

Alexis Blake

EN

**CRACK  
NERVE  
BOOGIE  
SWERVE**

the archive

07\_06\_11\_08\_2024

**ELS WIELS WIE**

# INTRODUCTION

Originally conceived as a performance, *Crack Nerve Boogie Swerve* embraces concepts such as transparency, resistance, resonance and disruption – breaking free from norms and the constraints of oppression, while stretching the boundaries of art institutions. At WIELS, Alexis Blake expands the scope of a live work into a performative exhibition that encapsulates its past iterations while slowly transforming the present one.

Building on extensive research, Blake developed the initial outlines of *Crack Nerve Boogie Swerve* in 2019. For her first presentation of the work at TENT in Rotterdam, she created an installation along with a series of three consecutive performance sequences using the exhibition space as a site of process, allowing the audience to view multiple phases of development. In 2023, Blake developed and completed a new, comprehensive iteration of the performance, which she presented at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, and later at the High Line in New York City.

The evolution at WIELS is precipitated by the adjunction of ‘the archive’, a deliberate acknowledgement to the previous iterations of the performance, while simultaneously building a vantage point from which to contemplate the future of Blake’s artistic practice. Fluid and ever-changing, the original performance was never intended as a fixed point in time, but rather as a scaffold designed to stage further venues of development, wherever they may lead. Blake looks forward by looking backwards, manifesting another version of her performative works,



affording us the opportunity to bear witness to a grand totality: years of research, countless hours of rehearsal, and the collective body of work forged between Blake and her many collaborators.

The propensity and functionality of archives stems from a necessity to preserve for future generations. However noble that task might be, in order to preserve, it is also necessary to constrain, essentially holding information and experience captive. This begs the question whether, given the dynamic nature of Blake's artistic practice, compressing her performative works into installations is not potentially at odds with bodily agency? In its most rudimentary form, an archive can become a sterile environment, policed by self-appointed custodians. These arbitrary factors effectively dictate how and when the archived materials can be accessed and experienced. Blake, however, repurposes these barriers to avoid viewing the archive as a mere repository where the past is done and dusted. Instead, she broadens the scope by allowing the body itself to become the archive, collecting the remnants of human presence within the spaces her performances inhabit.

**Curator:** Helena Kritis

**Text:** Josue Aliendre Carvani



Alexis Blake, *Crack Nerve Boogie Swerve*, High Line, 2023. Photo: Liz Ligon.

# GALLERY 1

Scattered throughout the first gallery, Blake has created **sculptural impressions of a body** molded out of glass plates. These facsimiles serve as visual representations of movement, evoking the multitude of micro decisions that build up the kinetic flow of a single action. Aesthetically, these sculptures engage with the malleability of glass, metaphorically straddling the line between resilience and fragility. Inciting an image of liberation, glass is treated as an amorphous, liminal medium that appears to compress the physical body. Each mold captures a distinct body part mid-motion, detailing a moment of exertion and fixing them as relief sculptures on the surface of the glass.

Resonating simultaneously across both galleries, two elements – sound and light – further accentuate the exhibition’s immersive sensory experience. Several strategically placed **subwoofers** emit deep, resonant vibrations, gradually synchronising each gallery and its occupants into an unfamiliar rhythm. The best way to enjoy the low frequencies, visitors are invited to literally sit on the subwoofers or the steel benches found in the space. This bespoke sound score is calibrated to interact with WIELS’ architecture, producing unique reverberations based on the bodies and installations present. In between the pulsating vibrations, a curated **soundscore** – created from sampling past performance iterations – transports visitors through temporal dimensions, making them part of the audience at different points in time. As each sound cycle draws to a close, a brief interlude of

silence ensues, inviting contemplation on whether visitors stand at the threshold of a new beginning or the closure of a loop. Several **free-moving steel structures**, including a **xylophone** played by a percussionist during performances, act as conduits of sound.

Secondly, the **lighting** scheme is intricately synchronised with the sound to accentuate the material properties of glass. As sound makes the glass vibrate, light reflects off it. In contrast, and introducing a playful liberation, different types of **reflective glass panels** are suspended from the ceiling or mounted on free-moving steel structures, allowing choreographed light to filter through. Thanks to simple incremental adjustments in the position of lighting elements, the resulting reflections are displaced, creating a wholly unique spectrum of light and space.

## **GALLERY 2**

This juxtaposition of past and future is vividly illustrated through the custom-made glass panels adorning the floor of the second gallery. Visitors are invited to interact with the installation by walking across the **glass floor**. The resulting cracks serve as tangible markers of the passage of time and people's movements throughout the exhibition space. Here, the act of glass breaking and its resonant aftermath transcend mere metaphor, evolving into a mode of communication that forges a new lexicon of sound and physical expression.

