

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER

WORK/TRAVAIL/ARBEID

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Work/Travail/Arbeid* began with a seemingly simple question: Can choreography be performed in the form of an exhibition? By way of an answer, the renowned Belgian dancer and choreographer reimagined her work *Vortex Temporum* (2013), originally conceived with a conventional theater setting in mind, for a museum space. While dance performances are traditionally presented on a stage, at a given time, for a fixed duration, and in front of a seated audience, exhibitions are mounted in spaces that are accessible during regular gallery or museum hours, over several weeks or months, allowing visitors to move about and come and go freely. Contemplating these differences between the black box and the white cube, De Keersmaeker transformed the dance *Vortex Temporum* into the danced exhibition *Work/Travail/Arbeid*.

This is not De Keersmaeker's first project to be presented in a museum space. In 2011, she performed the solo "Violin Phase," an excerpt from her very first piece, *Fase: Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich* (1982), in MoMA's Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium. Also originally intended for the stage, "Violin Phase" was performed twice a day at MoMA, with the audience watching from around the large square of sand on which De Keersmaeker danced and from a balcony on an upper floor. The following year, De Keersmaeker was invited by the Tate Modern, in London, to perform *Fase* in the Tanks (the museum's newly opened space designated for performances, video installations, and interactive art), and in that case she staged the various portions of the piece at intervals throughout the day.

With *Work/Travail/Arbeid* the artist goes even further in shaping her choreography in terms of the practices and protocols of an exhibition as opposed to those of theatrical performance: there is no stage, no set, no frontality, no beginning or end, and the public is not only positioned on the same plane as the dancers and musicians but can move freely among them. With this project, the dancers from De Keersmaeker's company, Rosas, and the musicians from the contemporary music ensemble Ictus do not simply bring *Vortex Temporum* into a museum; they reinterpret it in the space of MoMA's Marron Atrium in the form of a five-day exhibition. The original hour-long piece was set to the late French composer Gérard Grisey's eponymous 1996 sextet

for the piano, flute, clarinet, violin, viola, and cello. In its iteration as *Work/Travail/Arbeid*, it has been expanded into a nine-hour cycle, with each hour offering different choreography and a unique combination of seven dancers and seven musicians.

De Keersmaeker has focused on the relationship between music and movement throughout her career. Music has defined the structure of her dances, which distinguishes her from most of the contemporary choreographers influenced by Judson Dance Theater and the decades-long collaboration between the composer John Cage and the choreographer Merce Cunningham, in which music and dance were conceived independently of each other. In De Keersmaeker's work, music is not illustrated with movement,



"Violin Phase" from *Fase: Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich*. 1982. Performed at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, January 22–23, 2011. Photo © 2011 Yi-Chun Wu/The Museum of Modern Art

and movement is not derived from musical form; rather, the possibilities of music's structural organization are investigated. It was the compositional structure of Steve Reich's Minimalist music, for example, that prompted her to create *Fase*.

Music not only shaped the way De Keersmaeker thought about structuring *Vortex Temporum* in its original iteration for the stage; it also influenced how she reconceived it for the exhibition at MoMA. In his compositions, Grisey investigated what he considered to be the three forms of temporality: "the time of humans" (related to breathing and heartbeat), "the time of whales" (a sense of expanded time), and "the time of the insects" (a sense of contracted time).¹ This interest in various temporalities is evident in his *Vortex Temporum*, in which a short motif is expanded and

condensed, layered and played at different speeds, creating, as the title suggests, *vortexes of time*. The structural transposition from Grisey's music to De Keersmaeker's choreography is visible in the way in which the musicians are paired with the dancers—each dancer is "played by" the music. The circles and spirals on the floor likewise link sound and movement. In describing her performance of "Violin Phase" at MoMA, in which she drew circles and their diameters in sand with her feet, she said, "When you work with geometry and geometrical patterns, what you actually do is like measuring the earth. It becomes very much about the relationships of the amount of space you occupy in a certain amount of time."² The geometric patterns rendered in chalk on the floor in *Work/Travail/Arbeid* correspond to the idea of the vortex, of the whirling of time. In *Vortex Temporum* the floor pattern is drawn before the show; in *Work/Travail/Arbeid*, by contrast, the dancers draw the circles on the floor as part of the choreography, making the score visible as they execute it. In front of the audience, they reveal their working process and the structure of the movements that fill their "workday."

