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HAUNT Journal of Art

Title

Dress, Score, Tether

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9qk5765m>

Journal

HAUNT Journal of Art, 3(1)

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Publication Date

2016

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Volume three

2016

DRESS, SCORE, TETHER

By Mary Burge and Gerald Maa

Dress, Score, Tether was performed in 2014 as part of *Invito Spectatore: Four Collaborations between Poet and Performance Artist*, which was hosted at Greene Exhibitions. The description for *Invito Spectatore* follows:

In his influential diatribe against spectacle, his famous letter to M. D’Alembert, Jean-Jacques Rousseau punctuates a moment of anti-theatrical paranoia with words from the Roman historian Suetonius. When he highlights the dramatist’s sovereign power over actor and character themselves, Rousseau uses Suetonius’ words to underscore the fact that dramatists can force their characters to act “*invitus invitam*,” “against his will” and “against her will.” Rousseau, however, adds a third term; he proclaims the characters depart “*invito spectatore*,” “against the will of the spectator.” Rousseau’s fears stem from a belief that the spectator’s will is at the mercy of the will of the spectacle-maker. By showcasing performances built through collaboration between poet and artist, Greene Exhibitions wants to explore the economy between will and spectacle for writer, performer, and audience in a white cube, and in our current day.

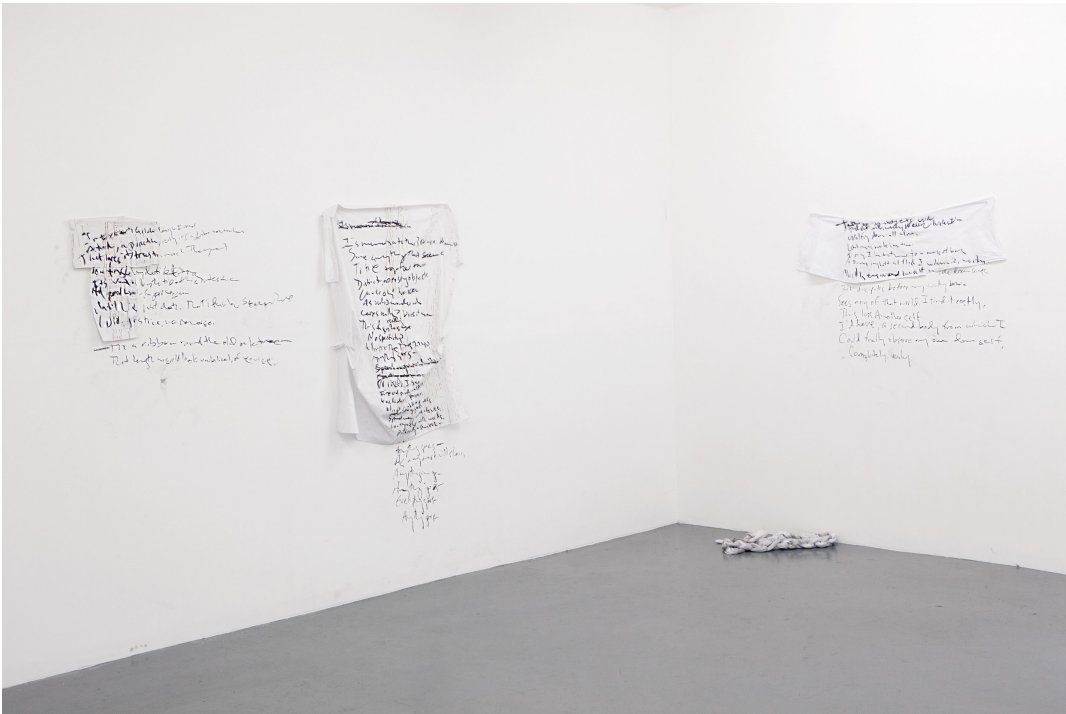
In general, our collaborations endeavor to activate spaces with the tension between writing and gesture. Maa, a formalist poet, and Burge, a technology-focused visual artist, seek to draw parallels between verbal and visual rituals, and explore how the destruction of one affects the other.

