

# Interview

## Dawn Kasper

By Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

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Whether carving a heart into her chest, branding love and truth on her biceps, maintaining the rigormortal stiffness of a corpse for hours, or sharing stories of autobiographical trauma, Los Angeles-based artist Dawn Kasper gives herself over to performance with breathtaking abandon and intensity.

Following in the tradition of her heroes—from Chris Burden, Paul McCarthy, and Mike Kelley to Gina Pane, Marina Abramovic, and Jason Rhoades—Kasper reminds audiences that art should never be safe and, to be truly transformative, it must endeavor to take real risks. Sometimes that even means putting the artist in the path of grave danger, as in her 2009 work *Repeater*, or *On Inertia and Anger*, in which Kasper, naked underneath a trench coat, threw a choreographed fit and screamed Fugazi lyrics from the bed of her pickup truck before jumping into its driver's seat and starting up the engine, only to crash into another car as she careened off into the night. "I'm trying to find some psychological breaking point in my mind and push that place by entering the trance state of performance," Kasper explains. "I have to be very present, and that requires practice, like yoga or meditation." The 35-year-old Kasper affirms her own physical presence with an urgency that belies her underlying preoccupation with absence, death, and uncertainty.

In fact, the productive possibility of lack and loss is at the heart of Kasper's ongoing series of performances called *On the Exposure of Process: A Nomadic Studio Practice Experiment* (2008-), which began when loss of employment forced her to give up her studio. For the duration of the Biennial this spring, she plans to temporarily relocate across the country to the Whitney, where she will publicly occupy its galleries using "the space as a studio, making new work, having studio visits, and playing music," she says. It may get messy.