Work/Travail/Arbeid is an itinerant exhibition. The original version was first staged at WIELS in Brussels over nine weeks in 2015, in two adjacent art galleries. It was then performed over nine days in 2016 at Centre Pompidou, Paris, in a big square space with glass walls that made the city outside seem very present. At the Tate Modern, where the work was performed over three days later the same year, the very long rectangular space of the Turbine Hall required the drawing of three vortexes. Each space presented different challenges for adapting the piece, and every time De Keersmaeker, together with the dancers and the musicians, had to rethink it in a new context, with new spatial and temporal parameters. MoMA's Marron Atrium offers yet another opportunity for metamorphosis, with its high ceiling and multiple vantage points. In all its variations, this project transforms, through its rigorous structure and De Keersmaeker's distinctive choreographic language, the very material conditions that have long been essential to dance into an entirely new exhibition form. Spread over time, *Work/Travail/Arbeid* reveals something about the complex conceptual, technical, and physical labor—the work—that is essential to the practice of dance.

¹ Catherine Wood, "The Still Point," in Elena Filipovic, ed., *Work/Travail/Arbeid, Essays* (Brussels: WIELS, Rosas, and Mercatorfonds, 2015), p. 67.

² Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, in "Performance 13: On Line/Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Jan 12–16, 2011," MoMA video, 3:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E10HI8_MPEG



Work/Travail/Arbeid. 2015. Performed at (top to bottom) WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, March 20–May 17, 2015; Centre Pompidou, Paris, February 26–March 6, 2016; and Tate Modern, London, July 8–10, 2016. All photos: Anne Van Aerschot. © Anne Van Aerschot

**ANNE TERESA
DE KEERSMAEKER:
WORK/TRAVAIL/ARBEID**

**The Donald B. and Catherine C.
Marron Atrium**
Wednesday, March 29–Sunday,
April 2, 2017
11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. daily, and
until 7:00 p.m. on Friday, March 31

Related Programs

Work/Travail/Arbeid Dance Workshops
The Agnes Gund Garden Lobby
Wednesday, March 29; Thursday,
March 30; Saturday, April 1
11:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 2:00 p.m.

Discover De Keersmaeker's work by learning a basic series of movements and seeing how they form the foundation for *Work/Travail/Arbeid*. Free with admission. Open to everyone ages six and above. Space is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis. Sign-up begins thirty minutes before each workshop.

**De Keersmaeker in Conversation
with Kathy Halbreich**
T3 (The Celeste Bartos Theater)
Wednesday, March 29, 6:00 p.m.

De Keersmaeker joins Kathy Halbreich, associate director of The Museum of Modern Art, for a conversation. Tickets (\$15; \$10 members and corporate members; \$5 students, seniors, and staff of other museums) can be purchased online or at the information desk, at the film desk after 4:00 p.m., or at the Education and Research Building reception desk on the day of the program.

Concept and choreography:
Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker

Original curator: Elena Filipovic

Artistic consultant:
Ann Veronica Janssens

Dramaturgy: Bojana Cvejić

Artistic assistant: Femke Gyselincx

Rosas (dancers): Boštjan Antončič, Frank Gizycki, Carlos Garbin, Marie Goudot, Cynthia Loemij, Sarah Ludi, Julien Monty, Michaël Pomeroy, Camille Prieux, Gabriel Schenker, Igor Shyshko, Denis Terrasse, Thomas Vantuycm, Samantha van Wissen

Music: Gérard Grisey, *Vortex Temporum* (1996)

Ictus (musicians): Jean-Luc Plouvier (piano), Chryssi Dimitriou (flute), Dirk Descheemaeker (clarinet), Igor Semenoff (violin), Jeroen Robbrecht (viola), Geert De Bièvre (cello)

Music director: Georges-Elie Octors

Costumes: Anne-Catherine Kunz

Technical direction: Joris Erven

Sound engineer: Alexandre Fostier

Technician: Michael Smets

Artistic coordination and planning:
Anne Van Aerschot

Costumes coordination:
Heide Vanderieck

Organized by Ana Janevski, Associate Curator, with Martha Joseph, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art; produced by Lizzie Gorfaine, Performance Producer, with Kate Scherer, Assistant Performance Coordinator.

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Piano provided by Steinway & Sons.

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The exhibition is organized by The Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with Rosas, Ictus, and WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels.

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PERFORMANCE

**ANNE TERESA
DE KEERSMAEKER**

WORK/TRAVAIL/ARBEID

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Modern Art**
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Cover: *Work/Travail/Arbeid*. 2015. Performed at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, March 20–May 17, 2015. Photo: Anne Van Aerschot © Anne Van Aerschot