

green-filtered spotlight onto a grid of coloured cards, rendering the formalist grid down to a mere stage prop, the young Mullican cultivates a vertiginous sense that colours are not stable quantities, but open to the slipperiness of how they are lit and perceived, only to humble that Wittgensteinian trope – beloved of the conceptualist artists – by having it double as a sign of the transience of cinematic culture.

A stack of raw wooden blocks from 1970 looks more like a work by Carl Andre than Jack Goldstein, but it is the latter. The block at the top is painted black, while another in white lies askew at the foot of the totem, as if the two formed the head and feet of a minimalist template, and the sculpture were coming out in blackface and white tap-dancing shoes to perform a ditty. Matter becomes artifice, form becomes image, as the CalArts faculty and student body provide a cross-sectional summary of American art's loss of a grip on empirical certitude, and with it the last vestiges of its innocence. This may be the exhibition's central theme, as exemplified by John Baldassari's early spoofs on Conceptual Art's emphasis on the primacy of information (Interview *AM331*). Perhaps it was the inevitable outcome of placing performance art against the backdrop of the more frivolous definition of the word offered locally by Hollywood.

Panning out, the suggestion that art gains critical credibility from acknowledging its status as a glorified game has come to distinguish the LA end of the East-West axis on which American art now pivots. That axis might have been forged here, in a series of relays between CalArts teachers and students. Baldassari's offbeat class assignments for his celebrated 'Post-Studio' course suggest that art needed an injection of irreverence to shake up the overweening priestliness of East Coast formalism: 'Imitate Baldassari in actions and speech. Video.' (The last imperative hilariously synonymous with 'Discuss' – used to qualify an exam paper's prompting question.)

Fittingly enough, for an exhibition that demonstrates how an educational institution contributed to defining an artistic era, it concludes with a series of early (1974–76) works on paper by Mike Kelley, perhaps the only former student in the show whose work wriggles free of any attempt to pin it down to movements, tendencies or schools, and one whose art is based on a conviction that education is as much an inculcator of illusions as a trustworthy source. With their dizzying transitions between styles and languages, the drawings show the outrageously talented student finding his way by taking the first step of converting all the historical precedents which education had placed at his disposal into images of themselves, then letting them fight it out for the claim to be the true voice – a fight they all lose, trashing the place in the process, to leave the potential of the new worlds he would go on to create already emerging from the wreckage.

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'Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead', installation view

## Bergen Assembly: Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead

Various venues, 5 September to 10 November

In an untitled crayon-on-paper work hung at the Bergen Kunsthall – one of the main venues of the Bergen Assembly 2019 – a trans woman with no arms and flowing, ginger hair cradles a baby in her legs, a small bottle of milk perched on her shoulder and over the child's grasping mouth. The painting is by Chilean artist Lorenza Böttner, a bilateral amputee who lost both her arms after receiving an electric shock when climbing a pylon in Punta Arenas as a child. Böttner, with her mother, moved to Germany for treatment shortly after her accident, but refused any prosthetics. Instead, she cultivated an incredible dexterity in her legs and feet, with which she painted, performed, danced and applied make-up. She also painted with her mouth: paintings and drawings that are both fantastical and stunningly tender. Böttner died in 1994 of HIV-related complications, but left behind a body of deeply moving work. Curator Paul B Preciado writes: 'Lorenza's dissident transgender body became a living political sculpture, a trans-armless sculptural manifesto.' In the opening moments of 'The Parliament of Bodies: The Impossible Parliament' – curated by Preciado and Viktor Neumann for the Bergen Assembly – Preciado called on stage Böttner's mother and dedicated the night to Lorenza. A photograph of the artist flashed across the stage. She stands tall and exalted in soft white trousers and a crop top, a long, dangling earring at each ear, her hair a loose topknot. She was sexy – and *how*.

Desire is the politics of Böttner's work: she sexualised her body in order to repoliticise it. This was astutely taken up by Antonio Centeno in a presentation where he discussed Crip politics and the urgency of integrating functionally diverse (a smarter, less offensive phrase for those with special needs or disability) people into mainstream life. Centeno, a Crip activist, actor and filmmaker from Barcelona who co-wrote and acted in the 2015 film *Yes, we fuck* about the sex lives and erotics of a group of functionally diverse people in Spain, said, 'We know that nothing but desire is enough. Everything that is not desiring us is assimilationism. We are here to transform, we want everything, we demand desire.' Centeno remarked on how ableism continues to be expensive for the state – placing people in institutions at a high cost, for instance – and cleanses functionally diverse people from public life.

Desire is therefore the only tactic that makes sense: to desire a body is also to fight to preserve its rights.

At the Bergen Kjøtt, American painter Sunaura Taylor takes us to a soft, inter-species queer kinship. Her paintings – in which she goes over pages from wildlife photography books with gentle dapples of oil paint – gather together the politics of functional diversity, pollution and climate change. In a small panel from *Wildlife*, 2014, Taylor paints herself cuddling a large, smiling polar bear and, in another, she is flopped over the bear in a sleepy, cosy pile. Taylor has arthrogryposis, the condition being the result of a toxic waste dump that contaminated water her mother drank while pregnant. ‘Pollution is a disability issue,’ Taylor says. Close to these works is another set of diffuse, smudged paintings that form part of the series ‘Suicide’, 2003–13, by Swiss artist Valérie Favre. Each work is an oil-on-canvas of a suicide: some are famous (Marilyn Monroe, Alexander McQueen), others are fictional (Lucretia, Ajax, Ophelia). Some are darkly humorous, in part explained by a small handwritten caption underneath. Although the paintings are strikingly gloomy, there is also a deep affection apparent in them for that very particular, and slight, moment that hovers between life and death. This is an affection shared by the premise of the Bergen Assembly’s third edition, conceived by a ‘core group’ of 12 curators, artists, activists and philosophers, which in each venue ‘rearranges the premise’ of the title, ‘Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead’. This invites reflection on the notion of death: who gets the privilege of being declared dead and who does not? Which deaths are cared for more than others? And, more mystically, how are the dead still amongst us and how do we call upon them?

‘We don’t die we multiply / Like Wildfire’ declares a video as part of the installation *Number Last: In Loving Memory of Title in Transgression*, 2019, by South African artists Simnikiwe Buhlungu and Malebona Maphutse, former members of the now defunct artist and activist collective Title in Transgression from Johannesburg. The collective first formed in 2015 in response to the nationwide student protests #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, which called for free and decolonised education in South African universities and schools. The group was active for almost three years before disbanding. The installation shows the vulnerability of process: sometimes things fall apart, and how in mourning them new things are born. ‘The Parliament of Bodies’ also included a presentation by surprise guests from Más Voces, a Colombian activist group that mobilises in protest against the murders of the

country’s social justice leaders, who have been especially targeted in the nation’s now six-decades-long struggle for peace. Norway has a role to play in the proceedings: it is a ‘guarantor for peace’ (along with Cuba) in the negotiations between the guerilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the current Colombian government. Más Voces explained that, in Colombia, the word for mourning is the same as that for planting. Resistance is fertile in the Colombian imagination, and deeply tied to community. For instance, when unidentified bodies are found in the countryside (many of which are pulled from the Cauca river), a local family will adopt the body and give it a proper funeral, marking the grave ‘N.N.’ (No Name). The Más Voces members ended their presentation with a photograph of the gate of a cemetery in Colombia, above which was written: ‘*Lo que eres fui / Lo que soy seras*’ What you are, I once was. What I am, you will become.

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Antonio Centeno in conversation with Paul B Preciado

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