

Rebecca Bellantoni



First, everything happens.
C.R.Y

ICA Theatre, Sunday 3 April, 2pm

First, everything happens. C.R.Y (2022) is the first part of a trilogical new moving image and performance work by Rebecca Bellantoni that deals with the realities and magic of the city, looking at the urbanised landscape, materials and past actions/movements. Focusing on a section of the Westway flyover, this new work imagines the city, its past encounters and their energetic traces as a positive trigger for meditation, transformation and growth. Ultimately the work speaks to the creation, dissolving of and regeneration of community and self.

Q&A

What is the background to your new work *First, everything happens. C.R.Y (2022)*?

It comes from a larger project called *C.R.Y*, which stands for Concrete Regenerative Yearnings. It is a project about the spiritual lives of people living in the city and the materials used to build the urban environment. I try to consider the experiences that I and others have had while living in the city that have allowed me/us to thrive and to grow, as well as the things that I/we used in order to satiate, to calm and to move forward.

What does your practice encompass?

My practice is broad in terms of the materials that I use and the works that I've made. It's often the idea that forms the starting point of the work and guides the material direction of it. I started off working with photography and then veered off towards sculpture and installation. Then not long before my daughter was born, I found myself in a situation where I had no studio space and no disposable income to buy materials. I decided that I still wanted to keep on making work, and that's how I came to performance.

At the time I wasn't really advertising that I was going to be doing something and that started me thinking about how to document those performances, and while documenting those performances, I started to think about reproduction of colour, and I realised often documentation doesn't give

you the feeling of the live performance. So, I started to think about how I could do that. What could I use in the editing process to push forward what it was that I was trying to give through these live performances? I think really that's how I came to moving image work. It was through trying document performance and then finding out that there was this new language that, for me, is related to photography, that allowed me to express something else.

I work with sounds, I work with text, in something that I call sound-text. I've worked with concrete, I've worked with textiles, I've worked with glass, I've worked with movement. I mean, my materials are endless really. So, I think that my practice just continues to grow in that way. Every time a new idea comes, if there's a new material, then I'll figure out how to make that work.

Are there any instances where you involve others in your performances?

For all of my performances, I have worked with my long-term collaborator artist Rowdy SS on the sound elements. In terms of what is seen I just realised the other day that actually, I am in general the sole performer in my performances. I hadn't really considered it earlier, other than to consider myself a proxy of myself. I had always just been making the work and I just so happened to be the person that could fulfil the role of me. The new work that I'm making now for the ICA is the first time that there will be an additional person in the performance, which is very exciting for me.

Would you call your *C.R.Y* works a series?

I don't know if I would call them a series, because there's so many variations between the works, but I think that in the future we'll see how they tie together. They all have the same origin. They're all considering the same things, but one time I might be considering an actual solid material, another time I might be considering, for example in this work, a song. They're very different things, and so I think only time will tell if they become a series and how they live together as a body of work. I don't think I'm approaching it like that at the moment. It feels like research in a way. Research and making.

Can you talk a little bit about your process and how you start in relation to research and how you develop your ideas into works?

It's really difficult actually, because I think that the research doesn't come first, but the research has been going on for so long now that I'm not sure where it starts or ends. There's always a new piece, a new text, a new work, or a new conversation to be had that might alter what's happening. The actual works come to me in what feel like visions, and I go from there. The visions involve all of the things that have come before, seen in a new way. Something is removed for clarity, something is added for depth.

So, it's like the ideas and concepts behind the work are ongoing. That's an ongoing process, but then every once in a while I might be reading something or listening to something, and then a visual will jump into my head, a feeling develop in my body that is attached to my thinking. It's difficult to pin down a process; research is important, but the time to close my eyes and to see things is very important as well.

Can you describe your new work?

The work is about the creation and dissolution of community and the self, and about those cycles. So, something gets created, something dissolves, and then something gets

created again from what's left over. I think that there are similarities in community and the self in that kind of regenerative urge that exists within them.

What is your relationship to audience; do you perceive of audience or have expectations of an audience for your work?

I don't perceive of an audience. I think I consider the audience something more like, not participants, but conductors, in a way. The audience join in this thing with me and we become conductors for something, and that something can be different each time. But I think the audience helps me to solidify intention, that the very act of turning up to join, to experience, to watch this thing, solidifies intention. What I truly hope to do is always provide some kind of space in which people can have their own room for meditation.

I don't mean meditation in a sit down and close your eyes, empty your mind type of way. I mean, to meditate on what it is that you're seeing and what that brings up in you. That's how I perceive of the audience, and I want to do the same thing myself in all of my performances. I've never answered any questions before I get to the performance. So what I'm doing for myself is what I hope I'm doing for the participants/conductors.

What is your relationship between the screen and live performance?

It's the first time I would've done something to this scale. There have been times when I've made performances that have included multiple screens at once, as well as projection. For example in the performance *Run come water*. The thing that I'm most interested in thinking about actually is the way that the live performance interacts with the screen, and its physicality. So things like shadows and obscuring what's on the screen with the body or possibly scenography or sculpture. That for me is something that I'm really interested in, but that interest only came about through doing. There were some things that happened while I was doing, that I realised, 'Oh, this is more interesting, than if it hadn't happened.' So for me, the relationship between performance and the screen is fraught in a way. It isn't an easy relationship in my practice, but it's something that I'm enjoying working through.

Rebecca Bellantoni's practice mines everyday occurrences and abstracts them, with a focus on the lives of Black people, in particular those living in cities. Investigating, through the lens of metaphysics, philosophy, spirituality and the aesthetics of them, the artist considers the concept of the accepted/expected 'real' and the experiential 'real', looking at how these removed borders may offer meditative experiences and portals to self, collective reasoning and healing thought. In material concerns Bellantoni works with materials that proliferate our everyday and within contexts that are both familiar and unfamiliar, aiming to skew/reinterpret their meanings and future encounters with those substances. Recent works have been shown at and with Frieze LIVE 2021; Den Stroom, The Hague (Languid Hands); Tate Modern, London (Rowdy SS); Raven Row, London (Nora-Swatje Almes); PUBLICS, Helsinki (Adelaide Bannerman); Art Night London (Nikki Agency); and Goldsmiths Library, London (Present Futures).