

January 20th - March 4th 2017

# Wanna talk about reading?

Jimmy Robert

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Jimmy and I started this exhibition with talking about lines and how to read them. At the time, he was working on an exhibition in Belgium entitled *A clean line that starts from the shoulder* and I had recently mounted an exhibition here at Western Front, *Reading the Line*. Line was nothing new to Jimmy's practice; though it was more foregrounded in this particular instance, I see lines manifest in many ways throughout his work—as forms, as gestures, and as links between art historical counterparts. It is present in the folds and cuts he uses to manipulate photographic images and the paper they are printed on, the physical gesture contained in a drawing, the movement of a body through space or the lines of a limb outstretched.

In many of Jimmy's works, line also manifests in a mapping of lineage. In the exhibition *A clean line that starts from the shoulder*, works by Belgian-Romanian artist Idel Ianchelevici, Belgian artist Lili Dujourie and Dutch conceptual artist Stanley Brouwn were present in the gallery while also providing a foundation for his own works in the show. Other projects of Jimmy's have pointed to Yoko

Ono, Marcel Duchamp, Jeff Wall, Marguerite Duras, or Sherrie Levine. These references act variably as citations, as hommages, or as points for critical departure. At times these are simply reminders about ideas that are still potent, at others, the shifted context of place, time, identity opens up a new perspective.

Just as intertextuality shapes Robert's work through these varied cultural citations, the dialogue and tension between image making and representation with sculptural forms and performance holds similar importance. Robert's visual works can stand alone on their own, or function as props and set pieces for performances. Even as stand alone pieces, works like *Untitled (Brouwn)*, *Untitled 1* and *Untitled 2*, and *Veneer (Cluj)* exist here in a certain iteration that is different from previous ones. In Robert's works, I read this like a live performance, where a subtle variation marks each successive presentation.

Behind the gallery entrance where one finds this text is a door that largely goes unnoticed. It leads to the studio/office of Jane Ellison. Though not one of the original eight artists inhabiting the building, Jane has been active in the building since 1975. In 1977, Jane began teaching classes in movement and experiential anatomy, at one point called Stretch and Strain with Jane and currently

known as Boing Boing. Though Jane was involved in many performances that took place here over the years, her practice leading workshops has been an equal, if not more central facet to her history as an artist at Western Front.

Given the historical adjacency of movement art practices to the visual and media arts programs at Western Front, connecting a line between Jane Ellison's presence here and Jimmy Robert was perhaps the unavoidable place that conversations with Jimmy led to. Though the work in the gallery was not created specifically for this exhibition (excepting the performance), the constellation of works included came into focus through a reflection on the conversations that unfolded between Jimmy and Jane and the ideas that were resonant with the history of movement practices at Western Front.

The two video works—*Paramètres* and *Untitled (Folding 2)*—juxtapose the performing body with the visual object. In *Untitled (Folding 2)*, a photograph is folded in different ways to conceal and reveal parts of the figure in the image. *Paramètres* begins with the artist reciting a refrain, “Set up the parameters. Adjust the structure.” Seated at a table, the artist moves through a stack of A4 paper sheets cut into different shapes, striking a pose

with each. In both of these works, the actions perform like a workshop, with Robert working through variation and instruction with each repetition of the gesture.

In *Veneer (Cluj)* (2016), a 3 foot wide photograph depicting the surface of a piece of beech plywood is rolled and perched atop a plywood board. In the text that sits alongside this piece, Robert positions the work as “An image/object, A body/text, To be read, To be performed.” The text references Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A* (1966) and *No Manifesto* (1965) stating that Rainer “made dances that she called ‘objects’ representing ‘work’.” Riffing on Rainer’s statements, Jimmy brings in another connection to Rihanna’s song “Work” to speak about spectators and performing bodies, and the tension between movement and stillness, between the conceptual and the sensual.

