

Tony Orrico

Selected Press

signs and symbols

New York, New York | www.signsandsymbols.art



Art World

Editors' Picks: 11 Virtual Art Events Not to Miss This Week, From a Live Talk With Jerry Saltz to an Online Print Art Fair

There's still plenty to see online.

Artnet News, May 11, 2020

Each week, we search New York City for the most exciting, and thought-provoking, shows, screenings, and events. In light of the global health crisis, we are currently highlighting events and exhibitions available digitally. See our picks from around the world below. (Times are all EST unless otherwise noted.)

Thursday, May 14—May 27



9. "Screening of Tony Orrico's *Leveraging sound from sensation with every in and out breath until the heart becomes a tender object*" at signs & symbols

In this 20-minute video, artist Tony Orrico manipulates the sound of his own breath to create a composition of sorts for the audience, as well as a heightened emotional state within himself. The screening is part of the gallery's series of two-week, online-only video exhibitions during lockdown. The gallery has also shifted much of its sales online, too, with a series of limited editions and other projects from gallery artists, including two new special editions by the late performance pioneer Ulay, the proceeds of which will support the gallery, the Ulay Foundation, and the Bowery Mission.

Price: Free, for permission contact info@signsandsymbols.art

Time: 6 p.m.

—Nan Stewart

CHOREOGRAPHING DIFFERENCE: BODIES THAT DRAW

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"Dancing on the
edge is the only
place to be."

Trisha Brown

Below and p. 198, 201, 204-5: Trisha Brown, *It's a Draw/ Live Feed*, 2003, Performance at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, March 16, 2003, Courtesy of The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Photo: Kelly & Massa Photography

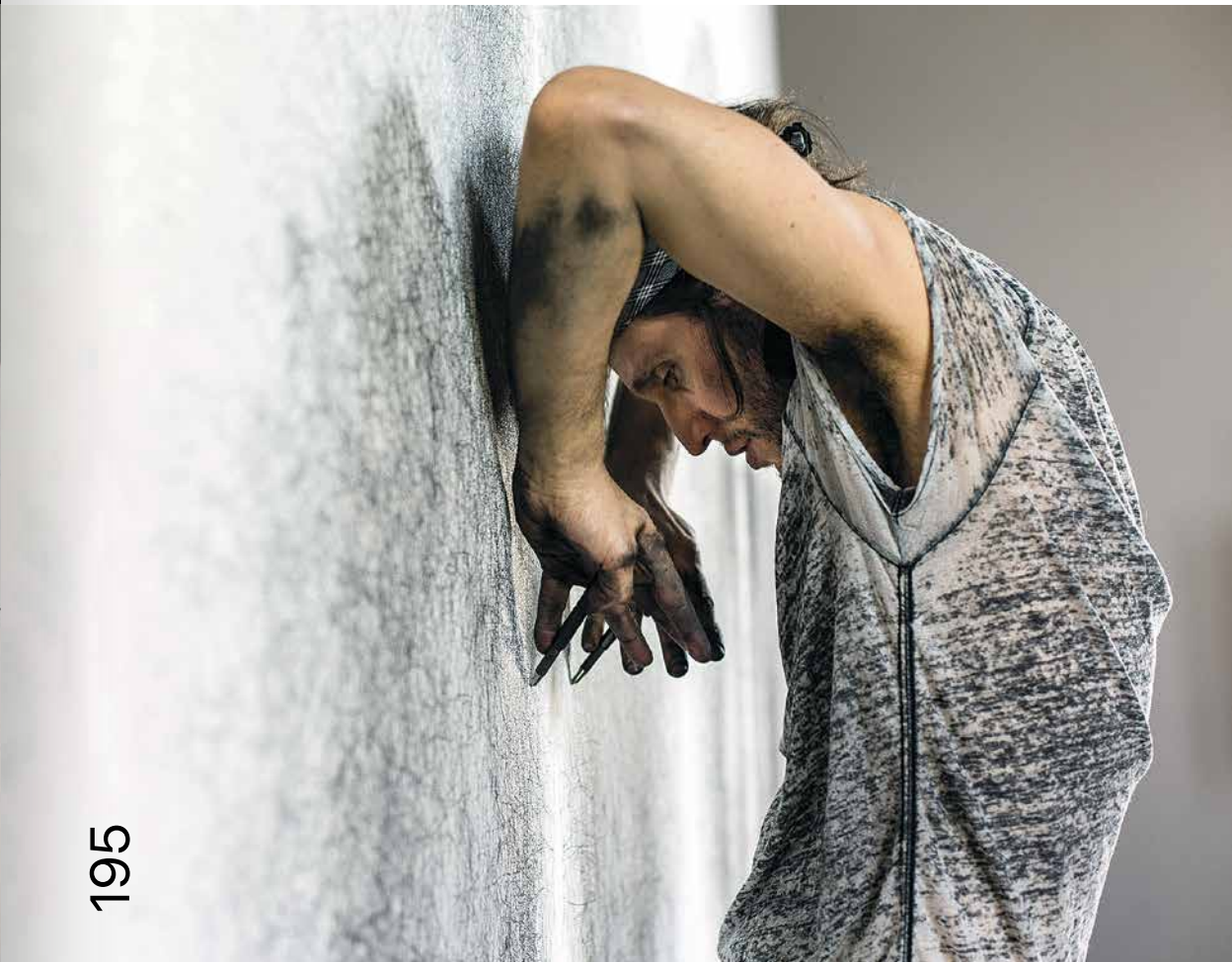
p. 195: Tony Orrico, *Penwald: 4: unison symmetry standing*, Courtesy of Art Stations: Stary Browar, Poznań.



One of the most renowned and inspirational choreographers and dancers of our time, Trisha Brown revolutionised the landscape of art and dance forever. More than a choreographer, Brown dismantled the boundaries between dance and art, enabling for a more encompassing definition of performance drawing. "I do the same thing in drawing as I do in dance", she has said, "I'm not sure which came first." Using the body as a system, she probed the relationship between drawing as process and drawing as product throughout her career.

In 2003, on a sheet of paper carpeting a vast expanse of floor, Brown improvised a series of large-scale drawings with charcoal, pastel and paper. The entire performance was presented to the audience as a live feed video. *It's a Draw/ Live Feed* as it was called, epitomised Brown's performative work. The drawings are mostly composed of the residual markings of movement, not static prints, translating into signs for where her body once was.

Although the artist passed away in 2007, her legacy and her influence on both the dance and artistic worlds remains unmatched. Echoes of her practice can be found in the work of Tony Orrico. A former dancer at Trisha Brown Company and now a performance artist based in New York, Orrico generates work which meditates on the physicality of the body. Drawing's ability to capture and express



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movement in both a representational and abstract sense makes it an attractive tool for dancers and artists alike. His performances can comprise drawing for up to four continuous hours in a mesmerising display of physical stamina where his body is the nucleus from which all things originate.

Tony Orrico *TALKS BODIES, CIRCLES AND SPACE*

Alice Finney in
conversation with
Tony Orrico

Below, read about Orrico's transition from dancer to visual artist, the relationship between thinking and doing and how we can seek to find liberation in the most uncompromising of structures.

Is your drawing a byproduct of the performance or is the performance merely a way of reaching the end result?

I think about this all the time. I try to keep accountability for the action and the product of the action. I try to acknowledge their difference and the separation between them while maintaining the elements of the performative offering – i.e. knowing that there's an audience. I think about the parameters, the imagery inside of a body doing this event and I separate that from the product. I think separately about the aesthetic of what has been made and what the new relationship/viewership of that is – a gallery space or however it is being presented. They are very reminiscent of each other but that they are not mutually dependent. I try to ensure that the drawings alone have a strong reference to the spatial capacity of a body. When you stand next to one, it's the same size as you but also it's beyond you as a viewer. You can feel the density and the lines and you know that a body, not a machine made it.

You can feel the energy that emanates from them, suggesting that someone has been moving and making them.

Yes and you can see smudging and other impressions from the body. The image itself is not a body but it has such an anatomical presence. The shape and contour of it remind me of our nervous system and networks in the body and the brain.

I read about your collaboration with Michigan Technological University in 2014 where sensors were attached to your brain and body. Can you explain a bit more about the project?

