

Goings On: A.K. Burns: Shabby but Thriving, The New Yorker, January 30, 2017, print



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

A.K. Burns: Shabby but Thriving

The white carpeting of Burns's installation was dirty on Day One: the artist had stationed leaking bags of soil around the museum's fifth floor. A battered couch, stripped of its cushioning and glowing like a spaceship, faces the show's centerpiece, "Living Room," a nonnarrative, two-channel video set in a fecund postapocalyptic present and starring an ensemble cast of children and queer artists. It was shot in a prewar building on the Bowery which the museum maintains for its artists-in-residence; Burns treats its interior structure as an analogue for a human being. Upstairs, the kids (in the collective role of the psyche) blur boundaries, dressed in prints that match the sofa's upholstery, while mimicking insects or fish. The adults struggle down stairways (intestines), schlepping garbage bags and furniture scraps. The finale is a party in a dank basement (the uterus), where dancers perform wearing headlamps and T-shirts emblazoned with fragmented slogans: "No," "Her," "Or Bust." Burns's exhibition arrives as many of us are urgently considering the fate of both bodies and the body politic; she has generously provided a punching bag for those who would like to take out some of their frustrations. On Feb. 5, Burns has planned two sessions with lawyers and activists, to help attendees prepare for the resistance.