A.K. BURNS

42 rue de Turenne, Paris - F-75003 / +33 1 42 72 68 13 / galerie@michelrein.com
Washington rue/straat 51A, Brussels - B-1050 / +32 2 640 26 40 / contact.brussels@michelrein.com

SUMMARY | SOMMAIRE

ARTWORKS | ŒUVRES 3

EXHIBITIONS | EXPOSITIONS 45

PRESS | PRESSE 83

TEXTS | TEXTES 119

PUBLICATIONS | PUBLICATIONS 128

BIOGRAPHY | BIOGRAPHIE 130

ARTWORKS
ŒUVRES



Marianne deludes the world, 2020
aquaresin-concrete mix (hand), newspaper (torch), steel rebar (arm), charcoal log (arm), cast concrete bag (sleeve)
béton aqua-résine (main), journal (chalumeau), barre d'armature en acier (bras), bûche de charbon de bois (bras), sac de béton coulé (manchon)
214 x 105 x 30 cm (84.25 x 41.34 x 11.81 in.)
unique artwork
BURN20104



The event between, 2019
glass, sand
verre, sable
51 x 35,5 x 1,5 cm (20.08 x 13.78 x 0.39 in.)
unique artwork

collection FRAC des Pays De La Loire, Carquefou, France



The cry, 2019
glass, silver nitrate, copper mesh, carbon
verre, nitrate d'argent, maille de cuivre, carbone
51,5 x 39 x 2 cm (20.08 x 15.35 x 0.79 in.)
unique artwork

private collection



Left leaning, 2020
powder-coated aluminium, K-way painted, rope
aluminium thermolaqué, K-way peint, corde
187 x 55,5 x 20 cm (73.62 x 21.65 x 7.87 in.)
unique artwork

collection FRAC des Pays De La Loire, Carquefou, France



Still leak, 2019
glass, cast plastic
verre, plastique moulé
1 element : 25,5 x 28 x 35 cm (9.8 x 11 x 13.7 in.)
2 elements : 24 x 14 x 14 cm (9.4 x5.5 x 5.5 in.)
unique artwork
BURN20101



Broke not broken, 2019
powder coated aluminum
aluminium thermolaqué
71 x 107 x 68,6 cm (27.95 x 42.13 x 26.77 in.)
unique artwork
BURN20093



Blue burden, 2019
powder coated aluminum, Ikea bag
aluminum thermolaqué, sac Ikea
101,5 x 75,5 x 30 cm (39.76 x 29.53 x 11.81 in.)
unique artwork
BURN20095



Pitch black dry sack, 2019
aquaresin-concrete mix (hand), cast epoxy (jug), steel rebar (arm), charcoal log (arm)
béton aqua-résine (main), coulé époxy (cruche), barre d'acier d'armature (bras), bûche de charbon de bois (bras)
112 x 121 cm (44.09 x 47.64 in.)
unique artwork

collection FRAC Ile-de-France - Le Plateau, Paris, France



MIRROR COLLAGE (Living Room series), 2019
7 elements: mixed media on mirror
7 éléments : technique mixte sur miroir
variable dimensions
unique artwork
BURN20115

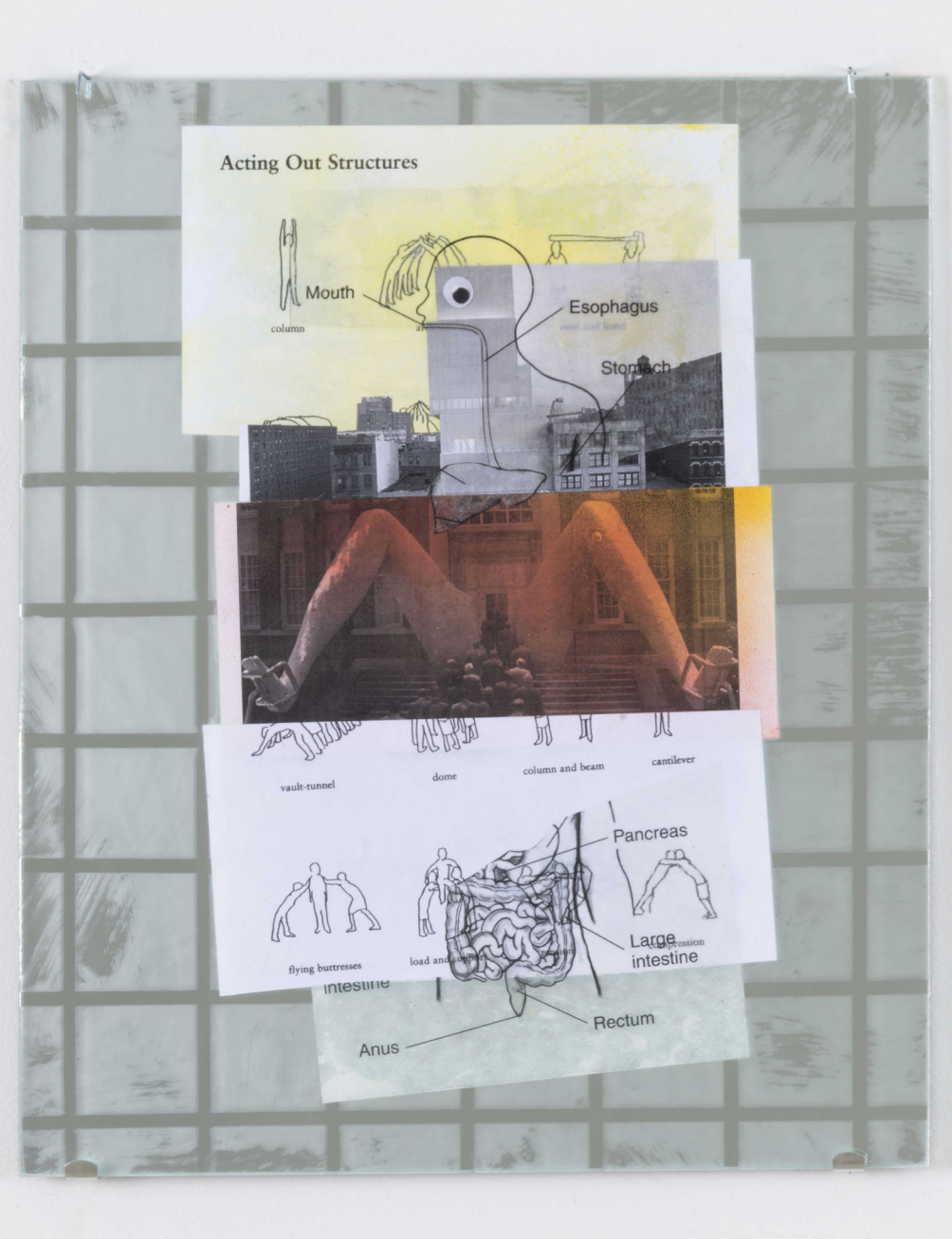

Eris
PRINCIPIA
DISCORDIA


Pluto
TOP SOIL
TOP SOIL
TOP SOIL
TOP SOIL
TOP SOIL
TOP SOIL
TOP SOIL
TOP SOIL
TIMBERLINE
SOIL
TOP SOIL


Siua Twins huge 8-10months
Suntan


The New York Times
"All the News That's Fit to Print"
Late Edition
VOL. CLXI . No. 55,784
NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MAY 27, 2012
$5.00
U.S. EFFORTS FAIL TO CURTAIL TRADE IN AFGHAN OPIUM
LURE OF POPPY PROFITS
After Allies' Exit, Drugs Likely to Remain Fuel of Corruption
Many Children Among Victims In Syria Attack
U.S. HOPES ASSAD CAN BE EASED OUT WITH RUSSIA'S AID
At Least a Third of the 92 Killed in a Village
ID Thieves Loot Tax Checks, Filing Ear


NO


Acting Out Structures
Mouth
column
Esophagus
Stomach
vault-tunnel
dome
column and beam
cantilever
Pancreas
flying buttresses
Large intestine
Rectum
Anus


Makemake



The Dispossessed (Fence 1), 2018
steel, aluminum and chromaflair paint
acier, aluminium et peinture chromaflair
221 x 213 x 130 cm (87.01 x 83.86 x 51.18 in.)
unique artwork
BURN21117



The Dispossessed (Fence 2), 2018
steel, aluminum and chromaflair paint
acier, aluminium et peinture chromaflair
183 x 175 x 213 cm (72.05 x 68.9 x 83.86 in.)
unique artwork
BURN21116



Survivor's Remorse, 2018
video installation, 9 screens 55 inches, HD video transport case, color, stereo sound, 20'11
installation vidéo, 9 écrans 55 pouces, caisse de transport vidéo HD, couleur, son stéréo, 20'11"
unique artwork
BURN21118

collection FRAC Bourgogne, Dijon, France







Orchid Show, 2013
HD video, color, sound
vidéo HD, couleur, son
13'34"
ed. of 3 ex
BURN17019

THE ORCHID SHOW

Orchid Show documents the annual event at the New York Botanic Garden as it is compulsively captured, reproduced and glossed over by visitors through the appeal of the image of flowers. In the video, the camera lurks, observing the observers, while the sounds of the garden folds into a composition for piano by Ruth Crawford Seeger, Kaleidoscopic Changes on an Original Theme, Ending with a Fugue (1924), by one of the few celebrated female composers of the early 20th century. Orchid Show critically observes notions of spectacle, gender and beauty as a query into the staging and imaging of nature.

The Orchid Show documente l'événement annuel du Jardin botanique de New York qui est capturé, reproduit et survolé par les visiteurs de façon compulsive à travers l'attrait qu'engendre l'image des fleurs. Dans la vidéo, la caméra se cache et observe les observateurs, tandis que les sons du jardin s'incorporent dans une composition pour piano de Ruth Crawford Seeger, Kaleidoscopic Changes on an Original Theme, Ending with a Fugue (1924), une des rares et célèbres femmes compositeurs du XXe. Orchid Show observe de façon critique les notions de spectacle, de genre et de beauté comme une interrogation sur la mise en scène et l'imagerie de la nature.



Any Means, 2012
porcelain vase, cast concrete, packing tape, foam fill, enamel paint, copper dust, epoxy
vase en porcelaine, béton moulé, ruban adhésif, mousse de rembourrage, émail, poudre de cuivre, époxy
61 x 30,5 x 30,5 cm (24.02 x 11.81 x 11.81 in.)
unique artwork

private collection



Discard (T-shirt), 2014
cast aluminium
fonte d'aluminium
39,4 x 50,8 cm (15.35 x 19.69 in.)
unique artwork
BURN17007



Discard (work shirt), 2013
cast aluminium
fonte d'aluminium
77,4 x 62,7 cm (30.5 x 24.7 in.)
unique artwork

private collection



Release Valve, 2017
aluminium, fiberglass, brass, oil paint, iron-on, air mattress, fishing lures
aluminium, fibre de verre, laiton, nylon antidéchirures, fermeture éclair, apprêt émail, argent plaqué cuivre, pièces de monnaie
133,4 x 55,2 x 12,1 cm (52.36 x 21.65 x 4.72 in.)
unique artwork

private collection



Figuratively, 2012
penny, archivial ink jet image tranfers on vinyl coated canvas
pièce de monnaie, impression jet d'encre transférée sur toile revêtue de vinyle
48 x 28 x 2 cm (18.9 x 11.02 x 0.79 in.)
unique artwork
BURN17002



Window In My Way, 2012
penny, archivial ink jet image tranfers on vinyl coated canvas
pièce de monnaie, impression jet d'encre transférée sur toile revêtue de vinyle
35,6 x 27,9 x 11,4 cm (13.78 x 10.63 x 4.33 in.)
unique artwork
BURN17001



Before the wake, 2014
spirulina, polyurethane, torn catalog pages containing photos of Glen Canyon, Utah taken by Tad Nichols before it was dammed in 1956
spiruline, polyurethane, page de catalogue montrant des photographies du Glen Canyon (Utah) prisent par Tad Nichols avant le barrage de 1956
30 x 30,5 cm (11.8 x 12 in.)
unique artwork
BURN17009



Leave No Trace, 2016
vocals and sounds: guitar, cymbal, large cardboard tube, small plastic bucket, bamboo, rocky sand, XLR cable touching tongue, no. 2 pencil, dental floss, contact mics, dynamic mic, looper and various effect pedals
voix et sons : guitare, cymbale, grand tube en carton, petit seau en plastique, bambou, sable rocailleux, câble XLR touchant la langue, crayon no. 2, fil dentaire, micros de contact, micro dynamique, boucleur et pédales d'effets diverses
MP3 format 31'8"
unique artwork
BURN17028

Leave No Trace





The record
a recording of listening
the vocal folds of a reclining
feline
or feedback
between a microphone and a nine-foot
cardboard tube
Chords and discord that I'm certain I
cannot redo

Ethics for a lived practice
temporary and portable
displaced, terrestrial wilderness

Be prepared
equipped
to act
Gatorade, 1965
Therm-a-rest, 1971
Lonely Planet, 1972
Gore-Tex, 1976

Detract
resistance
to impact
carefully covered up
covered over, glossed over
glossy glass mirrored back

The record
a rotation may be repeated
What is audible (or what is heard)
dissipates as fast as it arrives
You can hold on to it but I don't
recommend it

Sliding a finger between the sheets of
plastic
split the seal open
Maneuver your hand inside the
pocket
avoiding the surface, the grooves
Pull out the pair
slip them on
fingers
as each enters its respective
prophylactic canal
Now the record

To be tracked
or not
was wild ever wild
Passive and active constructions
a line traced
a line erased
invisible, inaudible
undocumented

Without history
Sports Bra, 1978, originally
constructed by sewing two jock straps
together Necessity, the mother of
invention raised capital
The dad of desire

Oh, leisure class, she's gone wild Polar
Fleece, 1979
Leatherman, 1983
Advil, 1984

An unregulated space or body
that wilderness
a dark web
a black market
a fugitive off-shore hacker separatist
living stealth

So stealth she passes
accelerating
spinning-out
leaving a torrent trail of dust

Carbon, digital, footprint
Teva, 1988
LED, 1994
Solar Backpack, 2006
on-the-grid
because she is the grid

Disappearing
occurs at the margins
May appear powerless
or corrupt
Super-human
flying above the law and under
the radar

What matters is what is perceived
to matter
the law
objective
always subjective
I'm suspicious
she seem like she may be hiding
something

No time, no place, no money
No time, no place, no body



Post Times (Mogul), 2017
newspaper, pigmented resin, enamel primer, polyurethane
papier journal, résine pigmentée, aprêt d'émail, polyuréthane
103,2 x 86,7 cm (40.6 x 34.1 in.)
unique artwork

private collection







Community Action Center, 2010
SD single-channel video, colored
vidéo SD monocanal, couleur
71'
ed. of 3 ex
BURN17041

collection MoMA, New-York, USA

COMMUNITY ACTION CENTER

Community Action Center is a single channel video work A.K. Burns conceived, produced, directed, propped, shot, and edited in collaboration with A.L. Steiner. This project is an archive of an intergenerational community built on collaboration, friendship, sex and art. The work rethinks how sex and sexuality is imaged and imagined for marginalized bodies — in particular women, queer and transgender. Inspired by gay porn-romance-liberation films and feminist practices of the 70s' and 80s' the work opens with a recitation of Jack Smiths, Normal Love. This video seeks to expose and reformulate paradigms that are typical of porn typologies by using tropes for their comical value, critical consideration and historical homage.

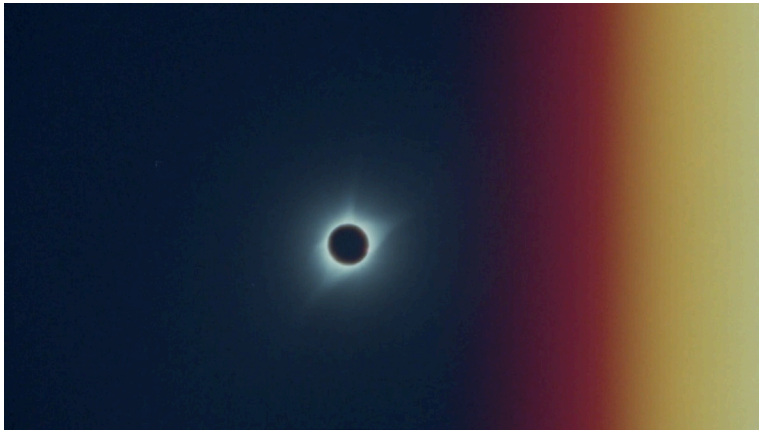
A.L. Steiner and A.K. Burns worked with artists and performers who created infinitely complex gender and performance roles that are both real and fantastical, set to a sound track of music culled from the worldwide sisterhood: Chicks on Speed, Effi Briest, Electrelane, Chateau featuring K8 Hardy, Lesbians on Ecstasy, Light Asylum, MEN, Motherland, NGUZUNGUZU, I.U.D. (Lizzi Bougatsos & Sadie Laska), Kinski and Thee Majesty (Genesis P-Orridge), and featuring original compositions by Justin Bond, Nick Hallett & Sam Greenleaf Miller, Ashland Mines & Wu Tsang, Sergei Tcherepnin and Tri-State Area with A V Linton.

Community Action Center est une œuvre vidéo à canal unique élaborée, produite, réalisée, étayée, tournée et montée par A.K. Burns en collaboration avec A.L. Steiner. Ce projet est conçu comme une archive d'une communauté intergénérationnelle construite sur la collaboration, l'amitié, le sexe et l'art. L'œuvre repense la façon dont le sexe et la sexualité sont imaginés et représentés pour les corps marginalisés — en particulier les femmes, les homosexuels et les transsexuels. Inspirée par les films pornographiques, romantiques et libératoires gais ainsi que par les pratiques féministes des années 70 et 80, l'œuvre s'ouvre sur une lecture de Normal Love de Jack Smiths. Community Action Center cherche à exposer et à reformuler les paradigmes caractéristiques des typologies du porno en utilisant les tropes pour leur valeur comique, leur considération critique et leur hommage historique.

A.L. Steiner et A.K. Burns ont travaillé avec des artistes et des interprètes qui ont créé des rôles de genre et de performance infiniment complexes, à la fois réels et fantastiques, sur une bande sonore tirée de la fraternité mondiale : Chicks on Speed, Effi Briest, Electrelane, Chateau featuring K8 Hardy, Lesbians on Ecstasy, Light Asylum, MEN, Motherland, NGUZUNGUZU, I.U.D. (Lizzi Bougatsos & Sadie Laska), Kinski and Thee Majesty (Genesis P-Orridge), et comprenant des compositions originales de Justin Bond, Nick Hallett & Sam Greenleaf Miller, Ashland Mines & Wu Tsang, Sergei Tcherepnin et Tri-State Area avec A V Linton.







Untitled, Eclipse, 2019
Negative Space series
16 mm film transferred to video, colour, without sound
film 16 mm transféré sur vidéo, couleur, sans son
13′
ed. of 3 ex
BURN19086

collection The American Academy of Arts & Letters, New-York, USA

UNTITLED, ECLIPSE

Shot in the field in Nebraska in 2017, ***Untitled, Eclipse*** depicts a total solar eclipse. During the eclipse, the sun seemingly transforms into a black hole in the sky—representing a void or negative space. The work is projected on a large angled screen, amplifying the residue of heavy film grain as well as the entanglement of astronomical phenomena, technology, and representation.

Tourné en plein champ dans le Nebraska en 2017, ***Untitled, Eclipse*** dépeint une éclipse solaire totale. Pendant l'éclipse, le soleil semble se transformer en un trou noir dans le ciel - représentant un vide ou un espace négatif. L'œuvre est projetée sur un grand écran à grand angle, amplifiant le résidu de grain du film ainsi que l'enchevêtrement des phénomènes astronomiques, technologiques et représentatifs.

NEGATIVE SPACE

A WORK IN FOUR PARTS

POWER (the sun)
A Smeary Spot, 2015, video installation

THE BODY
Living Room, 2017, video installation

SPACE (void/land)
Leave No Trace, 2019, video installation
Also titled Leave No Trace is a vinyl record and poem completed in 2016

WATER
What is Perverse is Liquid, (TBA)

NEGATIVE SPACE

Conceived as a non-linear and layered narrative, this series envisions a world wherein boundaries are fluid and hierarchical relations permute. This cycle of works playfully corrupts science-fiction tropes exploring the intersection of politics and fantasy to build idiosyncratic[1] allegorical imagery.

Burns deliberately locates the work in a speculative present filled with the detritus of everyday life. Filmed in stunning but familiar landscapes, like the desert of the Southwest United States, *Negative Space* exposes the tension between utopian proposals of sociality and apocalyptic anxieties. The works challenge long-standing assumptions about social orders, marshaling familiar images and objects to ask how value is assigned to resources, how marginalized bodies navigate a fraught social reality, and how different forms of matter come to matter.

As a formal term in art, « negative space » denotes the matter between and around the subject. If the subject is the focus of our attention, a definable entity, negative space is considered subordinate to the subject. Burns sees negative space as unfixed, malleable, and ultimately as an open set of possibilities. Recognizing this hierarchy, Burns uses this concept of negative space as a proposal for reorienting the viewer and as an analogy for generating agency within a subjugated position.

A quasi-science fiction four-part epic *Negative Space* explores the violence of boundary making practices and agency as enacted through subjugated positions. Each work is non-linear and allegorical, built around a physical system: power (the sun), the body, space (void/land) and water. Through a process of conjuring and deconstructing science fiction tropes, the videos work at intersection of politics and fantasy. Negative Space raises questions about the allocation of resources, environmental fragility, marginalized bodies, and their relationship to place.

1. personal reaction to the influence of outside agents

Conçue comme un récit non linéaire et stratifié, cette série envisage un monde où les frontières sont fluides et les relations hiérarchiques permutables. Ce cycle d'œuvres corrompt de façon ludique les tropes de la science-fiction en explorant l'intersection entre la politique et le fantastique pour construire une imagerie allégorique idiosyncrasique[1].

Burns situe délibérément l'œuvre dans un présent spéculatif rempli de détritus de la vie quotidienne. Filmé dans des paysages époustouflants mais familiers, comme le désert du sud-ouest des États-Unis, *Negative Space* expose la tension entre des propositions utopiques de socialité et des angoisses apocalyptiques. Les œuvres remettent en question des hypothèses de longue date sur les ordres sociaux, rassemblant des images et des objets familiers pour se demander comment la valeur est attribuée aux ressources, comment les corps marginalisés naviguent dans une réalité sociale tendue et comment différentes formes de matière deviennent importantes.

En tant que terme formel dans l'art, « l'espace négatif » désigne la matière entre et autour du sujet. Si le sujet est au centre de notre attention, une entité définissable, l'espace négatif est considéré comme subordonné au sujet. Burns voit l'espace négatif comme un espace non fixé, malléable, et finalement comme un ensemble ouvert de possibilités. Reconnaissant cette hiérarchie, Burns utilise ce concept d'espace négatif comme une proposition pour réorienter le spectateur et comme une analogie pour générer l'agencement dans une position soumise.

Chaque œuvre est non linéaire et allégorique, construite autour d'un système physique : le pouvoir (le soleil), le corps, l'espace (vide / terre) et l'eau. À travers un processus de conjuration et de déconstruction de tropes de science-fiction, les vidéos travaillent à l'intersection de la politique et de la fantaisie. *Negative Space* soulève des questions sur l'allocation des ressources, la fragilité de l'environnement, les organismes marginalisés et leur relation au lieu.

1. réaction personelle à l'influence d'agents extérieurs

POWER (the sun)

A Smeary Spot (Negative Space 0), 2015, video installation





A Smeary Spot (2015) is a video installation constructed as a 4-channel spatialized audio-visual panorama. This episode is the introduction and orbital center around which the other three episodes in *Negative Space* circulate and conceptually echo. The video is staged in two sites: the deserts of southern Utah and a black box theater. The desert and theater operate dually as real and psychological spaces that represent the vast infinitude and unfixed qualities of the void.

Performers navigate the desert observing the land, gathering garbage, equipment for provisional living (camping gear) and seeking im/material resources like water, smoke (air), and light.

In the theater, performers build their world from a central pile of waste while reciting a script culled from multiple texts. With each recitation a performer engages with props (the material world) in subtle and humorous ways that alter or augment the meaning of what is being said. Through this process the authority of language, and other boundary making devices are unhinged—exposing multiple meanings and ambiguity.

Over the course of the 53 minutes a poly-vocal recitation of the script unfolds like a manifesto, rooted in ontological fluidity and difference. The work voices an alternative to the current state of queer, migrant and race-based politics that advocate for equality through assimilation. Assimilation asks marginalized persons to adapt to hegemonic systems, ***A Smeary Spot*** wishes to cultivate difference as a vital aspect of a healthy ecosystem.

A Smeary Spot (2015) est une installation vidéo construite comme un panorama audiovisuel spatialisé à 4 canaux. Cet épisode est l'introduction et le centre orbital autour duquel les trois autres épisodes de *Negative Space* circulent et font écho conceptuellement. La vidéo est mise en scène dans deux sites : les déserts du sud de l'Utah et un théâtre de la boîte noire. Le désert et le théâtre fonctionnent en duo comme des espaces réels et psychologiques qui représentent la vaste infinitude et les qualités non fixées du vide.

Les artistes naviguent dans le désert en observant la terre, en ramassant les ordures, les équipements pour la vie provisoire (matériel de camping) et en cherchant des ressources im/matérielles comme l'eau, la fumée (air) et la lumière.

Au théâtre, les artistes construisent leur monde à partir d'un tas central de déchets tout en récitant un scénario tiré d'une multiples textes. À chaque récitation, l'interprète s'engage avec les accessoires (le monde matériel) de façon subtile et humoristique, ce qui modifie ou augmente le sens de ce qui est dit. Par ce processus, l'autorité du langage et d'autres dispositifs de délimitation exposent sans retenue de multiples significations et ambiguïtés.

Au cours des 53 minutes, une récitation poly-vocale du texte se déroule comme un manifeste, enracinée dans la fluidité et la différence ontologique. L'œuvre exprime une alternative à l'état actuel de la politique queer, migrante et raciale qui prône l'égalité par l'assimilation. L'assimilation demande aux personnes marginalisées de s'adapter aux systèmes hégémoniques, ***A Smeary Spot*** souhaite cultiver la différence comme un aspect vital d'un écosystème sain.







A Smeary Spot (Negative Space 0), 2015
Negative Space series
4-channel video installation with 6-channel sound, TRT 53'13"
installation vidéo 4 canaux avec son 6 canaux, TRT 53'13"
ed. of 3 ex
BURN17046

THE BODY

Living room (Negative Space 00)



Living Room is the second episode in Negative Space. This episode is focused around exploring dueling notions of the body as both an exploited and agential resource. It is a two-channel video filmed within the interior of a building. Shot in a series of found and constructed interiors, the video treats the entire building as both a stage and metaphorical organism.

The work is divided among four sites within the building: living room (psyche), stairwell (mouth to anus), bathroom (kidneys), and basement (uterus). The building exists as a hermetic ecosystem in the narrative of *Living Room*, wherein performers play various bodies–celestial, political, metaphysical, animal–working to co-subsist. This video features a unique soundtrack by Geo Wyeth and choreography by NIC Kay.

Living Room est le deuxième épisode de Negative Space. Cet épisode se concentre sur l'exploration des notions de dualité du corps en tant que ressource à la fois exploitée et agente. Il s'agit d'une vidéo à deux canaux filmée à l'intérieur d'un bâtiment. Tourné dans une série d'intérieurs trouvés et construits, la vidéo traite l'ensemble du bâtiment comme un organisme à la fois scénique et métaphorique.

Les travaux sont répartis sur quatre sites dans le bâtiment : salle de séjour (psychisme), cage d'escalier (de la bouche à l'anus), salle de bains (reins) et sous-sol (utérus). Le bâtiment existe en tant qu'écosystème hermétique dans le récit de *Living Room*, où les interprètes jouent de divers corps - célestaux, politiques, métaphysiques, animaliers - pour co-exister. Cette vidéo présente une bande sonore unique de Geo Wyeth et une chorégraphie de NIC Kay.







Living Room (Negative Space 00), 2017
Negative Space series
2-channel HD video installation, color, 5.1 audio
installation vidéo 2 canaux HD, couleur, audio 5.1
ed. of 3 ex
BURN17035

SPACE (void/land)

Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000), 2019, video installation





Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000) (2019) installation, explores the demarcation of space and how it changes the formation of bodies; formalized as the void, landscape, and grid. The video is projected on to the five visible sides of a white cube propped up on a fake human skull, making the cube slightly askew, a morbid nod to its use in the video as both a presence and a negation.

A solitary arch made of stacked speakers stands in the middle of an empty stage, shadows are cast across the floor as theater lights are used to echo the movement of the sun across the sky. Through this simulation of a sundial we experience «felt time» as opposed to mechanized time. Cut to a land-locked trailer where skulls are gathered into an Ikea bag from otherwise empty kitchen cabinets. These remains of a human body are toted across the desert and later used to prop-up a collectively built platform. Leave No Trace juxtaposes immaterial forces and what A.K. Burns calls the «non-event» sites of a theater, like the battens and theater grid, with desert sprawl. A group gathers on the site of a demolished building repurposing garbage to construct a new space, one without walls, that will serve as a stage for movement and a protest tableau. The platform borders a military base demarcated by barbwire and threatening signage. Suited in Chelsea Manning's jacket a performer trespasses while vocalist Shannon Funchess traverses a web-like theater grid, singing an a-cappella version of «Supernature», that conjures a macabre narrative of technologically altered beings.

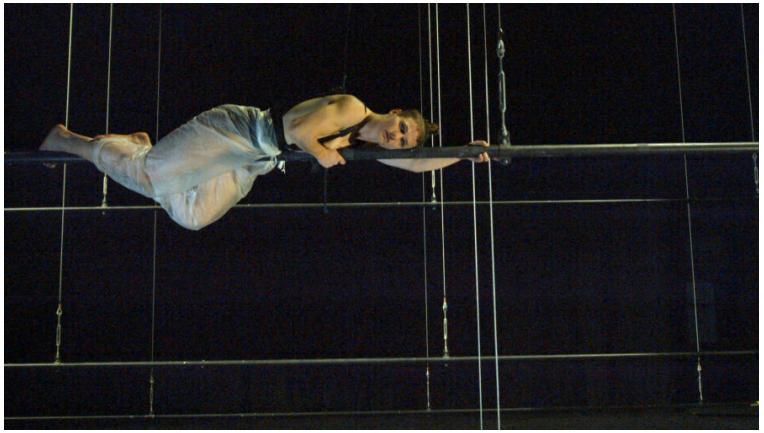
Returning to the stage we find a critical homage to Félix Gonzélez-Torres 1991 conceptual performance piece Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform) — reinterpreting desire through a non-binary body. The closing recitation is a text by A.K. Burns about the borderless sensation and impotence of human superiority as experienced within the desert.

L'installation ***Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000)*** (2019), explore la démarcation de l'espace et la façon dont ce même espace modifie la formation des corps ; formalisé par le vide, le paysage et la grille. La vidéo est projetée sur les cinq côtés visibles d'un cube blanc appuyé sur un faux crâne humain, rendant le cube légèrement de travers, un clin d'œil morbide à son utilisation dans la vidéo comme une présence et une négation.

Une arche solitaire faite de haut-parleurs empilés se dresse au milieu d'une scène vide, des ombres sont projetées sur le sol tandis que les lumières du théâtre sont utilisées pour faire écho au mouvement du soleil dans le ciel. A travers cette simulation d'un cadran solaire, nous faisons l'expérience du « temps ressenti» par opposition au temps mécanisé. Dans une remorque fermée à la circulation des crânes sont rassemblés dans un sac Ikea à partir d'armoires de cuisine vides. Ces restes de corps humains sont transportés à travers le désert et utilisés plus tard pour soutenir une plateforme construite collectivement. Leave No Trace juxtapose des forces immatérielles et ce qu'A.K. Burns appelle les sites « non-événement» d'un théâtre, comme les lattes et sa grille, avec l'étalement du désert. Un groupe se rassemble sur le site d'un bâtiment démoli qui réutilise les déchets pour construire un nouvel espace, sans murs, qui servira de scène de mouvement et de tableau de protestation. La plate-forme borde une base militaire délimitée par des barbelés et une signalisation menaçante. Habillée de la veste de Chelsea Manning, une performeuse s'introduit dans l'espace tandis que la chanteuse Shannon Funchess traverse une grille de théâtre en forme de toile, chantant une version a-cappella de « Supernature», qui évoque un récit macabre d'êtres technologiquement modifiés.

