

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Eiko Otake: A BODY ON WALL STREET

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, April 15th, 2020

In continuing to cover the winners for Round 3 of **Dare to Dance in Public (D2D)**, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to write about Eiko Otake, and her “Best Use of Location” award winning film, **A Body on Wall Street**.

Eiko is no stranger to putting her body — along with her astute, singular, and uncompromising aesthetic — into various situations and locales. Often performing without a score, her work is elemental and stark, dealing with stillness, time, scale, the human condition and so much more. She has installed herself into sites and landscapes that include train and bus stations, ferries, museums, universities, observatories, street fairs, theater lobbies, and a myriad of international locations including (not long after the earthquake and tsunami hit) Fukushima, Japan.



Eiko in A BODY IN FUKUSHIMA

Over the years I’ve had the privilege of seeing Eiko perform live with her partner Koma, but to see her live solo work is something else altogether. I first saw her performing solo in summer 2017 at Jacob’s Pillow, when they invited me out to see the place and what goes on there in advance of pitching ideas for my own site work for the following year. I was particularly interested in what Eiko was doing as it was “insitu” like I was proposing. Eiko led a small audience on a circuitous route to various sites on the Pillow grounds — both regularly trodden and more hidden. It was daytime, there was no lighting or theatrical magic, just Eiko carrying tattered swaths of fabric, as she responded to the flora and fauna in her course. She stopped at flowers, trees, and a huge boulder that she spent some time bathing with water as if it was a living thing in need of cleansing and care. Towards the end she took us by the Pillow’s lovely but “spendy” tented restaurant The Old Inn on the Green. At lunchtime it was full of lively and well-heeled diners who looked out at the spectacle of a paused and striking Japanese woman in full traditional dress, with a mane of black hair and a piercing, stricken expression holding a large tattered red cloth. For this viewer in that moment, with diners on the inside and Eiko and audience on the outside, it was a stunning impromptu image that brought to mind issues such as homelessness, economic disparity, an enemy without, and so much more on so many levels that I gasped back tears.



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So when Eiko submitted several films to us at **D2D** I was beside myself. Each one seemed better than the next, but ultimately **A Body on Wall Street** took the cake. I am so pleased to be

able to share the film in its entirety, as well as her recent comments about her work in general here:

SE: How did you first hear about **Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival**?

EIKO: A friend who lives in LA emailed me about it.

SE: Was your film created specifically for the festival and/or did you have a particular urge to make a film in the public realm and if so why and where was it made?

EIKO: In my 40 some year career as (part of) Eiko & Koma, we often performed outdoors and in non-theatrical indoor spaces. As a soloist I have performed in 40 or more public sites for a project *A Body in Places*. When I could, I have hired my video collaborator to film my performances and sometimes rehearsals. So I have done many edits to share the footage on my web and at my video lectures. Some were also shown in *Dance on Camera* such as this was, from a series of a month long, everyday a solo in a smaller places (that) limited the audience to 15 people. So when I learned about your festival, I re-edited material from my archive to less than 5 min and 30 sec which you (**D2D**) asked for. So it is not that I made a special attempt to create a film in public realm. I work in public places and I video it and I edit it myself. The last part is important. I do not like the idea of becoming a subject to another filmmaker. I want to self-curate what I show from my performances. And the more I work on creating media work, the stronger my desire becomes that I want to create a media work clearly created by a performer herself.

SE: What were you inspired by and/or exploring in making your film?

EIKO: I love film. Serious films that open viewers' eyes and minds to other time and space. But I am a performer. So I want to make the work that is made from a performance and by a performer. When I perform in public sites, I rehearse and create a score. But I am my own director so I can betray my score. I observe each situation, think instinctively and make decisions. I want to capture the body thinking and making decisions.



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SE: What were the biggest challenges you faced in making the film?

EIKO: Since I am the performer and I am performing publicly, I only have footage that is available to me. Almost always rehearsal footage lacks intensity compared to performance footage though filming rehearsals allows video camera person more choices. So I am always dealing with what is left to me. But I would rather work with this limitation than pretending I am a filmmaker. I do not make media work if I am not a performer. That is my identity and that is what I do.

SE: How did you raise the funds for making your film?

EIKO: I hired my cameraperson — young and talented and someone I can really work well with. From 2015 for two years I had the fortune to have a great cinematographer, Alexis Moh. She was very young when she began working with me so I could tell her what I want and she could work hard without costing me too much. I could work with her within what I could afford and we often sat together to see all the footage. So when I edit to a certain length, I know the material well, and could edit it shorter for your festival.

SE: Who/what was your biggest collaborator and/or influence in making your film, and what did you learn from the filmmaking process from or as a result of them?

EIKO: So my cameraperson Alexis Moh is my collaborator. As for influence... hmmm... I grew up (watching) so many art movies from Japan and Europe. So I never had appetite for commercial, high tech, busy, dynamic edits. So my distaste for commercialism might be the important factor for me.

SE: What are you craving to do next &/or is there anything else you'd like to say?

EIKO: Given that we now live with new global scare and pushed into virtual communication, I am doing two things. I am engaged with [virtual creative residency](#) so I am thinking hard — I appreciate having eyes and minds toward which I can work with. But I do not want to join the big wave of virtual dissemination of performing art. Instead I want to use this time to create/re-edit my media work. But I also want to open up my process imitating the ways creative residencies (would work) before Corona virus changed our lives. I make work... people stop by... I show something and we talk about it. The site has now two new videos I re-edited which is influenced by the time I was in quarantine. It is a far cry from **Dare to Dance in Public** space... but it is another site work. And I need to continue editing my Fukushima work. I have been visiting Fukushima since 2011 after the nuclear disaster there. I have been there five times. So far I edited as long as an 8-hour piece and as short as a one hour piece. Again this is a very different site work as most of the time I have been dancing there with nobody but irradiated landscape. But I continue to think the problem of radiation contamination is dire so I will continue on.

You can find out more about Eiko Otake and all of her projects at www.eikootake.org ... And to get a taste of her work, please enjoy, **A Body on Wall Street**.

(Photos by Willam Johnston)

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