

Teach Me How to Dougie: D’Ette Nogle

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When I finally met D’Ette Nogle last February, I realized that I was already familiar with her appearance after seeing her videos, many of which feature the artist herself. Her practice—encompassing objects, installation, video, and performance—has always been oriented to question the professionalization of art making. Interested in the thin balance between art and labor, Nogle inquisitively dissects the economic, personal, cultural, and social structures that govern the art field’s immediate lived relations and working conditions.

Given that Nogle works full time in education, teaching and learning are recurring themes in her artistic production, as well as training materials, tools, and linguistic constructs. The upbeat video *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Teach Me How to Dougie)* (2009) shows the artist receiving a Dougie lesson.¹ “Can you teach me how to Dougie?”—a man sings. “You know why? Cause all the bitches love me.” Calling upon her personal condition as “a learner, teacher, artist, worker, and consumer,”² the artist adopts different perspectives to observe the complexity of art making and creative labor in post-capitalist societies. Artistic work is exemplary of how laborers in a hyper-atomized industry dominated by asymmetrical power structures, freelance contracts, and verbal offers are exploited and deprived. In the lecture-performance *Bleeding Canvas: Teaching Video* (2019), presented last year at Bodega, New York, Nogle offered a mixture of personal and political information, then began reciting a series of open questions: “Who made the rules? Who were in a position of authority in the media? How does that impact your definition of you?” We—students, viewers, makers—were thus prodded to question how our political and social views are formed, stated, or distorted. “Capitalist realism,” writes Mark Fischer, “is more like a pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action.”³

Drawing from the language of pop culture while exploring shared affinities between media, artistic persona, and the maintenance of sociocultural values, Nogle questions the articulation of cultural and political thought and its social positioning. Synchronically exhibited next to each other, two identical videos titled *New Painting (Period of Significance)* and *New Painting (Premium Position)* (both 2016) play footage of the actress Kristen Stewart candidly talking about her role in the French movie *Personal Shopper* (2016), analyzing the correspondence between the film narrative and her persona, forcefully aware of the media’s influence on art. There is a subtle and revealing sense of humor in the works, unfolding fundamental artistic questions through the paradoxical privileged position of a celebrity.

Nogle’s art-making process can be also considered dynamic and dialectical—as a series of idiosyncrasies that problematize literal, singular, and conventional approaches to illustrating labor while questing for the truth. *Wardrobe Selections for Gallery (2013-2018)* (2018), consisting of five fashionably dressed mannequins, was conceived by the artist as a five-year retrospective of Hannah Hoffman through the gallerist’s personal wardrobe. The artist

asked Hoffman to select outfits she’d worn at art fairs, private viewings, fundraising dinners, and so on, acknowledging Hoffman’s stylistic choices as an extension of her labor. The outfits not only convey a materialization of personal-professional intersections, but also softly surface hidden systems of representation and value distribution. For the exhibition *D’Ette Nogle 2019: Problems and Achievements for Storage* (2019) hosted in an outside location, the artist displayed a mixed presentation of ripped, reproduced, and restaged older works (spanning 2001 to 2019) across four storage unit facilities in Los Angeles. Both spatially and conceptually, the dispersed, almost labyrinthine format unraveled an intersection of memory, authorship, and deeply personal meanings. There was a sense of empowerment, treating self-evaluation and reflection as the hardest of tasks.

In *Smart Casual* (2019), an assembled story of the recent Hong Kong protests, Nogle explores how current events are narrated. Taking into account her role as a reader and a watcher, the artist recognizes the distance between positions of spectatorship and those of the agitators, and investigates the impossibility of portraying truthfully any story that the media has already treated and thereby made biased and fragmented. How do we conjoin the expositive politics that works of art invoke with the political realities underlying art’s production and distribution? Nogle’s work is an attempt at resolving this question, envisioning a variety of personal roles, facts, power structures, personae, and at time artworks (her upcoming exhibition at Sweetwater, Berlin, in September 2020, will take Sigmar Polke’s painting *Schrank* [1963] as its departure point, and as a new possibility of conversation, inquiry, and investigation). It offers an opportunity for personal evaluation while elucidating the complexity of our fragmented selves.

- 1 The Dougie is a hip-hop dance generally performed by moving one’s body in a loose style and passing a hand through or near the hair on one’s own head. The dance originated in Dallas, and takes its name from similar moves performed by 1980s rapper Doug E. Fresh. The Dougie gained notoriety through rapper Lil’ Wil, who scored a hit with his 2007 song “My Dougie.”
- 2 Press release for D’Ette Nogle’s *Bleeding Canvas*, Bodega, New York, 2019, <https://bodega-us.org/bleeding-canvas.html>.
- 3 Mark Fischer, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009), 16.

33 D’Ette Nogle, *Smart Casual* (detail), 2019. Courtesy: the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles

34 (Top) D’Ette Nogle, *Bleeding Canvas*, installation view at Bodega, New York, 2019.

Courtesy: the artist and Bodega, New York

34 (Bottom) D’Ette Nogle, *Smart Casual*, 2019. Courtesy: the artist and Bel Ami, Los Angeles

35 D’Ette Nogle, *Stand Up*, 2019, *Maskulinitäten* installation view at Bonner Kunstverein, 2019. Photo: Mareike Tocha