Unique to this exhibition is a performance that Jimmy made in collaboration with Jane Ellison. The two carried out a conversation, remotely, with Jimmy in Bucharest and Jane in Vancouver and recorded thoughts and reflections on her history and experiences as an artist at the Western Front. Set apart from the mother and father figures that appear in some of Jimmy’s previous works, this conversation is active and present with a passing of knowledge from Jane and her ongoing work

as a part of this institution. For the performance, a 20 minute audio collage of Jane speaking will play in the gallery and set the score for Jimmy's work. Speaking about personal history, visualization, learning, embodiment, Jane's voice guides Jimmy through a series of movements that respond to her words, the cadence of her voice, and physical objects and images in the room.

Reflecting on her history at Western Front, Jane describes her role here as an "éminence grise," a person who exerts a certain influence, though without holding an official position. In a way, it is fitting then that Jane and Jimmy never met, his visit to Vancouver coinciding with Jane being out of the country for several weeks. Her presence in the exhibition comes from two white speakers tucked up in the corners, quietly, behind the scenes, shaping the work in the gallery.

– Pablo de Ocampo, Exhibitions Curator

## Artist Biographies

**Jimmy Robert** was born in Guadeloupe in 1975 and currently lives and works in Bucharest. His multidisciplinary practice encompasses performance, photography, film, video and drawing. Robert typically uses photography as a starting point for his works on paper, breaking down the divisions between two and three dimensions, as well as image and object. In some works Robert uses found photographs that he tears, collages, tapes and crumples before digitally scanning them and pinning them to the wall. In other works, Robert takes new photographs in his studio and crams them into wooden boxes or arranges them on the gallery floor. His sculptures similarly give the illusion of paper forms and often play with notions of value and durability. Integrated within his photographic and sculpture practice, performance remains a central part of Robert's work. His dance and performance works also oscillate between image and objecthood as well as the personal and the political.

**Jane Ellison** is a Vancouver-based dancer, teacher and artist focused in embodied anatomy and somatic practices. Since 1975 Ellison has participated in, organized and led numerous performances and workshops at the Western Front,

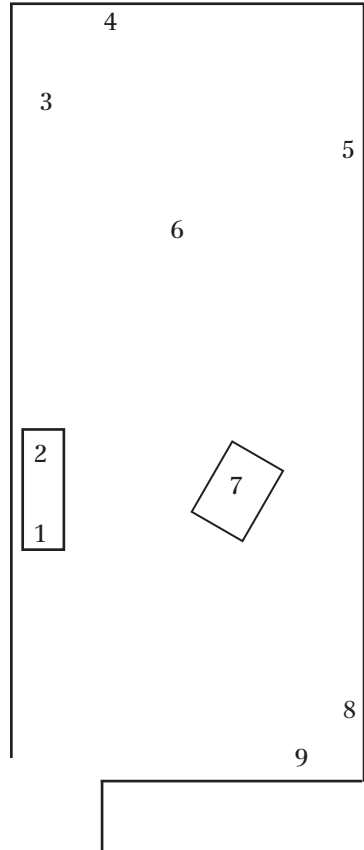
with her ongoing improvisational movement class Boing situated at the centre of this practice. Ellison's cross-disciplinary work reflects and is influenced by the Western Front itself, a building that has acted as a studio space, gallery, dance studio and home to artists. Between 1990 and 2008 her position on faculty at Studio 58, Langara College's acclaimed theatre school, provided another platform for her research into the relationships between movement, art, performance and life.

## List of Works

- 1. *Untitled (sweet malady)***  
artist book, edition of 200\*, 2005
- 2. *Suspended closure, suspended***  
vinyl LP, edition of 500\*, 2012
- 3. *Untitled (Folding 2)***  
video, 3:44, 2012
- 4. *Paramètres***  
video, 5:58, 2011
- 5. *Untitled wall piece***  
printed and cut vinyl, 2015
- 6. *Veneer (Cluj)***  
archival inkjet prints, plywood, 2016
- 7. *Untitled (brouwn)***  
archival inkjet print, table, 2015
- 8. *Untitled 1* and *Untitled 2***  
archival inkjet prints, plywood, 2012
- 9. *It's not lame...it's Lamé***  
archival inkjet prints, 2015

\*copies of the artist's book and vinyl LP are available for purchase. Please inquire in the office.

Jimmy Robert will make a performance in the gallery on Tuesday January 24 at 7pm.



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