

Bucknell Alice, 'Maybe it's sadistic; perhaps we're all a little sadistic when it comes down to it; Grace Schwindt'.
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Grace Schwindt

*“Maybe it’s sadistic;
perhaps we’re all
a little sadistic when
it comes down to it”*

What happens when the body does not do what it's supposed to? Grace Schwindt discusses live performance, dinner parties and the challenging impact of the disobedient body.

Words: Alice Bucknell

Your practice bleeds across film, live performance, drawing, sculpture and installation. What binds it together? All of my work considers movement as a material. And not just the mechanics of motion, but also its interrelational qualities—how one is expected to move through the world, and how this expectation that informs our judgment of every minute movement is socially and historically encoded. I am interested in these different conventions of looking at the body and what happens when those are challenged or disrupted, the awkwardness that occurs when a body does what it's not supposed to.

How do you choose the bodies you work with? I often use professional opera singers and ballet dancers, so I start with a body that is highly trained—perhaps overly trained—and then I interrupt that entirely. Professional performers can manipulate the architecture of the stage, curving its horizontal and vertical lines with their movement. Manipulating one's body as a tool in this way is such a specific choice—and a very violent one. Expertly trained bodies must constantly perform under a huge strain in order to convey action, thoughts and physical things equally. The skill of creating an atmosphere through movement also reveals the body's fragility, which can stand in for the weakness of our systems and of everything else. Capitalism is especially violent to all of us; it seeps into and violates every cell.



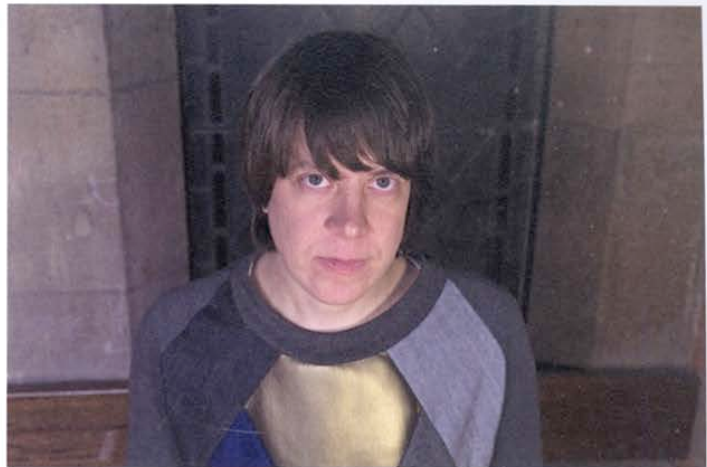
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ZENO X GALLERY, ANTWERP



Opening pages
Pierced Mermaid
Steel, fabric
136 x 60 x 60 cm

Opposite page
Sleeve, 2017
Pencil, acrylic on paper
42.0 x 29.7 cm

This page
Portrait by Enzo Barracco



Does this violence ever extend beyond the human body in your work? The frailty of our systems and the wounded body changes everything. My newest project looks at the Anthropocene and the destructive forces of the oil industry upon our planet through an ornithologist who collects, studies and mourns the dead birds that wash up on the coast of Vigo, a city on the north-west coast of Spain. For whatever reason, his grief forbids him to wear gloves. Violence and vulnerability permeate through touch: the hurt body interacts with the wounded planet. As ice melts into the North Sea, the oil spill seeps through the body of the bird, and madness and disease chip away at the scientist.

How do your sculptures relate to your performance work? I have recently started to think about my sculptures as their own works, beyond their use in film. While it's true that sculpture has a direct relationship to performance—you put it on a stage and it becomes a prop or a costume—I'm interested in what happens when you disrupt the functionality of it. There is a constant relationship negotiated among sculpture, performance and the body that plays out through time and duration.

I think sculpture can be performative in terms of its ability to warp our understanding of time. It can document and immortalize an unknown fate. Recently I've become obsessed with Bernini's porcelain sculpture of Apollo and Daphne, which depicts her mid-transformation into a tree. Her mouth is open. Is she screaming for help, or expressing the pain and terror of becoming a tree to escape rape?

Bernini's work is so captivating because it perfectly freezes this precise moment of suffering. I'm interested in the power of the perverse: of terror and transfiguration. I see my sculpture as objects that talk about magic and the theatricality of the body. Maybe it's sadistic; perhaps we're all a little sadistic when it comes down to it.

It's fascinating that after 400 years the Baroque still turns us on with its incredible suspension of disbelief, maybe more so than classical theatre itself. How do you understand the power relationship between a performer and her audience, especially outside of the white cube? Last year I took my performance off the stage and into a curator's apartment in south-east London. It unfolded in the context of a dinner party, which I loved. In the gallery space there's a sense of paranoia of being watched or behaving in a certain way; of looking at a work too long, or too briefly. The family house is also embedded with these themes, but they dig deeper into madness and derangement, the darker underbelly of the perfect nuclear family, as well as the problematic of a power imbalance stemming from self-organized hierarchies, which I was able to explore.

I was also interested in disrupting the proper decorum of the dinner party. The performer interrupted the smooth function of the dinner, sometimes erupting in loud, incompressible noises that overrode everything else, making it impossible to communicate. At other times she roamed around the table with her mouth open in silence, which created a weird vulnerability.

"Silent Dance" runs from 7 March until 28 April at Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp