

## ***Getting along, keeping moving* by Rosalie Doubal**

Built against a sheer quarry rock face, the dark, raw and unfathomably massive Edinburgh International Climbing Arena provides a striking amphitheatre for a historical re-enactment. Tessa Lynch's assembled performers do not don period garb however, and neither do they prepare for a bout of battle, for this is not a living history presentation nor a straightforward re-staging of an event now passed. Lynch's large-scale performance instead unfolds as a restless negotiation with the idea of duality and consequently embodies notions of both past and present.

Taking its cue from the story of the diamond, Alexandrite's discovery in the Russian Urals, this one-off event and following exhibition continually engages with the idea of dualism, introduced by this stone that shines green in daylight and red in incandescent light. Alexandrite embroils the serendipitous story of the gem with art historical touchstones – the works of Picabia, the vigorous inception of Dada performance and groundbreaking 1924 ballet *Relâche* - and references to contemporary sporting, theatrical and musical practices.

Performing an intriguing double movement, by rattling through a host of roles and relations, artist/performer Lynch, at once erases and creates with her attempts to re-work these specific moments in art's history.

Inhabiting our collective memory, cultural references are used by the artist as levers and prods, to pinch, pry, dig and drive at the creative imaginations of those involved. Revealing both these tools and their workings, and reveling in the individual experience of each of the performers - a group comprising Collective's audience and professional climbers, dancers and musicians - with Alexandrite, Lynch unfolds before her audience not a representational re-staging of artistic moments, but the processes of a small community re-working their knowledge of the past through a negotiation with their present. This is fundamental to the ceaseless dynamism of Lynch's practice. Her narrative-driven performative projects examine the ways in which people relate; how they work things out and how they avoid stasis in a world saturated by repetition.

Lay bare as a theatrical stage, the fake climbing walls, built within a natural quarry, proffer an estranged shape-shifting location that affects a futuristic, moon-like scene. Testament to both the site and the strength of this performance's production, a directed walking audience assumes absolute attention from the outset – the shock of the vast, brisk and darkened chamber soliciting a silence worthy of the most intimate of theatres. It is this professionalism that warrants the success of this exhibition. For it is not unknown for much to be lost in the disciplinary cross-over between visual and live art, with gallery audiences often left bemused by scattered attentions. Here, however, the strength of music, choreography, lighting and staging nurtures theatrical confidence in an accepting, open and informed audience.

Echoing the Dadaist charge of Picabia's instantaneous ballet *Relâche*, Alexandrite comprises a series of movement sequences using climbing and dance. A flood of pale green hue lights the multi-faceted bulging walls and actions are choreographed to spot lighting and a live sound accompaniment incorporating minimal electronic music, recordings and percussion. A troupe of twelve uniformed and synchronised performers negotiate the space, climbing, dropping, splitting and re-grouping, with different levels of energy appropriating and meeting the emotive associations of the lusty red and agitated green spots.

Narratives are born from the sequential and theatrical nature of this abstract performance and three actions emerge as dictating its overall effect.

The introduction of the group's main prop, a large sectioning banner, draws direct references to the works of Picabia. Acknowledging the Dada artist's drawings and mechanomorphs, the black and white banner pictures words and lettering – 'magic', '114' – referencing the artist's numerically titled magazine 291 and conjuring consideration of our general, loose associations of Dada, as if a record of a brainstorming session. With this, the artist begins to unveil her processes, as thoughts are turned to the performer's collective preparations for this performance - a series of on-site climbing and visual art workshops.

The action arrives with the performers assisting each other to climb through raised holes in the hanging frieze, with the shared aim of reaching the other side where the audience waits. Bridging, supporting, bending and accommodating, these mutually beneficial actions not only present a strong visual metaphor for the artistic concerns of this project – issues of duality specific to the works of Picabia - but a physical embodiment of the participants' interrogations of their common historical subject. To re-enact an artistic moment by physically penetrating a suspended representation of it, presents an explicit statement of intent by Lynch. Having reached the other side, this prophetic action signals a re-birth or release for the performers and similarly highlights a moment of climax in the work, as the eternal now and authentic physical wrangling of this re-enactment is dramatically emphasized.

