

**146**

2019

**Camera Austria**

INTERNATIONAL

A/D/LUX

16,- €

CH

18,- sFr

**Annie Ernaux**

**Katharina Sykora**

**Jens Klein**

**Christin Müller**

**Eileen Myles**

**Joanna Piotrowska**

**Alexander García**

**Düttmann**

4 192310 616005 0 0146

In a video recording, the German cultural theorist Florian Cramer claims that an exhibition on alt-right memes might be more useful than a “safe exhibition on minimalist art.” It seems that HMKV has taken this to be their mission statement. The collective DISNOVATION.ORG even provides a giant chart of political memes, distributing them along two axes: political left-right and authoritarian-libertarian. Pepe the Frog appears in the top right-hand corner, while Winnie the Pooh finds his home behind the “Great Firewall” of China in the left authoritarian corner, since he represents Xi Jinping on the Chinese Internet. The graph also comes as a poster that visitors are encouraged to take home, so it will spread like an analogue version of a viral meme. Arns hopes that the posters will be used as “maps to navigate the Internet.”

The question of what an exhibition can offer in a struggle against the right is raised again in Szabolcs KissPál’s “From Fake Mountains to Faith (Hungarian Trilogy)” (2012–16), which takes the form of a museum within the museum, marked by orange walls, the color of Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz party. KissPál arranges vitrines displaying nationalist knickknacks in this orange corner along with two quietly humorous videos: “Amorous Geography” (2012) investigating Hungarian irredentism, and “In the Rise of the Fallen Feather” (2016), an exploration of the symbolism of the falcon in Hungarian nationalism. KissPál thereby seems to historicize the illiberal democracy that Orbán is constructing, holding it up to our unflinching gaze.



Jonas Staal, Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective, 2018. Courtesy: the artist and Remco van Bladel.

This seems to be very much in the spirit of Boris Groys. In his essay “On Art Activism,”<sup>1</sup> the philosopher differentiates design from art. Design intends to increase use value, while art is precisely the act of stripping the use value away and leaving pure aesthetics. This is the hope that contemporary art can provide: to aestheticize the world, thereby killing it, which makes a new world imaginable. This seems to be KissPál’s strategy, but the exhibitions reviewed here attempt the opposite. They imbue art with political use value. However, Groys speaks of fight-



DISNOVATION.ORG, detail from: Online Culture Wars, 2018–19. Wallpaper; poster, dimensions variable.

ing for a new world, while the exhibitions and artists presented here are desperately defending the old. A defensive mode might require another strategy than laying the groundwork for a revolutionary imaginary. The weapons used in this epic battle are vitrines, glossaries, posters, and even three board games by the designer Simon Denny, satirizing the libertarian Silicon Valley utopias such as space exploration that would quickly turn into dystopias for anyone but the ultrarich. Liberal democracy, it seems, is using the information technologies of the nineteenth century in its fight against the new right, which in turn uses the technology of the twenty-first century: memes, online forums, YouTube videos.

The impression of frantic ineffectuality in the face of the ascendant right is most striking in a piece shown at “Global National”: Christine Würmell’s “widersprechen” (contradict or speak against, 2019), based on a poster campaign by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees that called on immigrants to return to their countries. These posters were pelted with paintballs and smeared with graffiti, which Würmell photographed and turned into protest signs dispersed throughout the space. Visitors were welcome to use the signs to stage their own miniature protest. What a sad thought: liberal bourgeois subjects staging a performance of a protest inside of a morally engaged exhibition, their little echo chamber, a safe space far removed from anyone who might punch them in the face for their views or tear gas them for not filing the correct form to approve the protest. It is also far removed from anyone who might need convincing. The printed texts to the exhibition even include the date of a pro-European protest march. The gestures toward a liberal model of citizenship and free expression in a public sphere of bourgeois society hardly answer the tough questions: Do these models still hold in the digital age? Are bodies in the street an antidote to memes on our screens?

1 See Boris Groys, “On Art Activism,” *e-flux journal* 56 (June 2014), pp. 1–14, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/>.

Caspar Shaller (born 1989) is a freelance journalist. He writes for *Die Zeit* (DE), both the magazine and the weekly newspaper, and *Die Wochenzeitung* (CH). He lives in Berlin (DE) and Amsterdam (NL).

