

Emily Clayton

Studio Warmups

Curatorial Statement

During her recent artist residency at the School of Visual Arts in New York, Emily Clayton hit the streets of Chelsea with only her camera and tripod before going into her studio. She photographed herself physically picking up five men each day. This "warmup" act, which began as an experiment, became an integral part of her studio practice over the course of her residency. As Clayton's first venture into photography, *Studio Warmups* builds on the conceptual foundation of her previous years of painting and installation.

A unifying thread that runs through the core of Clayton's diverse body of work is the confrontation of the relationship between the *performer* and the *stage*—two entities that, as metaphor, can be applied to many situations, but for Clayton symbolize an inherent and often problematic condition within an artist's practice. Her large-scale textile works visually allude to imagery that emphasizes the *stage* and absence of the *performer*: theatrical settings, stage curtains, and backdrops. By documenting a dynamic performance, albeit one that is private and decidedly behind-the-scenes, the photographs in *Studio Warmups* serve as a compelling compliment to her meditative fabric works.

The search for balance plays a significant role in *Studio Warmups*, both conceptually and visually. The act depicted is one of bravado and strength, while the desire to engage with one's surroundings and incorporate others into one's work requires a significant measure of dependence. The longing for balance is also suggested in Clayton's desire for social interaction and human contact before entering into the solitude of the studio. Similarly, the extreme physical exertion counters the heavy mental and emotional exertion involved in studio practice. The idea of balance is further rooted in the composition of the images from the dark/light color blocking to the coupling of the male and female form.

Clayton received her BFA from University of Tennessee, Knoxville and studied at the Academy of Fine Art and Design in Bratislava, Slovakia. She has completed artist residencies at the School of Visual Arts in New York, ACRE Residency in Wisconsin, and the Harold Arts Residency in Ohio. In 2012, Clayton received the Tennessee Arts Commission Professional Development Support Grant. Her works have been shown in solo and group exhibitions in Chicago, Knoxville, and Nashville. *Studio Warmups* is Clayton's first solo exhibition in Nashville.

Sara Estes
Curator, Threesquared