

WHITNEY

Press Release

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THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT PERFORMANCES OF *ASCENSION*, COMMISSIONED FROM ELIZABETH STREB

PERFORMANCES TAKE PLACE IN GANSEVOORT PLAZA, JULY 7-9, 2011



STREB Extreme Action Company in rehearsal for *ASCENSION*. Photo: Joel Bischoff.

NEW YORK, June 21, 2011 – The Whitney Museum of American Art has commissioned noted choreographer Elizabeth Streb to create a new work as part of the series *Whitney on Site: New Commissions Downtown*. The piece, *ASCENSION*, which involves a twenty-one foot rotating ladder, will be performed by members of STREB Extreme Action Company in Gansevoort Plaza (the intersection of Gansevoort Street, Little West 12th Street, and Ninth Avenue), a block from the Whitney's new

building site. Performances will occur twice a day, at 3pm and 5pm, from Thursday, July 7, through Saturday, July 9.

ASCENSION is performed by nine dancers to music by composer David Van Tieghem. Describing the work, Streb stated: “There is a sense of beauty about a ladder, a device that has existed for centuries to assist us when the need to go higher arises. As the ASCENSION ladder turns, and the forces wreak their confusing havoc on the climbers, it becomes difficult to recognize if the performers are climbing up or down at any given time. One by one they hop on and begin their endless climb, around and around and around all nine bodies go. The climb, the ever-revolving Sisyphean ascent to the unreachable top of the ladder, disallows arrival and the accomplishment of the quotidian function to get somewhere.”

ASCENSION is a part of *Whitney on Site: New Commissions Downtown*, a project that has so far included a series of large-scale, commissioned works by Guyton\Walker, Tauba Auerbach, and Barbara Kruger on the site of the Whitney’s future downtown building in Manhattan’s Meatpacking District. The commissioned projects, *Whitney on Site: New Commissions Downtown*, respond to the site’s dynamic urban context and herald plans to bring a downtown Whitney to the neighborhood. Other new works will be presented in the neighborhood during the next few years as construction progresses.

ASCENSION is also part of KISS THE AIR!, a new body of equipment-based Essential Acts by Streb, which will be premiered at Park Avenue Armory in December 2011. Also within this body of work is BREAKING GROUND which was performed by Ms. Streb and STREB Extreme Action Company in May at the Whitney’s groundbreaking ceremony on the site of its future building. In this version of BREAKING GROUND, choreographer Elizabeth Streb, wearing a helmet, stood beneath a specially designed apparatus filled with dirt. Six dancers dove boldly, one by one, through a series of panes of glass as 1500 lbs. of dirt rained down from the apparatus onto Ms. Streb, creating a pile around the artist that was then shoveled by Mayor Bloomberg and Whitney Director Adam Weinberg.

Elizabeth Streb’s previous collaborations with the Whitney include her recent performance of Trisha Brown’s *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* in September 2010. Using ropes, pulleys, and special rigging, she “walked” down the Whitney’s iconic Marcel Breuer building on the corner of Madison Avenue at 75th Street.

Performances of ASCENSION will take place from Thursday through Saturday, July 7–9, outdoors in Gansevoort Plaza at the juncture of Gansevoort Street, Little West 12th Street, and Ninth Avenue, one block east of the High Line’s southernmost entrance and the Whitney’s new building site. Performances will occur at 3pm and 5 pm each day and will run 15 minutes.

About Elizabeth Streb

Elizabeth Streb in 1997 was awarded a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Award. In 2008, Streb was appointed to the Mayor's Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission, a commission mandated by the City Charter to advise the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and is a member of the board of EMC Arts. She holds a Master of Arts in Humanities and Social Thought from New York University, a B.S. in Modern Dance from SUNY Brockport from which she has received an honorary doctorate of fine arts as well. Streb also holds an honorary doctorate from Rhode Island College. She is the recipient of numerous other awards and fellowships including the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1987; a Brandeis Creative Arts Award in 1991; two New York Dance and Performance Awards (Bessie Awards), in 1988 and 1999 for her "sustained investigation of movement"; and more than twenty years of on-going support from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Once called the Evel Knievel of dance, Elizabeth Streb's choreography, which she calls "PopAction," intertwines the disciplines of dance, athletics, boxing, rodeo, the circus, and Hollywood stunt-work. The result is a bristling, muscle-and-motion vocabulary that combines daring with strict precision in pursuit of the public display of "pure movement."

