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Janine Antoni in conversation with Abigail Levine

Artist Janine Antoni speaks of her recent engagement with dance and with performance documentation. In 2012 she danced in Merce Cunningham's and Anna Halprin's dances. Antoni describes herself as new to dance, although her artistic practice has always centered on the body. Movement improvisation, she says, serves as an accelerator of her artistic processes, and she continues, "dance is very beneficial to a state of presence and creativity that has usually had to exist in prison or meditation." Antoni's performance documentation, which she calls "photo-dances," recent works a practical dialogue between bodies and objects and, by extension, between dance, sculpture and other visual art forms. Her works, as well as her discussion of them, interweave with personal stories and lessons in yoga and conversations about the intersections of these forms and disciplinary categories.

Abigail Levine, Editor at Large

Janine Antoni: So, when I was going around offering my studio, I ran into Anna [illegible] at a performance. I didn't know who she was but learned quickly she was a legendary dancer. I was very interested in her work and her life and was immediately curious. I rarely asked for I don't like wasted space to remain. She called me the next day and said, I want to come to your studio and see dance material.

Before her arrival, I made a Power Point on my work seen through the lens of the dance. I talked about the dust with the artist, the dust with my mother, and the dust with myself. After my presentation she turned to her dancers and said, "do you see what dust? And I didn't know what to do about it." Anna, meaning Anna Halprin, was exactly what she would do: she's pulling her sources from everywhere.

Then Annie [illegible] and I launched into a conversation about our husbands being artists and our relationships with our husbands being artists and what it is like to talk about those incisive lives, they had created together (and sometimes destroy). I showed them, I went for a walk with my husband (the artist) Paul Rasmussen [illegible] [illegible], and I said, look at facebook, look at this incredible relationship. I feel were twenty five years of my work performed in five minutes of dance.

Abigail Levine: This was in what year?

JN: This was in 2010. And we said, That's a phenomenal idea.' I said, 'really?' I was actually about to apply for the Guggenheim Fellowship and a Creative Capital Grant and this was the idea I had to find five choreographers and ask them to create a piece for me. I had never danced in my life, but I had the idea that it was a retrospective. It would dance my life and I would show that in a video that curators have been presenting to me. Frankly I'm completely terrified of looking backwards in that way. But a dance retrospective would be a new piece. I put forward while looking back. I'd met Jill Zbigniewicz at a workshop I'd taught in Massachusetts and I said, 'Jill, I want to do this, I want to do a dance based on my sculpture. And I said, let's make a deal. I'll teach you what I know about sculpture if you teach me about dance. And she said, sis and she started to do things with me that became a piece. But when she said to me was, I'd have to dance with you, if I ask to do it you. I had no idea what she was talking about 'no' she'd. Actually I was terrified to be in the piece.

JN: Welcome to being a dancer.

JN: I know... I said you can do it with me. Or we can do it together, but what does this on thing mean? That incredibly powerful basically generated the whole piece. I'd never been in a dance piece before in my life. I'd never danced. I'd never had a father who worked directly with the contact improv. I'd had a lot of exercises to understand the feeling that I had while making the work. I wasn't sure exactly what I had to do with the work itself but that was part of the journey. I had to remain open to the way she was working even though I didn't know what was happening. I had to remain open to what it is to different than how I was used to communicating through my work.

AL: Yes, explicit positioning of a work in relation to another is more present in visual art history than dance.

Janine Antoni, Coming Down, from The Cube Lazarus Kist, performed by the Stephen Petronio Company. (Performance documentation, 2012). Belligerator artwatcher: polyurethane resin. Dimensions variable.

JN: Also, our relationship to language as makers, and thinking before acting—all of that is very important to me. I'm very, very, very,