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curated by: Hybrids

Propaganda Women – Maïa Izzo-Foulquier, Thelma Hell, Zelda Weinen

Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna, curated by Lili Reynaud-Dewar and Olga Rozenblum, 5. 9. – 3. 10. 2020

Discrete Simulation

Crone Wien, Vienna, curated by Jakob Lena Knebl, 5. – 26. 9. 2020

Untitled (Molly House)

Exile, Vienna, curated by Julius Pristauz, 5. 9. – 17. 10. 2020

by Emily McDermott

“What if you reimagine human experience outside of binary structures?,” writes Orit Gat in the introductory essay for this year’s edition of the gallery festival *curated by*. “Then hybridity can become a form of liberation,” she continues. With “Hybrids” as *curated by*’s overarching theme, the twenty-four participating Viennese galleries hosted exhibitions organized by guest curators that addressed subtopics ranging from interspecies relations to gender and body performativity. At Galerie Emanuel Layr, Crone Wien, and Exile, the latter rang loudly, with the curators and artists breaking down binaries and proposing alternate ways forward.

Take, for example, *Propaganda Women*, curated by Lili Reynaud-Dewar and Olga Rozenblum at Galerie Emanuel Layr, which presented work by one mind who identified under three names: Maïa Izzo-Foulquier, her legal identity; Zelda Weinen, a burgeoning rapper; and Thelma Hell, a sex worker, activist, and writer. Izzo-Foulquier’s photographs fall in the style of Nan Goldin and Wolfgang Tillmans, often using a flash to illuminate and capture familiar faces and intimate scenes from the artist’s life. In *Faouzi* (2016), a person sits on a retro couch, their tattooed arms bent and lifted, allowing their hands to cover their face—their sex revealed only by an exposed phallus. To the right of this image hung *June 13th* (undated), a close-up snapshot of someone urinating in the



The Writings of Thelma Hell 2017–2019.

With an introduction by Thierry Schaffauser and contributions by Thelma Hell (eng.). Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna 2020. 24 pages, 18 × 25.7 cm, numerous b/w and color illustrations. www.emanuellayr.com



Maïa Izzo-Foulquier, *Les promises*, 2019. Pigment print on alu dibond, 40 × 60 cm.

shower, the vantage point obscuring any gendered identification. To the left was *Self-Portrait as Frank* (2019), in which Izzo-Foulquier stands naked, looking down, her face covered with one hand and the other holding a mug over her genitalia. Parallel to the artist’s photographs were Weinen’s videos, wherein she addresses questions surrounding the perception of her race and cultural identity as a Person of Color with “white-passing” skin.

The Writings of Thelma Hell 2017–2019, a small booklet disseminated for free and accompanying Izzo-Foulquier/Weinen’s visual work, further unpacked an essential part of the artist’s identity: “The violence that I have experienced as a whore,” Thelma Hell writes, “is the violence of systemic heterosexuality, which I have already experienced as part of a couple, within my family, at work, or simply walking down the street.” This and the other writings were initially published in French on the blog *Ma lumière rouge* (my red light), hosted by the daily newspaper *Libération*. They reveal Izzo-Foulquier/Weinen/Hell’s intellect, but also her struggles of being trapped in one body, of being perceived in one way. “As whores, we accept to *perform femininity*,” she writes in the essay “Whore Feminism for Dummies” (July 5, 2018). “As feminist whores who work with sexuality, we are well placed to observe and understand the artificiality of the gender that all women are compelled to perform on an everyday basis . . . However, for sex workers who perform this femininity as part of their job, the performance of gender demanded of them outside of their professional activities . . . can become harder to bear.”

The performativity required from and the judgment faced by Izzo-Foulquier/Weinen/Hell found expression in her multifaceted artistic output, reflecting a person who refused to be labeled with one mind or one body; a person who yearned for fluidity and what she deemed a third-wave sexual revolution. But in this quest, she was consistently challenged by a binary-loving society, and her inability to exist as a hybrid identity is perhaps in part what drove her to the end:

Maïa/Thelma/Zelda took her own life, aged twenty-eight, in 2019.

