

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Movements and Variations: April 5, 2018, Modena, Italy

1. Resilience indicates a political agency. Politics, wrote Giorgio Agamben, is the sphere of pure means, that is, of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings. Your new work appears extremely topical and suggestive of both resilient and political qualities. Can you explain the origin of the new series and its relevance to the contemporary socio-political debate?

This exhibition comes out of many of the themes and structures I've employed over the course of my career. My interest in dance and movement, attention to the everyday, and engagement with portraiture and representation, are all starting points for this project. My work over the last few years with the young women of Rudzienko, and before that, with the children of Łódź in my film *Podwórka* (2009), were generative experiences. The resilience, strength, and determination that they displayed are inspirational when facing the myriad challenges in front of us.

2. The new series of photographs *Nine Sticks in Nine Movements* (2018) is an unfolding of your previous interests in the choreography of the routine and the mundane. It radicalizes portraiture by removing particularities of the identity and instead focusing on the archetypal. How does it relate to your interests in systems, movements, and any other organized structures versus the spontaneity of human behavior and its patterns?

Systems and structures have always been important parts of my work, and I've often played the systemic or clinical against the unintentional, mundane, or human nuances that are inevitable. For example, my early set of photographs *Auditions* (1994) in which I had young people reinterpret the moment before a kiss from a Truffaut movie, play the repetitive gestures of an audition against the highly personal reactions of bodies experiencing something for the first time. I am always attracted to structural work and artistic endeavors that engage with scientific methods. Noa Eshkol's work as a dance composer, for example, was really exciting for me to engage with in my films *Five Dances and Nine Wall Carpets by Noa Eshkol* and *Four Exercises in Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation* and the series of photographs *Models of Orbits in the System of Reference, Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation System* (all 2011) because it was so disciplined and pared down. Its use of musical structures and the way it both looked for idealized, abstracted bodies, but had to find its real form within the imperfect real bodies of its performers, were sources of inspiration. Postmodern dance was so important to me because it was a movement that embraced both the structural and the mundane. Lately, I've been looking at a system of reference for illustrators, The Fairburn System, that categorizes movements and gestures of the body much like the Bechers categorized architectural elements. I love the way clinical images present an opportunity for surprise within an image that has taken great pains to eliminate it. I've always thought that the clinical and the structural present the best opportunities for seeking out and presenting real subjectivity in a way that cannot be dismissed as sentimental. I think of this new work as a portrait through the nine movements of its protagonist. She is both at the center of the photographs and somehow almost always missing. The disjunction between the category, portraiture, and the reality of the images creates a space for viewers to re-engage their gaze and assess the categories that often are a given.

3. Furthermore, the accompanying series of bronze casts of tree sticks narrate the relationship between the individual and the community, as well as between the individual and the natural world. Such a "sculptural gesture" is a new formal development in your practice. Can you speak about this?

While these materials are admittedly new to my practice, the elements of this project really were generated organically from my previous work. In projects like *NŌ* (2003) or *Double Tide* (2009), the natural world plays a big role and individuals are situated within the larger systems or structures of nature (seasons or tides). Similarly,

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my photographic work has often employed sculptural objects, whether crafted from nature or part of the lexicon of objects in the world (Ikebana vases, plants, lunchboxes, or Noa Eshkol's spherical models of movement). Over the last few years, I have been spending a good deal of time amongst the trees of the southern Sierra Nevada mountains and have been collecting and working with the wood I find up there. During the workshops I organized for the Polish Pavillion at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, and the years leading up to it, I often brought sticks to the girls of Rudzienko. They became a symbol of feminine power for our group: each individual and unique in form but part of a unified group. The girls really identified with this. Casting the sticks in bronze gave them both metaphorical and physical weight. The reaction of a body to that weight was something that intrigued me. It created numerous photographic opportunities but it also created sculptural ones. Casting the sticks makes them no longer unique. Repetition and a play of variations arise out of the multiple possibilities presented by combining three sets of nine objects. I worked with a master from the Sogetsu School of Ikebana (and long-time collaborator Ravi GuneWardena) to come up with a set of variations on a bundle of sticks. Together, the defined set of arrangements and the photographs act much like the sets and dances I presented in the Eshkol films: they are a portrait and a constantly varying dance.

**4. The exhibition can be read as a manifesto of empowerment and emancipation, a call for action and resistance. What message do you want to convey with this exhibition?**

While the center of this project is the strength and determination of women, I think there is also a message about the viability of the aesthetic experience. Bringing beauty into the world is a worthy action and experiencing it is both healing and inspiring. I hope the movements and positioning of the body in relation to these heavy objects call to mind the strength, determination, and resilience that I've witnessed over the last few years in my work with the young women of Rudzienko. I also hope that viewers see in the arrangements of these simple sticks the possibility for finding beauty in the everyday world that surrounds them.