En revenant sur scène, nous trouvons un hommage critique à la pièce de performance conceptuelle Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform) de Félix Gonzélez-Torres 1991 - réinterprétant le désir à travers un corps non binaire. La lecture finale est réalisée à partir d'un texte qu'A.K. Burns a écrit sur la sensation d'une existance sans frontière et l'impuissance de la supériorité humaine telle qu'elle est vécue dans le désert.







Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000), 2019
Negative Space series
five-channel HD video installation with plastic skull, rubber tires, color, sound
installation vidéo HD cinq canaux avec crâne en plastique, pneus en caoutchouc, couleur, son
31'8"
ed. of 3 ex
BURN19087

WATER

What is Perverse is Liquid (TBA)

What is Perverse is Liquid is a semi-fictional text written about the experience of being in the deserts of Utah for the project Negative Space, published in *The Third* Rail (Issue 3).

« I'm squatting over a rusty-hued lump. You can imagine, like squeezing out an entire tube of toothpaste. I am right there, on the second tier of your turd-like impression. Barely noon, it registers 112 degrees. The view is so vast that the only thing I can comprehend is that my sense of self is entirely out of scale. There is nothing behind me or beyond. It's a type of nothingness that only excess can produce. It is the deprivation of familiar whims and I am reminded that there is no convenience like the bounty of a corner bodega. But I packed my gut before I arrived. The yogurt, banana, and green tea are culminating at my anus, so I make use of what lines my pockets, crumpled notes, and a used tissue. With the impossible intention to leave no trace, I burn and bury the waste.

Few things can be here. The snakes, scorpions, and kangaroo rats are infrequent at best. Have you ever seen a kangaroo rat? I doubt it. They're nocturnal, and if caught in a flash of light, they move like meth addicts. They're exactly what they sound like, a tangelo—with the hind legs of a jackrabbit, a Cat Dancer for a tail, and the body-face of a stout mouse.

Everybody offers up like a banquet. Thwack! The flies, landing subtly on exposed skin, quickly tease out a tiny piece of meat from the surface, leaving you bloody, bruised, or both. Thwack! Moving is what you do here. You can come and go, but you cannot stay. It is a now place because it is a non-possessed place.

I'm here with another. She is Donald Ducking about the landscape in an oversized t-shirt, ass to the wind. She gathers hardened sap from the few spindly pine trees. Later we set fire to small bits. Under flame it liquefies and bubbles as it boils. The fumes are a thick sweet pleasure. The sun is impossible and omnipresent. A glaring hot white blowout. Wetness pools as fast as it evaporates around the edge of my shades and anything else that touches anything else. At this hour, the exposure is violent and our bodies become terracotta- like. I'm over it. This kind of beauty is exhausting. The only thing we desire is to put water in, or on, our bodies.

Into our sports utility rental we go. The breeze of conditioned air engulfs us. After an hour or probably more of all-terrain travel, the engine begins to smolder. Exhaust barreling along a dusty path, we emerge over yet another expanse. The mouth widens, the line spreads, and an ocean-like river divides the horizon. We land in an entirely artificial town or constellation of properties, demarcated by slabs of cement and awkwardly placed trees. Such greenery appears like a mirage of grotesque luxury. Everything is ironic, even the way the water meets the land. There is no edge, no bank, no beach, just a liquid-filled void. Stripped bare, we submerge. Dripping dry. Over a parched surface, she draws Death—the thirteenth Major Arcana attributed to Scorpio—neither an end nor a beginning, but both, a sign of transformation. Scorpio, assigned the element of water, may have perceptions that border on psychic, but Scorpio's insights are often clouded by the intensity of feelings or deluded by an elaborate imagination. This vital solvent is formless on its own, and that's why those with this sign are quickly shaped by their relationships to others.»

EXHIBITIONS
EXPOSITIONS



Lismore Castle Arts, *Light and Language* (cur. Lisa Le Feuvre), Co. Waterford, Ireland, 2021





Lismore Castle Arts, *Light and Language* (cur. Lisa Le Feuvre), Co. Waterford, Ireland, 2021





Palais de Tokyo, *Anticorps*, Paris, France, 2020



Michel Rein, *Gloobster Soot*, *Medium Rare*, Paris, France, 2020



Michel Rein, *Gloobster Soot*, *Medium Rare*, Paris, France, 2020



Michel Rein, *Gloobster Soot, Medium Rare*, Paris, France, 2020



Michel Rein, *Gloobster Soot, Medium Rare*, Paris, France, 2020



JSC - Julia Stoschek collection, *Negative Space* (cur. Lisa Long), Düsseldorf, Germany, 2019



JSC - Julia Stoschek collection, *Negative Space* (cur. Lisa Long), Düsseldorf, Germany, 2019



JSC - Julia Stoschek collection, *Negative Space* (cur. Lisa Long), Düsseldorf, Germany, 2019



JSC - Julia Stoschek collection, *Negative Space* (cur. Lisa Long), Düsseldorf, Germany, 2019



FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, *The Dispossessed*, USA, 2018



Harvard Art Museums - Lightbox Gallery, *Survivor's Remorse*, Cambridge, USA, 2018



Harvard Art Museums - Lightbox Gallery, *Survivor's Remorse*, Cambridge, USA, 2018



Michel Rein, *ANY MEANS* (cur. Ami Barak), Paris, France, 2017



Michel Rein, *ANY MEANS* (cur. Ami Barak), Paris, France, 2017



Michel Rein, *ANY MEANS* (cur. Ami Barak), Paris, France, 2017



New Museum, *Shabby But Thriving*, New York, USA, 2017



New Museum, *Shabby But Thriving*, New York, USA, 2017



New Museum, Installation views of *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*, New York, USA, 2017



New Museum, *Shabby But Thriving*, New York, USA, 2017



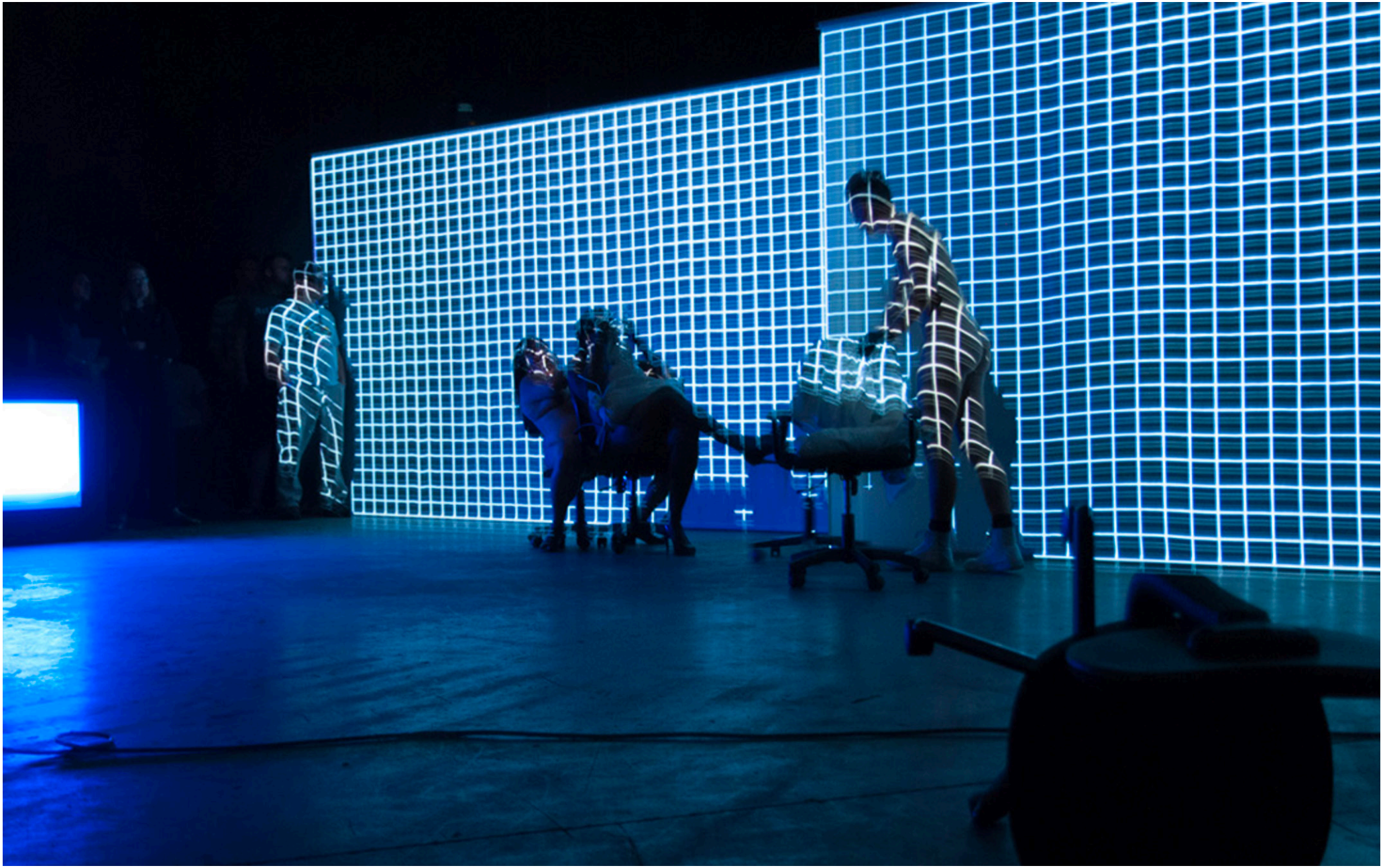
New Museum, *Shabby But Thriving*, New York, USA, 2017



Portland Institute of Contemporary Art's, TBA:16 live arts festival, performance w/ Jen Rosenblit and keyon gaskin, the record release of *Leave No Trace*, USA, 2016



Portland Institute of Contemporary Art's, TBA:16 live arts festival, performance w/ Jen Rosenblit and keyon gaskin, the record release of *Leave No Trace*, USA, 2016



Portland Institute of Contemporary Art's, TBA:16 live arts festival, performance w/ Jen Rosenblit and keyon gaskin, the record release of *Leave No Trace*, USA, 2016



Callicoon Fine Arts, *Fault Lines*, New York, USA, 2017



Callicoon Fine Arts, *Fault Lines*, New York, USA, 2017



"The Public Body" at Artspace, installation view of *Community Action Center*, Sydney, Australia, 2016



Participant, Inc., *A Smeary Spot*, New York, USA, 2015



Participant, Inc., *A Smeary Spot*, New York, USA, 2015



Callicoon Fine Arts, *Ending with a Fugue*, New York, USA, 2013



Callicoon Fine Arts, *Ending with a Fugue*, New York, USA, 2013



Callicoon Fine Arts, *pregnant patron penny pot*, New York, USA, 2012



Callicoon Fine Arts, *pregnant patron penny pot*, New York, USA, 2012



TAG, installation view of *Touch Parade*, The Hague, Netherlands, 2011



Community Action Center, in collaboration with A.L. Steiner, Taxter & Spengemann, New York, USA and Horton Gallery, Berlin, Germany, 2010



Community Action Center, in collaboration with A.L. Steiner, Taxter & Spengemann, New York, USA and Horton Gallery, Berlin, Germany, 2010

PRESS
PRESSE

AK Burns
Visuals Artists Ireland
By Jennifer Redmond
July 2021

CRITIQUE | 'LIGHT AND LANGUAGE'

Lismore Castle Arts, 28 March – 10 October 2021



A.K. Burns, The Dispossessed, 2018, installation view, Lismore Castle Arts, 2021.

Lisa Le Feuvre is the executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation1. She has foregrounded Nancy Holt's work in this exhibition, with her opening remarks stressing the importance of thinking and of asking questions through the experience of art.

Holt's *Electrical System* (1982) is a site-responsive piece2. A network of more than 70 lightbulbs is connected via conduit pipework to the electrical system of Lismore Castle. It is designed to externalise hidden networks that connect the architecture to the landscape. We may wander through this maze of lightbulbs.

Are the matrix of pipes and wires comparable to the roots and branches in the gardens? Could these systems fail?

There are 'thought prompts'; inscriptions carved by micro waterjet in sterling silver, displayed at intervals throughout the gallery. These are works by Katie Paterson in response to Holt's conceptualisations and they whisper to you as you drift.

"Objects soaked in moonlight for over one million years" (2016)

"The Universe's lights switched off one by one" (2015)

Light and language were entangled concepts for Holt. She expressed her most pressing concerns in her concrete poetry3; Sun, moon, water, sky, earth, star – the cosmos contained by the frames and reflections of the human eye, by a pool of water, or by the lens. American artist, Matthew Day Jackson's work, *Commissioned Family Photo* (2013), comprises 82 photographs of the artist and his family taken by a military camera, designed to record the extreme light waves and shock reverberations of nuclear detonations. This is chilling work; more evocative for being placed in the intimate setting of the upper gallery, surrounded by Holt's concrete poetry and other writings.

"The world focuses

And spins out again, seen."

A.K Burns' 13-minute 16mm film (transferred to HD video), *Untitled (Eclipse)* (2019), shows a total solar eclipse in 2017, through footage from a field in Nebraska.

What will the world be like when the sun dies – or with a different solar pattern – like on Mars?

The film is projected onto an angled screen – the film grain is thus amplified. The colour looks washed out – jaded, from another time. There are flares and bokeh, refraction and reflection, wildly ranging focus – ominous and unsettling.

Using her *locators*4 or 'seeing devices', Holt was always focusing and extending the limits of vision and perceptual significance. AK Burns does this with *The Dispossessed*. Located in the lower gardens, the function of the barriers is dissolved by glamourising and contorting them into shapes that invite their transgression.

In *Boundary Conditions* (2021), Irish artist Dennis McNulty creates a geolocated audio walk via The Echoes App. This evokes *The Trails* series, where Holt and associates experienced the landscape through sound words and image – an idea that is extended by McNulty's use of geolocation5. The theme of an accelerating dystopia is continued in McNulty's *Maybe everything dies…* (2013), where the lyrics from the Bruce Springsteen song, *Atlantic City*, are spelt out in haunting, digital time, on a minimalist structure – an apotropaic eye?

Does 'the digital' frame the limits of our being?

Interested in the sculptural relationship to experience, Charlotte Moth has created *Blue reflecting the greens* (2021) – a 90 cm blue mirror disc, mounted against a wall in the castle grounds, designed to reflect sunlight and foliage of the gardens in a blue-green cast.

Is the reflection (this reality) real, or is it an illusion?

MICHEL REIN PARIS/BRUSSELS

Light and language were entangled concepts for Holt. She expressed her most pressing concerns in her concrete poetry3; Sun, moon, water, sky, earth, star – the cosmos contained by the frames and reflections of the human eye, by a pool of water, or by the lens. American artist, Matthew Day Jackson's work, *Commissioned Family Photo* (2013), comprises 82 photographs of the artist and his family taken by a military camera, designed to record the extreme light waves and shock reverberations of nuclear detonations. This is chilling work; more evocative for being placed in the intimate setting of the upper gallery, surrounded by Holt's concrete poetry and other writings.

"The world focuses

And spins out again, seen."

A.K Burns' 13-minute 16mm film (transferred to HD video), *Untitled (Eclipse)* (2019), shows a total solar eclipse in 2017, through footage from a field in Nebraska.

What will the world be like when the sun dies – or with a different solar pattern – like on Mars?

The film is projected onto an angled screen – the film grain is thus amplified. The colour looks washed out – jaded, from another time. There are flares and bokeh, refraction and reflection, wildly ranging focus – ominous and unsettling.

Using her *locators*4 or 'seeing devices', Holt was always focusing and extending the limits of vision and perceptual significance. AK Burns does this with *The Dispossessed*. Located in the lower gardens, the function of the barriers is dissolved by glamourising and contorting them into shapes that invite their transgression.

In *Boundary Conditions* (2021), Irish artist Dennis McNulty creates a geolocated audio walk via The Echoes App. This evokes *The Trails* series, where Holt and associates experienced the landscape through sound words and image – an idea that is extended by McNulty's use of geolocation5. The theme of an accelerating dystopia is continued in McNulty's *Maybe everything dies…* (2013), where the lyrics from the Bruce Springsteen song, *Atlantic City*, are spelt out in haunting, digital time, on a minimalist structure – an apotropaic eye?

Does 'the digital' frame the limits of our being?

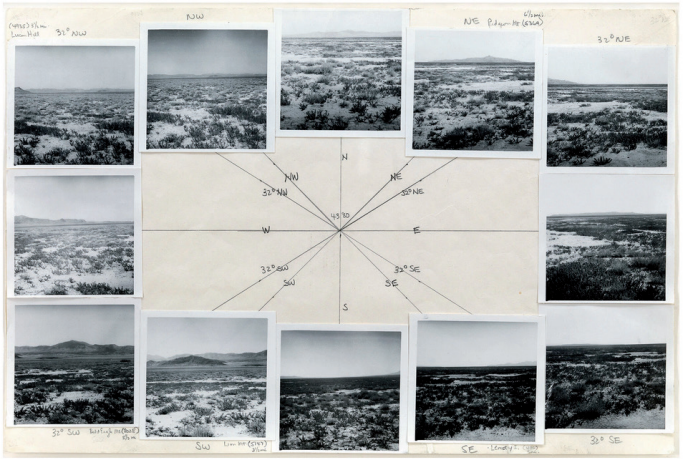
Interested in the sculptural relationship to experience, Charlotte Moth has created *Blue reflecting the greens* (2021) – a 90 cm blue mirror disc, mounted against a wall in the castle grounds, designed to reflect sunlight and foliage of the gardens in a blue-green cast.

Is the reflection (this reality) real, or is it an illusion?

The New York Times Style Magazine

A.K Burns
New York Times
March, 25th 2021
By Samuel Anderson

A Nancy Holt Exhibition Opens at an Irish Castle



Nancy Holt's "Preparatory Drawing of Sun Tunnels" (1975). © Holt/Smithson Foundation, licensed by VAGA at ARS, New York

Work by the pioneering American land artist Nancy Holt — perhaps best known for "Sun Tunnels" (1973-76), a series of four concrete cylinders that are each 18 feet long and 9 feet in diameter, and are installed in aeternum in Utah's desert flats — will be on display, beginning this week, at Ireland's Lismore Castle Arts. Curated by Lisa Le Feuvre, the executive director at the Holt-Smithson Foundation, which upholds the legacies of both Holt and her husband, the artist Robert Smithson, "Light and Language" explores Holt's output between 1966 and 1982 and includes indoor and outdoor installations, as well as photography and film. (There will also be a selection of pieces by five other artists, all of whom see their work as being in conversation with Holt's: A.K. Burns, Matthew Day Jackson, Dennis McNulty, Charlotte Moth and Katie Paterson.) For Le Feuvre, the exhibition's setting will be crucial to how it's experienced: It's "like going to see 'Tunnels,'" she says, in that "you get a sense of slowness, quietness and localness." But Lismore Castle, a winding hour-and-a-half drive from Cork, sits in stark contrast to the empty vistas of the American West. The property dates back to 1185, and some believe its gardens — which will frame several outdoor works by Holt, including "Locator P.S.1." (1971), a kind of prototype for "Tunnels" — to be the country's oldest. Also on view will be "Electrical System" (1982), a constellation of 80-plus light bulbs powered by a continuous network of interlocking steel arches that the artist once described as a "fountain of electricity," and "Boomerang" (1974), a video made in collaboration with the artist Richard Serra, and originally broadcast on live TV. The clip stars a young Nancy Holt, who at one point says, "My mind goes out into the world and then comes back." *"Light and Language" will be on view at Lismore Castle Arts, Waterford, Ireland, from March 28 through October 10, lismorecastlearts.ie.*

ARTFORUM

A.K. Burns
Artforum
March 2020
By Louisa Elderton

DÜSSELDORF

A.K. Burns

JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION



A nosebleed, a thick pipe from which liquid drips, a juicer spilling pools of bejeweled color, the hazy aura of a sun eclipsed by the moon—these were among the images of leakage in the three video installations, a silent film, and twenty-one collages in A.K. Burns's exhibition "Negative Space." Another kind of leakage was evoked by Chelsea Manning's military jacket, which reappeared throughout the series of sci-fi films on view, including two older works, *A Smeary Spot (Negative Space 0)*, 2015, and *Living Room (Negative Space 00)*, 2017; and the more recent *Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000)*, 2019, a five-channel video installation premiering here and projected onto a white cube sitting askew on a fake human skull. Such leakiness was not exactly literal—WikiLeaks, get it?—but, rather, a metaphor for what escapes despite systems of control delimiting boundaries (and binaries) that perpetuate imbalances of power.

A.K. Burns, *Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000)*, 2019. Still from the 28-minute, 15 second five-channel HD color video component of a mixed-media installation additionally comprising a 48 × 48 × 85¼" cube, speakers, a plastic skull, used tires, and ratchet straps. Clara López Menéndez.

Burns has long been concerned with the idea that matter constantly changes. Fixity is not truth, just a way of organizing the world. These works should be considered as a continuum of forms that continually re-form. Take, for example, the arid desert landscape with its deep canyons and sedimentary rocks in *A Smeary Spot* and *Leave No Trace*, or the black-box theater that features repeatedly in both. Rather than being sites of absence, these spaces, seen from another perspective, are in a state of constant becoming: The theater is making, unmaking, remaking; the desert accumulates small particles, crumbles, shifts.

If we consider the desert a mutable space rather than a mere absence, or void—and so dissolve its opposition with active, occupied space—then Burns manifests a world as described by the philosopher Karen Barad, who posits the entanglement of subject and object though what she terms the relational "response-ability" of matter, where subject and object reiterate and reconfigure each other rather than being different per se. It's not that opposites attract, but rather that neither is fixed. Quoting Barad among other writers in *Negative Space Poster*, 2019—a giveaway now lovingly tacked to my studio wall—the artist proposes: PERHAPS WE SHOULD LET THE EMPTINESS SPEAK FOR ITSELF. Silence can be deafening as we tune in to atmosphere, letting the surrounding space *be*.

Such staging is typical of Burns's videos, in which performers are what the artist calls "acting agents" and represent phenomena, while space itself is the protagonist. Thus the performers are symbolic rather than clearly discernible characters articulating a narrative arc, and the site itself represents a new kind of subjectivity. Humans assume representational value as free radicals, unpaired electrons that are highly reactive, or bright, pollen-coated bees that arduously labor for . . . what exactly? In *Leave No Trace*, they load and unload items including an aquarium, skulls, and protest-slogan T-shirts to build a desert stage. On it, a go-go dancer performs in metallic lamé shorts and tennis shoes—a clear homage to Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *"Untitled" (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1991—ripped torso sweating, one breast exposed. Labor is for the expression of such unfixed bodies, forms that move and seep.

Burns co-opted the art-history canon elsewhere in the show, too, with acting agents reproducing the poses of the reclining woman in Manet's *Olympia*, 1863 (in *A Smeary Spot*), and of Jean-Paul Marat in Jacques-Louis David's *La mort de Marat* (The Death of Marat), 1793 (in *Living Room*). David's painting also featured among the collaged imagery in *Detox Tub Talks (bathroom/kidneys)*, 2019, one of several works where we viewers leaked in, since their mirrored surfaces absorb our own reflection. Both Olympia and Marat are symbols of revolt—the former a prostitute returning the male gaze and the latter a revolutionary murdered by the French bourgeoisie—that have here re-formed and been queered through performative staging, their appearance suggesting a corporeality of unassimilated difference.

During a Q&A with Burns and the exhibition's curator, Lisa Long, an audience member asked (I'm paraphrasing), "How can I know what you mean when this means nothing to me?" But sometimes images and sounds just seep in, just as sometimes we are influenced without even realizing it. We learn through repetition. Let it be. Accept immersion. As Burns advised, "I want you to feel a sensation of being seduced and drawn into a world you do not understand." Let yourself leak a little.

—Louisa Elderton

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

A.K Burns
The Brooklyn Rail
By Alan Gilbert
January 2021

Full Circle: The Holt/Smithson Foundation

The open-endedness of much of Holt's and Smithson's art is mirrored in the exploratory quality of a foundation at the beginning of its lifespan—in the case of the Holt/Smithson Foundation, a pre-established one. In her interview with Abrams, Le Feuvre discusses strategizing for the foundation in five-year increments. As mentioned, building the website, inventorying Holt's and Smithson's work, and extending their lineages through artist projects and exhibitions are central to the first stage, including the upcoming *Light and Language: Nancy Holt with A.K. Burns, Matthew Day Jackson, Dennis McNulty, Charlotte Moth, and Katie Paterson* at Lismore Castle Arts in Ireland (March 27–October 17, 2021), which aims to show the influence of Holt's work on a younger generation of artists. The exhibition's centerpiece will be Holt's *Electrical System* (1982), a groundbreaking system work utilizing light bulbs and tubing that is being exhibited for the first time in more than 30 years. In a Skype conversation I had with Le Feuvre in early November, she also stressed that documentation—photographs, films, writings, and audio recordings—is crucial to the experience of many Holt and Smithson artworks, and that they both considered these materials to be substantial works in their own right (for instance, Smithson's film about the making of *Spiral Jetty* and his essay on the work, or Holt's photographs of her New Jersey site visits). Thus, over the next five years the foundation is seeking to create an online compilation of the various archives in which these and supplementary materials—sketches, work plans, etc.—are kept. The ultimate goal is to create a digital atlas of available scans in these archives.

artnet news

A.K. Burns
artnet
January 1th 2020
By Ben Davis

Opinion

The 100 Works of Art That Defined the Decade, Ranked: Part 4

In the final installment of this four-part series, our critic reveals his picks—number 25 through number 1—of the key artworks of the 2010s.

Ben Davis, January 1, 2020

18.
A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, *Community Action Center* (2010)



A three-year labor of love in every sense of the term, the traveling *Community Action Center* installation was, as Burns explained, an effort "to make a space for women and trans bodies to watch sexual content together, as well as to counter the way porn is now consumed on the personal computer." The film itself doubles as document of and for a certain community and an experiment in utilizing the physical spaces of art to create a temporary autonomous zone for queer connection.

MICHEL REIN PARIS/BRUSSELS

SOFA

A.K. Burns
SoFA
Winter 2020-Issue 4
By Spencer Byrne-Seres

A.K. Burns

A HISTORY OF THE EARLY DAYS OF

AN INTERVIEW WITH A.K. BURNS

W.A.G.E.

A.K. Burns talks to Spencer Byrne-Seres about the beginnings of W.A.G.E, an artist initiated non-profit that advocates for sustainable relationships between artists and institutions.

Spencer:
In thinking about the foundation of W.A.G.E., I'm interested in artist compensation, and how W.A.G.E. was recognizing those things for the first time. I'm really interested in what led to the coming together of this group to talk about these issues. What were those conversations initially about?

A.K.:
Well, in its inception, it was really A.L Steiner and I just having some gripey conversation and complaining. It stemmed from something that Steiner brought up because she had just been in Spain and had done this installation where she actually got paid a seperate fee on top of the exhibition costs being covered. Which was something she hadn't experienced before. We talked about how rare that was. And began to really pick apart and question why it was so rare.

This conversation occurred in 2007, probably about a year before we made our first public statements as W.A.G.E. I had also just started grad school, so I personally wasn't interfacing with arts organizations on that scale yet, but I had experienced the problem of how to cover the cost of producing a work for exhibition and the ongoing costs of supporting my practice, which always required (and still does to this day) having a job on top of my work as an artist. And of course I was very much in the midst of incurring the debt of grad school, as an 'investment' towards that career. And while I knew a few artists who survived off the art market (people with extremely focused object/material based practices), most, even those with very large international careers were teachers or had some other means to support their work.

Once we started to recognize that it was possible to be paid for the work we do as artists then we began to wonder why there seemed to be systemic obstacles to being paid for what we contribute to society? And by work, I do not mean the artwork itself, I mean all the office work it takes to run a studio and produce exhibitions beyond just the making of the work. So many emails, archiving, PR, promotion, writing, mapping out, planning, organizing, communicating and the management of others for various aspects of production. I would say personally, about a half or a third of my time in the studio is actually spent making artwork.

Also in 2007, we were on the threshold of the economic collapse of 2008. But we didn't know it yet. When we looked around the art market appeared to be rapidly proliferating. Everyone was rushing to get MFAs like never before—until the mid-90s it was fairly rare for artists to get MFAs. Art Basel founded Art Basel Miami in 2002 and from there art fairs began popping up. It's now a nearly continuous stream of fairs year round. Yet when we looked at ourselves and our peers, primarily queers, women, and those working in less commodifiable modes of art—which makes up a substantial part of art production and is highly valued by museums and non-profit institutions because it is seen as more 'radical'—it became clear that this boom served to support very few. And that everyone else was working double time to have a very basic level of economic sustainability. I think there was, historically, a notion that artists were poor until they died (and value increased post mortem). But by the 70s and 80s we began to see artists make real money within their lifetime. The romanic model shifted as neo-libral policies and late capitalism took hold in the Regan/Bush/Clinton eras. By the late 90s into the mid-2000s I think it became a kind of fever to create a massive art market in a belief that artists would be supported by that market. Silently we were all speculating, assuming it was just a matter of time till we 'made' it.

Spencer:
Right.

A.K.:
Then it was like a light bulb went off, 'making' it, ie. meeting the demands of having an art career, has very little to do with the 'market.' And we called up a group of friends, of other artists, inviting them over to engage this discussion more broadly, I don't remember who all was there. K8 Hardy for sure. I know we called Sharon Hayes but she couldn't make it. And from that meeting in early 2008, we did what you do when your angry about an issue, we wrote a manifesto. The W.A.G.E. wo/manifesto.

Sometimes I think some of the success of this project was that we did not take ourselves all that seriously. Because it all seemed so far fetched. We wrote a manifesto so that we could vent. So we could get it off our chests, but I don't think we understood it as structural to making something far bigger.

Spencer:
How did W.A.G.E. go from being a mode of venting to a real public project?

A.K.:
We didn't really have an idea of what it meant to publish the wo/manifesto or how to put it into the world. But then K8 Hardy got invited to the first Creative Time Summit: Democracy Now to give some kind of stump speech. K8 was like "Well, I don't have anything in particular I want to present, but I have this group that I'm working with. That we've got this idea. We'll make speeches." The three of us (Hardy, Steiner and I) wrote speeches.

So on September 27, 2008 we went out there gave those speeches and beforehand we were joking around, saying "Okay, this is probably the end of our art careers. But I guess we didn't have much to begin with so it doesn't really matter."

It just seemed like a great opportunity to make some noise about something that we've been thinking about. And then from that moment on, it was like a deluge. We pointed out the elephant in the room and everybody was like, "oh this is really important and we have to talk about this and think about this and act on this." It was also, of course, on the threshold of Obama's election. At this point, the election had not happened, but the economic crash had. And it would seem like economic collapse would be a bad time to ask for change and more fiscal support. But it was good timing in terms of people being willing to rethink old models. From that moment on, there was a lot of requests to do talks, and educate people on the ideas about inequity, especially in the non-profit model. Which is what W.A.G.E. focuses on.

Spencer:
Can you explain how you built W.A.G.E.s critique around issues in non-profits as opposed to the for profit gallery system?

A.K.:
Well galleries, as fucked-up as they are, have an economic system in place. And I think we were aware early on about having a single issue to build our platform on. With the small amount of resources we have as a group, remaining single issue, I think, is why we are still functioning. And because the non-profits (arts spaces & museums) made up most of our careers and of those around us, you can have a fairly huge career but spend most of your time rotating through public institutions. For some artists. galleries are more of a badge of alignment than an actual source of money. And galleries like to have 'radical' artists who don't really sell on their roster to make them look more diverse.

