

Each year we orbit one question in the company of artists through exhibitions and other events. Across the year we explore what this question offers us and what artworks and their authors can weave together. In 2024 we ask “do I need territory?” You can think of this as one exhibition in four parts, as a score played across a calendar, or maybe even as a forest. Join us.

2024
Do I need territory?

Joie noire Jimmy Robert 20 April – 13 July, 2024

It is one of the many pacts made in contemporary capitalist life that the body is disciplined into being either acceptably invisible or acceptably visible depending on the scenario. The honouring of this pact of visibility is experienced in moments of euphoric joy when we are most alive, and equally at life’s edges, when we are confronted by human vulnerability. It is honoured equally in our experiences as individuals as well as participants in communities.

Joie noire as presented here is the fourth iteration of Robert’s seminal performance of the same title, debuted at KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin in 2019 and its first reinterpretation in exhibition form. The work began as a meditation on his collaborator Ian White (1971-2013)—who was known for drawing out the ways in which the performing body can radically interrupt the behaviors of codified spaces, such as the museum, or gallery—and expanded into an expression of Robert’s ongoing analysis of spectatorship and desire. Honing in on the body in the public sphere the work sets up entangled points of encounter that worry at the borders of relating: how long does it take to look? How long does it take to be seen? In what ways are our bodies expected to be visible to the other, to the world? In what ways are our bodies acceptable to the other, the world? And where is intimacy in all of this?

In *Joie noire*, Robert casts light on and off of interlocking zones where disciplining the body is at stake: the night club, the AIDS epidemic, and death. In his original performance this “casting” on and off unfolded throughout the many territories of the host gallery: beginning in the courtyard, moving to its bunker-like-bar, and ending in the cavernous basement gallery. Each relocation of the audience was carefully guided by a gallery staff member or the artist and his co-performer as they enacted rephrased photographs of the ballet *Agon* by Balanchine. For this iteration

Artspace Aotearoa is a non-profit contemporary art gallery founded in 1987 by artists and arts workers, it continues to be artist-led. We work within a specific city context, and spiral out into national and international conversations that promote practices that present emancipatory world views.

Please note, this exhibition contains audio that describes the embalming process. This may be sensitive for some visitors.



we, the audience members, are invited to become the performing agents and move through elements of the original performance, navigating the space between two or more bodies: nursing the challenges of intimacy and detachment.

The cue sheet from his original performance acts as a point from which we can triangulate ourselves—live—between the red and blue light, the on and the off that set the pace of the gallery. Red: the disarming recording of Ian White reading from Jessica Mitford’s notorious 1963 critique of the funeral industry, *The American Way of Death*. Blue: a reflection on the ways in which the AIDs crisis resulted in radical changes to expressions of care and intimacy running via teleprompter; the compact playlist that calls up 50 years of club history. On: an image of the artist holding life, holding death as depicted in General Ideas 1991 work, *Black AIDS #1*. Off: our own breath and that of whoever is in the gallery at the same time, registering the fact of a body as being both a site of self-determination and limitation.

If the exhibition spotlights the discipline of visibility it simultaneously insists that we consider its opposite: precious disobedience. This form of disobedience breaks the pact of acceptable in/visibility, awakening our potential to be agents in commune, ones that exist closely, ones that get really close, to choreograph entirely new codes of relating.

Biography

Jimmy Robert was born in Guadeloupe but has lived in Berlin for the last decade. He works across a range of media—including photography, sculpture, film, video, and collaborative performance—gently breaking down divisions between two and three dimensions, image and object. He studied at Goldsmiths, London, was a resident at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam and is now a professor at UdK, Berlin. He has had major solo exhibitions at, amongst others, Moderna Museet, Malmö; Centre National de la Danse, Paris-Pantin in collaboration with Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Museion Bolzano; Nottingham Contemporary; and The Power Plant, Toronto. He has also participated in numerous significant group exhibitions including the 8th Berlin Biennale, 11th Dak’Art, Dakar, 5th Aichi Triennale, and the 7th Gwangju Biennale.

Jimmy Robert *Joie noire*, 2019/2024

Exhibition duration 33’00” (loop)
Comprised of the following:

1
Reproduction of cue sheet from original performance of *Joie noire*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 19 and 20 January, 2019
vinyl on wall
270cm x 190cm

2
Audio recording of Ian White reading an excerpt from ‘Behind the Fomaldehyde Curtain’, *The American Way of Death* (1963), red light on timer, red curtains, custom scent
Dimensions variable
9’43” (alternating loop)

3
Playlist including Sylvester, ‘I Need Somebody to Love Tonight’, 1979; Grace Jones, ‘Libertango (I have seen that face before)’, 1981 and ‘Pars’, 1980
English translation of Grace Jones lyrics: ‘What are you looking for, to meet death? Who do you think you are? Do you hate life too? In his room Joel and his suitcase, one last look at the walls, without regret without drama. Leave and above all don’t look back. Whatever happens I will always be with you.’
The Smiths, ‘Death of a Disco Dnacer’, 1987, blue light on timer, carpeted stage
240cm x 60cm
12’49” (alternating loop)

4
‘Joie noire’, archival ink-jet print (exhibition copy), white light on timer
110cm x 165cm
2’50” (loop)

5 Painted silver circle on wall
120cm diameter

6
‘The hands that touch’, teleprompter, colour, no sound
9’34” (loop)

Various documents, 2019-2024

In vitrine L-R: artist book *Revue*, Jimmy Robert, 2020, open to ‘L’ and ‘European Potraits’; exhibition catalogue *Pausing*, Jimmy Robert, Centre National de la Danse, 2023, open to documentation of *Joie noire*, 2019, KW Insitute for Contemporary Art; press release, *Joie noire*, 2019, KW Institute for Contemporary Art; sketch and paint test for *Joie noire*, 2019; new years card from Centre National de la Danse, 2023 with documentation of *Joie noire*, 2019, KW Institute for Contemporary Art; sketches for *Joie noire* using stills from *Agon* by Balanchine

All work courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin.

