

Vilma Gold

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6A Minerva Street

Charles Atlas

Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha

15 March - 12 April

Opening 14 March 6.30 - 8.30

Starting out in early 70s New York, Charles Atlas was part of the first generation of artists to explore the artistic possibilities of video. He pioneered the development of 'media-dance', - a performance work created directly for the camera - and has been making ground-breaking experimental video and immersive installation both independently and in collaboration with seminal choreographers and performers including Merce Cunningham, Michael Clark, Yvonn Rainer and Leigh Bowery, ever since.

Vilma Gold are proud to present Atlas' 5-Channel video installation Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, 2000, (5 channel synchronized video, with sound) and a new wall piece comprising twenty-four photographic prints: Gotta Dance no. 11, 2013, (photographic print on dibond, 24 parts, overall dimensions: 193 x 270 cm, 76 x 106 1/4 ins.)

Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, 2000 is made up of a group of five televisions arranged in an arc. Each television sets a different scene, with different versions of 'Martha' playing out across the channels. She is espoused via synchronised film clips in which protagonists call out to her, or through footage of the modern dancer Martha Graham herself. But she also appears to come in the form of heroines in B movies or as burlesque dancers, soft porn actresses or figure skaters. And the letters of MARTHA are periodically spelled out across the screens.

The work is borne directly of Atlas' involvement with the New York dance and club scene. During the mid 90s the performance artist and choreographer Richard Move, in his satirical impersonation of Martha Graham, hosted a live monthly program in a New York club called 'Martha @ Mother'. Atlas would provide the visuals in the form of video installation, making funny and theatrical montages of various clips that would play to the audience before each show. These included footage of Martha Graham of course, but also figures such as Merce Cunningham, Leigh Bowery or segments from his critically acclaimed two and -a half hour broadcast event on prime time Dutch TV with the work Television Dance Atlas (1993). In 2000, once the club had wound down, Atlas took the tapes and created a large-scale installation, of which this is a new version. With dance manifesting here in guises ranging from the irreverent and theatrical to the serious and minimal or even the domestic and banal, the film gives a charming and unique insight into Atlas' wide-ranging understandings of what dance can be.

Another type of montage, or to be more specific, collage, the work Gotta Dance no.11, brings the letters spelling out Martha's name back into the picture. Here its individual units demarcate a line through the centre of a series of still photographs from Atlas' work with dancers and choreographers over the years. Like the television channels of the video installation, each row of the grid-like arrangement works as a separate thread, a separate piece, within the whole. From top to bottom, or from row M – A the photographs feature: Michael Clark in Hail the New Puritan (1985-86), Merce Cunningham in Blue Studio: Five Segments (1975-76), Merce Cunningham Dance Company in Ocean (2011), Merce Cunningham Dance Company in Views on Video (2005), Douglas Dunn in Nevada (1974), Karole Armitage and Dancers in Parafango (1984)

In terms of influence Martha Graham is often compared to other huge Modernist figures such as Picasso, Stravinsky or Frank-Lloyd Wright. It seems that across the two works presented here, her name might become ironic byword for dance as a whole. Looping right back to Atlas' days in the club, it might even be said that she becomes a kind of 'mother' figure - and one that is sure to be gently teased by the younger generation. Her name is broken down into its individual units after all, split into separate channels, with each 'offspring' setting out its own version of dance. As 'mother' of modernism is broken up into myriad different modes, each with a life.

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List of works

(clockwise from street entrance)

Gotta Dance no.11, 2013
photographic print on dibond
193 x 270 cm
76 x 106 1/4 ins
16 parts:
25.4 x 33.9 cm
10 x 13 3/8 ins
and
8 parts:
25.4 x 45.2 cm
10 x 17.78 ins

Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, 2000
5 channel synchronized video work (5 monitors)
sound