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HANNAH BLACK PRESS

Flash Art

FAILURES OF INFLUENCE



HANNAH BLACK
in conversation with **ESTELLE HOY**
photographed by **LEE WEI SWEE**

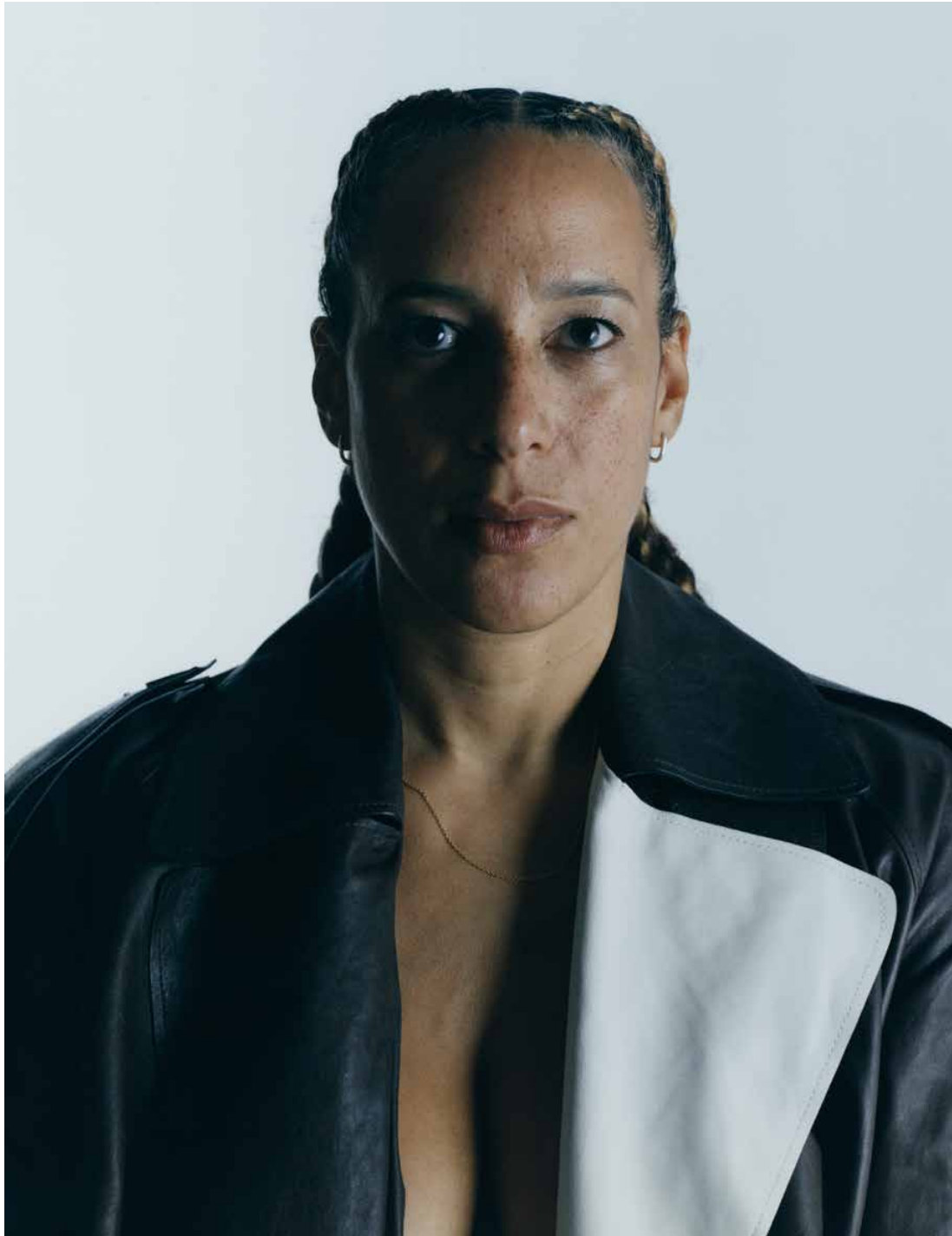
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Seaworthy: Ransacking and Looting
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HANNAH BLACK

IN CONVERSATION WITH
ESTELLE HOY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
LEE WEI SWEE



How do we swim in the same direction?

Free will is conceivable when humans are liberated from determination and can question the philosophical background of the rhetoric of freedom, which is exploited so dutifully by economic libertarians who have decimated social life for decades. It smells how it looks. Questioning political methodologies without necessarily rejecting one habitually venerated, Hannah Black plays cultural agitator by going beyond the cataclysmic rowdiness of looting and smashing windows. Her conceptual move is to differentiate between two methodologies: one. Biting and snarling in pursuit of ontological freedom. And two. A soft, pragmatic approach that aligns itself with persuasion. Which, mind you, is just another way of seeking ontological freedom. This isn't to say Black hasn't deployed the former, probably broken a storefront window or two, grabbed a crocodile Lacoste pullover, and thrown Pepsi bottles in riots in New York, Manchester, or port-side Marseilles, where she's now based. It's simply a new assignation of image as an alluring, potent, variable social force. Her video works, open letters, books, and performances have a unique talent for appealing to their audience through the contagion of political possibility quietly revealing itself to you. Stimulating the collective imagination, Hannah Black calls us to action through convincing videos and words that tell us all that there are ways to shape public opinions and attitudes outside of ruthless didacticism. Left organizers are not arbiters of ethical methodologies.



Broken Windows, 2022. Video. 15'. Edition 1 of 5 + 2 AP. Installation view at Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.

HANNAH BLACK IN CONVERSATION WITH ESTELLE HOY

Estelle Hoy: Hannah, thank you so much for making time to speak with me; it's deeply appreciated. Quiet rage and persuasive methodologies seem to creep into your new film work, *Politics* (2022) and *Broken Windows* (2022), recently exhibited at Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris, as part of "Condition," a film series curated by Hugo Bausch Belbachir. In the growing complexity of the puritanical culture of the far left, you begin to detach yourself from the invigorating emotional scars of front-line protest interventions in order to replay messages second-hand in film. Unwilling to deny the overwhelming force of Black murder by white police, you capture clear-minded discourse from two New York-based abolitionists, Aaina Lakha and Kay Gabriel, who calmly articulate their revulsion of skewed racial cartographies in protest/looting practices. The employment of police force to contain the havoc caused by dispossession is utterly needless, Aaina Lakha asserts. At no point in the committed, open dialogue of the film do the participants yell, scream, condemn, or talk over one another. The quietly affected voices of tense witnesses speak candidly and smartly about fraught factions, with no confronting images of emotional "demonstrations" (the term applied if you're white) or "riots" (if you're Black). The initial organizer, Aaina Lakha, wears a black choker with a heart at the front of the throat in *Politics*, which seems perfectly emblematic of the argument. Choking systemic injustice in different ways, cutting off its air supply, and asphyxiating every fucked-up racial obstacle, you don't *interview* the players so much as *document* their response *sans* interference. This is important. Having the fortitude to trust that our "duty" as artists is not to single-handedly ratify problems or even upend them; it is to inaugurate a steadfast allegiance to eschewing didacticism. Hannah, how can we press against violations in different ways?

Hannah Black: These videos were made in 2021 for a show in Toronto in early 2022, curated by Jenifer Papararo. So they came from that time, closer to the 2020 uprising. At the time of the interview in *Politics*, both Aaina and Kay were organizers within the Democratic Socialists of America, a political organization whose membership increased a lot around the time of the 2020 uprising. This was perhaps because of an expectation that DSA would be able to harness the energy of the riots and transform it into political change. But it's very hard to turn a riot into politics. That's what we see them talking about. They have different stances, and some of my questions were confusing or provocative, so, despite the lack of yelling, the conversation actually contains a lot of potential conflict, which is one reason why they're both smoking furiously throughout.

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Politics is exhibited alongside another video work, *Broken Windows*, in which I interviewed three witnesses/participants in some incidents of looting in SoHo during the uprising. All five of the interviewees in both videos are beautiful women (even the ones whose faces you can't see). That was a deliberate casting decision. I was thinking of how a riot is figured as a kind of frivolous or excessive or histrionic or purely acquisitive act, as if it were a high femme activity.

The two videos together present two extremes: the legible politics of public policy and elected representatives, which is the realm that the organizers are operating in, and the illegible politics of looting, which has multiple messy significances, and its value is contested even within left contexts. It is also illegal, so I can't name or even show the faces of the interviewees, and I had to edit the video according to legal advice. That actually made it a better video. It's an accidental collaboration with the law. The interviewees in *Broken Windows* describe literal broken windows, but "broken windows" is also the name of a notoriously racist zero-tolerance form of policing popularized by Rudy Giuliani, who was mayor of New York City from 1994 to 2001. Policing strategies like this make it clear that property rules everything around us. It's commonplace to say that police murders of poor Black people are not really violations but just the most spectacular moments of a system working exactly as intended. So, I understand the last part of your question as: How do we come to experience the everyday workings of capitalism as a repression of other possibilities? I don't have a universal description or prescription, but I'm interested in how that happens for people, even if just for a moment.



Bad Timing, 2023. Installation view at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, 2023. Photography by Den Frie Udstillingsbygning. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.



Broken Windows, 2022. Video stills. 15'.
Edition 1 of 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy of the artist
and Arcadia Missa, London.



HANNAH BLACK IN CONVERSATION WITH ESTELLE HOY

EH Your interest in *how* it happens for others seems thoughtful and inclusive. *Politics* almost lulled me into a fuller understanding of racial violations despite, quite frankly, not having full access to their intellectual prowess. It was a dialogue in which I was out of my depth on occasion, but it only persuaded me to educate myself further. Google Dictionary got straight-up burn-out. Is the work within reach for a wide range of gallery-goers outside of a certain level of grad-school education?

HB I think the difference in language across the two videos partly reflects the central difference they're illustrating: the looting video is anecdotal and concrete; the politics video is abstract and theoretical. I enjoy the way they talk because it's emphatic and libidinal.

EH The work speaks the truth. Not the entire truth because there's no way to say it all; it's literally impossible. So language fails, and it's through this exact impossibility that the truth holds onto the *real*, as Jacques Lacan would say, in abundant sweat and libidinal energy. I'm reminded of something quite emphatic that Lacan himself said: "The reason we go to poetry is not for wisdom but for the dismantling of wisdom." Or thereabouts. Could you tell us a little about how this categorical exhibition was initiated?

HB Hugo Bausch Belbachir at Fitzpatrick Gallery first proposed showing the videos there around the time of the riots protesting the murder of Nahel Merzouk, a seventeen-year-old murdered by police in Paris. Though it was made in the wake of the riots following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, I intend *Broken Windows* as a small celebration of all these moments of raw courage, the affirmation of the right to live. I love the Lacan quote. I identify with that description of what poetry does as dismantling wisdom, which is something like what a riot does, and of course, dismantling something is a way to clarify it.

EH Energized dismantling is probably something you see regularly now with a new baby, isn't it?! How has your experience of having a ten-month-old child clarified your understanding of art and politics?



"Dede, Eberhard, Phantom". Installation view at Kunstverein Braunschweig, 2019. Photography by Stephen Shark. Courtesy of the artist and Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin.

HB My baby is a wonderful little person, full of energy and love, like all babies. Through thinking so much recently about the perfection of babies, I sometimes get super sentimental and feel like I have a new depth of perception of how wasteful, violent, and perverse the world is — everyone started out as a baby and is, therefore, perfect. It's crazy! Sometimes I feel this as an apolitical or para-political sorrow, and sometimes as a renewed desire for revolution. But now she's starting to become a toddler, to individuate herself and say a pre-verbal version of "no," and I have to say my own "nos" back to her. We're gradually moving away from the boundless mommy-baby dyad and into a relationship that's more about social values like negotiation, humor, conflict, and mutual generosity. Finally, I can start to accept that babies are born into culture, not nature. I spend a lot of my time at playgroups, mostly attended by working-class French parents. Here, too, I see the complications of the politics of social reproduction: I am viscerally grateful that the state provides these spaces for me and my baby, but there are glimpses of how the education system functions as a disciplinary tool, training people from a young age in colonial French ideology.

EH Yes, a dis/advantageous collaboration with state law; we need a second interview! [laughs] In these films, the aspect of "apolitical sorrow" feels like it's been reworked for revolution, a kind of roundabout way of getting to the same desired outcome. That is, finding various artistic methods that affirm the right to live. It's a potent avowal and postlingual argument I can get behind with maximum esprit de corps. Do you think you bring the same social values you mentioned earlier — negotiation, humor, conflict, and mutual generosity — into your artistic practice?

HB I think there is a lot of humor and conflict, definitely. I strive to be generous, creatively, intellectually, spiritually, and financially, but I don't always succeed. Maybe there's also an ongoing negotiation with myself and with the context of the art world. In relation to the first part of your question, I think everything that actually happens happens somewhere in between those two poles of apolitical sorrow and desire for revolution. Not only political events but also artworks and these "social values" we are talking about. I also want to







The Hunt I, 2020. Three fake deer antlers and pages from: "Oral history interview with Ed Ruscha", 1980 October 29 - 1981 October 2 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Wikipedia page on Marquis de Sade; and blog post on Louis XVI, the Royal Hunt and Bastille Day, 102 x 25 x 20 cm. Photography by Eva Herzog. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa, London.

HANNAH BLACK IN CONVERSATION WITH ESTELLE HOY

say that in between answering this question and the previous one, I've been spending most of my time for the past few days following the Israeli atrocities in Gaza, and I'm thinking more than ever of the fervent almost contentless intensity of love of children, how it lives in a weird substrate or beyond of politics. I can't stop thinking of the parents in Gaza, not only the bereaved ones; it breaks my heart, but also the ones trying to hold up the sky for their terrified children. Meanwhile, the Israelis are sharing images of kidnapped children, and some people are crying over those; they are as devastated and undone as I am by news of the brutalized and murdered children of Gaza. But in order to respond to this adequately, something has to happen that isn't just affect; it isn't just love or horror. And that's the space of politics, a super-compromised, super-complicated space. (Also, free Palestine.) Thank you so much, Estelle.

EH: Free Palestine.

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Black's conditional commitment to politics and poetry is initiated privately and publicly, built upon dissonance, passion, metonyms, apathy, empathy, and all the ruins of the world. No one deserves anything, and everyone deserves something. *How* do we turn riots into politics, fill the raw political and cognitive fissures of injustice, find our sea legs, and endure in our unconditional pursuit of making us equal? How do we swim in the same direction? Black is looking to make and unmake the political refrain in all its messy signifiers, practicing new disciplines and systems as many times as permissible before getting caught, until we finally — and rightfully — register True North.

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Hannah Black (1981, Manchester) lives and works between London and New York. Black's work functions conceptually through a co-dependence between thinking and feeling, using conversations and collaborations featuring texts, voices, prints, videos, sculptural interventions, and performances. Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions at Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris; The Art Gallery of York University, Toronto; Luma Westbau, Zürich; Arcadia Missa, London; Kunstverein Braunschweig; Performance Space, New York; Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin; CAC – Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva; Chisenhale Gallery, London; Bodega, New York; New Museum Theater, New York; and Transmission, Glasgow. Group exhibitions include: Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen; ICA Miami; Kunstverein Freiburg; Busan Biennale; Manifesta 13, Marseilles; Swiss Institute, New York; Sharjah Biennial; Tate St Ives; Arsenal Contemporary Art, New York; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; The High Line, New York; Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin; The Kitchen, New York; and Château Shatto, Los Angeles. Black's critical writing encompasses various contributions to *The New Inquiry*, *Artforum*, and *Bookforum*. Her previous books include *Tuesday or September or The End* (2021), *Dark Pool Party* (2016), and *Life* (2017, with Juliana Huxtable).

