

Baby Gestures

Nina Ross



Baby gestures, 2016 HD video 16:9, 4 minutes and 57 seconds, looped, colour.

Art is something that not only goes in through the eyes, it goes in through the central nervous system. You feel art as much as you see art. I enjoy finding that feeling, my body an instrument in search of the rush of stimulus. In *Baby Gestures* I feel my muscles convulse with a strengthening of the spine. I feel my heart lurch forward in my ribs as if rushing the gate, eager to meet another that is also mine. I feel an ancestral urge to man the battlements. In my body I feel these things happening.

Art is also two particular types of things before it is anything else. At its birthing core, it is both sculpture and performance. What type of sculpture and performance it is then indicates what medium, genre, school and style it could be classified into. Ross's work of art, *Baby Gestures*, imprinted itself into my central nervous system with its invocation of primordial care, triggering bodily and intellectual reaction.

Baby Gestures reminds me that my wife danced my children into existence. It reminds me that there has been an art-historical turn toward the sculptural and the performative in contemporary art. And it reinforces my theory of art being two things before it is anything else, by way of its form – a performance with a sculpture, performed on a sculpture.

Yes, my children were danced into the world. As we all were. The ascending rhythms of breath, working in waves – in pulses and in choruses, in verses and in pause. Building to the frequency of existence and attaining ultimate crescendo. Birth is a song performed by the

body to the tune of the universe. And it is a dance that continues after birth. In this video Ross shows the final stage of the birthing dance. The closing out of the immediate intimacy of connection that comes with the confusion of two bodies as one.

As an art object *Baby Gestures* puts performance at play with sculpture. The physical performance is a dance with an avatar. The nature of that avatar, the child-substituting sculptural form, permits for the substitution of non-human offspring and creations. This gestural exchange of subject for object permits the viewer's personal history of connections to evoke meaning. This is art's generosity – the birthing of an idea presented as an object allowed to gather its own place in the world through the mutual production of its meaning.

As the teleological march of art history would have us believe, art is in a continued and intensifying examination of its own meaning. It is no surprise then that this collective cultural act of analysis would lead us to the heart of art and its foundational premise as performance and sculpture. It makes sense that Picasso and Duchamp, the twin birthing of contemporary art, rope-framed and Rose Selavied their way into sculptural and performative invention. And on through a series of ever refined considerations of object and action. *Baby Gestures* reminds me of this history and it gifts me the opportunity to birth this reflection.

The mediation of the performance, the way the dance is filmed and then delivered visually through an electronic screen, reminds me of the indexical nature of both the medium and the nature of procreation itself. A copy of a copy repeated. More than a memory relived, randomly accessed or otherwise. *Baby Gestures* reflects on the genealogical nature of biology and of digital distribution. It is generous and selfish at the same time, like the very instinct to give birth.

I watch the piece and reflect on its impact on my body and mind, and am reminded that my physical position, whether lying in bed with a laptop or standing in a gallery before a monitor, is my body's choreographed dance move with the object screen. My consumption of the work requires my performance upon a sculptural form. Now all my interactions of this nature are considered in this fashion, as I dance my email correspondences in my office and I care with every muscle of my being for my newly formed creations.

For this insight and all the reasons above, Ross's *Baby Gestures* is a generous work that both reflects and produces. It is creative and caring, like all good births and all good art should be.

Words by Kent Wilson