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# THE ARTIST AS ATHLETE: INTRODUCING RUN VERTICAL (RUNNING UP THE SIDE OF A BUILDING)

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Focusing on a practice-based approach – thinking about the relationships between drawing, performance and running, this paper is derived from a presentation aimed to introduce the artwork RUN VERTICAL (Running up the Side of a Building), an Arts Council England funded project.

Pointing to an increasing awareness of interconnected practices, necessity of collaboration and institutional critique, I highlight key aspects of my practice; and artworks by artists such as, Carolee Schneemann, Martin Creed and Trisha Brown help to inform an understanding of the 'line' and 'body'.



## Introduction

As an artist engaged in representing and uncovering ways to understand the body, a means of working has been to look at the physical act of running and drawing. Beginning with an interest in seeing the body as an object and tool, then delving into the relationship between art and philosophy, and making live performance-based artworks that explore mark-making, the pairing of running and drawing can sit within a particular context of art and art history that focuses on physicality. Evident in many artists' works since 1945, particularly from the 1960s and 70s, artists have shifted their conceptual thinking about the role of the artist 'as' the work (such as Carolee Schneemann's Up to and Including Her Limits and Richard Long's A Line Made by Walking). More than just walking, running can alter and skilfully add to the conversation and scholarly debates of what it might mean to be an artist.

In considering a historical relationship, artworks have served to address issues and concerns that revolve almost entirely around the body: a physical presence acts as the source and site of the work. In addition to this, artists interested in the act of drawing look to the line as a trope. It enables a thread, cultivating concepts and ideas in one area of drawing, and links and attaches itself to another across disciplines and academic fields. Through practice and philosophical approaches, contemporary artists have been testing methods and demonstrating how 'running as drawing' can operate as a way to gain a new perspective, as well as attempt to articulate a development in thinking about notions of the body, duration, and performativity. Opening the question of what the body can do and what a line can be can reach far past the discipline of fine art, but point to science, geography, architecture, and politics — a multiplicity of disciplines.

In addressing the situations in which we currently live, in what can be considered to be socio-political difficult time, ideas of collaboration and cooperation within the fine art landscape can also invoke, inspire, and aim to question what the role of the artist has to contribute via methodologies and ways of working collectively. For an artist working today, trying to progress an inspired pursuit or translate a thought, idea, or object into action, the issue of questioning value and contribution to society can be seen tangibly at the forefront of their mind. However direct the message (a physical gesture, a text piece, or a visual expression), an intention can be linked to a larger socio-cultural context; nevertheless, an artwork's accomplishments can be rewarded and traced to a certain thought process that pulls away from institutional critique/activism or a productive comment. This article considers how research derived from practice and the artwork itself holds significance. And how, when positioning the work in context by tracing a lineage backwards to historical underpinnings, forwards to thinking about relationships, and extending laterally to critical topical debates anchored in a certain understanding of fine art, the work can then reach new ground

#### Art and Action

In the past, artworks have transformed what can be considered art and, even more, what a line, a drawing, or the role of the body is. Artworks have presented lasting ideas about how to represent underlying issues of our relationships to one another, without explicitly sending suggestive conclusions or opinions. The contemporary art world has made an impact in terms of how we learn and transform information, and somehow collaborate to make things happen. It can be expected that artists aim to provoke or alternatively allow a sense of escape through art making, but they must also always, while

exploring and questioning how particular types of practices can make an impression, cause disruption and suggest social change.

In some ways, the contemporary field has been successful yet overtly poised and shaped by the discipline itself – focusing 'in' rather than 'out' – thereby making the invisible visible (and vice versa) and representing the personal and the subjective. Although, to some extent, the most interesting artworks seem to position themselves between various modes of working and fields of inquiry, it is the compelling aspect of fine art that makes the work even more accessible and powerful. Artworks that address the outer layers of a body or political, cultural, or social systems can at best be recognised by looking to individual experiences and the thinking within; for example, suggesting that the themes of space and time and relationships between others and institutional collaborations can be obtainable and made materially by a simple collaborative/individual action.