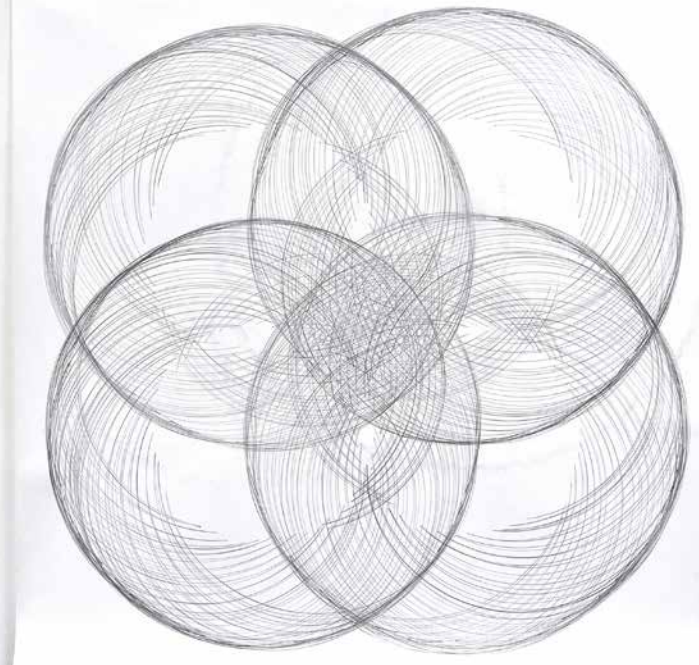
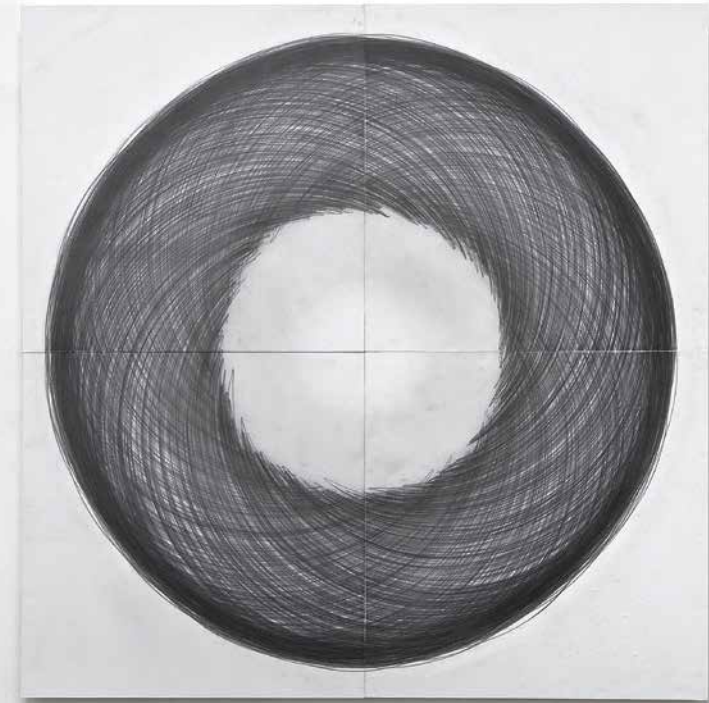
It was a failed experiment but it was really interesting. I was excited because it was going to be the first time I collected data from my movement practice. They dressed me in this uniform and attached coordinate markings to my body. We were using infrared to capture motion. I spent around two hours in that space virtually drawing and then that data was collected but there were lots of gaps. I think my body was blocking motion sensors. They also connected sensors to my brain and were collecting data but something else failed with that.

Oh no.

I know. The best thing that came from it was the immediate graphics the scientist had created during some of my iconic pieces such as my knee circle. A spirograph-like drawing was projected in real time and dimensionalised in the screen. That was really cool. I wondered how that system through my body, I might be able to work more sculpturally.

I am interested in the binary between technology and the body and how out of this you can find artistic expression. For me, this is what is really beautiful about working with systems. In anything that is systemic or inside of a construct, we can try to find our freedom or liberation. Especially from a body perspective. I like to challenge myself to find where the inverse

Penwald: 1: 1 circle (studio impression 1, 4 panels) 2011. Courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery
Penwald: 7: 4 3/4 turns left (studio impression 1) 2011. Courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery



escape is through movement. I wanted to work backwards and find the intention and what motivates a line spatially and to try to use that and build everything around it. To make the arrival the dominant statement. We have so much material and possibility that we can make anything. But to have it come from intention and the body and integrity is so hard.

For sure. I was reading about Soja's Thirdspace theory where you combine the physical space with the mental to create a new creative dimension. This is very much what you seem to be describing now.

I'll look into it.

Was the transition from dancer to visual artist a natural progression? Had you been



thinking about doing this kind of artwork when you were a dancer?

I knew that I wanted to stop dancing but I also knew that I wanted to make movement-based work. I was already a painter, albeit a very untrained one, when I came upon dance. I worked a lot with abstraction but not a lot of intention or clarity in what I was doing. When I started dancing I was 18 and being inside the studio brought so much to life for me and for my painting. I started to feel like I was navigating through lines and experiential painting. It led very naturally into making work that was process-based in relation to dancing. Then I worked for two really amazing dance-makers who had visual art practices: Shen Wei and Trisha Brown. Both are such big influences on me. I also worked with Marina Abramović and it brought so much clarity to the performative space that I was already working in. In a nice way, I stumbled upon this. It was through improvisation that I made my first body circle. I was living in a tiny apartment in Brooklyn, New York. I moved all of my furniture from the living room to the kitchen and rolled out some paper and I remember that feeling in my body and thinking that this is something really important. It was a really simple discovery that reminded me of Trisha's early work – of unlocking or opening doors to new possibility. It then became the basis of all my early work.

How much of your work is improvised now? Is there a balance between improvisation and repetition?

In all of my work, there's a very live spontaneity. It's reactive – reacting to information from the body that I'm sourcing through my senses: sight, ears, sensation. If it's improvised, it's usually contained by a measurement in the body, for example, if I'm standing at the wall and drawing within the span of my arms and filling that space. But the resulting image is very predictable and repeatable and becomes iconic of that system. I think about Trisha and *It's A Draw*, and my experience of it is that it's very improvised – she's in real time discovering potential with drawing. My approach is somewhat opposite; I'm creating a structure where the events are very determined and predictable and the liveliness is the endurance of it.

Tony Orrico, *Penwald: 8: 12 by 12 on knees* (MUNAL, Mexico City, MX) 2012
Photo by Berna J. Klein Rios

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And then the result is the "predictable end".

You could see anything in my series and say, "Oh that's that drawing." In Trisha's work, everything is unique.

Can you answer Trisha Brown's oft-quoted question: Do movement and my thinking have an intimate connection?

I love a good question, especially from someone so familiar. Oh yes. the relationship between mind and body is what I'm attracted to. It's the essence of life. As body practitioners, we can go so deep into that world just like Trisha. I'm so attracted to her eye because she's so detailed and specific. The study and regeneration of her material centres a lot on the thinking behind the doing. In every little, idiosyncratic movement you can identify where the focus, the release, the balance and the centre of the body are. I think it's extremely intimate

and I think that as artists and as people we can bring so much attention to it. Geometrically you can identify the lines and lengths of the body are corresponding to space. I've coined the phrase, "everything but the action itself" and I think it really applies to both her work and mine. The action is the deliverance but there's so much everything else besides it – the homeostasis, the awareness, everything else countering the deliverance of an action. That all-encompassing awareness is so important. I love to identify all the spaces in between.

