

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013



PERFORMANCE CLUB: A KISS IS JUST A KISS?

CLAUDIA LA ROCCA

APRIL 16, 2010

Of the many discussions and debates about Tino Sehgal, one that I've found most intriguing is the reaction to the sexual politics of "Kiss," his slow-mo choreographic embrace.

Apparently, Sehgal decided that the work should be performed by male-female couples only – a choice that has understandably irked a lot of folks. I have heard—but only secondhand—that he felt same-sex couples would be "distracting." Have also heard various market-value theories (MoMA already owns the work, having paid a five-figure sum for the right to present it and loan it out, as it did to the Guggenheim for Sehgal's recent solo show).

Whatever his reasoning, the stipulation strikes me as unfortunate and—at best—oblivious and short-sighted. So I was thrilled to hear that two artists, Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly of Moving Theater, have fashioned a response.

Without further ado, I present to you *You Call This Progress?* I hope you'll watch the whole thing, read their statement below, and let me know what you think...

Walking into the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum, we encountered a couple kissing on the floor. Noting the male-female casting of this couple, we returned to the museum over several days—and indeed the couples never varied from this heterosexual model. We discovered a casting call sent by email to members of the New York City dance community, announcing auditions for "dancers in couples (male/female) for the realization of Tino Sehgal's Kiss."

With very little but a hunch that we might eventually do something with the material, we started learning the choreography, first by memory and then by making an audio recording of the movements into our cell phones while visiting the exhibition. We observed the dancers and notated the score as accurately as possible and in real time: "His hands on her lower back...her arms around his shoulders...they turn oooooone huuuundred aaaaaaand eiiiiiiiighty deeeeeegrees." After the first extended viewing we were able to decipher that the work consisted of a 16-minute choreography, composed of two identical 8-minute sequences ("he" and "she" swap roles mid-way through the duet), on a loop.

You Call this Progress? evolved into a performance as critique, addressing Sehgal's insistence on conventional representations of heterosexuality in *Kiss* and the work's attempt to disguise the labor conditions of its performance. Much of the choreography of *Kiss* was appropriated in our performance, but the male-female couples were replaced by same-sex couples (and a trio). Instead of a single couple for the entire duration of the performance, one partner was consistently replaced by a new performer, suggesting a more promiscuous, less fixed relation. We followed Sehgal's slow, meditative choreography—verbatim, at first—then began to intervene with movements outside of the missionary position.

We presented the work twice—once at the Volta Art Fair and again, slightly retooled, at Burning Bridges. We worked with the dancers Shane Ohmer and Erick Montes for the Volta performance, and Erick and Malcolm Low at Burning Bridges. (We regret our oversight and lack of imagination in failing to work with other kissing couples—two women, couples involving transgender individuals, even male-female couples who could manage to queer *Kiss*). Our audio recordings from the Guggenheim became the sound score for the performance. We created moments of direct address in which a dancer approached the microphone and stated his name, described his

TEL 212-352-9700 FAX 212-352-9704

www.katewerblegallery.com EMAIL info@katewerblegallery.com

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

best kiss, and noted how much he had been paid for the performance and the amount of time he had rehearsed. In the second performance, we invited Gregg Bordowitz to read a poem he had written.

The project raised questions for us about appropriation and the inevitable inflation of Sehgal's project through our own intervention. Were we only increasing the commodity value of the work by re-performing it, albeit with a different gender configuration? Did this reenactment with a difference manage to dislodge the work's heterosexual assumptions, or serve only to once again make a spectacle out of queerness? And is the entire project of "queering," like "outing," too simple, hewing too close to the dominant representations we aim to subvert? Can a work ever be justifiably didactic while skirting the pitfalls of identity politics? A kiss is never just a kiss.

TEL 212-352-9700 FAX 212-352-9704

www.katewerblegallery.com EMAIL info@katewerblegallery.com