

ARTFORUM

Loretta Fahrenholz

REENA SPAULINGS FINE ART 165 East Broadway, September 8–September 22

In Loretta Fahrenholz's film *Ditch Plains*, 2013, the sole work on view in her latest show, the artist creates a kind of anticity-symphony about a post-Sandy, post-Silicone Alley New York. Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, (1927), is perhaps the genre's most prominent example, presenting 1920s Berlin as a bustling industrial metropolis. Fahrenholz shows New York as a ruinous temple to capitalism—the city's economic inequities and racial divisions made manifest around the havoc wreaked by Hurricane Sandy, especially within the working-class communities of the Rockaways and East New York, where much of *Ditch Plains* takes place. In Ruttmann's film, the city is the chief protagonist, coming to life in front of the camera with its crowds, locomotives, and smokestacks. In Fahrenholz's film, a few scant bodies move through a dead landscape in sequences of spatially constrained but wildly expressive dance.



Loretta Fahrenholz, *Ditch Plains*, 2013, HD video, color, sound, 29 minutes.

All members of the Ringmaster Crew, an East New York–based group of self-taught performers that worked closely with Fahrenholz to develop the film, the dancers enact abstracted and ambient dance narratives around a stop-and-frisk scenario, a drugged-out hotel-party scene, and an imagined death match in front of an abandoned house. Fahrenholz and the Ringmasters are committed to abstraction, bringing a host of sociopolitical issues into their orbit but refusing to submit to a purely critical documentary mode. These scenes are often more modal than narrative as the performers enter turgid loops of repetitive motion in tightly delineated space. The manic energy of the dances often recalls the incessant hand gestures of an immersed smart phone user, whose complex gesticulations are performed again and again on the confined real estate of a mobile screen. The creep of a deepening interiority runs through the film like its spine—augmented in no small part by the masterful sound design of Steffen Martin, and represented by an abstracted conflict narrative between a haunted protagonist and his shapeshifting, illuminated tormenter.

— Boško Blagojević