

Event Transcript

June 9, 2020 – *Performance-in-Place: Kinetic Light*

Sara Reisman:

So I think we'll start now. Ready? Before we get started, I want to ask everybody to adjust your Zoom settings to mute in order to reduce background noise for the first part of our program. I also want to encourage people to submit questions to the chat margin on the right hand side of your Zoom frame, and also look for Andrea and Anne who will be doing ASL tag teaming throughout the program.

Quick introduction for those who are joining us for the first time. My name is Sara Reisman. I'm the Executive and Artistic Director of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation. Until recently a program like this would have taken place at The 8th Floor. The event and program space where most of our public facing work takes place. Last month we hosted our first virtual public program launching a new series, *Performance-in-Place*, which will feature new performances and revisit past works by artists, choreographers and writers, including Nicolás Dumit Estevez Rafúl Espejo, LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Aliza Shvartz, Eileen Myles, Maria Hopfield, Baseera Khan and others.

Every three weeks on Tuesdays we'll host a performance by one of these artists, which will then be shared on our website and be on social media channels for further distribution. In addition to *Performance-in-Place* the Foundation is hosting monthly talks. Up next on June 18 we'll be hosting artist and activist Carmen Papalia who'll be joined by Kristen Rochelle Lance for *Open Access in the Virtual Realm*, a conversation about accessibility and disability rights in spaces like the one we're in now. Please visit The 8th Floor website at www.the8thfloor.org for updated information on these events.

Tonight's program features artists and collaborators of Kinetic Light, which is a leading disability arts and dance ensemble and a 2020 Rubin Foundation grantee. More artists of Kinetic Light will share short video dances in progress that they've created in response to the invitation to be part of *Performance-in-Place*.

Kinetic Light is the only US arts collective entirely led by disabled artists. Alice Sheppard, its Artistic Director, choreographer and dancer, Michael Maag, its video lighting projection designer. You'll see his work throughout. Laurel Lawson, dancer, choreographic collaborator technology lead. And Jerron Herman, dancer and choreography collaborator. They join us tonight for this virtual event.

The collective will share an excerpt from their latest work, *Wired*. An immersive aerial experience that traces the gender, race and disability histories of barbed wire, and a clip from *Descent*. The collective's rigorous investment in the histories, cultures and artistic work of disabled people and people of color transforms our understanding of the moving world.

Working in the disciplines of art, design, architecture and social justice, Kinetic Light showcases freedom of movement, revealing how mobility, literal, physical and conceptual is fundamental to participation in civic life. Welcome Kinetic Light. We can make a gesture of welcome together. For more information on Kinetic Light visit www.kineticlight.org. Please note, I'm going to say this again for those who are just joining, the presentation includes live ASL interpretation and captioning. Video clips will also be audio described.

So we have two ASL interpreters, Anne Eaton and Andrea Aleppi. So now I'm going to make a land acknowledgement. We're gathered virtually in many locations at once, including Manhattan, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, San Francisco among other places. Most, if not all, are unceded lands. As this event is organized by the Rubin Foundation, I'll address a specific site where our offices are located near

Union Square, that's where I'm sitting right now, thereby acknowledging the Lenape community, past and present, as well as future generations.

The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation acknowledges that it was founded upon exclusions and erasures of many indigenous peoples including those on whose land the Foundation is located. This acknowledgement demonstrates a commitment to beginning a process of working to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism, a commitment all the more poignant in this time of political upheaval that has already resulted in some transformative activist engagement across the country.

I also want to recognize that many of you here tonight are part of the important work taking place across the US and the world through listening, thoughtful discourse, and action. Activism that makes me anxious about the safety of African Americans and people of color in this country, but also hopeful for the future. I want to be optimistic that these expressions of political engagement continue to transform the culture of oppression that underpins US society. Thank you.

Switching gears, I want to remind everybody to stay with your sound off unless you're presenting in this first half of the program. If you have questions, please use the chat function on Zoom. So I'm going to pass this to Alice to make introductions with the members of Kinetic Light. Welcome Alice.

Alice Sheppard:

Hi. I'm Alice Sheppard. I am a light skinned multiracial black woman, and I am currently wearing, I guess you could call it a peach hoodie. There was a lot of discussion amongst Kinetic Lights for what we were going to wear about all of this, and in the end I decided I could only go with the un-coolness of who I actually am, though I am wearing a peach hoodie I am here in the Bay area [inaudible 00:05:35] tribe, and I am sitting outside. You can see in my background half of the house and a black window reflecting the sky with some trees. I'll pass it to Laurel.

Laurel Lawson:

Hi folks. I am Laurel Lawson, currently speaking to you from Atlanta where we have had some spectacular examples of voter suppression today, including lines of four and five hours. We have homes currently open late until nine and 10 in the evening to try to deal with that. I have pale skin, very bright red lipstick, and currently rather curly in an overgrown fashion, pixie cut brunette hair. I am seated against a low feature white background in cool light and wearing a black tee shirt with white lettering that is mostly invisible, but occasionally flashes into view reading, "All Y'all". Which has many meanings in my dialect. And, over to, let's go to Michael.

Michael Maag:

Thanks Laurel. Hi, I'm Michael Maag. I'm the production and lighting designer for the group. I'm a white guy with whitish blond hair and a big beard. Not as big as it used to be though, and let's see. We are on the land here of the Shasta and the Wintu tribes in Southern Oregon, and I'm looking forward to sharing our work with you. So, Jerron.

Jerron Herman:

Hello everyone, I'm Jerron Herman. I'm a dark skinned black man with facial hair, mostly a mustache and burgeoning twisty locks that I just prepared last night. I'm wearing a red shirt with some stripes, accents on the side, and I'm in a room, which has like off white colored walls and above me is a shelf unit, and then I'm surrounded by comfy pillows. And I'm also in New York City right now, as well.

