

Kayne Griffin Corcoran

ARTFORUM

Dara Friedman



Dara Friedman, *Dichter (Poet)*, 2017, four-channel HD video transferred from 16 mm film, color, sound, duration indefinite.

*Over the past decade, Dara Friedman has asked large casts of participants to respond to simple ideas or thoughts, eliciting, in turn, raw emotion and chance developments within controlled situations. On the occasion of her survey at the Pérez Art Museum Miami, the artist talks about her newest work, *Dichter (Poet)*, 2017, a four-channel video portraying sixteen people reciting their favorite poems. Titled "Perfect Stranger," the exhibition includes work spanning twenty years and is on view through March 4, 2018.*

FOR *DICHTER*, I wanted to summon the emotion often felt by teenagers of being passionately sad and yet full of energy. I wanted to feel like that again, and figured if I wanted to, others probably needed to as well. I grew up in Palm Beach County, Florida, during the 1980s under Reagan, which had its freedoms and qualities, but the preoccupations could be pretty materialistic and narrow. I took German in high school because I already spoke German, and I figured it would be an easy A. But the teacher was clever and would sit me in the corner and give me Rainer Maria Rilke poems to translate to keep me occupied, which of course completely blew my mind. The earnestly candid incantations of love and God that popped and tripped off my lips were a huge, welcome kick in the ass, and they were exactly what I needed at the time. So, I thought: "We're now in these awful, cynical times. Let's remember what put gas in our tanks in the first place—the urges and desires that made us want to be artists. Let's remember what that felt like." I decided I would put that question to others and see which poems they'd been carrying around with them since their teenage years.

Hoffman, Laura, "Dara Friedman". Artforum. 5 December 2017. Web

While trying to figure out the best way to speak these poems, I discovered acting exercises by Jerzy Grotowski and became interested in one that involves speaking against a wall, so that the vibrations of your own speech bounce off the wall and enter your body. Years ago I'd taken a Sanskrit course, and this exercise reminded me of it. When you speak Sanskrit, your tongue curls up into the roof of your mouth, and the vibrations of the words pulse through your skull. When you speak English—which is more of a rock 'n' roll language—all the wind rushes out in front of you like you're on a motorcycle. In German, two almost conflicting mouth actions happen at once: the first is tender and takes place at the front with your lips, and the second is strong and occurs at the back in your throat. The method for making *Dichter* involved filling the speaker's body with the vibrations of their own voice, and the words of the poem, bouncing their own sound waves off the wall and letting them be absorbed into the body. So that it isn't just the mouth speaking the words, but the full body transmitting the sound. The declaration "I LOVE YOU!" sounds furious.

I like to do open calls for my works because I have no idea who's going to walk through the door. It's always a surprise, but a controlled one. There are rules of engagement with strangers, of course. But having an open call feels like jumping over five years of casual meetings—you can immediately ask the question you're truly interested in.

This work was made with my friend Richard Needham behind the camera. We met in film school, and we've been working together since then—sometimes filming simultaneously with two cameras, or as a physical extension of each other, and sometimes in a more classic cinematographer and director relationship. I edit, and maybe that's my strong suit. It's a fairly solitary process. Editing by definition is controlling. Like the three Fates in ancient Greek mythology: you are sitting there spinning the thread of life as it dances before you on the screen, you measure the life, and you cut the life. You create the world in your own vision and rhythm, and it's one of the few situations where you can make it exactly as you want it to be. I'm impatient by nature, and in the editing process I get to edit things in my rhythm of impatience, and it momentarily becomes a virtue.

—Laura Hoffman