Estelle Hoy is a writer and art critic based in Berlin. Her critically acclaimed book *Pisti, 80 rue de Belleville* was published in 2020 (After 8 Books) with an introduction by Chris Kraus. She is currently working on a forthcoming book of essays with After 8 Books, Paris. Hoy regularly publishes in the international art press. She is editor-at-large at *Flash Art*.

CURA.

Hannah Black
2020

Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris
September 2 – September 30, 2023



Hannah Black, 2020. Exhibition view at Fitzpatrick Gallery, 2023.

The reactions to the protest movements in France in the weeks following the racist murder of a young teenager by a white police officer in June 2023 were apt proof of the only contempt that oppressed classes could receive when presenting themselves as their own political entity. What had largely been characterized as a set of vital demonstrations, had been transcribed as a global ensauvlement of those who were set out to silence. At the same time as an obviously racist murder, part of the police's colonial history, was taking effect, the furious reactions of those who could also have been shot – and who symbolically smashed cars, shop windows, or burned the flag of the country that had colonized and impoverished their parents' – were solemnly judged as barbarians, thieves, murderers and looters. I remember precisely the moment when, watching television with my friends, the dissociation was made, as if obvious, between a demonstration – led by white activists – and a riot – led by non-whites.



Hannah Black, 2020. Exhibition view at Fitzpatrick Gallery, 2023.

They speak of a 'new cartography of riots' in neighborhoods they call 'sensitive', 'popular'. They speak of 'urban violences even more intense than that of 2005', referring to the movements that followed the deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, who were electrocuted in an electrical substation while trying to escape from the police. They speak of a mob of looters for a few stolen Lacoste sweaters, a few bags taken from broken windows. Yet this looting carries its meaning in its reverse; it manifests the direct abolition of the commodity form, the suspension of exchange structures from the rules of the Capital, the rupture of the social contract in its identity of class, gender and race.

It is the use of this symbolic force that is discussed by Aaina Lakha and Kay Gabriel in *Politics* (2022). How far can this strategy go? How does it lead to a popular consciousness, a common receptivity? Through the elaboration of these autonomous means, rioting and looting is engaged as a time when the state is losing out, unable to contain populations within the systems it has established through the authority of the police. It's disobedience. There's also the question of purpose, and the extent to which its strategies lead to a modification of class, gender and racial systems. Maybe that's not the question either, and that these moments manifest themselves for something else. That the organizational expression of these struggles is above all a moral, or anti-moral. Because it creates this pleasure, this joy in fulfilled desire, forbidden in this very social contract, against the injunction to obey in order to form a collective convention that elaborates the extraordinary. Which, in the end, is the closest thing we have to the idea of freedom.



Hannah Black, 2020. Exhibition view at Fitzpatrick Gallery, 2023.



Hannah Black, 2020. Exhibition view at Fitzpatrick Gallery, 2023.



Hannah Black, 2020. Exhibition view at Fitzpatrick Gallery, 2023.

***Broken Windows* (2022)** brings together interviews with three anonymous individuals who, in 2020, took part in the looting of dozens of stores in the streets of New York as part of the protests sparked by a racist crime committed by a white police officer in the USA that same year. If every detail relating the places and names of these events is masked by the sound of a police car siren, it is in this sense the application of a conscious censorship, put in place to protect the discourses of these activists, and to protect their legal identities. Raising the question of how far activist political discourse can reach in a judicial system established through reprobation and punishment, each experience asserts itself in the possibility of gathering, translating and transmitting facts that cannot be precisely archived.

Impotent in the face of the rule of justice – which defends only those who decide it – the identities of the three activists are masked by a piece of wood, a barricade, the same as those erected on all the major stores during the BLM movement (and which it was assumed had increased the cost of wood by 275% in the USA), and others, in France too, as everywhere else. It's a report of censorship enforced by authority, by what Cedric J. Robinson understood as *all the events, instruments and organs which contribute the existential boundaries to any and all individuals. (...) An absurd, irrational and arbitrary placed insight which contains the first and last marks in the universe sustained by faith and fatigued intellectual brutality in the presumption that there is nothing beyond.*

Perhaps, it's surely because it might only for this ecstasy that these events take place, that they are in essence *the true meaning of life.*

CREDITS

All images courtesy the artist and Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris.

032c

The Last World: Hannah Black Investigates Mommy Issues and Death

July 4, 2023|Jordan/Martin Hell

“How to not blow up the world, even though it sucks?,” asks artist Jordan/Martin Hell in his interview with writer and artist Hannah Black. Taking Black’s novella *Tuesday Or September Or the End* as a starting point, the two artists discuss how incest and mommy issues correlate with various apocalyptic happenings and death as a universal feeling.

“and what has been done / May never be undone / So take your sad song / and sail into the next life . . .” —Grouper, “Clearing”

The hyoid is the U-shaped neck bone that’s broken in one-third of all homicides by strangulation. It’s also the bone responsible for some of the most vital machinations of the throat and tongue. In Chinese medicine, “plum pit chi” refers to the psychosomatic feeling of having an obstruction in the throat. In Western medicine, it’s called “globus” or “having a frog in your throat.” For a long time, I used to suffer from nightmares where I couldn’t talk or breathe and instead collapsed under the weight of total blackness beginning at the throat until I broke through it and awoke, panting in a panic.

In 2022 Elon Musk tweeted “Vox populi, vox dei” or the voice of the people is the voice of God, when Trump got reinstated to Twitter. For a cycle we were inundated with news of AIs being programmed to troll Drake by leaking his viral bops before they were even conceived of. Maybe it was orchestrated by larger forces to set the scene for the inevitably dumb conversation we’re all starting to have about emergent super-tech regulations in an already bombed-out music industry. Under late-stage capitalism, medical school has become so dystopian-ly expensive that scientists post 3D printable mockups of a cadaver’s collected hyoid bones online for poor students to use to study.

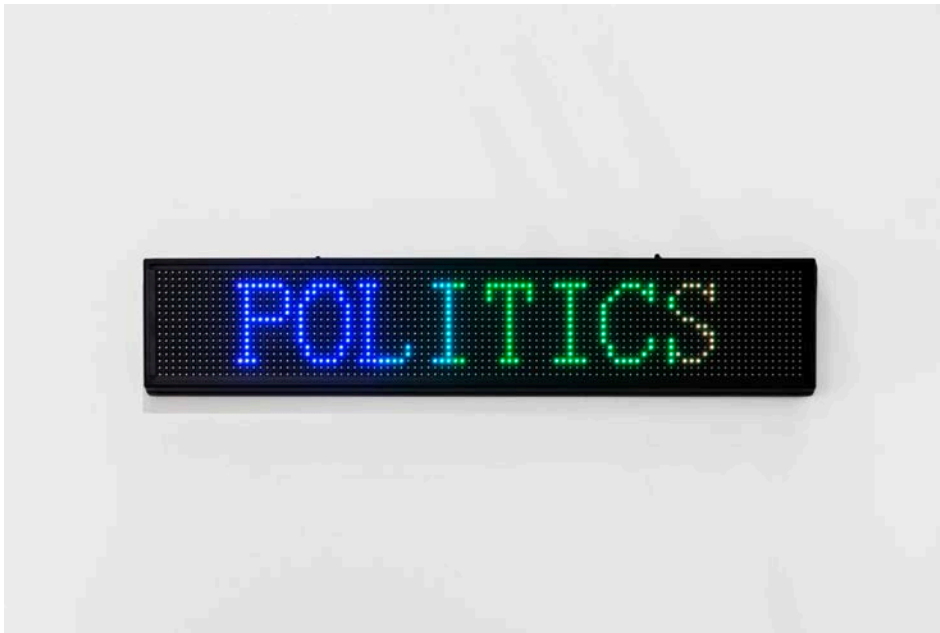
In Hannah Black’s *There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable* (plum pit qi, hyoid bone) the artist mines Taoism, fruit, and Freud, asking what exact bone breaks when one is strangled, and if we blow it up could we save the world? Ok, maybe I’m putting words in her mouth. Black doesn’t seem the type to want to blow up the world, even if it sucks.



"There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable," (plum pit qi, hyoid bone,) 2023. Courtesy of the Artist and Arcadia Missa, London.

In her most recent novella *Tuesday Or September Or the End*, she crafts worlds within worlds of dual internalities following the intrigue and antics of a newly separated couple named Bird and Dog as they ride out an alien invasion, an election, and Covid-19 in the comfort or discomfort of their own respective fuck ups. Utopia is a pendulum, continually panning through scenes of interrogation, deflection, exploitation, and action more like vaporwave in the haze of flu than the Michael Bay style pyrotechnics we've come to associate with the apocalypse. There's a near-constant muck of bad TV, restless situationships, social unrest, family drama, existential panic, Covid-19 travel restrictions, and worldwide collective alien obsession, to add a wild card into the mix. Then, the smoke clears and the real work begins as aliens and humankind put together a world worth dying for in the most unilateral ways possible (or impossible).

I caught up with Hannah Black in London to ask her about her recent work and her ambient philosophical relationship to being alive and giving a fuck in 2023— such as she lives and imagines it.



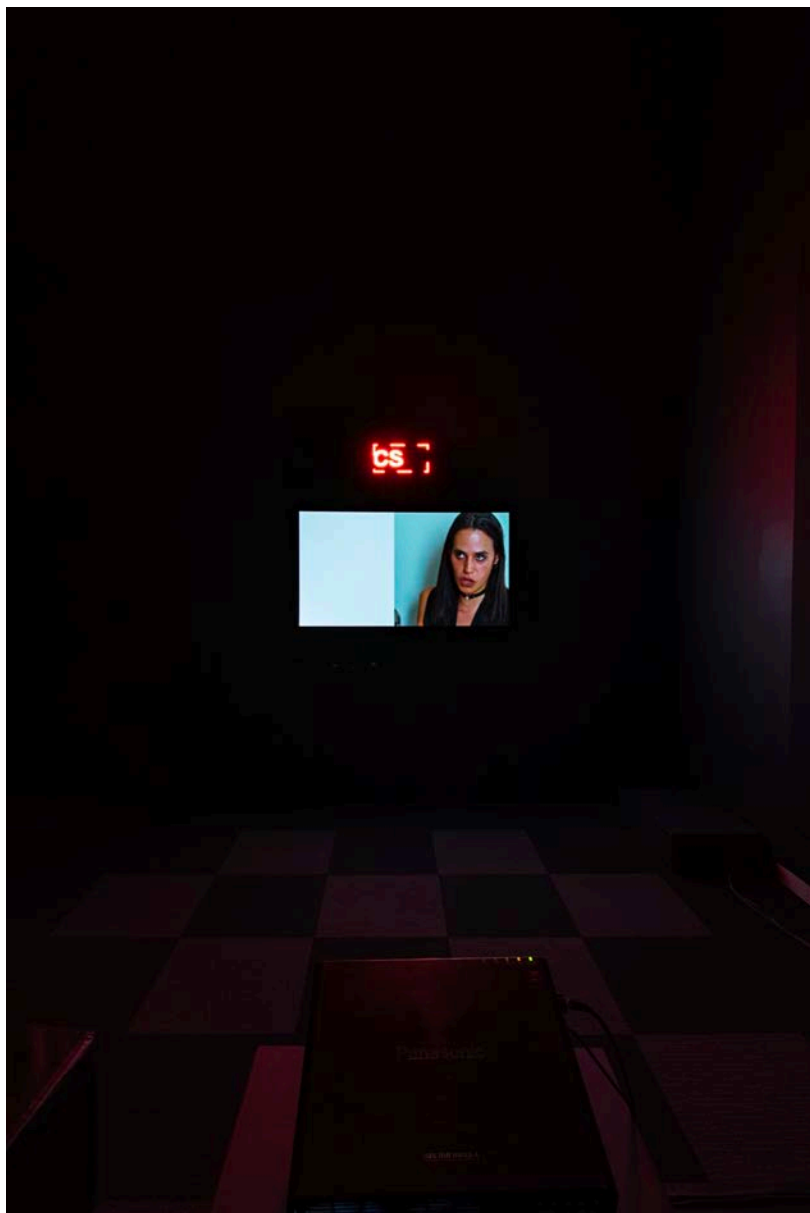
"Politics," 2023. Courtesy of the Artist and Arcadia Missa, London.

JORDAN/MARTIN HELL: What happened to you or your work during the pandemic and why did you write *Tuesday, September or The End*?

HANNAH BLACK: I want to say upfront that I'm writing out these answers to you after an attempt to answer them in real-time, and I hope I can say things better here, but I'm writing next to a sleeping baby. For me, the first year or two of the pandemic was a boom-and-bust era of insane overvaluations of and disappointments in my capacity to be adequate to my friendships, uprisings, political organizing, and so on. The book combines the registers of hype and crash by being both ambitious and slight.

J/MH: What is the relationship between sex and death in the book? What is sex like as you imagine it? What is death like?

HB: I imagine sex as a pure synthesizing wave, but I experience it via my actual body. My body is also what binds me to the life/death problem. I can't remember where, but recently I read that anything as universal as death must have something good about it. I feel sympathetic to this because I recently had a baby, which brings a feeling of universal vulnerability. I think while writing I was interested in the astrological thought figure of Pluto, which is the alchemical principle—the possibility of alchemy, which is something to do with the idea of an essence. In astrology this relates to sex and death because they are material transformations. I was interested in how transformative forces have been captured and put to work by capitalism. I think that's the kind of sex/death thing going on in the book.



"The Meaning of Life," 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Art Gallery of York University, Toronto.



"The Meaning of Life," 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Art Gallery of York University, Toronto.

J/MH: In the novel, the character Dog is invited into the home of another character named Fossa while he is canvassing in support of a grassroots campaign for a Bernie Sanders-type quasi-fictional electoral candidate called Moley Salamanders. They disagree repeatedly and do not reconcile their differences at all during their initial meeting. But instead of leaving, Dog and Fossa sleep together and then begin a three-weeklong situationship, quarantining together in the midst of the beginning of the pandemic despite Dog having a girlfriend. Why do those characters choose to fuck each other instead of revolutionizing the world or parting ways after it becomes clear that no political progress will be made? Is there an inherent erotics to political persuasion? Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

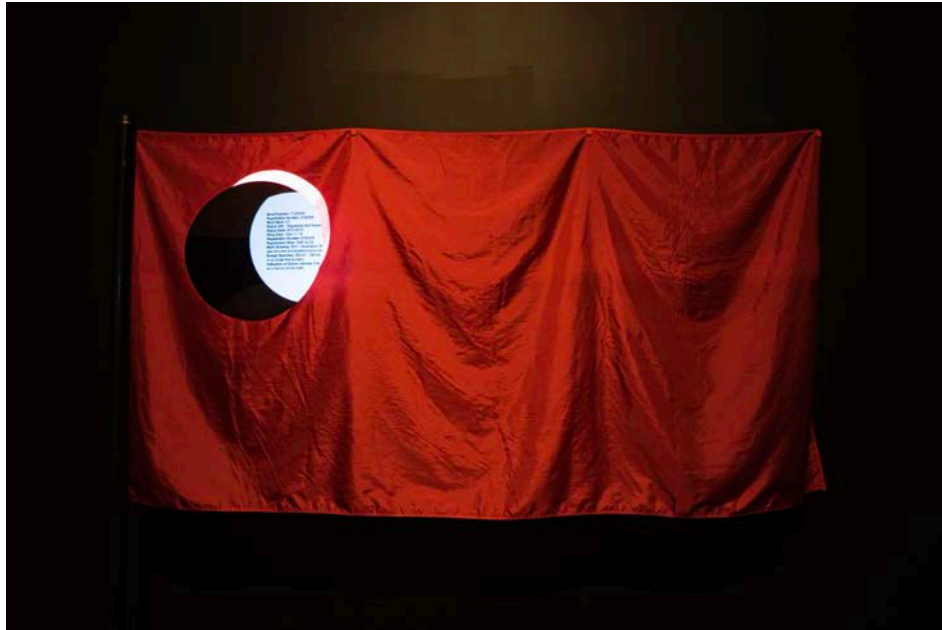
HB: This is a great question and I will need a couple of years to think about it! One thing I distinctly remember about the writing process was that I felt that I had to deal in a deep way with TV because watching TV was a huge part of the early pandemic for a lot of people. Other than that, this was another aspect of how I tried to stage the election/insurrection continuum via Dog and Bird's relationship. Dog and Bird both go their separate ways but what they each encounter is, firstly, the problem of the family (this was big in early Covid-19, because it forced the issue of normative categories of care), and secondly, the inverse of their politics: Dog goes canvassing and encounters this sort of deconstructed household; Bird enters the abyss and encounters (the impossibility of) revolution in the form of the aliens. Or a simpler way to say all this is that Bird has her daddy issue and Dog investigates his mommy issue. In my own creative process, the political aspects got confused with some intense realizations I was having about myself, and I think that the book is this strange convoluted little work partly because of that confusion.



