

Rosenmeyer, Aoife; Art In America, February 2013

"What a century of hands!-I shall never have my hand. After-wards domesticity leads too far" was the cryptic title of this solo show by Lili Reynaud-Dewar (b. 1975), a French artist whose work in performance, sculpture and the moving image has often touched on historical figures and performers. Five column-shaped loudspeakers occupied the gallery; propped against each was a plaster cast of a human leg from about the knee down or, in one instance, just a foot. Three flat-screen monitors around the periphery of the room showed Reynaud-Dewar, naked and in black body paint, dancing in the same space at Karma Inter-national in the manner of Josephine Baker, the videos constituting the first works in which Reynaud-Dewar has herself performed. Previously silent, the speakers suddenly began emitting a beat track, after which the artist's voice emerged, providing a first-person meditation on the work. Her voice quickly multiplied, becoming entangled with two additional tracks in which she offered similar musings. The mesmeric quality of the sound was intensified by linguistic repetitions, the visitor hearing, for instance, that Reynaud-Dewar had performed the dance in her studio "hot summer night after hot summer night."

Reynaud-Dewar's anachronistic dance made for uncomfortable viewing, conjuring the dubious history of blackface and an age when the idea of exotic Africa was a treasure trove for European artists. In a 2010 interview in *Art Press*, she expressed interest in dissident forms of entertainment, or those that oppose "what the dominant industrial logic establishes as a model." Baker is only the latest person to be cited in her work, after Sun Ra, Ettore Sottsass, Peter Saville, Peter Berlin and others. Nonetheless, at Karma International she revealed herself, both bodily and intellectually, more than she had done before. Some of her concerns were stated in the piece, including the way in which curators and directors of art institutions serve as landlords doling out privately owned space; or the issues of inserting her own body into the economy of art production and providing "abstract bits" of herself for public consumption.

Reynaud-Dewar is too thoughtful to take risks without calculation, and, indeed, her risks here paid off, for the installation was rewardingly provocative. The cross-contamination of cultural tropes-with historical trends of exoticism mixing with contemporary modes of personal revelation-proved productive, and the artist's own disquiet was affecting. The viewer was not confronted by this work but made party to an uneasy reflection on culture past and present.