

March 24, 2014

We Went to Roe Ethridge, Gerard & Kelly, and Doug Wheeler

by PADDY JOHNSON WHITNEY KIMBALL AND CORINNA KIRSCH on MARCH 24, 2014 · 0

COMMENTS **REVIEWS**



Gerard & Kelly: Timelining at The Kitchen (512 West 19th Street, New York, NY)

Runs through April 19, 2014

What's on view: Two actors, one middle-aged and one in their 20s, would walk together around the room in circles and take turns reciting a series of memories that seemed to go backward in time. They'd use the phrase "in front of" to stack the lines, such as: "The woman with the floral pants walked in the room, in front of...Feeling sick with my head on your knee, in front of...throwing up this morning, in front of..."

The room also included partially-erased wall text and a gallery wall leftover from previous Kitchen exhibitions of Boru O'Brien O'Connell and Luke Stettner and a series of sculptures by Gerard & Kelly.

Corinna: When I walked into the gallery, the first thing I heard was booming "actor voice." I don't know if that's an actual term, but you know the type of stylized speech that sounds a little too overly rehearsed, a little too focused on projection rather than emotion. So I wasn't too turned on by that type of acting; it seems to contrast too much with the type of personal memories the actors were supposed to be revealing to each other as they walked around in circles.

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Other than my quibble over “actor voice,” I mostly liked how the performance treated memory. Memory is supposed to be something absolutely personal and particular, right? But no, the memories these actors ended up talking about were really general, and often focused on public events. Princess Diana’s death, losing one’s virginity, and moving to New York were all fair game for these actors to talk about. Now that’s just a sad existential fact, that our memories could be swapped with others.

But that leads me to my one gripe with this performance’s logic of how memory functions, as a series of events made relatable by sentences. Why weren’t there any exclamations of sensations (“red!”) or emotions (“sad!”)? Memory is faulty and fragmented; it’s just not as clean as it’s presented in Gerard & Kelly’s performance.

Whitney: Well, I didn’t have such a problem with the way memories were listed off as generic actions, since I just thought it was one lens to look at life. As each person recited periods of their life, going back in time, you piece together a very broad picture of several years.

Like you said, it made different experiences seem like existential copies of each other. For example, when I went, the actors seemed to be mother and daughter (based on recurring names like “your father”). The younger woman was wondering whether she should feel okay about being an artist, or become a community organizer. The older woman said she spent the eighties waitressing at a macaroni restaurant and wondering what the fuck to do with her life. I felt like the list of life choices was an apt way to sum up that feeling of life passing by.

Also I was fortunately spared the booming “actor voice” when I went, probably because I got two women. But that’s a bummer.

Corinna: Oh, sounds like your session was better than ours. We went when there was one man, possibly in his 20s, and a slightly older woman. It sounds like the actors you saw were better at being less-than generic, although, to be honest, it was the generic aspect of memory that got me interested in the performance in the first place. I just hoped it’d move away from that and get a bit more complex.

Anyway, I should probably mention that this performance was still a lot better than most of the other stuff we saw in Chelsea that day.

Whitney: Should we talk about the sculptures?

Corinna: No.

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