

Alix Pearlstein

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Production Still, Talent.

Alix Pearlstein's "Talent" presents two videos that look at space-time relationships among actors and the self-consciousness of getting ahead in show business, as well in front of the camera.

In the titular video, shown upstairs in the gallery, a line of actors perform in front of a mirror in a light-filled dance studio, carrying out a series of exercises that alternately highlights their self-absorption and the attentive execution of their actions. The camera drifts laterally back and forth along a white line on the studio floor, creating a physical and mental division between the cast and crew. Actors pass a baguette from one to another, and the camera zooms in on their chewing. A vampy blonde lifts up her dress. Another woman steps apart from the group and theatrically introduces herself as Stacey. "Hi, Stacey," responds the group in rote unison.

When a man falls, halting the group's ambient wanderings, the others appear annoyed that one of the group disrupted the cohesion of the exercises. As he lands in front of the studio mirror, the rest of the ensemble shuns him to form a line a few feet in front of him, closer to the camera. Performers applaud at varying paces — a spirited clap, a slow and bored one, and a few barely participate. Through their applause, they demonstrate the range of affirmative reactions that an audience can give them, enacting a ritualistic display of reverence for the camera that records and justifies their actions. Later, they hold up their headshots away from their faces to blankly state their identities to the camera, and then exchange their photos with the actors to brandish them again. Curiously, two of the male actors have the same photo.

Pearlstein takes her cues from Dan Graham's 1975 performance tape *Performance/Audience/Mirror*, in which the artist narrates his relationship to the audience to which he is speaking, and Michael Bennett's musical, *A Chorus Line*, from the same year, about an audition that toys with similar ideas of group dynamics and individuation. After exploring the emotional lives of the individual actors, who dress in rehearsal clothes, in the final number, they wear matching gold costumes. In some sequences, Pearlstein's actors wear shades of black, blue, and purple that emphasize their bodies and personal style; in others, they wear black tops and jeans or blue pants.

The other video on display, *Finale*, projected downstairs, is a refracted version of *Talent*, taking place at night. The camera is positioned at a different vantage point, this time in the middle of the room. It rotates at varying slowed-down speeds, but it never lingers too long on any given moment, as though it is searching for something unspecified. Instead of capturing full-body shots, the camera absorbs whatever is directly in front of it — a preening woman's back, a window at dusk, the Empire State Building. The same actor that fell in *Talent* takes another dive with no reaction from the ensemble. Bits of dialogue fade in and out. Faint applause swells and fades, and the actors again present their headshots.

On its own, *Finale* is atmospheric and inconclusive, but its disorder implies the presence of order, a flickering counterpoint to *Talent's* tightly edited segments. While *Talent* episodically reveals the competition and variable intentionality among actors, the *Finale* recasts the interrelationships as happening without judgment. Together, they address the strange, insoluble experience of what it means to act.