

*“A.K. Burns: Shabby but Thriving”* marks a new chapter in artist A.K. Burns’ serial work drawing on theater, science fiction, philosophy, and ecological anxieties. Presented as part of the Department of Education and Public Engagement’s R&D Season: BODY, the project is organized around five elements: power (the sun), water, land, void, and body.

In *“Shabby but Thriving,”* commissioned by the New Museum, Burns premieres a new two-channel video staged within an installation that explores the subjugation and agency of various bodies. The video, titled *Living Room* (2017–ongoing), is the installation’s central work; it was filmed in the New Museum’s 231 Bowery building that houses the artist residency program. Moving from its basement through the stairwells (partially renovated and often bearing relics of previous eras) and into a series of found and constructed interiors, the video treats the entire building as both a stage and a metaphorical body. The building exists as a hermetic ecosystem and protagonist in the narrative of *Living Room*, as performers use their bodies to labor and leisure, choreograph and dialogue, bathe and subsist within this vital architectural interior. Furniture and props likewise act as both benign objects and political subjects. The video features a unique soundtrack by Geo Wyeth and a choreographed number by NIC Kay.

The Fifth Floor installation also includes sculptural objects that augment and animate *Living Room*’s narrative: a stripped and gutted couch outfitted with underglow, cast bags of dirt embedded with foil candies, a carpet soiled during the couch demolition, and fishing lures and lines stretched across walls.

Throughout the run of the exhibition, the Fifth Floor Resource Center—a hybrid exhibition, study, and pedagogical space adjacent to the main gallery—offers a variety of modes for understanding and utilizing energies of the burdened body, taking cues from reading rooms, gyms, listening stations, and spaces of respite. A punching bag, installed in the space for visitors’ use, speaks to the ways in which bodies process shock, psychic and physical trauma, grief, and rage in the face of political extremism. The Resource Center is organized by Burns and Alicia Ritson, Research Fellow.

As part of her exhibition and residency, Burns has organized a series of public programs exploring the body’s relationship to the law and the environment, including [“Body Politic: From Rights to Resistance”](#) on February 5, 2017. This daylong multipart event will feature information sessions with lawyers, activists, and grassroots organizers, focusing on bodies under duress and rights under the new political administration. This event is free and open to the public with RSVP.

The exhibition is curated by Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement, and Sara O’Keeffe, Assistant Curator.

A.K. Burns is an interdisciplinary artist and educator residing in Brooklyn and a co-founder of W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy). Her work has been exhibited widely, including in solo and two-person exhibitions at Callicoon Fine Arts, New York; Johannes Vogt Gallery, New York; Tate Modern, London; REDCAT, Los Angeles; Taxter & Spengemann, New York; Horton Gallery, Berlin; RECESS, New York; and elsewhere. She is currently a 2016–17 Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University. A Smeary Spot, the opening chapter of the serial work of which "Shabby but Thriving" is the second part, premiered at Participant Inc, New York, in 2015, and traveled to the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art in 2016.

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