



NOW AS A BIRD,
ESSAYS • INTERVIEWS • IMAGES
NOW AS A WORM,
EDITED BY MIKE HOOLBOOM
NOW AS A PLANT

EXHIBIT:

**HOPELESSLY MIDDLE AGED
HALLWALLS GALLERY**

SEPTEMBER 7-NOVEMBER 2, 2012

**EMILY VEY DUKE +
COOPER BATTERSBY**

WITH
MIKE HOOLBOOM
DANI LEVENTHAL

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HALLWALLS GALLERY

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HALLWALLS

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

EDITOR

Mike Hoolboom

DESIGNER

Kilby Smith-McGregor

EXHIBITION

"HOPELESSLY MIDDLE AGED," Hallwalls Gallery
September 7–November 2, 2012

CURATOR

John Massier

A Hallwalls Artist-in Residence Project (HARP)

ARTISTS

DANI LEVENTHAL

EMILY VEY DUKE + COOPER BATTERSBY

MIKE HOOLBOOM

Stills courtesy of the artists

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MUSCLE MEMORY

BY ERIK MARTINSON

It's difficult to express in words how much impact Dani Leventhal's video work and her way of seeing has had on me. The visual language she employs is so visceral, I can feel it with my eyes and in my head. It has the effect of recalling my own memories, only the angles are better, the images crisper, and the editing has been wrangled so that everything is in its place. You don't always understand why, but it is. This process of seeing – of looking out and in at the same time – that she is able to transfer to our minds via her videos doesn't quite match up with the word that some might use to describe this process: intuitive. I think we get hesitant about this word, its legacy in the arts, its impact, when it comes up in question and answer periods about an artist's methods. I'm not interested in using it here.

Watching Dani's *17 New Dam Road* (7:52 minutes 2012), a new phrase emerges that catches my attention: muscle memory. It's cumbersome, not perfectly fitting by any means, but it starts me off in a direction. Having seen all of Dani's videos up to this point, I can feel my eyes recalling their movements, scanning the frames she presents, how they've been internalized in a profound way. The scene she encounters in Hopewell Junction has all her presence behind the camera, her signature imprinting on the world around her. Something differs slightly in the unfolding of the shots though, it becomes clear that the location is always the same: the house, yard, people. The images come from one place and time-frame, instead of traversing spaces and temporalities as

we have seen in her past work. These located events are recalled in a structure that presents her experience of a visit to the home of Jason, Jason, Jon, and Teresa. Once inside, discussions of guns, ammo, and shooting are conveyed while pull-ups are performed, a kitten gallantly jumps between leaning weapons, and the Teresa's boxing is choreographed. The camera takes a drag from a cigarette as Teresa asks Dani if she has ever fired a weapon. Dani says she's shot a rifle only once and it kicked back so hard it hurt her shoulder. One of the Jasons talks about a glock's safety, it's right on the trigger, so he doesn't have to position his finger, it's right there. It's muscle memory.

This moment contrasts two experiences with guns. On one side is the body that recoils, its fibres and sinews unaccustomed to the kick, and on the other side is a body with unflinching joints resting on the trigger. This illustration of the theory of muscle memory ripples in my mind, and continues in my body, as I reflect on the ways I feel through Dani's videos. I noticed both familiarity and difference in *17 New Dam Road*, its gleaner's eye and ear compels me in way that's become familiar via encounters with Dani's work, but now matched with a distinctive locality that creates a space to reflect on this internalization in new ways, to think about the approaches used, the way they affect my vision. The way a shot can kill or reveal. My eye muscles, my brain wrinkles, having had this reflexive moment, are training harder. Pathways are renewed and newly made. The punches have landed on their mark. •