Further unveiling her relational approach to this project, a film featuring informal, behind-the-scenes interviews with the performers is projected onto the back of the banner. Interviewer and interviewee (again, a pairing) discuss questions relating to the role of art, their own feelings on how they might individually be able to contribute to the artistic process and finally, thoughts on the future. Lighthearted and at points humorous, this represents a shift in tone, yet also further wrangling with the group's subject. How does art work? Who is it for and by whom is it made? What does this mean for now? And so continues Lynch's disrobing of her historical material in a move to reveal her more current concerns.

The final set piece involves performers scaling walls upon which a pre-recorded film of them climbing is being projected. In a tack, similar to that of having the performers physically pass through the Picabia-influenced banner, they mount, pass-by, surpass and obliterate projected images of themselves by climbing on top on them, again emphasizing Lynch's meticulous re-workings of ideas of duality and re-enactment.

In a time when the permanent availability of widespread media representation renders forms of authenticity increasingly remote, Lynch's strategy of artistic re-enactment confronts questions relating to the meaning of images by removing distance from the events, by bringing involvement to the fore, whilst simultaneously surpassing the images by way of physical domination.

Typically tracking backwards, by including recorded footage of the performance in her gallery-based exhibition, and in particular filming that emphasizes the Dada aesthetic created by the asymmetric circular light spots on the black walls, striated with vertical stripes of rope, Lynch reconnects these seminal climbing scenes with the mechanical and geometric drawings of Picabia.

The exhibition is split between two spaces, which return again to the diamond with one room featuring prints and sculptures of which the predominant tone is a pinky red, and the other housing a dark, green-lit installation.

At once a continuation of, and an adjunct to, the performance, floor-based banner-like ink drawing *Long Live Relache* (2010), screen-print *Cancelled Tickets Again* (2010) and laser-cut sculpture *Alpha, Beta, Gamma Music* (2010), which literally lifts a Picabia motif off the page, rendering it three dimensional, all draw direct reference to the art historical moments re-visited in the performance.

In contrast, a series of prints, *Rose Tinted Picabia 1 – 4* (2010) and large screen print *Hot Eyes* (2010) possess a more complex, abstract relation to the one-off event. Returning us to thoughts of performance, emblazoned in the laborious making of Lynch's rose tinted prints is a notion of process, procedure and ultimately, performativity. Further to this, the metaphorical nature of this series reveals a passing self-aware comment by the artist on the rosy nature of re-enactment - her privileged, idealised position heightened by the strength of hindsight. With *Hot Eyes* (2010), Lynch re-works directly one of Picabia's paintings. The Dada artist painted *The Fig-Leaf* (1922) using household paint directly over another work similarly entitled *Hot Eyes*. With this straightforward pastiche, Lynch very simply delivers her audience back to the very source of her re-enactment – an interest in the nature of things that remain to be two things at once.

Ever resistant to the static, Lynch's sculptural installation *Alpha, Beta, Gamma Music (Dr. Pepper's Ghost)* (2010) returns the viewer to an embodied experience and invites the audience to perform. Recreating the phantasmagoria-like illusory trick using two sculptures - one moveable, one fixed - and a large sheet of glass, audience members are able to envisage ghost-like and hallucinatory apparitions.

By handing the exhibition experience back into the hands of the beholder, Lynch continues to toy with the very notion of re-enactment. Although she draws the viewer directly into confrontation with the workings of both this magical trick and Picabia's dual practice, the artist introduces several disquieting unknowns. For no longer does each cultural reference own a fixed representation, they are released. Interpretation, relevance, currency, significance and purpose lie in the hands of the audience who must relate. Who must work things out. Who must get along. Keep moving.