Alice Sheppard:

Okay. Hello from all of us. I need to give a quick shout out. You'll see in the artists of Kinetic Light that we do not come to the stage, digital or virtual, without the rest of the KL team, Candice, who I think is on the call, Rachel Hickman, and Morgan and Jermaine.

We're more than the artists, the whole team runs together, works together, rocks together, and thank you all for helping us get onto the stage. We are ready to share some work. Over to William.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah. As we're sharing this work I'm going to introduce Alice and Laurel quickly, just as you're sharing the screen, William. The first clip is from *Laurel in the Garden*. Laurel is a choreographic collaborator, dancer, designer and engineer with Kinetic Light. She's the primary costume and makeup designer, and in collaboration with Top Ends' Paul [inaudible 00:09:04] designed the wheelchairs that she and Alice use in performance, as well as contributing other visual and technical design, she's also the product designer and lead for Audimance, the company's app which revolutionizes audio description for nonvisual audiences. And I'll introduce Alice before her clip, so let's start with Laurel.

William, we don't have sound.

Alice Sheppard:

Unmute your sound.

William:

Thank you.

Alice Sheppard:

The corner of a deck outdoors. A white fence is topped with 30 red ceramic and clay pots, green plants sprouting from some. More plants line the deck, one flower's pink. Amongst the dramatic daytime shadow of the fence in this video Laurel plays with her relationship to the camera. The red of her hair picks up the red of the pots. She wears a black tee shirt reading [inaudible 00:10:29]. Laurel.

Camera in front, Laurel's back ripples languidly. The camera pivots as she arches up to the plant. The footplate of her wheelchair peeks in. Eyes closed, she circles her body, the camera pivots back. She curves an arm overhead, scoops forward on her knees. Camera back in front, she rises with determination, a sharp look to the left, curves her arms towards the plant pots.

Left hand catches right, arms down, push off with power. Reflectively her body circles. Her hands push off the ground. Arm like a blade, takes her around. Arm like a blade, carries the camera around. A brief glimpse of her wheelchair. A push into the air, legs curving her arm to the plants behind her. Spin. Lies back, enjoying the sun. Camera jumps out overhead. Arms outstretched, a sharp body ripple. Legs circle in response. Arms like a blade, takes her to sitting. Back roll.

Up to her knees, she looks briefly at the camera and then down to the ground. An urgent push to a V-shape, but hovers over the shadows of the [inaudible 00:11:49], that resolves into a stretch towards the sun. The camera zooms in. She curves now, towards the camera, and sits back down. Legs in a "W" shape, Laurel grasps her knees and rolls backwards over to sitting. Kneeling, she looks over her shoulder at the camera once more.

The camera reacts by jumping away. Her chair slips into view.

Choreography: Alice Sheppard. Dancer: Laurel Lawson. Videography: Laurel Lawson. Audio Description: Alice Sheppard.

Sara Reisman:

I think we're going to go right into Alice Sheppard's [excerpt 00:12:34]. I'll introduce Alice. She's the Artistic Director of Kinetic Light, as well as a choreographer and dancer in the company. As an emerging and Bessie Award choreographer, Sheppard creates movements that challenge conventional understandings of disabled and dancing bodies. Engaging disability, arts, culture, and history, she's intrigued by the intersections of disability, gender, and race. Now we're looking at Alice's excerpt.

Jerron Herman:

Alice. Alice wears a pink long-sleeve hooded top and grayish leggings. She lies, lounges backward while seated in her wheelchair, atop a deck loveseat outdoors. Behind her, intertwining trees in the dark evening, now lit by [inaudible 00:13:20] of green, blue on the deck railing, and red on her body. With her head over the edge of the deck loveseat, Alice swipes her hands upward and down from thigh to face. Arm cross body, then back to center. The swipe continues over her arms, sentient.

The hands span and the whole body inhales as the chair lifts from the hips upward. Balancing, she looks straight at you. The fan hands lift and stretch straight up, interlocked fingers, and circle around her body, like a carousel wheel or head. A strong pivot, while still on her back, she's parallel. The wheelchair rises atop the deck seat, making valleys out of her body. Her gaze persists.

A cylindrical rock of the hip is constant, as arms float from center to exterior air. A curl inward, pivots once more to full frontal. The casters tower over our sightline now, and Alice curls over the wheels to reveal another set of searching arms, tracing the curvature. [inaudible 00:14:25] lace the wheels, grabbing more forcefully. Forward and back, becomes sharp inhales as the red and green lights split her face.

Choreography: Jerron Herman. Dancer: Alice Shepherd. Lighting: Michael Madag. Audio Description: Jerron Herman. Videography: Daniel Dulitz. Video Editing: Alice Sheppard.

Alice Sheppard:

Let's just take a second to actually respond to that. We'll take questions and comments in the chat boxes, but also just to let you... Talk a little bit about how these works got made, and why. In many ways, these were gifts to each other. When Sara invited us to do something for the Rubin Foundation's *Performance-in-Place*, I didn't want to necessarily just do Kinetic Light's thing. But you'll get plenty of us, in our thing.

I really wanted to have us make gifts for each other to get to know each other, and, for better interplay, and... Wow! It was an experiment. Jerron, tell us about some of the making of this, and Laurel, tell us about some of the making of your work.

Jerron Herman:

Yeah! I love the notion of the "love-letter." I think that, as we uncover what vocabulary means in our sect of the arts industry and even the idea of "dance making," it's really important that we forefront with love and with curiosity. I think that what I was working with was... And what I think your original prompt was to think about the person we were giving this to, and to really reflect on what aspects of

their body did we appreciate, did we find interesting. And then, what can we challenge them to do on top of that?

I was thinking about power, for you, Alice. I was thinking about how you are always a force of that, for me. I was thinking about ways in which my vocabulary with arms is comparable to you, and how we've been through the same kind of patterns of our making.

Alice Sheppard:

Laurel?