### Agency of Singular Investigations: Flower Power. Archive

Triumph Gallery, Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMoMA), 27. 2. – 14. 4. 2019

by Andrey Shental

Is history shaped by human will or driven by natural phenomena? The Agency of Singular Investigations or ASI (Anna Titova and Stanislav Shuripa) suggests that it is a coevolution of human and nonhuman forces. Their artistic proxy, a clandestine organization “Flower Power” (FP), whose name simultaneously refers to counterculture and more recent theories of posthumanism, has persistently tried to channel the course of history in a more peaceful direction. Between 1778 and 2000, its members allegedly appeared during all landmark events, applying the energy of plants to affect people’s consciousness and behavior. The eponymous show chronicles a glorious defeat of this international network.

Titova and Shuripa call their artistic method “post-disciplinarity,” distancing themselves from a more common genre of artistic research. For their solo show at MMoMA, they constructed an imaginary archive that is not based on investigations or forensics, as one might expect, but rather resorts to the oneiric, parapsychological, and conspiratorial realms. The blurring between documentary and fictional narratives is hypostatized in a cardboard miniature representing a Soviet dacha. According to legend, the entire archive was discovered here, outside Saint Petersburg, and made this reconstruction possible. On the ground floor of the exhibition, one could see “flat” materials testifying to the group’s activity: a postcard sent from the Chicago branch of FP to Leningrad, sculptures of Soviet human rights activists in the form of romantic silhouettes, a dictionary of a secret language based on mental images of flowers corresponding to political notions, and a carpet with a diagram that aids in orientation during space travel. The second floor endowed FP’s activity with monumentality and tangibility. It presented drafts for materials to Soviet underground rock musicians, ritualistic costumes for semiotic travel, elements of a creepy technobiological beast, and, finally, an animation video about the organization’s block-

chain-like operative structure. What compositionally unified these cabinets of curiosities was a huge timeline with intermittent collages marking the secret society’s turning points.

Committed to the tradition of American modernist criticism, ASI treats visual materials in a way similar to what the editorial group of the US journal *October* has named “analogies in rhetorics,” that is, linguistic tropes (such as metonymy or metaphor) applied to the production of pictures. Their motley, almost psychedelic collages are based on reportage photography depicting political gatherings, secret meetings, demonstrations, and public speeches that are superimposed with vegetal ornaments or natural landscapes. Most of them contain yawning gaps that define outlines of absent bodies which function in a way similar to elision in linguistics, that is, omissions of certain written sounds during an act of utterance. Such a principle applied to history reveals, beyond the heroic façade, nonhuman anonymous forces and processes neglected by historians: a multilayered pluriverse that visualizes invisible and ineffable parapsychological and supernatural dimensions. ASI’s archive is thus a repository of unaccounted possibilities that are missed thanks to their very manifestation.



Agency of Singular Investigations, Mikhail Gorbachev in Murmansk, 2018. Collage, c-print, 40 x 50 cm.

This revisionist project in a way paraphrases the famous saying “Russia is a country with an unpredictable past.” For the last decade, its history has undergone a new round of ideological manipulations by state propaganda dignifying former and current militarism and oppression. ASI, in its critique of the colonization of the past, does not make any claims about historical facts, but rather speaks in the modality of “what if.” That is why most of the documents are chronologi-



Agency of Singular Investigations. Stanislav Shuripa, Anna Titova: Flower Power. Archive.

With an introduction by Vasili Tsereteli, a contribution by Yulia Aksenova, and a conversation between Yulia Aksenova and Stanislav Shuripa (rus./eng.). Moscow Museum of Modern Art; Triumph Gallery, Moscow 2019. 88 pages, 16.5 x 23.5 cm, numerous b/w and color illustrations. € 15.– / ISBN 978-5-6041669-2-5

cally centered on the events of 1968 (including the protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the Red Square), the unrealized potentialities of which haunt the present day. But at the same time, its ironic flirting with hippie aesthetics and counterculture of the late Soviet period makes one suspect a resentment generally shared by post-Soviet intelligentsia. By playing with the double entendre “counterculture,” ASI identifies the seeming peacefulness of nature with dissidents who believed in nonviolence as a political strategy. The current liberal opposition, which has inherited these ideals, contrives another extreme version of Russian history as nothing but a succession of atrocities and injustice. Similarly, the show fails to distinguish—or purposefully does not want to—different types of violence, such as that of a subjective, systematic, and revolutionary violence. Therefore, this enchantment with an agency of plants dangerously suggests structural oppression as a “peaceful” state of affairs.

Andrey Shental is a critic, curator, and artist based in Moscow (RU).