"The Meaning of Life," 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Art Gallery of York University, Toronto.

J/MH: Similarly, there are themes of incest and “mommy issues.” What does the apocalypse have to do with the collapse of the nuclear family such as it is proselytized in conservative media today?

HB: In the conservative media, the family is a fantasy apparatus that allows a certain type of ultra-repressive politics in the name of freedom. And on the other side of the culture war, I think the image of family is like the logo of a social nausea caused by longing, whether it's queer family or abolition of family—both of those are just ways of referencing the incurability of endemic atomization.



"The Meaning of Life," 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Art Gallery of York University, Toronto.

J/MH: Does that interest in motherhood transfer to the hyoid bone piece from Frieze NY 2023? You've said elsewhere that it's the "breastfeeding bone."

HB: The hyoid bone sculpture began with my interest in a diagnostic crossover between traditional Chinese medicine and psychoanalysis, the sensation of something stuck in the throat, which in both cases seems to have something to do with the condition of being feminized or hystericized or being a woman. The hyoid bone is an otherwise unattached bone anatomically stuck in the throat, it's important to the actions of speaking and swallowing—and the muscles that hold it in place are the ones a baby uses to suckle, so that was very relevant to my current interests! I wanted to make it really big and heavy. I would like to make a hyoid bone the size of an analyst's couch.

J/MH: What about the title, There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable (plum pit qi, hyoid bone)? Where did that come from?

HB: It's from Freud's essay "The Interpretation of Dreams," in which he describes his own dream of examining a woman's throat. He later died of cancer in that area of the body. He says this uninterpretable place is the navel of the dream—more mommy imagery! I was amused by the meaningless, navel-like association between "plum pit qi" which is the traditional Chinese medicine name for the stuck-in-throat feeling, as if a plum pit were stuck in your throat, and the word "unplumbable."

Credits

Text JORDAN/MARTIN HELL

FRIEZE

The Evolutionary and Revolutionary Thresholds of Hannah Black and Sophie Friedman-Pappas

Paired together at Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York, Friedman-Pappas explores the continuing drive toward industrialization while Black critiques the world of racial capitalism born from it

BY JESSICA S. KWOK IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS, US REVIEWS | 07 SEP 22



During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the price of plywood increased by 275 percent in the US. While this inflation resulted in part from supply limitations, there was speculation that it could also be attributed to the increase in demand from countless retailers who boarded up their storefronts during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. It is, therefore, both apt and subversive that Hannah Black has also 'boarded up' the faces of the performers in her video *Broken Windows* (all works 2022) with a plywood motif as a tongue-in-cheek signifier of protection of identity rather than property. Black's video works are paired with Sophie Friedman-Pappas's tactile sculptures in a two-person exhibition at Meredith Rosen Gallery. This dialogue explores the Anthropocene as a site of evolutionary and revolutionary thresholds, culminating in a contemporary world inexorably built on racial capitalism.



Hannah Black, *Broken Windows*, 2022, film still. Courtesy: the artist and Meredith Rosen Gallery

The concept of race, as outlined by theorists such as Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism* (1983), was birthed from capitalism – particularly through enslavement – and the maintenance of that economic system has continually demanded the commodifying of 'other' populations and environments. In Black's *Politics*, two organizers discuss ways to ground the US uprisings against the epidemic of police murder of disproportionately African Americans within the dialectics of social change. The conversation focuses on looting, an act Black positions as abolitionist because it temporarily ruptures prevailing late-capitalist structures.

While Friedman-Pappas's work does not deal directly with race, it layers Black's by exploring the evolutionary trajectory of environmentalism and material commodification that led to the society Black critiques. In *Socrates' pigeon house*, *Triantaros*, *Barn hosted by Sokratis-Nikos*, rabbit skin is transformed into parchment for drawing. Skin is the site of human-made metamorphoses: the production of leather to make expensive handbags, for instance, or the vexed social construction of race from the color of human skin. The Anthropocene cannot be unbound from racial and colonial violence: both the animal from which this hide was acquired and the humans continuing to be objectified and exploited have been subsumed into a capitalist ecosystem. Only a revolution can ensure freedom.



Sophie Friedman-Pappas, *Hide Pile #3*, 2022, vegetable-tanned leather, duct tape, and watercolour, 76.2 x 76.2 x 73.7 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Meredith Rosen Gallery

Animal hide reappears in a large stack in Friedman-Pappas's *Hide Pile #3*, which recalls the practice of Joseph Beuys. Though aesthetically most akin to *Unschlitt/Tallow* (1977) – 20 tonnes of tallow fat cast into a ten-metre-long wedge – *Hide Pile #3*, when viewed alongside Black's work, relates more closely to Beuys's theory of social sculpture. Specifically, its socio-political critique echoes *Organization for Direct Democracy by Referendum* (1972), a project presented at documenta 5, which aimed to initiate conversations on politics and erode the distinctions between art and life. Likewise, the pairing of Friedman-Pappas and Black provides a didactic space in which the intertwining of macroeconomic ideas of global industrialization with microeconomic decisions such as looting prompts viewers to consider the ways in which structural racism continues to characterize ecological destruction in service of industrial development.



Hannah Black, *Politics*, 2022, single-channel video. Courtesy: the artist and Meredith Rosen Gallery

Black's *Broken Windows* reinforces the importance of the redistribution of capital – not only for the purpose of envisioning a more just future, but also for the positive spirit of collectivity that it invokes in our present world. In the video, one interviewee describes the 2020 protests as 'amazing', adding: 'I was screaming in the street. It was cool. I guess thrilling is maybe the word.' The performers talk of a time of communal ecstasy, suspended momentarily from the restraints of commerce: the joys of dressing up to hang out with cute boys and receiving looted goods from strangers as gifts. The hopeful and even frivolous tone of the interviews about one of the most fraught times in recent memory stayed with me as I walked home down Fifth Avenue, looking for remnants of plywood boards on luxury stores.

'Hannah Black and Sophie Friedman-Pappas' is on view at Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York, through 10 September.

Main image: 'Hannah Black and Sophie Friedman-Pappas', 2022, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Meredith Rosen Gallery

GO OUTSIDE

Hannah Black's Year in Review

ALL RIOTS EMIT A WORLD-HISTORICAL SHINE, but the George Floyd uprisings were extra radiant because they opened the doors of the world. The riots saved social life by proving that it was possible, with masks and moving air, to spend time together outdoors without getting sick. The riots reconstructed an outside of the home as they enacted an outside of capitalist social relations. Before the riots, even before the pandemic, it often felt as if life stopped just before the point where other people began.

The opening of the outside was an accidental effect of the uprisings. Although the uprisings were a mourning practice, a riot is also the undirected intersubjective power of a crowd, just something that can happen when a lot of people are outside in the same place. By providing new uses for public space—by uprooting street furniture, smashing plate-glass windows into piles of jewels, and pedestrianizing highways—the riots demonstrated that all objects can be transformed by collective play. A riot can't resurrect the dead, but it can resurrect the dead spaces of cities, animate the streets—“*Our streets!*” as the chant goes, a civic-anarchic cliché that makes sense in the moment, as the streets get used differently. The physical sensation of taking a street stays even after the street is reconquered by everyday traffic.

It's important to go outside because you feel different when the weather touches you directly and because there are people there. Social life is the substance that revolution is supposed to work on, so it's no surprise that the brief, disgusting history of the police is founded not only on the slave patrol but also on crowd control. The police exist in

passionate opposition to crowds. Unlike riots or an idea of art, the police are filled to the point of obliteration by purpose, so that in the practice of policing they don't act as people at all. They are against escape and against gathering. The streets are the frame and context for working-class social life, so the police limit the pleasures that can be experienced there. Their job is to smash the informal life of the streets in all its manifestations: street vending, loitering, all the nothing crimes that hurt no one through which the police project of racist harassment gives itself legal form. Mohamed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation was the spark that began the Arab Spring, was a street vendor; Eric Garner was a street vendor. The banning of loitering is similarly paradigmatic, as it potentially criminalizes being anywhere at all.

A riot can't resurrect the dead, but it can resurrect the dead spaces of cities.

In New York in the first week of June, when the city said everyone had to be indoors by 8 PM, the chants of *Fuck your curfew* began as the hour struck. Whoever had really been out stayed out. No one was conscious of being brave; they were powered by the electric currents of collective energy that constitute courage. The police tried and failed to prevent groups of a few hundred or a few thousand people from congregating at random around the city. It was wild how close New York came, that month, to defeating the NYPD. This was achieved without weapons, just physical presence and fire.

After the riots, before the winter, the city was like a creature in between exoskeletons. It turned out everything could happen outside. In summer, the parks were dense with people and competing musics. Grill smoke and weed smoke and Pop Smoke outlined the spectral presence of the New York commune that lived a second ghost life after its erasure by politics. I walked dark streets with people I had met on apps and navigated suddenly ornate boundaries of touch. On Jacob Riis Beach, we swam at night and interrupted someone else's sex. Groups of young abolitionists still high on outdoor life congregated fleetingly in different parts of the city to eat and talk. It was romantic to see how everyone had grown into one another. In Prospect Park, we lay in the bowl of the earth and watched the sky tear itself into sunset. “I've been out every day,” a friend told me in October, “since

the first day of the riots.” With winter coming, we rediscovered fire, as if rewinding back to the first language-animals who lived when history had yet to happen. I remember in the image of riot the hyperadaptability of being.

Communism is a movement away from the state and toward each other. Everything that happens in the street is a lesson because it is a point of contact. Conversation and confrontation are a real education. Signs and wonders remain, the names of the dead graffitied on a building, broken windows like breathing holes in an airless world. The government does nothing worth anything for anyone, and on good days, it feels as if the state could just evaporate overnight. When the young people say, *New York will breathe*, or, *Abolition now*, they mean it—they go outside, and, for a few hours, they make an image of the present condition of freedom.

Hannah Black is an artist and writer based in New York.

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Hannah Black's "Ruin/Rien"

by Harry Burke

February 29–July 28, 2020

Arcadia Missa, London

July 24, 2020



View of Hannah Black's "Ruin/Rien" at Arcadia Missa, London, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa. Photo by Eva Herzog.

A 2001 paperback edition of *The Black Jacobins* (1938), C. L. R. James's study of the dialectical relationship between the Haitian and French revolutions, rests on a plinth in Hannah Black's exhibition "Ruin/Rien" at Arcadia Missa (*Ruin II*, all works 2020). Its cover features a detail of Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson's romanticist 1797 portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, a freed slave who attained the rank of captain during the rebellion and was the first Black deputy elected to the French National Convention. The artist has placed a post-it note on the upper-right corner of the cover. Written on it, in yellow pastel against a blue background, is the word "RUIN."

By revealing that the Haitian rebellion—which overthrew French colonial rule in one of the most consequential slave uprisings in history—was central to the upheavals in Paris, James argues that the question of slavery underwrites modern definitions of liberty. "Ruin/Rien" features a heterogeneous suite of new sculptures and videos that draw connections between these revolutionary events and the idea of the autonomous artwork. The bricked-up window of *Bastille*, for example, references both minimalist sculpture and the Bastille cell in which the Marquis de Sade was imprisoned and where he wrote *The 120 Days of Sodom*, pages from which are interleaved with the bricks. Tracing Belley's gaze across the gallery, we see *Oof*. This oil-on-canvas rendition of the post-it cartoon that appears on the

book is a scale appropriation of Ed Ruscha's iconic 1962 painting *OOF*: Black's version announces "RIEN." With essayistic reach, this exhibition digests the visual politics of contemporary art to explore how institutional structures—from French nobility to contemporary art museums—are legitimated by practices of signification.

In his 1993 book *On the Museum's Ruins*, Douglas Crimp contended that artistic strategies of reproduction and appropriation—such as those found in Ruscha's artist books—undermined the "originality, authenticity and presence" that had previously been "essential to the ordered discourse of the museum."¹ Black's *détournement* of "oof" to "rien" reframes these conversations by demonstrating that social reproduction, a line of inquiry often valorized in postmodern critiques of the museum, is itself neither neutral nor universally inclusive. As indicated on a printed text skewered on a fake deer antler in the wall-mounted sculpture *The Hunt I*, "rien," or "nothing," was King Louis XVI's aloof diary entry on July 14, 1789, the day the Bastille was stormed. His surreal, paradoxical jotting—which may have been referring to an unsuccessful hunt earlier that day—anticipates the semantic nihilism that many artists would later diagnose as a product of industrial alienation.

While Ruscha's work can be read in a lineage of artists who identify such

alienation as characteristic of urban life, it was Charles Baudelaire, observing Georges-Eugène Haussmann redevelop the cobblestoned streets of medieval Paris in his 1857 collection *Les Fleurs du mal*, who defined this spirit. Lorraine O'Grady explored this genealogy in her 1998 photographic installation *Studies for Flowers of Evil and Good*, a series of cibachrome diptychs that superimpose Baudelaire's poetry and images of him and Jeanne Duval, the Haitian actress and dancer who was his mistress and muse, upon details from Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907). "Ruin/Rien" evokes this self-reflexive critique of the entanglement of modernist appropriation and colonial expropriation.

Nearby to *Oof*, the soundless, four-minute video *Ruin I* (2020) loops on a flat-screen monitor. Closed caption text recounts a scandal concerning a "well-intentioned artwork" that, the viewer is informed, heedlessly perpetuated a global system of racial violence. Black does not reanimate the spectacle of the artwork—a white painter's depiction of Black suffering displayed in the 2017 Whitney Biennial in New York—by naming it. The viewer instead learns that a critical response to the artwork's complicity in "bringing ruin to lives" was met with contempt, eliciting debates concerning the "inviolability" of art. The proximity of *Ruin I* and *Ruin II* to *Oof* assesses a cultural logic in which Blackness is

coded as nothingness at once inherent to, and externalized by, the production of value. “How to de-create value?” the video asks, querying contemporary art’s genesis in the conditions of racial capitalism.

Though written mostly in the third person, the video’s diaristic voice channels the activist vernaculars that have characterized recent discussions of institutional liberation, in which Black has participated.² An entrancing run-on sentence concludes it: “I still believe that revolutionary collective practice / will one day remake the world / but it is too late for a lot of us / some dead and some still living.” The sentiment appeals to what Christina Sharpe, drawing on the work of poet Kamau Brathwaite, has termed “to dream Haiti”, meaning “to enter and inhabit the dream and reality of revolution.”³ Black’s brief, thoughtful parable appears over grayscale footage of water churning in a hydroelectric dam—an oceanic reflection on the dynamics of transference through which power is produced.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Frieze

Missing Galleries Amid Covid-19? Check Out these Exhibitions Behind Closed Doors

Each day for the next month, we’ll highlight a different exhibition that’s affected by the Covid-19 crisis

BY FRIEZE IN FEATURES | 20 MAR 20



Hannah Black, *Bastille* (detail), 2020, bricks, pages from Marquis de Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*, 1785, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Arcadia Missa, London

Hannah Black, 'Ruin/Rien'
Arcadia Missa, London

In Hannah Black's current solo show 'Ruin/Rien' at Arcadia Missa, one of the windows of the gallery is bricked up, blocking the outside world. Pages torn from a book are sticking out, wedged between the bricks. The installation is called *Bastille* (2020), and the book is *The 120 of Sodom* (1785) by the Marquis de Sade, written while the libertine was staying at the infamous prison. The original manuscript was found by a protestor, tucked inside the cracks of the wall in the Marquis's former cell. *Bastille* playfully nods at this anecdote while also evoking the pure formalism of minimalist sculpture: the claim that art means nothing, and that its power comes from lack of meaning.