Laurel Lawson:

So, coming to this as disabled choreographers, of course we each have understanding of movement that is not only grounded in our own capacities, our own native vocabularies, but an understanding, through working with other disabled bodies, other types of embodiment that may be completely foreign to our own, even in my practice of working with non-disabled dancers. So this was an exercise, very much, in exploring exactly where and how... Much in the same way that we shape each other's movement in the works we put on stage, and working in this kind of environment... For example, my dance chair is in New York. I am not. Shall we move on?

Alice Sheppard:

Not without a quick comment from Michael, on how you lit my deck up. We were worried about the neighbors seeing the rays going on at our place, but Michael, how did you get all of those beautiful colors?

Michael Maag:

First off, when I was looking at this piece, I was thinking about what we were doing here as a shadow of our ability to perform in proximity to each other, now. I was excited about trying to do things, that we'd create interesting shadows. I can't really take any credit for what happened on Laurel's deck there, but you know... It happened well. It was beautiful. It [crosstalk 00:18:55]...

Jerron Herman:

You mean you didn't control the sun, Michael?

Michael Maag:

It's one dimmer, but I don't have any control of it.

Laurel Lawson:

[crosstalk 00:19:02] to get the right weather conditions, if he had.

Michael Maag:

I would have, yes. Anyway, at Alice's place, we had the opportunity... We bought some cheapo RGB outdoor flood lights from Amazon, and had Daniel arrange them around and get them placed exactly so that those shadows on the chair were perfect, so the circles would line up and create the interesting pattern that we had there. There was much discussion about that color.

Alice Sheppard:

I think that's very much typical for us. In some ways, Kinetic Light... You know, we're talking about a new era where everyone is practicing social distancing and social distancing is remote and new. But, I want to honor disability communities that have been creating, organizing, and mobilizing remotely for years. The internet is not a new site of productivity, or home for us. Indeed, Kinetic Light is part of that. It was new to actually be able to operating the lights with Michael. We had, literally, every laptop and every phone and everything we could do, and back and forth, and multiple consultations to create a lighting design on this. Kinetic Light is used to being remote. William, can you just show us the slide of where we all live?

William:

Mm-hmm-hmm. One moment.

Sara Reisman:

Can I interject a question, Alice?

Alice Sheppard:

Yeah, go for it.

Sara Reisman:

We've talked a little bit about the impacts. We've all been talking about the impact of social distancing. But that... [crosstalk 00:20:57]

Alice Sheppard:

Like everyone else, we are at home in a variety of places.

Sara Reisman:

Okay!

Alice Sheppard:

[inaudible 00:21:03], William. [inaudible 00:21:04].

Sara Reisman:

Do you want me to ask this now, or should I hold off?

Alice Sheppard:

Let's get to the slide and listen for a second.

Sara Reisman:

Okay, go ahead.

Alice Sheppard:

Like everyone else, we are at home in a variety places, but Kinetic Light already knew how to work remotely. Our team lives in Arizona, California, Georgia, Kansas, New Jersey, New York City,

upstate New York, Oregon, and Texas. On the screen is a map of the United States with blue pins marking the states we live in.

So we are remote, and we've had a remote practice, a distant practice, for a while. Back in the days of Skype, remember when did Skype instead of Zoom? We actually set up a lot of the lighting and projection for *Descent* on Skype. To begin that part of the program, and then we'll get back to social distancing, if we can, Sara... The next clip shows *Descent*, which is an evening-long dance piece telling the love story of Venus and Andromeda. It's Kinetic Light's first work together. It was created a lot with distant practice. Michael and I spent hours on Skype.

The next clip shows some of Michael's lighting for *Descent*. Take it away, William.

The screen reads: *Descent* by Kinetic Light. This excerpt of *Descent* focuses on highlights of Michael Maag's lighting and projection. In this clip, dancers Laurel Lawson, a white woman with sea green hair, and Alice Sheppard, a black woman with red-blond striped hair, dance on a ramped stage set. There's a mountain peak on the right. The curved ramp leads to a platform on the left. In front of these features, is a sloping, ramped deck. *Descent* tells the love story of Venus, played with Laurel, and Andromeda, played by Alice. We see moments of that relationship.

Atop a distant mountain, a pool of white light holds Andromeda balanced against the Andromeda starscape. She rides, eerily. The white stars zoom in closer to show Andromeda sitting regally on the mountain peak. She pauses, looks down, then circles and rolls her body into black space. We plunge from starscape, to under water.

Venus is revealed, her back muscles rippling like the shadowy waves of blue light projected on the ramp. She lifts herself up onto the deck on the ramp and arches back, slowly, invitingly, towards us. She stretches her arms like wings. On the platform, she reaches down into the soft waves of the black and blue water light on the ramp. Gently, she touches Andromeda's sleeping body. Andromeda wakes.

Abrupt shift. Venus rides her wheelchair into Andromeda. The lavender ramp reveals violet mountain ranges in a faraway gray sky. Andromeda's wheelchair sits in a pool of light on the mountain top. A water, turquoise world, shimmers against the royal blue of the ramp. Andromeda straps into her wheelchair sexily. Venus circles her, invitingly.

The dancers draw backwards down the lilac and orange striped ramp, spinning at the base and pushing up, arms reaching towards the sky. Through the stripes on the ramp, white line sketches the women's bodies are softly [inaudible 00:24:38]. Overhead, we see them push up, ride down, turning forever and ever. The ramp's stripes are interwoven like a basket. Rolling, turning, rolling, turning.

In silhouette, against a sunset sky, the lovers explore each other. A larger version of the screen is projected on the backdrop, creating a shadow echo eerily out of time with the movement of the dancers. Venus reaches for Andromeda, who stretches out in return.