So, how do we produce a shift in our normative systems that allows for a being like Izzo-Foulquier to not only exist but to thrive? Through the idea of altering one stable state in order to produce a new stable state, this question was addressed by works in *Discrete Simulation*, a group exhibition curated by Jakob Lena Knebl at Crone Wien. Here, the artist-curator presented a range of works—from videos to objects to photographs to paintings—set against a backdrop of advertising and shelving units from the hardware store Hornbach. In Frederik Heyman’s short video *Y/PROJECT* (2020), originally commissioned for the titular brand’s FW19 accessories campaign, a robot-esque human stands next to a group of lifelike genderless robots stacked atop each other, positioned and moving mechanically in erotic, pleasurable ways. The greenery beneath the robots paired with the video’s me-



Untitled (Molly House).

With a preface by Julius Pristauz and contributions by Caspar Heinemann, Enesi M., Victoria Sin, Simon Würsten Marin (eng.). With works by Karolin Braegger, Anne Doran, Georgia Horgan, David Lindert, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Philipp Timischl, Bruno Zhu a.o. Exile, Vienna 2020. 96 pages, 15 × 21 cm, numerous b/w and color illustrations. € 5.– / www.exilegallery.org



Discrete Simulation, installation view at Crone Wien, Vienna, 2020. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com.

lodic soundtrack, replete with chirping birds, establishes an aura of normalcy—a utopian vision of a queer future.

Near to Heyman's video was CASSILS's photograph *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis* (2011), a self-portrait made in clear reference to Lynda Benglis's iconic feminist 1974 *Artforum* ad. While Benglis posed nude holding a double-ended dildo, CASSILS allows their ripped transmasculine physique to speak for itself with bright red lips, pierced nipples, and bulging biceps. Figurative paintings by Alexander Basil and sculptural objects by Judith Fegerl and Shana Moulton, along with other works in the show, continued to engender discourse surrounding sexual fluidity and hybrid identities, with Hornbach's visuals acting as a constant reminder: everything you think you know or perhaps even take for granted is a construction—be it societal, physical, ideological, or otherwise—and constructions can always be de/reconstructed.

Offering a reconciliation between past and present in order to forge into a nonbinary future constructed anew was *Untitled (Molly House)*, curated by Julius Pristauz at Exile. On the ground floor of the exhibition, Sophia Stemshorn's hand-forged steel sculpture *Keuschheitsgürtel* (Chastity Belt, 2020) rested on the floor near Robin Waart's work (*The loves that didn't make it*) (2020), a stack of pink-hued papers upon which the artist had reclaimed subtitles with the word "love," forming a poetic rumination on the word in question. Nearby hung two of David Lindert's intimate photographs of friends, *Untitled* (2020) and *Hasenheide* (2018), next to two of Anne Doran's untitled collages (both 1990) which construct the silhouettes of figures by using shooting practice targets, replete with bullet holes in the heads, and pornographic magazine cutouts. Identity, sex, and gender were further explored upstairs through pieces like Georgia Horgan's *Is sex interesting? (Costume for Katherina)* (2020), a transparent bustier embroidered with erotic scenes, and Dominykas Canderis's video *Unsuccessful Porn* (2020), which depicts exactly what the title suggests. The title of the exhibition itself was also twofold: today, "molly house" might be understood as an ecstatic place fueled by MDMA, whereas in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries gay men in London referred to each other as mollies, thereby making a molly house a place where gay people could safely meet. Showcasing works made over the last three decades by the aforementioned artists and by Karolin Braegger, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, and Bruno Zhu, among others, the exhibition highlighted the ways in which bodies, sex, and genders are de- and reconstructed in queer communities.

Through unique perspectives, these three exhibitions explored the topic of hybridity by questioning and offering alternatives to the binary



Untitled (Molly House), installation view at Exile, Vienna, 2020. Photo: Christian Siekmeier.

boundaries often ascribed to gender and, in turn, to human bodies. Curator and writer Legacy Russell also explores this in her recent book *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, noting that "binary gender keeps us from our cosmic corporeality, that space where the body can expand and explore in the freedom of abstraction." With their curated by exhibitions, Reynaud-Dewar

and Rozenblum, Knebl, and Pristauz brought together artistic positions that propose such cosmic corporealities, where identities are freed from their singular bodies and binaries. The artists featured, like Russell's troop of glitch feminists, "refuse the rhetoric of 'inclusion' and will not wait for this world to love [them], to understand [them], to make space for [them]." These artists and curators embody Russell's words: They take up space, and break this world, making new ones. . . . find[ing] life, joy, and longevity in breaking what needs to be broken."