– Justine Do Espirito Santo, Associate Director

years, out of their total budget of \$6 billion, but the situation is now moving so fast that it feels like maybe we should go further than that. I saw the proposal to dismantle the police department in Minneapolis; why not in New York?”

ABOUT A THOUSAND YEARS AGO in experiential time, Bernie Sanders ended his bid for the Democrat presidential nomination, centered around universal healthcare. This was just before the coronavirus deepened the massive inadequacies of the US healthcare system, resulting in (at the time of writing) 114,148 deaths. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor put it in *The New Yorker*: “Reality has endorsed Bernie Sanders.” More recently, Sanders has failed to endorse reality, refusing to support even reformist demands to defund the police in the wake of the recent US uprisings.

The sphere of the political has lately moved to the riot, which makes everything else look irrelevant. But the New York primary is coming up on June 23. If socialist and radical left candidates can win power at state and local levels, they would be in a position to convey the demands of grassroots solidarity movements. These are the politicians most likely to feel accountable to the streets. The political power of the police also needs to be tackled, especially in New York, where the police union runs the mayor and governor. Radical local politicians could take up the torch of street movements and help to transform baggy buzzwords like “defund” and “dismantle” into real gains for the people and reductions of police power.

The pandemic makes its own case for universal healthcare, and a pathway to this still remains at state level. The New York Health Act passed the state assembly four times only to be struck down by the state senate. The state senate’s new Democratic majority—which includes democratic socialist Brooklyn senator Julia Salazar—gives it a new chance of passing there. This would be a huge achievement in itself, and some are even cautiously optimistic that winning single-payer in one state could be the first step to nationwide free-at-point-of-service healthcare.

Jabari Brisport is hoping to join Salazar in fighting for this and other progressive legislation. The thirty-two-year-old middle-school teacher and former actor is running for New York State Senate in District 25, which comprises a big chunk of Brooklyn, including the neighborhoods of Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Red Hook, Bed-Stuy, Sunset Park, Gowanus, and Park Slope. His campaign, endorsed by Sanders himself and supported by the Democratic Socialists of

America, has had a lot to contend with in the coronatime. Not least, there’s been confusing back-and-forth around how to conduct elections without risking new infections. The city’s initial plan to send absentee ballots automatically to all voters ahead of the election on June 23 was nixed, but if you live in New York [you can order yours online here](#) by June 16. Jabari has been campaigning over video and phone calls from his apartment in Prospect Heights, where he lives with two roommates and a dog. With the pandemic constantly producing new emergencies, Jabari has been delivering groceries via a local mutual aid network alongside his election campaign, and his volunteer phone bankers spend many of their calls just checking in on people’s immediate needs.

The June 23 New York primary alone won’t decide our fate. But in pandemic times, fate expands its terrain. If socialist and radical left activists can win power at state and local levels, they would be in a position to convey the demands of grassroots solidarity movements and to cushion the impacts of what looks likely to be a very difficult near future, both economically and spiritually. No matter what happens in the national election in November, a major recession looks unavoidable and the eldritch white-power energies channeled by Trump are not going anywhere. Money will have to be found somehow, whether through taxation or expropriation. Or else we will see death and suffering on an even more massive scale.

I recently spoke with Brisport about the New York Health Act’s chances, the future of New York City, and why governor Andrew Cuomo’s 2 percent spending cap is the reason hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers waited weeks for their unemployment check. As with my [recent interview](#) with economist Philippe van Parijs on Universal Basic Income, I remain ambivalent about both reformist strategies and our medium-term chances of collective survival. But I’m open to hearing about any direction away from this latest abyss.

— [*Hannah Black*](#)

HB: How did you start out in politics?

Jabari Brisport: I never planned to run for office. I got into politics fighting for same-sex marriage in New York in 2009. I was just twenty-two, and I was like, We can make this win! And then we lost. I felt really shitty about it, like a second-class citizen. It came up for a vote again two years later and I just redoubled my efforts. I was organizing friends, doing phone

ArtReview

Hannah Black at Eden Eden, Berlin

By **Rebecca O'Dwyer**



Eschewing the traditional press release, Hannah Black's *Aeter* is accompanied by six short citations referring to slavery, cannibalism and psychoanalytic countertransference; their link to the work is not immediately discernible. In the centre of the gallery's ground floor, a pair of clay sculptures, *Clay Aeter 1* and *Clay Aeter 2* (all works 2018), resemble termite mounds in a process of disassembly. Each is sitting on a plinth. Over the course of the exhibition a gallery worker scrapes handfuls of clay from one to the other, until the first is bare save for its polystyrene support. Then the process begins again in reverse. Intimately entangled – like lovers, or analyst and analysand – each sculpture is always either cannibalising or in the process of being cannibalised. To think one independent of the other does not make sense.

Suspended in front of the shuttered gallery windows are three white plastic masks (*Shame Mask 1, 2 and 3*). Vaguely redolent of tribal artefacts, lengths of jewellery chase through their surfaces like talismans. It is difficult to work out these masks' function: whether they are made to celebrate and disarm individual shame; or, rather less comfortably, as a means of excising it, or passing it on elsewhere. Referring to a passage from the Book of Genesis used historically as slavery's justification, *Curse of Ham 1* is a rectangular, human-height, white advertising banner. Hugging the wall, it has two eyeholes cut into its surface, making it resemble both a perfunctory ghost and a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Looking through the holes, suggestive of a two-pronged *Étant donnés*, we see a piece of paper tacked lightly to the wall behind: a film still showing the naked figure of the actor Michael Fassbinder in Steve McQueen's 2011 feature, *Shame*. Consuming as we look, shame here is the at-times nauseating self-awareness of the gaze.

In the projected videoworks *Aeter [Sam]* and *Aeter [Jack]*, two interviewees recount separate kinds of cannibalism: bone transplant and compulsive nail biting, respectively. Alongside these, three further videoworks, *Hey 1, 2 and 3*, play out on stocky monitors sitting on the gallery floor. Peering down to look at them, we wait for something to happen. From these flat squares of red, lines of halting text stumble out, like awkward or conciliatory text messages: 'Hey. Baby. It's Just. Hey...' Received on its own as an SMS, the word 'Hey' can strike fear. It threatens something more serious or intimate: a breakup, a confession or even a request for help. There is an anthropophagic charge in this waiting: pushed into anxious intimacy, we feel ourselves slowly siphoned away too.

The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott claimed that, in order to treat a psychotic patient, the analyst needs to create the conditions for them to grow up. For the analyst, this infantilisation can breed hate, and, as a result of that hate, shame. Given Black's status as a woman of colour in an overwhelmingly white artworld, this idea is productive; even more so as an artist known to vocalise the failings of that same world, prompting it towards a kind of adulthood. The *Situation* (2017–18), an orderly pile of ash placed atop a small pile of carpet, refuses the terms of this exchange. Sharing its name with a book made from (already partially redacted) conversations with Black's peers, and shown as part of her 2017 solo show *Some Context* at the Chisenhale Gallery, London, in which viewers were invited to shred the volume, this new work seems to say, and without shame: whatever the book said is no longer being communicated – at all.

Hannah Black: *Aeter*, Eden Eden, Berlin, 26 November – 2 February

From the March 2019 issue of *ArtReview*

SLANT

THE TEAR GAS BIENNIAL

July 17, 2019 • A statement from Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson, and Tobi Haslett regarding Warren Kanders and the 2019 Whitney Biennial



Central Americans try to avoid tear gas deployed by US border police agents during an attempt to cross the border between Mexico and the US during the first minutes of January 1, 2019, in Tijuana, Mexico. Photo: Josebeth Terriquez/EFE/Alamy Live News.

WARREN B. KANDERS DIDN'T EARN HIS PLACE as vice chair of the board at the Whitney Museum of American Art through his good taste alone. He has also used some of his estimated \$700 million fortune to make tax-deductible donations to support exhibitions at the museum. What successful enterprise has made this generosity possible? Thanks to the collective, years-long effort of activists, students, and reporters to bring everyday brutality to light, we could tell you quite a lot about Kanders's company Safariland, which does a brisk trade supplying batons, handcuffs, holsters, and body armor to police and security forces including the IDF and the NYPD. But let's talk about the tear gas.

Tear gas is a chemical weapon: a mist of toxic particles that inflames mucus membranes and triggers pain receptors wherever it touches. The skin burns, the eyes water, the throat swells, it's almost impossible to breathe. This is a "less-lethal" product, but can kill and has killed people, like Layla al-Ghandour, an eight-month-old baby who died last year in Gaza after tear gas inhalation; Osman Abubakir, a sixty-two-year-old man who choked to death in February of this year in Khartoum, Sudan; and the thirty-seven people killed by tear gas in the back of a police van in Cairo in 2013.

After it was trialed on the battlefields of World War I, tear gas was outlawed for military use in 1925. That same year, Federal Laboratories, a company now owned by Safariland, manufactured the first tear gas police batons for use against civilians. "The use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices, has been justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world," proclaims the 1925 Geneva Protocol. But tear gas remains legal to use in peacetime, by governments on their own citizens.

Because the power of protest comes from our capacity to gather and act together, tear gas is useful to the state because it forces people to disperse. For this reason, it has been used against a vast spectrum of struggles and uprisings: American students were teargassed at Kent State in 1970 just like Sudanese students were teargassed at Khartoum University this year. In a now-infamous photograph published last November by the New York Times, a woman at the border wall in Tijuana grips the arms of two little girls in diapers as all three flee a plume of tear gas streaking from a launched canister. US Customs and Border Protection—whose agents are currently overseeing concentration camps across the country—purchased that tear gas from Safariland. Kanders's thriving company also made the news a few years ago: It supplied tear gas and other counterinsurgency equipment to police tasked with suppressing the passionate collective response to the murders of Freddie Gray in Baltimore and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Both the counterterrorism era inaugurated by 9/11 and the heightened unrest and instability since the 2008 financial crisis have led to a sharp increase in profits for tear gas manufacturers, a market dominated in the US by three companies. One of them is Defense Technology, a subsidiary of Safariland. In 2015, Safariland chemicals were launched at water protectors at Standing Rock in North Dakota, after which the company was sued by a protester because a canister mutilated her left arm. Safariland also made the tear gas used to disperse and defeat a 2018 May Day anti-austerity protest in Puerto Rico. "Your face starts to itch, you start crying, you have to run, you can't really breathe well," said Lucía Ruiz Cedeño, a nine-year-old girl teargassed at the demonstration.

We know all of this because many people—reporters, activists, inhabitants of Palestine and Ferguson picking up empty tear gas canisters with their hands and looking for a corporate logo—wanted us to know, and made it possible for us to know. This knowledge should have been enough to drive the artists in this year's Whitney Biennial to make the most unequivocal gesture of opposition to Warren B. Kanders: withdrawal from the show. There should have been a boycott.

The Biennial is a prominent platform, and the teargassing of asylum-seekers, including children at the US-Mexico border a few months before its May opening, has thrust Kanders and Safariland into the public eye. And some of the artists involved have sincere political commitments and surely feel concerned that their work is being instrumentalized to cleanse Kanders's reputation. Outside of the sphere of career artists, the movement against Kanders has been remarkably successful in galvanizing community organizations of the sort that rarely take interest in "art-world" affairs, and the art press, too, has been largely consistent in their condemnation of Safariland. Even now, it remains possible that artists could act according to their conscience, political sensibility, or instinctive revulsion and remove their work before the exhibition closes in late September. It would be in every sense of the word a shame if this opportunity were to be entirely missed.

Only one artist, Michael Rakowitz, has so far refused to participate. Weekly protests against Kanders were led by the activist group Decolonize This Place, which has no professional connection to (and therefore limited leverage against) the Whitney. After a Hyperallergic article revealed Kanders's connection to the teargassing at the border, there was a laudable open letter from the Whitney's staff (signed by just one of the Biennial's two curators) professing their horror and demanding, among other things, that leadership "consider asking for Warren Kanders' resignation."

Whitney director Adam Weinberg replied with a plea for civility and “kindness.” Kanders himself insisted that his products are nonlethal, that he doesn’t throw the grenades himself, that riots are dangerous and bad anyway, and that he knows all this because he spends a lot of time with the police. A letter demanding Kanders’s removal was signed by over 120 critics, scholars, and theorists, and was then sent to artists. Of the participants in the Whitney Biennial, the majority of whose works have some political valence, only about two-thirds signed. (Some of the artists who didn’t sign were nevertheless outraged when the “radicality” of their work was questioned in reviews.)

A boycott would boost the force of every one of these statements and actions. But the art world imagines itself as a limited sphere of intellectual and aesthetic inquiry, where what matters, first and foremost, are inclusion, representation, and discussion. This ignores art’s ongoing transformation into yet another arm of the culture industry, for which, as in other industries, the matters of chief importance are production and circulation. The Biennial is a major site of this activity—and thus a choke point, where the withdrawal of work has potentially powerful economic as well as symbolic effects. More than just a gesture of solidarity with victims of state repression, withdrawal of work from the gallery disrupts the actual circuits of valorization—not only of the work and its display in the prestigious museum, but of the museum and its stated interest in progressivism and socially committed art. There are moments when the disembodied, declarative politics of art are forced into an encounter with real politics, i.e. with violence.

What has made refusal seem inappropriate or impossible? There has been resentment among artists, expressed privately and on social media, that the original (opaque and bungled) call to boycott or strike came from the art activist organizations Decolonize This Place and W.A.G.E.—the latter derided by some as the pet project of just one white woman. But criticisms of these groups, true or not, are not adequate substitutes for a genuine assessment of the political circumstance or what it asks of us. We’ve heard, too, that the effort to politicize the Biennial amounts first, to racism, because it places an unfair burden on artists of color, who ought to be celebrated in this majority-minority Biennial, and second, an expression of class privilege, because “artists must eat.”

This argument flies in the face of history and turns the very notions of strike and boycott on their heads — as if they were marks of luxury, rather than acts of struggle. Although in some cases made in good faith, this view promotes the reactionary fiction that marginalized or working-class people are the passive recipients of political activity as opposed to its main driver. Opportunities to collectively refuse are not unfair burdens but continuations of collective resistance. The insistence that artists alone — unlike teachers, incarcerated people, and Uber drivers—are unable to act because of their financial and professional circumstances is a career concern masquerading as class analysis. Among other things, it reflects artists’ fear of being sidelined (canceled, perhaps?) by the arbiters of art value for having the wrong politics. By refusing to be totally compliant with the demands of the institution, artists are taking a risk. That’s precisely what makes these actions impactful and even inspiring: that they have stakes.

At the same time, those who do choose to align themselves publicly with political struggles are accused of making calculated career moves in an art world—so goes the story—in which political commitment is irrelevant at best and elitist at worst. Which is it: that artists are helpless to act politically for fear of losing their livelihoods, or that political commitments among artists are blandly congratulated and even encouraged?

Many people who socialize and work in the art world regard it as an improper place for political action and are at pains to remind agitators that their efforts would be put to better use elsewhere. Art professionals seem to be quietly convinced that art is basically irrelevant to normal people and real politics (except when the two worlds are conflated under the heading “social practice”). This includes Kanders himself, who stated: “[T]he politicization of every aspect of public life, including commercial organizations and cultural institutions, is not productive or healthy.” For Kanders, both the workers who create value for commercial organizations and culture itself are not at all political; there simply is no class/race struggle, no gender

violence. Adam Weinberg’s response to his staff’s open letter also denied the institution’s specific role in the ongoing counterinsurgency, with the truism that the museum “cannot right all the ills of an unjust world.” Given the situation, it seems all the Whitney can do is exacerbate them.

