

## Bodily Response, Mountain Standard Time Performative Art, Calgary

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### Alfred Marasigan

↖ *The Ballad of Plastic Bags*, in collaboration with Yuji de Torres, video stills, Manila, Philippines, 2020.

Photos : courtesy of the artist & M:ST Performative Art, Calgary

## Bodily Response

After a fleeting glance at a person holding a camera towards themselves, the perspective is inverted, looking outwards at a parking lot in the Philippines. In those few instants, the initial glimpse of Alfred Marasigan's performance *The Ballad of Plastic Bags*, our focus is drawn towards the lens that allows us to share moments instantaneously across the globe. Sitting at my computer in my wool socks, peeking through the viewfinder at a distant and warm place, I am struck by the momentary presence of a body manipulating the lens. What follows is a slow and jittery handheld dance of the artist inching across a parking lot to behold the random trajectory of two plastic bags in the wind. As the heat and humidity of the setting sun radiate off of the pavement, the sounds of whizzing diesel vehicles and a nearby rooster echo across the vacant lot. A majority of the action is offscreen and only heard, until the ominous figure of a helmeted motorcyclist comes into view. Spewing blue exhaust, the vehicle emits asphyxiating toxic fumes evoking the worldwide health crisis, as well as a recent volcanic eruption in Southern Luzon. The spectre of the faceless rider looms in the background. After following the flow of the two plastic bags for thirty minutes, the initial stumble of the camera operator revealing themselves still lingers. Colouring the entire event, it reminds me that we are bound by a web of screens and cameras—looking *into* the eye of technology as a means of looking *out*.

*Bodily Response* was initiated by Mountain Standard Time Performative Art (M:ST) in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts community. A series of live streamed performative actions presented over the course of two months, the event evolved alongside the spread of the novel virus. As unease and uncertainty gradually infiltrated our lives, M:ST provided a window onto our different yet shared realities. The Calgary-based performance art biennial allocated financial and technical resources to local and global

artists, including an online platform, presentation fee, and viewing community. This contrasted with isolationist and austerity measures enacted by various local, provincial, and federal governments. As Canada and other nations rehearsed a familiar biopolitical stance, securing the infrastructural safety of the wealthiest and most privileged, while stranding Black, Brown, Indigenous, and elderly communities, M:ST offered an unfiltered, unedited virtual space for actions of different kinds. As an alternative to the meaning-seeking media frenzy of performative daily briefings by elected officials, *Bodily Response* was an open and experimental environment for creators to hold space.

Part of the series' appeal rested in the intimacy of each artist live streaming from the locations of their confinement. "Sheltering in place" manifested itself differently across the works: from a cow farm in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand, in Jood Jung's *Cokhwid-20*, to Julianne Chapple's Vancouver apartment in *Women Appear (and sometimes they learn how to disappear)*. While Jung's piece created a dynamic experience as she covered extensive ground, moving from one task to another in an open air, rural landscape, Chapple's interior drama pushed back the confines of her apartment by focusing on its details, diving deep into every nook and cranny with her body. Jung's visual compositions were especially rich, most notably as she stood in the middle of a populated cow pen holding a bright orange canister on her head, with mountains in the background. Chapple's interior scenes were more enclosed, but the warmth of lamps and the soft glow of daylight through sheer curtains set a languid atmosphere. In both performances, the artists were followed with a freehand camera, generating a feeling of impromptu and unstructured exploration. A sense of being trapped and a desire to transform and transgress the insular rituals of everyday life were ever present in both works. The insertion of the performing,



ambling body in a quotidian space and the distortion of functional tasks broke with the monotony of confinement.

As the series stretched on, it also overlapped with the killings of twenty-two people in rural Nova Scotia by a man disguised as an RCMP officer. The trauma of the largest shooting in Canada's modern history was compounded by the inability for gathering and mourning the sudden loss of life because of physical distancing measures. Carrie Allison's performance *Kiskisohcikew* (*they make things to make people remember*) addressed this inability to hold proper grieving rites during the pandemic. Allison engaged in beadwork at a worktable in her home office while repeating after a pre-recorded Cree prayer twenty-three times. The artist explained that the twenty-third recitation was in honour of Brady Francis, a Mi'kmaq man who was recently a victim of a hit-and-run. Over time, the repetitive cadence of her voice in addition to the rhythmic threading of tiny white beads created a contemplative state. The busy manual labour became a focal point, overshadowing the colourful sunset through the rear window. The juxtaposition of the Nova Scotia tragedy, a prominently televised and bereaved national event, and the continued colonial disregard for the loss of Indigenous life at the hands of state, police, religious, and other forms of violence, felt especially poignant.

The ten video-performances that make up *Bodily Response* are still available for viewing on the M:ST website, and now stand in as time capsules. Peering into moments of collective uncertainty facing artists and cultural workers, the repository bears witness to this crisis by uniquely deploying the cameras and screens that link us to each other from a distance.

**Didier Morelli**

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### **Mountain Standard Time Performative Art, Calgary** April 1–May 14, 2020

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#### **Carrie Allison**

↖ (top left) *Kiskisohcikew* (*they make things to make people remember*), video still, Halifax, 2020.

Photo : courtesy of the artist & M:ST Performative Art, Calgary

#### **Julianne Chapple**

↑ (top right) *Women Appear* (*and sometimes they learn how to disappear*), video still, Vancouver, 2020.

Photo : courtesy of the artist & M:ST Performative Art, Calgary

#### **Jood Jung**

↑ (bottom left and right) *Cokhwid-20*, video stills, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020.

Photos : courtesy of the artist & M:ST Performative Art, Calgary