Crystallizing, in sharp, cut white light, the dancers, in their wheelchairs, edge up the ramp. Venus pushes Andromeda. They circle each other wearily. Shadows stretch huge and dark and fallen. Seen from overhead now, on a cold white ramp tinged with blue, their shadows loom. The screen fills with rotating pixels. Venus leaps from Andromeda's peak, Andromeda following her to the top of her. White light flashes. The screen blacks out.

Descent. Filmed in performance. The EMPAC video team. November 2018. Credits online at the Rubin Foundation page.

Over to you, Sara.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah. We have a set of questions about this distance, the experience of distance. But, I think I'm going to skip to the aesthetic implications of working together from a distance rather than the logistical. How does it change aesthetics? Maybe asking this in a different way, what are the differences between the stage of home versus the stage of a shared rehearsal space? We saw a performance base, in *Descent*, but with Laurel and Alice, we've seen the stage of home. Maybe you guys could reflect on that. Jerron, too, even though we'll see your work in a little bit. Any takers?

Laurel Lawson:

Obviously, there's a huge difference in that our work is extremely physical. Much of it uses close partnering extensively. That is something that is simply not available to us right now. What are we necessarily exploring? We're exploring solo. We're exploring those other components of the piece. There is an immense amount of work that is not necessarily physical that goes into building this, that goes into telling you a story that fills the evening. Yeah, focusing in those ways, but we are going to need to come back together to consummate our work, if you will.

Alice Sheppard:

Also, the weirdness of my home being a stage...I'm deeply...I don't really invite people home often. Now, I feel like all of you from the internet are seeing the work. Hi! Welcome home. And, home isn't really set up for dancing.

Sara Reisman:

No, I wouldn't think so.

Jerron Herman:

This is Jerron. I think that we had prepared... I guess, certainly, processes are similar between the works. With *Wired*, we had prepared beforehand in such a way that felt rigorous and noted, so that when we were remote... For me, there was this continuation of aesthetic priorities. Even if we had to reestablish our homes as studios... Meanwhile, Alice says her home isn't a studio, but we all know it really is. Cough cough.

Then Laurel too. Her ingenuity with creating her space as a studio is quite inspired. I think it was really interesting. I'm curious to know that we didn't miss a beat in terms of transferring what we had been doing together to our own special places.

Alice Sheppard:

Yeah, I think that's true.

Laurel Lawson:

Yeah.

Alice Sheppard:

We've been working together as a group, so it felt like virtual rehearsal was possible. We could just keep going.

Sara Reisman:

Right. And did this change the lighting at all, for Michael, or is this just the norm to be working at least partly remotely? Michael?

Michael Maag:

I ended up having to work remotely a lot because I'm also the resident designer at the [inaudible 00:29:36] Shakespeare Festival. I have to be in residence here quite often. When they can gather to rehearse, then often I am working remotely and just camera-ing in and making notations and changes. We do a lot of collaborative planning and thinking it through. I certainly can't claim ownership of all these design elements. We put them together, together.

Sara Reisman:

Thank you, yeah. Great. I think we can move to...[crosstalk 00:30:10]

Alice Sheppard:

To... Someone mentioned *Wired*, right? This is absolutely terrifying. We are about to introduce to you, for the first time, some of the rehearsal clips and the background to our new evening-length work, *Wired*. William, give us the background.

Wired is an evening-length, immersive dance experience with two interconnecting strands: the story of the barbed wire itself, and the story of the people who interact with it. Against the black background, an image of part of a coil of barbed wire. Text reads: *Wired* honors the race, gender, and disability stories of barbed wire in America.

Wired began when I rounded a corner at the Whitney and saw Melvin Edwards' sculpture, *Pyramid Up and Down Pyramid*. My stomach flipped. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I knew there was work to be made. An image of the sculpture *Pyramid Up and Down Pyramid* nestles in between a white wall divider. On the right-hand side of the wall, a pyramid of barbed wire reaches upwards. On the left, upside-down, a pyramid stretches downward.

Wired is performed by Kinetic Light: Alice Sheppard, Laurel Lawson, Michael Madag, and Jerron Herman. An image that includes pictures of Michael, Laurel, Jerron, and Alice. We are joined by this journey by composers Ailis Ni Riain and LeahAnn Mitchell. A picture of Ailis, a white woman with white blonde hair, leaned under the lid of a piano. Her hand plucks at one of the strings. A picture of LeahAnn, a black queer transwoman wearing a headset, using her phone to adjust the music, she sits at the keyboard.

We fly safely, due to the Chicago Flyhouse. On screen, is an image of us loading into a theater. Chains cascade from the ceiling. Wires and cables are carefully coiled. Pipes lie in a line on the floor. A [inaudible 00:32:10] says: "The Chicago Flyhouse."

Against a black background with silver strands of barbed wire running across it, text reads: "*Wired* is supported in part by The Shed Open Call Program, the MAP fund, and USA Artists. Residency are bought from Jacob's Pillow, Pillow Lab and New York Live Arts."

An image of a coil in barbed wire casting a shadow on a shiny gray surface. This is my favorite quote from Melvin Edwards: "I've always understood the brutalist connotations inherent in materials like barbed wire." I find it sadly appropriate, definitely timely. We hope we will get to share why with you in person.

Sara Reisman:

There we go.

William:

The next slide, Alice?

Alice Sheppard:

Hit it, William.

William:

Okay.

Alice Sheppard:

Wired is...

An image of a white background and several strands of barbed wire hooked to a wall. The shadows stretch across the frame. Text reads: *Wired*. Beauty assists us in our attention to justice - Elaine Scarry.

In this rehearsal video are clips of Jerron, Laurel, and Alice in several different rehearsal locations performing excerpts of *Wired*. There is no over-arching narrative, and the numbered clips are not sequenced in any meaningful order.

One: A black wall and greenish floor. Suspended by a single line, Laurel and Alice, in their wheelchairs, fall, languidly from the ceiling, slowly turning, twisting, folding, and unfolding their bodies. In their hands, they hold a strand of barbed wire. They wrap and unwrap themselves in the barbed wire, stretching towards each other, coiling out, and coiling in.