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Tony Orrico, *Supporting a continued gesture towards expanding sanctuary*, 2019, Courtesy signs and symbols

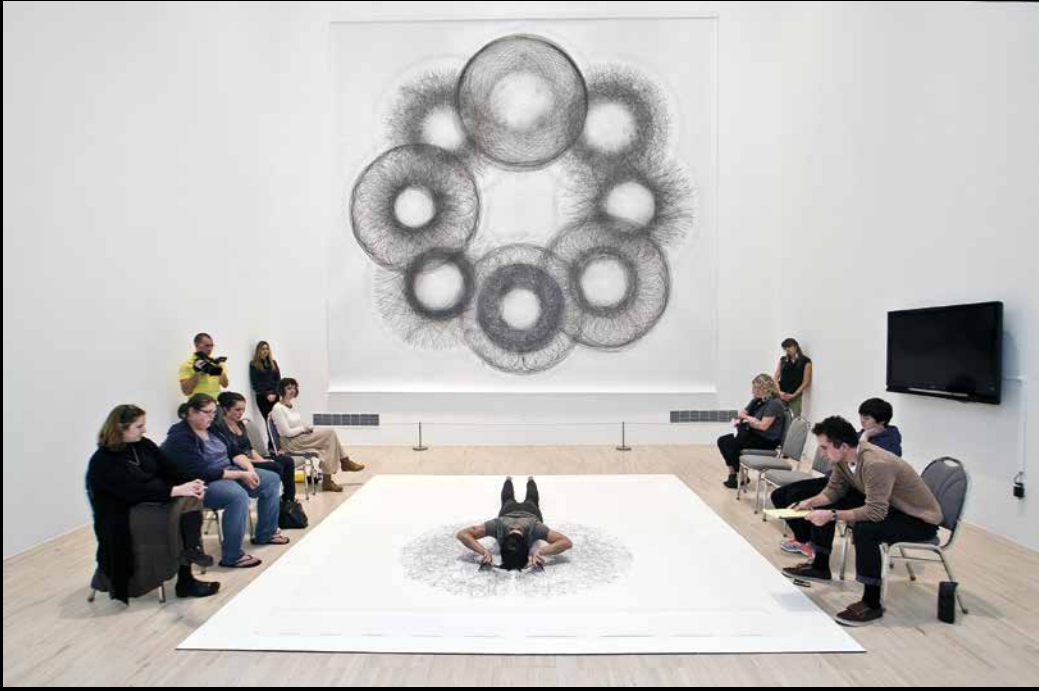
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right: Tony Orrico, *A continued gesture towards us*, Courtesy signs and symbols
Trisha Brown, *It's a Draw/Live Feed*, 2008, Performance at Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman

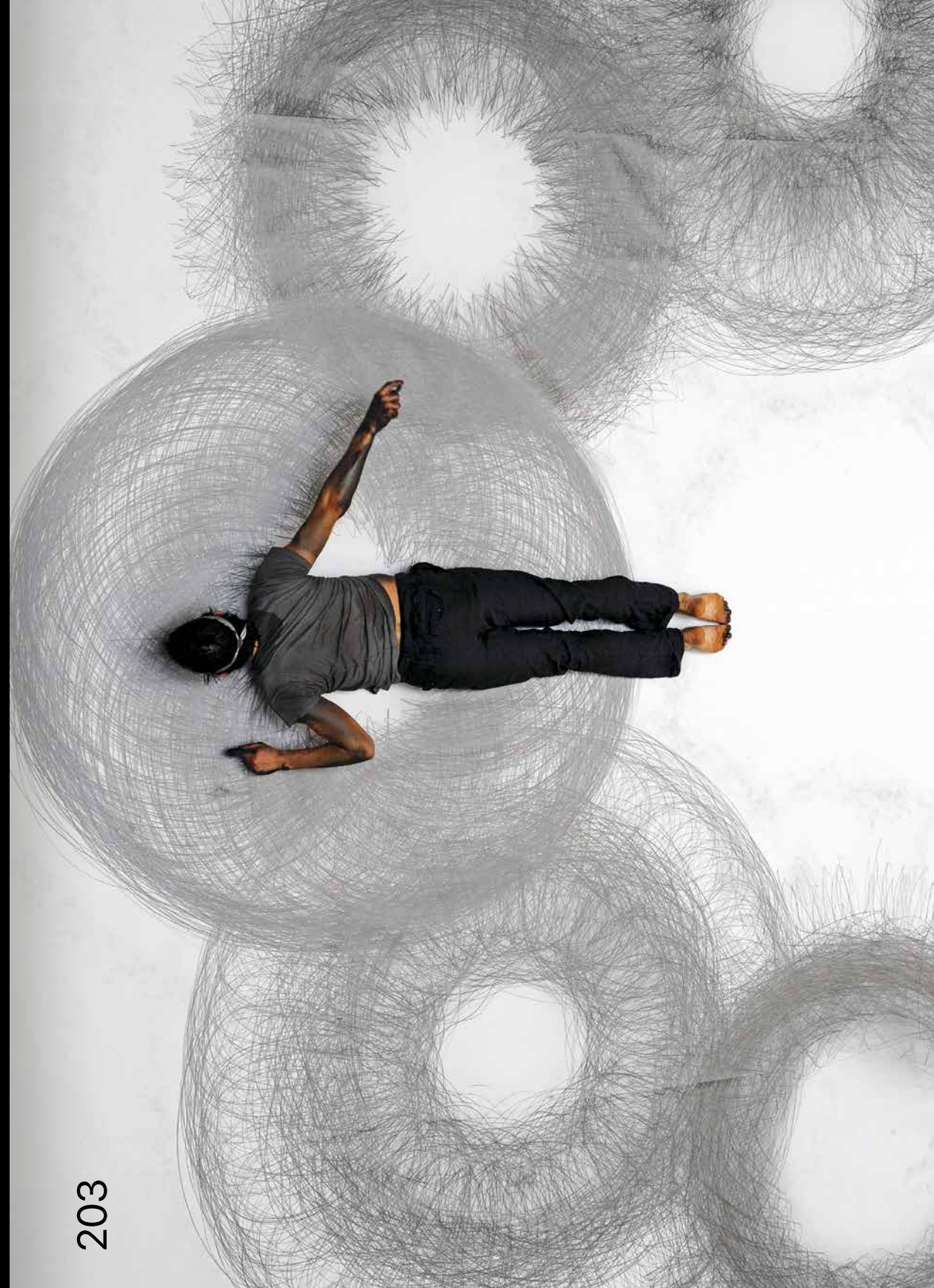
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Tony Orrico, [foreground] *Penwald*, 12: *prone to stand* (UB Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY) 2012, [background] *Penwald*: 2: 8 circles: 8 gestures, LP'11, CCCB, Barcelona, 2011

Trisha Brown, *It's a Draw/Live Feed*, 2008, Performance at Walker Art Center. Photo: Gene Pittman





ORRICO ON THE THRESHOLD: A REVIEW

Brooke Lynn McGowan · January 23, 2019



Installation view, Tony Orrico, Sins and Symbols Gallery, New York

Orrico on the threshold

[Signs and Symbols gallery](#)

New York, NY

By BROOKE LYNN MCGOWAN January, 2019

Who turned us thus around, so we,
no matter what, have the pose
of one who is departing? ...
So we live, forever taking leave.

- Rilke

"I am dancing with myself," Tony Orrico laughs, speaking on the occasion of his latest performance and exhibition, *A continuing gesture towards us*, at Signs and Symbols gallery, recently relocated to New York's Lower East Side. A former professional dancer turned performance artist, Orrico's current work continues to make use of the most basic tools of drawing—graphite, substrate, and guiding hand—in order to performatively lend to the medium a third and fourth dimension: spatiality and duration. Yet, this work, composed through continuous choreographed motions, also contains at once a dancer's memory of line and an attempt to mine the contemporary gestures of conflict, division and cultural apartheid that mark modern America.

However, if Orrico is dancing with himself, his gesture is also a counter gesture: he is also dancing with an other. The silence of the room is unstified by idle chatter, mindless chitchat, or the lugubrious, vicious muck of art speak or air kisses. A solitary bottle of Bulleit Rye sits on a pine bench beside the lithe form of a spectator, her spine straight and rapt attention betrayed her background as a dancer. Around the room hushed thong, old women and young men, sits, stands, leans above, and lies below a single turning form. The only sound is the rhythm of a pencil on a substrate. I've arrived one hour into the private view performance of *Supporting a continued gesture towards expanding sanctuary* (2019), whose "sustain"—a leitmotif of the artist's own vocabulary—would last long after my 90-minute sojourn between whisky and wood. The slender stranger leans over, whispering, without averting her gaze, "We danced together for most of a decade; I can't help but admire the openness and commitment of his body to the work."



Tony Orrico, mixed media

Orrico's commitment to the transition between dancer and artist began in 2009. After six years as a professional dancer for first Shen Wei Dance Arts and then the renowned Trisha Brown Dance Company, the artist knelt on his knees, sticks of graphite clutched in both hands. This 'circle' work of which the most recent iteration *Circle on Knees Reimagined* (2018) appears in the current exhibition, presents as a tondo, begging comparison to a mandala or the devotional compositions of Buddhist monks. "I swing my arms in sync, back and forth, in a pendular fashion" explains Orrico, "striking the surface of the paper, which naturally leaves dots at the point of impact and long strokes in the follow through." Tracing the circumference eight times, the performance from which the austere, minimalist and highly rhythmic work results, last only eight minutes. It is, states the artist, his "shortest work to date, yet most collected." Yet brevity can have great import. Those 480 seconds in 2009 informed the entirety of Orrico approach to his audience and the continuing of his performance practice; "This brought about the early realization that the work I would create would involve audience... the engagements would have no introductions or contrived formality [in order to] test how each action might earn the audience's concentration, silence, stillness, or otherwise."