In 2003 Streb established S.L.A.M. (STREB Lab for Action Mechanics) in Brooklyn, NY (streb.org). S.L.A.M.'s door is literally open for the community to come in and watch rehearsals, take classes and learn to fly. The central idea at SLAM (besides always being public) is to mix three extreme action forms: PopAction, KidAction and Circus Arts.

Streb has been featured in documentaries on her work: including *PopAction* by Michael Blackwood, PBS's, *In The Life* as one of three stories of gay individuals, and is currently airing on PBS's *Great Performances* for her piece, *Wild Blue Yonder*, a commission from the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts honoring the invention of the airplane in 1903 by the Wright Brothers. Streb's work has been seen on The David Letterman Show, CBS Sunday Morning, CNN's Showbiz Today, ABC Nightly News with Peter Jennings, Nickelodeon, NBC's Weekend Today, MTV, Channel 11's News-hour, NY 1 and she debated with Dick Armey on Larry King Live. In 2010, Elizabeth Streb's book, *STREB: How to Become an Extreme Action Hero*, was published by the Feminist Press.

About STREB Inc.

Founded in 1985, STREB Inc. tours extensively throughout the United States and internationally presenting performances and residencies and conducts year-round activity at its home studio/laboratory, the STREB LAB for ACTION MECHANICS (S.L.A.M.), located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

STREB Inc. opened S.L.A.M. in January 2003. Housed in a former warehouse, S.L.A.M. is the company's creative and educational center where new productions are mounted, classes for children and adults are taught in the POP ACTION School and all company activities—rehearsals, demonstrations, workshops—are open to the public.

STREB Inc. is committed to presenting the work of the STREB Extreme Action Company in both traditional and non-traditional venues. The company has been seen in public spaces throughout New York and across the country in such venues as Vanderbilt Hall in New York's Grand Central Terminal, the Winter Garden of the World Financial Center in New York, in front of the Cyclone at Coney Island, on the mall outside the Smithsonian Institution, during a Minneapolis Twins and New York Yankees game at the Minnesota Metrodome, in the Anchorage under the Brooklyn Bridge, during intermission of the International Squash Tournament finals and at the State of Illinois Center in Chicago. They have also been presented by the Lincoln Center Festival, University of California Berkeley, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Jacob's Pillow, Barbican Center, London, Theatre de la Ville, Paris, Singapore Arts Festival and the Melbourne Festival among others. STREB Inc. has recently been commissioned to create new work by the River to River Festival, the Park Avenue Armory and the Whitney Museum.

STREB Extreme Action has received numerous awards including annual support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and the NY City Department of Cultural Affairs. Throughout its history, STREB has been widely recognized by the philanthropic community and has received major support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Booth Ferris Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation Cultural Innovation Fund, the Carnegie Corporation, the New England Foundation for the Arts, the New York Community Trust/Wallace Funds and the Ford Foundation, to name a few.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world's leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum's signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is moving forward with a new building project, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground was broken on the new building in May 2011, and it is projected to open to the public in 2015.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Cory Arcangel: Pro Tools	Through September 11, 2011
More Than That: Films by Kevin Jerome Everson	Through September 18, 2011
Breaking Ground: The Whitney's Founding Collection	Through September 18, 2011
Lyonel Feininger: At the Edge of the World	June 30–October 16, 2011
Xavier Cha: Body Drama	Opens June 30, 2011
Singular Visions	Through November 2011
Designing the Whitney of the Future	On continuous view

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$12. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission to the Kaufman Astoria Studios Film & Video Gallery only: \$6. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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