But artists can and do bite the hand that feeds. Two recent examples spring to mind. Participants in the 2014 Biennale of Sydney organized to withhold their work when public attention was drawn to the fact that the Biennale’s founders and chief sponsors were managing the facilities on Manus Island, where migrants were being—and remain—indefinitely detained. These offences were not new. But artists rose to the occasion by politicizing the exhibition, and the Biennale cut ties with its corporate patron. In the US and the UK, Nan Goldin’s remarkable success in spearheading a global campaign of divestment from the Sackler family, who have profited enormously from the opioid epidemic, testifies to the real power of even a single artist willing to organize with others. Now, of course, even Kanders’s most robust defenders decry the Sacklers—they’re really evil, and broke the law! But the fact is that institutions abandoned the Sacklers not because they were self-evidently evil, but because Goldin had the audacity to fight.

It happens that Weinberg’s note to his staff alludes to another art-world philanthropist, who has since been ousted: “As one director colleague describes the contemporary museum, it is ‘a safe space for unsafe ideas.’” That “director colleague” is Yana Peel, CEO of London’s Serpentine Galleries. She was recently revealed to be an indirect owner, through her husband Stephen Peel, of NSO Group, a cyberweapons company whose spyware has allegedly been licensed to authoritarian regimes like Saudi Arabia, who may have used NSO technology to target an associate of Jamal Khashoggi, the journalist who was assassinated and hacked to pieces in Istanbul last year. Mere weeks ago, amid mounting public outcry, Peel resigned. Kanders remains.

It is naive to believe that history proceeds according to a moral calculus. Things happen contingently, accidentally, among real people and not according to some algorithmic measure of worse and worst. But thankfully, when we are called to act politically, we are not only invited to exercise an abstract moral judgement, but to respond to an unfolding circumstance. When you call us up to ask us to contribute to your friend’s fundraiser, it would make no sense for us to say, “But there are millions of people about to be evicted! Why should we care about this one?” We understand that what has singled out this person are the social relationships, activities, and desires that fill our lives and give our lives meaning. Kanders may well be no more malign than many of his peers on boards around the country, and it’s to an extent true that, as people like to say, “all the money is evil,” i.e. capitalist accumulation has as its basis the exploitation, misery, and boredom of people all over the world. But if we believe that our capacity to act against this evil is limited, we should take every opportunity given to us to act.

What is exceptional about Kanders is that activists in Ferguson, students at Brown University (where he is also on the board), and, presently, staff at the Whitney, have all worked to make him vulnerable to protest. The current struggle represents the culmination of years of research, organizing, and action, by the likes of the War Resisters League and college undergraduates, whose efforts coincide with the present and catastrophic spectacle at the border. The movement against Kanders is not random or impulsive. The case against him has been building, and has now been delivered into the hands of artists, who have an extraordinary capacity to speak and be heard. As Fred Moten put it, on the subject of solidarity with Palestine, “the boycott can help to refresh (the idea of) the alternative [. . .] even in the midst of reaction’s constant intensification.”

Two of the authors of this statement have recently rejected offers from the Whitney in explicit protest against Kanders. But these were private negotiations, private gestures—which we are now making public as a way, we hope, of joining our efforts to those of colleagues and friends who also wish to contribute to putting collective pressure on the institution. We have heard that it would be impossible to remove Kanders; everything is impossible before it happens.

“If this was an instance of a #metoo scandal,” reads the letter from Whitney staff, “would we call for resignation? If this was an instance of overt racism, would we call for resignation?” Yes and yes, because the political commitment favored by the art world’s managerial class has made “radical” art party to any and all barbarism—as long as that barbarism is structural (that is, implanted in the bureaucracy of institutions) rather than a matter of the sins of particular leaders.

In line with global politics, the art world is in the midst of a hard rightward swing. But we are concerned less with the state of the art world than with what this world does to our friends, peers, and elders, when professionalization at all costs becomes the condition of their practice. The ease with which left rhetoric flows from art is matched by a real poverty of conditions, in which artists seem convinced they lack power in relation to the institutions their labor sustains. Now the highest aspiration of avowedly radical work is its own display. Even the strategies of the historical avant-garde (oppositional independent salons, for instance) seem to have vanished from the realm of possibility, or no longer appear desirable, as institutions are treated like an omnipotent, irresistible force.

In 1970, Robert Morris shuttered his own exhibition at the Whitney in protest of the killing of students at Kent State, the suppression of the Black movement, and Nixon’s bombing of Cambodia. This ignited weeks of agitation by artists, students, and workers, culminating in the historic New York Art Strike Against Racism, War, and Repression, in which hundreds joined to amplify Morris’s gesture with concrete political actions and demands. They formed pickets, withdrew their work from exhibitions, and organized within the culture industry, mobilizing against both state violence within the US and an appalling foreign war. Adrian Piper, in lieu of artwork she intended to exhibit at the New York Cultural Center, submitted a statement that resonates today: “The work originally intended for this space has been withdrawn. The decision to withdraw has been taken as a protective measure against the increasingly pervasive conditions of fear.”

In 2014, Safariland tear gas was pumped into the streets of Ferguson in raging, massive clouds, as police officers throttled an uprising sparked by their murder of a teenage boy. This summer marks the five-year anniversary of the uprising—that is, five years of intense and even painful self-interrogation by many of us about our power and purpose in an age of escalating crisis.

We know that it’s hard: hard to survive, hard to act. It’s hard to remain sensitive to horror in an art world bored by its own obscenity. The rapacious rich are amused by our piety, and demand that we be pious about their amusements. Against a backdrop of prestigious inertia and exhausted critique, it can be hard to marshal our most vital feelings: our anger, our love, and our grief.

We know that this society is riven by inequities and brutal paradoxes. Faced with this specific profiteer of state violence, we also find ourselves in a place to act. It is not a pristine place. But we must learn—again, or for the first time—to say no.

— Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson, Tobi Haslett

VIOLENT MEDIATIONS

Jenny Nachtigall in Conversation with Hannah Black

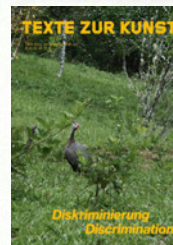
„Hannah Black: Aeter“, Galerie
Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin,
2018/2019, Ausstellungs-
ansicht / installation view



The symptoms of discrimination take many forms, violence chief among them. The history and myriad forms of violence wrought on the body have been enduring subjects in the work of the British-born, New York-based artist and writer Hannah Black. In her most recent show in Berlin, Black's visual work provided important touchstones for the way in which violence, like the inscription of race itself, is enacted on and against the body in all its material specificity.

Jenny Nachtigall sat down with Black to ask her about the nature of her aesthetic explorations of abuse and brutality in the context of discrimination. What follows is an exchange that probes the points of libidinal contact in Black's work with an eye to what they have to say about the possibilities for critical practices in the face of rampant discrimination in the art world today.

JENNY NACHTIGALL: The title of your exhibition "Aeter" seems to operate between the materiality of flesh (aeta) and a disembodied, immaterial medium (aether). The ambivalence between these two registers returns throughout the show in the way objects and images dwell on the unstable meanings and shifting functions of cannibalism as both colonial origin myth and contemporary condition that wavers between desire and death. That history and violence are inscribed into bodies unevenly – making some legible as subjects, while turning others into fungible matter (read: flesh) – is something that has been central to your practice. Both as an artist and writer you have implicated yourself within the question of whether one is on the giving and/or receiving end of violence on account of one's social positionality in terms of race, gender, ability, and class. Would you agree?



HANNAH BLACK: The title of the exhibition that you mention is adapted from the Old English word for cannibal: self-aeta. I then modernized the term so that it would also refer to aether as an imaginary medium. It's an obsolete scientific concept that arose from the idea that things like light required a specific medium to move through. It's hard to conceive of nothingness. So, in a way, the show tries to spin a theory of mediations between history and living. The primary sense is of eating; a potentially cannibalistic eating.

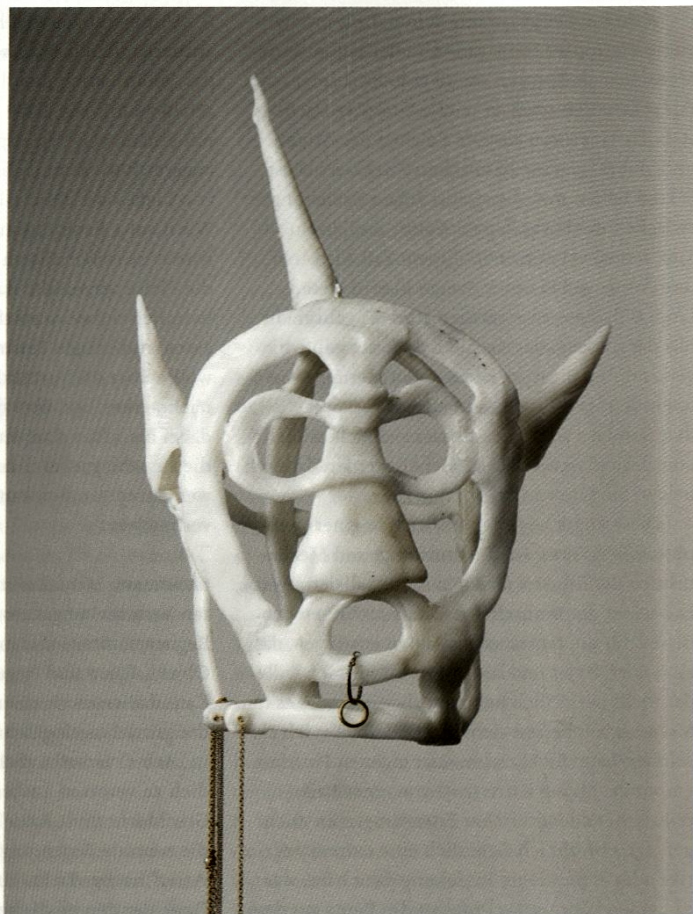
The etymology of the word "cannibal" provided one strand of how I was thinking about it: as a European ruling-class guilt complex. I followed this to the furthest conclusion I could find. I was reading "Black Marxism" while working on the show and Cedric Robinson really paints a sad picture of pre-modern Europe, struggling to maintain basic social functions. He quotes an example of commercial cannibalism during a famine in France in the eleventh century: someone selling cooked bodies in a market. The point is to believe, for the purposes of following a line of intuition, that Europe innovates a non-ritualistic cannibalism: cannibalism as pragmatic, fully secular, stripped bare. The body reduced to flesh, to invoke Hortense Spillers.

Throughout the development of the colonial period, Europeans produced propaganda depicting colonized people as cannibals. Meanwhile, wealthy Europeans would literally drink tinctures made from the corpses of the poor, and "Libyans," as medicine.¹ These facts helped me understand the vitalist relation between bourgeois culture and its others: in this case, Africans and (usually, in the case of the hanged) the poor. These social categories make the people who are forced to inhabit them available for an unreal amount

of labor. This availability for misuse by others is achieved exactly by the action of social categorization. Not only that, but by literally consuming the people marked as poor and/or racialized, the rich can become more energized, more alive.

This logic is also with us in a less physical form as the cannibalizations performed by the institutions and mechanisms of art. There's a desire for artists to supply the proof of a fantastical outside that is imagined to be wilder, freer, and available for consumption. I don't want to take this personally, but I have to. My work often turns on what I find to be the painful impasses of my own position, as someone who has been marked in my career with a certain set of political or ethical expectations despite having an actually extremely negative and ambivalent relationship to what it might mean to articulate the problem of value from inside one of its spectral expressions, which is bourgeois culture. I find that difficult and I don't want that difficulty of it to totally subsume my work. But on the other hand it feels more generative to just go with that than to resist it. I'm scared of lying to myself.

So, to acknowledge my implication in this history, as a kind of resistance to feeling myself deployed only as a vitalist infusion, I also tried to imbue this exhibition with another sense of cannibalism: as a relation of love, or of mourning. I love Donald Winnicott's observations on the role of cannibalism between parent and child; Winnicott argues that the mother subconsciously resents her child partly because she cannot eat it or have sex with it. I wanted to think about the violent mediations of love and death; race as one of the social forms that decide who can be loved and who can be killed, and how we negotiate with that.



Hannah Black, „Shame Mask 1“, 2018

NACHTIGALL: My sense was that the works on view intensify a slippage between registers – between subject and object, eater and eaten – internal to cannibalism as a colonial origin myth. The objects locate you or force you to locate yourself in terms of gender and race specifically. I was thinking in particular about the centrality of the Curse of Ham in “Aeter.” An engraving depicting the biblical curse of blackness/slavery by Gustave Doré (known for his Bible illustrations as well as his anti-Semitism) serves as the show’s visual epigraph, and there are two works titled “Curse of Ham.”² In one of them you replace Noah with a nude shot of Michael Fassbender from “Shame.” Viewed through two peepholes burned into an advertising banner, that sight is unexpected – funny but also horrible. Though arguably that depends on who is looking at it. I was wondering whether questions around positionality and modes of address – the social grammar of looking or, I guess perhaps also more site-specifically speaking, the question of what kind of audience your work would have in a city like Berlin – played a role in the making of “Aeter”?

BLACK: Yes. I liked the Fred Moten line in his MoMA talk “Blackness and Nonperformance” about how the legal concept of the individual is a hole cut in the fabric of the social. The distinction between subject and object helps organize thought, but it doesn’t correspond to the wild reality of relating.

This show is very specific both to the gallery and to my hopes and fears about audience. The theatrics of art, where you walk into a room and it’s guaranteed there’s something there, even if there’s nothing, is attractive because it’s a really minimal level of control to exert on someone’s

attention while nevertheless demanding it from them. There’s a kind of half-hidden desire in that to nevertheless command attention, but in a roundabout way, as if through the other person’s desire. That’s a social grammar of looking, maybe. The question of audience feels really unwieldy, so I have to reduce it to a few individuals and just think about them, my feelings for them. There are lots of secret references and private jokes, and some are so private that only I know them. This interplay of showing and hiding is how I deal with the strangeness of making inner processes public.

It’s important to me to generalize questions of race, gender, ability, class, and so on away from the individual, and away from the exemplary individual, and even away from collectivity insofar as it’s understood as a collection of exemplary individuals. The question that preoccupies me is more, what are the social forms that are mediating experience? What ideas and categories are we compelled to use to think about ourselves, and what do they depend on? That doesn’t mean individual experience is irrelevant to these questions – the individual is even the theater of the questions – but I prefer to let the individual (me, even) reappear on this abstracted field as an atmosphere rather than as a definite quantity.

NACHTIGALL: A few years ago you wrote about the relation between universality/difference in controversies around identity politics: on how critiques of the latter tend to assume whiteness as a universal default, while personalizing deviations from it. I was thinking in particular of a line from your text, “The Identity Artist and the Identity Critic”: “Collectivity might be the necessary first step toward making life bearable, but the

production of that collectivity may be less cozy than strategies of inclusion, diversity, and universality suggest.”³ Meanwhile, hard-fought debates over “cultural appropriation” and the different meanings of identity politics seem to envelop political analyses.⁴ What’s your take on these debates and could you speak on how collectivity comes into play in your view of difference/universality (in art and/or beyond)?

BLACK: I don’t see myself as contributing to contemporary cultural appropriation discourse, I think that would be a misunderstanding of my position, but I think it can be a really helpful educational tool. It’s appropriate for the kinds of mass-learning practices that people are developing on platforms like Twitter; it helps us scale down massive structural questions to a level where they can be easily grasped and discussed.

