



Alex Martinis Roe
Studio 12 / Emerging Writers Program
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Alex Martinis Roe
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Languages of Movement: The Female Body in Studio 12

Olivia Poloni



*The perceived solidity of architecture will be made vulnerable, and its instrumental role in the production of physical boundaries will be explored. This exploration delves into the gendered modes in which such boundaries are produced.*¹

Alex Martinis Roe's practice is both gestural and conceptual. She provides a complex feminist critique of the social and political body, breaking down fixed ideas of the female body through examining languages of movement and gesture and their connection to space. The body becomes her tool which she uses to question physical and psychological identity. Engaging with the tradition of artists such as Austrian video artist Valie Export Martinis Roe utilises the camera in conjunction with live performance, and her body to explore preconceived ideas of the feminine.

In recent exhibitions Martinis Roe has explored the social and political body through the 'language of movement that is drawn upon in the formation of subjectivity'.² Her exhibition *Alex Through the Looking Glass* at Seventh Gallery (2005) consisted of elements that were: 'held together by a hypnotic tango of tapping and mumbling'.³ The title work was a projection on paper that featured the artist tapping her nails against a

1 Artist's Statement (15 January, 2007)

2 ibid.

3 Tamsin Green, 'Alex Martinis Roe', *UN Magazine*, Issue 6, p.33

mirror. Her nails, painted with white polish, hammered away obsessively and painfully as the white polish was chipped away. This neurotic action had a self-punishing quality, and the mounting tension was intended to demonstrate 'the masochism necessary in maintaining one's beautiful façade,' a protest against imposed ideas of femininity.⁴ As part of this exhibition, Martinis Roe included a double video projection in which she looked at her own reflection, and occasionally the audience, whilst seductively whispering indistinct words. The juxtaposition of Martinis Roe's physical presence with the awkward murmur created a sense of unease.

In her new video installation at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, *Sticky Dimensions*, Martinis Roe continues her interest in the female body and feminine language. Flaunting her sexuality, the performer challenges traditional gendered viewing practices, and imbues her body with a sense of discomfort. She creates an illusion that the gallery space has doubled in size - extending beyond Studio 12's normal dimensions. A video projection displays the artist walking around the walls of the space, her movement impeded by the apparent adherence of her hands and feet to the walls and floor. The work creates a rhythmic resistance through the regular, repetitious creaking of the artist's feet on the floor-boards, and the bonding of her hands to the walls. Martinis Roe explains this as: 'the distinction between the gallery's physical autonomy and the existence of gendered subjectivity via a

4 ibid, p.33

direct struggle between my body and its surfaces'.⁵ She views this struggle, together with the expansion of the space, as a complication of boundaries between the female body and architecture. Her bodily attachment to the physical boundaries of the gallery presents the performance artist as a kind of *objet d'art*.

Martinis Roe explores the female body through action and sound. She creates a feminist gaze by seducing the viewer with movement, and then counters this with restless sounds and unsettling architectural environments. The result is a disjunction between desire and discomfort that disrupts the viewer's voyeuristic pleasure.

Olivia Poloni
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Image Credit: Front Cover: *Taking Advantage*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, 2006, video projection onto column and plinth, image courtesy of the artist. Top Left: *Taking Advantage* (installation view), Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, 2006, video projection onto column, image courtesy of the artist. Top Right: Alex Martinis Roe and Amy Miller, *The Drawing Room* (installation view), Linden St Kilda Centre for Contemporary Arts, 2006, video projection onto paper screen, image courtesy of the artists.

5 op. cit., Artist's Statement

