

Jill Sigman Interview with Megan Nicely

March, 2, 2007

On March 2 at the Rubin Museum I sat down to talk with Megan Nicely, a dance writer and fellow choreographer. Megan interviewed me about my recent project, *RUPTURE*, which I had just premiered at Danspace Project, as well as related issues about my choreographic practice, my background in academic philosophy, artistic transcendence, and dance as political action. What follows below is an excerpt from our conversation in which Megan probed me about how *RUPTURE* was different from my previous work.

MN: Can we move to your recent piece? I know you just finished it and were saying you haven't had a chance to see everything, but you mentioned that you'd had some goals or some things you wanted to accomplish with the piece and I wondered if you could say what some of those are.

JS: That's hard, no one has made me articulate that yet Megan, thank you. I feel like I had a few different goals with this piece so bear with me, I have to kind of think out loud for you on this one. I guess I feel like there have been various threads of movement and character or what other people like to call character in my work and I wanted to keep playing out some of those threads but push myself to craft something more stringently. Some of my work has been very loose in its format. The last big piece was a performance installation that basically filled a giant space in a carnival-type way but didn't have a crafted arc. People's role's were semi-crafted, my material was very much improvised even though it had structure, and I sort of wanted to see what happens if I really really push myself to craft the thing even more, so that I have more control over how far it can

go and what sorts of emotional effects it can have on an audience. That sounds sort of vague but—I don't know, it just felt like there was a sense of wanting to go further with it. There's also a sense of wanting to move more. I had been injured right before the last big show, and I did the last big show on crutches. Which was—

MN: *Pulling the Wool?*

JS: It was *Pulling the Wool: An American Landscape of Truth and Deception*. And that was a kind of amazing experience to have rehearsed this thing for a year and then be in a totally different body and have to perform it with now two metal limbs which were, you know, in addition to what I had normally, or didn't have any more. And that was all a really interesting process and healing from that took a long time and I had to learn to walk again which for dancers—obviously a very profound and tremendous and insightful thing. So I was very excited about being able to move, and just the idea of moving and being able to locomote and be vertical seemed so, like, shocking to me in a way. So there was just this whole different level of movement that started coming into my work in the studio, my vocabulary, and there was a lot of really frenetic energy, and shaking, and there was all this backward movement that had also started to come in since 9/11, like there was a really interesting kind of movement theme that I had been working since then, and I sort of gave myself this very movement oriented goal of trying to really preserve some of that movement in this piece, like let all of that shaking and the bouncing and the hopping and the—you know, I mean you've seen the piece—there's a lot of bouncing and running into the wall and getting thrown against the floor and I wanted that

really visceral physicality to be in this piece. And that hasn't always been characteristic of my work, so it was sort of a goal for me to say, Okay, that doesn't have to be left out. I think there was also this goal of saying, What can I do by going back to a performative arc? The last piece had been this performance installation that ran for three hours and people could come in and out whenever they wanted. And that was very interesting to me, to do that kind of experiment and give the audience that sort of power. And I think for some people that was kind of exhilarating to be able to come in and do whatever, and make the piece, essentially. But what I realized was that not everyone has the same level of skill, so for some people it was very overwhelming or just simply—

MN: Sorry, you mean on the part of the audience?

JS: Audience, yeah. Not all audience members have the same level of skill in knowing how to craft an experience for themselves. And why should they, right? And I sort of realized, Oh, as the artist maybe that's something I know more about than they do so maybe I should take back that responsibility. In the last piece that was interesting to give people that thrill, but now let me see if I can craft something for them and kind of give it to them like this little gift, so that they get an experience they might not be able to make for themselves if they just came in and wandered around. So I wanted to create something with a beginning, middle and an end that would feel like it went somewhere. That was one of the goals. Another goal was to work with dancers in a way that was somewhat different from what I had done before. I have always either made a piece for other dancers or I've made solo work, or in *Pulling the Wool* there were other dancers, there

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were eleven of us, but I kept my solo work separate and I was just kind of an element in the space that was working in counterpoint to what the dancers were doing. And in this I wanted there to be a greater level of interface between my solo work and the work of this chorus of dancers that I had, the four other dancers, and that was really challenging for me choreographically. I had never forced myself to put myself into the performance as much as I did in this piece. So that was a goal.