I learned a lot from those kinds of conversations, especially during the first year I lived in the US. I don’t feel like they’re very gripping as moral questions, but they are helpful in illuminating systems and structures. To me, the point isn’t that there’s an absolute alterity between cultures that must be respected; the point is that cultural practices are intertwined through violence, exploitation, sexual imaginaries, and so on, and it’s interesting to take that into account in how we interpret cultural production.

The main metonym for dealing with race in an art context currently seems to be the situation of Black America. This is obviously because people were excited by the uprisings in Ferguson and they became a global political event, an object of mass enthusiasm. I feel moved by this, but the focus on the US context has its issues. Many of the problems of America are materially and

symbolically global, but if you only ever hear about race in terms of its specific manifestations in the US, it potentially allows too much space for audiences elsewhere to react self-servingly, like, “Well, it’s very racist in America, but not here.”

I sometimes find the current intense interest in blackness outside of Black communities, and my implication in that, kind of weird and embarrassing. But it’s understandable to the extent that (evidently Frank B. Wilderson is right about this) anti-blackness is a psychosocial organizing structure for white society, and so it can be used to explain phenomena other than the immiseration of Black people, like how Aimé Césaire or Amiri Baraka use it to account for the rise of European fascism in the 1930s and 1940s as a kind of return of the conditions of the colony to the center, which is what we’re also seeing now. It’s complicated because the situation of actually existing Black communities has to be the ground of any analysis of anti-blackness, so it doesn’t get completely vitiated into being just another vaguely inspiring buzzword.

NACHTIGALL: In an interview in the frame of your exhibition “Some Context” (2017), you talked about how analytical categories (such as white supremacy or misogyny) collapse in a post-2008 situation in which violence defines the status quo as a state of permanent catastrophe.⁵ With the systemic erosion of liberalism – and thus of the critical or educational functions of art and culture that are founded upon it – there seems to be a general sense of disorientation and a radical questioning of the roles and responsibilities of criticism and critique. What is your perspective on this post-liberal situation and on the functions of criticism/critique within art and theory

today? Would you say that there is a difference in how you deal with this situation in your visual work and in your writing respectively?

BLACK: The current feeling of the political order being especially volatile and conflictual, which is new to those of us who grew up in Western Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, inevitably produces a lot of nostalgic fantasies about social cohesion, as well as an erotics of upheaval. It’s distressing and exciting to be so actively confronted with the zero-sum nature of capitalist social relations. I get the attraction of leaning on concepts like love, solidarity, togetherness, unity, community, but I often wonder why those political ideas aren’t inflected with more realism about love, which is a highly charged condition involving conflict, violence, and ambivalence as much as harmony. I think these are issues carrying extreme tension, I think the source of that tension is real, historical, and held in the psyche. I’m interested in understanding that. That’s my idea of a good time.

The ideal ethic of the moment, I think, is to lay ourselves open to the total vertigo of the loss of law of the father while remaining good-humored and chill. I’m interested in thinking about the current state of permanent catastrophe as a generalization of conditions whose historical reserve is anti-blackness: an ultraviolent condition of abjection and extraction that’s beneath, beyond, and behind the wage relation. Capitalism seems to have fused itself so fatally to the infrastructure of living that life itself is now poisoned – and the amazing thing about our era is that we must understand this not only as where we are now, but where people have been since the beginning of capitalism. It’s a moment of intense encounter, with the past, with the terrible contingency of

the reproduction of meaning. It’s obvious why this entails a loss of faith in mythic containments such as whiteness and patriarchy, and renewed attention to art and theory as sites of their maintenance. By shifting between art and theory, I hope to express my suspicion of both. As for criticism and critique, I like Twitter a lot. People are really generous online with their thoughts and jokes. I really appreciate it.

Notes:

- 1 See Peter Linebaugh und Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra. Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Boston 2000, p. 61.
- 2 In Genesis Ham was cursed to eternal servitude because he sinfully looked at his naked father Noah. The curse was subsequently understood to include black skin, establishing a circular relationship between blackness and slavery that figured centrally in justifying the slave system, e.g. in antebellum America. See David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave. The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham*, Berlin/Boston 2017.
- 3 Hannah Black, “The Identity Artist and the Identity Critic,” in *Artforum*, Summer 2016.
- 4 See for instance the debates around Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump*, London, 2018. See also Jens Kastner, Lea Susemichel, *Identitätspolitik. Konzepte und Kritiken in Geschichte und Gegenwart der Linken*, Munster 2018.
- 5 Ellen Greig/Hannah Black, “Chisenhale Interviews: Hannah Black,” https://chisenhale.org.uk/wp.../Hannah-Black_Chisenhale-Gallery_Interview.pdf.

‘The Painting Must Go’: Hannah Black Pens Open Letter to the Whitney About Controversial Biennial Work

Alex Greenberger
March 21, 2017 10:36am

Despite initially receiving semi-positive notices, mainly from white critics, a Dana Schutz painting in the Whitney Biennial generated controversy this weekend. This past Saturday, the artist Parker Bright held a protest in front of the work, which is titled Open Casket and depicts an abstracted version of the famed photograph of Emmett Till’s open-casket funeral. Bright wore a grey T-shirt, with “BLACK DEATH SPECTACLE” written in Sharpie on the back of it, and reportedly said, “She has nothing to say to the black community about black trauma.”

Writers, curators, and artists took note of the protest online and responded. Now, the artist and writer Hannah Black has issued an open letter addressed to the Whitney Biennial’s curators, Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks. Repeating the refrain “the painting must go,” she urges the curators to destroy the work so as to make sure that the it can’t be sold or seen in the future. At this time of writing, artists Juliana Huxtable and Addie Wagenknecht, Rhizome assistant curator Ari Dean, and critic Mostafa Heddaya are among the signees. The open letter follows in full below.

OPEN LETTER

To the curators and staff of the Whitney biennial:

I am writing to ask you to remove Dana Schutz’s painting “Open Casket” and with the urgent recommendation that the painting be destroyed and not entered into any market or museum.

As you know, this painting depicts the dead body of 14-year-old Emmett Till in the open casket that his mother chose, saying, “Let the people see what I’ve seen.” That even the disfigured corpse of a child was not sufficient to move the white gaze from its habitual cold calculation is evident daily and in a myriad of ways, not least the fact that this painting exists at all. In brief: the painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time.

Although Schutz’s intention may be to present white shame, this shame is not correctly represented as a painting of a dead Black boy by a white artist — those non-Black artists who sincerely wish to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material. The subject matter is not Schutz’s; white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights. The painting must go.

Emmett Till’s name has circulated widely since his death. It has come to stand not only for Till himself but also for the mournability (to each other, if not to everyone) of

people marked as disposable, for the weight so often given to a white woman’s word above a Black child’s comfort or survival, and for the injustice of anti-Black legal systems. Through his mother’s courage, Till was made available to Black people as an inspiration and warning. Non-Black people must accept that they will never embody and cannot understand this gesture: the evidence of their collective lack of understanding is that Black people go on dying at the hands of white supremacists, that Black communities go on living in desperate poverty not far from the museum where this valuable painting hangs, that Black children are still denied childhood. Even if Schutz has not been gifted with any real sensitivity to history, if Black people are telling her that the painting has caused unnecessary hurt, she and you must accept the truth of this. The painting must go.

Ongoing debates on the appropriation of Black culture by non-Black artists have highlighted the relation of these appropriations to the systematic oppression of Black communities in the US and worldwide, and, in a wider historical view, to the capitalist appropriation of the lives and bodies of Black people with which our present era began. Meanwhile, a similarly high-stakes conversation has been going on about the willingness of a largely non-Black media to share images and footage of Black people in torment and distress or even at the moment of death, evoking deeply shameful white American traditions such as the public lynching. Although derided by many white and white-affiliated critics as trivial and naive, discussions of appropriation and representation go to the heart of the question of how we might seek to live in a reparative mode, with humility, clarity, humour and hope, given the barbaric realities of racial and gendered violence on which our lives are founded. I see no more important foundational consideration for art than this question, which otherwise dissolves into empty formalism or irony, into a pastime or a therapy.

The curators of the Whitney biennial surely agree, because they have staged a show in which Black life and anti-Black violence feature as themes, and been approvingly reviewed in major publications for doing so. Although it is possible that this inclusion means no more than that blackness is hot right now, driven into non-Black consciousness by prominent Black uprisings and struggles across the US and elsewhere, I choose to assume as much capacity for insight and sincerity in the biennial curators as I do in myself. Which is to say — we all make terrible mistakes sometimes, but through effort the more important thing could be how we move to make amends for them and what we learn in the process.

**The painting must go.
Thank you for reading**

**Hannah Black
Artist/writer**

**Whitney ISP 2013-14
Co-signatories:**

Amal Alhaag
Andrea Arrubla
Hannah Assebe
Thea Ballard
Anwar Batte
Parker Bright
Harry Burke
Gaby Cepeda
Vivian Crockett
Jareh Das
Jesse Darling
Aria Dean
Kimberly Drew
Chrissy Etienne
Hamishi Farah
Ja’Tovia Gary
Hannah Gregory
Jack Gross
Rose-Anne Gush
Mostafa Heddaya
Juliana Huxtable
Alexander Iadarola
Anisa Jackson

Hannah Catherine Jones
Devin Kenny
Dana Kopel
Carolyn Lazard
Taylor LeMelle
Beatrice Loft Schulz
Jacqueline Mabey
Mia Matthias
Tiona Nekkia McClodden
Sandra Mujinga
Lulu Nunn
Precious Okoyomon
Emmanuel Olunkwa
Mathew Parkin
Temra Pavlović
Imani Robinson
Andrew Ross
Cory Scozzari
Christina Sharpe
Misu Simbiatu
Addie Wagenknecht
Dominique White
Kandis Williams
Robert Wilson

THE WHITE REVIEW

REVIEW BY:
NINA POWER
NOVEMBER 2017

Chisenhale Gallery
22 September – 10 December
2017



HANNAH BLACK, SOME CONTEXT

On the cover of the 1985 Pelican edition of D. W. Winnicott's 1971 book, *PLAYING AND REALITY*, there is a picture, by Lawrence Mynott, of a teddy bear with a missing plastic eye. Winnicott is famous, of course, for talking about teddy bears. He writes: 'the object is affectionately cuddled as well as excitedly loved and mutilated'. One must, he notes, 'recognise the central position of Winnie-the-Pooh' in the life of the child. Teddy bears without eyes and Winnie-the-Pooh-type creatures turn up quite a bit in Hannah Black's *SOME CONTEXT* (2017). There are seven *TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS* scattered about the gallery space. These visionless fabric animals, some bears, some dog-like, one elephant-like (the latter hung up on some metal hooks), are filled with shredded copies of a text called *THE SITUATION*, 20,000 copies of which (bar those that have been taken and/or shredded) form a strange temple-like monument in the middle of the room, guarded by an animal with long silky hair that looks like someone's idea of an Afghan hound if they had never seen one.

The floor, entitled *CARPET*, is covered with already-shredded pages from the book, and in odd clearings, there are *CREATURES* made of modeling clay – some are faces, some are eyes, perhaps the missing eyes of the toys – and others are figurines, clutching at the side of the fabric animals. One is just a smear, though perhaps it has been stepped on, as differentiating the curious crunch of shredded paper from the partly hidden modelled objects makes wandering around the show rather delicate. In three sites, menacing paper shredders, switched on and full of eaten paper, add an air of dangerous possibility – should I shred the book? Is that what the machines want? Is that what the artist wants? On the back of the book two small diagrams show a bear-like creature throwing the book up into the air as it appears to explode, and another shows the bear walking off with the book under its arm. I followed the second bear.

All this anxiety, uncertainty and possibility is perhaps part of the point – after all, what is 'the context' that this show demonstrates 'some' aspect of it? What exactly is 'the situation' that the book describes? Comprised of interviews with many people – some with their names obscured and some mentioned at the back, and none tied to the body of the text so you don't know who's speaking – the book both is the show and is about the show. The transcripts, sometimes tentative, sometimes impassioned, often blacked out as if censored, speak of many different kinds of 'situations'. Some of these are structural (patriarchy, sexual and physical violence, colonialism, racism, capitalism, environmental destruction) and others institutional – the relationship between artists of

colour and art institutions – though it is hardly as if institutions are separable from the structures that dominate them. As one voice puts it: 'Maybe the situation is a question of reparations in the representational context'.

Black's show poses this exact question in multiple ways: what is the relationship between reparations as a political, historical and economic demand, and reparations in the context of art? Are they separable? What do different groups of people owe objects, transitional or otherwise, and what do they owe us? What do we owe the written word, and when should we read, and when should we destroy? By posing the possibility of the destruction of the words of black artists, shredders awaiting, Black points to uncomfortable realities, both historical and current. Is assimilation and invitation (always selective, of course) just the latest iteration of the long history of institutional neglect, theft and exploitation of black artists?

As one interviewee in *THE SITUATION* puts it:

It's like this Malcolm X line in the Fred Moten book ... something like: 'what we have to remember when we're dealing with the white man is that we are dealing with a very silly man.' These are very silly people. They're easily disturbed by minor things. You're fine, don't worry, no Nazis are going to burn any of your books.

The teddy bears of *SOME CONTEXT* are perhaps a (disturbing) comfort, but the time has come to put away childish things. Playing and reality – 'the situation', played out in multiple ways, is the horror of reality, the reality of violence against blackness, the reality of representation as intimately tied to racism, colonialism, capitalism, whiteness.

SOME CONTEXT is strange and idiosyncratic, but also a deeply collective work – not just with the speakers in Black's book – but also with the collective experience of childhood. But who gets to grow up, and who doesn't? If there is an object here, it might be white infantilism, and if there is a subject, it is a double one of the black child, killed as if they were an adult, and the black artist, forced to negotiate the dangerous, because easily disturbed, silliness and power of the white man and his white cubes.

<http://www.thewhitereview.org/reviews/hannah-black-context-chisenhale-gallery/>



Frieze London Announces Winner of Stand Prize and Tate Fund Acquisitions

While Frieze London has so far only opened for previewing, the fair today announced that their jury of international curators and directors have awarded the Frieze Art Fair Stand Prize, given to an outstanding presentation in the main section of the fair, to São Paulo's Galeria Luisa Strina (Stand C8). Special commendations went to Mendes Wood (C14), also from São Paulo, Berlin's Galeria Gregor Podnar (G11), Hubert Winter from Vienna (S5), and the Parisian gallery Air de Paris (S8).

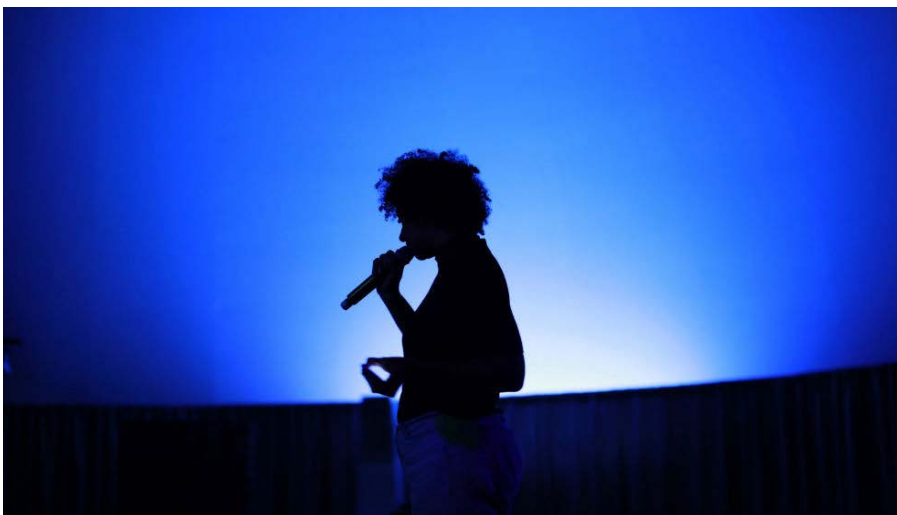
Additionally, the 2017 Frieze Tate Fund, supported by the entertainment conglomerate WME | IMG, have acquired works from Frieze London by several artists as gifts to the Tate collection. The chosen artists are Dorothy Iannone and Mary Beth Edelson, who both had work featured in the section "Sex Work: Feminist Art & Radical Politics," curated by Alison M. Gingeras, as well as Hannah Black who has a video installation in London gallery Arcadia Missa's booth in the Focus section, and finally Lawrence Abu Hamdan, whose work is shown in Maureen Paley's booth in the main section. Abu Hamdan also won the 2018 Abraaj Group Art Prize today, as artforum.com reported this morning.