An interesting example could be Zhang Huan's *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond* (1997) and many works made by Francis Alÿs, in particular, *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002). Both are referenced in Catherine Wood's book, *Performance in Contemporary Art* (2018), for their theme of situations that address collaborative acts with natural materials and reference the pursuit of making an ethical impact (Wood 2018: 146).



FIGURE 1: FRANCIS ALŸS IN COLLABORATION WITH CUAUHTÉMOC MEDINA AND RAFAEL ORTEGA WHEN FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS (CUANDO LA FE MUEVE MONTAÑAS) LIMA (2002)

# Line and Running

Interested in these notions and, in particular, the forward movement of the body, such as running and leveraging what action can do, this approach takes the historical and cultural shifts of lines (Tim Ingold), running (Dan Liberman), and drawing (Catherine de Zegher). It is narrowly based on the context and

trajectory of fine art practice. The line and the movement of 'the body in a line' have been a way to explore the landscape and make performance-based works that begin to shape ways of collaborating across disciplines. It is through description and bridging language that a line has agency. Demonstrating a sense of empathy and responsiveness to terms, as well as considering an alternative use for a simple definition, the arts provide a way to borrow, tilt, re-shape, and broaden understandings from other disciplines, perhaps as an indirect way of collaboration.



FIGURE 2: RUNNING ROAD: PHOTOGRAPHIC NOTES, HURON COUNTY, CANADA

Growing up in a rural area of Canada, the lines I ran on divided the ownership of land. In an area where the terrain is flat and roads appear to emerge from the ground and stretch far beyond the horizon, this backdrop brought an initial awareness and understanding of how far a mile is. With no particular agenda, I ran. By running within the environment and using parts of the landscape as markers, I have started to make meaning out of the visual importance of mark making. The habits and methods of learning about the body as an instrument, and to use visual tools for considering distance continues to inform my thinking.



FIGURE 3: GOOGLE EARTH IMAGE: STOKE NEWINGTON, LONDON, UK.

Today, as an artist based in London, UK, a Google Earth image demonstrates a different set of lines. Relocating to a city and training for long-distance events mean that a runner becomes an urban runner, who uses the roads, canal paths, and old railroad routes that link city parks and any green spaces to accumulate mileage. Testing and experimenting with the body's physical limits have been consistent parts of my lifestyle, from running the long straight roads in Canada to now training and pursuing the artwork, *RUN VERTICAL*, by aiming to run up the side of a building.

# Artwork, RUN VERTICAL

For the artwork, *RUN VERTICAL* (*Running up the Side of a Building*), I will run towards the building then transition to the vertical and run up the multi-storey building. In front a live audience and filmed for video documentation purposes, the work will contribute to a live performance art platform and challenge the naturalised movement of running as a method of making.

To achieve this, the trained artist will be raised/lowered using a manual 'performer flying' system by an operating team. The performance will be approximately 30 minutes in duration. Although each run will approximately only take 2 minutes, for documentation and filming purposes the performance will be repeated. As it looks to the artist as athlete and brings together the skills and practice of various disciplines and generations of art making, this artwork has been in the forefront of my research for many years.

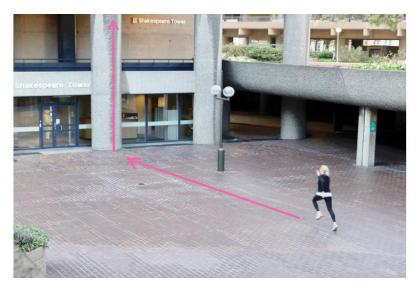




FIGURE 4: PROPOSED LOCATION PATH, WORK NO. 5, RUN VERTICAL (RUNNING UP THE SIDE OF A BUILDING), 2018 BARBICAN CENTRE, LONDON UK.

Interested in movement that defies gravity, *RUN VERTICAL* alters an artists' practice by moving outside of the studio and onto the facades of public architectural surfaces. By addressing access and mobility in terms of the physical, it challenges the perspective of our relationship to the body in space – and what that can do to our imagination. It poses questions of aesthetics, materials, and modes of collaboration. Dependent on collaborative processes, as it involves team efforts and professional assistance, it requires a working relationship with institutions and authorities of communal and private/public spaces.

