

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

MODERN PAINTERS

Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly Bring Pole Dancing to the New Museum

By Wendy Vogel

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A view of "Open Pole" as part of "Gerard & Kelly: P.O.L.E. (People, Objects, Language, Exchange)" at the New Museum. (Courtesy New Museum)

Partners in art and life, Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly have been collaborating since 2003 in the creation of performances and installations about intimacy, movement, and memory. Both have dance backgrounds: Kelly was a member of the New York City Ballet for four years, and Gerard worked with the postmodern Judson Dance Theater's Simone Forti. Their oeuvre is notable not only for their elegance and rigor, but also for their queer perspective. This month, the duo present an 11-day exhibition, opening February 4, in the lobby gallery of the New Museum in New York, where they've been Fall 2014 R&D season artists in residence. "We were thinking about the kinds of frameworks by which we approach making art," Kelly explains. "At the same time we were interested in pole dancing — what it is and how it has been appropriated by different kinds of communities, specifically feminist and queer communities." Their six months of research culminates in a show titled "P.O.L.E. (People, Objects, Language, Exchange)," which will include object-based and performance elements — and, yes, a pole — and will also involve displacing the translucent drop ceiling panels onto the gallery's glass walls, shadowing the action inside while opening up the skylight view.

As part of their residency (organized by Johanna Burton, the New Museum's director and curator of education and public engagement), Gerard & Kelly filled the museum's fifth floor from October through late January with artworks and events. These included invitation-only pole-dancing classes and "In Bed With" conversations featuring such figures as artist Andrea Fraser. Museumgoers freestyled on the pole, and some even taught the artists a thing or two. Kelly describes a

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female visitor who went to the museum instead of to her weekly pole-dancing class; she demonstrated the proper inner thigh technique. “She starts giving me this training where I’m wrapping my legs around the pole on the floor and squeezing my ass so I can get it off the floor,” Kelly says. “It was the weirdest exchange.” Complementing these events was *Reverberations*, a score performed by the New Museum’s R&D fellow Lauren Bakst, composed of gestures and movements witnessed during the preceding months of programming. Gerard says the collaborative score arose from a question that the artist duo continue to mine: “How do we remember and how can we subjectivize the process of documentation?” Looking forward, Gerard & Kelly will parlay their research on movement and space into an installation in Los Angeles that examines “queer repatternings of domestic life” as part of “Modern Living,” a two-venue exhibition held between Schindler House in L.A. and Philip Johnson’s Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut.

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