Other notable acquisitions from the fair so far include the Contemporary Art Society's purchase of a major installation by Dineo Seshee Bopape. The work, which has been presented at Frieze by Sfeir-Semler Gallery, will be donated to Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne, UK. For more coverage of Frieze London, see Linda Yablonsky's Scene & Herd from around town prior to the official opening of the fair tomorrow.

Hannah Black Transcends the Dana Schutz Controversy With a Slow-Burn MoMA PS1 Performance

All eyes were on Black this weekend, for her first performance following the Whitney Biennial controversy.

Terence Trouillot, April 11, 2017



Hannah Black. 2016. Still from Credits.

The beautiful weather and the Spring Open House invitation—highlighting some new and promising exhibitions featuring works by Ian Cheng, Maureen Gallace, and Tomáš Rafa, among others—were attractions enough this weekend at Long Island City’s MoMA PS1. But I went to the museum on a mission: To see OR LIFE OR (2017), the 45-minute performance starring Hannah Black, a collaboration with musician Bonaventure and designer Ebba Fransén Waldhör.

I wasn’t alone. Throngs of people lined up outside the museum’s always-ominous VW dome to see Black at work.

Black, of course, very recently caused a seismic uproar in the art world by calling for the removal and destruction of Dana Schutz’s controversial painting *Open Casket* (2016), currently included in the Whitney Biennial. Her open letter to the Whitney garnered vitriolic responses from artists like Coco Fusco and Gary Indiana, as well as writers and critics from almost every corner of the Internet. It has become a touchstone for debates about race and censorship today.

Given the impact of the letter it is no surprise then that Black is now being heavily scrutinized as a visual artist. Heretofore, she’s been mainly known for her words, writing extensively for *Artforum*, *4columns*, *The New Inquiry*, *Texte zur Kunst*, and publishing the genre-bending book *Dark Pool Party* (Dominica & Arca dia Missa, 2016). The Schutz controversy showed a large audience that considers her something of a thought leader. OR LIFE OR was a chance to get a sense of the larger creative practice, which incorporates video, performance, and—of course—text.

I first encountered Black’s work last summer in a group show titled *Welt Am Draht* (World on A Wire) at the newly founded Julia Stoschek Collection space in Berlin. Black presented the video *Bodybuilding* (2015), a somewhat lackluster piece bringing together images of bodybuilders and scrolling text referring to the body, such as, “Please help my body refuses to grow/change!!!” Concurrently the Berlin Biennale was in full swing, which Black famously reviewed for *Artforum*—one of the more celebrated reviews of that exhibition.

It was also at that moment that Black and Bonaventure (Soraya Lutangu) embarked on a collaboration, bringing together spoken word and music for the very first time as part of Berlin Community Radio’s *Boat Rage #4*. Since then the two, with the help of Ebba Fransén Waldhör, who designs the sets, have presented other iterations of this initial performance at the ICA in London, the mumok in Vienna, and now at PS1.

The afternoon’s performance began in almost pitch black. Lights from different angles spotlighted Black, as she roamed and paced restlessly around the space.

Waldhör’s set evoked a broken, dystopian arena: small pool-like cutouts filled with resin and a black tar substance littered the floor of the dome. Throughout the performance, piercing ambient noises would interject alternating with hypnotic mashups of songs by Beyoncé and other pop music. Laser projections of excerpts from Black’s text were drawn against the wall.

Seeming almost completely unaware of the intent audience packed around the dome, microphone in one hand and smart phone in the other, Black launched into a monologue.

“At the beginning of the film or dream...,” she began. What followed was a rapid-fire, lyrical reverie of poeticized statements about the body, capitalism, race, politics, and life. It was far too much of a torrent of words to capture (though I did try, scribbling notes in the darkness).

But what stood out beyond the specific words was just her command of them, and Black’s overall aura of eloquence mixed with intensity. She often looked down at the floor or occasionally at her phone. This was ostensibly to stay on the script—although the artist seemingly knew the text by heart and delivered every word at lightning speed with great authority, sometimes speaking in a mesmerizing monotone, at other times breaking into an eerie falsetto.

While Black’s ravings seemed cryptic and impossible to decipher in one sitting (e.g. “Fuck the weaponization of solitude...”), the theatricality of the work was very effective, at times evoking comparisons to Beckett. Black is incredibly personal and candid in her revelations, relentlessly self-critical in tone. “Europeans raised me but I also raised myself,” is a phrase that stays with me.

The whole spectacle—at once stream-of-consciousness and choreographed—very successfully evoked an imagined scene of aching discord, perhaps, between the body and the self, or self and society.

Putting aside the debate that Black instigated with her Whitney letter, OR LIFE OR seems to present work that is both emotional and a display of the intellectual heft of the artist herself. Her art criticism may have brought her to attention, but at PS1 she showed how that criticism, turned equally outward and inward at herself, could be spun into an art of its own.

500 WORDS

Hannah Black

ARTFORUM

10.06.15

Hannah Black's writings and artwork address race, gender, class, pop culture, and geopolitics, among other things. Her first solo show at Arcadia Missa in London, which she discusses here, opened on October 2 and runs through October 31, 2015. Black is also currently participating in two group shows: "Workland: the fence is a narrow place" at Chateau Shatto in Los Angeles, on view through October 31, and "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" at the Yarat Contemporary Art Center in Baku, Azerbaijan, which runs through January 7, 2016.

THERE ARE SEVERAL DIFFERENT types of objects in this exhibition—airline blankets, a video, and big paintings that operate as space dividers, like you might find in an office. But the show was conceived as a single installation about a dialectic between block and flow, which I think is fundamental to how capitalism works. Capitalism imposes extraordinarily stable racial and gender identities in a market-forged world that values transformational processes such as exchange, progress, and growth. Goods and money move more freely than people. But some people can also move very freely: rich people with certain passports, for instance.

I was interested in relating these ideas to a contemporary discourse around the relationship between blackness and abstract principles of capitalist accumulation and social control.



View of "Hannah Black," 2015, Arcadia Missa, London. From left: Black Quadrilateral 4, 2015; Black Quadrilateral 2, 2015; Black Quadrilateral 1, 2015; Black Quadrilateral 3, 2015.

What happens when these principles of accumulation are given flesh and walk around? The gallery space is related to the same entanglements all my work addresses: the white art world and contemporary art as a social form that pantomimes ideologies of global flow and global subjectivity. For a lot of leftists there's this outraged cry: "What do you mean that there are limits on my knowledge?" But maybe knowledge gets more interesting, not less, when we recognize its limits across subject positions, when we don't make it subordinate to a blanketing, universal subjectivity.

The video, which shows images of trade, flight, and circulations of all kinds, addresses this most explicitly, and the airline blankets evoke individual discomfort, the care of people's bodies, and mass circulation at the same time. I read that metabolism comes from the Greek *metabolē*, or "change," but that the word could also mean exchange or trade. Between the body and the ordering of the world there are all these ideological confluences—if someone says "blood circulates" or "commodities circulate," in a way the relation is totally metaphorical but it's also made real through different forms of control: threats of violence or exclusion or poverty. In every case, living is at stake.

Frank B. Wilderson III's ideas have been helpful to me in thinking about this show. He comes out of a Marxist tradition, but his political desire is bound up with black liberation. He talks about how blackness, understood as a kind of permanent negation of subjectivity, is the disavowed heart at the concept of "subject" or "citizen." Since I first read Wilderson, I've also become interested in theorists like Sylvia Wynter, Saidiya Hartman, and Fred Moten, but I really value Wilderson's punk negativity because it contrasts with the positivity of activism. It refuses to respond to the demand that we have to be able to describe alternative worlds before we have the right to desire them. Part of me is just in a long tantrum about having to live with all these crazy traps of race and gender, and Wilderson speaks to that. Also, in Jared Sexton's 2008 book *Amalgamation Schemes*, he talks about race as a scratch, a line going astray, so in the show I scratched these crude smiley faces into brown paint on the dividers, because I wanted to ruin the surfaces and make the objects abject with these grotesque, ingratiating smiles.

I think this show is a little despairing, but despair about politics isn't despair about the world. I've carried around race and gender like a stone in my throat for a long time and now I am giving more credence to this stuck stone—in fact it's the only thing I'm giving credence to. I like Wilderson's stance on art as a place where you're allowed to want the world to end, and I want to distinguish it from a bratty insurrectionist stance. I think the desire for this end is about mourning, just as the 2011 London riots could be understood as mourning, and so could everything that happened in Ferguson and after. I've been thinking about how mixed up the desire to live and the willingness to die are, and how they don't need to name themselves as political.

— As told to Paige K. Bradley

Hannah Black Small Room

By Kimberly Bradley
Mumok, Vienna 17 March – 18 June

What is life? In Small Room, a lean show on view in Mumok's basement, Hannah Black asks the largest of questions. The British-born, Berlin-based artist and writer recently gained notoriety after writing an open letter on Facebook calling for the destruction of Dana Schutz's Open Casket (2016), a painting on view in this year's Whitney Biennial depicting Emmett Till, an African-American teenager lynched in 1955. Black's oeuvre nearly always addresses racial and gender-identity themes, alienation and how social stratifications and power imbalances inscribe themselves upon the body. Her take on the Schutz painting – that a white painter has no business rendering the physical image of a murdered young black man – created a raging social-media discussion that was ultimately parsed in The New York Times, and in many ways it encapsulates her hot-button topics. Small Room encapsulates them as well, but far less overtly. The show's centrepiece is a looped, ten-minute, three-channel video, Beginning, End, None (all works 2017); in its collage of manipulated and mostly moving images, Black ponders the lines demarcating life and death by considering and presenting the cell as a biological unit, but also paralleling it with prison cells (presumably the titular 'small room') and factories, both symbols of exploitative late-capitalist institutions. To this end, we're presented with visual fragments: a schematic drawing, as if from a children's book, of a human cell as, indeed, a factory; a recurring rendering of something that could be a prison; the abstracted profile of Black's face gazing at a neon-laced landscape through a train window; and onscreen texts like, 'There has never been a world' and 'It's the beginning of the world,' sometimes read aloud, sometimes left for the viewer to read and ponder. The multitrack audio echoes the images, rapidly shifting between autobiographical snippets and grand statements addressing the macro structures that the tiny life-units must face.

Opposite the three screens, four sculptures made of creamy-coloured latex hang from the ceiling like skins, crisscrossed in draped strands of black yarn. In the film, a voice claims that no form of life exists without a membrane: these sculptures appear to be abstracted manifestations of that universal biological imperative. But even here, there's a moment of personalisation: at the base of one membrane is a floral body tattoo. Considering Black's prior body-related work, too, one wonders whether the odoriferous latex alludes in some way to sexuality (skin? fetishwear? condoms?), and whether its light colour is significant. Perhaps the crux of the exhibition is its least conspicuous component – two copies of a slim little novel titled Life, chained to the wall near a video-viewing bench tucked into a corner (its subtitle, 'The mechanism by which life began on Earth is unknown', is attributed to Wikipedia). Black cowrote this science-fiction narrative with New York-based artist/musician Juliana Huxtable; in its pages each author plays the character of a risk analyst 'returning from the dead,' somehow to accompany or prevent the apocalypse. 'I have retired from risk, and now nothing can happen to me. I'm a single-celled organism carved out of the white bone of the world. Mind is a miracle,' writes Huxtable. 'You don't have to tell me what you were by virtue of still being,' answers Black. In Small Room, Black simultaneously zooms far in and far out on what's always been important to her – the constrictions and limitations of biology, of societies, of ideology, of the 'accepted' representations of reality. But she also tests our limits in mixing weighty dialectics of life/death, personal/universal and present/future into a visual and textual brew that's as unsettling as it is sticky. We learn through Black's video that defining 'life' is elusive; most definitions lean on description. What is life? Depends on who's asking, and where, when and how. From ArtReview Summer 2017

ARTGALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Hannah Black

The show's title, "Soc or Barb," nods to Rosa Luxemburg's antiwar declaration from 1916: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism." The young Manchester-born, Berlin-based artist responds with a fragmented, allegorical installation. A throng of lumpy sculptural figures—aliens, barbarians, or, perhaps, both—wear infinity symbols on T-shirts, while a video titled "New Dawn" plays on a trio of monitors. As day breaks on another planet and morning's pink light slowly creeps into the frame, we try to connect the dots of the accompanying sound collage: personal conversations, philosophical texts, a fascist British marching song, a Céline Dion ballad. It's an inventory of metaphorical dawns, from the New Soviet man to far-right "new orders" to a new romance. But Black's installation also subverts such grand pretenses, presenting an endless loop of sunrises, witnessed by a barbarian horde.

— The New Yorker

Art in America

Hannah Black's practice deals primarily with issues of global capitalism, feminist theory, the body and socio-political spaces of control. A graduate of the art writing program at Goldsmiths and the Whitney Independent Study Program, Black underpins her work with rigorous theoretical research. In "Not You," her first solo show, her concerns manifested in direct, material gestures. Employing video, sculpture and painting, Black staged a compelling investigation into racial and bodily identity under capitalism.

Upon entering the gallery, viewers encountered four large paintings on wooden boards, titled "Black Quadrilaterals" (all works 2015). They are freestanding and thus inherently sculptural pieces; inscribed with emoji-like expressions scratched into brown paint, they partitioned the space. Standing at 8 by 6 feet, they felt confrontational, bristling against their spatial confines. The first loomed large under the broad entry arch of Arcadia Missa, which is located beneath a railway line in South London.



Behind the "Black Quadrilaterals" were less imposing wall-mounted works: three sculptures and a video. The sculptures Blanket (Etihad) and Blanket (Lufthansa) feature fabrics laid on plexiglass forms resembling chairs; viewers can faintly see their reflection through the translucent material. Both are titled after airlines, and recall the transitional spaces of departure lounges and terminals, where the body interfaces with wider infrastructures. Another sculpture, Zaum, acted as a pause in the show. It is a swath of latex immaculately folded and placed on a shelf, next to the video at the back of the gallery.

In the video, All Over, lasting seven minutes, satin sheets billow across the monitor as the artist's voice softly declares that "this is the part where nothing happens." Next comes a pixelated diagram of the human anatomy, superimposed on illustrations of flight paths. In its conflation of bodily and global networks, the video makes the show's most explicitly theoretical proposition: the body is not merely an occupant of transitional spaces, but a means for interrogating their structures. While the voiceover guides the spectator through the video with soothing clarity, the overall effect is unsettling and a little disorienting.

"Not You" harbored a political urgency, and was more analytical than its constituent parts may have initially appeared. The recurring theme of air travel was an astutely chosen motif through which to approach the personal, and indeed the body, in a geopolitical framework, owing to its creation of spaces of transactional and highly accelerated movement. A text placed where a press release would ordinarily be suggested that the most gestural moments in "Not You," the scratched faces on the paintings, were connected to race, by arguing that the etymological roots of race were synonymous with "the scratch, the mark, the line." They thus joined the other references to race, from the brands of international airlines to transitory spaces of cultural exchange. The exhibition's myriad artistic strategies invited viewers to consider their own bodily movements, spatially, theoretically and politically.

