

## Rose English, A Premonition of the Act / Florian Roithmayr, with, and, or, without, London, Camden Arts Centre

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### Florian Roithmayr

← *with, and, or, without*, exhibition view, Camden Arts Centre, London, 2015.

Photo: © Mark Blower, courtesy of Camden Arts Centre

→ *Endstart no. 4*, 2015.

Photo: courtesy of MOT International

↘ *Crustacean*, 2015.

Photo: courtesy of MOT International

### Rose English

→ *Ornamental Happiness*, video still, 2006.

Photo: courtesy of Camden Arts Centre

## Rose English *A Premonition of the Act*

What movement vocabularies, what kinesthetic potentials, best speak to our time? Randy Martin, the great theorist of dance and financialization, wrote of the need for a concept of the *kinestheme* (like Foucault's *episteme* but adapted for motion), a concept that interrogates what kinds of movement are possible in a given place-time and in a given social order. In his essay "A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality," Martin writes that so many recent movement practices (from hip hop to skateboarding) express a relationship to precarity and partake of "corporal economies where risk counts as its own reward." Given the austerity-induced precariousness felt by so many, perhaps it is not surprising that one of movement's tasks should be to enable its practitioners to harness, feel, value, and move with risk itself.

Two concurrent exhibitions at the Camden Arts Centre—Rose English's *A Premonition of the Act* and Florian Roithmayr's *with, and, or, without*—find their own paths to precarious movement, their own ways to make risk its own reward. English has worked for years with Chinese acrobats who specialize in balancing enormous stacks of glasses on their feet, hands and heads, all while slowly shifting through a dizzying array of contortionist positions. Her 2006 performance (documented in this exhibition), *Ornamental Happiness*, features acrobats from the Zhejiang Acrobatic Troupe, who balance stacks of glasses that English and other attendants bring to them. Chinese acrobatics, a four thousand-year-old tradition, grew out of the practices and instruments of daily life. Glasses, jars and other commonplace objects feature prominently in these performers' precarious feats. English focuses on their extreme attentiveness toward these fragile, quotidian objects. She further explores the textures of the performers' engagement with these objects in a three-channel video work documenting rehearsals by the Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe, which is installed beside a

## Florian Roithmayr *with, and, or, without*

tabletop covered with blown glass versions of the acrobats' props. The main room of the exhibition, dark and strewn with chairs, contains a storyboard and research images of acrobats and their objects. This installation incorporates a sound component: *Music for Lost in Music* (2015), a 72-minute composition for vocals and percussion composed by Luke Stoneham, based on a libretto conceived from bits of text in English's storyboard. The resonance of the voices ties into the implied resonance of the glass objects and their fragility—objects so deftly managed by the acrobats, whose skill insures against breakage.

Roithmayr's exhibition risks another kind of breakage. He presents a series of sculptures whose forms could not have been predicted, nor could they have even been guaranteed to remain intact. He stages conflicts between disparate processes, forces and materials. For instance, two of his works feature cast concrete blocks. While the concrete was drying, Roithmayr injected foam into the mold; the gas from the nozzle makes the stream of foam oscillate wildly inside the cast. The pieces were removed from their molds on site; using dental instruments gallery staff delicately unpicked the foam from the concrete, to reveal the snaky tunnels of negative foam-space left in the concrete block—now reduced to a lacy network of free spaces in the conflicted space of the casting process. In other works, Roithmayr constructs delicate curves out of concrete—pieces curved to look as though they could have been made of a more elastic substance, such as thick rubber. He then balances these forms delicately in the gallery, hoping they will remain in position for the duration of the exhibition. In one of the pieces gentle concrete curves, buoyed by thin layers of softer materials, stack inside each other and hang precariously from a peg on the wall. In another piece, cast, brittle curves hang from skilfully balanced piping, in a complex vocabulary of nearly-falling.



While English's exhibition featured acrobats with props, Roithmayr's sculptures seem to be, of themselves, both acrobat *and* prop—expert movements around and through the fragility of their materials.

It could be said that these two exhibitions meditate on the senses of precariousness that, as Martin points out, are symptomatic of a time of crisis (financial, environmental, political). And yet, compared with Martin's scenario, there is another twist: the risk, the precariousness, is not primarily *of* the bodies that dance about it. It is the objects, the materials themselves, that are precarious. The acrobat, the dancer, the sculptor, with their skilled sets of movements, manage this risk, perform the great care required for these materials to go on being in their current form, balancing on a knife's edge. The precariousness of materials takes the concern for precarity and kinesthetics present in these exhibitions beyond our time, and into the deep time of materials. The concrete and the glass, safe for the moment, wait for their next act, their next change, in the delicate balancing act of their existence.

Emily Rosamond

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