With the ensuing development of his practice, Orrico's circular works expanded to the length and breathe of his body, with implicit Vitruvian dimensions, in his celebrated *Penwald* series, which has been performed at galleries and museums throughout the US and Europe, well before the artist had the opportunity to work with the durational aesthetics of Marina Abramovic, in the re-performance and retrospective of her work in 2010. However, it was a concept of 'threshold' taken from her tutelage, rather than endurance, which informed Orrico's work. "What I learned from that experience, for three months, several days a week holding such space multiple times a day for hours, definitely influenced the trajectory of my developing work. Marina speaks about meeting a 'threshold' ... that has become an anchoring moment in most of my repertory of performances. It's a moment that seems to actually begin each work; it's a promise of relief and deeper consciousness that lies on the other side of major discomfort and even disorientation. On the other side, for me, is where the essence of the engagement is."



Installation view, Tony Orrico, Signs and Symbols Gallery, New York

This engagement is not simply bodily—the point is not, or is not *only*, to push the body to the edge of collapse. Rather, in *Supporting a continued gesture towards expanding sanctuary* (2019), the central work of the current exhibition and that which I was fortunate enough to witness as a whiskey marinated audience member on a cold January evening, Orrico's commitment extends towards an investigation of the power of gesture as a form of engagement with the suffering of others. "Our one common human experience is suffering," explains the artist. "In this case, I am considering more of the implications of gesture from person to person... holding, receiving, framing, identifying, supporting, underlining. In referencing images of people in these heightened states I am looking at their hands.. coping inside of what they may be enduring." Composed on purposely provisional, seeming rickety structural support of thin wooden slats bound together with string and expanding foam, like the aftermath of an unsuccessful barrier, to which a continuous pathway of paper is attached, the work furthers Orrico's consideration of the sculptural possibilities of drawing, not only through the spatiality of his own body, but space taking gesture of work per se. Sourcing media images of the hand movements of individuals experiencing conflict or tragic circumstances—such as the anguish of a father and a daughter in the border crisis or the sorrow of individuals in the aftermath of a mass shooting—the artist composes the continuous choreography of the drawing, completed through obsessively repeated, constrained pirouettes over three hours, with graphite in both hands, not through a strict appropriation of each gesture, but through the formation of what he calls a counter gesture. These consist of, he clarifies, "gestures that identify what I personally can perceive, being the only interaction that is actual and possible via the degrees of our separation in our experiences, as the most sincere way for me to access my own compassion towards their predicament": gestures of coping, empathy, or support.

Though the futility of the intention couched in this work remains obvious, the piece itself is successful in its own partial, rundown, DIY, quotidian poetry: a persistent visual precarity reflect the lives of those to which artist would reach out. The solipsism of previous compositions falls away: Orrico is no longer dancing with himself but extending a hand to the thousands of victims of violence and solitary tragedy in contemporary society. This is an effort of somatic understanding, an ode to the visceral helplessness inscribed in what Susan Sontag called, 'regarding the pain of others', without the simplification, agitation, or illusion of consensus that direct images of conflict and suffering might provoke. He is dancing with an other, perhaps absent, elsewhere, or off-stage, but nonetheless, there, and not there: forever taking leave. WM

The New York Times

6 Dance Performances to See in N.Y.C. This Weekend

Gia Kourlas December • 27, 2018



Peiju Chein-Pott, center, and fellow members of the Martha Graham Dance Company in “Prelude to Action,” a work the troupe will perform again for the American Dance Platform at the Joyce on Jan. 3.
Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Our guide to dance performances happening this weekend and in the week ahead.

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER at New York City Center (Dec. 28, 8 p.m.; Dec. 29, 2 and 8 p.m.; Dec. 30, 3 and 7:30 p.m.). On Sunday, this troupe wraps up its season with a special finale highlighting this year’s premieres. It was an impressive one in that regard, with compelling new dances by Ronald K. Brown and Rennie Harris; the evening culminates with “Revelations.” One more family matinee remains, on Saturday, which includes a Q. and A. with Ailey dancers following the performance. Looking ahead to Jan. 5 — on what would have been Ailey’s 88th birthday — Judith Jamison, the company’s artistic director emerita, holds a workshop at Ailey Studios. Open to dancers of all levels and backgrounds, it is a personal celebration of the group’s founder.

212-581-1212, nycitycenter.org

AMERICAN DANCE PLATFORM at the Joyce Theater (Jan. 3, 8 p.m.; through Jan. 7). Six companies take part in this showcase, starting with the mixed bill of the Martha Graham Dance Company and Stephen Petronio Company. The Graham troupe, led by its artistic director, Janet Eilber, presents Pontus Lidberg's "Woodland" and two sections from Graham's revelatory "Chronicle": "Steps in the Street" and "Prelude to Action." For his part, Petronio offers his own "Hardness 10" and Steve Paxton's "Excerpt From Goldberg Variations." The run continues with more pairings: from Philadelphia, BalletX and Raphael Xavier (Jan. 4 and 6), and Ephrat Asherie Dance and Ronald K. Brown/Evidence with Arturo O'Farrill and Resist (Jan. 5 and 6).

212-242-0800, joyce.org

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO at the Joyce Theater (Dec. 28, 8 p.m.; Dec. 29, 3 and 8 p.m.; Dec. 30, 3 p.m.). It may not be as conventional as "The Nutcracker," but any performance by the Trocks, as they are affectionately known, adds up to one of the most festive outings in town. This all-male company of highly technical dancers and comedians skews the classics with old-world glamour. This year, there are two programs and the welcome return — after 15 years — of Robert LaFosse's Balanchine-inspired "Stars and Stripes Forever," set to music by John Philip Sousa.

212-242-0800, joyce.org

CHASE BROCK EXPERIENCE at the Beckett Theater at Theater Row (Dec. 28-29, 8 p.m.; Dec. 30, 3 and 7 p.m.; Jan. 2-3, 8 p.m.; through Jan. 13). Brock plants his new piece, "The Girl With the Alkaline Eyes," in a futuristic setting: a high-tech lab where Oliver, a young coder, is hard at work on a secret project related to artificial intelligence. (It's all in the title.) In this 70-minute dance thriller, featuring a score and scenario by Eric Dietz, Brock explores the desire between a man and his machine.

212-239-6200, chasebrockexperience.com

'GEORGE BALANCHINE'S THE NUTCRACKER' at the David H. Koch Theater (Dec. 28-29, 2 and 8 p.m.; Dec. 30, 1 and 5 p.m.). It is the last weekend to bask in New York City Ballet's stellar mix of dancing and storytelling. From the party scene to the sparkling Kingdom of the Sugar Plum Fairy, this holiday classic, with its visual surprises and heart, never fails to delight. On Saturday at 2 p.m., the cast features a young, talented trio: Emilie Gerrity as the Sugar Plum Fairy, Silas Farley as the Cavalier and Miriam Miller as Dewdrop.

212-496-0600, nycballet.com

TONY ORRICO at Signs and Symbols (Jan. 3, 6-8 p.m.; through Jan. 27). The gallery hosts "A Continued Gesture Towards Us," a site-specific performance and exhibition in which Orrico, an artist and dancer, translates his movement practice into visual forms. His performative works — two-handed drawings as intricate and feathery as spiderwebs — create three-dimensional experiences in which he uses his body as a guide for measurement. For the first two weeks of the show, Orrico will turn the gallery space into his studio; in addition to graphite, he will work with rope, reclaimed wood, foam, glue and plaster. Opening night features a reception and a 90-minute session in which Orrico performs a drawing. It's a fascinating sight.

917-880-8953, signsandsymbols.art

A version of this article appears in print on Dec. 28, 2018, on Page C22 of the New York edition with the headline: Dance. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

The logo for HuffPost, featuring the word "HUFFPOST" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letters are set against a black rectangular background. On either side of the text, there is a vertical teal bar.

