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Inbetween Time Festival of Live Art and Intrigue

Various Locations, Bristol
2 – 5 December

Reviewed by: [Mary Paterson »](#)

What Next for the Body?

Arnolfini, 1 December – 6 February

Ivana Muller: 60 Minutes of Opportunist

Wickham Theatre, 3 December

Silvia Rimat: Imagine Me To Be There

Wickham Theatre, 4 December

Jordan McKenzie: Holding My Breath

Arnolfini, 5 December

In *37 Cuerpos* by Teresa Margolles (part of the exhibition 'What Next for the Body?'), a single, bare thread divides the largest room in the gallery. Up close, you realise that it's not one thread, but many short ones knotted together. Each strand is fragile, frayed and dirty, like scraps of leather.

These are actually thirty-seven pieces of surgical thread, used to sew up the bodies of thirty-seven victims of violent death. As a gruesome relic the work fails to represent the lives of the victims, just as it failed to bring them back to life. But its weakness is what makes its physical presence so compelling. The thread divides the room in two as if on the brink of life and death, and represents the mysterious truth of our bodies – that they house life, but do not contain it.

'What Next for the Body?' is an exhibition about the body dissolving, breaking or breaking down. It sat at the centre of the Inbetween Time Festival, a four-day programme of 'live art and intrigue' taking place in art venues and public spaces across Bristol. It was also the name of one of the festival's curatorial strands; the other, 'D:Stable,' promised works that "thoroughly reject the conventions of theatre". These two rich and familiar problems created a dense programme that also suggested another recurring theme – the place of live, embodied presence in the modern world.

In *60 Minutes of Opportunism* the choreographer Ivana Muller explores the relationship between her body, her identity and her persona. She is live onstage throughout, but her voice is heard in a sound recording played into the auditorium. This divides Muller in two: the person from the image, her past self (who made the recording) from the woman who is standing here now. Muller 'the image' slides between a collection of visual stereotypes – traveller, dancer, suicide bomber – the potency of each cliché as disturbing as the fluency of the movement. Meanwhile, her voice is beset with glitches and background noise that remind the audience that it's stuck in the past.

This dislocation is eerily familiar. It draws me into a type of looking that is baited by visual presence, and contextualised by words untethered in space or time. In other words, it's exactly like browsing the Internet, or flicking through channels on the TV.

Sylvia Rimat's *Imagine Me To Be There* brings the theatre show even closer to the computer. Rimat is alone on stage – cross-legged on the floor, eyes glued to her



[\[enlarge\]](#)
Ivana Muller, '60 Minutes of Opportunism', performance, 2010. Photo: Oliver Rudkin

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laptop. She begins to type and words appear on the screen behind her 'Silence.'

The skill of Rimat's performance lies in the way she marries the magic of the theatre with the fantasies of the virtual. When she writes about the lights fading in the auditorium, they really do. Of course, we know she doesn't control them – but the device is clever enough to suspend the audience's disbelief. Which means that when Rimat writes about wearing a bear suit, we're inclined to indulge that fantasy as well. And when she writes directions for the audience, we happily play along.

At a Curator's panel in December, an audience member suggested that video streaming and online technologies should replace live events. Given the obvious debt these two performances have with digital modes of representation, it's hard to disagree. Both are in fact about performing – Muller begins by telling us she was asked to make a performance in which she appears on stage, and Rimat's show is effectively a deconstruction of theatre. But their relationships to more proverbial and accessible forms of representation beg the question: why does theatre (with or without its conventions) matter?

I found an answer by returning to the disappearance of things. *In Holding My Breath*, the third in a trilogy of performances by Jordan McKenzie, the artist stands in a small room with cupped hands, holding the attention of eight or ten strangers who watch water drip through his fingers. We match each other's breathing, listen to the rustle of each other's clothes and feel the concentration thread through McKenzie's body.

This is the meaning of shared presence – its fragility. Value (to paraphrase the writer Eva Hoffman) is scarcity measured in time. Just as the threads in *37 Cuerpos* resonate with what they cannot represent, so the time we strangers have together describes the distance between us, and the times we won't share.

This precarious and temporal balance between the known and the unknown is also the space Muller uses to dissect contemporary modes of looking, instead of just recycling them. When she says she is going to do something 'dangerous' – and starts smoking – it really is dangerous because it affects the precious and finite bodies of everyone that is looking. Similarly, when Rimat gives the audience a knife, she is not streaming a relationship with strangers, nor representing it. She's testing it out.

Perhaps it's telling, however, that McKenzie is dressed in 1930s costume – suit, waistcoat, waxed moustache. This cherished affirmation is emphatically old fashioned – as if being 'live' is no longer part of daily life, but a relic of the past.

Writer detail:

Mary Paterson is a Writer and Curator with a specialism in Live Art and performance. As a member of Live Art UK's 'Writing from Live Art', she is involved in promoting critical debate around performance based work. Mary's curatorial projects have explored performativity, political relations and fantasy. She has produced exhibitions of fine art and performance in the UK and Ireland, both independently and as Co-Director of the Curatorial group Art-3.

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