

RIGA, LATVIA

## Donna Huanca

KIM? CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE

A painting needs a body if it is to move freely in space. And if the surface of the painting were the skin of that body, the paint would serve as clothes. Set the body in motion and the painting becomes unfixed, its textures and colors forming fleeting compositions. Painted clothes are stripped of their usual function—they smear or crack, dry up and flake off, and in this way they tell stories about the body they occupy. Such fluid interplays of painting, clothing, and memory abound in *POLYSTYRENE'S BRACES*, 2016, the surreal installation by Bolivian American artist Donna Huanca, recently on view at kim? Contemporary Art Centre. (Curated by Anne Barlow, this new commission—the first presentation of the artist's work in the Baltics—resulted from a long-term collaboration between the institution and Art in General in New York.)

On the exhibition's opening night, two female models, wearing only gauzy body stockings that featured large cutouts and passages of wet paint in hues of pastel pink and mint, moved hypnotically around the gallery for three hours. In a seemingly ritualistic tribute to Yves Klein's "Anthropometries," 1960, they pressed themselves against three hanging Plexiglas works and the gallery walls, making body-part prints on various surfaces in the space. After the enigmatic performance, these traces of the models' movements remained, a legend to help the viewer piece together past events.

The disjunction between the event and its motionless aftermath brought to the fore the installation's themes of mobility and the slipperiness of identity in the age of global migration (the artist's personal story is critical here, as her cultural background is rooted in Bolivia, North America, and Europe). Huanca seems fixated on what bodies leave behind and the inscriptions they make on surfaces. For this reason, clothing is a recurrent theme in her work. Clothes carry with them the stains, scars, and memories of the bodies that once inhabited them. In this performance, the models interacted with a blue raincoat, two pairs of handmade shoes, and a pair of boots. These remained strewn around the gallery, along with the stockings worn by the performers, for the duration of the exhibition. Though she is invested in movement and flux, the artist grounded her work in the city of Riga—not through abstract references but physically and personally: She used local performers, an art student and a dancer, and collected her materials at a nearby outdoor market.

Huanca's paintings, ever-shifting with the activity of the models' limbs, were as materially ephemeral as the transitory movements in which they were viewed. As such, they invited meditation on the affective sense of longing.

Although the works were washed away from the body once the performers exposed their skin to running water, Huanca left the viewer with something else—marks that memorialize movement, migration, and change.

—Neringa Černiauskaitė



Donna Huanca, *POLYSTYRENE'S BRACES*, 2015. Performance view, December 6, 2015. Gabija Birina. Photo Ansis Starks.