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Bruce Nauman *Contrapposto Studies, i through vii*
Sperone Westwater, New York 10 September – 29 October

Since the mid-1960s Bruce Nauman has consistently created some of the most visionary and innovative artwork around. Conceptually rich and existentially trenchant, it probes the body in temporal, physical, political and psychological spaces, and incorporates, as an opus, video, sculpture, drawing and installation. Nauman has redefined what art can say and how it says it. The seven looped videos that comprise *Contrapposto Studies, i through vii* (2015/16) reinforce, both individually and *in toto*, the breadth and depth of his work.

The pieces range in duration from seven to just over 63 minutes. All are based on a clip of the artist, wearing jeans and a white t-shirt, seen from the front, back or side, walking forward and backwards, his hands held behind his head as he shifts his hips from side to side in a clumsy, methodical gait that mimics contrapposto – the classical stance meant to represent the weighted body in space. In each, the images are arranged in multiple vertical columns, and as the series progresses, they

are split into horizontal registers so that body parts move in different directions and at times appear to shift and repeat across rows creating complex but apparently mathematically determined patterns. In a further complication, segments in which the artist steps backwards are rendered in positive, and those in which he steps forward, in negative. Combined with the sound of the artist's feet scraping against the floor, the visuals become dizzying.

The series revisits works and subjects Nauman addressed early in his career. These include, most obviously, *Walk with Contrapposto* (1968), a video in which he walks back and forth in a narrow corridor, and more generally a group of works that took the artist's body as their subject, for example, *Wax Templates of My Body Arranged to Make an Abstract Sculpture* (1967), which divided the body into seven units reflecting the art-school paradigm that the represented figure be seven heads high. These works play on the tension between the artist's actual physicality and the

abstract ideas of artistic practice in which he engaged.

Nauman has not appeared in his work since the late 1960s. In reintroducing his body, and in revising past works, he invests the themes they explored with issues of ageing and mortality. *Contrapposto* is, after all, a tool to freeze or transfer the body into permanent, artistic form, in essence removing the look of it from lived time. Small details such as the hole in the right armpit of his shirt, or beneath it the rectangular outline of a colostomy bag (as confirmed by the gallery), become evident as one watches the videos and reinforce the intensely immediate, personal experience of age. But through duration, multiplication, reversal and repetition, the highly specific presence and character of the artist's body is driven towards abstraction. Time becomes the frame, medium and ultimate theme of the works. Sustained viewing and listening draws viewers into the visual, auditory and temporal rhythms of the videos, rendering us, as much as the artist, time's subjects. *Joshua Mack*



Contrapposto Studies, i through vii, 2015/2016 (installation view).
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