These shows were seen in the context of Verein K's Visiting Critics Vienna 2020 residency.

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Jimmy Robert: Akimbo

Nottingham Contemporary, 26. 9. 2020 – 3. 1. 2021

CRAC Occitanie, Sète, 4. 2. – 16. 5. 2021

Museion, Bolzano, 28. 5. – 21. 8. 2021

by Niki Russell

Hands on hips, elbows bowed outward, arms locked in a sharp bend. To stand akimbo is a posture more often associated with confidence, defiance, or even aggression, and yet the corresponding French idiom *faire le pot à deux anses*—literally, "to play the pot with two handles"—conjures something more transitional and performative. A body becoming object, pending or ready to stand in place of another.

The ambiguous and performative body is present throughout *Akimbo*, a survey exhibition of the French artist Jimmy Robert, which brings together diverse works from 2002 to the present day. The recurring presence of the black male body, often his own, oscillates between politics and materiality. The physical body as image, falling, enswathed, curved around until it bends back upon itself, as armature, propping up or being held in place provisionally by other materials. As representation, these works highlight the intersectional nature of the body, through racialized and gendered readings. To paraphrase Carol Hanisch's feminist mantra: the personal body is political.

Bodies, here, are presented not as a stable or fixed entity but instead are continually being reconfigured to produce affect. It is an approach that brings to mind Rosi Braidotti's "nomadic subject" and that, described by Lisa Blackman in *Immaterial Bodies* (2012), is defined by either their movement or process. Individual works by Robert attempt to capture fragments of these bodies in motion, to home in on the tensions between their embodiment and the objects that touch, resist, or contain them.

The grainy Super 8 film *Brown Leatherette* (2002) presents an intermediate space, perhaps a service station at night under artificial lighting. In a static shot, a figure slides across a row of waiting-room seating, arms stretched outward, pushing back against the resistance between faux leather clothing and surface friction. In *Untitled (Ompdrailles)* (2013), by contrast, an inkjet print is draped over a turned oak dowel, allowing partial access to an image on either side

of the fold. A living body collapsed at the base of a statue, arm curved around the prone head, and an outstretched leg reaching back up the pedestal to touch the plunging bronze foot of *La mort d'Ompdrailles* (by Charles van der Stappen, 1892), whilst overleaf revealing two sculpted male figures, one holding another in death.

Prints, drawings, and other works on paper are layered as collage, manipulated into fluid material, and spatially dispersed amongst numerous films and texts. These distinct elements coalesce as a series of stages that punctuate the galleries. The overriding condition of this installation is one of back-and-forth movement between the



Jimmy Robert, *Untitled (Ompdrailles)*, 2013. Archival inkjet print, turned oak, 144 × 97 × 10 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin.

artist, different components that comprise the exhibition, and ourselves. As we follow lines within the work, trace particular textures, and move through the architectural space, we encounter each other. The delicate outline of a male figure in Greco-Roman robes, *Silk* (2015), offers a translucent screen through which to read other works and people inhabiting the exhibition architecture, allowing bodies and materials to slip in and out of focus.

Carefully installed fragments produce edges that cut across and break down bodies. Photographs are roughly torn or cut into neat triangles, taped and pieced back together to allude to three-dimensional space. Here, representation breaks down through a type of pointillism caused by a printing process, and there, glimpses of a choreography, or performing to the camera. Hands grasp a book. A leg kicks back to catch falling paper. We begin to replicate this fragmentation and performance in the space as we tread lines that connect human and nonhuman bodies. Robert has previously noted that there is still work to be done for the audience. In a necessary close reading, the sense of our ongoing performance unfolds, and for us this exhibition comes to be a consequence of ongoing processes in our body. As Umberto Eco would say, "the work remains inexhaustible insofar as it is open."

Niki Russell is an artist, curator, and currently the director at Primary, Nottingham (GB).

