

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

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timesunion

At UAlbany Gerard & Kelly explore gender, sexuality, repetition

Show at UAlbany arts center had moments of intrigue, poignancy

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What happens when you repeat something over and over and over and over? Does it become distorted in the retelling, or enhanced? Do you discover new layers and subtleties, or does the original become eroded, like sand washed by an endless succession of waves?

The nature of repetition is one concept at the core of "Reusable Parts/Endless Love," a live performance installation by the Los Angeles-based artists Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly, which was on view at the University at Albany Performing Arts Center Friday evening.

But there are other issues at play here as well. Gerard and Kelly set out to pose questions around gender, sexuality and "couplehood," by transliterating a kiss between a man and a woman into a movement language performed either by a single dancer or by a non-heterosexual couple.

The work was born in 2010, with an audio score produced by the duo's recorded notations on Tino Sehgal's "Kiss," an eight-minute performance in which a man and woman reenact a series of iconic kisses drawn from art history. This became the first set of instructions for "Reusable Parts"; for each subsequent iteration, a new score is recorded live during the performance. In Albany, the performers started from a score made during a 2014 performance at the University of California Los Angeles.

The first voice was that of a single performer (Julie Tolentino) who stood in a corner, repeating a series of instructions in response to the previously recorded score in her headphones. Then her new recording was amplified throughout the space, and she began to dance to it — acting the parts of both "kissers" as directed by the blow-by-blow chronicling each partner's every move.

Meanwhile, a second performer (Malcom Low) re-spoke the score; then their recorded voices were simultaneously amplified, while they both danced solos in response. A third performer (Kia Labeija) spoke the score again, and danced to it. Finally, a fourth (devynn emory) recorded a new score, describing the movements of the other three, which then served as instructions for two duets. As the piece progressed, the performers moved throughout the space and the audience members followed, navigating around sliding set pieces made of eight-foot walls joined at 90-degree angles, like freestanding corners.

What to make of all this? At a basic level, it's intriguing to see how one dancer embodies actions meant for two, and to observe how four different dancers interpret the same set of instructions, orally and physically. There was also something poignant about the way the dancers tossed the roles back and forth in their duets, each taking turns embodying the "she" identified in the score, so that gender disparities and even distinct identities seemed to dissolve. In order to fathom the many nuances of the work, however, it would be necessary to see it again—and again and again and again and again.