When we started to break things down, it became very clear. We were like, "Okay, these are nonprofits. They are tax-free because they are educational institutions." Then you have to wonder... "Who's the educator? Oh yes, the artist is the educator." Then the educator must be paid for their work just like everyone else at the organization. And we also started digging into the archives at MoMA where we found really amazing documents like the papers from Art Workers Coalition and the Hollis Frampton letter to the Director of MOMA, when they wanted to do a retrospective on his films. And he was asking for something like $200 for the whole retrospective. Some measly amount. Over the course of a four page letter he painstakingly explains how the projectionist expects to get paid, and the how the person who develops his film expects to paid, etc, everyone else in the process of making and displaying art expects to get paid. And Frampton had gotten this letter from the director saying, "It was for love and honor so there's no money included." And Frampton is like, "I can't tell all these other people that it's for love and honor." It's a very eloquent rant on how there's an illogical romance around the artist. That somehow we function outside of the economy because we have this passion that drives us. Like we'll make the work regardless. But no matter how illogical it is to be an artist, it's no excuse to be seen as free cultural labor. Or to expect that the cultural capital you get from showing at the MoMA will result in sales. That's not a real equation.

Spencer:
There is this idea that somehow the freedom involved to do what you want to do means you don't have to suffer through a regular type of compensation structure or something.

A.K.:
Right. Also how do you compensate for something like this? And this became a real problem for us when we started to think about how you create any kind of equity. How do you put a number on art production or the other kinds of labor involved in an exhibition? People do it all the time for the gallery system. But that's also just a weird fiction. It's like, "well this painting's bigger than that painting so it costs more." That has nothing to do how much work you do to make it. There's no labor ratio.

Spencer:
How hard you try on the painting. How many hours you have spent on it...

A.K.:
Like I think for us we were like, "Well, if we're really going to put energy into making this is a real organization, we want it to be productive and make real change in the world." And Art Workers Coalition is amazing. They made a lot of documents and they supported allot of causes and protested and were crucial to the dialogue going on at that moment around the vietnam war, etc. But you look at their list of demands and most of those things still have not been met from their 13 demands. I think one of the main things they got was the free nights at museums which are now "Targets-free" nights. And they're one evening a week. But the AWC, they really wanted free museums. Access to culture for everyone.

Spencer:
I wonder if the reason for the lack of compensation was because you had this gallery model. It was assumed that you were selling a bunch of paintings all the time and that was your source of income. And then these exhibitions were, like you said, for love and honor or whatever. What has shifted in terms of artists' practices and what they're doing, that this came into contrast?

Is artists' work not commodifiable in the same way, when you engage with an institution? Or is there an assumption that somebody comes from the museum and just picks up the painting from my studio and I don't have to do much work. It's already there or something like that?

A.K.:
But it's never... Even if you're a painter, it's not that simple. There's a lot of coordinating and talking with the curator and other aspects of an institution. It's like it's a farce that there's not a whole other layer of labor going on beyond the making of work. I've never had a show where a curator just takes something and runs away with it and never talks to you about it. No artist would want to engage in that. It's an ongoing conversation and it's many meetings and it's planning and it's like, and depending on the scale of the show there could be a public conversations or writing to coordinate. Then there is coordinating pick-ups and drop-offs and packaging the art, finding where it is stored. Usually galleries or studio assistants handle a lot of those parts but the people who have those resources are the people who have money to pay for that. And then install can take anything from weeks to a day depending on the scale of the show. I think it's also shifted a lot in the sense that I think the MFA industrial complex really upped the stakes of what artists are investing financially. So a lot of artist start from a point of debt.

Spencer:
It's so interesting to think about the MFA and its role in shifting the economy of being an artist. All of a sudden people were willing to go $100,000 into debt just to be an artist, right? And that then shifts the stakes of everything, right?

A.K.:
Artists don't really need MFAs. Except to teach but they used to not even need MFAs to teach. I don't think MFAs are a load of shit. I think they can be a very productive time for artists, I mean I got one and I teach in MFA programs, so dare I be a hypocrite? But I know I felt like I was buying time I couldn't get on my own because I was so busy working instead of making art. So it's a perverse situation where you buy yourself time to develop because there is no time in this economy that doesn't cost money. Especially given the cost of living in cultural hubs like New York.

Spencer:
And one of the few jobs that exists for an artist to teach, right? Like that's a salaried job where I get to be an artist and paid for my knowledge in that field.

A.K.:
It's a real Catch 22 in many ways. MFAs to teach but not enough well paid positions for the amount of MFAs so that's not really a sustainable model either. Hence why nonprofits need to step up to the plate and pay fees for exhibiting. We need these things to have a healthy cultural eco-system. Artist fees aren't about getting rich, they are about providing more support for diverse practices.

Spencer:
And it's all within a capitalist structure that we live in now. It's economized no matter what you are doing.

A.K.:
Yes first it was the loft living boom of the late 90s that transformed every medium to large city in the United States (San Francisco, Portland, New York, LA..etc) and dare I say worldwide became deeply gentrified and turned into these hipster villages. A lifestyle that has become a commodified, rather than a form of survival for those who need other kinds of spaces for the specific way artist work. And now many artists go without studios or have downsized practices out of their bedrooms. Then came the gig economy and things like WeWork that also evolved from practical situations that were created to manage the precarity of being an artist. I often think we have a much bigger influence on society in the way it's economically structured than through the culture we make. Do you know what I mean?

Like this whole gig economy stuff and the way that artists function, is a very high risk lifestyle. It's actually not something that large portions of the population should be doing. Nor is a loft a great way to live, unless you have money to burn on a massive heating bill.

Spencer:
There's no job security. There's no benefits.

A.K.:
Yeah, it's just like you are spinning your wheels in something that is exploiting you. And I think part of what W.A.G.E. is acknowledging, is that, we as artists we are participating in being exploited. Because we are often willing to ignore the monetary relationships to how we move through the world because we are 'dreamer' types. I mean you have to be, like I said, kind of nuts to be an artist. We're not the best at making logical decisions for ourselves, I think. W.A.G.E. offered a kind of retraining not just for institutions and their responsibility to artists, but the way artists are responsible for the systems they participate in.

Spencer:
And there's this perception that it is a privilege to be an artist, right?

A.K.:
Well, it enforces that. If you're not paying the educator at a nonprofit organization and your a tax deductible organization, you're actively eliminating the artists with fewer resources who cannot afford to participate for free. It very much benefits the artists who are already privileged enough to take the risks.

Spencer:
Yeah, and I think about that a lot. And risk, in general, a lot about who's able to take risk, right?

A.K.:
Yeah, and then there's the burn out, where all of us are taking risk, risk, risk and at a certain point, you're like I can't do it anymore. Can I sustain this? What's the value of my limited amount of life energy and labor? You know what I mean? Yet the art system seems to want it, right? They're hungry. They're just pushing out exhibition after exhibition after exhibition and they need programming, programming, programming.

It's been almost 12 years now since we started W.A.G.E.. And there's a whole younger generation of artists and they're not fucking around. They don't go and do something if someone's not paying them. Like they expect to have a discussion about money. I see this more and more over the years since we started. It used to be an almost unheard of conversation.

Spencer:
And a big part of it, I think, is recognizing that social capital doesn't feed you. Like feed your body.

A.K.:
Yeah, that romance is dead. W.A.G.E. killed that romance. That was our primary goal. I think that's the one good thing that we did. Your celebrity status is not going to feed you.

A.K. Burns
The New York Times Magazine
April 19th, 2020



Chapter 3 Legends

Photographed at Outpost Studio in New York City on Jan. 27, 2020.

The Renegade



Standing, from left: the writer PATTY YUMI COTTRELL in their own clothing; the musician JD SAMSON in h own clothing; the artist A.K. BURNS in a Kwaidan Editions jacket, $1,777, atelierneweork.com, and her ow clothing; the artist A.L. STEINER in her own clothing; the musician MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO in h own clothing; the artist NICOLE EISENMAN in a vintage jacket, courtesy of What Goes Around Comes Aroun (212) 343-1225, and her own clothing; the writer EILEEN MYLES in a Gucci blazer, $3,500, gucci.com, an their own clothing; the writer ROXANE GAY in a Universal Standard jacket, $448, universalstandard.cor and her own clothing; the artist MICKALENE THOMAS in a Balenciaga jacket, $2,390, (212) 328-1671, and h own clothing; the filmmaker LORENA RUSSI in a Lacoste suit, price on request, lacoste.com; the filmmak SU FRIEDRICH in her own clothing; the artist TIONA NEKKIA MCCLODDEN in her own clothing; the actor-mod JENNY SHIMIZU in a Raf Simons coat, $5,495, doverstreetmarket.com, and her own clothing; and the writ ALISON BECHDEL in her own clothing. Seated, from left: the filmmaker KIMBERLY PEIRCE in her own clothin the actor ROBERTA COLINDREZ in her own clothing; the choreographer ELIZABETH STREB in her ow clothing; the curator PATI HERTLING in a Balenciaga coat, $2,990, and her own clothing; the artist COLLIE SCHORR in her own clothing; the musician TOSHI REAGON in her own clothing; the actor LEA DELARIA i her own clothing; and the writer CASEY LEGLER in a Gucci jacket, $3,200, vest, $1,200, pants, $980, an shoes, $1,250, and their own clothing. Hair by Tamas Tuzes at L'Atelier NYC and Latisha Chong. Makeu by Yumi Lee at Streeters. Set design by Jesse Kaufmann at Frank Reps. Photo production by Hen's Toot

Queer culture and the arts would be much poorer without the presence and contribution of butch and stud lesbians, whose identity is both its own aesthetic and a defiant repudiation of the male gaze.

By Kerry Manders Photograph by Collier Schorr
Styled by Brian Molloy Produced by Casey Legler

"BUTCH" HAS LONG been the name we've given a certain kind — *that* kind — of lesbian. The old adage applies: You know her when you see her. She wears men's clothing, short hair, no makeup. Butch is an aesthetic, but it also conveys an attitude and energy. Both a gender and a sexuality, butchness is about the body but also transcends it: "We exist in this realm of masculinity that has nothing to do with cis men — that's the part only we [butches] know how to talk about," says the 42-year-old writer, former Olympic swimmer and men's wear model Casey Legler. "Many people don't even know how to ask questions about who we are, or about what it means to be us."

Many of us wear the butch label with a certain self-consciousness, fearing the term doesn't quite fit — like a new pair of jeans, it's either too loose or too tight. The graphic novelist Alison Bechdel, 59, doesn't refer to herself as butch but understands why others do. "It's a lovely word, 'butch': I'll take it, if you give it to me," she says. "But I'm afraid I'm not butch enough to really claim it. Because part of being butch is *owning* it, the whole aura around it."

What does owning it look like? Decades before genderless fashion became its own style, butches were wearing denim and white tees, leather jackets and work boots, wallet chains and gold necklaces. It isn't just about what you're wearing, though, but how: Butchness embodies a certain swagger, a 1950s-inspired "Rebel Without a Cause" confidence. In doing so, these women — and butches who don't identify as women — created something new and distinct, an identity you could recognize even if you didn't know what to call it.

By refuting conventionally gendered aesthetics, butchness expands the possibilities for women of all sizes, races, ethnicities and abilities. "I always think of the first butch lesbian I ever saw," says the 33-year-old actor Roberta Colindrez. "This beautiful butch came into the grocery store and she was built like a brick house. Short hair, polo shirt, cargo pants and that ring of keys. . . . It was the first time I saw the possibility of who I was." And yet, to many people, "butch style" remains an oxymoron: There's a prevalent assumption that we're all fat, frumpy fashion disasters — our baseball caps and baggy pants suggest to others that we don't care about self-presentation. But it's not that we're careless; it's that unlike, say, the gay white men who have been given all too much credit for influencing contemporary visual culture, we're simply not out to appease the male gaze. We disregard and reject the confines of a sexualized and commodified femininity.

ETYMOLOGICALLY, "butch" is believed to be an abbreviation of "butcher," American slang for "tough kid" in the early 20th century and likely inspired by the outlaw Butch Cassidy. By the early 1940s, the word was used as a pejorative to describe "aggressive" or "macho" women, but lesbians reclaimed it almost immediately, using it with pride at 1950s-era bars such

as Manhattan's Pony Stable Inn and Peg's Place in San Francisco. At these spots, where cocktails cost 10 cents and police raids were a regular occurrence, identifying yourself as either butch or femme was a prerequisite for participating in the scene.

These butches were, in part, inspired by 19th-century cross-dressers — then called male impersonators or transvestites — who presented and lived fully as men in an era when passing was a crucial survival tactic. We can also trace butchness back to the androgynous female artists of early 20th-century Paris, including the writer Gertrude Stein and the painter Romaine Brooks. But it wasn't until the 1960s and early 1970s that butches, themselves at the intersection of the burgeoning civil, gay and women's rights movements, became a more visible and viable community.

From their earliest incarnations, butches faced brutal discrimination and oppression, not only from outside their community but also from within. A certain brand of (mostly white) lesbian feminism dominant in the late '70s and early '80s marginalized certain sorts of "otherness" — working-class lesbians, lesbians of color and masculine-of-center women. They pilloried butchness as inextricably misogynist and butch-femme relationships as dangerous replications of heteronormative roles. (Such rhetoric has resurfaced, as trans men are regularly accused of being anti-feminist in their desire to become the so-called enemy.) Challenged yet again to defend their existence and further define themselves, butches emerged from this debate emboldened, thriving in the late '80s and early '90s as women's studies programs — and, later, gender and queer studies departments — gained traction on North American and European college campuses.

The '90s were in fact a transformative decade for the butch community. In 1990, the American philosopher Judith Butler published her groundbreaking "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," and her theories about gender were soon translated and popularized for the masses. In her academic work, Butler argues that gender and sexuality are both constructed and performative; butch identity, as female masculinity, subverts the notion that masculinity is the natural and exclusive purview of the male body. Soon after, butch imagery infiltrated the culture at large. The August 1993 issue of Vanity Fair featured the straight supermodel Cindy Crawford, in a black maillot, straddling and shaving the butch icon K. D. Lang. That same year, the writer Leslie Feinberg published "Stone Butch Blues," a now classic novel about butch life in 1970s-era New York. In Manhattan, comedians such as Lea DeLaria and drag kings such as Murray Hill took to the stage; it was also the heyday of Bechdel's "Dykes to Watch Out For," the serialized comic strip she started in 1983. In 1997, Ellen DeGeneres, still the most famous of butches, came out. Two years later, Judith "Jack" Halberstam and Del LaGrace Volcano published "The Drag King Book" and the director Kimberly Peirce released her breakthrough film, "Boys Don't Cry"; its straight cisgender star, Hilary Swank, went on to win an Oscar for her portrayal of Brandon Teena, a role that still incites contentious debates about the nebulous boundaries between butch and trans identity. These artists and their legacies are the cornerstones of our community. As Legler says, "This is where we've come from, and the folks we look back to. If you identify with that lineage, then we'd love to have you."

To watch a documentary about butch culture, visit tmagazine.com.

LIKE ANY QUEER subculture, butchness is vastly different now than it was three decades ago — though the codes have been tweaked and refined over the years, younger butches continue to take them in new and varied directions: They may experiment with their personas from day to day, switching fluidly between masculine and feminine presentation. There are "stone butches," a label that doesn't refer to coldness, as is often assumed, but to a desire to touch rather than to be touched — to give rather than receive — and is considered slightly more masculine than "soft butch" on the Futch Scale, a meme born in 2018 that attempted to parse the gradations from "high femme" to "stone butch." ("Futch," for "femme/butch," is square in the middle.) And while there remains some truth to butch stereotypes — give us a plaid flannel shirt any day of the week — that once-static portrait falls apart under scrutiny and reflection. Not every butch has short hair, can change a tire, desires a femme. Some butches are bottoms. Some butches are bi. Some butches are boys.

Different bodies own their butchness differently, but even a singular body might do or be butch differently over time. We move between poles as our feelings about — and language for — ourselves change. "In my early 20s, I identified as a stone butch," says the 45-year-old writer Roxane Gay. "In adulthood, I've come back to butch in terms of how I see myself in the world and in my relationship, so I think of myself as soft butch now." Peirce, 52, adds that this continuum is as much an internal as an external sliding scale: "I've never aspired to a binary," she says. "From day one, the idea of being a boy or a girl never made sense. The ever-shifting signifiers of neither or both are what create meaning and complexity."

Indeed, butch fluidity is especially resonant in our era of widespread transphobia. Legler, who uses they/them pronouns, is a "trans-butch identified person — no surgery, no hormones." Today, the interconnected spectrums of gender and queerness are as vibrant and diverse in language as they are in expression — genderqueer, transmasc, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming. Yet butches have always called themselves and been called by many names: bull dyke, diesel dyke, bulldagger, boi, daddy and so on. Language evolves, "flowing in time and changing constantly as new generations come along and social structures shift," Bechdel says.

If it's necessary to think historically, it's also imperative to think contextually. Compounding the usual homophobia and misogyny, black and brown butches must contend with racist assumptions: "Black women often get read as butch whether they are butch or not," Gay says. "Black women in general are not seen, so black butchness tends to be doubly invisible. Except for studs: They're very visible," she adds, referring to a separate but related term used predominantly by black or Latinx butches (though, unsurprisingly, white butches have appropriated it) who are seen as "harder" in their heightened masculinity and attitude. Gay notes that "people tend to assume if you're a black butch, you're a stud and that's it," which is ultimately untrue. Still, butch legibility remains a paradox: As the most identifiable of lesbians — femmes often "pass" as straight, whether they want to or not — we are nonetheless maligned and erased for our failure of femininity, our refusal to be the right kind of woman.

ANOTHER LINGERING stereotype, one born from "Stone Butch Blues" and its more coded literary forebears, particularly Radclyffe Hall's "The Well of Loneliness" (1928), is the butch as a tragic and isolated figure. She is either cast out by a dominant society that does not — will not — ever see her or accept her, or she self-isolates as a protective response to a world that continually and unrelentingly disparages her.

When a butch woman *does* appear in mainstream culture, it's usually alongside her other: the femme lesbian. Without the femme and the contrast she underscores, the butch is "inherently uncommodifiable," Bechdel says, since two butches together is just a step "too queer." We rarely see butches depicted *in* or *as* community, an especially sobering observation given the closure of so many lesbian bars over the past two decades. But when you talk to butches, a more nuanced story emerges, one of deep and abiding camaraderie and connection. Despite the dearth of representation, butch love thrives — in the anonymous, knowing glances across the subway platform when we recognize someone like us, and in the bedroom, too. "Many of my longest friendships are with people who register somewhere on the butch scale," Peirce says. "We're like married couples who fell in love with each other as friends."

Legler, for their part, recognizes a "lone wolf" effect, one in which some young queers initially love "being the only butch in the room." In organizing the group portrait that accompanies this essay over the past months, Legler was curious "what it would be like for butches to just show up together and to be able to display all of their power, all of their sexiness, all of their charisma, without having it be mitigated in some way." And not only for butches of an older generation, but for those still figuring things out, transforming the scene in ways that both defy and inspire their elders. "It's been centuries in the making, the fact that we are all O.K.," Legler adds. "That our bodies get to exist: We have to celebrate that. You can do more than just survive. You can *contribute*."

les inrockuptibles

A.K. Burns
In rock uptibles
February 17th, 2020
by Ingrid Luquet-Gad

A.K. BURNS

Les 5 expos à ne pas manquer en février



Vue de l'exposition "Globster Soot, Medium Rare" d'AK Burns à la galerie Michel Rein à Paris

Terres arides, corps brûlants

En France, la présence d'AK Burns est encore ténue. Agée d'une quarantaine d'années, la New-Yorkaise est déjà passée par le New Museum ou le Sculpture Center, précisant au fil des expositions la teneur de son vocabulaire. Les vidéos transféministes des débuts, où elle reperforme notamment des vidéos fétichistes de Youtube, introduisent un corps incertain, morcelé et indéterminé.

Le même processus, celui d'une ontologie désirante et d'une perception haptique, elle le fait progressivement évoluer vers une pensée des matériaux. Ceux-ci sont radicalement urbains, rebuts d'une ère industrielle passée, dont il ne reste que les métaux lourds, dont les larmes de rouille suintent à la surface de sols contaminés.

A Paris, AK Burns est actuellement présentée à deux reprises. A la faveur d'une exposition de groupe à la Maison Populaire de Montreuil tout d'abord, où elle présente un fossile d'atelier, soit un banal t-shirt d'atelier qui a vu de meilleurs jours moulé en fonte aluminium. A la galerie Michel Rein qui présente sa seconde exposition solo entre ses murs, l'accent est davantage placé sur la navigation d'un corps fragmenté au sein d'un environnement aride et déserté, imbibé d'un romantisme délétère et dystopique.

• AK Burns, dans le cadre de *I'm from nowhere good*, jusqu'au 4 avril à la Maison Populaire, à Montreuil, et *AK Burns. Global Sooth Medium Rare*, jusqu'au 21 mars à la galerie Michel Rein, à Paris

Konbini

A.K. Burns
Konbini
October 27th, 2020
By Donna Ghezlane-Lala

Face à la pandémie, le Palais de Tokyo réagit avec l'expo collective Anticorps

Vingt artistes expriment leurs "réactions épidermiques" aux restrictions de contact imposées par le Covid-19.

Lieu d'expression expérimental de l'art contemporain à Paris, le Palais de Tokyo donne la parole à vingt artistes qui illustrent chacun·e leurs *"réactions épidermiques"* aux restrictions de contact imposées par le Covid-19.



A. K. Burns, "Pitch Black Dry Sack", 2019. Béton aqua-résine (main), coulé époxy (cruche), barre d'acier d'armature (bras), bûche de charbon de bois (bras). (© A. K. Burns/Michel Rein, Paris et Bruxelles/photo : Florian Kleinefenn)

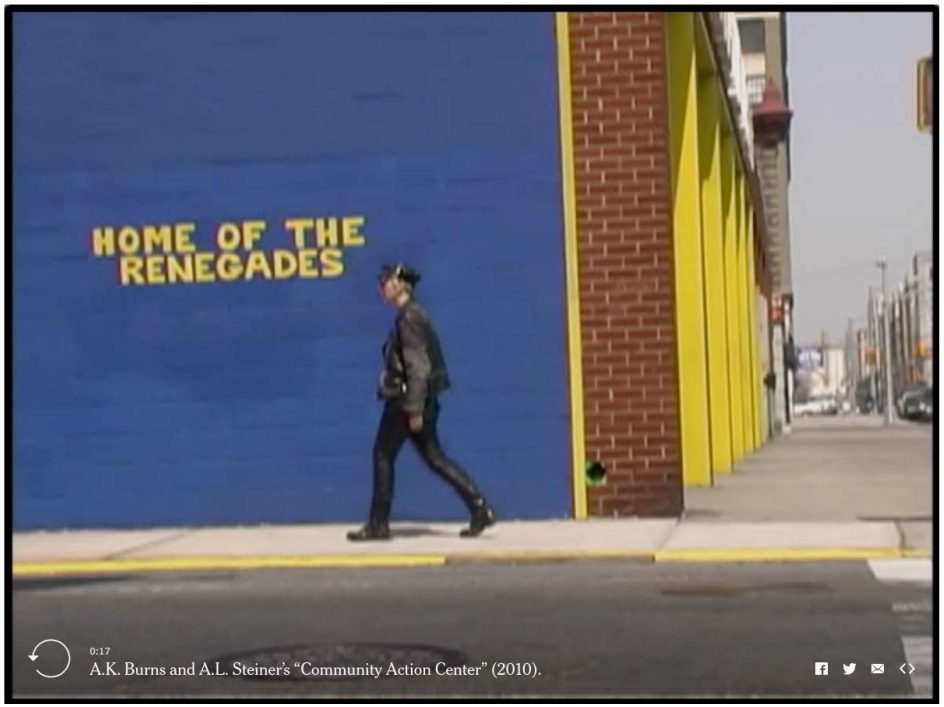
Cette exposition présente des œuvres pour moitié d'artistes étranger·ère·s, pour moitié français·es : des installations, vidéos et peintures, dont les messages, de force très inégale, sont de l'ordre du ressenti. "Anticorps" témoigne, explique à l'AFP Emma Lavigne, présidente du Palais de Tokyo, *"comment l'art peut jouer le rôle d'une forme d'anticorps"* et explore *"les nouvelles frontières que fait expérimenter l'épidémie : au niveau de la peau et des sens, au niveau de la cellule familiale et entre les pays"*.

"Ce n'est pas une exposition sur le Covid", mais les artistes cherchent à *"montrer comment on arrive à se toucher au niveau émotionnel, au niveau esthétique, comment nos corps sont affectés par cet autre espace-temps qu'invente l'épidémie"*, ajoute-t-elle. La Britannique Kate Cooper réalise un film montrant une femme prisonnière d'une combinaison en plastique transparente qui la protège et l'agresse à la fois. À la recherche d'une libération olfactive, l'artiste marocaine Ghita Skali expose des cartons débordant de feuilles de verveine.

A.K. Burns
The New York Times Style Magazine
July 17th 2019
By David Breslin, Martha Rosler,
Kelly Taxter, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Torey Thornton

A.K. BURNS

The 25 Works of Art That Define the Contemporary Age



Three artists and a pair of curators came together at The New York Times to attempt to make a list of the era's essential artworks. Here's their conversation.

20. A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, "Community Action Center," 2010

"Community Action Center," a 69-minute erotic romp through the imaginations of artists A.K. Burns (b. Capitola, Calif., 1975) and A.L. Steiner (b. Miami, 1967) and their community of friends, is a celebration of queer sexuality as playful as it is political. We watch as a diverse, multigenerational cast engage in joyfully hedonistic acts of private and shared pleasure involving paint, egg yolks, carwashes and corn on the cob. Although the video opens with the cabaret star Justin Vivian Bond reading lines from Jack Smith's experimental film "Normal Love," there is otherwise little dialogue. Instead, the focus is on the dreamlike visuals — captured with an offhand intimacy on rented and borrowed cameras — and the visceral sensations they evoke. "Community Action Center" is the rare ribald work that doesn't refer to male desire or gratification, which is partly why Steiner and Burns, who are activists as well as artists, describe it as "socio-sexual." Radical politics needn't come at the cost of sensuality, however. The piece is meant to titillate.

KT: It's a really important work, too.

TLF: I haven't seen it.

KT: They spearheaded this project to essentially make porn, but it's much more than that, with all kinds of people from their queer community. It includes so many artists that we know and that are making work now, and very visible, but it was all about figuring out how to show their body, show their sexuality, share their body, share their sexuality, make light of it, make it serious, collaborate with musicians. It's a crazy document of a moment that opened up a conversation.

the other artists : Sturtevant; Marcel Broodthaers; Hans Haacke; Philip Guston; Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro and the CalArts Feminist Art Program; Lynda Benglis; Gordon Matta-Clark; Jenny Holzer; Dara Birnbaum; David Hammons; Barbara Kruger; Nan Goldin; Cady Noland; Jeff Koons; Mike Kelley; Felix Gonzalez-Torres; Catherine Opie; Lutz Bacher; Michael Asher; Danh Vo; Kara Walker; Heji Shin; Cameron Rowland; and Arthur Jafa.

Frieze

A.K. Burns
Frieze
September 6th 2019
By Moritz Scheper

A.K. BURNS

A Guide To The Best Shows in Dusseldorf and Cologne During DC Open

Celebrating a new season of exhibition openings, your guide to what to see in the Rhineland cities



A.K. Burns, 'Negative Space'
Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf
6 September – 15 December

Given the recent focus in art on the socio-political significance of the body, it is surprising that A.K. Burns has had so little exposure in Germany to date. Her show at Julia Stoschek Collection, 'Negative Space', consists of four multimedia installations and a dozen collages, in which she applies paper cuttings, varnishes and oil paints to shop-bought bathroom mirrors. Standout works include *Body Building, Building Body* (2019), an intelligent composition of human and architectural bodies on a mirrored grid, and *Leave No Trace* (2019) – one of the dramatically staged installations – in which the artist opens up a space with sci-fi narratives to engender a dream of a LQBTQ-friendly society.

WAF WORLD ART FOUNDATIONS

A.K. Burns
World Art Foundations
Winter 2019

JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION: A.K.BURNS 'NEGATIVE SPACE'



A.K. Burns's interdisciplinary practise explores the body as a contentious domain where social, political, and material forces collide. Engaging deeply with questions of materiality and (re)production, Burns examines how power is connected to the body, its functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures. For Burns, the body is not an object with inherent boundaries and properties but multifaceted and porous, permeating and penetrated by its surroundings. These inquiries take shape as visually seductive and socially critical videos, sculptures, writing, sound, drawings, and collages.

NEGATIVE SPACE, A.K. Burns's first institutional solo exhibition in Germany, is comprised of three multi-channel video installations that are a part of an ongoing cycle of works by the same name. Conceived as a non-linear and layered narrative, this series envisions a world wherein boundaries are fluid and hierarchical relations permute. This cycle of works playfully corrupts science-fiction tropes exploring the intersection of politics and fantasy to build idiosyncraticallegorical imagery.

Burns deliberately locates the work in a speculative present filled with the detritus of everyday life. Filmed in stunning but familiar landscapes, like the desert of the Southwest United States, the Negative Space series exposes the tension between utopian proposals of sociality and apocalyptic anxieties. The works challenge long-standing assumptions about social orders, marshalling familiar images and objects to ask how value is assigned to resources, how marginalized bodies navigate a fraught social reality, and how different forms of matter come to matter.

At JSC Düsseldorf, Burns will restage two video installations A *Smeary Spot (Negative Space 0)* (2015) and *Living Room (Negative Space 00)* (2017), and premiere a new episode entitled *Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000)* (2019). In addition, the exhibition will include twenty-one collages related to the series, a new film observing a total solar eclipse, and an experimental sound work presented as a vinyl record.

NEGATIVE SPACE is part of HORIZONTAL VERTIGO, a year-long program at the JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION in Düsseldorf and Berlin, curated by Lisa Long.

JSC Düsseldorf, Schanzenstraße 54, 40549 Düsseldorf |Germany

Deutschlandfunk

Deutschlandfunk
September 5th 2019
By Peter Backof

A.K. BURNS

Der amerikanische Albtraum

Von düsterer Science-Fiction, die im Hier und Heute spielt, bis zum transfeministischen Manifest: Die Videos der New Yorkerin A.K. Burns fesseln. Sie sind zum ersten Mal in Deutschland zu sehen: Albträume, aus denen man irgendwie nicht aufwachen möchte; böse Märchen, die auch für Befreiung stehen.



„Kinder, die mit Messern spielen! Gleich schlachten sie die Wohnzimmersofas und weiden sie aus. Im Aquarium nichts Grünes mehr. Auch da ist Wüste. Die Aquarien sind auch nur halb voll!"

Und der amerikanische Einrichtungstraum auf Halbmast – im Video „Living Room" von A.K. Burns. Dann geht der grell erleuchtete Albtraum weiter: Die Kleidung der Kinder nimmt das biedere karierte Muster der Sofas an. Das „System" hat sie gefressen. Bis sie schließlich spastisch und wie Kaulquappen am Boden herum zucken. Während Karl Marx zitiert wird. Also da müssten mal Freud und folgende ran, um dieses Leid zu deuten.

A.K. Burns: „Es geht um diese Angst, die mittlerweile überall da ist. Und die gefühlte Enge, die vielleicht mit der politischen Situation seit 2016 zu tun hat, also seit der Wahl. Es ist gemeint als Gegenwehr."

Manche „Acting Agents" – menschliche Protagonisten in den Videos von A.K. Burns – tragen überall kleine Pflaster, als hätten sie sich bei Ganzkörperrasuren geschnitten.

Die Alltäglichkeit der Xenophobie

„Microaggression! – die Leute sagen dir: Ich bin kein Rassist, bin nicht homophob! Ich doch nicht! Und dann tun sie doch etwas, was verletzt. Es geht nicht um Vergewaltigung, nicht die großen Sachen. Sondern zum Beispiel das: Du gehst als Frau die Straße lang und sie grinsen dich an. Gut, man ist das als Frau ja gewohnt. Die meisten Frauen brauchen es ja sogar, als Bestätigung."

A.K. Burns braucht es nicht. Die Künsterin mit intersexuellem Look weicht etwas zurück, als hätte sie geahnt, dass jetzt gleich wieder die Frage kommt: Wofür steht „A.K."? Sie ist bei Wikipedia einsortiert unter Transfeminismus.