Dress, Score, Tether has started our current collaborative project, a metonymic chain of performances created by a process-driven practice. *Dress, Score, Tether* started with the image of our two bodies counterweighing each other via a cotton tether. With that, the dialectical process started: Maa wrote his words, Burge made her dress, and the two talked about, debated often over, the gestures that would underpin the performance. With the piece, we attempted to dismember and re-ritualize our respective daily practices to make a particular space—here, a white cube—a sacred, social one, for, as Henri Lefebvre wrote, “(Social) space is a (social product).”

The physical remains of *Dress, Score, Tether*—the charcoal-streaked cotton fabric—are being reworked into the next installation and performance. Inspired by Paul Schimmel’s account of the foundation action painting established for performance art, we continually seek out ways in which activated writing can inform new types of performance. Here, we sought to juxtapose the diminished importance of the written word with the mutability of visual messages. These two types of communication—and their requisite performances—are presented through the relationship of the two bodies. We wanted to show a creative process that is not a simple coexistence, but one that is also countervailing by nature.



Mary Burge and Gerald Maa, *Dress, Score, Tether* performance photo, 2014
 Courtesy of the artist, Greene Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA.



Mary Burge and Gerald Maa, *Dress, Score, Tether* installation photo, 2014
 Photo by Mary Burge, Green Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA.

Dress, Score, Tether

—Tethered to a body that I fuck
 And eat with, mostly. Workday lunches I'm
 Wolfing down all alone.
 Loneliness makes me time.
 I say I'm tethered to a mass of bone,
 A towering heft of flesh I wake with, mostly,
 Mostly engauzed in a self-made dreamscape
 That dissipates before my waking brain
 Sees any of that world. I find it costly,
 This loss. Another self
 I'd have, a second body from which I
 Could finally observe my own damn self,
 Completely, verily.

--

In Frazer's *Golden Bough*, I read a tale,
 A practice, really, of a tribe somewhere
 That loves its trees too much. They nail
 To a freshly defiled tree
 Its vandal by the tip of his intestine
 And prod him around as a procession
 Until his just death. That's fair law somewhere.
 With justice, no remorse
 —Tie a ribbon 'round the old oak tree—
 That length would look umbilical, of course.

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More happy love! More happy, happy love!
 More happy love! More happy, happy love!
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—I'll mention
What the Algerian Philosopher
Said: "speech excites attention;
The visible exacts it."

--

Is memory a tether? And are dreams?
Since anything that seems
To tie together two
Distinct, opposing objects
Can easily be seen
As such, I wonder who
Cares, really? Does it mean
This figure really has
No specificity?
Why tie the ties that tie?
Anything goes—
Or, rather, I say, as
Freud said, a navel point
Each dream possesses,
Unplumbable. With words,
Anything goes—
Spread magic, with a touch,
Contagiously, with words,
Pictorially, a smirch—
Anything goes—
As any mark will show,
Anything can go—
Anything goes—
Everything goes—
Anything goes—

Duration: 24:38 / Fabric, Charcoal, Verse; Dimensions Variable Documen-
tation Footage

† Gerald Maa is a writer based in Los Angeles. His poetry, translation, and essays have appeared in places such as *American Poetry Review*, *Common Knowledge*, *Studies in Romanticism*, and *A Sense of Regard: Essays on Poetry and Race*. His writing has earned grants and fellowships from places such as the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Library of Congress Asian Reading Room, and Vermont Studio Center. His art has been performed and shown in Los Angeles and Sweden.

† Mary Burge is a Los Angeles based artist. In 2010, she received an MFA from the Digital + Media program at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she earned the award for best thesis for *Two Lonely Hunters: Simulation of Presence in Mediated Storytelling and the Southern Oral Tradition*. Her work has been exhibited in Los Angeles, New York, Budapest, and Providence. More information and images can be found on maryburge.net.

Haunt Journal of Art

Volume 3

2016

ISSN 2334-1165 (PRINT)

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Funding provided by the Department of Art and the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at the University of California Irvine.

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