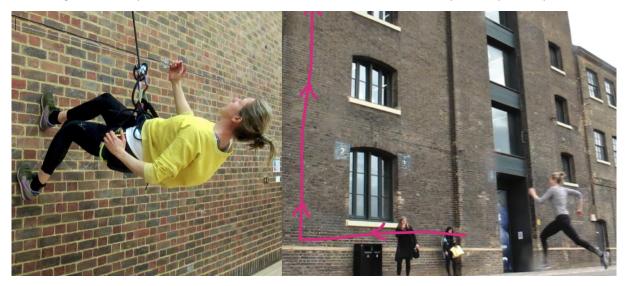


FIGURE 5: PROPOSED LOCATION PATH, WORK NO. 5, RUN VERTICAL (RUNNING UP THE SIDE OF A BUILDING), 2017 GRANARY BUILDING, KING'S CROSS, LONDON UK.

Although, rather than an act of running, it may be considered to be the process of 'running up the side of a building', as it is, instead, a collaborative achievement of hoisting and scaling; the runner's form and position perpendicular to the ground will be important and the effect of a seamless transition from running horizontal to vertical will be attempted. It is a different kind of testing limitation, one of many. The work is loaded with fallibility, support structures, and professional, tailored equipment, as well as

the inclusion of others in terms of institutional provision and permission, alliance and partnership. Technically, running is a natural movement but, against gravity, it is a real impossibility, especially depending on the site-specificity and the level of collaboration warranted. Perhaps, it could be understood that this is where the creative element in the work is introduced: when an artist makes their own rules, retrieves and learns new skills, and those of others, another aspect of this journey begins.

# Previous Artworks

Since 2004, I have been making 'performance drawings' by drawing circles with my extended arm for as long as possible or, rather, until the graphite falls out of my hand. Folding a 4 metre section of paper on itself, attaching the top of the fold to the wall, I then use a stick of graphite to draw. Testing the limits of the body and allowing the front section of the paper to react to my upwards and downwards circular and continuous movement, the work is a result of the performative element and tenuous relationship with materials. It also places an emphasis on my own conviction and response to an audience (either camera or live).



FIGURE 6: WORK NO. 1 (CIRCLE DRAWING) 2HOURS 03MINUTES, 2019. LONDON UK.

After hours of continuous drawing (usually between two to three hours), my arm eventually becomes fatigued. What starts as a large continuous line, becomes a smaller and smaller circle and, through the mark-making process, the bounds of my ability are revealed. First, the shoulder and back muscles

become worn then the legs and forearms start to give way, and eventually my hand cramps and the graphite drops.

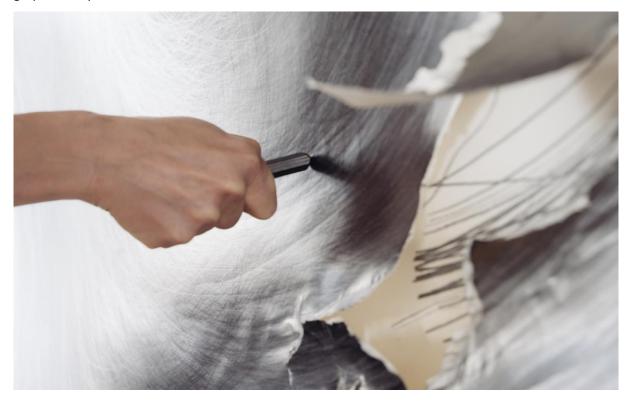


FIGURE 7: WORK NO. 1 (CIRCLE DRAWING) 2HOURS 03MINUTES, 2019. LONDON UK.

Due to the effort and pressure of drawing, sometimes the paper stretches and rips, and the skin on my knuckles tear and traces of blood appear. Each work is titled by its duration; yet, the evidence of the time endured and the energy expended remains as a trace in the graphite and paper.

Like going for a long run, the first stages of the drawing are aimed to stimulate a repetitive, bodily, 'active' activity; the aim is to keep moving, expend energy, and make a single continuous line. The line is used to determine time and distance – and end when the body is exhausted.

