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## MORGAN O'HARA: LIVE TRANSMISSION DRAWINGS AT THE BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC

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Morgan O'Hara, *LIVE TRANSMISSION: Pappa Tarahumara: Ship in a View, November 30, 2007*  
Graphite on paper, 23 x 29 inches.

Morgan O'Hara has been developing her series of drawings, known as *LIVE*

*TRANSMISSION*, since 1982 and at BAM since the mid 1990s. These drawings, which the artist calls “time-based performance,” are created by tracking and recording the movements of her various subjects using pencil and paper. Over the years, O’Hara created some of the more than 3000 *LIVE TRANSMISSIONS* in the various BAM theaters, often without the knowledge of staff, or the artists whose performances she’s recorded, including masters of modern dance like Pina Bausch and Martha Graham.

In discussing her work, the cultural critic Paul Virilio has called her “an antenna,” a straightforward and extremely accurate descriptor for her role in producing these “transmissions.” However, she can also be seen as not just a receptor, but also as an interpreter of movement, an ontologist—an obsessive documentarian with a need to record every possible kind of activity that exists within humanity and beyond. Signals—like the gestures of a dancer or the movements of a musician playing an instrument—are beamed out into the audience and picked up by the eyes of the artist. O’Hara intercepts this rich variety of movements and translates them into drawing, using dozens of pencils, compressing the three dimensions of the stage onto the two dimensions of paper. She captures actions in real time through her own performance; the record exists as the *LIVE TRANSMISSION*.

Within the entire series of *LIVE TRANSMISSION* drawings, O’Hara’s range of subject matter is incredibly diverse – from jazz musicians, to Butoh dancers, to a chef preparing a meal. It is instantaneously clear within these drawings that something both mysterious and exciting is happening. A visual language has been discovered within movements, from the every day to the spectacular.

O’Hara’s drawings were first shown at BAM in a group show highlighting works from the flat files of Red Hook, Brooklyn’s Kentler International Drawing Space as part of *BrooklynNext* in February of 2007. These drawings included a rich variety of pencil lines from abstract tangles, which seemed to dance across the paper, to

condensed spots of shadowy darkness. Upon further examination, it was revealed that one drawing depicted the hands of a jazz quintet, while the second artwork mapped the trajectories of Mikhail Baryshnikov's hands as he danced in a tribute to the Merce Cunningham Company's 50th Anniversary season (BAM 1997.) The artist revealed that there were numerous drawings made at BAM over many years. After the BrooklynNext exhibition, it became clear that O'Hara's deep-rooted connection to both the institution and the performing arts was significant and should be explored.

To further discover the possibilities of *LIVE TRANSMISSION*, O'Hara was invited to attend productions at BAM throughout the 2006 spring season and the 25th Next Wave Festival in order to allow her to capture the enormous range of performances taking place on its stages, which has culminated in this exhibition of drawings. These performances included the Cheek by Jowl Company's production of Shakespeare's *Cymbaline*, postmodern choreographer John Jasperse's *Misuse Liable to Prosecution*, the haunting Japanese dance-theater troupe Pappa Taramuhara's *Ship in a View*, as well the 30th anniversary of *Dance Africa*, BAM's celebration of African dance and culture.

The resulting drawings range from delicate strands to heavy knots and snarls of pencil line. Sometimes almost unreadable as anything beyond abstraction, these images are nonetheless a direct translation of the movement of the subjects. Each transmission, especially those done during the Next Wave Festival, is radically different from the next. The variety of line and shape is outstanding, reflecting the myriad styles of contemporary theater and dance as well as the variety of movement found within each. For example, the transmissions from Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen's *Borrowed Light*, based heavily on the circularity of Shaker dance, are themselves also incredibly circular, covering the entire page as the dancers filled the stage. On the other hand, in the drawings from Tan Dun's *The Gate*, where the artist observed members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the forms captured are discrete shapes, each cluster

representative of a single musician. The range from strings to brass to percussion is intriguing; it is here one sees that the language of music and dance is beyond doubt translated onto the paper.

Drawing from performances at BAM seemed to be a natural fit given O'Hara's long time association with avant-garde dance and new music, frequently highlights of the Next Wave Festival. However, it was also remarkable to see how her work would vary when given carte blanche admittance to BAM's programs, allowing the artist to do *Live Transmissions* of Shakespeare plays or symphonies and even a dance troupe from Uganda, which she may not have otherwise attended. O'Hara may have been drawing at BAM for fifteen years, but she had never before cataloged so much of what happened during one year. This kind of access provided her with the ability to capture performances that resulted in a series of drawings of incredible breadth.

*Born in Los Angeles and raised in Japan, Morgan O'Hara is an interdisciplinary artist living and working in New York City and Italy.*

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