like the images densely packed across the surrounding walls.

These women move, they move together and apart, they move in their own ways, in each others' ways, in ways familiar and unrecognizable. It is difficult to apprehend where motion begins and ends, who started the sequence and who follows, who is in thrall to whom, who is impeded and who facilitates. And, most critically perhaps, who holds the power to initiate movement, to make others move, to make us, as viewers, feel the movement and long to be involved, to move ourselves, in her way, which is my way, your way, every way. One woman trills and stutters, sings, squeaks, squeals, pauses with her mouth and ideas stretched wide; two women in skin-tight silver one-pieces crawl across the floor toward each other, circle like prey, hold each other, breathe and gasp and shudder in unison, slither quickly away; behind them, another woman rests on her haunches as audience members wearing masks are invited to physically engage with the dancers, to manipulate simple props that recall hand-crafted talismans or charms, each with dangling ribbons of pink and orange.

This is Sonia Boyce's *We move in her way*, a multimedia installation created from the documentation of an open-ended performance that took place in the theatre space of the Institute of Contemporary Arts. If it sounds confusing at first, that's because it is. The viewer must surrender to the

framework of the exhibition and its purported constituting elements: collaborative improvisation, play and playfulness, participatory dynamics, and the use of live action in conjunction with inert objects destabilize movement, space, time, the body, and exchanges of power both mutual and inferred.

Boyce's art practice is often participatory, and she draws on a wide range of collaborators who contribute to an expanded field of materials that includes play, chance, and unspoken emotional and physical reciprocities. Although her approach is clear and poignant in its scrutiny of human behaviour, with a particularly keen focus on gender and race, it also feels laboured at times, unnecessarily weighted by art-historical references that might be enigmatic to most viewers. Thus, these unspoken frissons, so powerfully present when live, lose some of their essential magic in cumbersome reproduction.

Emily LaBarge

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