In both activities, running and drawing, the notion of the line has been a way to strive for some type of understanding (or perhaps distraction). From the many hours spent running the same roads and performing circle drawings over and over again, the line fundamentally has helped connect me to the vast landscape and bring focus to the work. And, in particular whilst drawing, the obsessiveness of markmaking and the purpose of making art stirs an excitement inside.

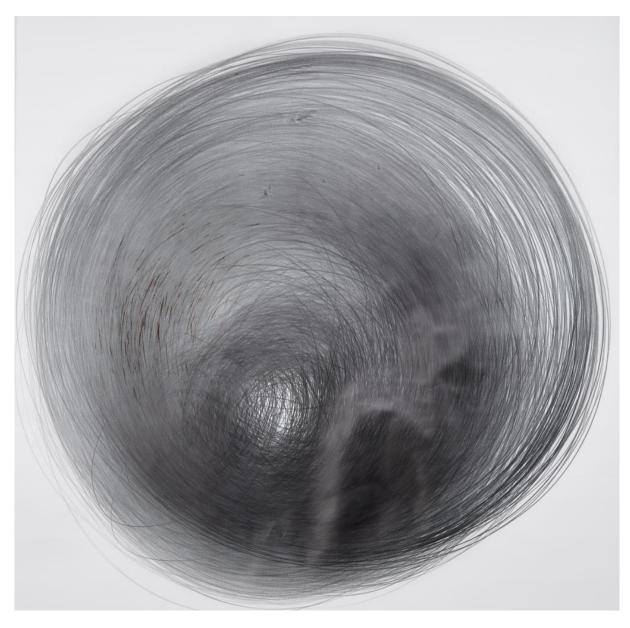


FIGURE 8: WORK NO. 1 (CIRCLE DRAWING) 2HOURS 10MINUTES, 2016. GALLERY 46 WHITECHAPEL, LONDON UK.

These indulgences of drawing large human-scale circles on paper and running in the Canadian landscape are what drives and casts a shadow on the fixation with the line and physical mode of working to promote drawing and empower the role of the artist. Deeply passionate about linking these two forms, which are rooted and connected to movement, this practice can be located in a larger inquiry into the performative nature of human activity. Running and drawing are both strategies and methods of working to denote a sense of being, question what makes us human, and provide a way of contributing to an important discussion that embraces the poetic history of the line, evolution, and art.

## Back to the Line

Occupying the role of geometry, the Greek mathematician, Euclid of Alexandria of 300 B.C. in his book, *Elements*, was the first to record the definition of the line; part of this iteration is the 'line is a brea(d)thless length' (Heath 1956: 153; McCall 2014). This definition, which identifies its fundamental properties and description, is also a philosophical one – a conceptual depiction that has contributed to an understanding of how a line operates beyond mathematical definition and marks a key reference in drawing and art practices. In Tim Ingold's book, *Lines: A Brief History* (2007), he offers an analogy between drawing the line and map making and describes the line to have a phenomenal presence in the environment. He describes Euclid's line as more visionary and metaphysical and describes the nature of the line as intangible and infinitely thin and an abstract and conceptual construct (Ibid.).

Through this conceptual construction and key examples in art history such as Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (1974), and Francis Alÿs's *The Green Line* (2004), artists have continued the dialogue surrounding its conceptual meaning to further unfold what the line can be. By pursuing its lineage, in this linking between artworks and opening up of new areas of fine art practices, drawing has become a line made by walking/running and cutting through a house, and is considered a process of 'thought' (Rose 2011: 310). The line is used as a collective term to orchestrate a particular way of thinking that helps to cross boundaries, disciplines, and generations of artworks. To quote, Francis Alÿs, in reference to his work titled *The Green Line*, 'sometimes doing something poetic can become political, and sometimes doing something political can become poetic' (Alÿs 2018) — immersing the fact, the context and the simple act of doing can provoke a physical and cerebral dual meaning.