„Transfeminismus, was ist das nun wieder? Gute Frage! Gehen Sie damit mal mit dem Mikrophon unter die Leute. Vielleicht definiert es jeder anders? Für mich: Gibt es natürlich glücklicherweise die Geschichte des Feminismus, auf der ich aufbauen kann. Aber Transfeminismus bewegt sich in dem Sinn weiter, dass er – in dieser heteronormativen Welt –, nicht nur auf Frauen schaut, sondern generell die Machtfrage stellt."

Also mehr als die #MeToo-Frage: Wo sind die Frauen in den Museen?

Rache-Akte mit Humor

„Bin ich überhaupt eine Frau? Das ist meine Frage."

Veranschaulicht in dem Video „Eclipse" mit einer totalen Sonnenfinsternis, gefilmt in Utah. Und wie es ist, in die Sonne, beziehungsweise ins Nichts zu schauen. Darum dreht sich ein feministischer Science-Fiction-Text von Joanna Russ von 1976, den A.K. Burns hier zitiert und bebildert. Es ist eine Denkweise, wie etwa beim Afrofuturismus von Sun Ra: Wenn auf dem Planet Erde an den Machtverhältnissen nichts zu ändern ist. Dann bleibt als Zuflucht nur das Weltall.

Aber von Opfergehabe in den Arbeiten von A.K. Burns kaum eine Spur: dafür Humor, mit lauter kleinen Racheakten am weißen, proaktiven, optimierten Mann. Im Video „Leave No Trace", ganz neu und für die „Julia Stoschek Collection" entstanden, wird er geradezu zum Idioten erklärt. Seine ganzen Qualifikationen und sein Status ist hier einen Dreck wert: ausgesetzt auf einem Wüstenplaneten. Die Rache der pluralistischen und diversen, der eigentlichen Wirklichkeit der USA.

„Inzwischen geht es auch um die Frage: Wie überleben wir, da alles niedergeht? In Science-Fiction wird ja Technologie oft romantisiert. Alles sieht so futuristisch und toll aus."

Wendet sich alles zum Guten?

Während es bei A.K. Burns als Requisiten vor allem eins zu sehen gibt: Müll, Müll und nochmals Müll. Thema Klima, auch bei ihr. Bis dann wieder, in dieser aufwändigen, komplexen Ausstellungsarchitektur – mit Kafka-krummen Wänden und würfelförmigen Projektionsflächen – alles wieder verschwindet in einem digitalen Linienraster. Das war also wirklich nur ein Albtraum, diese Wüstenaquarien und -planeten, diese Aggrokinder, diese Sonnenfinsternis für womöglich immer? Zumal die letzte Projektionsapparatur auf einem Totenschädel steht. Das Vanitas-Motiv schlechthin.

Doch alles könnte sich noch guthin wenden, durch Fantasie und Humor. Wie auf einer queeren Party. A.K. Burns ist von vielem inspiriert und will selber andere inspirieren. Das gelingt. Aus ihren Video-Albträumen möchte man eigentlich gar nicht mehr aufwachen.

„Alles ist hier am Kämpfen und mit Überleben beschäftigt. Aber am Ende jedes Videos steht eine Tanzszene. Als Akt der Befreiung. Es ist der Moment, wo du frei bist, mit und in deinem Körper. Das ist mehr als Flucht und Jammertal. Denn so kann man der Welt auch noch was Positives abgewinnen."

A.K. BURNS – NEGATIVE SPACE, kuratiert von Lisa Long, JSC Düsseldorf, 6. September – 15. Dezember 2019

them.

A.K. Burns
them.
August 8, 2019
By Zachary Small

This Queer Artist's Latest Work Shows Public Art's Complicated Link to Gentrification



At first, it's hard to see why A. K. Burns is in Cleveland, Ohio, making her first-ever public art installation. Burns has a certain level of anxiety about being here — not necessarily because she's uncomfortable as a queer woman in the Midwest, but more because the assignment has her contending with her work's relationships to gentrification and the big money donors who back public art in this country.

Burns hesitated but ultimately accepted an invitation from FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art to conceive of a new public work that could comment on the ongoing gentrification issues plaguing the Ohio city's poorest neighborhoods. More specifically, FRONT tasked Burns with making a piece that addresses the history of a small district called Hingetown, which has rapidly transformed in the past twenty years from a working-class neighborhood with a vibrant gay nightlife scene to one of Cleveland's trendiest places to live. Just take a look at the neighborhood's own website: its coffee is "unbelievably delicious" and its art museum is "kick ass."

The story of Burns' first public sculpture is one of controversy because the work engages how gentrification has led to queer erasure in the neighborhood. It's also a story about manipulation, one that shows just how vulnerable artists are to the financial whims of cultural institutions who often take advantage of their ethical brands.

The history of Hingetown follows a common gentrification narrative. "Hingetown" itself never really existed. That name was a marketing ploy created in 2013, a rebranding exercise to attract real estate investors to an otherwise undesirable location built alongside a six-lane freeway and a housing project called Striebinger Block, wedged between Cleveland's Warehouse District, the Market District, and Gordon Square. To visitors, this neighborhood must have looked abject and defunct. Speaking to *Vanity Fair* for a profile of the neighborhood in October 2015, Fred Bidwell, a leading player in the redevelopment of Hingetown who first moved to the area after making his fortune in advertising, described its transition from slum to something: "This place, which was a nowhere, toxic corner, has become a destination." A full year before Bidwell's comment, two officers shot Tamir Rice dead only a few blocks to the west of the neighborhood.

Surely, Hingetown's former inhabitants would beg to differ. Writing for *Belt Magazine*, Greggor Mattson, a professor of sociology at Oberlin College, describes how gentrification erases the overlap between queer people and working-class communities: "If the Striebinger Block was 'a corner of poverty,' it's because Cleveland queers are also poor. If we stood in the lots described by gentrifiers as 'missing teeth,' they reflected our own bodies." Although sometimes blamed for starting the cycle of gentrification by attracting artists (and later techies and bankers) to low-income areas, queer people are more often than not part of those vulnerable minorities at risk.

As an artist, Burns has had to think about gentrification for a long time. In 2013, she moved her studio from Industry City, in Brooklyn, to Maspeth, Queens. "There's no bus or subway to the studio. There's no train. No grocery store. It's all very unappealing for gentrification," she told me with a half-smile as we stood in her studio discussing her upcoming project for FRONT. Of course, these facts, along with the arrival of artists, make an area ripe for gentrification, and Maspeth has been no exception in recent years. "Every time I have to move my studio or home to be able to afford being an artist, I try to be as conscious as possible about where I place myself because I know that it's going to affect my environment."

Originally from a California beach town outside Santa Cruz, Burns moved to Oakland in 1998 after studying graphic design at RISD. Eventually, she found herself co-running a gallery there. But when she visited her old neighborhood years after finally making the move to New York in 2003, she noticed a rapid transformation of the area from a fairly unpopulated space into a shopping district with a sprinkling of galleries. There's a stinging recognition that her gallery may have fomented such a large change in the area. This lesson informs Burns' work with Hingetown, and how she sees queer culture within a narrative of gentrification. "I don't believe that queer culture was a thing that changed the neighborhood — the gay clubs were in cohabitation alongside other marginalized economies, like prostitution and drugs," she explained. "I believe that bringing the arts in created a space where others were drawn to the neighborhood, seeking culture. Even if the culture represented was that of marginalized bodies—museums and arts organizations claimed a cultural high ground that made previously existing cultures and economies incompatible to the new flux of visitors."

The FRONT Triennial exemplifies this sometimes-caustic relationship between art and gentrification in Hingetown. The same person who called the old neighborhood a "toxic corner" is also FRONT's founder and executive director, Fred Bidwell, who moved to Cleveland with his wife after a lucrative 35 year career in advertising and marketing in Akron. Establishing the Bidwell Foundation in 2011, he later bought an old transformer station and turned it into a contemporary art space in 2013, where he could support local artists and showcase his collection of photography. This was the same year that the neighborhood was rechristened "Hingetown." Four years later, Hingetown gained Ohio's first historical marker honoring its role in the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement as the rare space that catered to the queer community through bars and clubs.

Come mid-July, FRONT will have to answer for its role in eclipsing the queer history of the past with the shiny, millennial Hingetown of the future. Originally, FRONT asked Burns to bring her "UNKNOWN KNOWN" triptych of fences. This work riffed on Donald Rumsfeld's infamous speech where he leveraged the ambiguity of the unknown to induce fear during the "War on Terror." Traveling to Hingetown, however, Burns decided against bringing her old work to Cleveland. "Walking around the neighborhood and observing the sites under construction, I noticed that most were locked down with chain-link fences," she said. Those fences became the inspiration for her public work, which brutalized the fences as a commentary on how gentrification can disappear bodies—particularly queer bodies—from local history. "I was reading a lot of Jane Jacobs," explains Burns. "But it wasn't getting me to the language or resolution that I wanted, which was a bit more poetic. In my frustration, I just wanted to crush the fucking fence. Which turns out is the poetics I was looking for."

The Dispossessed is a mangled and ChromaFlair painted chain-link fence that Burns developed for the FRONT Triennial. Twisted into an unimaginable shape, the bruised fence almost resembles a crumpled up paper thrown into a waste bin like a discarded idea. The work stands like a gaping maw, whose negative interior space becomes a foreboding silhouette of local residents whose time in the neighborhood has come to pass during gentrification. The paradoxical presence of disappearance encourages the viewer to contemplate the vanishing of Hingetown's queer community in recent years. But fences are also often used in the criminalization of people's bodies, forming borders or delineating public space from private space. Seen in an area of rapid "redevelopment," Burns's work questions how the neighborhood's previous residents will be treated in the new Hingetown.

Originally, Burns envisioned a series of fences scattered across Hingetown, standing in the lots marked for redevelopment and construction. Instead, she only has one sculpture defiantly on display in front of Bidwell's Transformer Station. After nine months of theorizing and experimentation, FRONT informed Burns that she would not be receiving the funding she had initially requested. Therefore, she would not have enough funds to build multiple sites for the artwork and, by default, get no commission fee since funds were never separately set aside to pay the artist.

"They said I could sell the work, but I don't have a record of selling large public sculptures," the artist explained. "That's a very particular collector base. That's just not going to happen overnight." In the end after paying to create the work, there would be very little by way of compensation for Burns, a situation she described as all too common.

Responding to the situation at Hingetown, Bidwell acknowledged the issues surrounding FRONT's presence in a gentrified area, but avoided addressing the denial of Burns's request for full funding: "It's true to say that Transformer Station did lay the groundwork for Hingetown's transformation which is generally perceived to be positive by the community. We are pleased that AK Burns's sculpture recognizes the history of the neighborhood and the changes that have occurred here, creating a vital discussion around Hingetown."

The irony of FRONT's reluctance to properly compensate a queer artist for a sculpture confronting a queer-displacing gentrification catalyzed by the triennial's executive director is not lost on Burns. A founding member, along with with multimedia artist A. L. Steiner and performance artist K8 Hardy, of WAGE (Working Artists and the Greater Economy), she has spent most of her career fighting for better economic equality between artists and institutions.

"While there are problems with the gallery system, there is an economic structure to it. The problem is that a lot of artists exist primarily within the non-profit structure, which includes everything from small artist-run spaces to museums. It has no consistent economic structure to it," Burns says. "There's all this money moving around, but it's concentrated in a 1% grouping of artists. How is any community supposed to sustain itself that way?"

You might think that Burns could count herself in that lucky one percent, given her résumé. The recipient of Harvard University's prestigious Radcliffe Fellowship, Burns has exhibited internationally in venues like the Tate Modern in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She has also co-edited *Randy*, an annual trans-feminist arts magazine and helped draft WAGE's landmark womanifesto. But FRONT Triennial's reluctance to meet Burns's price demonstrates how queer women artists are still being devalued by a system that predominantly skews straight and male. Even with a history of fighting for economic justice for artists, someone like Burns is just as easily discounted as the poor environs of Hingetown.

There is a special humor in seeing *The Dispossessed* sitting outside Bidwell's Transformer Station. Half-realized and resembling discarded rubbish, Burns' work serves Cleveland a similar notice to the one Kara Walker's *A Subtlety* served Williamsburg back in 2014 when she installed her bleached sugar sphinx resembling a naked black woman in the old Domino Sugar Factory scheduled for demolition and redevelopment. Like Walker, who tied the gentrification of Brooklyn to the commodification of black bodies, Burns eulogizes a bygone queer neighborhood with her art. Still, there is another level of irony here that *The Dispossessed* will lure attention and tourism that might further gentrify Hingetown.

Which gets to the bigger question of why Burns agreed to come to Cleveland in the first place. Perhaps by working with the FRONT Triennial to develop their inaugural exhibition, she could create something ethical and responsible. Perhaps gentrifiers can acknowledge their footprint on displaced community and find a path toward development that doesn't leave other bodies in its wake. Someone has to make the art. If not her, then who else? Unfortunately, it appears FRONT didn't give the chance to native Hingetowners to be their own best advocates.

Burns sees it as an ongoing battle. "I'm part of a lineage of cranky lesbians who get agitated enough to do something. We have a history of this. It's really our job."

Frieze

A.K. Burns
Artforum
July 24, 2018
By Ewan Moffitt

What the Inaugural FRONT Triennial in Cleveland Highlights About the Problems with Art Tourism

At the crux of this ambitious show lies the question: who is this triennial really for?



So goes the thinking of Fred Bidwell, a millionaire collector and former advertising executive from Akron, Ohio. He is the chief funder and public face of FRONT International, the new Cleveland triennial for contemporary art, curated by Michelle Grabner, that opened on 13 July and continues to 30 September. Among the exhibition's 28 venues – which stretch across metropolitan Cleveland, Akron and Oberlin – is the Transformer Station, a disused electrical plant that Bidwell and his wife Laura Ruth Bidwell acquired in 2011 to stage rotating exhibitions of their collection. It serves as a hub for FRONT's film programme, as well as installations by Stephen Willats and A.K. Burns which tackle issues of urban blight and gentrification.

On the Transformer Station's clipped front lawn, A.K. Burns has installed *The Dispossessed* (2018), a gnarled, jet-black chain-link fence. Chain link is ubiquitous in the neighbourhood, cordoning car parks, construction sites and fast-disappearing vacant lots. A small silver plaque notes that the art space is 'part of a wave of gentrification' and states that the sculpture stands 'in critical dialogue with various modes of local "revitalization".' It's a relatively oblique artwork, but a brave and indignant gesture by an artist in response to a financial backer. The ethics of development plague FRONT, which largely ignores the socioeconomic conditions of greater Cleveland in order to repackage it for high cultural tourism. Despite the fact that Cleveland clocked the country's second-highest poverty rate and its ninth highest crime rate just last year – both functions of its declining and disenfranchised population – almost none of FRONT's projects represent local people or the problems they face.

ARTFORUM

A.K. Burns
Artforum
July 21, 2018
By Zack Hatfield

DIARY

DOWN IN FRONT

July 21, 2018 • Cleveland, Ohio • Zack Hatfield at the inaugural FRONT Triennial



A.K. Burns, The Dispossessed, 2018. Installation view at Transformer Station.

The next morning, we went to Fred Bidwell's Transformer Station, the gallery space that helped gentrify Hingetown a few years ago. In its front lawn, A. K. Burns had installed a pair of warped chain-link fences. As we idled around them, eating donuts, Burns herself wandered by and gave an impromptu spiel about the work, which arose from ideas about borders (bodily and geographical) and the tangled dynamics of art and redevelopment. "The lines of gender don't make a lot of sense to me," she said, acknowledging that Hingetown once served as a haven for the local queer community. "And gentrification and the arts have this knotted, complicated history." The fences, she said, could help express some of the rage felt about all of this. "It's actually not easy to crush a fence," she added.

ARTnews

A.K. Burns
Artnews
July 17, 2018
By Alex Greenberger

Hot in Cleveland: Front International Triennial Kicks Off in Ohio with Promising First Edition



A. K. Burns, *The Dispossessed*, 2018, at Transformer Station.

Outside Transformer Station, A. K. Burns debuted the sculpture *The Dispossessed*, a pair of fences that look as though they were crushed by heavy machinery. Standing next to her sculpture, Burns explained that she was fascinated by fences she spotted throughout Ohio City, which she said "appear around construction sites and empty lots, as markers of ongoing gentrification." She thought that the fences could be metaphors for borders, and she wanted to break them down. "I got so frustrated, and I was like, 'Ah, I want to crumple these fences!' " she said. With a laugh, she added, "You'd think it would be more fun. It's actually not easy to crush the fence."

ARTFORUM

A.K. Burns
Artforum
December 2018
By A.K. Burns

THE ARTISTS' ARTISTS

THE ARTISTS' ARTISTS

To take stock of the past year, Artforum *asked an international group of artists to select a single exhibition or event that most memorably captured their eye in 2018.*



Zoe Leonard, *Strange Fruit*, 1992–97, orange, banana, grapefruit, lemon, and avocado peels; thread, zippers, buttons, sinew, needles, plastic, wire, stickers, fabric, trim wax, dimensions variable. Photo: Graydon Wood.

A.K. Burns

Zoe Leonard, Strange Fruit, 1992–97 (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) I simultaneously squealed with excitement and nearly burst into tears when I entered the central chamber of Leonard's survey at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where Strange Fruit, 1992–97, lay like a gathering of recuperating strangers. The now-withered fruits exposed both the fragile temporality of being and the labor involved in surviving. Previously I had only witnessed the installation in pictures and believed it was thread that was used to reassemble those skins into hallowed bodies. But it's the details that you see in person, the urgent deployment of buttons, hooks, and zippers—by any means—that prompted my rare emotive explosion.

THE NEW YORKER

A. K. Burns
The New Yorker
January 30th, 2017

GOINGS ON
ABOUT TOWN

EXPLORE

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

A.K. Burns: Shabby but Thriving

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

INTERNATIONAL EDITION
THE ART NEWSPAPER

A. K. Burns
The Art newspaper
April, 2017 - n°289
by Dan Duray

Big hit at the New Museum

Do current politics make you want to punch something? Then head over to the New Museum, where the usually drab education centre on the fifth floor has been remodelled with a Ringside-brand punching bag, courtesy of the artist A.K. Burns and tied to her excellent show, Shabby but Thriving. "The Resource Center is just that," she says in an email. "In considering what resources we might need at this critical political juncture, I felt we don't just need things that feed our mind but also our body. And when bodies are under stress it's perfectly natural to want to hit something, to release aggression or to want to scream—hence the padded wall and the heavy bag alongside texts about the body and trauma." Tampons are also available, in metal boxes that usually carry ammunition.



Beat that: A.K. Burns has installed a heavy bag at the New Museum

The Highlighter

A. K. Burns
The Highlighter
January 22nd, 2017
by Natalie Whalen

ENTERTAINMENT, REVIEWS, VISUAL ART

New Museum Exhibit Explores Strange Bodies



Video still courtesy of A. K. Burns and Galerie Michel Rein. © Shabby but Thriving.

Artist-in-Residence at the New Museum, A.K. Burns', new fifth-floor installation, "Shabby but Thriving," is nothing if not thought-provoking.

The exhibit itself centers on a video projected onto overlapping walls. Sometimes the smaller 'wall,' which is more or less a piece of heavy material placed at a slant perpendicular to the other, will provide a close-up on Burns' meticulously crafted scene. The thirty-six minute video, titled "Living Room," is organized within a series. The first in the serial, titled "A Smeary Spot," was debuted in 2015 but is currently housed by the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art.

Surrounding the video is a smattering of sculptural objects, including bags of dirt and a gutted wooden couch with blue light emanating from underneath. These objects act complementarily towards the video, which seems to explore some of these themes of perpetual dirtiness.

Overall, the video is very strange. Admittedly, this exhibit may not be for the first-time viewer of contemporary art. It opens on two individuals (one, a visibly pregnant woman; the other, a man dressed in drag) carrying trash and destroyed furniture down the stairs on a pre-war building, which happens to be the home of the New Museum's artist-in-residence program at 231 Bowery. It is cut with images of children lying on couches, engaging in various dubious activities. One child is looking through bags of dirt for candy; another is staring longingly at a fish tank.

The video ends with a bizarre dance party in the basement of the building. Performers wear oversized shirts with arbitrary words such as "no" and "again" and headlamps as they writhe to the music. What the exhibition seems to and claims to explore is bodies within spaces, and the implications of this dichotomy.

This makes sense given Burns' status as a queer, female artist. In a time where being female and queer is somewhat peculiar in itself, the exhibit is knowingly bizarre—perhaps too bizarre for the audience of giggling museumgoers that I encountered upon attending last weekend. But Burns' work is recognized and highly regarded by authorities on contemporary art: the artist teaches at graduate programs at Hunter College and Columbia University, and is a 2016-2017 Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University.

Politically minded Burns has not simply left her work to fend for itself, either. The New Museum will feature a series of public programs to complement "Shabby but Thriving." On Feb. 5, the museum will host a day-long program titled "Body Politic: From Rights to Resistance" featuring sessions with, "lawyers, activists, and grassroots organizers on issues of bodies under duress: civil disobedience, protest, healthcare, policing, prisons, immigration, and environmental contamination." Mar. 9 will host a panel on quantum feminism, and Apr. 20 will feature a listening party for A.K. Burns' 2016 experimental record "Leave No Trace."

"Shabby but Thriving" opened on Jan. 18 and will run through Apr. 23. New Museum admission is free with your NYU ID.
Email Natalie Whalen at entertainment@nyunews.com.

A.K. Burns
Le Beau Vice
May 31th, 2017
by Elisabeth Lebovici

AK Burns par tous les moyens



Si l'identité n'est pas une, qu'elle est une fable, une fiction, une division, une crise, alors pourquoi diable une exposition monographique prétendrait-elle le contraire? " La réclame d'identité", dit Edouard Glissant dans le Traité du Tout Monde," n'est que profération quand elle n'est pas aussi mesure d'un dire. Quand au contraire nous désignons les formes de notre dire et les informons, notre identité ne fonde plus une essence, elle conduit à Relation."
Traduire ici relation par affinités, un mot qui se cherche.

Prenons le catalogue des beautés naturelles : Lake Powell, Utah, par exemple. Du paysage qui s'est composé durant des milliers d'années, un autre paysage a émergé il y a soixante ans. Le lac résulte de la construction du barrage du Glen Canyon, en 1956. L'eau qui l'emplit a transformé le canyon en contenant, mais inversement, elle désigne, par sa fluidité et son volume, la transformation du canyon et sa négation, l'espace négatif qu'elle a construit.
Cette relation, techniquement, a un nom, un corps: damm. Ça veut dire barrage en anglais mais les sonorités du nom, damm, dammed, résonnent comme dans Femmes Damnées de Baudelaire.
Autre exemple: les floralies de la société botanique newyorkaise. Des perles de culture. Mais aussi un florilège d'Iphones bombardant chacune des espèces, qu'on peut retrouver filtrées et recolorisées chez Instagram. «Mais qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une fleur? Une pro-creation inter sexe et inter-espèce, comme un cyborg».

C'est ce que dit AK Burns, l'artiste dans l'exposition de laquelle on trouve Lake Powell, sous formes d'image d'un vieux catalogue de photos éclaboussées à la Spiruline, l'algue verte-bleue vernie et fixée par un polyurethane, pour figurer l'eau damée-damnée, ainsi que la parade des orchidées (The Orchid Show (2013) sous forme d'une vidéo, où des vidéos de fleurs tapent l'incruste, et où les sons de l'exposition florale s'emmêlent à la musique pour piano de Ruth Crawford Seeger (Kaleidoscopic Changes on an Original Theme, Ending with a Fugue, 1924).

Des états, sinon des étapes de transformation, qui entrent en relation avec d'autres pièces, avec lesquelles pourtant elles n'ont rien à voir —ou plutôt puisqu'il s'agit d'une exposition, elles n'ont pas à être vues ensemble.

Ainsi, ces collages sur toile souple d'images documentaires [un siège de bureau scotché, une sculpture femme-siège d'Allen Jones, des ouvriers en grève...] qui tiennent à une pièce d'un pence, fiché sur le mur (série Penny hung drawings, 2012-14). C'est ce «tenir à», cette relation au mur qui reste tributaire de la gravité [peinture/frontalité + sculpture/verticalité] que ces pièces entrent en rapport avec d'autres, par exemples ces grilles ou cadres industriels servant d'accroche à divers matériaux prélevés sur des activités ou citant des activités extra-artistiques... quoique!. La pêche, le camping, les équipements de plein air. Lors de l'exposition de ces dernières pièces chez Callicoon à New York, AK Burns citait Les Dépossédés d'Ursula Le Guin: "...c'était ambigu, à deux faces. Ce qui était à l'intérieur et ce qui était à l'extérieur dépendait de quel côté on se plaçait.»
Le mot 'relief' peut aussi s'observer des deux côtés. Relief aplati, estampé, d'aluminium et relief, au sens de reste, de déchet, de rogaton. Celui qu'on plaque au mur, qu'on voit de











l'extérieur, celui dans lequel on s'est placé, le t-shirt dans lequel on a transpiré, dont on s'est extrait, qu'on n'a pas jeté mais plié et moulé... pour le plaquer au mur, le voir de l'extérieur, se glisser à l'intérieur, .plier, mouler...

Ayant eu accès à une fonderie, raconte AK Burns, l'artiste avait été sensible à la sensualité de l'aluminium fondu, comme à l'uniforme requis pour y travailler: des chaps de cuir. AK Burns, co-fondatrice de W.A.G.E (Working Artists in a Greater Economy), co-éditrice de Randy, un magazine trans-féministe, et co-réalisatrice de l'inoubliable Community Action Center, le sait bien: Discard (T-shirt) est aussi un moulage d'un travail reproductif, celui de «l''identité-artiste» dans une économie ultra-libérale.

DAZED

A.K. Burns
Dazed
September 25th, 2017
by Miss Rosen

The artists using gender as a tool and a weapon

25th September 2017

Text Miss Rosen



"Untitled" from Community Action Center by A.K. Burns + A.L. Steiner, 2010. Digital video Photography A.L. Steiner

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY - FEATURE

As the New Museum opens a stellar new exhibition, we survey those using gender to embrace, reject, and subvert the status quo





Beyond the binary lays a world of infinite possibility, a space of total freedom and fluidity. 'Male' and 'female' are the space where we begin, and when we liberate ourselves from the paradigm of 'either/or' a vast wealth of gender expression begins to reveal itself.

Invariably, not everyone is comfortable within this extraordinary space. Many hold fast to simplistic, reductive thinking that diminishes the complexities and nuances of human experience and may resist enlightenment. Others understand the necessity of expansive and inclusive ideas, conversations and art – and it's here that *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* takes off.

Curated by Johanna Burton, *Trigger* is a major exhibition featuring the work of more than 40 artists from all walks of life, which will be on view at the New Museum, New York this month and catalogued in a book of the same name on November 21.

By positioning gender at the intersection of race, class, sexuality and disability, *Trigger* exposes deep ambiguities, curious contradictions and fundamental questions at the heart of life on earth. The artists featured here offer ways to use gender to construct and dismantle culture, building new spaces and refurbishing the old. We speak with Burton about the importance of the show, and profile the work of six artists using gender as a weapon and a tool to embrace, reject and subvert the status quo.

"My experience of art is that its function is to make you feel not uncomfortable in a bad way, but to make you question your assumptions" – Johanna Burton

Why is gender so triggering for so many people?

Johanna Burton: Assuming that one could walk away from a gender binary, that destabilisation means you have to think about everything, and when we talk about relationships to power, that kind of destabilisation has a huge impact.

I admire that you're putting out contradictory information, because people are so desperate to get to the solution before they go through the process. How does art have the power transform our ideas?

Johanna Burton: It seems to me that we've moved into an unfortunate moment in general about consumption: that one goes into a museum to feel good or to feel confirmed in their ideas. My experience of art is that its function is to make you feel not uncomfortable in a bad way, but to make you question your assumptions.

That brings it back to what I think of as the purpose of art: to depict the profound, complex differences (between us) and also the universality of human experience.

Johanna Burton: The question of universal humanity is one people are debating heavily right now as we talk about experience, and who can represent what. There are a lot of questions that are making people question if we can experience the same thing at all. At the same time, it feels like we're able to acknowledge our differences and still have conversations that are hard and unresolved – and that's a way of connecting.

A.K. BURNS & A.L. STEINER

A.K. Burns & A.L. Steiner created the classic video Community Action Center (2010), which toured the United States before being acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The 69-minute work upends porn tropes and reimagines them to represent queer erotic idioms. What's more, the creators require the work to be viewed communally, rather than privately, as most people choose to to porn. The Museum will also restage Room for Cream, a lesbian soap opera, performed between 2008–2010.

Johanna Burton: *Community Action Center* is one of the more historical pieces in the show. Having it return gives us a place to talk with the artists about how much has changed in a decade. A.K. and Steiner are just going to screen the movie once and have a discussion. We're thinking about what it means to have history that is built so quickly. *Room for Cream* is a great example: not all of the original cast identifies as lesbians any longer. What does it mean to account for those kinds of shifts within the longer legacy around art history and collaborative practice?



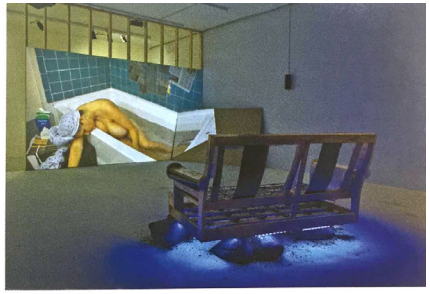
ARTFORUM

A. K. Burns
Artforum
May 20th, 2017
by Laura McLean Ferris

A. K. Burns

NEW MUSEUM/CALLICOON FINE ARTS

In recent months it has been dispiritingly difficult to visit exhibitions without applying the lens of American politics, but "Fault Lines," A. K. Burns's show at Callicoon Fine Arts, couldn't have been read without it—literally. Language was a focal point of the presentation: Steel fences featured the Rusmfeldian terms *knowns* and *unknowns*; a cast-concrete foot on a rebar leg bore the words YOU'RE FIRED; and a



A. K. Burns, *Living Room*, 2017–, wood, metal coils, plastic webbing, underglow lighting, two-channel HD video (color, sound, 36 minutes). Photo: Maris Hutchinson.

similar hand gracefully offered a gold-plated brass IUD in *Hand Out (She Was Warned)*, 2017, its title echoing the silencing of Elizabeth Warren as she opposed the nomination of Jeff Sessions for attorney general.

At the New Museum, Burns's "Shabby but Thriving" was far more ambiguous and literally messy, sited within a gallery that was partly decked out as a grubby living room lined in a cream carpet smeared with dirt. Populating the space were a number of sculptures individually named *Corporeal Soil*, 2017, each consisting of resin, topsoil, and foil-wrapped hard candies (à la Felix Gonzales-Torres) that have been mixed and fixed and hardened in bags, so that they resemble slumping pillowish shapes even though the packaging itself has been cut away. These collapsing, Eeyore-ish forms are melancholic and invite a kind of sympathy, yet they are also abject, like glittery feces. They're shit that's breaking down and getting everywhere, but we're encouraged to look at them as kindly and appreciatively as we would a body: These are mixed feelings that I really appreciate.

A stripped sofa with soiled pillows beneath it sat within *Living Room*, 2017–, an installation with a two-channel video that is both sprawlingly episodic and structurally symbolic. Each section of the video component relates to different spaces in 231 Bowery, next door to the New Museum, where the artist has been in residence this spring, as well as a corresponding body part. In the section "Detox Tub Talks," relating to the kidneys, artist A. L. Steiner lies in an Epsom salts bath in a dingy bathroom ripping out articles from *The New York Times* and adhering them to the tiles around her with water, accompanied part of the time by keyon gaskin, who appears clad in a hospital gown and covered in Band-Aids. They share a chocolate cake, discuss semantics and money, and plan a revolutionary protest dance party. At times this conversation is frustrating, being both difficult to hear in the tiled environment, as well as slightly overprescriptive, unlike the rest of the video, which captures a buzzy materialism. In "Animalia Anima," three seraphic children carry out symbolic gestures on spinning sofas. Memorably, a girl dressed in fish-print pajamas on a matching sofa plays with a fish tank before thrashing on the floor. In "Weight-Bearing," two figures struggle to descend a staircase, one in high heels and a military jacket bearing a nametag that reads MANNING and the other with a large backpack, a strapped-on pregnancy belly, and pool sliders. Both are further burdened by piles of foam and furnishing material, such as ripped-up sofa parts, that have been awkwardly lashed to their bodies, as a form of allegory for bodies that pass with difficulty through a given system.