Tony Orrico Performance At Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros, Mexico City

Heinrich Schmidt · December 06, 2017

With the exhibition CARBON, the Polyforum Siqueiros in Mexico City presents Tony Orrico's third solo exhibition. Orrico is a visual artist as well as a performer and choreographer, and is a former member of Trisha Brown Dance Company as well as Shen Wei Dance Arts. He was chosen as one of the performers that re-performed Marina Abramovic's work in her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In his work, Orrico combines movement and drawing. His drawings are created by performances that he realizes either in his studio or live in front of an audience. On his website, he writes that his Penwald Drawings are "a series of bilateral drawings in which Tony Orrico explores the use of his body as a tool of measurement to inscribe geometries through movement and course. The master of each drawing is a conceptual score of Orrico's efficacious techniques, imposed variables, and specified durations and/or objectives." Because of the geometric curves that he creates during his performances, he is sometimes called the "human spirograph".

Tony Orrico's three month solo exhibition (curated by MARSO) takes place in a remarkable building that was designed by the Mexican social realist painter David Alfaro Siqueiros in the 1960s. The decagon shaped construction hosts the massive mural work called La Marcha de la Humanidad.

Tony Orrico: Fourths And Quarters (performance). Polyforum Siqueiros, Mexico City, April 19, 2012. Video by Jacinto Astiazarán.

For more videos covering contemporary art go to VernissageTV.

Marcela Quiroz • September, 2015

Mexico City Reviews

Tony Orrico

MARSO GALERÍA DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO



Tony Orrico, *Untitled (mask)*, 2015, Sri Lankan graphite, porcupine quills, starfish, tape, solder, paper clips, seashell, chicken bones, beads, *barro negro*, semen, hair, 10 1/4 × 7 × 13".

Tony Orrico's work is an exploration of the infinite and finite dimensions that inhabit our body—both its maximum potentials and its frail and perishable reality. His performative drawings are configured by countless graphite traces. This exhibition, "Movement Toward Definition," focused on the American artist's recent work, although two 2011 works from his "Penwald" series, 2009–, were also included to establish some context for his current practice.

Waning (Hyde Park, Arts Center, Chicago, IL), 2013, is a mountain-like figure drawn in graphite on a sheet covering almost an entire wall. The traces captured inside its imprecise borders seem like a vibrating checkerboard pattern. Up close, the lines reveal a wavering quality that testifies to their status as corporeal evidence, and yet the intensity marked by their ambiguous configuration suggests that these are not necessarily marks made under the artist's control. Their irregularities (in trajectory, length, intensity) seem to resonate within the most intimate sensible energy of the viewer's nervous system. The quality, consistency, density, and imperfection captured in each trace make it feel as if it had just been drawn, lending it a latent energy that unexpectedly echoes within the other almost-still body in the room: that of the viewer.

On a small screen, we could see the documentation of this drawing being made: Against a white wall, a man—the artist himself, who was formerly a professional dancer with the Trisha Brown Dance Company—stands against a wall (sometimes facing it, sometimes with his back to it), holding thick graphite pencils in both hands. It's as if he's trying to undo the divide between his own body and the crisp white wall. Then he falls down onto the floor, dragging his arms against the wall while struggling to keep both hands in contact with its surface. Each fall leaves two wandering lines on the wall, every mark revealing, in its own manner, the body's strength and endurance. Orrico gets up and repeats the action over and over again, falling first to one side, then the other—insistently, relentlessly, yet hopefully tracing his own fleshly finitude. His traces probe the potential of the human body as both creator and subject. The artist confronts the body *within* its own singular dimensions, capacity for movement, and unspoken inner rhythms, allowing the audience to understand through the body's delicate, shivering murmur that our corporeal groundings are limitless energy; it is this core vital dynamism that the artist aims to limn again and again in his work.

Also shown here were Orrico's first sculptural works created with "other bodies" (porcupine spines, chicken bones, shells, and so on). What appears to be a delicately arched human back is instead a succession of graphite-covered echinoderms (*Standing Knobby Starfish*, 2015). By relating the creature's outward skeleton to our internal one—also resilient but not openly visible, and protected by our flesh—the artist evokes a sense of enduring corporeality that transcends the differences between species. In all the works gathered in this exhibition, drawings and sculptures, the viewer rediscovers his or her own body as an energy-compacted witness conveyed within space. The bodies Orrico aims to "move toward definition" seem to shed their own temporal, material, and contextual roots, so as to offer us the possibility of reconstructing traces of unexpected relationships that are fleeting yet eternal.

—*Marcela Quiroz*

<https://hyperallergic.com/241489/a-performance-artist-draws-with-his-teeth/>

HYPERALLERGIC

ARTICLES

A Performance Artist Draws with His Teeth



Natalie Axton October 2, 2015



Tony Orrico performing “Prepare the Plane” (2012) at Polyforum Siqueiros, Mexico City (photo by Juan Cano, courtesy Marso Gallery)

Tomorrow at noon, visual and performing artist [Tony Orrico](#) will sit down at an eight-by-eight-foot sheet of paper and begin to chew. He’ll keep chewing, slowly treating the entire paper with his teeth, for eight and a half hours. The endurance effort — taking place [Saturday](#) at [Defibrillator](#) in Chicago — is a performance of one of Orrico’s signature pieces, “Prepare the Plane” (2012).

While many artists have made work dealing with the body, it's safe to say that few share Orrico's interest in the specific articulation of the human jaw.

"Well, there's personal backstory in my curiosity about the jaw," explains Orrico. It started six months into Orrico's undergraduate dance studies at Illinois State University, when his jaw started dislocating several times a week. "The first time it happened it really shocked me and landed me in the hospital. I couldn't close my mouth. My chin was against my chest and I was stuck — wide open — for hours."

The problem, which Orrico attributes to an underlying alignment problem, continued into his graduate work in dance and his first job dancing for choreographer Shen Wei. "My first weekend in New York my jaw locked open for three days," Orrico says. "I hid in this apartment that I was renting. I had to show up to rehearsal on Monday so I went to the ER on Sunday night." An ER doctor had to straddle Orrico on a hospital bed and throw his entire body weight into Orrico's face in order to reset the jaw, a procedure Orrico had to explain to the doctor. It worked. "I went for rehearsal on Monday and I didn't tell a soul. That was my first day of work in New York."

Dance had been a creative revelation for Orrico. "I was painting a lot [in college] and instead of working just two-dimensionally I was really excited about a third dimension and addressing the body experientially." Additionally, he was drawn to the work of postmodern, Judson Church-era dance artists. Says Orrico, "My passion inside of dance is this idea of physics and the body. Postmodernists have worked with [everything from] pedestrian movement to full-on codified technique, but were always working conceptually first, placing the body through systems and structures. And that's everything that informs my work." After his time with Shen Wei Dance Arts, Orrico went on to work for Trisha Brown.

To meet the demands of his professional dance career Orrico dove into the relationship between his own mind and body. He overcame his jaw dislocation problem with a series of exercises, or a body "logic" he created, a logic that relied heavily on resetting the body through awareness and symmetry, and using feelings of levitation and suspension. "I've seen a lot of doctors, I went to physical therapists," he says. "Nothing was working for me except these early fundamentals I was discovering in my practice."

