

ART & DESIGN

Review: Lili Reynaud-Dewar Summons Walt Whitman in Brooklyn

By ROBERTA SMITH FEB. 25, 2016

Lili Reynaud-Dewar dancing is an amazing sight to see. Trim, androgynous and in the buff, this enormously talented French artist makes videos that show her improvising, alone, lost in private fantasies in empty public spaces. Almost always on her toes, she leaps and prances, evoking a good swath of modern dance or movement: Isadora Duncan, Nijinsky's faun, Josephine Baker, George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham, but also folk dance, yoga and colloquial gestures.

Following her 2014 lobby show at the New Museum, Ms. Reynaud-Dewar's first commercial gallery exhibition in New York, "I Sing the Body Electric," is titled after Walt Whitman's passionate poem, here used as an ode to New York's unfettering energy. The dominant works are two projected videos in which she returns to the site of last year's Venice Biennale, where she exhibited a video installation that focused on a debate about safe sex. Now she dances through the Biennale's cavernous central exhibition spaces, where the show was staged. Labels are still on the walls; the red-painted stage from which Marx's "Das Kapital" was read aloud is intact.

Ms. Reynaud-Dewar's body is a deep red-orange, too, like a Matisse dancer. She sometimes pauses for a cigarette or to check her phone while pacing about.

Then she's off again, dancing past dissembled walls, shipping crates and trash bins.

Two other installations feature large sections of red carpet strewn with silk scarves that are printed with stills of her dancing or with excerpts from Whitman's ode. In a third installation, a recording of Ms. Reynaud-Dewar reciting the poem blasts from four speakers, which are covered with bright felt and festooned with scarves and potted plants, like sentinels. These other works don't equal the exhilarating videos, yet they reiterate, localize and put into words the complex implications of Ms. Reynaud-Dewar's dancing — which itself demonstrates not only the freedom and vulnerability but also the precision essential to originality.

Lili Reynaud-Dewar

'I Sing the Body Electric'

Clearing

396 Johnson Avenue

Bushwick, Brooklyn

Through March 6

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