

NEWS RELEASE

Exhibition: Moyra Davey: *Horse Opera*, 2019-2022

Dates: June 13 - July 19, 2024

Opening: Thursday, June 13, 5 - 7pm

Screening: Wednesday - Saturday, Noon, 1 pm, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm

Address: 16 Main Street, Ground Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Higher Pictures presents Moyra Davey: *Horse Opera*, 2019–2022, HD video with sound, 60 minutes.

The Glorious Body of Moyra Davey (On Horse Opera) by Dalie Giroux published in *Spirale*, no.286, spring 2024:

Horse Opera premiered as part of a retrospective of the filmic work of artist and photographer Moyra Davey, at the Museum of Modern Art, in 2022. The film offers a visual and literary narrative in which horses form the phenomenological framework for a dense reflection on music, dance, pain, intoxication, ecstasy, community, and life.

After the film's screening at Montreal's Musée d'art contemporain in September 2023, Moyra Davey explained that its title, a reference to the western film genre (horse opera), is also quietly haunted, pained by the anticipation of preparing to accompany a horse-friend into illness and eventually death (Davey has been around horses for many years, and they feature regularly in her recent work). "What's more," adds the artist after a moment's reflection, "the title evokes an 'operatic' time," marked by a lyrical gravity. *Horse Opera* is Davey's pandemic film—a work that straddles the intimate fold of primordial powers, a kind of *anarchive* of an era lived between light and shadow, a suspended judgment held by a gaze both raw and loving, hospitable and unvarnished.

Moyra paces around an interior populated by her favorite photographic subjects: a record player's needle collecting dust, a heavy collection of vinyl, piles of books lined up on rickety shelves (Patricia Highsmith in the company of Beauvoir and Garcia Lorca), stacks of old paperback editions with red-tinted edges, pillboxes, armies of liquor bottles—the materials of a vibrant, unending pursuit, all the verticalities of everyday life. With phone in hand and headphones in her ears (a strangely soothing device, notably employed by Davey in *Hemlock Forest*, 2016, and *i confess*, 2019), she delivers, in a hesitant, monotone voice, a careful text packed with detail. The filmmaker recounts the forays of an autofictional couple, Jordan and Elle, into the New York disco scene, born out of the Loft parties inaugurated by David Mancuso in 1970, in search of that "mystical freedom of being united under the silver ball and the balloons, in a utopic space that recalls childhood."

The subject matter, peppered with recollections of her reading (including the brilliant Hilton Als of *White Girls* and *The Women*), is strongly sociographic: the anticipation of getting ready, getting into the party, the drugs consumed, the clothes and accessories worn by the many attendees, the interactions among the crowd, accessing the toilets, everyone's dance moves, the music playing, the discomfort, the clumsiness, the body's stumbles, the rush, the ecstasy, the fatigue, the aftermath, the guilt, the gathering and its vicissitudes.

The dance parties, ritualized engagements held four times a year, are the site of an existential search, that of a kind of revelation—a revelation of love, of a commonality without a morning-after. The dance floor is this entry point into another dimension, this "oasis of inclusivity," where, sometimes, just barely, with the help of music and narcotics, on that fine line at the boundary of vulnerability and exuberance, something happens, a transitory state, a trance, a journey outside the self, even if you shit your pants on the way to the bathroom after snorting too much cocaine, even if COVID-19 and its rumors spread among the dancers afterwards. Davey quotes Als: "one of the reasons you get high is to forget who you are and concentrate on how you feel as the world melts away."

The recitation examines the body's collapse as well as its ephemeral glory, the need for others and the solitude that is always in play, the motley beauty of a riot of love under the auspices of dance sounds, placed under glass, in the house where the artist is confined, surrounded by nature, suspended in a space-time with elusive contours that is nonetheless

anchored in the passage of seasons, where the artist scrutinizes animals and stars with the help of her lenses: woodpeckers, tits, jays, blackbirds and red squirrels visiting the feeders hanging from branches, a dog dozing on the sofa or chasing a deer that has ventured near human dwellings, a bear pell-mell among the patio furniture, busily hacking away at the wooden porch, the moon, an eclipse, fire, snow, passing foxes, porcupines climbing tree trunks, colorful lizards and various toads, snakes, snails, red ants, earthworms, spiders weaving their webs between fence posts or up medicine cabinets, fledgling birds, collections of abandoned nests, butterflies, a carcass, a wild turkey spreading its feathers in courtship, and always the horses, mares, foals, ponies, an obsessive presence, in groups, on the move, playful, flicking their tails or head-to-tail to swat away the flies that harass them, tended by human hands, their large, muscular bodies framed tightly by Davey's camera, and these scenes, repeated over and over again, where we can observe the equine gentry pissing, pissing, and pissing again, their vital functions powerfully asserted, abject, the grandeur and misery of the ecstasy of the living. "Elle learns that serotonin is found in the brain, the blood vessels and the bowels."

Weaving through the bucolic and animal scenes are images of the urban pastimes that spur gatherings whose unfettered beauty bursts open in the wake of the pandemic: seniors playing dominoes in a parking lot, a couple fishing in the Hudson River, young people playing on a volleyball court, cyclists pedaling through pedestrians meandering among the trees, geese resting on a lawn, an impromptu weightlifting session under an overpass, and always, the music that brings people together.

"Hilton Als," recalls Davey, "talks about letting the mess come in. Adding that conventional narratives feel inauthentic because they want control." And with great tenderness and generosity, she assembles this *humanimal* swarm, this Horse Opera, where the story of urban escapades is woven in an impossible yet frank manner, uninterrupted, without straining the metaphor, the artist's patient camera allows the viewer to inhabit this life for a few beautiful moments—taking note of the "boring and repetitive" details of illness, fatigue, pain, medication and dependency, and against the advice of Elisabeth Hardwick, who, Davey recalls with ambivalence, "advises against writing about ailments and insomnia."

The image-affect that emerges from the film is, perhaps, timeless, that of the congregation and dispersion of beings on Earth, prancing horses and New Yorkers gathered around barbecues in parks, writers and spiders, gestures of mutual care and bodies in disarray, musicians and warblers, cocaine and LSD, ointments and painkillers, pandemics and dance floors; it's commensurate, necessary, ephemeral, difficult, and it's glorious, like a stream of hot piss shooting from a horse among other horses in the crisp autumn air.

Moyra Davey (1958, Toronto) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions and screenings include "Horse Opera" at the Berlin International Film Festival (2023), an eleven-part film series at Museum of Modern Art, New York (2022), "Les fervents" at Concordia University, Montreal (2022), "My Saints" at Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (2021), "The Faithful" at National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2020), "Lanak/ Obras/ Works" at Artium Museoa, Vitoria-Gasteiz (2020), "Scotiabank Photography Award: Moyra Davey" at Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto (2019), and "Hell Notes" at Kunstverein Bielefeld (2018) and Portikus, Frankfurt (2017). Recent group exhibitions include the 2024 Quebec Biennial, "Her Voice - Echoes of Chantal Akerman" at Fotomuseum Antwerp (2023), "Trust Me" at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2023), "Exposed" at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023), "No One Is Bored" at Hessel Museum of Art, New York (2022), "Working Thought" at Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2022), "Send me an Image" at C/O Foundation, Berlin (2021), "Exhibition as Image", at 80WSE, New York (2021), "Understudies: I, Myself Will Exhibit Nothing" at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021), and "New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century" at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley (2021). Recent publications include *Index Cards* (2020, Fitzcarraldo Editions / New Directions); *I Confess* (2020, Dancing Foxes Press); *The Shabbiness of Beauty* (2021, MACK Books).