

## The Body As Archive / Together, Again

By: Sarah Rose

Written in response to Olga Rabetskaya's installation "The Body as Archive" January 28, 2022

When I first entered SMUSH Gallery on Friday January 28, I could immediately tell that curatorial fellow, Olga Rabetskaya, had paid careful attention to her curation not just of the photos on the walls and the performance elements in the evening's program, but to the welcoming environment and community she shares her life with. Olga's intimate photos became a container for this community gathering. As we came together in close proximity with one another, I could not help but recall my embodied experience of isolation across the pandemic. It felt incredibly cathartic to be SMUSHed in together, bearing witness to community and to the body's role as archive of our unfolding lives.



Rabetskaya's photographic exhibit was curated into sections by dancer, with four or five photos illustrating that performer's improvisatory interpretation of Olga's inquiry into the body as archive. The images are intimate, visceral, and evocative, immediately prompting an internal response from the viewer. This visual aesthetic feels essential to Olga's work and central questions. She began from her own lived experience witnessing violence on the subways of New

York City and asked the participants to recall through their improvisation their experiences on the subway during the pandemic. These images and memories, translated through the body of the performer and the lens of the camera, come through to the viewer in tone, shape, expression.



The photographic exhibit was in direct conversation with the performance components of the evening. While the three dance performances were choreographed independently, they shared a uniform curatorial theme and approach to using the body. The performers used body tone to shift from subtle gestural movements to athletic whole body movements. Each of these nuanced performances became like a live look into one of Rabetskaya's photos. Just as the use of the body in the photos transports the viewer, so too, the live performances, carried by expert use of the body, convey the viewers into a new experience of physicality.

The experience of the photos and live performance components run parallel and are mutually enhanced by the crowded nature of the gallery. Just as the dancers in the photographs are only partially visible in the frame, the tight nature of the gallery creates a similar experience for the live performers. They navigate spatial restrictions created by the proximity of the walls and of the viewers. These elements combine to leave the viewer with an increased awareness of their own physicality. We are acutely aware of ourselves in space, in proximity with one another, with the performers, with the viewers. We are SMUSHed.