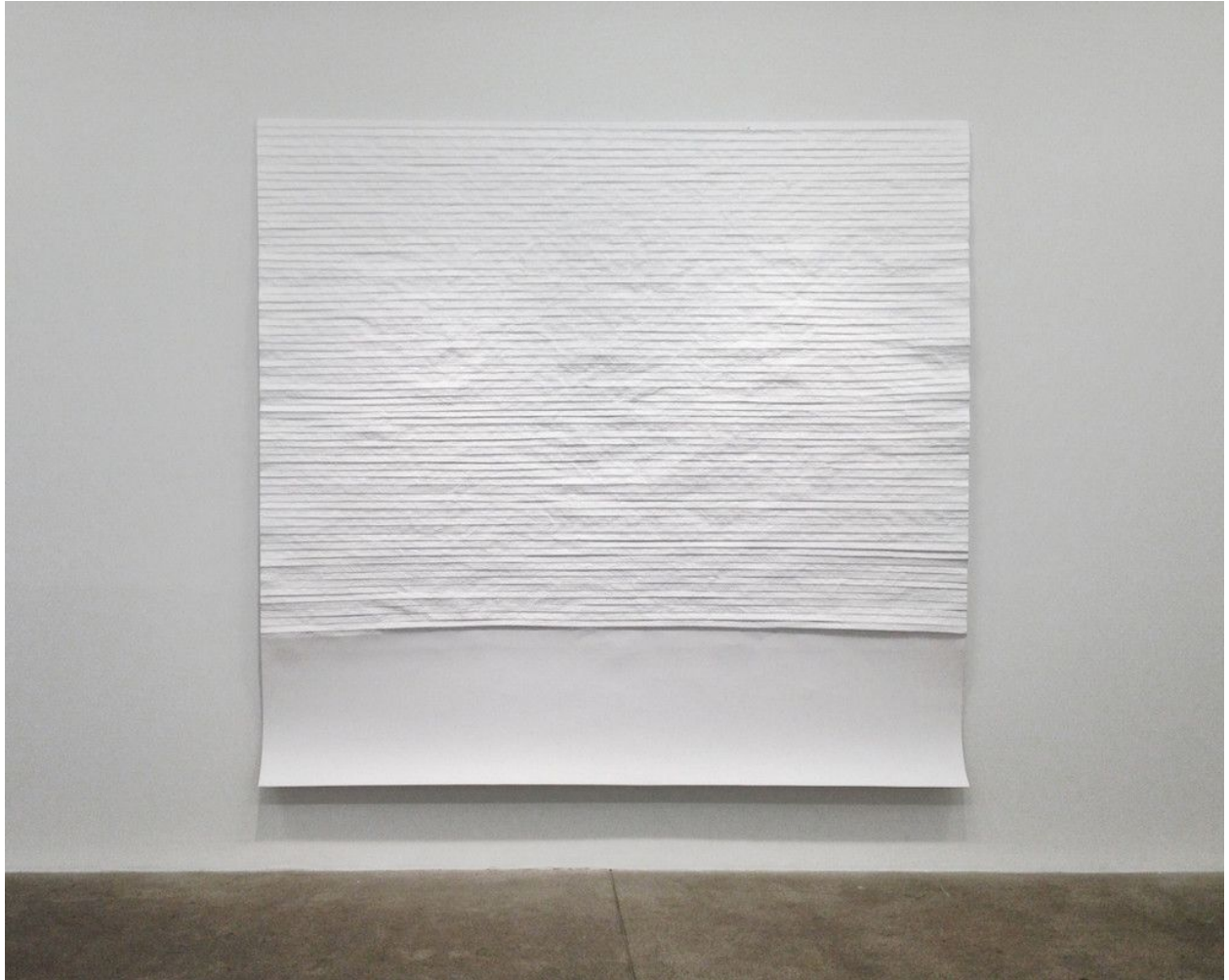
Indeed, symmetry acts a kind of dual muse and processor for Orrico. One of Orrico's recent films turns an improvised hand dance by Yvonne Rainer into a choreography. Called "Accelerated Image" (2014), the short film features Orrico dancing opposite his wife, Melinda Jean Myers, to an original score by John McGrew. Orrico learned the movement on one hand, then taught it to his other, and had Myers perform the same movements opposite him and in unison.



Tony Orrico performing "Penwald: 2: 8 circles: 8 gestures" at CCCB, Barcelona in 2011. (photo by David Ruano, courtesy the artist)

The body logic practice is something Orrico has developed into a workshop, which he offered at Defibrillator this week ahead of his performance on Saturday. It is deeply rational, he explains, and it informs all of his paintings and drawings. His Penwald series, which began in 2009, marked Orrico's arrival on the scene as a conceptual artist. Remarking on a *Penwald* drawing Orrico performed at Dance Theater Workshop in 2010, *Wall Street Journal* dance critic Robert Greskovic described Orrico as "Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man in contemporary, casual clothing, seen from the back, extending his arms in the act of conjuring a vaporous circle out of continuously scrawling black lines." Watching him perform these drawings and watching the drawings take shape, slowly — and in the movement arts, the power of slowness is harnessed all too rarely — was like witnessing an act of meditation. This is an effect, Orrico says, that comes from the physical practice he uses to prepare and maintain himself during a performance.

Humanism aside, the precision and endurance of the *Penwald* performances evoke a kind of organic machine. Orrico is no longer dancing professionally and he has what he describes as an “increasingly untrained body.” He says that where his *Penwald* drawings are about limitation, his *Carbon series* is about imagination. “It’s like walking from room to room wherever the imagination wants to wander,” he says. And a lot of the work concerns preparing the body as a material and as a tool. It all starts, he says, with “Prepare the Plane.”



Tony Orrico, “Prepare the Plane” (2014) at PPOW Gallery in New York (image courtesy of PPOW Gallery)
(click to enlarge)

He has performed this piece twice before. The first time was in Mexico City in 2012. Orrico expected the effort to last about two hours. It took four times that long. The second time he sat down to the piece, in 2014, he said he was “terrified.” “There’s publicity around it. There’s a date, a time, there’s

a blank spot on the wall to hang the work when it's finished. And I have a lot of distractions in my life and I've lost touch with my body in a lot of ways. I feel pretty average when I sit down in front of a concept I created three years ago. I feel an on-pouring of fear. And then I go." (In the end it took him almost exactly as long to complete the piece the second time around.)

He says that if the need to get up — for water, to go to the bathroom, or just for a break — becomes overwhelming, that's when the piece will end. "I want to take a body, a piece of paper, and a task and just see how long it can go and what the visual effects of that are."

Tony Orrico performs "Prepare the Plane" at Defibrillator (1453 West Chicago Avenue, Chicago, Illinois) on Saturday, October 3, from noon to 8pm. The performance will be followed by a talk and reception.

PAJ

Voyage of the Transfer: Tony Orrico

May 15, 2014

While investigating subtleties within movement efficiency as a dancer, my attention strongly favored the depth of awareness I was experiencing onstage. In fact, any extent of virtuosity became too strong of a distraction from what I was interested in exploring.

I began to consider consciousness as a medium. I had danced for nearly a decade, and I asked myself: What are the other applications for a ready body and mind? What might they imply? Blurring the lines between my ongoing disciplines, I began appropriating my own somatic work, my *symmetry practice* (circa 2005) as methodology to enter my visual work. Previously, as a mover, I used these visualization exercises to help me alert proprioceptors and balance the hemispheric tension of my body. In 2008, I stopped painting with a dominant hand and employed bilateral drawing as a means to measure dual frictions against a surface. In my termed *state of readiness*, I started to investigate the sustained application of a present body to a plane, object, or course.

I am fascinated with how physical impulses manifest into visible forms. My work often displays infinities of reflective and rotational symmetry with attention to what is lost/gained through representations and how imagery in motion may replicate, mutate, or disintegrate. Centralizing on themes of cyclic motion and the generation and regeneration of material, my work draws on the tension between what is fleeting and what is captured.

Without the use of technology, I have been attempting interface with the invisible. Sight is one sense that we use to negotiate and communicate shared space, and it constantly reminds us of what materials are tangible or what constructs are in place. We interpret and represent visible structures through point, line, shape, fill, etc. We can create substance from substance by tapping into universal matter and reorganizing it to make our concepts visible. I appreciate ways action turns solid and how the image or residue of something experiential may fail to translate. The exchange of images feels much more distant than we realize. It is less of a handshake and more of a note sent by carrier pigeon. The image received has the voyage of the transfer impressed upon it.

Drawing

Austin R. Williams • April 13 2011



TONY ORRICO

*Drawing at the
Speed of Daylight*

BY AUSTIN R. WILLIAMS



Photo by Amanda L. Phillips. © 2011 Austin R. Williams. All rights reserved. All images are for editorial use only.

When we draw any subject from life, we are always drawing the same thing: light. It is the artist's ultimate subject, and one of the greatest challenges a young artist faces is learning to recognize how light is working in a given situation and how best to reproduce it and modify its appearance to suit one's vision.

