

BROOKLYN RAIL

Madeline Hollander: Heads/Tails



Installation view: Madeline Hollander, *Heads/Tails*, Bortolami, New York. Courtesy the artist and Bortolami, New York. Photo: by Kristian Laudrup.

55 Walker Street—the second location of Bortolami Gallery—is tucked away from the smog, sound, and destruction of New York. And yet, on this Tribeca street, visual artist and choreographer Madeline Hollander draws from the hustle and bustle outside in her new exhibition, *Heads/Tails*.

A 2019 Whitney Biennial participant and professional choreographer, Madeline Hollander uses her impressive conceptual dance practice to analyze the ways in which humans interact within the mechanical trappings of modern society and urban landscapes. First developed in her *Gesture Archive* project, Madeline Hollander uses repeated movements to understand the function of human physicality in the modern world. In her explorations, the technological and practical elements of the world, such as cars and signs, become part of the performance. In her previous works, *MILE* (2016) and *Arena* (2017), Hollander and her fellow dancers perform amongst real life scenes and interact with the environments they find themselves in, from beaches to parks to art fairs. These dances, in which Hollander is often a performer, are not in conflict with their surroundings, but rather a part of them, prompting the performers to negotiate space in a public setting.

While *Heads/Tails* explores similar thematic elements, there is one massive difference between this installation and her previous work: there are no dancers. *Heads/Tails* is not a performance piece, but an actual art installation comprised of headlights and taillights of old cars that simulate the movement occurring at the intersection of Walker Street and Broadway, down the street from the gallery. Instead of analyzing movement through the human body, Hollander is looking at mechanical movement patterns and synthesizing them in a manner that allows for comparison between inanimate objects and human physicality. This thematic exploration is first seen in the show's framed drawings and diagrams that she used to develop her research and understand the flow of traffic and traffic signals through human movement. These drawings are so intricate and visually striking that you nearly forget that they are designed to function as choreography notes; the little human figures and lights anthropomorphize machinery in a way that elevates the entire

body of work. Hollander's movement research is then translated into the main installation where the lights are synced up to a timer that individually turns them on and off, even changing in brightness according to the time of day. Seeing the lights gleefully flicker on the wall as a traffic light turns green is an incredible effect.



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Heads/Tails' accompanying text by A.E. Benenson foregrounds the complex narrative one can derive from the data that Hollander painstakingly gathered for the exhibition, but the installation hints at the wider implications of urbanization and human existence in the sprawl of the city. Regardless, the visual effect of the installation is stunning, and the illustrated choreography notes offer up a unique perspective into her creative process that brings a greater level of intimacy and understanding to her performances. Yet, I left 55 Walker wanting more and wondering what an expanded version of Heads/Tails would look like—or even how different Heads/Tails would be had it looked past this one specific intersection.

Madeline Hollander's Heads/Tails at Bortolami solidifies her status as one of New York's most exciting multidisciplinary artists while still allowing room for growth. Moving beyond dance, this exhibition feels like the exciting first step in a multifaceted art practice that grapples with function and movement in a world that becomes more unnatural by the day. In our city, it is easy—and perhaps more comfortable—to see our surroundings as separate from us, and the technology that we create, move, and live in as distant entities. Madeline Hollander sees the similarities between man and machine, understanding that the way both operate is more similar than we may want to recognize.

- Madeleine Seidel