



**External
Space**

2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
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Tuesday-Saturday 12-6
www.xpace.info

To celebrate emerging Canadian artists and the new location of XPACE External Space in OCAD U's The Learning Zone I am programming a series of unassuming, documentary-type videos. With little to no edits, loose or minimal narratives, the artists in this series embrace and execute trivial or absurd tasks through repetition and humour.

The videos in this five part series have meditated on the fragile and overblown expectations we often set for ourselves; investigated learning and empathy through imitation; reflected on the value of self or existing as a person in the experience of other people; and deconstructed the conventions, production and dissemination of news media.

The fifth and final video in this series, *This Goes Out To All My Girls*, uses pop culture and its tropes as access points to interrogate mediated or proposed identities, and the implications of pop icons as paragons. Exploring how media presents women to the masses, the artist, who also stars in the video, appropriates Beyoncé's choreographed dance routine from her 2011 hit music video, *Run The World (Girls)*. The visual glitz and glamour of the original video is stripped away, resulting in a tension between an awkward fan video and an empowering critique of prescribed gender expectations in the twenty-first century.

Framed by a static long shot, a rudimentary soundstage is the setting for the video. The artist performs for the camera, aware of the of the viewer's gaze. Doing away with haute-couture fashion and the exotic locales of the original music video, the artist's contrasting attire is as basic as the backdrop; she is barefoot wearing a plain pair of black shorts and a black tank top. As the beat begins her body nods and gyrates, the artist's motion builds with the rhythm. Her facial expression is unflappable; she is seen murmuring counting sets of eight to stay in time. She has dedicated herself to rehearsing the moves yet does no execute them with the confidence of a pop star. Graham operates within the pop icon's system as a method of revealing the essence of both Beyoncé's and her own body language.

Beyoncé's status is far-reaching, her music and videos incite Internet dance crazes (*Single Ladies, Put a Ring on It*) and her performances capture a sizeable audience (playing the Half-Time Show at Super Bowl XLVII). Her songs with Destiny's Child explored themes of perseverance (*Survivor*), independence (*Independent Women*), and body image (*Boastylicious*). When the *Run the World (Girls)* was released a quick Google search revealed contrasting feminist readings of this anthem, demonstrating that audiences are discussing roles of women, ideas of celebrity and politics of feminism; encouraging and adding to a dialogue of gender, race and class structures.

- Jennifer Simaitis, OCAD U Graduate Student, Art Criticism and Curatorial Practice