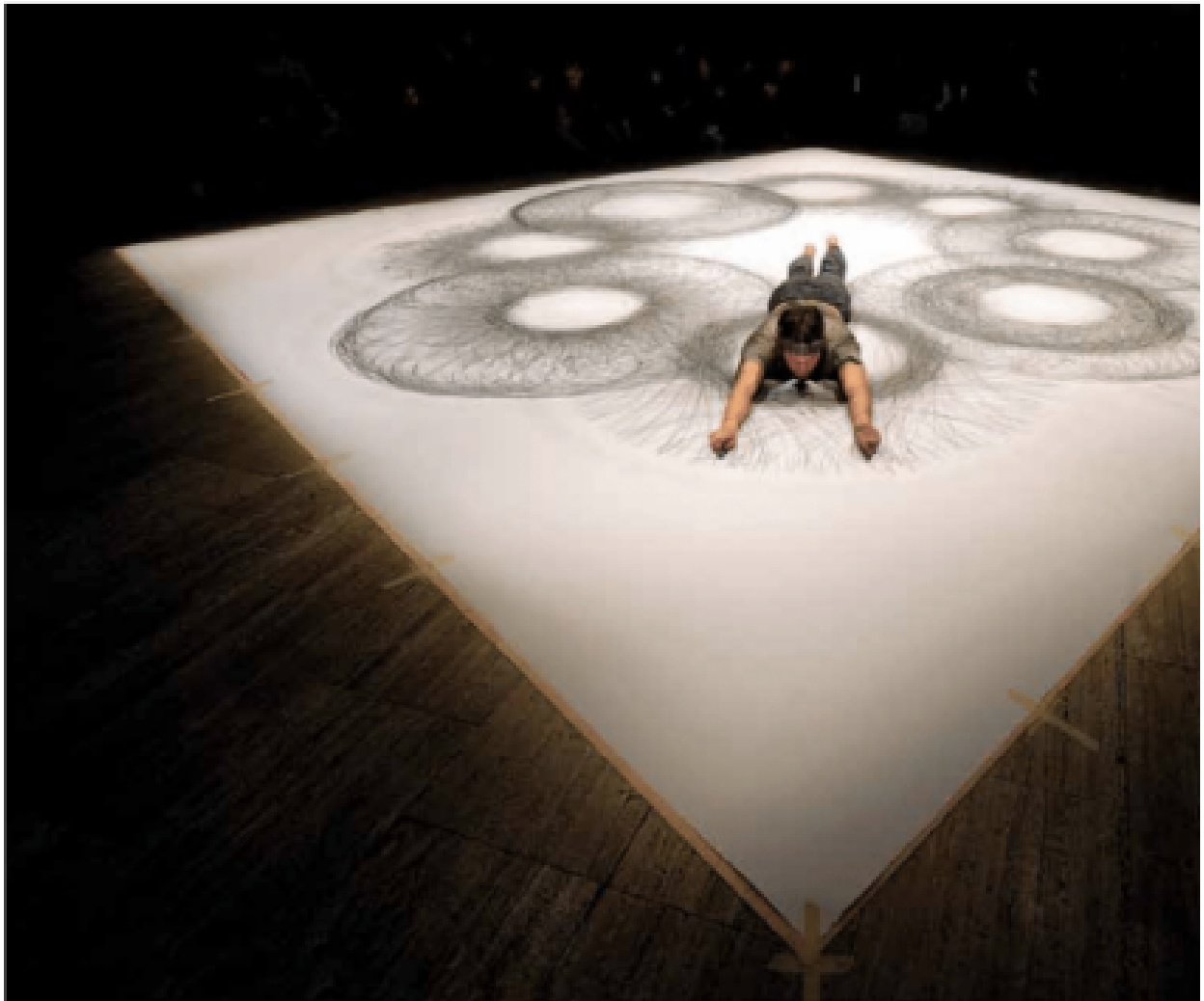
In his recent work "passing light (Mural 1) 2012," Tony Orrico takes another approach to the practice of drawing light. Rather than capturing light as it illuminates forms, he strives to depict light itself, following rays of sunshine traveling across his paper with graphite. The results are intriguing, geared, and original.

The inspiration for "passing light" came when the artist was sitting on his couch. "There's one cast of light that comes through my door at home—a little half-circle," Orrico says. "I was just sitting around, and I started to notice its habits, what walls and furniture it crawled across. I took out paper and was interested in trying to capture that light and document that movement and that passing of time."

Orrico positioned a sheet of paper in the sliver of light and covered the area where it fell with a stick of graphite. As the light moved, the artist's paper and graphite followed. This is a novel experiment. Normally



OPPOSITE PAGE AND ABOVE
passing light (Mural 1) 2012
www.tonyorrico.com



or tone—the absence of light. Orrico reversed this, using tone, somewhat counterintuitively, to represent light itself. He also found that because his hand was following the path of light, the graphite looked as though it was onstage under a spotlight. For Orrico, an artist who combines drawing with live performance, this suggested possibilities.

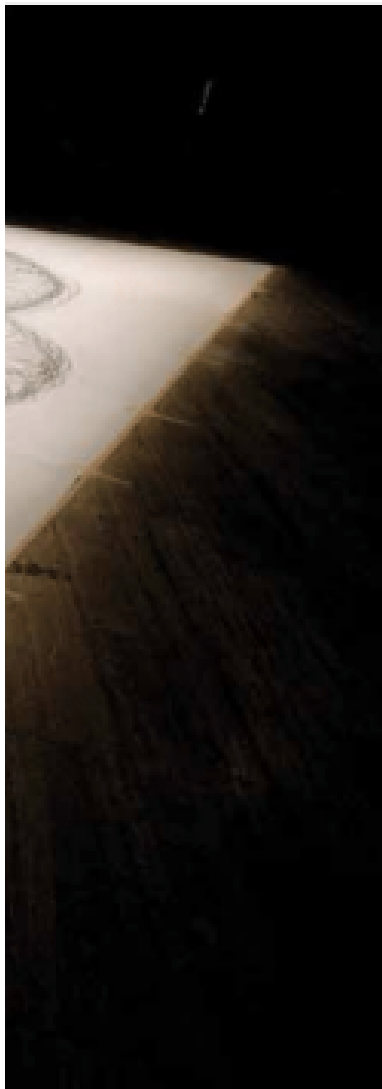
Orrico has studied both as a visual artist and as a dancer, and his current work merges these art forms—most of his drawings are done in graphite

and created in front of an audience. The artist is particularly interested in exploring themes of motion, repetition, and the possibilities and limitations of the body. In his ongoing Penwald series, for example, Orrico stretches his body across large surfaces, holding graphite sticks in his hands and moving them to create circular patterns on the paper. The results are large-scale drawings that are abstract but also highly informed by the human body.

“passing light” gave the artist

further opportunity to explore these areas of interest. “I was looking at uniting body, surface, graphite, and movement,” Orrico says. “I knew this work would sit with some of those themes.” A month after he first experimented with the project, he started to formulate it as a full piece to be drawn in front of an audience.

He began by setting some parameters. He decided to keep his paper stationary as a beam of light fell across it. He would draw the area where the light hit the paper, using sticks of 2B graphite.



As the light moved across the surface, with one hand he would continue to draw the light, and with his other hand he would smudge and erase the areas the light had left. When the light had entirely left the surface of the drawing, the piece would be finished.

The artist arranged to create the work in a grand venue, the Museo Nacional de Arte, in Mexico City. Over the course of a day, he and his audience travelled to various floors of the building, where the artist found spots with strong fields of light. He completed four pieces, the shortest taking 30 minutes, the longest taking more than two hours.

As in much of Orrico's other work, patterns began to form—both visual patterns on his surface and patterns of movement in the artist's

body. "I was drawing with my right hand, erasing with my left, creating a similar rhythm of passing from right to left. Then there would just be these stains and trails of shape that would slowly distort due to the angle of the sun." The experience offered some surprises. "I was tricked by my own concept, because as one shard of light would pass by, another would start at the tip of the paper," he says.

Orrico's process emphasized the impermanence, elusiveness, and beauty of light—no small feat. Light has fascinated artists for so long that it's not often you come across a novel approach to depicting it, but Orrico may offer just that. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT
WWW.TONYORRICO.COM.

ABOVE AND RIGHT

Fenwald: 2; 8 circles; 8 gestures (L'PTL, CCCB, Barcelona, Spain) 2011

2011, graphite, 240 x 240, approximately 2 hours.



PHOTOGRAPH BY PHOTOGRAFIA: MONTAÑA, IN COLLABORATION WITH TONYORRICO.COM

Art in America

Tony Orrico

Leah Ollman · August 27, 2011



Photo: Tony Orrico: Penwald 4: unison symmetry standing, 2011, marker on wall, approx. 6½ by 8 feet; at Shoshana Wayne.

