

Simeon Barclay

Bus2move

21 September - 9 November 2019

Wednesday - Saturday, 12 - 5pm

In his first institutional solo exhibition in the North East of England, Simeon Barclay presents a new body of work informed by research into the internationally renowned Phoenix Dance Theatre. Phoenix Dance Theatre is the UK's longest standing contemporary dance company outside London. Founded in 1981 in inner city Leeds by three black British dancers, it has grown to be a key Northern forerunner in contemporary dance.

From the visual spectacle of contemporary dance theatre to the communal experience of the night club dance floor, *Bus2move* combines costume, film and video, photography, lighting and sound. Barclay's interest in dance centres on the construction of masculinity, with particular focus on the way popular perceptions and stereotypes become defined, contested and encoded upon the male body.

Barclay undertook a research residency at the internationally renowned Phoenix Dance Theatre based in Leeds to inform the creation of new artwork for the exhibition. Focusing on choreography; sound design; costume; lighting and stage design, this research informed a series of new installations which continue Barclay's ongoing interest with the complexity of subjectivity and how these states of consciousness are refracted through race, class and received notions of identity.

The exhibition has been produced in partnership with The Tetley, Leeds and Turnpike, Leigh and is supported by Henry Moore Foundation.

About Workplace Foundation:

Workplace Foundation is a charity based in Gateshead in the North of England that supports emerging and under-represented artists with a specific commitment to UK art scenes outside of London and with a focus on The North of England.

For further information on how to support Workplace Foundation, please contact Miles Thurlow at: miles@workplacefoundation.art

For more information visit: www.workplacefoundation.art

List of works:

Main Gallery, Rear Gallery and Corridor space:

Look No Hands, 2018

Neon, video, mannequins, clothes, sonic score

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Club culture has been a profound influence on Barclay, affecting the way he thinks about space architecturally, sonically and socially. A hierarchy of space and restricted access is also hinted at throughout the exhibition, inferring the way that clubs bring people together yet once inside, areas such as the VIP lounge and even the dancefloor, can be highly demarked, reflecting the spaces we inhabit within wider society. In contrast to the more formal and considered choreography of theatre productions, some of Barclay's original research for this exhibition was based upon his own experience of the British jazz dance scene. Birthed in the underground clubs of London in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s it was a specific subcultural movement that eventually expanded beyond the capital to the North of England. The scene fostered its own hierarchies and subtle nuances invisible to the uninitiated. Dancers borrowed from many sources, including ska, reggae, ballet, tap, jazz, film musicals and martial arts. These different styles were fused with dances drawn from the African and Caribbean diaspora, creating a highly idiosyncratic style that defied easy categorisation. Through practice, the dancers' technical ability was honed for battles that would take place in the club. There was an emphasis on complexity of movement, experimentation and virtuosic display of prowess, which Barclay alludes to in the neon signage placed throughout the gallery spaces. This created highly competitive arenas in which recognition amongst peers, one-upmanship and bragging rights were the highly prized spoils of victory. "It was a liberated space" Barclay remarks, "exciting, something you wanted to be part of... it was attractive and confusing in the way that it offered up both conflicting and alternative formulations of how to be a man." In pairing altered found video footage and what the artist terms 'sonic scores' that cut through the space, Barclay both exorcises and re-claims this energy as a form of re- remembering.

Rear Corridor:

2 Step, 2018

Transparent acrylic, powder coated steel 210 x 90 x 3cm

Courtesy the artist

A decorative panel covers the entrance to the rear exit. It is a life size rendering of a detail from *The Dance (II)* by Henri Matisse which depicts a circle of dancers. Matisse's painting has special resonance for the artist as one of the artworks he struggled to imitate when he was studying at night school. After recently seeing its sister painting in the flesh for the first time at MoMA, New York, he was struck by its' sheer size and presence within the space: "it was as if it was in 3D, almost as if I could join hands and join in". In offering only a segment of the painting Barclay says he wanted "to imply movement, and the sense of space created by Matisse" and by leaving the room empty he suggests the space itself is needed to complete the full circle.

Bank vault:

Forming the Phoenix, 1984 Directed by Kim Evans

52:56

Courtesy Phoenix Dance Theatre

This film by documentary maker Kim Evans follows the original founders of the Phoenix Dance Company (later to become Phoenix Dance Theatre). First shown in 1984 on LWT during the South Bank Show, it charts the beginnings of the company as well as the more personal thoughts, ideas and aspirations of the original forming members. Based in Leeds, Phoenix Dance Theatre is the UK's longest standing contemporary dance company outside of London. Since the Company's small beginnings in 1981, it has grown to be a key Northern forerunner in contemporary dance and for three and a half decades has performed across the globe educating and inspiring audiences through the medium of dance

Middle Gallery:

Fail to Learn, 2018

Transparent acrylic, photographic print, vinyl Each 70 x 70 x 70cm

Courtesy the artist

Barclay presents a contemplative portrait of the pop artist formerly known as Terence Trent D'Arby (now known as Sananda Maitreya), in a set of three floor-based sculptures. *Fail to Learn*, considers the various ways in which we assemble and perform individual identity, and the psychological implications that become apparent when we don't measure up to our own perception of self within society. Barclay is drawn to the figure of D'Arby whose beauty, resistance to racial profiling and self-assertive bravado were part of the allure of his meteoric rise. His subsequent demise and fall from fame was just as rapid and for Barclay, endemic of a catastrophic crisis of self- expectation.

Calyx, 2017

Choreography: Sandrine Monin Score: Robert Rusconi

Courtesy of Phoenix Dance Theatre

Alongside *Fail to Learn*, Barclay also presents *Calyx* a performance selected from the archive at Phoenix Dance Theatre that again alludes to ideas around the self- destructive impulses of pleasure. *Calyx* was produced by company dancer and choreographer Sandrine Monin and was been inspired by the infamous '*Flowers of Evil*' by Charles Baudelaire, in seeing love as both a muse and a curse. The work explores themes of beauty, desire, sin and decadence, set to a sweeping original score by composer Roberto Rusconi.