Breaking up the symmetry of the glass floor, a **series of three steel structures holding vertical fractured glass panels** are interspersed throughout.

Each of the groupings compress the essence of all three performance iterations, imbuing them with an intuitive materiality. Within this constellation of transparency, every crack, chip, and imperfection coalesces into one entity, mapping out the distinct conditions set in motion by each performance iteration. The presence of past participants and the inexorable passage of time become etched into the very fabric of the glass. Yet, to reach each grouping, visitors must venture across the glass expanse, participating in the process of breaking, thereby marking their present existence while attempting to peek into the past.

Glass occupies a liminal space between 'whole' and 'broken'. When 'broken', it assumes a state of apparent uselessness. This perceived fragility extends beyond the realm of materiality, permeating into socio-political spheres. The act of 'breaking' thrusts individuals into a crucible of conflicting forces, creating tension between the notions of oppression and liberation. In this arena of power dynamics, moral clarity becomes elusive, as perspectives on oppression and liberation diverge. Such is the balance, that 'breaking' can assume multiple interpretations that constrict and distort meaning. A stone hurled through a storefront window may be a sign of defiance or criminal intent. Public protests can be construed as acts of change or disruptive agitation. Demonstrations of solidarity may be hailed as either noble gestures or dismissed as disingenuous posturing. This ongoing tug of war brings latent conflicts to the surface, emphasizing the precarious balance upon which societal cohesion teeters.

# PERFORMANCES

During weekends, segments from the original iteration of *Crack Nerve Boogie Swerve* are selectively performed by dancers and musicians, facilitating a dynamic interplay among all the different elements of the exhibition. By isolating certain segments of the performance and recontextualising them as stand-alone ventures, this deliberate choice invites contemplation imbued with introspection. It juxtaposes the broken with the unbroken, summoning echoes from the past while offering glimpses of prospective futures, all in an attempt to carve out fleeting moments of coherence. Each new performance unfolds either as a solo or a duet, usually reprised on multiple occasions, affording both performers and spectators the latitude to reimagine the experience of the collective body engendered by the original performance.

# ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alexis Blake's (b. 1981, US/NL) multidisciplinary practice combines various disciplines, including visual art, performance and dance. She investigates the way in which the body is represented and treated as an archive, which she then critically examines, disrupts, and re-negotiates. Her work directly engages with the representation and subjectification of women's bodies while activating them as sites and agents for socio-political change. In doing so, she creates languages of resistance and cultivates spaces that challenge and evade systems of power.

Blake received an MA in Fine Art from Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam (2007) and participated in prestigious artist residencies, such as those at Callie's, Berlin (2023), WIELS (2020+2021), the Delfina Foundation, London (2016), Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht (2014–15) and the Fondazione Antonio Ratti with Yvonne Rainer (2015). Her oeuvre has been showcased at numerous esteemed venues, including Kunsthaus Zürich, the High Line (NYC), EMST – The National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens, KW Contemporary (Berlin), the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the 1st Riga Biennial (Riga), BOZAR (Brussels), IMMA – Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin), Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), British Museum (London), TENT (Rotterdam), ExtraCity (Antwerp) and La Triennale di Milano XXI (Milan). Notably, she was honoured with the prestigious Dutch art prize, Prix de Rome in 2021.

## **CREDITS**

**Low frequency sound composition and subwoofer arrangement:** Stefanie Egedy

**Co-producer, mixing and mastering of soundscore:** Zeno Mainardi

**Light designer:** Ofer Smilansky

**Steel elements produced by:** Bart Boots (CMS)

**Glass 'Z-profile' brackets made with:** Zeno Vogel (office haratori), Johannes Husmann (Raumbau)

**Glass sculptures made with:** Van Tetterode Glass Studio

**Garments:** Elisa van Joolen with Mika Perlmutter

**Assistance:** Helena Julian (studio manager Alexis Blake Studio)

**WIELS interns:** Josue Aliendre Carvani, Vivien Kämpf, Elena Silena Roccetti



Special thanks to: Uri Gilad, Léon Kruijswijk,  
Yeb Wiersma, Krist Gruijthuijsen, Meredith Blake,  
Ula Sickle, Zoë Gray

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## EVENTS

Artist talk <sup>(EN)</sup>

Alexis Blake & Léon Kruijswijk

Sun 11.08.2024, 15:00

Performances every weekend.

More info at [WIELS.ORG](https://www.wiels.org)

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Alexis Blake, *Crack Nerve Boogie Swerve*, 2019/2023. Photo: Diana Oliveira