Tony Orrico takes the basic ingredients of drawing—a mark-making implement, an agent to move it, a surface and the time elapsed during the process—and intensifies them to a thrilling degree. With sticks of graphite clenched in his fists, he performs series of repeated, varied movements engaging his entire body over predetermined periods of time, or until certain numbers of strokes, cycles or rotations are completed. The drawings that result are strikingly beautiful traces of his actions, resonant with the ritualized, meditative, physically demanding processes that produced them.

Orrico has performed his drawings publicly in a variety of locales in the U.S. and Europe since 2009. This is his first gallery exhibition. In addition to 10 works on paper (all 2011), Orrico created a wall drawing on site. For each of its three parts, he stood in a single position for four hours, markers in both hands, moving his arms in unison to the length of his reach. The dense, scraggly masses of blue-black line that accreted over the allotted time resemble the twinned lobes of the brain, tangled with internal circuitry. “Penwald,” the collective title of all the drawings, refers to a learned ambidexterity; Orrico’s physical acts pay tribute to the cerebral engine that drives them.

Most of the drawings assume the form of whole or partial circles, taking measure of the span of Orrico’s outstretched arms or the arc circumscribed by the motion of his wrist. A DVD playing in the gallery shows the artist, a trained dancer, in

action, and the subtitles of the works indicate the posture or duration involved. For *Penwald: 3: circle on knees* (studio impression 2), Orrico swung his graphite-wielding arms brusquely forward and backward, rhythmically lifting and lowering his knees to rotate his body. The drawing represents the sum of eight laps and contains all the dynamism of its making, the lines strong and swift, punctuated by a spray of small, dark dabs, like seeds in a centrifuge.

Orrico created the largest work in the show before an invited audience a few days prior to the opening. With balletic athleticism, he drew a wreath of eight interlocking rings on a roughly 20-foot-square expanse of paper comprising 25 sheets. Each ring is the culmination of a distinct, bilateral gesture made while lying on his stomach and using his bare feet to turn his body like the hand of a clock. He completed the self-prescribed eight laps around the platform in just under two hours, his skin slick with sweat and the silvery sheen of graphite. Orrico's feats of endurance owe much to Marina Abramović (he was one of the "re-performers" in her recent MoMA retrospective), and bring to mind as well Richard Long's poetic transcriptions of presence and Jackson Pollock's physically immersive webs. With elegance and concision, the drawings exalt the symmetry and proportions of the human form. They dynamically reprise Leonardo's Vitruvian man, the vacant middle of each of Orrico's circles a smudged ode to what the Renaissance polymath suggestively called man's "center of magnitude."

JUXTAPOZ

TONY ORRICO'S PENWALD DRAWINGS

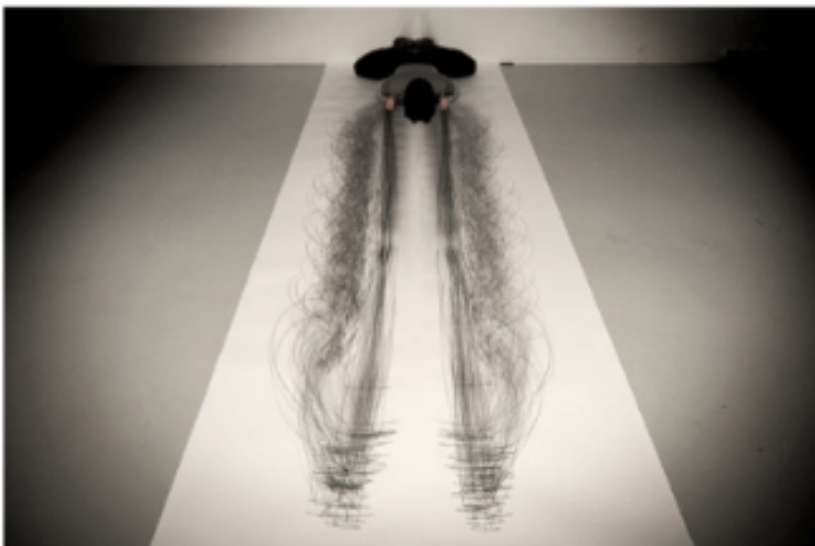
John Pavlus • April 13 2011



These are magnificent. [Tony Orrico](#) is an artist and dancer who has been called the human spirograph, performing for up to 4 hours continuously. In these videos you can see his process, and how he can actually go out his performance drawings for over 4 hours. Incredible stuff.

Orrico has a solo show opening at Shosana Wayne Gallery in Santa Monica on May 28, 2011.

Via [Booooooom](#).



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Drawn Into His Web

Robert Greskovic • September 2, 2010

The casually lettered sign on the sidewalk in front of Dance Theater Workshop says "Live Drawing Tonight 5–9 p.m." Passersby shouldn't take this to mean a lottery of any sort.



Tony Orrico in performance. *Liliana Dirks-Goodman*

Behind the glass front of the theater's lobby, they'll find something far more unusual and intriguingly artful. Think, perhaps, of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man in contemporary, casual clothing, seen from the back, extending his arms in the act of conjuring a vaporous circle out of continuously scrawling black lines.

To kick off its current fall season, DTW is presenting visual artist and performer Tony Orrico, working in a series of on-site drawing sessions that he calls "Penwald Drawings." "Penwald: 4: unison symmetry standing" began on Tuesday and is planned for four uninterrupted hours on three

consecutive evenings. To date, this is the longest sustained time Mr. Orrico has devoted to drawing.

For an organization that prides itself on stressing the contemporary and experimental in the performing arts, DTW's choice of Mr. Orrico's edgy work, somewhere between movement theater and visual-art making, is apt. Situated on the edge of DTW's actual theater area—the gallery wall marks the border between the lobby and theater space—his "live drawing" event amounts to an installation and performance.

Penwald: 4: unison symmetry standing

Dance Theater Workshop
Live drawing through Sept. 2.

Installation on display through the winter.

What you'll see at the free event is Mr. Orrico, neatly dressed in gray and black, almost meditatively facing the space's pristine, white wall. Depending on the point at which you observe what is happening, you'll either find the Illinois-born 31-year-old inscribing a delicate mesh of fine black lines—I was partly put in mind of foliage-like configurations

reminiscent of Ellsworth Kelly—or you'll observe a dense build-up of overlapping lines, suggesting a thickening web or bubble of blacks and grays that tell of sooty smoke or charred membranes. The lines at the perimeter appear like animated solar eruptions captured by high-powered telescopes.

Similar to Leonardo's iconic, classically proportioned Vitruvian Man—with his arms outstretched to each side, drawn in duplicate to suggest motion—Mr. Orrico works symmetrically from a central, vertical axis. When you pause to study his activity in his fixed stance, you note that his center-parted hair, spine and straight, parallel legs define a kind of stem to his constantly moving arms. Eventually the amassed array of angling, discursive and moving lines define what might be two halves of an intricately crimped brain or the tangled filaments of a dandelion seed head.

Casual ambient sounds give Mr. Orrico's drawing performance extra dimensions. When, at the start, he removes the tops from the felt-tipped pens that are his chosen implement and lets the caps clatter to the floor, they sound like discarded shell casings from, say, plastic bullets. And as he wears out a succession of these markers, one hears sounds related to their function. When they are fresh with ink, they pass over the wall slickly, almost caressingly. Eventually, as they get depleted, Mr. Orrico tends to press them harder and harder onto the wall, where they variously squeak and scrape their lines in place.

For body language, Mr. Orrico—who has danced with Shen Wei Dance Arts and with the Trisha Brown Dance Company—displays moves that express different characteristics of his varied line-making. While remaining in his stationary position, he can seem free as a bird, extending his arms like outstretched wings. He can also suggest an almost demonic intensity, his elbows, shoulder blades and tightly gripping fingers seeming to grind their joints, as if he is aiming to dig his lines deeply into the wall's surface.

For those unable to take in this project on site, DTW provides a live-stream webcast that documents the full four hours of each session (www.ustream.tv/channel/dance-theater-workshop). A somewhat edited version of the individual days' footage will remain on the site. Once all three drawings are in place on the lobby's wall, they'll be displayed there through the winter.

Mr. Orrico will also return to New York after traveling for a stint in the Netherlands to create a similar project. Back at Dance Theater Workshop, there will be a special reception on Nov. 4, when he will create another kind of "Penwald," one he calls "circle on knees" and is done in graphite on paper. It sounds softer and more restful in character, but its creation will likely be just as fascinating to ponder as Mr. Orrico's standing, indelible ink efforts.

Mr. Greskovic writes about dance for the Journal.

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