Two: A dark wall and white floor. Jerron, wrapped in barbed wire, drums his feet until suddenly he is free. He jumps and turns over the wire, as if it were a game of double dutch. Suspended in the sky in her wheelchair, Alice watches, catching some of his movement. Underneath her now, he jumps up, the wire in his hand. She reaches for him, again and again.

Three: A white floor and wood panel wall. Laurel, on a bungee, both hands down, pulls her way like a cat to the left. The bungees pull her back, her hands drag. Push, into bounce, joyful bounce, and turn, wheels up. Now, a one-wheeled spin around and around and around. Head thrown back, and controlled land.

Four: Text on a studio wall reads: Ascent. Wrapped in bungees, Jerron leans forward to the audience. He drops languidly, brushing the floor as the jumpee pulls him away, again. A glance to the sky brings him to a standing glide into sitting back. He looks at the audience. Supported by the bungee, a wide-bodied turn. Spread legs, arms reaching. He pulls himself together, tucking his arm into the bungee, looking up. Waiting. Hanging. Hanging. Hanging. And releasing, slowly, inevitably into turning flight.

Five: [inaudible 00:35:50] by Jerron and Alice. Laurel, suspended by bungees, pulls herself off the ground, arching into a turn, she lands. A yank on the bungee takes her around. Leap. Around. Leap. Turn. Leap. Turn. A flip of her wheels upwards. Pull down, release up into flight, endlessly turning, hanging, turning. She looks at us over shoulder, cool and controlled, and then, turning, she lands.

Six: Text on a studio wall reads: Ascent. Balanced on casters, then yanked by bungees, Alice falls, wheels up into flight. She swings, turning, arms akimbo, nosing her body through the air, spine like a dolphin. Hands to ground, she stops herself. Pushes left. Right. Left. Right. Left. Around, and suddenly, she's aloft. Arms soaring, carving circles in space. Flying, grazing hands to the ground, she turns to stop. Wheels up.

Wired: in various rehearsals. Dancers: Jerron Herman, Laurel Lawson, and Alice Sheppard. Composers: LeahAnn Mitchell, Ailis Ni Riain. Credits online at the Rubin Foundation page.

And there we go!

Sara Reisman:

Amazing.

Alice Sheppard:

Good luck, we'll get to share that with you if ever the theater just becomes real and possible again. Yeah. I think the next place for us to go is to take you into how... We'll take questions about how *Wired* works, or anything like that, in the chat box afterwards. But, to follow on with some of the things that Kinetic Light is doing in order to make the work that we're doing. We're going to go quickly into a look of the company, and then Laurel will take it away with a deep explanation of what's going on.

William, over to you.

William:

The only four videos left are of Jerron, you, and Laurel.

Alice Sheppard:

Then we are missing one. About the company itself? I would say that we are one of the few, in fact, the only disability arts ensembles. We are gathered around the notions of disability, art, thinking about intersectional disability aesthetics and race and gender. These are... Our work, disability itself, is an essential element of our artistry. The company itself is of us, the disabled artists. We occupy all of the leadership positions. The first thing that we would say to you is that you may think of us as a dance company, and you may have seen some of our great dance, but we don't just make dance. If you're not familiar with our background, you can check out "Descent" under "Momentum." [inaudible 00:39:25] a dance short film, and *Wired* will be coming to you in person.

But, you may not know that we are also on the edge of some exciting innovations in disability, dance, technology, and design. You can see that in the wheelchairs that we use. Laurel Lawson, together with [inaudible 00:39:44] has designed for us prototype dance chairs. Really incredible, beautiful design. Highly responsive, incredible materials. I use no other word for them other than sexy. I think that has to do with the way they hug our bodies, the curves snug into our hips. They are backless. It changes the notion of design.

We are also looking at dance and technology. Laurel, again, is our tech lead, has designed an app that we call "Automance," together with Cycore Systems. This transforms the way in which audio description is performed. Laurel, to you.

Laurel Lawson:

As Alice said, dance is perhaps the easiest part to see. But, in order for us to make the work that we want to make, Kinetic Light is of necessity on the forefront of creating new ways of understanding and new ways of accessing live performance, new ways of thinking, of describing, of being in the world. We have an entire suite of things in the works, of which Automance is one example.

Automance is the software that we used to execute our video description practice. So far, you have heard audio description in these videos as kind of a [inaudible 00:41:31], which is how it is commonly executed. What we found when we began doing work in progress showings of *Descent*, was

that the best audio description at that time was not good enough. Our friends, our non-visual audience members, were coming to us and saying that they could tell they were missing things that sighted audience members were getting.

So, we needed to fix that. While we, of course, are not deploying Automance for you tonight, among other things, it is part of the show production and is queued live from Queue Lab to ensure that it is absolutely synced with the performance. Upcoming in a few of the clips, you're going to hear some more exploratory audio description practices, which center skilled listening. You're going to, if you are listening to the audio, you're going to hear overlapping voices. They are deliberately separated via several means. You may find this very challenging to listen to, and that's okay.

We never claim to make easy art. If you are looking at the captions or the interpreters, that is also going to be reflected, necessarily compressed in the captions, because we don't have multi-line captioning here. That is something else that is potentially something that we can consider. But, yeah. We're up to a lot of things that aren't necessarily immediately visible onstage.

Sara Reisman:

Should we turn it over to Jerron's video clip and I'll introduce Jerron in the meantime, before William presses play?

Jerron Herman is an interdisciplinary artist creating through dance, text, and visual storytelling. He's based in New York City. Until recently, he was a key member of Heidi Laskey dance. Jerron has performed at venues like Lincoln Center and the Whitney Museum of American Art, and is a member... I think the newest member of Kinetic Light. Welcome, Jerron.

