

Re-Construction in Rhythm: Josephin Böttger's *Trapez*.

Josephin Böttger's media work *Trapez* focuses on images of demolition and construction in the life of the city. It looks at redevelopment as a physical activity devoid of the emotional responses that so often attend it. In Böttger's work, construction workers become ballet dancers as they perform the choreography of the building industry. Cranes operating in harmonious sequences perform the making of the city.

The project employs time-lapse video to tell its story, and you see the city taking shape; construction and deconstruction. Morphing in time and space. The cinematic work can't avoid the absurdist nature of the enterprise: the constant renewal, the endless development, people permanently displaced, replacement housing that does not fit the needs and budgets of the community. It's an old story.

These conditions are becoming world-wide as capitalism strives to wring more dollars out of every piece of real estate, and the new face of globalism highlights inequity between regions, countries, and classes. The building in the video houses artists' studios in Hamburg, and they are demolished to build office buildings. Böttger had a studio in the building across the street. Her narrative never highlights the politics, but only because they are so obvious. It's all about renewal, regeneration, and the city revisioning itself.

At grunt gallery we planned Böttger's visit to Vancouver to coincide with the New Forms Festival, where she would do the performance *Dynamo Lines* at grunt with musician Sergej Tolksdorf. Her performance was complemented by a series of projections at the Great Northern Way Campus and in other locations throughout Vancouver co-presenting with the festival. The final part of her work was the presentation of *Trapez* at UrbanScreen from September 6th to 15th 2013.

While many of Böttger's other works speak to industrialization and urban life, *Trapez* seems more ordered in its delivery. The graphic elements mediate between the video images, bringing us into them and linking them together. The images are like musical elements in how they are timed and orchestrated. The time-lapse sequences animate them. The cranes give way to grids of scaffolding being set up and workers' bodies, then in turn gives way to cement pots being craned into space. Graphic elements assert themselves and then fall back, letting the video take over. Scenes of demolition alternate with construction. A dinosaur excavator rips windows out of an older building, its giant jaws eating through the concrete. Böttger gives the process life and shows it in all its monstrosity.

But *Trapez* isn't a set piece. Every rendition of it is adapted to the screen it's being shown on. At UrbanScreen this meant adapting it to the unique set up of the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre. In Vancouver the images were mixed live in the outdoor projections. For two weeks they took up public space. *Trapez* spoke to the situation in the Lower

Mainland perfectly at that present moment. Development had driven us to the limits, and in 2013 many people were leaving BC because they had no affordable place to live. Neighborhoods were being redeveloped so quickly that they became unrecognizable to the people who grew up there. The landscape across the region was marked by many cranes of construction.

Trapez captures the franticness in the process of rebuilding the city. UrbanScreen was a perfect venue for this work as it used the landscape of the city to talk about the city. The work is immediately accessible. The casual viewer immediately “gets” the work; it is easily consumed. The rhythm pulls you in as you get lost in the changing images of bodies and machines.

Given how much time we in the Lower Mainland spend talking about housing (real estate prices, high costs of rentals, renovations, foreign buyers, public space, mortgage costs), *Trapez* spoke completely to that moment and this. Its choreography gives it focus and distracts at once. While it was current then, unfortunately it still is, as none of the problems have been resolved in the time since. There’s an inevitability here as well, time goes on; obliterating our past, complicating our present and negating a future.

The time-lapse photography of *Trapez* provides the rhythm of the piece as we see the city constructed in fast forward. Time folds in on itself as it collapses and is rebuilt. As you watch, the rhythm takes over: Day-Night-Day-Night. The world moves at a quicker and quicker pace as the choreography speeds up the action. The hand-drawn elements work flawlessly with the video. It flows effortlessly. But there is no end and no beginning. There is building and demolition one after another in endless succession. There is something primitive in Böttger’s modern city. Beneath it, in its urges to create and destroy, lies something distinctly not modern. It is as old as the world itself.

In *Trapez*, architecture and the body have an equal presence. The human body shapes the built environment. The built environment shapes the human experience. In the end Böttger’s title gives us a clue. It isn’t a dance as much as a circus act: the high wire and the trapeze. They require the same delicacy of movement as the dance, but with more risk involved.

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For over 30 years, curator, writer and Program Director of grunt gallery, Glenn Alteen has played a central role within the British Columbia and Canadian arts communities.

As Director of grunt gallery in Vancouver, Alteen has been active in creating sustainable administration practices through the purchase of a facility, the Blue Cabin Residency Program and the creation of the grunt gallery Legacy Fund, an endowment held by the Vancouver Foundation.

His writing on Performance Art was published in Wordless (2019) Unceded Territories: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (MOA), Making Always War (Stride Gallery), Access All Area (grunt),and Caught in the Act (YYZ Books), In 2018 Alteen received a Governor General's Award for Outstanding Achievement.