



Arts and Culture

Everybody Suz-ercise!



The opening of artist [Susan Lee-Chun's](#) new exhibition on Saturday at [David Castillo Gallery](#) may feel like a trip to the gym, if the people at your gym all wore matching futuristic black and gold outfits, dark glasses and head gear while propelling their lives toward a utopian vision.

“What I’m trying to portray is this faux real venture that this fake collaborative of me, myself and I conjured up,” says Susan Lee-Chun, referring to The Suz, her trio of Su, Sue and Sioux. These are the alter-egos Chun developed in earlier works. Now she’s united them to forge a new identity. Companies, she says, tend to do this very quickly, redefining themselves through constant inundation with images and logos. She decided to employ the same practice through Suz-ercise.

Chun began work on the ongoing performance project during art residencies in Omaha and Chicago earlier this year. Come Saturday, she says, David Castillo Gallery will serve as a polished and fictitious gym-like space that will host six black- and gold-clad Suz-ercisers -- volunteers she recruited in Miami – who will “work out” periodically throughout the night.

This show, she says, is a way to introduce a concept she hopes will generate enough funding to take the project to a larger scale, so that as many as 100 Suz-ercisers could perform in public spaces.

Chun confesses that she's "a total infomercial freak," who was intrigued by the response to fitness infomercials for Billy Blanks' Tae Bo and other fitness fads. "It's not just the testimonials but when you see masses of people investing into this image, product or lifestyle, it becomes this bigger-than-life object."

Suz-ercise is also a fitness movement, albeit a whimsical and tongue-in-cheek one full of powerful yet meaningless terms such as "certified" and "authentic" and phrases such as "We'll help you to meet our immeasurable goals."



"I love that phrase," Chun says, laughing. "It's an interesting and subversive way to talk about what we envision as our goals. As an artist, I'm creating this fictitious narrative of this whole venture. It's at my whim and I'm wanting people to take on these ideas and become part of it and it's interesting, but people *do*. You give them the right ingredients and people are like 'Oh, I want that!' or 'I believe that,' and 'Sure, I'll do whatever you want!'"

While working on this project in Chicago, Chun had to recruit 10 volunteers. "I just randomly put out the word to the organization I was working with that I needed Suz-ercisers and people were like, "I want to do it! I want to be a part of it!"

In Chicago, Chun took Suz-ercisers in full black and gold outfits, glasses and headgear to a lakefront to do their thing. "The three Suz-ercisers and I would walk around and I was in the background with the boombox and we would randomly set the stuff on the beach and they would start doing the routine for maybe three to five minutes."

Then they'd pack it in and drive a few miles to their next lakefront spot and do it all over again. "It was so out-of-the-ordinary but it almost felt like it had a place since we're so used to having images of really quirky workout classes on Fit TV or whatever," Chun says. "And it's happening on the *lakefront* but it's so bizarre and yet it's believable and real and we don't question it. ... It's almost like musicals, like a story is happening with dialogues and then out of nowhere there's a perfect opportunity and moment and a song and dance happens, and it's just like, 'Oh of course, why *wouldn't* it have happened? It's obvious. There's no rhyme or reason to question it, so follow along."

Once in Suz-erciser gear, it's hard to differentiate one Suz-erciser from the next, making it easier to lose one's self and become part of something bigger. "They're able to take themselves out of their body the way performers do. ... It gives just the right amount of ammunition for them to really project themselves into this project."

Getting all of these ideas surrounding Suz-ercise across in a gallery space could be a different sort of challenge than hitting the lakefront with three Suz-ercisers and a boombox to feel things out, but Chun seems up for the task. "When people walk into a gallery space and come upon a performance project, there's this immediate wall that's put up between the performer or artist and the viewers or audience," Chun says. "I think there are some interesting components whereby through the right measure of humor and visual elements you're actually able to confront and maybe even diminish these walls."



Chun strives for just the right blend of laughter, anonymity, belonging and vision to help people achieve dreams and most importantly, to recruit an army of people who can help The Suz meet its immeasurable goals, not that anyone asks Chun to explain the goals. People are accustomed, she says, to ambiguously worded promises that a particular product or program will provide self-fulfillment or make their life better.

Chun wants to take Suz-ercise to new levels, but her more immediate hope is for people to engage with The Suz and Suz-ercising. "That's all I can ask for, and that the image stays in their mind," she says.

"At the end of it all, when the exhibition closes or things come to an end, it's packaged up and put away, but it does actually exist. It exists in the mind and I think that's how images maintain their ever-presence in our society that you don't just constantly need to be in the forefront. You just have to be somewhere, like you plant a seed and then you're able to walk away and you know that it's going to germinate or at least it's cultivating somewhere. I think that's one really interesting aspect of how any kind of image or perspective or idea happens to exist in our realm."

Everybody Suz-ercise! opens 7-10 p.m. Saturday and runs through Dec. 1 at David Castillo Gallery, 2234 N.W. Second Ave., in Miami.

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