

Jan Nelson knows a lot about the slippery yet intensely valuable properties of transcendence. Her recent work has explored the processes and power structures by which art somehow exceeds its material properties to become charismatic. Carefully dissecting the machinations of 1960s avant-gardism, Nelson has developed a practice that both extends and diverts the logic of the modernist ideal. Where artists like the French provocateur Yves Klein sought to create pockets of mystery in large momentous gestures, Nelson searches for complexity in the prosaic. She focuses on the constitutive pieces that make up the artistic process building these parts into a journey. Invoking the logic of the road movie, Nelson navigates the crucial narratives of making art from conception to experimentation. The purpose of this is not to highlight the triumph of the finished art work but to show that the anticipation of arriving is every bit as powerful.

In *Studio Practice* the artist dismisses the heroic in order to find something real in the everyday. The video and photographic images of walking, leaping, crawling and lying down illustrate activities that are at once menial yet also full of creative potential. They exist as a series of experimental propositions that explore the interplay between chance and rational decision making. The deliberately inconclusive nature of each act eschews a sense of completion while leaving open the possibility of an instant of symbiosis where banality may become profound. Nelson is not afraid to risk making mistakes and spoiling the perfect work of art for within error exists new layers of meaning. Blunders do not necessarily point to failure but offer an insight into the human condition. The act of falling off a chair twice for instance suggests a fool stupidly making successive mistakes. Yet a more interesting analysis points to individual volition and our obsessive nature in getting things right.

Nelson's acts of experimental drifting have another specific purpose aside from renegotiating the parameters of the chutzpah. This is to explore the issue of identity in relation to the actual site of artistic production. Framing and reframing her body in still and moving formats, the artist is also questioning her whole relationship to the studio. She alludes to the uncertain and constantly tenuous nature of this space that serves to secretly fabricate her art while at the same time hide her body from the finished product. Stripping the creative process to its bare bones, the artist offers her body as an instrument of mark-making in place of the actual marks. By revealing this process and herself, Nelson is demanding a level of proof: evidence that the artist is physically and emotionally imbricated in the work and that art is not a static, de-personalised activity.

Nelson's willingness to explore fragility is a direct challenge to the masculine conventions of the avant-garde. With no spectacular tricks up her sleeve she appears to be a phoney or at best a second rate alchemist. Yet in her willingness to reveal other elements for consideration, important, if more subtle, points of transcendence are made possible. Her brazen leaping and stomping on the streets of Paris are a case in point. Judging by the bemused looks on the faces of passers by, Nelson successfully transcended her status as artist and became instead a slightly obsessive French philosopher.

David Cross