<https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/hannah-black-62082/>

10 Artists to Watch at Frieze London, 1:54, and Sunday

BY ALEXANDER FORBES AND MOLLY GOTTSCHALK / OCT 6TH, 2017



Frieze London built its brand by claiming itself to be the defining voice on the cutting edge of contemporary art. The fair still remains fertile ground to discover new talent and fresh-out-of-MFA-program young upstarts, though to be fair, the art world's overall attention has since broadened in scope. (Reflecting that trend, the winners of Frieze's own Stand Prize for its Focus section of young galleries have consisted only of artists born in the first half of the 20th century for the past two years.)

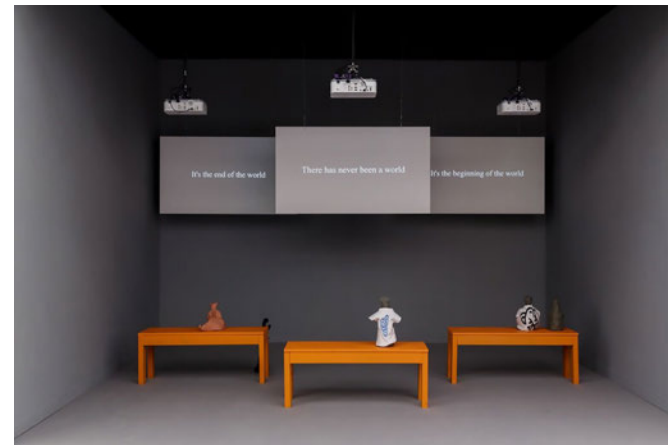
Meanwhile, Frieze's satellite fairs continue to provide collectors opportunities to dig deeper, exploring what directions contemporary art may head in next. Contemporary African art fair 1:54 brings together the strongest galleries globally showing artists who hail from the continent, while emerging fair Sunday offers 25 young galleries a chance to show a tight selection of artists in a triple-height industrial space just down the road from the Frieze tent.

That's a lot of ground to cover. Artsy's editors combed all three fairs in order to highlight 10 artists you'd do well to keep an eye on in the near future.

Hannah Black

B. 1981, MANCHESTER. LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN
ARCADIA MISSA, FOCUS SECTION, BOOTH H32

Many in the art world—and millions of suburban watchers of The View—became aware of Black after she penned a widely-circulated open lettercalling on the Whitney Museum of American Art to remove Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till, who was lynched in 1955 at the age of 14. But the writer-cum-artist, who graduated from Goldsmiths art writing program in 2013 and from the Whitney Independent Study Program a year later, had been gaining critical and curatorial attention well before the controversy.



Hannah Black, Beginning, End, None, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Arcadia Missa Gallery.

This year, Black has had solo shows at London's Chisenhale gallery and Vienna's MUMOK. For Frieze, she presents Beginning, End, None (2017): a 10-minute, three-channel video that brings together found footage from YouTube, images pulled from science journals, and a wireframe rendering of a panopticon. Another video by the artist, Intensive Care/Hot New Track(2013), was acquired by the Tate at Frieze. It intersperses audio files of interrogations that took place after the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal with footage of Rihanna and Chris Brown, and, like Beginning, End, None, critiques social structures and power relations dictated by capitalism in a mode that feels incredibly current.

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-10-artists-watch-frieze-london-1-54-sunday>

Artist Profile: Hannah Black

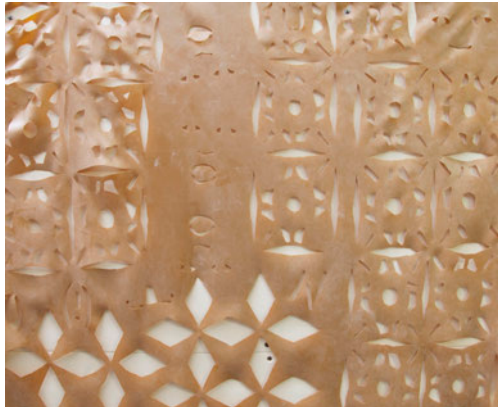
By Jesse Darling

Feb 17, 2015

RHIZOME

Your work concerns bodies, or the condition of being bodied. Your last video *Fall of Communism* (2014) feels like a sculpture in the sense that as a viewer, one's own body is pulled into relief, as with an object in space. I felt pulled into the space of the video, vertiginous. At your show at the Legion TV gallery in London, one half of what was on display was a hand-cut latex the color of skin. Is the work an analog for the body, or otherwise, where does the body (of the maker or the viewer) intersect or interact with the body of the work for you?

It's true that if you look at a lot of my work there is an interest in viscera, in the interior of the body—but it's not a Paul McCarthy guts and blood thing, it's a stand-in for interiority in general, for the inside being outside and vice versa. The phrase “being bodied” could mean “getting killed” as well as “being embodied” and I think that tension is one of the ways that I'm interested in what it means to have, or not have, something called “a body.” I tried to write about how our concept of the body might one day, in a utopian way, be replaced by the framework of lifetime or different concentrations of experience. My wildest idea was that this reinterpretation of sensory experience would “render death merely chronological,” a phrase I still love, though it's hard for me to recall exactly what I meant by it. Something about placing yourself in the long flow of time, allowing your self-conception to accommodate more than just your own conscious physical experience, I think. In the end it was too sci-fi an idea and didn't work out as an essay, so instead became the video *My Bodies*. I wanted to say something about how there is no generic body, no such thing as “the body”; bodies are raced, gendered, and assisted differently in the world. I collected images of white business executives, and you hear the voices of African-American female singers—Aaliyah, Beyonce, Whitney Houston, Jennifer Hudson, and many others—all singing the phrase “my body.” I also use Ciara's song “Body Party.” There is a whole tradition in black philosophy of trying to think about to what extent white thought is able to conceptualize black people as having bodily integrity. Hortense Spillers says that the enslaved body, for example, becomes just flesh; Frank Wilderson picks up this train of thought. This is part of the black critique of white feminism: the latter assumes, absurdly, that all women have bodies in the same way. The first part of the video presses on this tension. The second part of the video imagines a realm in between lives where someone is considering whether or not to be born again into a new body, knowing all of the implications of that, knowing how many people in this world have bodies that are racialized or impoverished or perhaps don't, in some senses, fully have bodies at all. It's like the famous romantic scene in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* where they realize they have had their relationship before: would I do it again? Would I choose to be embodied again?



Hannah Black, *Intensive Care II* (detail) (2013)

The *Intensive Care* latex piece that you mention is obviously evocative of practices of self-harm and self-beautification, and the mortification of certain bodies. My work in latex draws on the issue of how our subjectivities are formed by histories of brutality, with aggressive literalness. I cut line drawings, like ruined linotypes, into fabric whose texture and color evokes skin. Again, this is simultaneously violent and reparative; *More Love Than I've Ever Seen* (2014) suspends a carved image of the young Whitney Houston amid childlike representations of planets and creatures. (As in my video *The Neck*, I am really interested in drawings by and for kids, and also just the mode of drawing in general.

Video editing and drawing are the most like writing of anything, and I don't know why. I made a fan drawing of Houston for the Wysing screensavers project in 2013.) The title borrows an emotionally ambiguous line from her song “All the Man That I Need” that reminded me of Mike Kelly's *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*: Houston sings, “He fills me up, he gives me love, more love than I've ever seen.” It evokes both the laborious process of cutting the images into the latex, and the difficult idea that love given is often not commensurable to love received. I don't mean this as just a universal emotional observation, but also specifically to women, and even more specifically women of color and black women: historically that's who the wealth of colonial countries is ultimately derived from, and what did they get in return? Houston is an iconic figure, almost a sacrificial victim who gave abundantly and didn't get enough back, and her voice and image recur in my work.

She's in my video *Fall of Communism*, for example, where her famous, virtuosic sustained long notes become the scream of a falling body. I was interested in how a body could be both fungible with other bodies (through social forms like race and gender) and singular, in the same way that a commodity is both itself and a portion of everything else at the same time. We could think of a body as a register of experience: it's the place where we experience the world and where we carry experience as identity.

I could say that the body of work is also my body, or part of how I circulate in the world. I sometimes think that my work is a way of expanding my possibilities of intimacy with others, but maybe that's also just a way of saying that intimacy can be really hard. Channeling desire into objects—texts, videos, whatever—is a way to acknowledge the problems inherent in any kind of desire.

Language feels like a sinewy thing running through all your work, like an expertly handled weapon. Can you talk a bit about your relationship to language, your story with it?

The writing in the videos is inseparable from the images and other sound; I write and rewrite according to the rhythm of the edit, so when I'm asked for the text (which happens occasionally, like if it's being screened in a non-Anglophone country) I have to watch the video to reconstruct it. The texts I write for video and performance are very different from my essays. Working with images brings my language closer to how I speak, how I am. A good friend who read my writing before he met me said that I laughed less in writing than in real life. But I know how to laugh in a video.

I resent writing, but I also love it. Earth is the language planet.

I was thinking about whether it's possible to identify something like “straight materiality” and “queer materiality,” the hypothesis being that all works are an analog for the body in the world, and when the condition of that body is complicated or compromised then the work seeks to/is forced to/learns to occupy space accordingly. Could we speak of, for instance, a white materiality and a non-white materiality?

I read your question as something like, “How white is the white cube?” The tradition of western art does seem kind of bound up with whiteness, at least for now, because a certain mode of self-conscious cultural production becomes part of the alibi for white supremacy, part of the sketchy evidence for the white bourgeoisie being exemplarily human. “Look, we create Great Art, we're not like these savages!” Contemporary practice still evokes the modernist gesture of appropriating indigenous culture, seen as unselfconscious craft that can be transformed into art by the more refined subjectivity of the artist. In a way, art is always implicated in these transfers of power and vitality away from the specificity of their origin and back into capital flows. I don't think this is specific to any particular institution, but just is about the institutionalization of art. I'm not sure if I can claim any ethics in relation to this, maybe only that I hope my work also has its own power and doesn't rely on vitiating other people's.

My work isn't really “about” race, but it comes from my experience and thoughts and my experience and thoughts are marked by race, or specifically blackness and Jewishness, in weird ways. Can my work be part of a black tradition? I hope so, but I don't know. As a person who has both black and white heritage, who grew up partly in white households, obviously I have a particular kind of experience. In any case, I don't think this is only a matter of what some people dismissively call “identify politics”: questions of globalization, the commodity and circulation are already ingrained in these experiences.

A lot of the work that I come across is by white men—some work I like, some I don't, but certainly a lot of it. As a result, I know a lot about what that experience of the world is like, perhaps more than I even know about my own experience. As people who are not cis white men we have to try to take art as an institution approximately as seriously as it takes us, which is not very.

Can art be a legitimate form of activism or otherwise an agent for social change?

I don't think art or at least my art should aim to be activist. All I can do is to express a relationship to my own conditions of being. Those conditions are historical and I didn't determine them, but I can think about them. For me, that's basically what art does.

I'm sometimes really surprised that people want to read my work as activist. I make artworks, objects, in an approximately conventional way, even if they are mostly videos. I'm always trying to drag big geopolitical or historical narratives into the realm of direct individual experience, and I even go so far as to find that kind of funny, that weird combination of scales: funny and also a bit painful. For example, *The Neck* puts together my bad childhood drawings where I didn't understand how to draw a neck between the head and the body, and my dad's black radical politics that he had at one time, some of which was great but sometimes we would go to political meetings and be told, "The man is the head of the household and the woman is the neck." *Jaki Liebezeit During A Power Cut* Circa 1970 fuses the economic changes in the organization of capital that happened in the 1970s and a child listening to her parents' records. The child is partly me and partly someone else—I wasn't born yet in the 1970s, but someone I was in love with at the time was. I don't see how any official politics can be any more important than the intensity of listening to music. Maybe, more than anything else, the videos are about rhythm. I fantasize that one day I will just make music.

What I'm saying is, my work is a kind of refusal of politics, as much as an affirmation of politics. But I want to take those things seriously. I'm not sneering at any of it. I ended up reading the neck as the idea of mediation, the impossibility of mediations between the image and the self, between a racial identity and the self, partly because maybe we don't even know what's really there, in the place of the self. I don't think this follows the logic of activism at all. Those kinds of links are so insubstantial, they are almost arbitrary, something to do with memory, maybe, and I think they can only really happen in art or in a joke.

An artwork might change something I guess because of how it is received or how people carry the memory of it. When we're talking about art changing anything, we're talking about art changing a person, and what that person might do in response to this encounter with a work. There are definitely artworks that have changed me and not all of them were even works that I particularly liked.

Now that I'm thinking about it, I'm not sure which is more prominent: my desire for change or my desire to give form to some kind of anger/sorrow. Those things are all mixed up: look at what's been happening recently in the USA, the Ferguson moment, where anger and sorrow are politicized. But in terms of the direct concerns of my work, I don't have anything to say about changes that might never happen.

Can you describe your process, e.g. with a video? Do you begin with a text or with an image or a proprioceptive kinetic sense of something, or what? And then how do you proceed? In conversation, you have spoken about your editing style, which you have conversely described as no style at all. This relates back to rhythm of course, and materiality—I want to know how you make your work. How do you know it's finished? How do you know what it's becoming, or become?

This is a really good question because it's hard for me to say. The videos mostly begin with texts, but the texts just decompose as I'm editing. Sometimes I rewrite directly into the titles box in Premiere. There's a thing that happens as I'm working, which you're right, is rhythmic. I discover what the rhythm of the edit should be. It doesn't feel like a style because it's like dancing: I know I do have a style of dancing. I'm recognizably myself dancing, but I don't approach it consciously. I collect images from the internet but the recent videos also have something approximately "hand-made" even if it's only vaguely so. That's a kind of weird compromise between making new moving images, which seems so weird and pointless, and not wanting the kind of stylistic collapse or neutrality that can come from just collaging other people's images.

Intensive Care/Hot New Track began with this text conflating celebrity gossip about Rihanna and Chris Brown with Abu Ghraib and then everything came from there, using the karaoke track for "What's My Name?", the spinning images. That video was very personal, but look how many impersonal things I had to use to give myself that permission. I still laugh sometimes when thinking about how I took a song about oral sex and turned it into a video about violence: "The square root of 69 is 8 or something..." Fall of Communism came from the idea of someone falling into an abyss in Manhattan and at every level they change into a different person, but it didn't start to really work until I realized that Whitney Houston's voice could also signal falling. At some point, the text, the images, and sound fuse together.

The video I'm working on right now is a nightmare because I tried to start without a script. I'm really curious to see how it goes. Maybe it will be my first wordless video, which would be really weird for me.

Questionnaire:

Location: Berlin

How/when did you begin working creatively with technology?

That's a really hard question. Do you remember when we would go on weird forums online and just make shit up, when we were around 15? Maybe that was performance art. I made my first video with Final Cut Pro in 2007 where I made a papier mache head in Jamaican colors to represent my dad and then cut it up with scissors. I was at film school at the time and had a boyfriend who made real films and he laughed when he saw it and said, "Why did you make that?" and kind of patted me on the head. Now I use Premiere. That man moved back to Serbia, I think. I hope he's doing OK, but I am sure he would still hate my videos.

Where did you go to school? What did you study?

In my teens I wanted to be a dancer and left home at 17 to do a one-year program in that, but then I went to Cambridge and got a degree in English literature. A few years later I went to film school on a scholarship, but dropped out after six months as I realized I really wanted to go to art school. I graduated from the MFA in Art Writing at Goldsmiths in 2013—it was an experimental text-led art practice program and no longer exists, but it was really wonderful, I now realize, because we were basically left to our own devices. Last year I did the Whitney ISP in New York.

What do you do for a living, or what occupations have you held previously?

I've done bar work, clerical work, babysitting, sales work, whatever. Now, I have some income from screenings, but mainly I do writing, editing and video editing for money. I'm an editor at *The New Inquiry*. My first job was in a stationery store when I was 14.

What does your desktop or workspace look like? (Pics or screenshots please!)



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