

# The Building Show: Cathy Weis

DEC 08, 2016 BY MAURA DONOHUE IN DANCE



Cathy Weis "Sundays On Broadway" featuring: Cathy Weis, Greg Corbino, Kevin Lovelady, Maria Manhattan, Maura Gahan, Patrick Gallagher, Saori Tsukada, Tyler Fairbanks

Cathy Weis concluded her Fall 2016 "Sundays on Broadway" series with *The Building Show*, a work that took us on a tour of various parts of her beloved 537 Broadway, a co-op in Soho that has, thankfully, kept dance-based and other artists housed and working for over 40 years. Last spring, she had included a performance, viewed across the courtyard from Weis' loft, by Douglas Dunn and Dancers in Dunn's loft at 541 Broadway. This fall, the installation was set entirely within the 537 Broadway building itself, except for one delightful surprise. That this

building has maintained so much of its original spirit, with the hallways especially retaining fixtures and architecture through the years, is increasingly more valuable. The city has disappeared from us, torn down and rebuilt into glittering, glass towers, and sometimes it can feel like artists have disappeared from the city, incapable of meeting the financial demands of survival (see my excerpts of Sarah Schulman's *Gentrification of the Mind* in my [previous post on the end of Lost and Found](#)) there are fewer places to convene and experiment. Today, with an impending Developer-in-Chief and First Son-in-Law eager to tear down historic buildings for the sake of more real estate profits, the preservation of buildings like 537 Broadway become essential. Kudos to Cathy for bringing it forward as the centerpiece and star of her latest work.

After checking in with Kevin Lovelady's ash-smearing firefighter downstairs, I encountered a small band on the stairs with Greg Corbino conducting Maura Gahan, Patrick Gallagher and Maria Manhattan through a freeze dance/freeze play musical sequence which, in deciding to abide by their score, made it very hard to get up the stairs during the brief bursts of music. But, eventually, I crawled up to the 2nd floor, where "in lieu of donations they were taking our coats," and settled in on the floor. Cathy came in complaining about the bad, bad band and called them up before beginning a presentation on how she'd bought her loft from Simone Forti, keeping the space for dance.



Photo by Anja Hiltzenberger

She then delved into the lurid history of previous buildings at that location delivering details from a lectern while a series of images were projected onto a set designed by Clare Dolan. The lurid and colorful history of PT Barnum's 2nd American Museum defined the 2nd-floor section. His museum included a collection of bizarre items, stuffed and living animals, a fake mermaid's skeleton and a freak show –

including the famous original Siamese twins, [Chang and Eng](#), and (according to the slideshow) an apparently time-traveling bearded lady – Circus Amok founder and regular Weis collaborator Jennifer Miller. At one point, Maura’s mermaid is carried out by Kevin’s fireman for a lively moment of performed miracle wherein she sprouts legs. The museum burned in 1865, horrifically killing all of the animals and [boiling two beluga whales alive](#). Barnum re-built the museum but it burned again in 1868.



*Photo by Richard Termine*

Maria then led us up the familiarly creaky stairs to Eden’s Expressway on the 4th floor where Movement Research still holds many classes, workshops and other events. We were invited to “peak in” on a “rehearsal” that Jon Kinzel and Jennifer were “conducting,” which was less rehearsal and more watching two great movers work through some possibly pre-existing material from Jon and delicious improvisational choices from Jennifer. We then filed into Cathy’s [WeisAcres](#) studio for a magical series of rigged curtain shifts amidst live and projected dance sequences where the performers were replicated and mixed live upon their own images creating a multiplicity of timelines and at some points a kind of Siamese-twinning of the dancers.



*Photo by Anja Hitzberger*

As a legendary contributor to mediated live performance, host of her Salon Series for many years, and now, Sundays on Broadway, Cathy Weis has provided the field with a very valuable continuity of community, as well as non-market driven ways to keep gathering and dancing and sharing histories and ideas. And she's always been good for a proper laugh, which was beautifully exemplified when we all turned around to watch Jennifer – outside, across the street and dancing on the sidewalk in overcoat and umbrella as she wove in and out of surprised pedestrians. The perfect intrusion of fanciful discomfort amidst the excesses of capitalist development.