

art  
agenda

## Simone Forti's "On An Iron Post"

THE BOX, Los Angeles

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by ANDREW BERARDINI

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Dear Simone,

Your performances are the jump and splash of a brook, the color of a found leaf, a painted flag wrapping a woman as the river dances around her. At 80, your nimble movements inspire. When I stop to read back about your lifetime of accomplishments and confluences, I can't help but admire you all the more: learning improvisation with Anna Halprin in San Francisco in the 1950s; trying and moving into your own through the techniques of Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, and Trisha Brown; your presence at the birth of Judson Church; your collaborations with Yoko Ono, La Monte Young, and Terry Riley. Just a few flickers from an enduring and illustrious career. I see all those layers and life here in your videos, objects, performances, deepening the grace of your movements and the susurrus of your words, knowing that such simplicity is not easily won.

In the long, high gallery at The Box, I watched the water crash and shiver over the stones on the monitor in *Northeast Kingdom* (2015), the headphones sounding a dinner conversation between two men about geography and Vermont. Plucking the headphones off (always like wearing an insect when looking at art), I turned to look at the trio of projections behind me. In *Flag in the Water* (2015) I couldn't feel the difference between the sound of the flowing water and your movements through it as you stepped into the river in your white shirt and khaki pants, wearing the flag like a shroud, a wedding dress, a shield. Opposite the river is the ocean. You wrestle and rest with a sheaf of soaking newspapers and a tangle of seaweed in *Zuma News* (2014). I liked seeing the spooked viewers trying to jump out of the eye of the camera along the river, bemusedly passing a glance upon the beach, caught as witnesses in these cleansing ceremonies. I liked them because I felt like them. Not for a moment unwelcome, there's a softness, a kindness in your performances, but even then I felt a gravitas to all this, a simple ritual with a flow that I wouldn't want to ungracefully mess up.

And here, for me, that is what your exhibition is about: flow. The flow of water, of human events writ large, of time, of pure movement. Though most of the work dates from the past couple of years, there are a few things from the 1960s, and documents from the '80s into the 2000s, that reveal a stream through the decades. The painting *Sink* (1960) lets water out. A sculpture of dynamic tension (entitled *A Sculpture*, it was dreamed in 1961 but made only this year) and a crumpled paper scrawled with the words "Past" and "Future" (*Past/Future*, 2012) both examine the tension of the present in time. The latter two rested on plinths painted a shade of green that your recent collaborator Jason Underhill told me was intended to match a leaf found outside the gallery.



Tucked around the main gallery are smaller rooms filled with monitors and relics of performances, including two from the series of “News Animations” from 2003 and 2004. These stories of a body and voice finding a way to process the comings and goings of the world make me see how each of us, however humbly or grandly, doesn’t have to be merely a consumer of the news but can find a place in the story through interpretation and understanding. That this process can lead to action.

In the video you made as part of a series organized by Halprin, *Stone Face at Cascade Falls* (1993), I loved watching you explain a drawing of the flow of water in a creek in a notebook on display. Those onomatopoeic phrases sound both silly and serious, poetic and dissonant, like Jack Kerouac’s linguistic renderings of the sea sounds in *Big Sur* (1962). How difficult it is to capture the sound and shape of movement.

This letter is a letter to follow yours to your father that stands in for the press release. And for me, letters are a way out of the sometimes alienating method by which we humans often talk to each other. A letter acknowledges that our reader is a person, a consciousness, and that by writing we are attempting to connect with them. Most writing is a kind of letter, the intimate communication of one human to another, even if we pretend otherwise. Reading is the whisper of words in my head, one of the most intimate places a voice can go.

Your letter was moving in its intimacy and as a way of passing thoughts. You wrote, “The show’s got lots of parts, like a day of experiences with different energies, lyrical, abrasive, adding up to something complex but without closing in on any particular meaning” and “There are parts that pull in on parts that push out. It’s the tension; like a dance. Yes, I still dance. I’m going to do a News Animation at the show’s opening. Wish you could be there.”

Ezra Pound wrote that “literature is news that stays news.”<sup>(1)</sup> Maybe this is true, but the news is not in its facts but in its flow. If literature stays news, it’s because it can move us years and years after it’s written. It is the movement inside of us, with each reading renewed.

And when I spent those hours in your show, watching your performance at the opening, and all the passing moments and stories in the videos, the flow of all that water and time, everything looked like movement. The flowing brook over stones, the color of a found leaf (did you catch it falling or was it plucked from a rustling tree?), the flow of the river, and the shift of the cloth of the flag. All of it movement and all of it moving.

(1) Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), 29.

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