A Cage Is a Cage Is a Cage

Joanna Piotrowska: Frowst

Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 18. 9. – 6. 12. 2020

by Ewa Borysiewicz

Joanna Piotrowska's *Frowst* is the first institutional show by the internationally recognized artist in her native country. The word employed in the exhibition title, designating staleness and stuffiness, generates exclusively negative associations and, accidentally or not, this seems apt for the current times. *Frowst* not only relates to the consequences of isolation caused by the pandemic, but on a regional scale the term might refer to the atmosphere inside the country. The recent reelection of a right-wing president confirmed that the public increasingly approves of an all-encompassing black-and-white rhetoric and participates in a widespread effort to list characteristics of the Other in order to clearly indicate who should be granted access to a community. Piotrowska's show, curated by Magdalena Komornicka, is a lucid, welcome reminder that today certainty is occasional, and that identity (be it gender or national) usually presents itself in shades of gray. The artist's carefully choreographed black-and-white photographs, often resembling a sterile documentary, encourage a projection—interpretations infused with one's personal history—rather than an irrefutable, immovable judgment.

Just as the political manifests itself in the personal, the body reflects one's mental state. Piotrowska's photographs document the translation of the psychological into the physical: the models' unnatural and bizarre postures convey the complexity of relationships and a vast array of moods. This fluid nature of the bodily and the mental, the mutual permeating of macro- and microcosms, is reflected in the construction of the exhibition itself. Instead of focusing on a particular aspect of Piotrowska's oeuvre, the artist-curator duo chooses to handle it in a holistic fashion. By emphasizing moments that conceptually connect subsequent pieces, one series never ends completely but fluently transforms into the next.

Nevertheless, the show incorporates the most crucial of Piotrowska's works. Familial photographic souvenirs and Bert Hellinger's family constellations (a method of working through clannish entanglements and healing trans-generational trauma) inform the titular cycle (*Frowst*, 2013–14). The artist portrays household members in ambivalent, eerie constellations. One of the photos (*XIII Frowst*, 2013–14) depicts a woman watching a man (presumably her son) lying on a bed in a defenseless pose. The stuffy ambience of scenes depicted in this series is amplified by an overwhelming variety of patterns on both bodies (veins, sweat, moles) and objects (blankets, curtains, paneling) which dominate the photographs. The monotony and repeatability of decorations give rise to associations with transference of behaviors and beliefs from one generation to another.

Following a dreamlike logic, this odd mother and child couple reemerges in the exhibition, this time neighbored by fragments of another one of Piotrowska's series. *Untitled* (2015) also touches upon the subject of restaging: poses depicted in self-defense manuals by male models are found here, as instructed by the artist-photographer, reenacted by young women. The effect is

uncanny: the contorted black-and-white bodies, immobilized in uncomfortable positions, seem to be battling an invisible (and perhaps invincible) enemy; undeniably, patriarchy is a fiend so ordinary that it is considered natural. Women are again the protagonists in the video *Animal Enrichment* (2019). The objects (resembling instruments of either pleasure or pain), with which the performers are impressively interacting, are items designed to aid with zoochosis—a repetitive behavior pattern observable in animals held in captivity. Complementing this piece is *Enclosure XXX* (2019), a photographic record of a meticulously arranged, yet menacing space in a zoological garden. The empty, frugal architecture of a concrete pool meant to accommodate young seals emanates with a grim aura: the space designed to animate the dull life in captivity itself awakens memories of a prison. Here, the difference between seemingly exclusive notions (in this case: coercion and protection) is not at all obvious.

The delicate, thin line demarcating care from imprisonment is one of the many ways to organize the world around us: it allows differentiation between strangers and kin, the feeble and the wardens, the human and the animal. Ernst Gombrich, referring to Aby Warburg's *Pathosformel*—a gestural language signifying a "common expressive purpose (rather than a formal



Joanna Piotrowska, *Enclosure XXX*, 2019. Gelatin silver print, 200 × 160 cm.

similarity)"—described it as "the primeval reaction of man to the universal hardships of his existence, that underlies all his attempts at mental orientation."² Gestures are the central motif of the show in Warsaw, and the ones preserved by Piotrowska seem to be coming from the middle of a story in which a conclusion has not yet been drawn. Therefore, the exhibition at Zachęta can be studied as a catalogue for new, curious kinds of expressive schemes, a collection of more ambivalent, yet equally emotionally charged, visual formulas.

- 1 Sharon Sliwinski, "New York Transfixed: Notes on the Expression of Fear," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 30, nos. 3–4 (2008), pp. 232–52, esp. p. 247.
- 2 Ernst H. Gombrich and Fritz Saxl, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1986), p. 223.

Ewa Borysiewicz is a freelance curator and writer based in both Poland and Switzerland.