From room to room, circumstances, aesthetics, and characters change, giving the video a certain unwieldiness. Individually, however, these vignettes have moments of crackling energy and sensitive texture. A child stabs and tears a sofa apart with vigor, the rips making a satisfying sound, like a body that is opened up with unexpected pleasure, or a soil bag torn away, spilling fertile contents everywhere.

—*Laura McLean-Ferris*

ARTFORUM

A. K. Burns
Artforum
September 16th, 2016

ARTISTS AND IDENTITY



A. K. Burns, *A Smeary Spot*, 2015, four-channel video installation (channels 1–3: HD video, color, 53 minutes 13 seconds; channel 4: digital video, black-and-white, silent, 4 minutes), dimensions variable. Marcelo Gutierrez.

IN A HYPERACCESSIBLE WORLD, cultural margins can shift rapidly. Historically crucial social and safe spaces such as cruising spots and dyke bars have been reconfigured or dissolved entirely. A generation has emerged for which identity appears to be fluid and multiplex: Gender cyborgs now assert the singular *they*, bringing it into everyday use—resulting in the pronoun becoming the American Dialect Society's 2015 word of the year. As the rate of change accelerates, is postidentity what we are building one *they* at a time?

Post-, defined as "after," is a semantic device that champions newness at the expense of the word that it qualifies. This device, which structurally cannibalizes the word to which it is affixed, not only generates new rhetoric on which to capitalize but, with regard to "postidentity," proposes that the burden of identity is resolved only when differences cease to exist. While declaring something as past may provide space for visionary alternatives to begin to take shape, what is the value of jettisoning identity when it is still visibly present? Those who latch on to the new at the expense of the old are often acting from a position of privilege—one that allows them to remain blind to stark inequities, the persistence of which is made all too clear by the recent anti-LGBT law in North Carolina, the fascist demands to erect a migrant obstacle course on the US-Mexico border, and the long-standing institutional abuses that brought about the Black Lives Matter protest movement.

Society includes what it can identify with. In the case of trans citizens, having their experiences articulated through the spectacle of popular culture offers visibility by demarcating their personhood. Yet while visibility may be a step toward shifting perceptions, it's far from resolving the persistent issue of violence against difference. With the mass marketing of these branded bodies comes a new set of presumptions that I encounter regularly: that as gender nonconforming, I identify like I look (trans-male), or that I use the all-accommodating pronoun *they*. While the introduction of this third category challenges the fixity of the s/he binary every time *they* is uttered, it simultaneously introduces another frame to fit into. I'm personally not interested in being accommodated or accommodating. What feels politically critical for me is to situate myself next to *she*, but without an interest in participating in the performance of *her*. I may not look or even feel like *her*, but I am in conversation with *her* past and future.

Through self-segregation or separatism, identity-based movements use their prescribed "difference" as a uniting force, building coalitions based on shared experiences to cultivate the language and agency necessary to produce social change. While these are old tactics, they are still in use because identity is a superstructure that we can't dismantle simply by declaring its "post"-ness. Certainly much changes: We have a black president and black principal ballerina as well as trans visibility in sitcoms and reality shows. But *new* is what capitalism feeds on, and such surges of assimilation are about as permanent as the run of a TV series. This kind of change starts to look a lot more like spinning in circles than moving forward. After we acknowledge that the Ouroboros of newness has nothing more to offer us, we might make space for unassimilated difference, a safe space for the strangers that we all are.

In somatic therapy, the patient can't change or remove their trauma. They can only slowly reshape trauma-based patterns until those patterns evolve into a healthier set of behaviors. This process is slow, and it hinges on a plural, rather than a reformed or "cured," understanding of oneself. If systemic change is not a revolution but a slow dance with the perpetrator, I wonder what other language we could create to acknowledge social change as a continuum—an ongoing process—as opposed to terminal cycles of inscription.

A. K. Burns is an artist based in Brooklyn, NY.

MOUSSE

A. K. Burns
Mousse
April 2016
by David Everitte Howe



BE FREE WITH ME: "WILD" WOMYN TO THE MARGINS[1]

BY DAVID EVERITT HOWE



As the queer underground becomes ever more mainstream, a group of artists including A.L. Steiner, A.K. Burns, and MPA are expressing their resistance to this legitimation occurring in heteronormative terms via a proposal for a wild, "third space"—in the words of the postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha—to advance their desire not to fit.

We see a very, *very* big vagina in the desert, somewhere in the American southwest. It doesn't belong to a human—no, that would be pretty ordinary, your garden variety vagina—but rather, is monumentally carved in stone, like something of a dolmen or monolith. It's worshipped by a clan of prehistoric lesbians, who—incidentally—are crouching on a nearby boulder, naked. This isn't some ancient, forgotten feminist civilization—a la *Mad Max: Fury Road*'s all-female desert colony—but rather, the opening salvo of Peaches' uncensored 2015 video *Rub*. Peaches' epic, mystical genital grants courageous pilgrims the magical ability to go "wild." Meaning, board a beat-up pussy wagon—replete with a vaginal talisman dangling from the rearview mirror—which drops intrepid females into a secret warehouse containing a large bath full of naked women doing all kinds of things to each other. The teaches of Peaches, apparently, is still fucking the pain away, and liking it.

After the orgy, party-goers then decamp back to the desert—still naked, a trend—where they play guitar in the sand, surrounded by cacti; engage in shamanic rituals at night; pee in pairs; and have more sex together. The whole set up is so over-the-top and ridiculous that Peaches laughs, seemingly off-cue, as a transgender woman flaps her penis in Peaches' face (lyric: "Can't talk right now, this chick's dick is in my mouth"). *Rub* concludes with a particularly liberatory shot that unfolds in slow motion: a woman riding a horse towards the camera at sunset, naked and bareback, her hair flapping dramatically in the wind with the hills behind her cast in orange. It's a vision of the Wild West, as tamed by a woman. An indelible image, it signals a queering of this symbolically male-dominated landscape, the desert re-cast as a space for difference, in all of the term's open-ended sweep.

Ironically, however, the video also signals a relative mainstreaming of the queer underground. Relative, in the sense that while it may not be mainstream for some, to others it's an instance of a household name enlisting an array of trans-feminist and queer collaborators, in one way or another and in various capacities; they've spent a decade or so challenging the very mainstream *Rub* is marketed for, by plying the gendered tropes of pornography, the media industry, monogamous partnerships, etc. Listed in the music video's ending credits are *Rub* co-director A.L. Steiner—whose *Community Action Center* (2010), made in collaboration with A.K. Burns, is perhaps the most obvious reference point—MPA, and Narcissister. Most interestingly, Steiner, Burns, and MPA in particular are also simultaneously conceiving of worlds far away from our own—marginal, "wild" spaces counter to society-at-large.

Opposite, top - A.K. Burns, *A Smeary Spot* (still), 2015. Courtesy: the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, New York

Opposite, bottom - A.K. Burns, "A Smeary Spot" installation view at Participant Inc., New York, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Participant Inc., New York; Callicoon Fine Arts, New York. Photo: Chris Austin

"Wild," used here as a truncation of "wildness," is not a *Girls Gone Wild* generalization, but—as theorized most recently by a trio of New York University academics—"a space/name/critical term for what lies beyond current logics of rule," as Jack Halberstam sums it up handily.[2] We have to thank a range of poststructuralist and postcolonial thinkers, from Michel Foucault to bell hooks to Homi K. Bhabha, for various attempts at theorizing a marginal wildness, a real and imaginary "third space" (or heterotopia, as Michel Foucault initially sketched it out). For Bhabha, it's a space that "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives…the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation."[3] **For these artists then, how to visualize these "other" spaces is a way to promote and propagate a sense of "not quite fitting"—or better, not wanting to fit—at a time when, ironically, they're fitting more than ever before, with gay marriage and transgender rights ever more visible and accepted**; and with films like *Carol* (2015) representing the historical plight of lesbians, in particular (who escaped the societal strictures of New York by driving out "west, wherever my car will take me" as Cate Blanchett exclaims). This is all a double-edged sword, if anything. Queer legitimation is so often made in heteronormative terms, and under a heteronormative rubric. Maintaining an unclassifiable, open-ended alternative that's neither homo nor hetero, gay nor straight, normative nor alternative—in a sense, forever *neither-nor*—has never been more urgent, and doubly, calls into question the very binary logic of a margin, assuming we *actually* want to do away with it.

At question is how this kind of marginalism is conceived spatially. With *Community Action Center*, space is perhaps less of a key concern than in some of the other works I'll be considering, namely, Steiner and robbinschilds' *C.L.U.E., Part I* (2007), Burns' *A Smeary Spot* (2015), and MPA's newest body of work, which imagines Mars as a potential third space. That said, *Community Action Center* shares with all a sense of the natural landscape as liberating force—here utilized to envision sex and sexuality as something open and amorphous; it's a political act in which tropes of pornography are campily *détourned* for queer use by a community of artists, writers, and thinkers who—quite often—are performing sex acts on each other (or themselves) as a way to enact a new kind of pornography, one free of a misogynistic gaze. Pseudonyms are used by all involved to allow other kinds of representations to unfold—ones outside their "proper" artistic practices. The video's opening shot features friends playfully wrestling and painting (or wrestling in paint) in an art studio, while a voiceover drolly intones about a three foot-long, ten-inch-wide cock; or a stereotypically older bull dyke, Max Hardhand, clad in leather, "taking advantage" of a young woman in a railroad yard, Stargëizer, who clearly likes the attention. In a

later pairing, Stargëizer's rather wet orgasm segues directly into a scene of another woman whose "porn name" is Jugzz, washing her car in the suburbs—emphasis on wet. Slow motion shots dwell on her pausing to dramatically douse herself with streams of water, as if channeling a preposterously underdressed Jessica Simpson in that terrible country music video where she lathers a confederate flag-laden car. The woman swings her wet hair to and fro, rubs her sudsy sponge on her crotch, and shoots the spray between her legs, all accompanied by an orgiastic dance track. Canned tropes of female sexuality are thus hilariously dressed down.

In this context, maybe the most symbolically rich character in *Community Action Center* is Pony, a nymph-like radikal fairy figure who sexually channels the woods she inhabits, and is perhaps the character most associated with an otherworldly "wildness." She seems to rediscover her vagina several times over during the film's roughly 1 hour and 8 minute running time—*Oh! What's that between my legs? Hmm, what should I do with it?* In one instance, she finds a large, mystical gem in the woods, and uses it not as a makeshift dildo, but as a makeshift…something. She closes the film—again, at sunset—holding up some sort of winged symbol, standing in a meadow. What is it about nature, and not the city, that these filmmakers find so appealing? For Steiner, she looks for "open expanses, places beyond place, a feeling of freedom, a toggling of boundaries—between 'wildness' or more precisely, visual space—wherein terms such as natural, unnatural and human-made can create a montage of meanings, a queered gateway."[4]

She's referring specifically to *C.L.U.E.*, which was shot among monumental rock formations in the Southern California desert and in the redwood forests of Northern California, where these natural forces become visual, almost graphic signifiers of wildness—not to mention the act of disrobing itself. The two dancers of robbinschilds, Layla Childs and Sonya Robbins, wear matching bright, monotone outfits, and move around the landscape in a kind of coordinated, forward and reverse choreography that's a bit Yvonne Rainer-like: de-skilled, intentionally clunky even. They dance on boulders, lay on an open road and roll about on the pavement, and wrestle in front of a felled redwood tree's massive root system, which becomes an almost abstracted, monochrome backdrop. Later it becomes the functional coat hanger for their outfits, which hang on its roots as they crawl naked on the ground around it. Whether it's the redwood tree, the wide-angle view of a single lane highway receding into the horizon's flatness, or the railroad tracks they dance around, these settings become projections of the "open road," limitless land, and the mythologized American west, with all of its fucked up histories of manifest destiny, Native American exploitation, and the very idea of ownership, or the lack thereof.

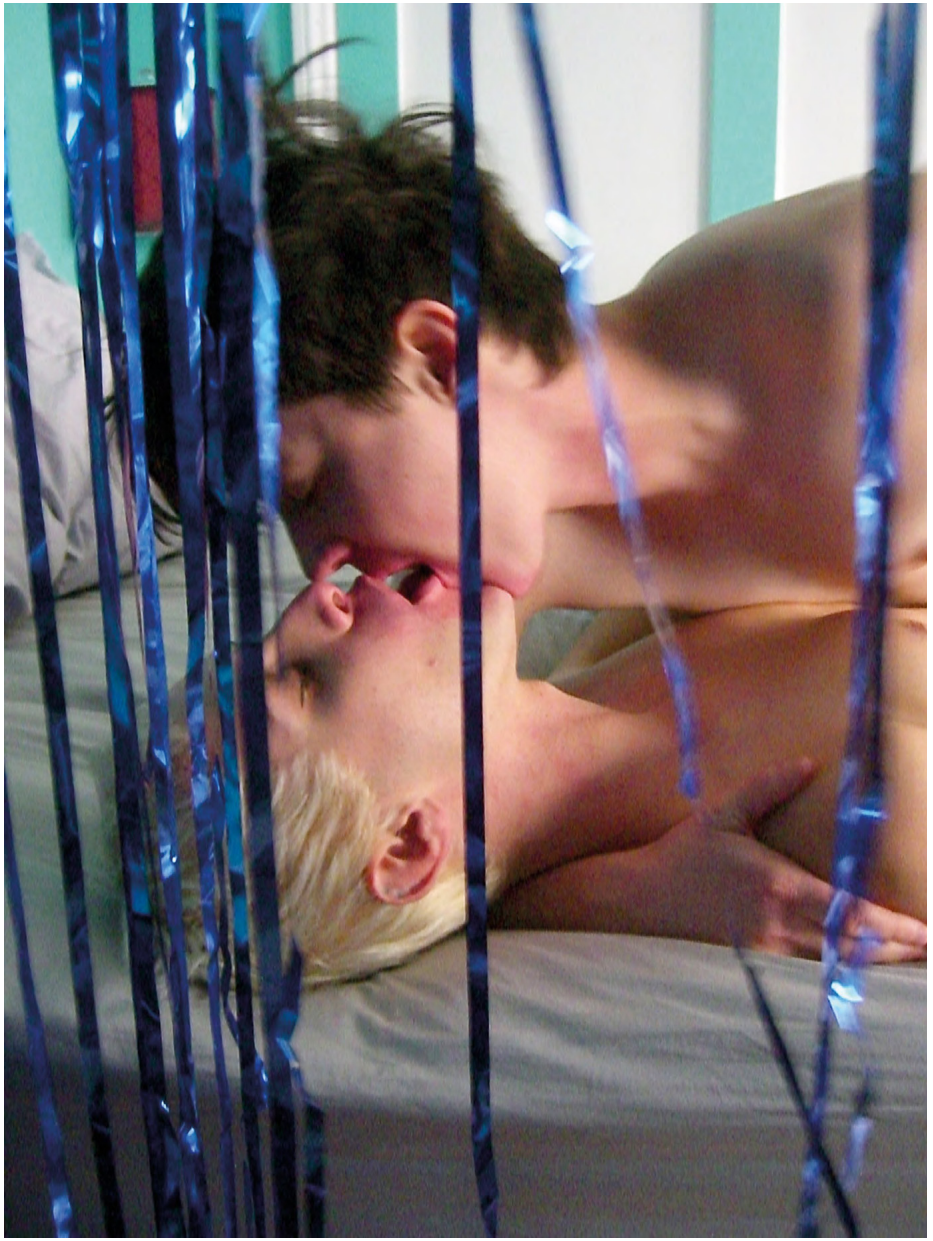
Burns' *A Smeary Spot* directly addresses these very complicated histories, as well as how these kinds of landscapes visually read as wild and are *actually* rather wild. Titled after a description of the sun by science fiction writer Joanna Russ,[5] the film—among other things—follows dancers niv Acosta and Jen Rosenblit as they travel through the Utah desert, camping, swimming, essentially settling the terrain. Burns' attraction towards the film's Utah settings ultimately came down to a more general *look* of otherworldliness[6] than any other conceptual reason, though who's to say that, in this instance at least, the *look* of a place and the place itself are mutually exclusive? While aesthetics may have been a deciding factor in where to situate the work, the place itself and the complicated politics of public land and its historical exclusions became an important backdrop for the film. Loosely regulated—and literally a little lawless—the land is not privately owned. It's the leftovers from when western expansion carved up the landscape into national parks, Native American reservations, and private homesteads. As Burns has noted, about 70% of Utah's land is held as "public" land, in which anyone can legally reside as long as they don't stay in any one place longer than 14 days, and don't leave a mess. In theory, you could live there rent-free,[7] but implicit in this public function is how the term "public" was essentially at the service of an authoritarian government, forcefully decreeing who gets what, with resources not essentially its own—a kind of butchering and "fencing off" of the commons that John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau considered the inevitability of progress.[8]

The landscape's foreignness came to represent Burns' notion of "negative space," which isn't very far off, actually, from the concept of a third, wild space, where encounters are staged "between the many who remain many, and become a new entity in their multiplicity," as José Esteban Muñoz conceived it.[9] As Burns notes:

"Negative space, as a formal term, is generally understood as the between, under, inside and around space, the atmosphere, the unseen matter. Positive space is the subject/object, the thing around which we orient our understanding of what is (and thereby what isn't). This sets up a rather boring binary dynamic of absence and shapelessness (negative) vs. occupation and definable shapes (positive). What's compelling to me about negative space is not that it is an inversion of positive space but that it has its own agency, that it is unfixed, dynamic, changeable and ultimately free: an open set of possibilities."[10]

Here again, **the desert becomes the de facto placeholder for a wild land, free of the "mainland's" overriding power structures—whether they're neoliberal, patriarchal, sexual, what-have-you.** But as *A Smeary Spot* illustrates, there's a danger intrinsic to this othering of space. At one point in the film, Acosta performs a kind of duet with a white flag-like fabric, high on a promontory. Flapping ferociously in the wind, it sticks to his body—forming to its contours and shaping it. The scene functions as a dramatic signaling of queer presence; or rather, the presence of queers, *queers-as-colonizers*, which brings to a head the potential pitfalls of forging marginal spaces set apart from the hegemonies of the regular world. Put simply, they could constitute new kinds of hegemonies, reinforcing a binary separation they were tasked to pry apart. As Halberstam notes, riffing off of Walter Benjamin, "going wild might well propel us into another realm of thought, action, being, and knowing, but could also just as easily result in the reinstatement of an order of rationality that depends completely on the queer, the brown, and the marginal to play their role as mad, bad, and unruly."[11]

MPA, for her part, seems to be washing her hands of this whole Earth thing entirely, setting her eyes on Mars. With all the recent news of water on the planet's surface—and the potential for life to already thrive there—her exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum Houston, "THE INTERVIEW: Red, Red Future," poses the tantalizing question of not *if* we will colonize the planet, but *how*. And more to the point: how we can colonize *differently*—an implicit acknowledgment that we, on Earth, have never been able to do so ethically. Of course, the whole gambit is speculative, but it's the speculation that takes the whole thing to the next level—so to speak—to the next kind of space. Perhaps the most interesting work on view is *The Interview* (2016), which doesn't provide much to look at at all. Rather, it's a direct hotline to the artist, who invites museum visitors on the phone to talk with her about the planet, and how they imagine its future—their future, ultimately—to look like. As MPA puts it, **"In this looking 'there' (Mars) that is a looking 'here' (Earth), I would like to propose that colonization hijacked time into a linearity that distracts and ridicules the experience of dimensional time. Heterotopia exists, I assume, in this colonized frame, and participates in the faith that human evolution is always advancing from a primitive past. I would like to re-state that our past is not primitive, and that our time is collective, dimensional, and multi-versed."[12]** This is all well and good, but ultimately doesn't guarantee that if we did—hypothetically—colonize Mars, it would look any different than here.



A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, *Community Action Center* (still), 2010. Courtesy: the artists; Callicoon Fine Arts, New York; Deborah Schamoni Galerie, Munich; Koenig & Clinton, New York. Photo: A.L. Steiner







164

A.L. Steiner and robbinschilds, *C.L.U.E., Part I (color location ultimate experience)* (stills), 2007. Courtesy: the artists; Deborah Schamoni Galerie, Munich; Koenig & Clinton, New York. Photo: A.L. Steiner

165

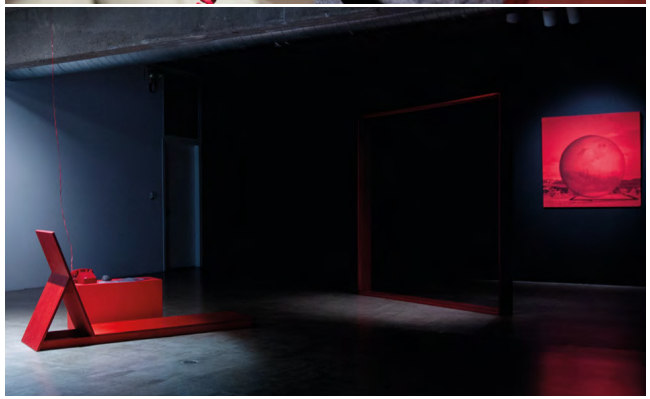
BE FREE WITH ME: "WILD" WOMYN TO THE MARGINS
D. EVERITT HOWE

MPA, *The Interview*, 2016, performance documentation, "THE INTERVIEW: Red, Red Future" installation views at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Photo: Max Fields





From left to right - MPA, *The Interview*, 2015; *Red Frame*, 2014; *Mars*, 2014-2015. "THE INTERVIEW: Red, Red Future" installation view at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2016. Courtesy: the artist and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Photo: Max Fields



This is all presupposing, of course, that we should be trying to deconstruct the center-margin dialectic at all; and not, instead, "being mad, bad, and unruly," happily *margining* away in the constant tension of action and reaction, mainstream and counter-culture—critique, really—that gives us all, ultimately, a sense of queer purpose. Maybe being dialectical is *a-okay*, and that wildness provides something to—returning to Peaches—rub up against, especially when it's so quickly co-opted in a political climate where good taste and political correctness make sex, sexuality, and our bodies increasingly normalized, not liberated. In a world of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and continually formulaic RomComs, maybe there's something to be said for playing the part of the other—and liking it—especially when the alternative is no alternative at all.

David Everitt Howe is a Brooklyn-based critic and curator. He received his BFA from the Savannah College of Art and Design and his MA from Columbia University. He has recently mounted major solo exhibitions and performances by Charles Harlan at Pioneer Works, Dynasty Handbag at The Kitchen, and Emily Roysdon at Participant Inc, while his writing has recently appeared in *BOMB, Frieze, Mousse,* and *Art Review,* where he's a contributing editor. Currently, he's Curator/Editor at Pioneer Works and Online Art Editor at *BOMB*.

1 I just want to thank Joshua Lubin-Levy for directing me to relevant texts about "wildness" as a critical lens.
2 Jack Halberstam, "Wildness, Loss, Death," in *Social Text* 121 (Winter 2014), p.138.
3 Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p.211.
4 As told to the author in an email on February 28, 2016.
5 Risa Puleo, "Transformations and Becomings: an Interview with AK Burns," in *Art in America Online* (September 21, 2015). Accessed February 29, 2016. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/becomings-and-transformations-an-interview-with-ak-burns/.
6 As told to the author in conversation on February 23, 2016.
7 Lauren Cornell, "If the Future Were Now: an interview with AK Burns," in *Mousse* (October-November 2015), p.68.
8 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.171.
9 Halberstam, p.141.
10 Cornell, p.67-68.
11 Halberstam, p.145.
12 As told to the author in an email on March 9, 2016.

di David Everitt Howe

Proprio mentre l'underground queer diventa sempre più mainstream, un gruppo di artisti come A.L. Steiner, A.K. Burns e MPA esprimono la loro resistenza nei confronti di questa legittimazione che avviene in termini etero-normativi attraverso la proposta di un ritorno a un "terzo spazio" selvaggio – per usare le parole del teorico post-coloniale Homi K. Bhabha – presentando il proprio desiderio di non adeguarsi.

Da qualche parte nel deserto del sudovest americano, compare ai nostri occhi un'*enorme* vagina. Non appartiene a un essere umano – in quel caso non sarebbe altro che una comunissima vagina – bensì è incastonata nella pietra, monumentale, come una specie di dolmen o monolito. Un clan di lesbiche preistoriche, rannicchiate – casualmente – nude, sotto un masso lì vicino, è in sua adorazione. Potrebbe sembrare una memoria di qualche antica e dimenticata civilizzazione femminista – una colonia desertica tutta al femminile stile *Mad Max: Fury Road* – e invece è l'apertura del video *Rub* di Peaches, versione *uncensored*, del 2015. I genitali spirituali, epici di Peaches concedono alle coraggiose pellegrine il magico potere di diventare "selvagge". Ovvero di salire a bordo di un malconcio pulmino acchiappa-femmine – con tanto di talismano a forma di vagina appeso allo specchietto retrovisore – che trasporta le intrepide in un magazzino segreto, con una enorme vasca da bagno piena di donne nude che si fanno vicendevolmente qualsiasi cosa. *The Teaches of Peaches* (dal titolo del suo album del 2000), i suoi insegnamenti, sembrano gli stessi di sempre: "Fuck the pain away", come dice la canzone. Basta paure, goditela.

Dopo la grande orgia, le baccanti tornano all'accampamento nel deserto – ancora nude, ovviamente – e suonano la chitarra sulla sabbia, circondate dai cactus. Si ingaggiano in rituali sciamanici notturni, pisciano a coppie, e si dedicano al sesso tutte insieme. L'intero allestimento è talmente eccessivo e ridicolo che Peaches ride, apparentemente fuori copione, mentre una donna transgender la schiaffeggia col pene sul viso (mentre le parole della canzone dicono: "Ora non posso parlare, ho in bocca il cazzo di questa bambola"). *Rub* si chiude con una scena particolarmente liberatoria, in slow motion: una donna al tramonto, cavalcando a bisdosso, viene in direzione delle telecamere, nuda, con i capelli che ondeggiano vistosamente al vento mentre alle sue spalle le colline si tingono di arancione. È una visione del Vecchio West, addomesticato da una donna. Un'immagine indelebile, che indica la riappropriazione in chiave queer di un paesaggio simbolicamente dominato al maschile. Il deserto viene riadattato a spazio per la differenza, in una ricerca interamente aperta.

Tuttavia, non senza una certa ironia, il video segnala anche una relativa tendenza a farsi mainstream da parte dell'underground queer. Relativa, nel senso che per alcuni non è mainstream, mentre per altri è un esempio di collaborazione fra una personalità nota e una serie di collaboratrici queer e transfemministe, coinvolte in un modo o nell'altro e con diverse mansioni, ingaggiate in una sfida più che decennale nei confronti del mondo molto mainstream al quale *Rub* si rivolge, invadendo le figure retoriche genderizzate della pornografia, dell'industria dei media, delle relazioni monogame eccetera. Di queste collaborazioni, come leggiamo nei crediti di coda di *Rub*, compaiono anche la co-regista A.L. Steiner (il cui *Community Action Center* del 2010, realizzato in collaborazione con A.K. Burns, è forse il punto di riferimento più evidente), MPA e Narcissister. L'aspetto più interessante che accomuna Steiner, Burns e MPA è l'idea di mondi lontani dal nostro, di spazi marginali, "selvaggi" (in inglese "wild"), contrapposti all'idea generale di società.

Il concetto di "wild" indica uno stato di selvatichezza, in questo caso; non ha alcuna valenza di richiamo alle *Girls Gone Wild* e al porno, bensì – come teorizzato di recente da un trio di accademici newyorchesi – rappresenta "uno spazio/nome/termine critico per ciò che si nasconde dietro le attuali logiche normatrici", secondo la sintesi di Jack Halbertsam.[1] Dobbiamo ringraziare una serie di pensatori post-strutturalisti e postcoloniali, da Michel Foucault a bell hooks fino ad arrivare a Homi K. Bhabha, per i loro tentativi di teorizzare una sorta di stato selvatico marginale, un "terzo spazio" reale e immaginario (o eterotopia come inizialmente chiamato da Foucault). Per Bhabha, si tratta di uno spazio che "disloca le storie che lo costituiscono, e costruisce nuove strutture di autorità, nuove iniziative politiche…il processo di ibridazione culturale dà vita a qualcosa di diverso, di nuovo e irriconoscibile, una nuova area di negoziazione del significato e della rappresentazione."[2]

Secondo queste artiste, dunque, la creazione visiva di spazi "altri" è un modo per promuovere e propagare un senso di "inadeguatezza" – o meglio detto, una *volontà di non* adeguarsi. Ironia della sorte, ciò avviene proprio nel momento in cui si stanno adeguando più che mai, ora che i matrimoni gay e i diritti transgender sono visibili e accettati, e che film come *Carol* (2015) rappresentano le difficoltà storiche vissute dalle lesbiche in particolare (che scappavano dalle gabbie sociali di New York al grido di "Verso ovest, ovunque mi porti la mia macchina" come fa a un certo punto Cate Blanchett). È un'arma a doppio taglio, se ce n'è una. La legittimazione queer spesso avviene in termini eteronormativi, passando per un'agenda eteronormativa. Affermare un'alternativa aperta, inclassificabile, che non sia né omo né etero, né conformista né anticonformista – che sia sempre *né né*, in qualche modo – non è mai stato tanto urgente come oggi, così come è urgente mettere in discussione la logica fortemente binaria della marginalità, posto che *davvero* ci se ne voglia disfare.

Le opera chiamano in causa il modo in cui questa specie di marginalismo viene concepito in relazione allo spazio. In *Community Action Center*, lo spazio non occupa una posizione centrale come in altri lavori, fra cui per esempio *C.L.U.E., Part I* (2007) di Steiner e robbinschilds, *A Smeary Spot* (2015) di Burns, e il nuovo corpus di lavori di MPA che identifica in Marte un nuovo potenziale terzo spazio. Ciò detto, *Community Action Center* condivide con questi ultimi una visione del paesaggio naturale come forza di liberazione, utilizzata in questo caso per rappresentare il sesso e la sessualità come aperte e amorfe; un atto politico, all'interno del quale i tropi della pornografia subiscono un ostentato *détournement* per essere utilizzati in chiave queer dalla comunità di artisti, scrittori e pensatori i quali – spesso – inscenano atti sessuali gli uni verso gli altri (o verso se stessi) come modo per inscenare un nuovo tipo di pornografia libero dallo sguardo misogino. Tutti i coinvolti usano pseudonimi per consentire rappresentazioni esterne alla loro pratica artistica consueta. La scena d'apertura rappresenta amici che fanno la lotta per gioco e dipingono (o fanno la lotta nella pittura) in uno studio d'arte, mentre una voce fuori campo declama le virtù del cazzo di V lungo 1 metro e largo 25 centimetri; o la classica, stereotipata lesbica, Max Hardhand vestita di pelle, che su una strada ferroviaria "approfitta" di una giovane donna, Stargëizer, la quale chiaramente gradisce le attenzioni. In un successivo accoppiamento, l'eiaculazione orgasmica di Stargëizer è seguita da una scena in cui un'altra donna, Jugzz, lava un'auto in periferia, con particolare enfasi sull'idea del bagnarsi. Le riprese in slow motion si soffermano su di lei che si inzuppa teatralmente d'acqua, come a imitare l'assurdamente svestita Jessica Simpson in quel tremendo video country in cui insapona un'auto con dipinta sul cofano la bandiera confederata. La donna fa oscillare i capelli bagnati avanti e dietro, si passa la spugna insaponata sull'inguine e fra le gambe le sgorga uno spruzzo d'acqua, il tutto accompagnato da una orgiastica colonna sonora dance. Tutti gli stereotipi preconfezionati sulla sessualità femminile vengono messi ironicamente in riga, uno dopo l'altro.

