

Measuring the city with the body

THE PHYSICS ROOM

A CONTEMPORARY ART PROJECT SPACE



Measuring the city with the body

An itinerant Physics Room project

Curated by Stephen Cleland

26 August - 23 September, 2011

ST PAUL St Gallery is pleased to welcome an exhibition curated by Stephen Cleland, Director of The Physics Room in Christchurch. The show presents a collection of works exploring radical and poetic provocations for activating public space and includes New Zealanders Daniel Malone and Yuk King Tan alongside a strong international contingent including Francis Alys, Pak Sheung-Chuen, Junebum Park and Claire Fontaine.

The offsite project is foregrounded by the postponement of a solo exhibition at St Paul St Gallery by Christchurch-based sculptor Pauline Rhodes due to disruptions caused by the February 22nd Christchurch earthquake. The Physics Room, the Christchurch-based contemporary art project space which itself has been gallery-less since February 22nd, has filled the gap with an exhibition exploring the notion of performativity within the urban landscape. The exhibition is the first of a series of itinerant projects that The Physics Room is developing throughout New Zealand for the remainder of

2011.

Measuring the city with the body groups a selection of artist's works characterised by a particularly subjective relationship to public space. Artists such as Claire Fontaine and Pak Sheung Chuen propose a blurring of the divisions between public and private space (what would happen if every private door was suddenly open and accessible?) while Junbum Park's subtle but humorous video works perform shadow plays whereby the artist's 'giant' hands appear to manually construct an enormous cityscape.

The term performative here is used in a specific way. While many of the works in the exhibition involve performing, such as Yuk King Tan's *Drummer* who surrounded by the Hong Kong cityscape belts out a near-silent solo set on her customised cardboard drum kit, the use of the term performative also draws on John Langshaw Austin's original use of the term in his seminal lecture series *How to Do Things with Words*, delivered at Harvard University in 1955. Dorothea von Hantelmann states that Austin 'introduced the notion 'performative' into language theory in order to refer to the act-like character of language. In certain cases he argued that something that is said reaches beyond the realm of language. Under certain conditions where signs can produce reality; one is said to *do things with words*.' Just as von Hantelmann seeks to restore Austin's original use of term performative to describe artists who position their work between poetic and directly political action, the exhibition seeks to occupy this space whereby seemingly small performative gestures provoke larger thought around ones ability to enact direct change within urban environments.

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