

TOXIC TANGO

Performance by Jennifer Natalya Fink and Julie Laffin
Photographs by Scarlett Wardrop

43.5" Around bust.

Red Tide. Rhodophyta.
Algae isn't a pretty word.
Pray for the fish.

36 ¼" Under breasts

Do friendships have seeds? Pits? My body so ungainly after hers, smaller, squatter, all the glamor and glitter turned to seaweed and bile. We have to remake the dress. Expand it to fit my childbitten hips. After the human era, with its disposable children and bleach wipes, will the algae ascend?

Waist: 42"

Worst bloom. A scarlet wave of neurotoxins. A hundred manatees, a dozen dolphins, three hundred sea turtles, one red heart. All dead. 145 miles of coastline, swallowed in algae. Thousands of fish dying, do you know what that smells like? Like thousands of fish, dying. Putrid doesn't cover it. Fish is flesh. Pray for the fish.

Inseam: 24"

Will the dinosaurs reanimate.
Will you remember me.
My voice
(The substitution of one person or process for another.)
in your throat.
The woof and weave.
Will you.

Hips: 47"

Earlier performance traditions remain in the body of the next generation, passed from the captor to the conquered. The spoiled of war. We have been friends for exactly thirty years. If our friendship were a child, she'd be middle-aged, the teeth and waistline starting to go. My teeth and waistline are long gone. When I was pregnant, the earth felt sharp and new. Dangerous, potent. Full of toxins but exciting somehow. The territory continues to put on lipstick, its best dress.

Thigh: 24"

'Disabled' is an identity you make after the fact. A certain fiction of independence, of a body sealed at its borders, replaced by dependence, interdependence, despair. Then solidarity? Joy? Algae? We are entangled like a sea lion caught in the plastic ring of a six-pack. But who is the ring? Who is the lion? This is a [Superfund](#) site.

Upper Arm: 16"

Chemical runoff from all the shit humans put in the ground to make more shit:

it feeds the algae. Blooms a bouquet of neurotoxins.
Here, sniff.

Low Shoulder: 16.5"

Sea grass thrives in the rhodophyta sea.
Manatees graze on toxic sea grass, die a red death.
Watch them nurse.
You will never be the sea.

Red tides in Florida, record heat in South Bend, endless storms everywhere of pesticides and political pestilence. Welcome to *Toxic Tango*.

Conceived by Jennifer Natalya Fink and Julie Laffin, this performance responds to the mass contamination of our global physical, psychic, and political environment. Do we clean it up? How? Do we mourn? Give birth to a new planet? Dance on its grave?

Toxic Tango stages this intervention on a Superfund cleanup site in South Bend where invisible toxins infiltrate a rust belt fall day.

An iteration of Laffin's infamous, sculptural, and monumental "Red Dress" series of feminist interventions into body art, Fink here, now, occupies this terrifying territory, infusing it with her own experimental text. A red giant, a dead planet.

Performance studies scholar Joseph Roach suggests that surrogacy is an inherent part of performance: within the body of one performer lie traces of a prior performer's history. We take this literally and lovingly. Laffin, who cannot perform live because of an environmental illness, is surrogated by Fink, who occupies Laffin's red dress even as Laffin's body, voice, and sweat occupy Fink. Their 30-year history of collaboration tangos with the environment. With their own contaminated bodies. With one another.
With you.

We invite the audience to join in mutual surrogacy, feminist interdependence, anthropocene survival skills, #metoo queer/femme rage and a remarking of the toxic park. This performance will reinscribe what we think we're doing when kill bodies, women, and planets.

We'll leave this red earth cleaner than we found it. Will you?