In questo contesto, il personaggio più ricco dal punto di vista simbolico in *Community Action Center* è, probabilmente, Pony la "radikal fairy" che incarna sessualmente i boschi in cui abita, ed è forse la figura più associata a un mistico "stato selvatico". Durante l'ora e 8 minuti di film, riscopre più e più volte la sua vagina – *Oh! Cos'ho qui fra la gambe? Hmm, e cosa dovrei farci?* –, ogni volta prendendosi la libertà di giocare con se stessa. In una scena, trova nei boschi un grande masso, spirituale, e non lo usa come un vibratore fai-da-te, ma come un fai-da-te…non si sa bene cosa. Sempre lei chiude il film – al tramonto, di nuovo – innalzando in un prato una specie di simbolo alato.

Che cosa trovano di tanto interessante nella natura, questi filmmaker, rispetto al paesaggio urbano? Per Steiner, la protagonista è in cerca di "distese aperte, luoghi oltre i luoghi, una sensazione di libertà, una disattivazione dei confini – all'interno dello "stato selvatico", o più precisamente, dello spazio visivo – laddove termini come naturale, innaturale e antropizzato possano creare un collage di significati, una via d'uscita in direzione queer."[3]

Steiner si riferisce specificamente a *C.L.U.E.*, girato fra le monumentali formazioni rocciose della California del sud e le foreste di sequoie della California del nord, dove le forze naturali diventano visive, espressioni quasi grafiche di stati selvatici, per non parlare dell'atto stesso dello spogliarsi. Le ballerine del duo robbinschilds, Layla Childs e Sonya Robbins, con indosso completi chiari e monotoni, si muovono attorno al paesaggio in una coreografia coordinata di movimenti in avanti e indietro, un po' in stile Yvonne Rainer: limitate nei movimenti, quasi goffe. Danzano sulle rocce, si sdraiano su una strada aperta, si rotolano per terra, lottano davanti alle immense radici di una sequoia caduta, trasformandola in uno sfondo monocromatico, quasi astratto. Che più tardi diventerà, invece, un funzionale appendiabiti, attorno al quale le due giironzolano nude, gattonando. Che si tratti della sequoia, del grandangolo di una strada statale che dirada lungo l'orizzonte piatto, o dei binari di una ferrovia, questi scenari diventano proiezioni della "strada aperta", della terra senza limiti: il West Americano, mitizzato con tutte le sue ormai abusate storie di destino manifesto, di sfruttamento dei nativi e di costruzione dell'idea di proprietà, o della mancanza di essa.

A Smeary Spot di Burns parla direttamente di queste storie intricate, di come questo tipo di paesaggi non soltanto appaiano selvaggi ma siano *effettivamente* selvaggi, in qualche modo. Così intitolato da una descrizione del sole della scrittrice sci-fi Joanna Russ,[4] il film segue — fra le altre cose — i ballerini Niv Acosta e Jen Rosenblit che, in viaggio attraverso il deserto dello Utah, si stabiliscono sul territorio fra accampamenti e nuotate. L'attrazione di Burns verso gli scenari dello Utah in cui è ambientato il film si trasforma poco alla volta più in un'*apparenza* generalmente spiritualista[5] che in ragioni concettuali, anche se chi dice che, almeno in questo caso, l'*apparenza* di un luogo e il luogo stesso si escludano l'un l'altro? L'estetica potrà anche essere stata un fattore decisivo per scegliere il luogo in cui girare, ma il luogo stesso e le complicate politiche legate alla proprietà pubblica del territorio e le sue esclusioni storiche sono diventate una scenografia importante del film. Amministrato in modo disinvolto – letteralmente un po' sregolato – il territorio non è di proprietà privata. Sono i resti del periodo in cui l'espansione a Ovest faceva a pezzi il paesaggio per trasformarlo in parchi nazionali, riserve indiane e proprietà coloniali. Come fa notare Burns, circa il 70% del territorio dello Utah è considerato territorio "pubblico", e chiunque può risiedervi legalmente purché non rimanga nello stesso posto per più di 14 giorni e non lo lasci in condizioni disastrose. In teoria, si potrebbe vivere da queste parti liberi dalla schiavitù dell'affitto,[6] ma l'assunto implicito di questa funzione pubblica è che il termine "pubblico" vuol dire essenzialmente al servizio di un governo autoritario, che decreta con la forza che cosa debba andare a chi, decidendo su risorse che essenzialmente non gli appartengono – una sorta di macellazione e di picchettaggio dei beni comuni, che tanto John Locke quanto Jean-Jacques Rousseau consideravano elemento inevitabile del progresso.[7]

L'estraneità del paesaggio finisce per rappresentare la nozione di "spazio negativo" di Burns, non lontanissima, in verità, dal concetto di terzo spazio, selvaggio, in cui gli avventori si collocano "fra i tanti che rimangono tanti, e nella loro molteplicità divengono una nuova entità", secondo l'idea di José Esteban Muñoz.[8] Come ha scritto Burns:

"Per spazio negativo, in quanto termine formale, si intende generalmente lo spazio che sta in mezzo, sopra, sotto e intorno, l'atmosfera, la materia invisibile. Lo spazio positivo è il soggetto/oggetto che la nostra mente interpreta come ciò che è (e di conseguenza di ciò che non è). Si determina così una dinamica binaria piuttosto noiosa fatta di assenza e mancanza di forma (negativo) da una parte, e occupazione e forme definibili (positivo) dall'altra. Lo spazio negativo mi attrae non tanto come inversione dello spazio positivo ma perché possiede una propria potenzialità non fissa, ma dinamica, mutevole, in una parola libera: una gamma aperta di possibilità."[9]

Di nuovo, il deserto diviene *de facto* una variabile del territorio selvaggio, libero dalle strutture prevalenti di potere del "continente", siano esse neoliberiste, patriarcali, sessuali o quel che preferite. Ma come spiega *A Smeary Spot*, in questa alterità dello spazio c'è un pericolo intrinseco. A un certo punto del film, Acosta inscena una specie di duetto con un lenzuolo bianco, simile a una bandiera, in cima a un promontorio. Sventolando ferocemente il lenzuolo si attacca al suo corpo, tracciandone la sagoma e dandole forma. La scena funge da segnalazione teatralizzata della presenza queer; o piuttosto della presenza *delle* queer, delle *queer colone*, che fa venire al pettine il nodo delle insidie nascoste nella creazione di spazi marginali lontani dalle egemonie del mondo "normale". In poche parole, il pericolo che si costituiscano nuovi tipi di egemonie, rinforzando quella separazione binaria che ci si era impegnati a cancellare. Come nota Halberstam, parafrasando Walter Benjamin, "tornare selvaggi potrebbe spingerci in un nuovo regno del pensiero, dell'azione, dell'essere e della conoscenza, ma potrebbe anche facilmente divenire la restaurazione di un ordine razionale completamente dipendente da un ruolo folle, cattivo e insubordinato giocato dal queer, dal nero, dal marginale."[10]

MPA, da parte sua, di tutto ciò che riguarda la Terra sembra lavarsene completamente le mani, e guarda invece dritto a Marte. Con le recenti notizie riguardanti la presenza d'acqua sulla superficie del Pianeta – dunque alla sua capacità potenziale di ospitare la vita – la sua esposizione al Contemporary Art Museum di Houston, "THE INTERVIEW: Red, Red Future," pone l'intrigante questione non del *se* dovremmo colonizzarlo, ma di *come*. E ancora più precisamente, di come possiamo colonizzarlo in modo *diverso*: un implicito riconoscimento del fatto che sulla Terra la colonizzazione non è avvenuta in modo etico. Ovviamente l'intero stratagemma è speculativo, ma è quel tipo di speculazione che porta il discorso a un altro livello o – se preferite il gioco di parole – su un altro pianeta. Forse il lavoro più interessante a riguardo è *The Interview* (2016), che non fornisce molto materiale visivo. È una sorta di filo diretto con l'artista, che invita i visitatori del museo a parlare al telefono con lei di come vedono il Pianeta rosso e come ne immaginano il futuro: il proprio futuro, in fin dei conti. Come dice MPA: "Guardando lì (Marte), guardiamo qui (Terra), mi piacerebbe proporre la colonizzazione che dirotta il tempo in una traiettoria che ridicolizzi la temporalità consueta. L'eterotopia esiste, credo, in questa cornice colonizzata, e partecipa all'idea per la quale l'evoluzione umana discende da un passato primitivo. Voglio asserire nuovamente il fatto che il nostro passato non è primitivo e che il nostro tempo è collettivo, dimensionale e multi-verso"[11]. Tutto bene, ma non ci garantisce che se - ipoteticamente - colonizzassimo Marte, il pianeta non finisca come quello che abitiamo oggi.

Tutto ciò presuppone, ovviamente, che dovremmo provare a decostruire la dialettica centro - margine, invece di "essere folli, cattivi e ribelli", felicemente *marginandoci* in una costante tensione di azione e reazione, di mainstream e controcultura – critica, davvero – che dia a tutti, infine, una specie di senso dello scopo queer. Forse essere dialettici è la scelta migliore, e forse lo stato selvaggio offre qualcosa – per tornare agli insegnamenti di Peaches – contro cui strofinarsi, specialmente quando viene rapidamente cooptato in un clima politico in cui il buon gusto e la correttezza politica rendono il sesso, la sessualità e i nostri corpi sempre più normalizzati, invece che liberati. In un mondo di *50 sfumature di grigio* e continue banali commedie romantiche, forse c'è ancora qualcosa da dire a impersonare con piacere la parte dell'altro; specialmente quando l'alternativa è nessuna alternativa.

1 Jack Halberstam, "Wildness, Loss, Death," in *Social Text* 121 (Inverno 2014), p. 138.
2 Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, Londra, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, p. 211.
3 Come detto a chi scrive in un'email del 28 febbraio 2016.
4 Risa Puleo, "Transformations and Becomings: an Interview with AK Burns," in *Art in America Online* (21 settembre 2015), consultato il 29 febbraio 2016. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/becomings-and-transformations-an-interview-with-ak-burns/.
5 Come detto a chi scrive in una conversazione il 23 febbraio 2016.
6 Lauren Cornell, "If the Future Were Now: an interview with AK Burns," in *Mousse*, ottobre-novembre 2015, p. 68.
7 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 171.
8 Halberstam, cit., p. 141.
9 Cornell, cit., p. 67-68.
10 Halberstam, cit., p. 145.
11 Come detto a chi scrive in un'email del 9 marzo 2016.

MOUSSE

A. K. Burns
Mousse Magazine
October, 2015
Lauren Cornell

IF THE FUTURE WERE NOW

BY LAUREN CORNELL

A.K. Burns (b. 1975) lives and works in New York. Her practice encompasses sculpture, video, performance and collage. Her work often deals with representations of the body and, in her words, "economies of gender, labor, ecology and sexuality." Burns' work has shown extensively in solo and group exhibitions in the U.S., Canada and Europe. In 2008, she co-founded the activist group W.A.G.E. (Working Artists for the Greater Economy); in 2009, with gallerist and publisher Sophie Mörner, she co-founded *Randy*, an arts magazine with a "trans-feminist and vag-centric" perspective; and in 2010, with A.L. Steiner, she debut *Community Action Center*, a "sociosexual" feature-length video inspired by feminist performance art and gay porn-liberation films of the 1970s. Burns' new body of work titled *Negative Space* intends to reconsider the genre of science fiction. *A Smeary Spot* (2015), its first episode, is a four-channel video installation shot in both the desert of the American southwest and the black box theater of the Kitchen in New York. *A Smeary Spot* premieres at Participant Inc, NY in fall 2015.

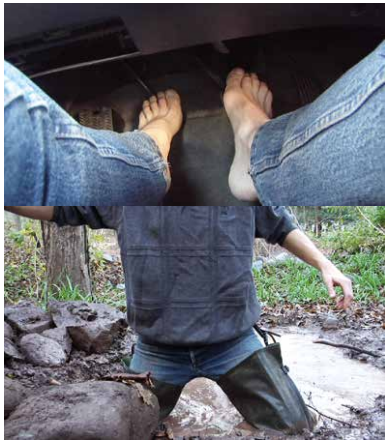
A



WHAT IS NEGATIVE SPACE? THE EXPRESSION USUALLY APPLIES TO THE AREA SURROUNDING THE SUBJECT, SOMETHING INDEFINITE, INVISIBLE MATTER. YET IT IS PRECISELY THIS SPACE THAT OFFERS THE GREATEST POTENTIAL, DYNAMISM, MUTABILITY, FREEDOM. A.K. BURNS PUTS NEGATIVE SPACE AT THE CENTER OF A NEW PROJECT, A VIDEO INSTALLATION FOR WHICH SHE DESCRIBES THE FIRST EPISODE, *A SMEARY SPOT*,

A *Touch Parade (crush)* (still), 2011. Courtesy: the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, New York

B Top - *Touch Parade (pedal pump)*; bottom - *Touch Parade (wading)* (stills), 2011. Courtesy: the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, New York



B

TO LAUREN CORNELL. THE BODY, TOO, IS NEGATIVE SPACE, A DISORDERLY, MUTABLE WORK IN PROGRESS. THROUGH THIS COMPARISON

BETWEEN NEGATIVE SPACE AND THE BODY BURNS CREATES A SORT OF MANIFESTO ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF BEING, ITS CONTRADICTIONS AND POLYVALENCE.

LAUREN CORNELL The first shoot for *A Smeary Spot* took place in the desert in southern Utah, with the desert's vastness and formidable age refracted through the movements of two dancers, niv Acosta and Jen Rosenblit. When we spoke about this shoot, you described being deeply moved by the landscape and mentioned, in particular, how Lake Powell, a dammed body of water that fills a deep canyon leaving a palpable and evocative absence, was an apt metaphor for the work. Can you talk about how you define the overarching concept of *Negative Space*, of which *A Smeary Spot* is an introduction?

A.K. BURNS Negative space, as a formal term, is generally understood as the between, under, inside and around space, the atmosphere, the unseen matter. Positive space is the subject/object, the thing around which we orient our understanding of what is (and thereby what isn't). This sets up a rather boring binary dynamic of absence and shapelessness (negative) vs. occupation and definable shapes (positive). What's compelling to me about **negative space is not that it is an inversion of positive**

di Lauren Cornell

Cos'è uno spazio negativo? Generalmente quest'espressione indica l'area che circonda il soggetto, qualcosa d'indefinito, la materia invisibile. Eppure è proprio tale spazio a possedere in misura più ampia potenzialità, dinamismo, mutevolezza, libertà. A.K. Burns pone lo spazio negativo al centro del suo nuovo progetto, un'installazione video, di cui illustra il primo episodio, *A Smeary Spot*, a Lauren Cornell. Anche il corpo è uno spazio negativo, un *work in progress* disordinato e mutevole. Attraverso questa assimiliazione fra spazio negativo e corpo, Burns crea una sorta di manifesto sulle possibilità dell'essere, sulle sue contraddizioni e sulla sua polivalenza.

LAUREN CORNELL Hai iniziato a girare *A Smeary Spot* nel deserto dello Utah meridionale, che si riflette, immenso e vetusto, nei movimenti dei due danzatori, niv Acosta e Jen Rosenblit. Quando abbiamo parlato di questa esperienza, hai raccontato della profonda emozione che ti ha trasmesso il paesaggio. Ti sei soffermata in particolare sul fatto che il lago Powell, creato dalla costruzione di una diga che ha riempito un profondo canyon, determini un'assenza palpabile ed evocativa che si traduce in una metafora perfetta del progetto. Puoi raccontarci come hai definito la grande visione di *Negative Space*, che ha in *A Smeary Spot* il suo capitolo introduttivo?

A.K. BURNS Per spazio negativo, in quanto termine formale, si intende generalmente lo spazio che sta in mezzo, sopra, sotto e intorno, l'atmosfera, la materia invisibile. Lo spazio positivo è il soggetto/oggetto che la nostra mente interpreta come ciò che è (e di conseguenza di ciò che non è). Si determina così una dinamica binaria piuttosto noiosa fatta di assenza e mancanza di forma (negativo) da una parte, e occupazione e forme definibili (positivo) dall'altra. Lo spazio negativo mi attrae non tanto come inversione dello spazio positivo ma perché possiede una propria potenzialità non fissa, ma dinamica, mutevole, in una parola *libera*: una gamma aperta di possibilità. Per me rappresenta un contesto che richiama per analogia la questione socio-politica dell'uso e dell'abuso del potere. Mi interessava ripensare il genere della fantascienza come pretesto per indagare il punto di incontro tra politica e fantasy. Il titolo, *A Smeary Spot*, è un riferimento al sole – citato in questo primo episodio – tratto da un brano sui viaggi nello spazio della scrittrice di fantascienza Joanna Russ.

LC Questo contesto evoca altri progetti ai quali hai lavorato in passato come *Community Action Center*, che celebrava il sesso *queer* come "non fisso… una gamma aperta di possibilità", o Randy e W.A.G.E., due piattaforme concepite per facilitare lo sviluppo di iniziative artistiche multiple e divergenti. Il concetto di spazio negativo sembra a questo punto esemplificare un metodo che utilizzi da tempo.

AKB Proprio così, questo concetto è una sorta di metodologia che permea diversi aspetti della mia pratica e della mia vita.

LC Come si configura tutto ciò in *A Smeary Spot*?

AKB Quando mi sono trovata nel deserto, ho capito che le numerose analogie che emergevano tra quel sito e il concetto di spazio negativo in senso ampio ne facevano il paesaggio ideale nel quale e intorno al quale sviluppare questo progetto di quasi-fantascienza. Il fatto di trascorrere molto tempo in aree pubbliche ci ha reso immediatamente chiara l'analogia tra quel tipo di paesaggio non privatizzato e



C

space but that it has its own agency, that it is unfixed, dynamic, changeable and ultimately free: an open set of possibilities. I see it as an analogous framework for all kinds of socio-political questions of use and abuse of power. I was drawn to rethinking the science-fiction genre as an excuse to work at the intersection of politics and fantasy. The title, *A Smeary Spot*, is a reference to the sun—that is quoted in this opening episode—from a passage about space travel by science fiction writer Joanna Russ.

LC This framework recalls previous works of yours like *Community Action Center*, which celebrated queer sex as "unfixed… an open set of possibilities," or Randy and W.A.G.E., both platforms that create space for multiple and divergent artistic pursuits to unfold. It seems the concept of negative space encapsulates a long-running method of yours.

AKB Yes, this concept is a kind of methodology that permeates many aspects of my practice and life.

LC How does this get channeled into *A Smeary Spot*?

AKB Once I got to the desert, I realized that was the landscape in and around which I wanted to develop this quasi-science fiction work, because so many analogies emerged between the larger concept of negative space and that site. We ended up spending a lot of time on public lands, and it quickly became clear that this type of landscape that is non-privatized, with little regulation, without rent and without a specific function, acts similarly to the loss of Glen Canyon and the dammed body of water now called Lake Powell, as another type of negative space. To explain briefly, public lands are the result of early American westward expansion when land was divided up into private homesteads, national parks and reservations. Everything left over (in Utah 70% of the state is public land) was handed over to the Bureau of Land Management. It is open for any "citizen"* to be on as long as you follow the "leave no trace" ethic and move every 14 days. So you could ostensibly live out there for free, forever, if you so desired. But one also has to acknowledge that this potential utopia is, at its core, a tremendously fraught contradiction bound to our national history of violently stolen lands and defended borders.

scarsamente regolato, libero da vincoli immobiliari o funzioni specifiche, e la scomparsa del Glen Canyon con la comparsa, al suo posto, del lago Powell, dopo la creazione della diga, che diventa a sua volta un tipo di spazio negativo. Spiego brevemente che quelle aree sono pubbliche perché, ai tempi dall'espansione verso ovest, la terra fu suddivisa in fattorie private, parchi nazionali e riserve; tutto ciò che non rientrava in quella suddivisione (in Utah il 70% della superficie statale è pubblica) divenne di competenza del Bureau of Land Management. Qualunque "cittadino" può sostare sulle aree pubbliche a patto che rispetti l'etica del "non lasciare traccia" e si sposti ogni due settimane. Questo significa che in teoria si può vivere gratis, per sempre, in quei territori, se lo si desidera. Ma bisogna anche riconoscere che questa potenziale utopia è, di fatto, una contraddizione terribilmente esplosiva frutto della nostra storia nazionale di terre rubate con la forza e di confini difesi con altrettanta violenza.

LC Perché hai deciso di abbinare queste aree pubbliche con una sala teatrale, che è l'altra location in cui è stato girato il video?

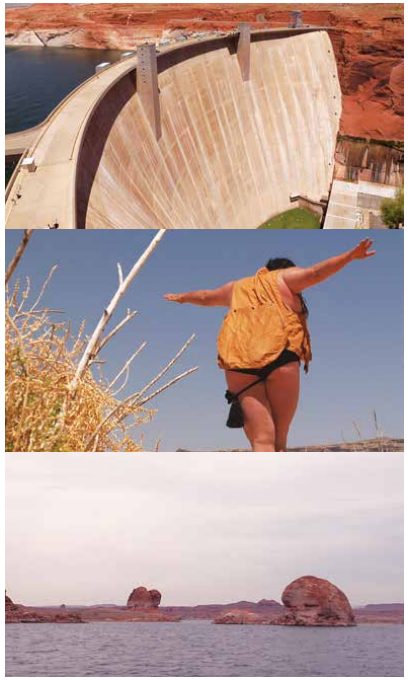
AKB L'elaborazione del progetto mi ha portato a ricercare un altro sito da utilizzare come polo di conversazione con il deserto. Ho cominciato a lavorare nella sala teatrale perché visivamente crea un'illusione di spazio infinito. Il teatro è anche il sito muto del divenire continuo – il palcoscenico in attesa della performance successiva.

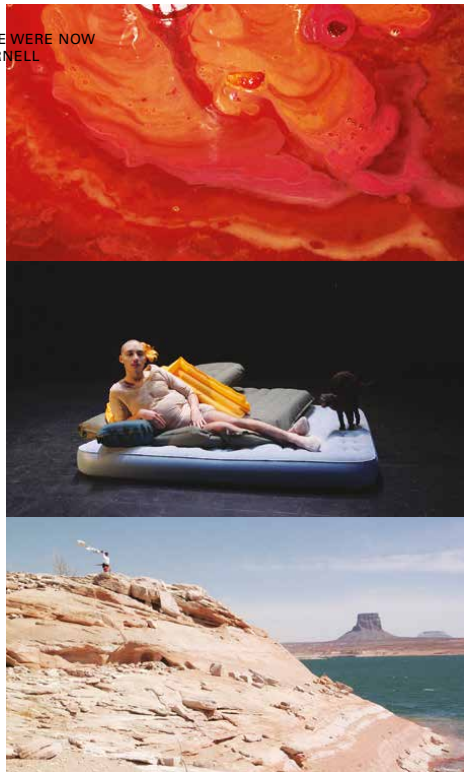
LC Nel deserto i danzatori appaiono spesso da lontano: sembrano puntini nel paesaggio, mentre in teatro li si vede da vicino, al centro di un allestimento meticoloso e colorato e circondati da oggetti di scena. Come mai questa diversità nella visione dei performer nei due contesti, il deserto e il teatro?

AKB Trovo interessante che tu faccia notare questo aspetto della scala. Ci ho pensato molto mentre mi trovavo nel deserto. Lì ti senti davvero minuscolo e alla mercé della natura che decide della tua sopravvivenza. In un posto come New York ti rendi conto che la città ha al massimo qualche secolo: nel deserto, il tempo assume una dimensione geologica nella quale la tua esistenza non è che un puntino. I cambiamenti di scala, sia letterali che metaforici, rappresentano una tattica che uso per rielaborare il modo in cui il valore è applicato alla relazione tra le cose. Anche i corpi, tutti i corpi, possono diventare spazi negativi; il corpo femminile, il corpo trans, il corpo malato, il corpo vecchio, il corpo nero. Cosa succede quando smettiamo di vedere il corpo (a livello medico, sociale, economico…) attraverso le scale normalmente utilizzate per misurarlo in quanto territorio riservato a un uso, a una ristrutturazione e a una produzione di tipo specifico, determinata da genere, classe, razza, ecc.? Con *A Smeary Spot* io propongo un interrogativo: e se celebrassimo e difendessimo il corpo come un work in progress disordinato, in continua mutazione, mai uguale a sé stesso?

LC Mi sembra meglio che difendere il corpo come qualcosa a cui adattarsi secondo modelli rigidi e prestabiliti! Quindi, niv e Jen danzano nel deserto, dando vita a una sorta di reazione semi-spontanea al paesaggio. In teatro, le performance sono dettate da un copione, strettamente definite da un testo e da gesti studiati: Nayland Blake recita brani dello scrittore Georges Bataille; Jack Doroshow (alias Flawless Sabrina) recita brani della teorica femminista Karen Barad; mentre Grace Dunham recita brani dell'autrice di fantascienza Ursula K. Le Guin. In entrambi i casi, la tua regia sembra manifestarsi, in

D





E

C, D, E, F *A Smeary Spot* (stills), 2015.
Courtesy: the artist; Participant Inc., New York; Callicoon Fine Arts, New York





LC Why pair these public lands with a black box theater, the other location where the video was shot?

AKB As the work developed, I was looking for another site to bring into conversation with the desert. I started working in the black box theater because on film it gives the illusion of infinite space. The theater is also a mutable site that is constantly becoming—the next stage for the next performance.

LC In the desert, the dancers are often seen at a distance. They appear like flecks on the landscape, whereas in the theater the performers are seen in close-up, carefully arranged within colorful mises-en-scène and surrounded by props. Can you discuss your depiction of the performers in these two contexts, the desert and theater?

AKB It's interesting that you bring up scale. I was thinking about this a lot while in the desert. You feel impossibly small and at the mercy of nature for your survival. A place like New York City feels, at most, a few centuries old; in the desert, you're on geological time and your own lifetime is just a speck. Literal and metaphorical scale shifts are one tactic I use to rework how value is applied to the relationship between things. **And bodies are subject to being negative spaces as well; the female body, the trans body, the sick body, the old body, the black body.** What happens when we stop seeing the body (medically, socially, economically...) through the scales by which it is usually measured, as limited territory for specific use, restoration and output, determined by gender, class, race, etc.? In *A Smeary Spot* I pose a question: what if we were to celebrate and support the body as a messy, always changing, never the same work in progress?

LC That sounds better than supporting the body as something we fit into rigid preset shapes! So, niv and Jen dance in the desert in what seems like a semi-spontaneous response to the landscape. In the theater, the performances are scripted, defined more tightly by an assigned text and gesture: Nayland Blake recites writer Georges Bataille; Jack Doroshow (aka Flawless Sabrina) recites feminist theorist Karen Barad; and Grace Dunham recites science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin. Your direction, in both cases, seems to be part prompt and part improvisation. Can you describe how you direct one of these vignettes?



G

parte, come suggerimento e in parte come improvvisazione. Ci descrivi il modo in cui hai diretto una di queste scene?

AKB In *A Smeary Spot*, i danzatori Jen e niv sono simboli di movimento e azione che attraversano il paesaggio accumulando materia, rifiuti e oggetti. In una scena sembrano impegnati in una specie di lenta danza di seduzione del paesaggio. Per quella scena, ho chiesto loro di misurare il paesaggio con i loro corpi; ciò che appare in video è la loro interpretazione del mio suggerimento. I loro personaggi fanno parte di un gruppo di performer che ho soprannominato "radicali liberi", una definizione che uso sia per assimilare i performer alle molecole prive di elettroni[1], sia per rappresentare i loro corpi come attivisti nomadi o promotori del cambiamento. I radicali liberi innescano reazioni a catena che creano altri radicali liberi, e quindi si tratta di un gruppo di performer destinato ad aumentare e caratterizzato nello spazio teatrale per un abbigliamento costituito da maglietta, jeans e stivali neri, una sorta di uniforme da attivisti. Tutti i performer presenti in teatro ricevono suggerimenti aperti e improvvisativi che sono anche materialmente guidati dagli oggetti teatrali con i quali chiedo loro di interagire. A Grace, ad esempio, abbiamo dato un materassino e le abbiamo chiesto di sgonfiarlo. L'azione di far uscire l'aria con la forza era intenzionalmente abbinata alle parole di Karen Barad sul perché la materia è importante, ossia: "Se potere vuol dire possibilità… esistono possibilità particolari di agire in qualunque momento, e queste possibilità mutevoli implicano una responsabilità di intervenire… per contestare o ridefinire ciò che è importante e ciò a cui è impedito di esserlo."

LC La scultura è una parte importante della tua pratica. Nei tuoi video di qualche tempo fa, ad esempio *Touch Parade*, si manifesta come un'attenzione particolare agli oggetti di scena e alla struttura dell'allestimento (i cinque monitor sembrano altrettanti corpi in verticale). In *A Smeary Spot*, ogni oggetto – anche quelli sommersi da una densa galassia di altre cose – ha un significato. Che ruolo hanno gli oggetti di scena nel lavoro?

AKB Anche se nella mia pratica ho un approccio molto interdisciplinare, in fondo sono una scultrice, cioè percepisco e produco attraverso una sorta di sensibilità di matrice scultorea-materiale-fisica che casualmente mi ritrovo a esprimere attraverso il medium del video. Nello spazio del teatro, l'insieme degli oggetti di scena ha svolto un ruolo importantissimo: qualunque oggetto, utilizzato o nella pila dei rifiuti, ha un significato materiale preciso. Ad esempio, a Nayland Blake, che doveva interpretare il "lavoro ri/produttivo", abbiamo chiesto di attivare alcuni oggetti tra cui uno spremiagrumi. Ho scelto lo spremiagrumi perché è una macchina che trasforma la materia, i solidi in liquidi. E poi i materiali che produce, i fluidi del succo e gli scarti della polpa, sono visivamente colorati. Quello spremiagrumi l'avevo trovato in un negozio dell'usato: era privo sia del contenitore per la polpa che dell'elemento a immersione, quindi ho improvvisato usando una busta per abiti per catturare la polpa, che poi compare anche come contenitore della giacca militare di Chelsea Manning come accenno alle fuoriuscite [intese in questo caso come fughe di notizie, NdT] e ai corpi che fanno fuoriuscire qualcosa, e quindi non si uniformano. Per rimpiazzare l'elemento a immersione abbiamo utilizzato una scarpa sportiva Keds, in pratica un rovesciamento dell'idea di pulizia e di cultura del benessere associata agli spremiagrumi, e anche un cenno auto-referenziale al mio *Touch Parade*. Il costume di Nayland è un grembiule e un sospensorio, quindi un po' un abito con la



H



I

AKB In *A Smeary Spot*, Jen and niv, as dancers, are markers of movement and action, traversing the landscape accumulating matter, refuse and material goods. There is one scene where they appear to be engaged in a kind of slow dance seducing the landscape. For this scene, I asked them to measure the landscape with their bodies; what you see in the video is their interpretation of that prompt. Their characters are part of a group of performers that I call "free radicals." I use that nomenclature both to propose the idea that these performers are molecules with missing electrons[1] and to represent bodies that are nomadic activists or those who initiate change. Because free radicals set off chain reactions that create more free radicals, this is an ever-growing group of performers that in the theater space all wear black t-shirts, jeans and boots as a kind of activist uniform. All the performers in the theater are given open and improvisational prompts that are also materially guided by the props I ask them to interact with. For example, Grace was handed an air mattress and asked to release the air from it. The forcing out, the release of confined air was very intentionally paired with the Karen Barad quote on why matter matters. To quote: "If agency is about possibilities […] particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene […] to contest or rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering."

LC Sculpture is a significant part of your practice, and in previous video works like *Touch Parade* it has translated into a careful consideration of props and the structure of the installation (the five monitors appeared like freestanding bodies). In *A Smeary Spot*, each object—even if it is submerged in a dense galaxy of clutter—has significance. Can you talk about the role of props in the work?

