

VOGUE

Bauhaus, Ballet, and Brazilians, Oh My! This Is the Most Interesting Performance You Can See This Weekend

November 19, 2016 7:00 am by [Mark Guiducci](#)

Whoever first knocked the idea of “design by committee” had never seen Oskar Schlemmer’s Triadic Ballet. A complex Gesamtkunstwerk first staged in Stuttgart in 1922, the experiential performance combined music, dance, and design, all pivoting on principles of the Bauhaus movement in a collaboration that is just as puzzling and astonishing today as it was when it premiered. (See this 1970 [arrangement](#) to get a sense of it.) The Triadic Ballet explored man’s codependency with machines as its subject matter, leaving future generations to wonder: What would that conversation look like, nearly a century later?

Curators Mafalda Millies and Roya Sachs have set out to ask, if not definitively answer, that question. Taking Schlemmer’s work as inspiration, the duo are directing a Performa Visionaries-hosted performance titled “Virtually There,” which debuts this evening at Mana Contemporary, in [Jersey City](#). Though “Virtually There” is the brainchild of these two vivacious curators, it is more easily understood as a meeting point for nearly 30 collaborators. Celebrated Brazilian designers Fernando and Humberto Campana conceived of the costumes; Karole Armitage (the “punk ballerina” whose past commissions range from the Bolshoi Ballet to Broadway) choreographed seven dancers, whose roles have such titles as Honeycomb Woman and Accordion Man; visual artists Kate Gilmore and Heather Rowe designed the sets; Matte Projects, a commercial production firm that has worked with Nike and Chanel is coordinating the staging and lighting, and at the center of the work is a score by the exciting young composer Charles Derenne.

“Our role was to make sure everyone stayed in tune with Schlemmer’s themes,” Millies says, “but we allowed everyone to maintain their artistic integrity. Each collaborator has a persona in the group dynamic.” But they admit that working with so many collaborators could be hectic. As Sachs puts it, “our group emails are insane.” (This has not stopped cooperative performance work from becoming something of a trend, with “Virtually There” coming on the heels of “Rules of the Game,” a collaboration between Pharrell Williams, Daniel Arsham, and Daniel Bokaer, and “Letter to a Man,” a production by Mikhail Baryshnikov and Robert Wilson.)

While the curators have upheld Schlemmer’s three-act structure, “Virtually There,” as its title implies, focuses on how people interact with digital inventions, rather than the mechanical machines that were the focus of the Triadic Ballet. “In the last act, the digital and human are no longer mutually exclusive,” Sachs explains, “There is a codependence; the digital relies on us as much as we rely on it.” Speaking of digital dependency, it’s worth mentioning that Millies and Sachs swear the New Jersey venue is “very accessible” via Uber.

“Virtually There” will be performed November 19–22 at Mana Contemporary, Jersey City. Tickets are available [here](#).