Alice Sheppard:

Jerron. Jerron wears a white tank top and black biker shorts. He dances in a hallway with a wooden floor and white walls. [inaudible 00:44:25] apartments are present. At the end of the hall, some white LED tubes cross and zig zag over the wall. They cast strong shadows on the gleaming floor and glowing walls. Jerron appears almost in silhouette. Light from behind.

Hand grazing the floor, bent over. Hand stretching up the wall. Jerron sensing. A push, and coiled turn. Hand on the other wall. Jerron rises, bent over. Head on the wall. Light, behind, unwinding to standing. Hand on the wall, then an arm arches over a curved back. Light, from behind. Jerron touches the other wall. He brings his leg up, passes it under him as he turns, balancing on one leg like a flamingo. The other leg swings, forward, and back. Hand on the wall, body arch up to receive the light from behind. Head down now. A foot pushes the wall.

Jerron's body bounces, a rigid plank, he rebounds from wall to wall to wall. He pauses, makes a chair shape, back to the wall. He slides down. A small bounce, and up. And down. Jerron, caught in light, arm stretched out in still of light.

Choreography: Alice Sheppard. Dancer: Jerron Herman. Lighting: Mizuki Kaneda. Videography: Dan Kim. Audio Description: Alice Sheppard. Video Editing: Alice Sheppard.

Laurel Lawson:

Jerron. Piercing gaze towards the camera. And loose shirt, stark against rich black skin. Arms, forming a diamond and steadily lean against the wall.

High Pitched Voice:

He begins to swing a hip.

Laurel Lawson:

Turning face, winding.

High Pitched Voice:

He traces his one foot gently on the floor, rotating his body back and forth with it until he steps forward, swinging one leg up straight, gesturing towards the camera.

Laurel Lawson:

[crosstalk 00:47:02] towards the camera.

High Pitched Voice:

He skips back and turns to face the warm light flooding in one side.

Laurel Lawson:

His body drops over, step [crosstalk 00:47:05] into a squat, deeply sinking. Upwards, arching back to neutral. White shirt shows to the warm sunlight. Arch. Almost touching the other side of the narrow hallway, into a turn... Turning... Creasing at the hip. Legs crossed.

High Pitched Voice:

Down to a crouch.

Laurel Lawson:

[crosstalk 00:47:31] under his chin. Head [crosstalk 00:47:33].

High Pitched Voice:

He steps back, [crosstalk 00:47:36] turning away and back to the camera.

Laurel Lawson:

Turning back.

High Pitched Voice:

One leg bent, while he looks questioningly. Bending at the waist, bending at the knee. Leg turns in, turns out, and advances forward.

Laurel Lawson:

Bent leg, opens, closes, and steps. Steps forward to fourth. He advances on the camera. Now crossing sinuously, crossing. Step, cross. Step, cross. Step, cross.

High Pitched Voice:

He comes towards you, one leg wrapping around the other.

Laurel Lawson:

Seducing you.

High Pitched Voice:

He steps and steps and steps.

Laurel Lawson:

From side to side.

High Pitched Voice:

And steps. Camera focusing on hips, shirt, hand.

Laurel Lawson:

Into the camera.

High Pitched Voice:

Empty hallway.

Laurel Lawson:

And beyond. The hallway is empty.

Laurel Lawson:

Choreography by Laurel Lawson. Dancer: Jerron Herman. Lighting: Michael Madag. Videography by Dan Kim. Audio Description: Laurel Lawson. Video Editing: Alice Sheppard.

Alice Sheppard:

Really loving the conversation in the chat box, and the questions. Keep them coming. We'll keep working with it all as we go.

We're getting close to the final videos, right? I'm wrapping them up with time.

Sara Reisman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alice Sheppard:

Our final videos are, one example, a second example of a multilayer description that you're reacting to now, and a single describer. Which, one of our advisors and friends and colleagues, calls the "Voice of God." As Laurel points out in the chat, as a sighted audience member, you're choosing where to look. The idea of choice is one of the critical parts of our audio description practice in live performance. For the moment, we're doing what we can over this video conferencing platform. If William could take us into the final two clips, we're going to be at home tonight. Lit by Michael Maag.

Jerron Herman:

Laurel. Seated on the floor in a rose-hued room, Laurel wears a black t-shirt stating "All Y'all" and black leggings. Her wheelchair sits parallel to her. Already rotating from the hips, she lifts her hands to her head. Shadows cascade behind her. Laurel's hands reach their limits, stretching in breathing patterns.

A sharp inhale brings both legs together and close to the chest. They swing forward as one leg swipes in front of the other. Touching the chair, bringing it closer with another arm, flourishing upward, she sits in it and reclines. The shadows mirror her elongated legs and torso. In the light, a jolt upright turns into a languid roll forward and back. A sudden turn to the front fills her body in the frame. Her hands search and caress each other, revolving for a second.

One hand fills the entire frame. A sharp cut to Laurel back in the corner of the wall, as she lifts her arm angularly over her head, and pivots, facing the wall, stretching out the same arm. Spin to the front. Spin to the back. As she slowly rolls to the front, she coyly places a hand on her cheek and looks into the camera.

Choreography: Jerron Herman. Dancer: Laurel Lawson. Lighting: Michael Madag. Videography: Laurel Lawson. Audio Description: Jerron Herman. Video Editing: Alice Sheppard.

Laurel Lawson:

Alice.

High Pitched Voice:

Turquoise and fuchsia light reflects off every surface to make a fantastical scape. We see a wooden corridor, a narrow hallway, lined with little railings, ramped up towards you, back into a door. With [crosstalk 00:52:27] and rich sunset colors. A woman in skin tight black. Only face, hands, and hair showing.

Laurel Lawson:

Alice, seen only on her front two wheels, shadows beneath her. Alice throws her hands in the air behind her back, forming an "X."

High Pitched Voice:

Light brown skin and wildly curly hair, in her chair.