AKB While my practice is very interdisciplinary, in my heart I'm a sculptor, or I perceive and make through a kind of sculptural-material-physical scale-focused sensibility, and I just happen to be using the medium of video to express this. Within the theater space, the props played a huge role, so there is a lot of material meaning behind every object you see used or in the refuse pile. For example, Nayland Blake, whose task was to be "re/productive labor," was asked to activate his props, which included a juicer. I chose the juicer because it is a machine that transforms matter, solids into liquid. It also has a colorful visual output, both in the juice fluids and the pulp waste. I found that juicer in a thrift store and it was missing both the container for capturing the pulp and the plunger, so I improvised by using a garment bag to catch the pulp, which you see later also containing Chelsea Manning's military jacket, a nod to leaks and leaky bodies, bodies that don't conform. A Keds sneaker is used as the plunger, which is a kind of inversion on the idea of cleanliness and health culture that comes with juicers, and is a self-referential nod towards my work *Touch Parade*. Nayland's outfit is an apron and jock strap, so it's a bit like a dress with an open back, which is meant to give the effect of being a subordinate. It's my take on a role that represents a conflation of domestic and industrial labor. He's also covered in yellow dust, which was visually derived from stumbling onto a macro photo of a bee with pollen trapped in its hair, schiena scoperta che ha lo scopo di comunicare l'immagine di un sottoposto. È il mio modo di vedere un ruolo che rappresenta un lavoro insieme domestico e industriale. E poi è ricoperto di polvere gialla, un'immagine che ho costruito dopo aver visto per caso l'ingrandimento di un'ape con il corpo ricoperto di polline: le api sono un simbolo classico del lavoro. Appena ho intuito che volevo un performer ricoperto di polvere gialla, ho capito che mi serviva un individuo molto peloso per far sì che la polvere gli restasse addosso. Conoscevo Nayland perché avevamo insegnato insieme per un anno nel programma ICP Bard e così ho pensato: ecco l'*orso* che stavo cercando per il mio progetto! E lui si è gentilmente prestato.

LC Ci sono altri riferimenti all'arte? Puoi citarne qualcuno?

AKB In *A Smeary Spot* ce ne sono diversi: a un certo punto si vede un'immagine della diga ricoperta da caramelle come quelle che usava Félix González-Torres che poi riempiono un elmetto militare che diventa una sorta di vassoio porta-caramelle; in un altro punto si vede l'artista Marcelo Gutierrez in posa su una pila di materassini che recita *The Screwball Asses* di Guy Hocquenghem adagiato come l'*Olympia* di Manet, un'immagine carica di significati legati alle economie sessuali.

LC In una descrizione del video, hai scritto che tutti i passaggi concorrono a "formare una sorta di manifesto sull'essere". I riferimenti presenti — il femminismo, il marxismo, la fantascienza — contengono già una risposta alla mia domanda ma come descriveresti con parole tue il tipo di "essere" che emerge da questo processo?

AKB Sai che faccio fatica a descrivere questo tipo di essere. La risposta ovvia mi parrebbe "essere *queer*" ma poi non mi convince del tutto per via dello svuotamento di significato derivante dall'uso eccessivo che si tende a fare oggi del termine *queer,* che diventa spesso un riempitivo, come se *queer* avesse una sorta di definizione universale. E invece, se una definizione il termine *queer* ce l'ha, è proprio "ciò che non ha una definizione universale". Quindi, se ti dico che è un manifesto sull'essere *queer,* cosa vuol dire? Essere *queer* implica anche una posizione contrapposta all'orientamento omosessuale come posizione privilegiata. Utilizzo alcuni brani di *The Screwball Asses* proprio perché mette in dubbio la posizione che vede l'omosessualità come sinonimo di marginalizzazione, come forma di ribellione implicitamente politica. Nell'epoca della politica dell'assimilazione gay, questo non è mai stato così evidentemente non rispondente al vero. Possiamo riconoscere la radice del termine, la narrativa storica e l'etimologia, ma non darei per scontato che gli omosessuali siano *queer,* così come non darei per scontato che il femminismo riguardi solo ed esclusivamente le donne. Evito di specificare il tipo di essere perché voglio che sia chi guarda a trarre le proprie personali conclusioni in merito alle *possibilità dell'essere* per le quali non propongo una soluzione unica o universale. Chiedo solo di riconoscere la differenza, le contraddizioni e il valore di un punto di vista plurivoco.

LC Quando dici che si tratta di un'opera di "fantascienza", mi affascina il fatto che, invece di un futuro immaginato, tu descrivi, o amplifichi, le realtà attuali o le "possibilità dell'essere" nel nostro presente. La fantascienza si colloca spesso in un futuro – 1989, 2020 – anche se è chiaramente un futuro estrapolato dal presente. *A Smeary Spot* trasgredisce questa convenzione espandendo la nostra definizione del presente in modo che comprenda anche "il futuro".

bees being a kind of classic symbol of labor. Once I knew I wanted a performer covered in yellow dust, I needed someone who was very hirsute for the dust to stick. I had been teaching with Nayland at ICP Bard program over the past year and I thought, "that's the *bear* I need for this job!" He generously obliged.

LC Can you point to some of the other references to art in the work?

AKB *A Smeary Spot* includes several: in one part, Félix González-Torres-style candies spill over the image of the dam and ultimately into a military helmet that acts as a candy dish; in another, artist Marcelo Gutierrez poses on a pile of air mattresses reciting Guy Hocquenghem's *The Screwball Asses* posed as Manet's *Olympia*, an image loaded with the issues of sexual economies.

LC In notes about the work you wrote that, together, the passages "weave into a loose manifesto on being." Their references—feminism, Marxism, science fiction—imply an answer to my next question, but in your words, can you describe what kind of "being" emerges here?

AKB You know I'm hesitant to say what kind of being, because I think the obvious answer might be "queer being" and I'm a little skeptical of the contemporary overuse and thereby depletion of the term *queer*. It often gets used as a space filler, as if queer had some universal definition. If there is any definition for queer it might be "that which lacks a universal definition." So if I tell you it's a manifesto on queer being, what does that mean? Queer being also implies that there is an inverse authority of the homosexual orientation as the privileged position. Part of why I use excerpts from *The Screwball Asses* is because that work challenges the position that the homosexual is synonymous being marginalized, a form of rebellion and thereby inherently political. In the age of gay assimilation politics this has never been more obviously incorrect. We can acknowledge the root to the term, the historical narrative and etymology, but I would not take for granted that homos are queer any more than that feminism is strictly about and for women. **I don't specify what kind of being because I want you to watch it and draw your own conclusions about possibilities of being of which I am not proposing a singular or universal solution, but rather an acknowledgement of difference, contradictions and the value of a polyvocal viewpoint.**

LC What fascinates me about you describing the work as "science fiction" is that instead of an imagined future, you are really depicting, or amplifying, current realities or "possibilities for being" in our present. Science fiction often relies on a future time—1989, 2020—even if that time is very clearly extrapolated from the present. *A Smeary Spot* transgresses this convention by expanding our definition of the present to possess "the future."

AKB I think if we literally change the way we see, value and define the world in its present state, that will open new ways of acting and being that will thereby create a new future. It's a bit utopic. But shit is dismal out there and what we really need right now is not another sci-fi embedded in all the possible outcomes of our failures as humans (wars, surveillance, capitalism, uber-technology, etc.) but an outlet to create another world, different from the one we have.

AKB Penso che cambiare letteralmente il nostro modo di vedere, valutare e definire il mondo nel suo stato attuale possa aprire nuovi modi di agire e di essere, che a loro volta creeranno un nuovo futuro. Ma le cose sono allo sfascio e quindi adesso non abbiamo bisogno di un'ennesima visione fantascientifica figlia di tutte le possibili conseguenze dei nostri fallimenti come esseri umani (guerre, sorveglianza, capitalismo, ipertecnologia, ecc.) ma di una via d'uscita per creare un mondo diverso che quello che abbiamo.

1. In termini scientifici, i radicali liberi sono molecole instabili. Quando incontrano una molecola stabile le "rubano" l'elettrone di cui hanno bisogno per stabilizzarsi: in questo modo innescano una reazione a catena che crea altri radicali liberi. Si tratta del processo che determina, ad esempio, l'ossidazione.

1 In scientific terms, free radicals are unstable molecules; when they find another stable molecule they "steal" the electron they need to be stable and thereby set off a chain reaction that creates other free radicals, which is how oxidation occurs, for example.

J

G *A Smeary Spot* (stills), 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Participant Inc., New York; Callicoon Fine Arts, New York

H *After the Sky Box*, 2015, "A Smeary Spot" installation view at Participant Inc., New York, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Participant Inc., New York; Callicoon Fine Arts, New York. Photo: Chris Austin

I "A Smeary Spot" installation views at Participant Inc., New York, 2015. Courtesy: the artist; Participant Inc., New York; Callicoon Fine Arts, New York. Photo: Chris Austin

J *Touch Parade*, 2011, "Double or Nothing" installation view at TAG, The Hague, 2012. Courtesy: the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, New York



Los Angeles MAGAZINE

A. K. Burns
Los Angeles Magazine
July, 2015
Mark Sitko



Queer Fantasy Examines Gay Art beyond "Victim Art"

The new exhibition at OHWOW Gallery focuses on artistic diversity within the gay art scene

July 8, 2015 | Mark Sitko

In a joyful coincidence, the group exhibition *Queer Fantasy* will open this Saturday, July 11, at the OHWOW Gallery in West Hollywood, two weeks after the Supreme Court decision to grant the right of marriage to the gay community in the United States. William J. Simmons, the curator of *Queer Fantasy*, did not foresee this development when he began collaborating with the OHWOW Gallery. His aim was to challenge a discourse around Queer Art which assumes a univocal gay motive exists and to question the belief that all queer artists want to participate in the advancement of this speculative agenda. The truth is gay artists in this country have been making work about everything under the sun for decades, and it would be shortsighted to only consider examples of "victim art" as representative of the whole.

Simmons explains the curatorial balance required when presenting queer artists that do not make art associated with gay issues. "It is always a push and pull. At once you have to acknowledge that the standard lineage and history of queer art tends to focus on the depiction of queer bodies, of queer sex, of themes dealing with AIDS. At the same time I don't want anyone to think this show is an attempt to be post-AIDS or post-identity politics. I think it is an attempt to honor that history while looking with more nuance at the possibilities for queer expression."

By selecting artists for *Queer Fantasy* of different ages and backgrounds, working in a range of media, Simmons is attempting to reformulate our artistic histories. He explains, "I think that most people think of queer art in terms of film and photography. In the 60's and 70's these forms of media were very important because the work was able to be reproduced, disseminated, and used as activist material. It provided a community with diverse viewing material, but something I have been thinking a lot about lately is how queerness can be made manifest in other media."

The ten artists involved in this exhibit, A.K. Burns Leidy Churchman, Jimmy DeSana, Celeste Dupuy-Spencer,Mariah Garnett, Jacolby Satterwhite, David Benjamin Sherry, Jack Smith, A.L. Steiner, and John Waters, serve as successful examples of Simmons' interest in the expanding possibilities for queerness in artistic expression. Simmons has included photographers, filmmakers, and painters, as well as sculptors, and installation artists, "to show how queerness can also be fleshed out into three dimensions, how it can inhabit a space."

This exhibit is aligned with the 30 year anniversary of West Hollywood's establishment as an incorporated municipality. "Some of these artists, such as Jimmy DeSana, have never been shown in L.A., ever. At the same time there are some artists that are deeply rooted and inspired by L.A., such as A.L. Steiner and David Benjamin Sherry, who really derive a lot of their artistic identity from that particular context."

"While it will be a place for people to celebrate this landmark Supreme Court decision, I hope that it will also prompt people to do more research and think further about what else needs to be done. The show runs a historical gamut from the '60s to the present, so you can sort of see the things we have accomplished that Jack Smith could have never imagined. And with that I hope this is a space where the diversity of queer experience really comes to the fore, and provides the impetus for people to say, 'hmm, what's next?'"

THE NEW YORKER

A. K. Burns
The New Yorker
March 26th, 2013

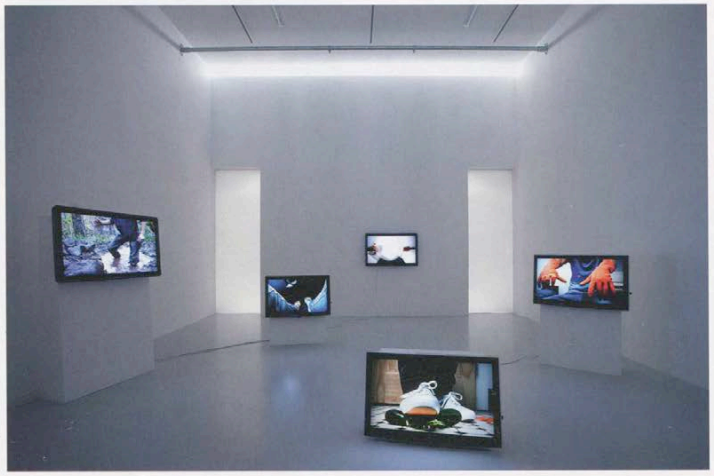
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

A. K. BURNS

Sculptures by the artist best known for "Community Action Center"—her brilliant film collaboration with A. L. Steiner, which staked a claim for gynocentric erotica—capitalize on tensions between humble and high art. Freestanding rectilinear pieces are clad in lowly Formica; a vase, broken and reassembled with foam and tape and coated with glitter, has a shabby-chic grace. A sly political subtext may be revealed in the ingenious installation of ink-jet prints on linen: wedged into grooves carved in the wall, each work is held in place by a penny, as if thumbing its nose at the notion that the value of art can be reduced to dollars and cents. Through April 15. (Callicoon, 124 Forsyth St. 212-219-0326.)

METROPOLIS

A. K. Burns
Metropolis magazine
June 30th, 2012
by Alexander Mayhew



A.K. Burns, *Touch Parade*, 2011, multi-channel HD video, loop, foto Gert Jan van Rooij

Double or Nothing

TAG, Den Haag

Double or Nothing is een term uit de gokwereld, waarbij de verliezer zijn schuld verdubbelt wanneer hij een volgend spel wederom verliest of vereffent wanneer hij wint. Het is ook de zowel omineuze als gedurfde titel van de eerste tentoonstelling in TAG onder het nieuwe directeurschap van Suzanne Wallinga, die de voormalige ongrijpbaarheid van de instelling enigszins wil beteugelen. Wat niet betekent dat zij vanuit de vraag van het publiek zal redeneren; het gaat niet om het consumeren van beeldende kunst, maar om kennisontwikkeling en onderzoek. Met de tentoonstelling *Double or Nothing* wil zij artistieke methodes verkennen die de autoriteit van personen, instituten en objecten tegelijkertijd vergroten en ondermijnen. Bij de drie getoonde kunstenaars staan persoonlijke en materiële transformatie centraal.

Dat TAG meer wil zijn dan een presentatieruimte wordt direct duidelijk in de werken van Eileen Maxson (1980), die voornamelijk bestaan uit kant en klaar foto-en filmmateriaal, zogeheten *stock footage*, dat zij op internet koopt. Stock footage is goedkoop en wordt daarom vaak ingezet om de productiekosten van een film of advertentie te drukken. De installaties en prints waarin Maxson dit materiaal heeft verwerkt, lijken eerder onderdeel van een *artistic research* project dan individuele kunstwerken. De gebruikte afbeeldingen vertonen op zichzelf weinig zeggingskracht en lijken tamelijk willekeurig gekozen. De manier waarop Maxson de beelden vervolgens inzet, levert nog steeds geen pakkende visuele verrassingen op. Het roept de vraag op wat deze stock footage eigenlijk communiceert en in hoeverre dit voorgebakken materiaal überhaupt kan worden getransformeerd tot iets authentieks.

Het gevoel dat je als bezoeker naar een creatief proces of onderzoek kijkt geldt ook, zij het in mindere mate, voor de drie video's van Leidy Churchman (1979), die voortkomen uit zijn praktijk als schilder. De kunstenaar maakt picturale composities op de vloer van zijn atelier, waarbij alledaagse objecten over de grond worden gesleept en met olieverf besmeurd. Takjes, zakjes en houten speelgoed slangen maken onderdeel uit van deze voortdurend veranderende, abstracte tableaus, die later weer als inspiratie dienen voor Churchmans schilderijen. Hoewel de video's wel degelijk als zelfstandige werken kunnen worden gezien, zouden ze evengoed als documentatie uit het persoonlijke archief van de kunstenaar afkomstig kunnen zijn. Ze hebben zowel iets dromerigs en tijdloos, als een bepaalde mate van verveeldheid en navelstaarderij, die de kunstenaar gedurende zijn scheppende proces heeft kunnen overvallen.

De kunstenaar wier werk nog het meeste lijkt aan te sluiten bij de wat diffuse thematiek van de tentoonstelling is A.K. Burns (1975). Haar video-installatie *Touch Parade* (2011) is gebaseerd op fetisjvideo's op internet die niet waren voorzien van een expliciete waarschuwing. Vijf van dit soort video's zijn door haar nagespeeld, variërend van het met witte gympen vertrappen van voedsel tot het over elkaar heen aantrekken van rubberen handschoenen. Dat zij als vrouw de hoofdrolspeler is in de video's valt niet op. Haar gezicht is niet te zien en haar lichaam kan gemakkelijk doorgaan voor dat van een jongeman. De handelingen zijn tamelijk onschuldig en doordat de filmpjes ogen als YouTube filmpjes, associeer je ze niet direct met seksuele verlangens en behoeftes. Burns slaagt erin lichtheid en luchtigheid aan het onderwerp te geven. Zelfs een kind zou zonder problemen naar haar werk kunnen kijken. Het is bovendien intrigerend te bemerken dat je onbewust een voorkeur ontwikkelt voor een van de video's, terwijl je van tevoren geen gevoelens hoeft te hebben bij een bepaalde fetisj. De kracht van Burns' werk is dat je je daar helemaal niet schuldig over voelt. Het werk van Maxson en Churchman lijkt voornamelijk zichzelf te bevragen. Burns beschikt daarentegen over het altruïstische vermogen om de toeschouwer zich over zichzelf te laten verwonderen.

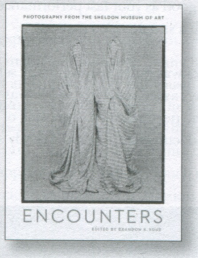
Alexander Mayhew
freelance kunstcriticus, Den Haag

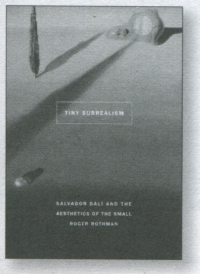
that particular social body and its respective sensual politics. The erotic sequences that make up the film were improvised by the performers, and the soundtrack similarly emerged from that community, with tracks from Los Angeles and Brooklyn bands like Light Asylum, Chicks on Speed, and MEN. In order to counteract the private, consumerist nature of contemporary pornographic consumption, the title will never be placed on the internet, shown in segments, or available for individual purchase (which includes sale as an artwork to a private collection). The title will only be rented for public screenings to educational institutions, community centers, or other social settings that promote queer social interaction and discourse, or sold to archives that allow the public to access their holdings. As Burns would later relate to me, though this makes the material somewhat trickier to be viewed by "some queer living in Wisconsin . . . anyone [ultimately] has access to it, they just have to organize."[13]

While the site of spectatorship for these two titles—viewing public in a crowded screening hall and a streaming video on a pornographic website—could not be more divergent, the queer desire that stirred the audience at the sold-out screening shares remarkable similarities to that which drove fourteen hundred viewers to engage an online pornographic short, ensuring the production of its feature counterpart. Both titles speak to the desire within their respective communities to see a more naturalistic depiction of contemporary life, to forgo fantasy for accurate self-representation. This has occurred individually, in titles such as Sachs's autobiographic film, but even more invasively in *I Want Your Love* and *Community Action Center*, which transformed viewing platforms respective to each community into dynamic spaces for queer dialogue and moving image production.

BRADFORD NORDEEN *is the creative director of Dirty Looks, a roaming platform for queer experimental film and video that has screened in venues such as the Kitchen, the Hammer Museum, White Columns, and SFMOMA, and the site-specific offshoot series, Dirty Looks: On Location, a month of queer interventions in New York City spaces. His writing has appeared in* Art In America, *the* Huffington Post, Lambda Literary, *and* Little Joe *magazine, among others.*

NOTES **1**. Ben Walters, "New-wave queer cinema: 'Gay experience in all its complexity,'" *the* Guardian, *October 4, 2012, www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/oct/04/new-wave-gay-cinema.* **2**. *A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner,* Cliffs Notes on Community Action Center *(Brooklyn, NY: A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, 2010), 01.* **3**. Carl Williamson, "Marlene McCarty," Little Joe *3 (2011), 85.* **4**. Thomas Waugh, "The Third Body: Patterns in the Construction of the Subject in Gay Male Narrative Film," *in* The Visual Culture Reader: *2nd edition, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (2001 reprint, London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 636–54.* **5**. Advocate Editors, "Here comes the new new queer cinema," Advocate *(April 2005), cover.* **6**. Walters, "New-wave queer cinema." **7**. *Ibid.* **8**. Johnny Murdoc, "Making Love: The Story of a Sweet, Dirty Movie," Sex is Social, *July 2, 2010, www.edenfantasys.com/sexis/sex-and-society/making-love-story-sweet/.* **9**. Evan Ross Katz, "This One Time . . . James Franco . . . Made an Erotic Gay Short Film: Co-Director Travis Mathews Talks 'Interior. Leather Bar,'" Huffington Post, *January 16, 2013, www.huffingtonpost.com/evan-ross-katz/james-franco-travis-mathews-interior-leather-bar_b_2440260.html.* **10**. Linda Williams, Screening Sex *(Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.* **11**. Murdoc, "Making Love." **12**. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Film Quarterly *44, no. 4 (1991), 2–13.* **13**. Interview with the author, *January 15, 2013, in New York City.*





NEW FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS

Encounters
Photography from the Sheldon Museum of Art
EDITED BY BRANDON K. RUUD
In this volume, the Sheldon Museum of Art presents more than one hundred examples from its distinguished photography collection, which contains nearly twenty-five hundred objects. Encompassing the full range of photographic history, *Encounters* showcases recognized masterpieces, recent acquisitions, and rarely seen treasures by a diverse range of artists.
$50.00 paperback
AMERICAN TRANSNATIONALISM SERIES

Tiny Surrealism
Salvador Dalí and the Aesthetics of the Small
ROGER ROTHMAN
By focusing on Salvador Dalí's identification with the small and the marginal, *Tiny Surrealism* sheds new light on both Dalí's well-known and little-studied works and his work as a response to modernism.
$60.00 hardcover

For complete descriptions and to order, visit us online!

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS
WWW.NEBRASKAPRESS.UNL.EDU
800-848-6224 • *publishers of Bison Books*

TEXTS
TEXTES

Globster Soot, Medium Rare
Michel Rein, Paris
01.02 - 02.05.2020

Text: A.K. Burns

« Marianne arrived in the hull of a ship. Dismembered for easy transit, and upon arrival reconstituted as a monstrous figure — a diva of idealism. On the eve of 2020, 133 years old, geriatric and exhausted from the burden of rendering false ideologies, her torch sputtered and smoked, off-gassing the residue of a dying ember. Then the blood evacuated her arm from holding it above her head for so long. And that was that, back on the barge she goes. Like all the other refuse in New York City (an annual 33 million tons), she was deported. In memory of her fatal existence, Marianne Deludes the World (2020) has been forcefully returned to Paris to linger in the coffers of the white cube.

It is from these murky sea waters that the Globster washed ashore. Disfigured. Decomposing. Unidentifiable. It gazed longingly into the mirror, attempting to assemble a self. The mirror, a pool of ladled molten glass. Its glossy surface disturbed by clusters of heat resistant debris. Everything else dissolves in instant combustion leaving carbonized trails. The exhaust makes each breath unbearable. A charcoal lung. And an obsession with filtration ensues. Obstructing the undesirables and letting the soup du jour pass on thru. The air, the water, the insects, the people, and the metaphors all standing in line at quality control.

The line wraps across a giant field. Yellow grasses appear like a carpet of kindling under the blazing midday sun. Everyone shuffles along and relief spills over the top of heads from jugs of distilled water. The hot white orb above, blurs at the sight of human eyes. Lurching slowly across the sky, in its diurnally rote manor, suddenly and spectacularly, a brief display of high contrast theater commences. A collapse of day and night, of time and space, as Moon previously hidden by the over exposed lighting, cuts the line. Each in a particular place, moving no matter how still. The blackest black, a total void bores a tunnel straight through our exosphere, through the Sun and out the other side.

The exhibition includes a series of hand poured and mirrored glass works formed around openings embedded with various materials. These mirrors obscure environmental reflections rather amplifying the interior worlds of each. Some form crude faces, Cyclops (2019) is rendered with a bulging mass of glass while another weeps silver nitrate. Emerging from stumps of charred logs, a pair of arms are perched on shipping pallets. Marianne Deludes the World (2020) holds a burnt-out torch aloft while the other thrusts an empty water jug. In addition, a series of powder coated window screens in various states of (dis) repair, no longer act as environmental filters. Perforated, the screens belie the imagined barrier between the wild and domestic spheres. At the entrance of the gallery, Untitled (Eclipse) (2019) a 16 mm silent film is projected. Shot in an open field in Nebraska in 2017 the total solar eclipse is captured in heavy film grain. »

« Marianne arriva dans la coque d'un bateau, démembrée pour faciliter le transport et remontée à son arrivée sous la forme d'une figure monstrueuse — une diva de l'idéalisme. A la veille de 2020 à 133 ans, sa torche vieille et éreintée d'avoir porté le poids de l'incarnation des fausses idéologies se mit à crépiter et à fumer, relâchant les gaz d'un résidu de braises mourantes. Puis, à force de la tenir depuis si longtemps au dessus-de sa tête, son bras se vida de son sang. Et c'est ainsi que, de retour sur la barque, elle s'en alla. Comme tous les autres déchets de la ville de New York (33 millions de tonnes annuelles), elle fut expulsée. En souvenir de son destin fatal, Marianne deludes the world (2020) fut rendue à Paris de force pour traîner au fond des coffres du white cube.

Ce sont ces eaux de mer troubles qui rejetèrent le Globster sur le rivage. Défiguré. En décomposition. Non identifiable. Elle fixa le miroir avec envie, cherchant à assembler son être. Le miroir, cette flaque de verre fondu coulé. Sa surface brillante n'est troublée que par des amas de débris résistants à la chaleur. La combustion dissout instantanément tout le reste, ne laissant derrière elle que des traînées de charbon. La fumée rend chaque respiration insoutenable. Un poumon de charbon qui laisse place à une obsession pour le filtrage. Entraver les indésirables et laisser la soupe du jour passer au travers. L'air, l'eau, les insectes, le peuple et les métaphores, tous debout à la queue du contrôle qualité.

La file s'étire à travers un champ géant. Les graminées jaunes ressemblent à un tapis de petit bois près à s'embraser sous le soleil brulant de midi. Tout le monde traîne des pieds et les jarres d'eau distillent leur apaisement sur le sommet des têtes. En haut, la sphère chaude et blanche s'estompe à la vue des yeux humains. Elle vacille lentement dans le ciel, dans son manoir diurne habituel, quand soudain, coup de théâtre extraordinaire, le spectacle d'un tableau haut en couleurs commence. Un effondrement du jour et de la nuit, du temps et de l'espace, pendant que la Lune jusqu'alors dissimulée par l'éclairage cru, coupe la file en deux. Chacun à sa place respective, se déplaçant qu'importe leur immobilité. Le plus noir des noirs, un vide total creuse un tunnel à travers notre exosphère, à travers le Soleil et débouche de l'autre côté.

L'exposition comprend une série d'oeuvres faites de miroirs sans tain en verre coulé, moulés autour d'ouvertures incrustées de matériaux divers. Ces miroirs ne reflètent pas l'espace, mettant plutôt l'accent sur les mondes intérieurs de chaque oeuvre. Certaines forment des visages rudimentaires : l'un boursoufflé en verre forme le visage de Cyclope (2019), tandis qu'un autre pleure du nitrate d'argent. Surgissant de souches de bois calciné, une paire de bras est juchée sur des palettes. Marianne deludes the world (2020) tient en l'air une torche brulée, pendant que de son autre bras, elle lance une carafe vide. Une autre série d'œuvres est constituée de moustiquaires de fenêtre laquées dans différents (mauvais) états. Elles ne remplissent plus leur fonction de filtre environnemental. Perforés, les écrans remettent en cause la frontière imaginaire entre les sphères sauvage et domestique.Un film muet en 16 mm, Sans titre (Eclipse) (2019), est projeté à l'entrée de la galerie. Filmée dans un champ au Nebraska en 2017, une éclipse totale du soleil est restituée sur une pellicule au grain marqué.»

Negative Space
Julia Stoschek Collection
Düsseldorf
06.09 - 15.12.2019

Text: Julia Stoschek Collection

NEGATIVE SPACE, A.K. Burns's first institutional solo exhibition in Germany, is comprised of three multi-channel video installations that are a part of an ongoing cycle of works by the same name. Conceived as a non-linear and layered narrative, this series envisions a world wherein boundaries are fluid and hierarchical relations permute. This cycle of works playfully corrupts science-fiction tropes exploring the intersection of politics and fantasy to build idiosyncratic allegorical imagery.

Burns deliberately locates the work in a speculative present filled with the detritus of everyday life. Filmed in stunning but familiar landscapes, like the desert of the Southwest United States, Negative Space exposes the tension between utopian proposals of sociality and apocalyptic anxieties. The works challenge long- standing assumptions about social orders, marshaling familiar images and objects to ask how value is assigned to resources, how marginalized bodies navigate a fraught social reality, and how different forms of matter come to matter.

As a formal term in art, "negative space" denotes the matter between and around the subject. If the subject is the focus of our attention, a definable entity, negative space is considered subordinate to the subject. Burns sees negative space as unfixed, malleable, and ultimately as an open set of possibilities. Recognizing this hierarchy, Burns uses this concept of negative space as a proposal for reorienting the viewer and as an analogy for generating agency within a subjugated position. Drawing on the concept of "intra-actions"—a term coined by physicist and philosopher Karen Barad—Burns's proposal in this series suggests that all entities, including humans, do not precede one another but come into being together. This approach upends the humanist separation of subject and object, nature and culture, instead propagating an entangled existence "where actions of human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, and chemical agents interrelate." Negative Space therefore becomes a materially-discursive site wherein notions of posthuman performativity are articulated by various "acting agents" (a term devised by Burns to denote roles her performers play within the work). The performers therefore enact concepts rather than acting as particular human characters.

Within the Baradian concept of intra-activity, all matter is active and able to enact different forms of agency. We thereby have the possibility to perform agency at any given moment, and "these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering."4 Moving forward we might ask ourselves: What possibilities exist for agency? How can we intervene in less destructive ways in the world we are manifesting? And, where do the issues of responsibility and accountability enter in?

"Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfiguration of the world."

This exhibition is the most comprehensive presentation of the Negative Space series to date. Burns restages two video installations A Smeary Spot (Negative Space 0) (2015) and Living Room (Negative Space 00) (2017), and premieres a new episode entitled Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000) (2019). In addition, the exhibition includes twenty-one collages related to the series, a new film observing a total solar eclipse, and an experimental sound work presented as a vinyl record. In the entry hallway, the collages, constructed on mirrors, are presented in groups of seven, each group corresponding to an episode of Negative Space. They are comprised of research that informed the Negative Space series, encompassing images mined from the internet, resonant materials, and texts, which create an associative atlas for the symbolic mapping of each episode. The underlying mirrors are in some cases covered with black ink or etched, producing an opaque white surface. These effects are echoed in the glass walls of the exhibition space that are painted black on one side, turning the reverse side into a mirror-like surface in which the gallery and its contents are reflected. Burns uses the mirror as a physical manifestation of the concept of negative space: the mirror's ability to reflect its surroundings implicates the viewers in the work, and activates what would otherwise be the blank ground for the collage materials.

In the first gallery, the single-channel silent film Untitled, Eclipse (2019) and the experimental sound work Leave No Trace (2016) are juxtaposed. Shot on 16 mm film in an open field in Nebraska in 2017 (here transferred to HD video), the film depicts a total solar eclipse. During the eclipse, the sun seemingly transforms into a black hole in the sky—representing a void or negative space. The work is projected on a large angled screen, amplifying the residue of heavy film grain as well as the entanglement of astronomical phenomena, technology, and representation.

