

It was 1975 when Pooh Kaye—then twenty-four and recently graduated from Cooper Union—shot *Dig* in a forest on the outskirts of New York City. The film opens skyward to a treetop clearing, before panning shakily to the ground where, in a patch of leaf-strewn soil, a naked Kaye crouches on her knees with head and elbows tucked beneath her.

From this child's pose she begins clawing at the dirt, pressing her body headfirst into the ground, ass in the air, as she clears space with her hands. Shot on Super 8 that has been pixilated (the frame rate slowed to achieve stop-motion effect) the film races jerkily forward, exacerbating Kaye's frantic motion. Displaced dirt gets swept up into a shifting pile of soil on her back that, partially camouflaging her, disintegrates the line demarcating body from ground. Towards the end of the fifty-five second film, Kaye stills. Her breath, registered as slight shifts of vertebrae, remains the only visible movement. In the last seconds she rises suddenly to all fours, staring mischievously into the camera, panting. With her impish gaze she dispels any possible misconceptions as to her intent: this is no communion, she is no earth mother. The image flickers to black.

*Dig* is the first of a string of Super 8 films that Kaye produced between 1975 and 1980, followed by *Climb* and *Table-Walk* (both 1976), *Swim* (1977), and *Going Out* (1980). Like *Dig*, these are all brief and pixilated and capture her body, often naked, performing the task-like movements suggested by their titles. *Climb*, for example, documents her repeated attempts to shimmy up a structural column in her otherwise bare Canal Street loft, wearing only a grass hula skirt. In *Swim* she lays across a chair—itsself perched on a table—and “doggy paddles”; she performs the titular activity precisely, but in mid-air and going nowhere. Save *Dig*, all of the works take place in apartments in New York: the city habitat serves as both set and pre-condition to her actions. *Pooh Kaye: Object Actions 1975-1980* presents these films together for the first time since 1996, when they were screened at Anthology Film Archives.

The production of these films intersected with a period in which Kaye was working closely with Simone Forti, who in the the 1960s had pioneered what came to be known as postmodern dance. And in several respects, Kaye's films encapsulate key tenets of dance and performance art of the time: the movements they capture are task-like, pedestrian—rigorously casual, even. Simultaneously choreographies, performances, films, and documents, they speak to the profound interdisciplinarity of this moment in downtown New York. Yet these films also turn from this paradigm, embroidering their pared-down actions with proscribed elements like narrative and theatricality, heightening an absurdity that was perhaps always latent in the dance lineage from which they emerge. In doing so, Kaye introduces a psychological excess that would increasingly come to dominate her work as a choreographer and filmmaker from 1980 onwards, and which one can retrospectively see

percolating under the surface of New York's larger artistic climate in the 1970s.

-Josephine Graf

Pooh Kaye (b. 1951) received her BFA from Cooper Union and her MFA in Dance and Media from Bennington College. Her films have been shown at institutions including the The Kitchen, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Institute of Contemporary Arts, Boston; The Chicago Art Institute; The National Gallery, Washington, D.C.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; EMPAC Performing Arts Center, Troy, NY; and were featured in the film programming of the 1985 Whitney Biennial. Her dance company, Eccentric Motions, was founded in 1983 and has performed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Lincoln Center, New York; The Kitchen, New York; The Joyce Theater, New York; American Dance Festival, Durham, NC; and Jacob's Pillow, Becket, MA; among other venues. Kaye is the recipient of six National Endowment dance fellowships, a Guggenheim fellowship for dance, and New York Foundation for the Arts fellowships.

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