While introducing these key artworks, discussing the term and some understandings of performance and 'performance drawing' adds a certain richness to the visuals and on-going questions. Performance art became the medium that challenged and violated borders between disciplines and genders, between private and public, and between everyday life and art that follows no rules (Goldberg 1988: 20). Arguably, traced to Catherine de Zegher's publication in 2001 titled, *Drawing Papers 20*, the term 'performance drawing' was used to create a new classification and alter the understanding of what drawing on paper represented (2001). Alluding to how drawing is a cognitive process that links to movement through performative qualities, she adds that any movement and action or image made by movement is a 'kind of drawing in space' (de Zegher 2001: 104). Perhaps not as reactionary as when artists first started making performances, performance drawing has a tie to being temporal, outside any conventional suggestions and between disciplines.

Noticeably demonstrating this is Tom Marioni's *One Second Sculpture* 1969, an artwork made by the artist releasing a tightly coiled metal tape measure into the air. Documented in a single photograph, this artwork reinforces how an event can unfold to make a drawing in space. He states, 'my instrument was a rolled-up tape measure. I threw it into the air, and in one-second it opened like a spring, making a loud sound, it left my hand as a circle, made a drawing in space, and fell to the ground as a straight line' (Marioni 2003: 93). Thus, influencing the implications of what drawing can be and how a line can exist.

Through the implementation of elements, such as duration and sound, that move drawing beyond the visual form of perception, an approach can be established as to how even activities without leaving a mark can operate as a viable method of drawing by, again, representing a line through movement. From writers, such as, Wassily Kandisnky, Paul Klee, Tim Ingold, and Rebecca Solnit, and the numerous artists

and authors across different disciplines, the performative line offers an analogy and a bridge between drawing, movement, and the body. The line is a visual and conceptual paradigm – moving us closer to running as drawing – and strongly linking human consciousness and physicality.

Other works, such as Bruce Nauman's *Performance Corridor* series (1969) and Carolee Schneemann *Up to Including Her Limits* (1973–76), provide a historical context, which contributes in particular to an extension of the physical body and line.

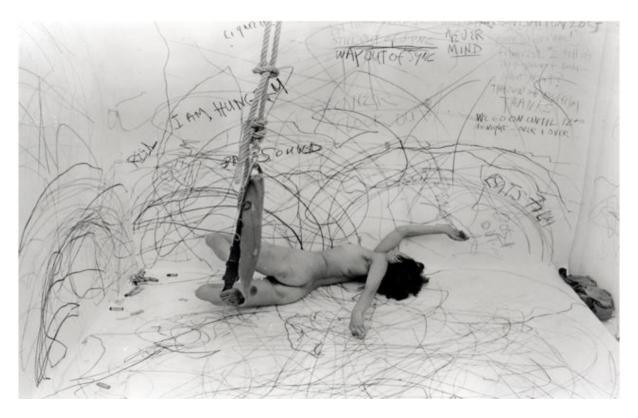


FIGURE 9: CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN UP TO AND INCLUDING HER LIMITS (1973) PHOTO: HENRIK GAAD.

In Martin Creed's *Work No. 850* (2008), in the Duveen Hall Gallery at the Tate Britain, London, every thirty seconds an individual ran, according to Creed's instructions 'as if their life depended on it' (Higgins, 2017: 1) through the eighty-six metre corridor. The sound and rhythm of the runner's footsteps reverberated, presenting a live presence of the runner as the 'object of art' (Stout, 2008: 3). Each sprinter operated as a drawing tool, activating different speeds and rhythms, while audiences had the option to walk along, run beside, or stand still, watching and tracking the runner.

Illustrated in the on-going series, *Work no. 2 (Line Dialogue)* with artist, Jane Grisewood, the above listed historical artworks and ideas have seeped into my own practice in many ways – shifting and guiding my interests and triggering particular developments in a collaborative process.

