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Empty

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, January 4th, 2017

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There is something about empty, old, and/or abandoned indoor gymnasiums, especially those with swimming pools, that is inherently poetic and must speak directly to the concept of merging dance and film. The cavernous space can be haunting and beautiful, the scale in the deep end of an empty pool itself and its relationship to surrounding high walls and windows with their numerical markings and faded tiles from years of use can be especially evocative. Maybe it's that we can envision all the water, practically *hear* the swimming and splashing, and jubilant voices in what we imagine might be the middle of summer. Almost as with the work of visual artist Christian Boltanski, who uses old photographs, clothes, and shoes to suggest (at the very least) the passage of time and who/what is now absent or gone, these old empty spaces seem to evoke what I like to call a "ghost imprint" of bygone days.



A lone dancer moves in "Empty"

So when I encountered Barcelona-based director Gerard Montero's film **Empty**, on NOWNESS, I quickly checked to see if it was shareable on YouTube. The film features five women in just such a beautiful abandoned, indoor pool and gymnasium, and the palette of the space, costume design, and overall film is soft with faded pastels cut with the light from high windows. But along with the un-credited experimental score, the wonderful choreography by Paloma Muñoz combines soft and edgy movement with patterns reminiscent of synchronized swimmers and slices through it all like a knife, making the film really interesting. **Empty** puts to great use the location's space and scale, and as per the liner notes "*The film explores ideas around dance and the significance we place on movement, which can't always be easily explained.*"



Synchronized movement in "Empty"

Although this is the fourth or fifth dance film I've seen in such a location, as someone whose first response to space and scale is always with movement, and having just recently completed a site-specific dance film of my own in a huge space, **Empty** resonated for me. Maybe because dance inherently requires and demands space, like a visual artist requires a blank canvas an abundance of empty space just invites us to have at it.

Happy New Year, and I hope you enjoy **Empty**.

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