

Hanne Tierney: *Baby, Said Alice B. Toklas*

April 15 – May 28, 2017

Opening Reception: April 15, 6 -9pm

Artist Talk: April 16, 6pm



Hanne Tierney, *Baby, Said Alice B. Toklas*, Installation view at FiveMyles.

Knockdown Center is pleased to present *Baby, Said Alice B. Toklas*, a self-performing object theater produced by puppetry and performance artist Hanne Tierney. Installed across the expanse of Knockdown Center's Annex, a series of vignettes come to life as cloth figures, hula hoops, and other fabric forms gesture, twirl, and sway, manipulated by a complex system of mechanized pulleys programmed and designed by engineer Oskar Straumantis. *Baby, Said Alice B. Toklas* will be played on a fifteen-minute loop during gallery hours, offering viewers the possibility of an ongoing encounter with the immersive, ambulatory experience of Tierney's enchanting work.

As the abstracted figures come to life at the command of Straumantis' large-scale robotic "brain," they are further animated by a soundtrack of Tierney's voice and piano scores by avant-garde French composer Erik Satie. Each scene is illuminated by colored spot lights - often refracted through glass tiles created by artist Maura Sheehan - that guide viewers attention across four scenes, while a drifting narrative forms around imagined arguments between Gertrude Stein and her life partner Alice B. Toklas, woven with excerpts from Stein's early plays, *A Circular Play* (1920) and *Listen to Me* (1936).

Tierney's use of fragmented text from the two plays written by Stein between World War I and World War II subtly incorporates wartime references, including lines like "Amelia and Susan were not scared. They said they were refreshed by the news. I can never forget the slaughter." The work poignantly draws attention to today's increasing exposure to violent images of global conflict and the associated automated technologies such as drones or automatic rifles. By contrast, the humble mechanics of Tierney's self-performing theater similarly removes the human operator while buoyantly celebrating themes of love and human relationships.

Tierney has been presenting what she describes as “theater without actors,” or “object-theater” since 1980, often drawing from historic plays for source material. Previous examples include *The Seagull* (1994) in dialogue with Anton Chekhov’s play of the same name, and an interpretation of Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* (1999). Guided by a history of 19<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde theater’s attempts to achieve abstraction, and the ostensible impossibility of entirely eradicating human presence and expression, Tierney’s plays always use materials like fabrics, pipes, beads, geometric shapes rigged with strings in place of actors, brought to life when manipulated live by Tierney and assistants. First presented in 2016 at Tierney’s Crown Heights exhibition space FiveMyles, *Baby, Said Alice B. Toklas* is Tierney’s first play to answer what she calls the “radical vision of the early modernist theater theoreticians,” by eliminating human presence entirely through the development of a precise motorized system. Tierney considers the work to be the closest realization of Stein’s idea of theater as landscape, creating subtle - but continued - spatial relationships between elements that exist in simultaneity, as opposed to a linear, forward trajectory. The work will take its largest form at Knockdown Center, where viewers will be free to wander amongst the scenes, further breaking away from the conventions of traditional theater.

**Hanne Tierney** has performed her puppetry and object theater at The Kitchen, Franklin Furnace, the Queen’s Museum, the Whitney Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, MoMA/PS1, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Espace Kiron, Paris, the Akademie der Kuenste, Berlin, and at the Jim Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater. Tierney received an OBIE in 2000. Tierney is the founder and director of Five Myles, an exhibition and performance space in Crown Heights that focuses on engaging directly with the community and presenting work by under-represented artists.

Knockdown Center gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 5 PM to 9 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM to 8 PM.

### **About Knockdown Center**

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