Laurel Lawson:

Black "X" balanced amongst her [crosstalk 00:52:46]. Flying upwards and falling back.

High Pitched Voice:

Brilliant silver metal.

Laurel Lawson:

Swinging and sprint, push.

High Pitched Voice:

And clean lines and [crosstalk 00:52:54].

Laurel Lawson:

And turn, and fly, circle. Return. Repeat. Grab, shake, twist. Fight. A look. Push. A look. And turn. Resign, pleading. Push, gesture, reach, fail. And losing grasp. Fail, slip, slide, and she tries once more... Fall... and falls. Sliding backwards, sliding away... Falling away... on her stomach and contortion. And we

see nothing but contorted silhouette, twisting, writhing, wheels rotating through space. Resolving, again, we see only the bottom of her chair... Push out... As she comes towards us. Centaur. Grapping the railings... Reach... She swings, [crosstalk 00:54:08]... Stretch... Pulls herself up with momentum. Try it again. She sprints once more, to a stop. Sprint. Stop. Throws her head firm, and smirks.

Choreography by Laurel Lawson. Dancer is Alice Sheppard. Lighting by Michael Maag. Videography: Daniel Dulitz. Audio description by Laurel Lawson. Video editing by Alice Sheppard.

Alice Sheppard:

Conversation is well away, but let's... Sara, over to you. Checking the boxes and... [crosstalk 00:54:52].

Sara Reisman:

I'm seeing some words of, let's say, excitement. Mesmerizing, enticing, exciting word buffet. Stunning, amazing, so badass. Brilliant, wow with many "w's." I wondered... I guess, language is one of the key points here, for me in thinking about how you embedded audio description into the video dances throughout this, and also in this clips of collaborative dances.

Let's just start with, how do you go about writing audio description? How does that work with each... Is it a collaborative process between the whole company for each dance, or what happens?

Alice Sheppard:

So, two things happen. For live performances, for *Descent* and for *Wired*, we commission disabled artists and [inaudible 00:55:44] worked on *Descent* to basically do their thing, as they know how to do it, in the best way possible. Eli Claire wrote an amazing poetry cycle for *Descent*. That was his... *Descent* became a poem in his hands.

Here, in this work, we literally... Each choreographer described the work as they were able to, wanted to. I worked with Michael on a document to really get the words right for what he was doing and what was represented in the video. It was a huge collaborative process to get these in place performances going. Essentially, there will be a team of six describers working on *Wired*, which will give... In that form, *Wired* should become like a huge, sonic experience in its own right, never mind what happens on stage. You could listen to *Wired*.

Sara Reisman:

Right. Tonight we're looking at this with the text embedded, and the audio description embedded. How would it be different in a live performance? Would there be more choice for the viewer, for the audience?

Laurel Lawson:

Sure.

Sara Reisman:

Laurel?

Laurel Lawson:

I skipped over this earlier, but if everyone would care for a moment to imagine yourself in a large room, perhaps on the eighth floor, which is a large spare gallery type of space... And if you imagine that there are speakers that can be anywhere in the room, they can be on the floor or the ceiling, the middle, the corners, anywhere. Maybe fifteen, twenty speakers. Each speaker is playing a different track. Got it?

Sara Reisman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Laurel Lawson:

All of these tracks are part of the same show, and they begin and they go through a performance, and they end. You can move yourself throughout this room. You can choose to go and snuggle up to one speaker, and listen to one track from beginning to end. You can wander among them, moving from track to track, from mode to mode. You can put yourself in the middle of the room and listen to as many as you want can parse at once, or simply let the sound wash over you.

That is how we would present it in performance, where we have the visual universe from the stage, we also have this auditory universe. That, we had some questions in the chat, I think... That is something that we consider to be equitable access, where you have multi-channel choice-driven experience, visually. We are giving that same multi-channel, multi-form, choice-driven experience, non-visually.

Sara Reisman:

Thank you for that, Laurel. I guess what I wanted to talk about is... So we have ASL interpretation, we have captioning. There's a kind of interpretation that happens live. What I wanted to just talk about is, how you optioned to share a script. Alice was adamant that we should share a script with the ASL interpreters, because language is so critical to this work. The interpretation, the receiving of this text or transmission of this text, is integral to the work. I thought it might be interesting to talk about this part of the artwork. I did see some comments where, Alice you were answering some questions and responding... This is part of the artwork. This is not separate, right? It's for everyone involved, but I put it to Alice first.

Alice Sheppard:

This is part of what I experience as just doing the work. Right? If you show up to a conference, a video call, or a play, or anything else, and your interpreter or your person doing captioning isn't prepared because the venue or the performer or the presenter or the speaker hasn't done the work beforehand, then the likelihood is that the quality of your experience is not going to be the same as everybody else's. In some ways, working with words is part of the work. Getting the stuff to the interpretation companies in time is just part of the job.

The idea, for us artistically, is that the art exists in many forms. It exists visually, it exists in words, it exists in sounds, it exists in multiple dimensions. We're accustomed to considering dance as an art form where you sit down, a dancer's presenting in front of you, and then you applaud and that's the end of it. It's consumed visually.

But, I'm thinking of dance more as a kinesthetic, felt experience. It needs to be tactile, it needs to be in your body, it needs to be [inaudible 01:01:18], it needs to be sonic. It needs to be multisensory in its intake. When you craft the work that way, you're able to craft an accessible experience. Me, wanting to make sure that the scripts got to the ASL interpreters for interpretation and captioning

before the show, that's not special. That's just what it means to attempt to have an accessible event on this... Yeah. In this kind of platform.

Sara Reisman:

Thank you.

For a lot of people, watching contemporary dance, viewing contemporary dance, experiencing it... They may know what they like, right? It's that question about our... I know what I like, but I don't know what it means. I hear that a lot in visual art. I think there's something interesting in this use of language and how it helps people inform what they're experiencing, or helping them to describe that. Do you think about the role of audio description as something that can contribute to the discourse around dance? That's a question for you all.