Leave No Trace (2016) is a poem and an experimental audio project on vinyl comprised of two unlabeled tracks, one per side, that combine ambient environmental recordings, vocalizations, an old electric guitar, and sounds generated from found materials. The poem printed on the album cover speaks to the code of wilderness ethics known as the seven "Leave No Trace Principles," which outline procedures for campers to interact ecologically with natural sites. Burns pushes this idea to new contexts, questioning what is natural or naturalized and considers untraceable or illicit activities, the desire to dis-appear, and the subjugation of that which goes undocumented. The record is placed across from Untitled (Eclipse) on a record player that the audience may play or pause freely. Allowing the audience to start and stop the record at will creates an unpredictable dynamic between the film and the record.

A Smeary Spot (Negative Space 0) (2015) is the introduction and core of the Negative Space cycle. The title, which describes the after-effect of gazing directly at the sun, is quoted from Joanna Russ's 1976 feminist science fiction novel We Who Are About To ... The four-channel video installation was filmed on public lands in the deserts of southern Utah and inside a black box theater. Both the desert and theater operate as physical and psychological spaces that represent the vast infinitude of the void, sites of potential to act out new forms of relation. Moving in and across these sites, performers deliver a script comprised of appropriated and altered texts. The polyvocal recitation unfolds like a manifesto, rooted in ontological fluidity and difference. The texts quoted in the script are lifted from writers and theorists such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Karen Barad, and Guy Hocquenghem, among others.

Projected on three horizontally aligned screens, A Smeary Spot cuts across the exhibition space at an angle. The credits run separately on a box monitor, allowing the videos on the larger screens to play in an uninterrupted loop, undermining the traditional linear structure of film. The gallery is painted black to mimic the aesthetics of the black box theater and wheeled office chairs invite the audience to be actively engaged rather than passive viewers.

The central screen of A Smeary Spot opens with a saxophone solo by experimental musician Matana Roberts. On a flanking screen, billowing fog slowly obscures the empty space. Here the cloud dissolves into a monologue about the void by Mother Flawless (performed by the late drag legend Jack Doroshow), a clairvoyant who asks, "Can anything be said about nothing without violating its very nature? (...) Perhaps we should let the emptiness speak for itself." In A Smeary Spot and later in following episodes, the cloud reappears in varying contexts—making the invisible visible. For art historian Hubert Damisch the cloud in painting is a sign or agent that masks the limitations of linear perspective, which cannot account for the complexity of visual experience.

In the desert, the camera follows two Free Radicals from juxtaposed points of view as they meander the vast landscape gathering equipment for pro- visional living and (im)material resources, such as water, smoke, sun, and waste. Free Radicals, are representative of the implied double meaning of their name, connoting both activists and unpaired electrons seeking mole- cules, which can generate significant change or chaos within a system. A third performer appears in the desert as the Ob-surveyor. As the name suggests this acting agent's task is to observe the landscape as opposed to measuring the land (the first step in assigning capital or value) as a surveyor would. The images on screen simultaneously show the Ob-surveyor and the images they are filming, leaving the audience to assemble multiple points of view. While the Free Radicals roam and dance across the desert, the soundtrack builds and fades, mixing synthesized and ambient sounds, ritualistic chanting, dis- co and punk beats with excerpts of newscasts and a heavy, vibrating bass.

In A Smeary Spot, these desert dwellers reappear in the black box theater in "activist drag"—jeans, black boots, and black T-shirts—accompanied by other Free Radicals: the Shapeshifter and Re/productive Labor. In the theater all the props emerge from a central pile of garbage and return to it, activating discarded materials as productive elements of sociality and exchange. In each environment, Burns creates a world that questions how we interpret material and use value, showing the interconnectivity of language, gestures, and matter. Living Room (Negative Space 00) (2017) explores the body as an exploit- ed resource as well as one with degrees of agency. The video is shot within a building where each room symbolizes a part of a metaphorical organism. In this organism, the living room becomes a dreamlike space of a child's psyche; the stairwell is a passageway for the movement of waste, like the bow- els; the bathroom constitutes a place to detox, a function of the kidneys; and the basement is a uterus, providing a stage for vital choreography. Moving through these spaces, the acting agents in this episode represent bodies— celestial, political, metaphysical, and animal—who are wrestling with various forms of survival.

Installed in a room that alters and cuts into the existing architecture, the left channel of Living Room is projected onto a wall with partially exposed studs; the right projection is cast onto a propped-up piece of unused drywall. By exposing the substructure of the walls, the installation explicitly reveals its perpetual state of construction. A gutted couch from within the video appears in the physical room as seating, ripped apart on screen by three children performing as Dwarf Planets: MakeMake, Eris, and Pluto.

In the video, the broken couch is hauled down a long stairwell by two act- ing agents, Mx. Manning and Pregnant Backpacker, each carrying an un- bearable physical and social weight. Once the trash arrives in the basement a choreographed movement begins. The performers wear headlamps—providing the only source of light in the scene—and black T-shirts with bold language stating "HER," "OR BUST," "AGAIN," and "NO." The first three terms were taken from the 2016 US presidential campaigns by lifting the last word from slogans of presidential candidates: "I'm with Her," "Bernie or Bust," and "Make America Great Again." Exhausted from overuse, these words are revived and recontextualized through a synchronized dance.

Living Room loops with a close-up of a dying insect being attacked by a spider, whose body is much smaller than the insect's, evoking the feeling of a battle—David against Goliath—or of a counter-insurgence movement ready to attack

a falling empire. Living Room features a unique soundtrack by Geo Wyeth and choreography by NIC Kay.

The newest episode, a five-channel video installation entitled Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000) (2019), explores the demarcation of space and how it changes the formation of bodies; formalized as the void, landscape, and grid. The video is projected on to the five visible sides of a white cube propped up on a fake human skull, making the cube slightly askew. Opening with an establishing shot of a solitary arch made of stacked loud speakers standing in the middle of an empty stage like a ruin from a future time. The title emerges from the arch as if appearing through a black hole. In close- ups of the arch's base, shadows are cast across the stage floor, echoing the movement of the sun across the sky. More ruins appear as the scene jumps to an abandoned trailer in the middle of the desert in which Free Radicals collect skulls from the otherwise empty kitchen cabinets—the remains of a human body that is later used as a foundation for a collectively built stage.

Juxtaposing immaterial forces and the "non-event" sites of a theater like the battens and theater grid with the open sprawl of the desert, the work re- turns to places, props, and characters first introduced in A Smeary Spot and Living Room. Chelsea Manning's military jacket, an aquarium, protest slogan T-shirts, and gutted furniture from previous episodes as well as phenomena such as smoke and light are used to weave the worlds within each video together and expand their symbolic connotations.

As various narrative threads converge, groups of acting agents gather on a trash- laden site bordering a military base to construct a new stage on which to go-go dance and rehearse forms of playful protest. While performer Shannon Funchess traverses a theater grid, singing an a cappella version Cerrones's "Supernature," a go-go dancer wearing silver lamé shorts, tennis shoes, and headphones dances to an arrhythmic disco track on the desert platform, a critical homage to Félix Gonzélez-Torres 1991 artwork "Untitled" (Go-Go Dancing Platform).

Leave No Trace initiates a dialogue between acts of construction, the potentiality of the void, and the grid as an organizing principle. Confronted with imposing boundaries, these gender-defying bodies escape the totalizing effects of standardized time and space.

NEGATIVE SPACE, la première exposition solo institutionnelle d'A.K. Burns en Allemagne, se compose de trois installations vidéo multicanaux qui s'inscrivent dans un cycle continu d'œuvres du même nom. Conçue comme un récit non linéaire et stratifié, cette série envisage un monde où les frontières sont fluides et les relations hiérarchiques permutables. Ce cycle d'œuvres corrompt de façon ludique les tropes de la science-fiction en explorant l'intersection de la politique et du fantastique pour construire une imagerie allégorique idiosyncrasique.

Burns situe délibérément l'œuvre dans un présent spéculatif rempli de détritus de la vie quotidienne. Filmé dans des paysages époustouflants mais familiers, comme le désert du sud-ouest des États-Unis, Negative Space expose la tension entre des propositions utopiques de socialité et des angoisses apocalyptiques. Les œuvres remettent en question des hypothèses de longue date sur les ordres sociaux, rassemblant des images et des objets familiers pour se demander comment la valeur est attribuée aux ressources, comment les corps marginalisés naviguent dans une réalité sociale tendue et comment différentes formes de matière deviennent importantes.

En tant que terme formel dans l'art, "espace négatif" désigne la matière entre et autour du sujet. Si le sujet est au centre de notre attention, une entité définissable, l'espace négatif est considéré comme subordonné au sujet. Burns voit l'espace négatif comme un espace non fixé, malléable, et finalement comme un ensemble ouvert de possibilités. Reconnaissant cette hiérarchie, Burns utilise ce concept d'espace négatif comme une proposition pour réorienter le spectateur et comme une analogie pour générer l'agence dans une position soumise.

S'inspirant du concept d'"intra-actions" - un terme inventé par la physicienne et philosophe Karen Barad-Burns dans cette série - suggère que toutes les entités, y compris les humains, ne se précèdent pas les unes les autres mais se forment ensemble. Cette approche renverse la séparation humaniste du sujet et de l'objet, de la nature et de la culture, propageant au contraire une existence enchevêtrée "où les actions des corps humains, des créatures non humaines, des systèmes écologiques et des agents chimiques sont interreliées". L'espace négatif devient donc un lieu matériellement discursif où les notions de performativité posthumaine sont articulées par divers " agents " (un terme conçu par Burns pour désigner les rôles que ses interprètes jouent dans l'œuvre). Les artistes interprètes ou exécutants mettent donc en scène des concepts plutôt que d'agir comme des personnages humains particuliers.

Dans le concept baradien de l'intra-activité, toute matière est active et capable de mettre en œuvre différentes formes de représentation. Nous avons ainsi la possibilité d'agir à tout moment, et " ces possibilités changeantes impliquent la responsabilité d'intervenir dans le devenir du monde, de contester et de retravailler ce qui compte et ce qui est exclu de la matière ". En avançant, nous pourrions nous demander : Quelles sont les possibilités pour l'agence ? Comment pouvons-nous intervenir de manière moins destructrice dans le monde que nous manifestons ? Et, où entrent en jeu les questions de responsabilité et de reddition de comptes ? "L'agence n'est pas un attribut mais la reconfiguration en cours du monde."

Cette exposition est la présentation la plus complète de la série Negative Space à ce jour. Burns restaure deux installations vidéo A Smeary Spot (Negative Space 0) (2015) et Living Room (Negative Space 00) (2017), et crée un nouvel épisode intitulé Leave No Trace (Negative Space 000) (2019). De plus, l'exposition comprend vingt et un collages liés à la série, un nouveau film observant une éclipse solaire totale et une œuvre sonore expérimentale présentée sous forme de disque vinyle.

Dans le couloir d'entrée, les collages, construits sur des miroirs, sont présentés en groupes de sept, chaque groupe correspondant à un épisode d'Espace négatif. Ils sont constitués de recherches qui ont inspiré la série Negative Space, comprenant des images extraites d'Internet, des matériaux résonnants et des textes, qui créent un atlas associatif pour la cartographie symbolique de chaque épisode. Les miroirs sous-jacents sont dans certains cas recouverts d'encre noire ou gravés, ce qui donne une surface blanche opaque. Ces effets se retrouvent dans les parois vitrées de l'espace d'exposition qui sont peintes en noir sur un côté, transformant le verso en une surface en miroir dans laquelle la galerie et son contenu sont réfléchis. Burns utilise le miroir comme une manifestation physique du concept d'espace négatif : la capacité du miroir à refléter son environnement implique les spectateurs dans l'œuvre et active ce qui serait autrement le terrain vague pour les matériaux de collage.

Dans la première galerie, le film muet monocanal Untitled, Eclipse (2019) et l'œuvre sonore expérimentale Leave No Trace (2016) sont juxtaposés. Tourné en plein champ dans le Nebraska en 2017 (ici transféré en vidéo HD), le film dépeint une éclipse solaire totale. Pendant l'éclipse, le soleil se transforme apparemment en un trou noir dans le ciel - représentant un vide ou un espace négatif. L'œuvre est projetée sur un grand écran à grand angle, amplifiant le résidu de grain de film lourd ainsi que l'enchevêtrement des phénomènes astronomiques, de la technologie et de la représentation.

Leave No Trace (2016) est un poème et un projet audio expérimental sur vinyle composé de deux pistes non étiquetées, une par face, qui combinent des enregistrements ambiants, des vocalisations, une vieille guitare électrique et des sons produits à partir de matériaux trouvés. Le poème imprimé sur la couverture

de l'album fait référence au code d'éthique de la nature sauvage connu sous le nom des sept principes "Leave No Trace Principles", qui décrivent les procédures permettant aux campeurs d'interagir écologiquement avec les sites naturels. Burns pousse cette idée dans de nouveaux contextes, questionnant ce qui est naturel ou naturalisé et considère les activités introuvables ou illicites, le désir de disparaître, et l'assujettissement de ce qui n'est pas documenté. Le disque est placé en face de Untitled (Eclipse) sur un tourne-disque que le public peut écouter ou mettre en pause librement. Permettre au public de démarrer et d'arrêter le disque à volonté crée une dynamique imprévisible entre le film et le disque.

Un point de frottis (espace négatif 0) (2015) est l'introduction et le noyau du cycle de l'espace négatif. Le titre, qui décrit les séquelles du regard porté directement sur le soleil, est tiré du roman de science-fiction féministe de Joanna Russ, We Who Are About To .... L'installation vidéo à quatre canaux a été filmée sur des terres publiques dans les déserts du sud de l'Utah et à l'intérieur d'un théâtre à boîte noire. Le désert et le théâtre fonctionnent comme des espaces physiques et psychologiques qui représentent la vaste infinitude du vide, lieux de potentiel pour mettre en scène de nouvelles formes de relations. En se déplaçant dans et à travers ces sites, les interprètes livrent un scénario composé de textes appropriés et modifiés. La récitation polyvocale se déroule comme un manifeste, enraciné dans la fluidité et la différence ontologiques. Les textes cités dans le scénario sont tirés d'auteurs et de théoriciens comme Ursula K. Le Guin, Karen Barad et Guy Hocquenghem, entre autres.

Projecté sur trois écrans alignés horizontalement, A Smeary Spot traverse l'espace d'exposition en biais. Les crédits s'exécutent séparément sur un moniteur de boîte, ce qui permet aux vidéos sur les grands écrans de jouer en boucle ininterrompue, minant ainsi la structure linéaire traditionnelle du film. La galerie est peinte en noir pour imiter l'esthétique de la boîte noire et les chaises de bureau à roulettes invitent le public à s'engager activement plutôt qu'à regarder passivement.

L'écran central de A Smeary Spot s'ouvre sur un solo de saxophone du musicien expérimental Matana Roberts. Sur un écran de flanc, le brouillard qui s'échappe obscurcit lentement l'espace vide. Ici, le nuage se dissout dans un monologue sur le vide de Mère sans défaut (interprété par le regretté Jack Doroshow, légende du dragster), un clairvoyant qui demande : "Peut-on dire quoi que ce soit sur rien sans violer sa nature même ? (...) Peut-être devrions-nous laisser le vide parler de lui-même." Dans A Smeary Spot et plus tard dans les épisodes suivants, le nuage réapparaît dans différents contextes, rendant l'invisible visible. Pour l'historien de l'art Hubert Damisch, le nuage en peinture est un signe ou un agent qui masque les limites de la perspective linéaire, qui ne peut rendre compte de la complexité de l'expérience visuelle.

Dans le désert, la caméra suit deux Radicaux Libres à partir de points de vue juxtaposés alors qu'ils serpentent dans les méandres du vaste équipement de rassemblement du paysage pour la vie pro-visionnelle et les ressources (im) matérielles, comme l'eau, la fumée, le soleil et les déchets. Les radicaux libres, qui sont représentatifs de la double signification implicite de leur nom, évoquent à la fois les activistes et les électrons non appariés à la recherche de taupes, qui peuvent générer des changements importants ou le chaos dans un système. Un troisième interprète apparaît dans le désert en tant qu'Ob-surveyor. Comme son nom l'indique, la tâche de cet agent est d'observer le paysage plutôt que de mesurer le terrain (la première étape de l'affectation du capital ou de la valeur) comme le ferait un arpenteur. Les images à l'écran montrent simultanément l'Ob- surveyor et les images qu'ils filment, laissant le public assembler de multiples points de vue. Tandis que les Free Radicals errent et dansent à travers le désert, la bande-son se construit et s'estompe, mélangeant sons synthétisés et ambiants, chants ritualistes, rythmes disco et punk avec des extraits de journaux télévisés et une basse lourde et vibrante.

Dans A Smeary Spot, ces habitants du désert réapparaissent dans le théâtre de la boîte noire en jeans, bottes noires et T-shirts noirs, accompagnés d'autres radicaux libres : les Shapeshifter et Re/productive Labor. Dans le théâtre, tous les accessoires sortent d'un tas central d'ordures et y retournent, activant les matériaux mis au rebut.

Any Means
Michel Rein, Paris
18.05 - 22.07.2017

Text: Françoise Docquiert

The necessity to reinterpret the various fields of knowledge through the prism of specific approaches clearly seems like the great question of our time. However, we are also living a time when many certitudes and constraints are falling apart. Art and artists show us the way by integrating ethics and imagination to plastic media and techniques.

A.K. Burns quickly understood it and made it the whole of her art. Her work proposes a reading of the world, which peaks through most of the media she uses – sculpture, installation, video, collage, and performance. She has her own way of staging objects and raising questions without limiting herself to one medium. Through her works, she skillfully plays with her ability to reveal passageways and the fluidity of frontiers.

With her, there is no definite identity or closed territory. Her art is rather about understanding the infinite distance that stands between two artworks and appreciating it in order to fill the gap with the dynamic of the artistic gesture. A.K. Burns often resorts to used materials with a previous history and stages them in original constructions. Her works are all well planned, yet the artist allows herself to innovate in the framework of an ongoing thinking based on a constantly reinvented making process. Garments turned into sculptures, fragmented and recomposed vases or printed landscape views aimed at elaborating, developing, exploring and explaining the singularity of her approach play like mirrors of her most intimate convictions.

Besides, her works express a strong desire to take part in the social dialogue: first through acting as a militant for artists rights and the feminist cause seen under a contemporary light – in 2008, A.K. Burns cofounded the artist activist group W.A.G.E. (Working Artists for the Greater Economy)-, she shows awareness for all the intersectional issues of today's society, especially women's rights environmentalism, climate change and LGBT movements. Through her diverse range of artworks, she knows that, today, artists have to take the risk to show the unreadable, considered by some as superfluous or laughable. The tensions between order and destruction, seriousness and absurdity create gravity as well as a healthy subversive pleasure: her artworks propose to go further, invoking memory, experiences and material suggestions to push boundaries... expands and refines her thought on the relationship between art and society.

Like Althusser and his views on transversality, the artist works with juxtapositions. She tries to bring about a bursting of knowledge and a surging of new forms through the unearthing of yet unknown or little known relationships. She seeks to discover new territories, which disrupt the established artistic models without being spectacular or in total rupture with what came before. She therefore aims at creating a network of sensibilities and gestures, an aesthetic world totally on the fringe of the classic or institutional knowledge of contemporary art.
For me, A.K. Burns is the perfect example of a sharp artistic mind. Beside the materials she uses, her mind is her first tool. Her very dense work is constantly "in progress" and multiplies plastic proposals yet without loosing coherence. If her work seems constantly changing, the artist stays focused, almost "fixated" on her desire to tackle "the economy of gender, labor, environment and sexuality" –in her own words.

A.K. Burns does not make splashes: in a total freedom, she is simply determined to open and go through the all-too visible walls of classic art in order to bring forward other possibilities of artistic expression.

A l'évidence, la nécessité d'un travail de réinterprétation des champs de connaissance à partir d'approches spécifiques se révèle comme la grande question de ce temps.

Mais nous sommes aussi à une époque où basculent un certain nombre de certitudes et de bornes. L'art et de nombreux artistes nous montrent la voie en intégrant aux matériaux et aux techniques plastiques de l'éthique et de l'imaginaire... A.K. Burns l'a compris très vite et en a fait l'objet de la totalité de son travail. Son œuvre est une lecture du monde, qui traverse la plupart des pratiques artistiques qu'elle aborde - sculptures, installations, vidéos, collages, performances, documentaire – et a une façon particulière de poser les objets, les expressions plutôt que dans la fixité d'un seul médium.

A travers l'ensemble de ses pièces, elle joue savamment de sa capacité à montrer les aires de passage, la fluidité des frontières. Il n'y a pas chez elle d'identité fermée ou de territoire clos mais plutôt comment comprendre, à travers l'œuvre d'art, l'infinie distance qui nous sépare l'une de l'autre, en prendre la mesure pour la combler dans la dynamique d'un geste artistique.

Si A.K. Burns s'empare souvent de matériaux pré-utilisés et porteurs d'histoire vécue, elle les projette dans des constructions originales. Ses œuvres sont toutes calculées, l'artiste se laissant le droit d'innover mais dans une réflexion constante pré-établie par un processus de fabrication toujours inédit. Vêtements figés en sculpture, vase fragmenté et recomposé, vues de paysages imprimés visent à élaborer, développer, explorer et rendre audibles les caractères singuliers de sa démarche et demeure le miroir de ses convictions intimes.

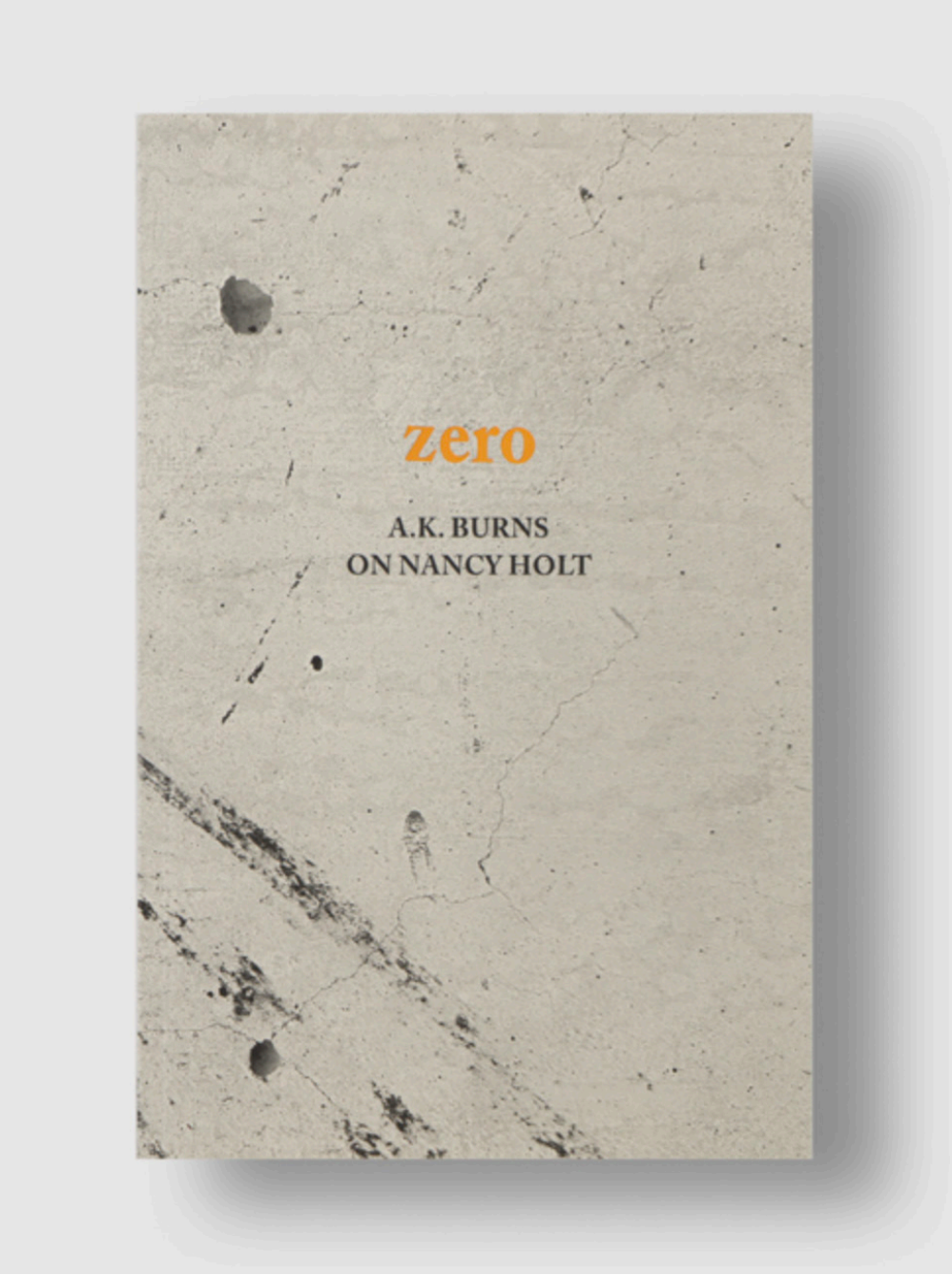
A cela s'ajoute une volonté assumée de prendre part au dialogue social : en se positionnant d'abord comme militante pour les droits des artistes et de la cause féministe envisagée dans sa contemporanéité - A.K. Burns a cofondé, en 2008, le groupe militant W.A.G.E. (Working Artists for the Greater Economy) -, elle est réceptive à tous les grands enjeux de nos sociétés contemporaines en particulier l'écologie, l'environnement, le réchauffement de la planète, les flux migratoires.

Avec l'ensemble de ses pièces de différentes natures, elle sait qu'il faut prendre le risque aujourd'hui de montrer ce qui est illisible, considéré par certains comme dérisoire ou superflu. Les tensions entre ordre et destruction, sérieux et absurde engendrent à la fois gravité et un sain plaisir de la subversion : ses œuvres sont autant d'épisodes conduisant plus loin, entrainant mémoire, expériences et suggestions plastiques pour en développer toujours une suite.... Avec l'inclusion de la photo, de la vidéo et de la performance, A.K. Burns se donne les moyens d'élargir et d'affiner sa réflexion sur la relation art/société.

A l'image d'Althusser quand il parle de transversalité, A.K. Burns agit par juxtaposition et s'efforce d'entraîner, par la découverte de rapports jusque là inconnus ou peu usités, un éclatement des savoirs et le surgissement de formes nouvelles. Elle s'applique à découvrir de nouveaux territoires non pas en rupture totale avec tout ce qui leur a préexisté mais qui perturbent, sans être pour autant spectaculaires, les modèles de l'establishment artistique. Elle veut ainsi créer un réseau de sensibilités et de gestes, une famille esthétique totalement en marge de la reconnaissance classique ou institutionnelle de l'art contemporain.

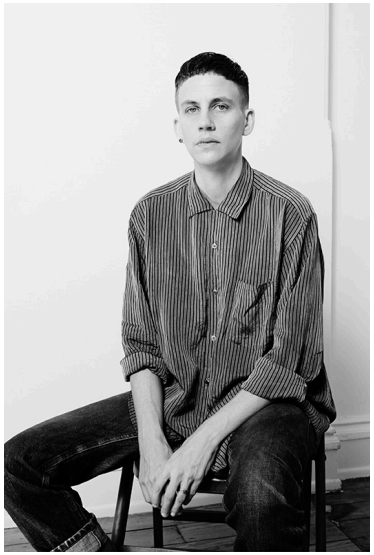
A.K. Burns est, pour moi, le parfait exemple d'une conscience aiguisée d'un artiste aujourd'hui. En dehors de la matière sur laquelle elle s'appuie, son premier instrument est son propre esprit. Son œuvre, très touffue, est continuellement « in progress », s'efforçant de multiplier les propositions plastiques pourtant toutes cohérentes. Si son travail semble en continuel changement, l'artiste reste ancrée, presque « butée » dans son envie de traiter, selon ses mots de « l'économie du genre, du labeur, de l'écologie et de la sexualité. Loin des tapages éphémères, dans une liberté totale, elle est déterminée à élargir et traverser les parois souvent trop facilement perceptibles d'un art classique pour entrainer d'autres possibilités d'expressions artistiques.

PUBLICATION
PUBLICATION



Publisher: Callicoon Fine Arts City: New York, NY
Year: 2019
Pages: 32 pages
Dimensions: 21 x 15 cm
Cover: Paperback
Stock ID: 115512 C

BIOGRAPHY
BIOGRAPHIE



Born in 1975 in Capitola (USA). Lives and works in Brooklyn (USA).

A.K. Burns' interdisciplinary practice explores the body as a contentious domain where social, political, and material forces collide. Engaging deeply with questions of materiality and (re) production, Burns examines how the «deployment of power» is connected to the body, its functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures.
For Burns, the body is not an object with inherent boundaries and properties but multifaceted and porous, permeating and penetrated by its surroundings. These inquiries take shape as visually seductive and socially critical videos, sculptures, writing, sound, drawings, and collages.

A.K. Burns' work has been exhibited at Palais de Tokyo (Paris) ; Julia Stoschek Collection (Düsseldorf/Berlin) ; New Museum (New York) ; Tate Modern (London) ; MOMA - Museum of Modern Art (New York) ; Sculpture Center (New York) ; The Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) ; MET - The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) ; MMK - Museum für Moderne Kunst (Frankfurt am Main) ; SOMArts (San Francisco) ; ICA - Institute of Contemporary Art (Philadelphia) ; Leslie-Lhman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art (New York) ; KADIST (San Francisco) ; Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Harvard Art Museums (Cambridge) ; Portland Institute for Contemporary Art ; Human Resources (Los Angeles) ; The LGBT Community Center (New York).

Burns received in 2021 the Guggenheim Fellow in Fine Arts and Art Awards Purchase Program from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, in 2018 the New York Foundation for the Arts - NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellowship, in 2016-17 the Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University and a recipient of a 2015 Creative Capital Foundation Visual Arts Award.

Her work is part of prestigious collections as Guggenheim Museum (New York) ; American Academy of Arts and Letters (New York) ; Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) ; LACMA - Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Kadist Foundation (San Francisco) ; MoMA (New York) ; FRAC - Pays De La Loire (Carquefou), Frac Île-de-France, Le Plateau (Paris).

Né.e en 1975 à Capitola (Etats-Unis). Vit et travaille à New York (Etats-Unis).

La pratique interdisciplinaire d'A.K. Burns explore le corps comme un domaine litigieux où les forces sociales, politiques et matérielles entrent en conflit. S'engageant profondément dans les questions de matérialité et de (re)production, Burns examine comment le «déploiement du pouvoir» est lié au corps, ses fonctions, ses processus physiologiques, ses sensations et ses plaisirs.
Pour Burns, le corps n'est pas un objet avec des limites et des propriétés inhérentes, mais il est multiforme et poreux, perméable et pénétré par son environnement. Ces enquêtes prennent la forme de vidéos, de sculptures, d'écrits, de sons, de dessins et de collages visuellement séduisants et socialement critiques.

Les œuvres d'A.K. Burns ont été exposées au Palais de Tokyo (Paris), Julia Stoschek Collection (Düsseldorf/Berlin), New Museum (New York), Tate Modern (Londres), MOMA - Museum of Modern Art (New York), Sculpture Center (New York), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), MET - The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), MMK - Museum für Moderne Kunst (Francfort am Main), SOMArts (San Francisco), ICA - Institute of Contemporary Art (Philadelphie), Leslie-Lhman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art (New York), KADIST (San Francisco), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Harvard Art Museums (Cambridge), Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Human Resources (Los Angeles), The LGBT Community Center (New York).

A.K. Burns a reçu en 2021 la bourse du Guggenheim dans la catégorie «Fine Arts» et le prix de l'American Academy of Arts and Letters dans la catégorie «Art Awards Purchase Program», en 2018 la bourse de la New York Foundation for the Arts - NYSCA/NYFA, en 2016-17 le Radcliffe Fellow à l'Université d'Harvard et le prix Creative Capital Foundation Visual Arts Award en 2015.

Son travail fait partie de nombreuses collections comme le Guggenheim Museum (New York), American Academy of Arts and Letters (New York), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), LACMA - Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Kadist Foundation (San Francisco), Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection - MoMA (New York), Film & Video Archive - MoMA (New York), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art Library (New York), FRAC - Pays De La Loire (Carquefou).