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Kelly Nipper	Kn
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Gloria, Sutton, "Kelly Nipper.", *Vitamin Ph*, Phaidon Press Limited, New York, NY, 2006, pp 196 - 197

While many artists are interested in contesting photography's ability to function as material proof, **Kelly Nipper's** work suggests that photography operates as a proof itself—a test or sequence of steps or stages used in establishing the validity of a mathematical or philosophical proposition. Her photographs do not function as evidence of a past moment; rather they push photography's capacity to perform, forcing the image to act within a prescribed set of parameters. The result is that the subject of Nipper's photographs may not necessarily be what transpired, but what one experiences while viewing the work. She tests the notion of duration: the act of isolating discrete movements, both physical and temporal, is critical to her inimitable photographic practice.

Core to her projects is the formulation of a hypothesis about a structure or system of meaning. Using the studio as a lab, she often works with professional dancers to stage a series of exercises bearing on the system in question. While the activity unfolds under Nipper's close direction, the constructs she establishes inevitably succumb to happenstance and human error, reflecting the body's idiosyncratic ability to measure time, balance and change. Take, for example, "timing exercises" (2001-2), a series of chromogenic diptychs featuring individuals with their eyes closed alongside a digital clock. Nipper asked her sitters to stop the digital clock when they felt ten minutes had elapsed. The relative nature of time, a fixed universal measure, is exposed through the titles of the works, which tell us how long the person actually kept their eyes closed.

Critics have claimed that the seeming neutrality of Nipper's subjects drains any cultural specificity from her photographs, thus making them purely formal endeavours. While she certainly privileges austere compositions, a precise sense of scale and a limited palette, Nipper's photographs almost always carry very particular modernist cultural markers. Since she received her Masters in Fine Art from Cal Arts, Los Angeles, in 1995, her work has been deeply engaged with 1960s avant-garde art practices, addressing an activated viewer. The formal vocabulary of her videos and photographs is very much in dialogue with the experimental nature of Merce Cunningham's fluidity of movement, Yvonne Rainer's adaptation of pedestrian tasks, Helio Oiticica's suggestion of "free-form space and colour", and Allan Kaprow's prolific instruction pieces of the 1970s, which overtly addressed audience participation as the work itself. Above all, Nipper's use of seemingly generic costumes and geometric dance movements reflects her long-standing interest in modern dance theorists Rudolph Laban and Oskar Schlemmer, who both advanced the notion of dance as marking space. Nipper expands on their ideas through the deliberate installation of her photographs, which she synchronizes with the context of their surrounding architecture, be it in a gallery or the pages of a book. Conceptually charged and rigorous, her installations are often the result of months of research and hours spent in rehearsals and editing sessions. Nipper's photographs enact rather than simply mimic the theories and ideas underlying her work.

Her recent series "Evergreen" (2004)—images featuring a stage technician adjusting a microphone at various intervals in front of a yellowing theatrical curtain—exemplifies Nipper's controlled brilliance. As our attention is focused on the unremarkable technician and the empty stage, the real action takes place outside the frame of the image. In these works Nipper manages to turn photography, one of the most fraught forms of representation, into a phenomenological experience.—Gloria Sutton



