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MUSEUMS

Janine Antoni gets wrapped up in her work at Philadelphia’s Fabric Workshop

Project celebrates the interconnectedness of life through dance, installations and sculptures

by GABRIELLA ANGELETI | 27 April 2016


Ally, an art and dance project at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, is “not your normal exhibition”, says the artist-in-residence Janine Antoni. Working with the choreographer Stephen Petronio and Anna Halprin, the 95-year-old Postmodern dance performer who helped pioneer the genre in the 1960s, Antoni has created a programme of performances, as well as installations and sculptures that take up four floors of the museum. The multi-disciplinary project aims to “show how everything in life is connected, stays in process and has malleable meanings,” she told an audience at the preview last week.
The collaboration started in 2012, when Halprin provided Antoni and Petronio with the scores to some of her previous performances. “We kept going to back to her and instead of closing [the process] she opened it more each time,” Antoni said. “That’s what Halprin taught me about process through dance: there are fleeting moments, and somehow certain moments stick to you.”

Performances are scheduled to take place throughout the exhibitions three-month run, although reservations for many of them have already been filled. These include the three remaining dates when Petronio and Antoni perform Rope Dance, a partially choreographed and improvised dance conceived by Halprin in 2014, where the two tug-and-pull on long ropes to draw lines through the gallery. The audience is eventually invited to join the artists, and the interaction forms a random web. Before the performance and during off-hours, visitors can see a video of Halprin’s face as she reacts to Petronio and Antoni performing the dance on the deck of her home in Kentfield, California.

Visitors can still reserve spots to see Paper Dance, which Antoni described as “a miniature retrospective of my work, told through dance”. The gallery contains shipping crates, rolls of brown paper and some of the artist’s previous work, such as the chocolate and soap sculpture Lick & Lather (1993), which Antoni swaps out during each week’s performance, unpacking and repacking them. She also creates temporary sculptures from the rolls of paper, which she wraps around herself as she undresses. When the performance isn’t taking place, a film of Halprin’s Parades of Changes (1965), which also used brown paper, is screened in the gallery.

Even the sculptural works in the show are tied to the temporal. In the installation Swallow, for example, a 10ft strip of cotton that was woven at the museum and swallowed by Antoni and Petronio in front of ten witnesses in 2015, sits on a golden reliquary. Above conjoined chairs, ten audio speakers relay the viewers’ descriptions of the act, one of them describing it as “something so common becoming something so primal”. At the other end of the room the only photograph of the event is printed in black and white on a cloth that is held in a glass case with live moths, which are expected to breed and consume the fabric by the end of July.

“Most materials you see in exhibitions have longevity, and this project conveys meaning through other terrains,” Adrian Heathfield, the performance writer who has edited a forthcoming book on the project, told The Art Newspaper. “What we are doing here is transplanting ephemeral things and situations that are momentarily engaging—things that burn and disappear.”

The exhibition is supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and Creative Capital. Additional funding comes from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Shipley-Miller Foundation, and the board of directors and members of the Fabric Workshop and Museum.

- Ally, Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, until 31 July. All performances are free with reservations. See the museum’s website for times.