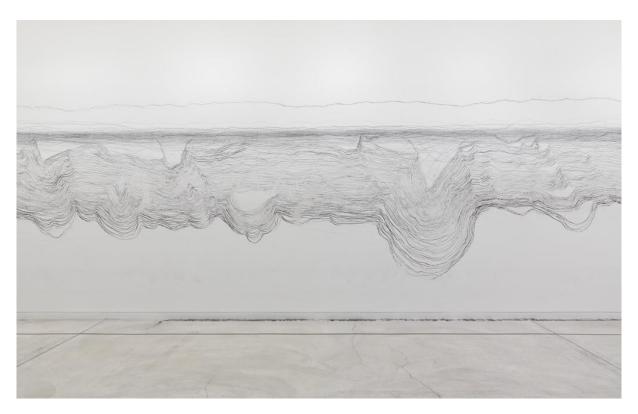


FIGURE 10: WORK NO. 2 (LINE DIALOGUE) V, 2012, TWO-HOUR PERFORMANCE WITH JANE GRISEWOOD IN FRONT OF A LIVE AUDIENCE, CHARCOAL AND GRAPHITE, OVERALL 1200 X 200 CM. 'AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN' EXHIBITION AT VANCOUVER ART GALLERY, VANCOUVER, CANADA. PHOTO: RACHEL TOPHAM.

For Work no. 2 (Line Dialogue) V, at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Grisewood and I worked together merging our practices and drawing alongside one another. For the two-hour performance, Grisewood started at one side of the room – drawing and tracing the last line – while I began at the other, reaching and extending as far as possible – drawing and repeating the same line with my outstretched arm; both drawing, back and forth. Like the Circle Drawing performances, Line Dialogues continues to examine durational events, explore ways to mark time by focusing on the task at hand, and use the entire body to create a wall drawing.



FIGURE 11: WORK NO. 3 (HORIZON/DISTANCE) SNOW FIELD, 2010, PERFORMANCE WITH CAMERA, VIDEO STILL, HURON COUNTY, CANADA.

Returning to Canada on visits, I began running with a camera strapped to my chest, and recorded the direction of movement towards the horizon line and the edges of the flat and open landscape. Whilst beginning to increasingly think about how the body traverses and carves through space — engaged in the temporal, and in this case the invisible line — the body and camera became the agency of the work. This moves the discussion into the complexity of documentation and performance, and questions about where the work sits.

Most performance elements of a work are live with an audience and later mediated through photographs or video documentation. Often performance drawings are created the same way, while also leaving evidence in visual markings or tracings as objects or drawings that remain as archive material. The connection between performance and documentation can usefully be exploited and, therefore, a controversial issue for many as it can also become an entangled conversation between what is required for a performance to have taken place, who/where the audience is, and what are the various forms of media that enable the work to take shape.

Hence, from a practitioner's point of view, I am increasingly interested in how the documentation can become another extension of the work. Although the means and intension of medium is based in performance and performative drawing, video and other means of documentation have started to become the work.



FIGURE 12: WORK NO. 4 (RESTRAINT/RUNNING) BACK HILL, VIDEO STILL, 2014.

For example, in *Work no. 4 (Restraint/Running) Back Hill* (2014) in a small street in central London using a long 20 metre elastic band – a particular material that athletes use to strengthen and build muscle in sprint training – I tied myself to one end of the band whilst the other end was bound to a cast-iron bollard (part of the public infrastructure). I ran to stretch the material, running back and forth, until the band broke.

The aim of this work was to make a line drawing using the effort of running and elastic band to draw a line through the street, with the recorded material and the frame of the camera, as well as a live performance. As a performance, the only audience was the camera and the people who happened to be passing by.

#### Back to RUN VERTICAL

Leading back to the artwork, RUN VERTICAL (Running up the Side of a Building), it was while I made the performance Work no. 4, running at ground level, squeezed between the facades of the buildings, that I began to think about how I could change these conditions. It seemed the building I was running alongside lent itself formidably to the next project. Could I run up those brick walls at elevation?



FIGURE 13: PROPOSED LOCATION PATH, RUN VERTICAL (RUNNING UP THE SIDE OF A BUILDING), 2019, TATE MODERN'S CHIMNEY – EAST FACING, LONDON, UK.

The discussion will now focus on the current research and proposal stage of the next artwork, *RUN VERTICAL*. From the initial practice of grabbing a stick of graphite and paper and drawing for as long as possible, it has now developed into assembling a truss structure at roof level, attaching myself (the runner) to a harness with ropes and via a manual pulley system to run towards the proposed building (the Tate Modern) and then seamlessly transition to the vertical, running up the entire 99 metre high elevation of the east-facing chimney.