Alice Sheppard:

Yeah. I'd love to have a quick go at that, and then toss it over. For so much of the time, disability is unlanguage. Everyone says, "oh, I don't have words for it." There's no word for that move, there isn't a word for this, there is no word for that. There is no language for disability, and yet, there really is language. In part of what you're seeing here is a byproduct. Yes, we are able to add vocabulary to dance discourse, as well as an aesthetic commitment for things to exist in [inaudible 01:03:05] format. Jerron, Laurel, Michael, over to you.

Jerron Herman:

I concur... This is Jerron, I concur. Just the state of criticism in itself is under fire and [inaudible 01:03:26] needs a seat, or kind of a wake-up call. I think that what [inaudible 01:03:35] aesthetics often do is that they interrogate frameworks for how things operate, so that ascribing folks for critique, or for analysis, often is done without someone's consent, or without someone's knowhow.

I think this also radicalizes how individuals take part, and someone else understanding them. I think that's also a really wonderful addition to the normalcy of using audio description in work, especially as it patterns to disabled bodies that we can start to have vocabulary and an enriched lexicon that uses words that we have been using and tend to use.

Laurel Lawson:

This is what I was attempting to say in many ways. There is a level of technique in what we are doing and how we are thinking and how we are working, that's it not always legible. Being presented in these videos, and in these contexts that do not, as a [inaudible 01:05:04] disabled artist, do not present work made by disabled artists. That conversation becomes critical, because part of the experience of dance for many people, is having that context and having that language.

Sara Reisman:

Michael, do you want to add anything?

Michael Maag:

No, I just... Our process is about opening this up for everyone, and getting past that barrier that is presented to so many people when they join what we're doing. We're trying to make it a bit more sensible.

Sara Reisman:

Alice, you go.

Alice Sheppard:

Was that you, Sarah? Are you calling an end here.

Sara Reisman:

No, I just see some good questions, and I wondered if we could take one. If you want to add anything...

Alice Sheppard:

I just want to add one small thing. There's a difference between inclusion and equity in a performance. We are really moving from, "Oh, you were included we're offering you some kind of access to..." This is a way in which we can offer and communicate and share the aesthetic of the show. That's the move that all the artists here at Kinetic Light have made. We've gone beyond individual inclusion and access as defined by regulations of the ADA. We are really in a different conversation.

Sara Reisman:

I want to... Maybe a question for Michelle Friedner, she seems to have so many questions. I don't know where she is. There's, maybe along the lines of what you just addressed, Alice. Michelle, in one of her many questions, "What's the difference between legibility and accessibility?" If you [crosstalk 01:07:01].

Alice Sheppard:

Right, I can really take some of that on.

First, catch up on the chat conversation too where Mel is also addressing some of these questions. I think there's also a larger tie-in about legibility and accessibility. In the past, people have assumed that disability and disability culture is singly-legible around one thing.

Actually, disability culture is complex and multiply legible and around multiple things. We are creating work that is creating, from the inside of disability culture... People who are familiar with the culture, on the inside of the culture, are getting one set of legible and interpretation. People on the non-disabled ward are getting a different set of legibility and interpretation. Not everyone gets everyone, and nor should everyone get anything. I think that's part of the move, is the recognition that disability culture is not monotrack around the deficit of a diagnosis. It is complex, it is rich, it is conflicting. The interpretations clash, and move beyond one another, and we get to say that we don't know, and you shouldn't know all of it either. I think that, sadly, it's sort of new and sad to have to wear that.

It's also a recognition of the complex theater, the culture. In the chatbox you can see some of that negotiation going on right now. The people are like, "No, we can do that! Yes, we do that. No, we do this over here all the time." There are multiple insight positions, as there are with any work and any culture. Our company is opening up a space for these things to become not necessarily legible, but experienced.

I don't believe that you should have the answers to everything all the time.

Sara Reisman:

Right. Anyone want to add anything to that?

Alice Sheppard:

Sorry, that was a long answer.

Sara Reisman:

It's a lot to think about.

Laurel Lawson:

I mean, that is seriously something we could go on about for the next several hours. The literary journal that actually created the shirt that I'm wearing published a piece recently about the privilege of opacity, opacity as the opposite of legibility. Who do you feel like you need to understand? Why do you need to know details about a person's life to accept and respect what they are saying to you. This is something that comes up constantly, and yeah. It's something about which we could have very, very long discussions. So, catch us later.

Sara Reisman:

Yes. I guess catch us later. It's 8:14, do we end here? I think it's time. I'm amazed by this presentation, and I'm amazed by the questions. I think what we might do is, we will have materials from this event, not the entire recording, available on the Rubin Foundation... Actually, The 8th Floor website. We'll have it ready in a couple of days, I think, and then it will be up in one week.

I'm interested in this chat transcript, but we'll figure out what we can do that, because the comments are incredible. I want to thank everybody for being here tonight, virtually, distanced but together, and for Kinetic Light, bringing together so many rich ideas and experiences for this audience. I want to thank William for doing the logistics and production.

I don't know if Alice or Laurel or Jerron or Michael, if you want to close with any remarks, or thank yous. It's up to you. We can hang out here for a little bit.

Alice Sheppard:

I kind of don't want to let go, [inaudible 01:11:12] and the conversation that's happening. Maybe, thank you to you, to the Rubin Foundation. The Rubin Foundation is actually funding the development of the content, some of the new describing work for Wired. When we said there was going to be six subscribers working on *Wired*, that work is supported by the Rubin Foundation. Thank you for your commitment to us. Also, the Rubin Foundation was one of the first companies, foundations to come on and support the development of the app, Automance, so thank you for your commitment to us again. Also, thank you for this space, to be able to share this work with you. Thank you all for showing up tonight.

Sara Reisman:

Thanks everybody. Thanks for the beautiful work. Woo!