The work indirectly becomes a broader more complicated practice, which involves other systems of operations and partnerships needed by larger institutions. Embarking on this project, my practice has since become a source of connecting the disciplines of proposal and funding writing, networking, and curatorial inquires, and championing how different forms of site-specificity and explorations of public places can bring together notions of impossible movement and suspension. Beyond the work as a spectacle, it makes a comment about employing the city and landscape in which we live – the approval and authorial systems of decision-making and how the persistence and drive is demanded as another means.

Importantly, this artwork references past artworks, such as Trisha Brown's *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), which was first performed (in the arena of dance) in New York city but which made architecture the basis for a choreographic score and live public performance. The work featured her then husband, Joseph Schlichter, poised perpendicular to the ground descending the facade of a six-storey building using a line of a rope (the body and breath). Anchored by the water tank structure on the roof, this enabled him to be both lowered down evenly and pulled back so that his feet were engaged on the side surface of the building of 80 Wooster St. in Manhattan (Goodden 2019). To quote Susan Rosenberg, 'altering the ordinary act of walking – [the work] became an achievement of athleticism and form of physical expression' (2017).



FIGURE 14: TRISHA BROWN, MAN WALKING DOWN THE SIDE OF A BUILDING (1970) 80 WOOSTER ST., MANHATTAN, NEW YORK, US. PHOTO: CAROL GOODDEN.

The iconic, well-documented performance of an artist at height and parallel to the ground attached to ropes has resonated in my mind – prompting and giving purpose to *RUN VERTICAL*. With the lens through which we view feminism and the strength or spectacle of the body, I aim to be the woman running up. More importantly, I aim for this iteration and trajectory of performance to highlight and underpin how artists engage and are interested in building and utilising unconventional and archetypal materials and are inflected by art history and the positioning and understanding of the body.

The artwork, RUN VERTICAL (Running up the side of a Building) will similarly address the facade and architecture as a surface, like a painter's canvas, the building and city's landscape will become a platform. Instead of walking, running is revealed to be an empowering and artistic activity and, like many of Trisha Brown's re-enacted performances, will be institutionally sanctioned. This poses a contextual shift: an example of the new arenas (and adaptations since the 1960s) governed by attempts to form collaborations between institutions and artists.

To date, this work consists of a 52-page proposal document of different versions; with site visits from various different rigging companies and a long list of emails, phone conversations and artist materials, such as 20 metres of prolyte aluminium scaffolding tubes and clamps, rubber and plywood planks for matting, a ballast weight, performing harness, min. 200 metres of rope, an elevated work platform, 5–10 rigging crew personnel, marshals and security, and film crew and, most importantly, as mentioned, acquiring the health and safety assessments, method statements, insurances, licenses, and permissions. Because the most difficult part of performing on a listed English Heritage building, and performing at great heights, is, of course, gaining that institution's permission. Quoting Christo and Jean-Claude, 'every

part of this world is 'owned' by somebody or belongs to somebody' (2018). And it is this part of the process, this challenge and testing of limitation, which I aim to embrace.

# Conclusion

In the expansion of my practice, and describing the artworks, *Circle Drawings*, *Line Dialogues*, and *RUN VERTICAL*, it has become apparent that there is a growing necessity for collaboration and negotiation; and, through the working relationships between artist and practice, materials and situations, the individual and collaboration, the importance of learning about various disciplines, terms, and understandings becomes essential. The un-concluding question might be, is the 'line' something beyond measure, beyond the body, and beyond grasp?

While introducing the artwork, *Run Vertical (Running up the Side of a Building)* and providing key developments in my practice; this paper has aimed to present the critical framework that situates an understanding of the line and the body and some relationships to drawing, performance, and running. Describing the lineage of and trajectory of my own practice, I have aimed to demonstrate thinking about the importance of a performative drawing practice and articulate a way of pulling from key historical artworks.

Through Francis Alÿs' When Faith Moves Mountains, Carolee Schneemann's Up to and Including Her Limits, and Trisha Brown's Man Walking down the side of a Building, this article has brought together works that involve an activation and intention to perform and, while building and expanding on concepts first emerged in 1960s and 70s artworks, I have looked to the fabric of movement and notions of running to expand the artist as athlete.

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