### Lorenza Böttner: Requiem für die Norm

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 23. 2. – 28. 7. 2019

von Marie Himmerich

Für seine Retrospektive zum Werk der mund- und fußmalenden Transgender-Künstlerin Lorenza Böttner (1959 – 1994) hat der Kurator Paul B. Preciado eine fantastische Materialsammlung sprichwörtlich ans Licht geholt. Preciado, der bereits eine Böttner-Sektion auf der documenta 14 verantwortet hatte, hat hierfür den Nachlass aus dem Keller der Mutter der Künstlerin umfassend gesichtet und für La Virreina Centre de la Imatge in Barcelona aufbereitet. Nun ist ein Teil des Konvoluts, das neben Dokumentationen von Böttners Performances, Pastellkreidezeichnungen, Malereien, Papierarbeiten und Fotografien auch zahllose persönliche Ephemera umfasst (unter anderem Visitenkarten, Briefe, Zeitungsausschnitte), im Württembergischen Kunstverein Stuttgart zu sehen.

Als Achtjähriger berührt der in Chile geborene Ernst Lorenz beim Versuch, einen Vogel zu fangen, eine Oberleitung, beide Arme werden bis zur Schulter amputiert. Auf die Übersiedlung nach Deutschland folgt Ende der 1970er-Jahre ein Kunststudium in Kassel, das mit der Annahme einer transidenten Identität sowie einer aus der physischen Abweichung abgeleiteten Performance- und Bildpraxis einhergeht, die durch Aufenthalte im subkulturellen New York der 1990er-Jahre zentrale Impulse erhält.

In Stuttgart sind es vor allem die autonomen Zeichnungen und intimen Studienblätter, in denen Lorenza Böttners kritische wie poetische Strategie eines *Queering* popkultureller und kunsthistorischer Bildwelten den größten Effekt erzielt. Böttners Selbstentwürfe in pornografischen Rollenspielen – als Ballerina oder barmarter Muskelprotz, als geflügeltes Wesen oder Modequeen – vermitteln ein spürbares Begehren, in den gezeichneten Visionen eines in jeder Hinsicht wandlungsfähigen Körpers aufzugehen, deren imaginäre Durchschlagskraft sich damit nur dürftig beschreiben lässt.

Geradezu obszön gegenüber Böttners erfindungsreicher Ausschöpfung des *Trans-crip*-Genres verhält sich Joel-Peter Witkins aus-

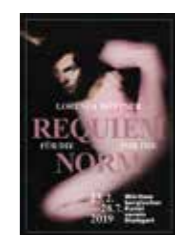
gestellte Fotografie Lorenzas als behinderter Bachus (»Bacchus Amelus«, 1986), deren himmelschreier Exotismus weniger über die Traditionslinie der *directorial photography* zur Salonmalerei des 19. Jahrhunderts erzählt als über die Spektakelkultur historischer Freak-Shows. Auch hier zeigt sich Böttners eigener Zugang



Lorenza Böttner und Johannes Koch, ohne Titel, 1983. SW-Fotografie, 12,5 x 17,5 cm. Courtesy: Privatsammlung.

in einer Collage mit dem Slogan »Lorenza. Das armlose Wesen« überlegen, auch weil sie den dargestellten Akt des Schminkens als künstlerisches Medium reklamiert. Die enthaltenen, im Stil der 1980er-Jahre kolorierten Selbstporträts wiederum basieren auf der Fotoserie »Face Art« (1983), die Böttner, taxonomisch fixiert, in diversen Maskeraden zeigt – mit betonten Brauen, als Fabelwesen, perlen-beohringte Frau –, jedoch vergleichsweise konventionell daherkommt.

Lorenza Böttners Auftritt als Maskottchen bei den Paralympics im Jahr 1992, ihre Straßenmalaktionen oder die Hauptrolle in einem co-konzipierten Werbe-Clip der Firma Faber Castell dürften ihren bereits bestehenden Outsider-Status auf künstlerischer Ebene zusätzlich zementiert haben, auch durch die Nähe zu erst später kanonisierten Genres, etwa der Crossdressing-Sparte der Amateurfotografie, an die eine Serie von Schnappschüssen Böttners beim Posieren auf einem Stuhl erinnert. Ein solcher Blick überlagert jedoch leicht die Entdeckung alternativer Codes, darunter die der Realität funktionaler Andersheit, wie sie in einer verwandten, aber zu recht separat präsentierten Aufnahme zu machen ist. Was zunächst wie ein abstrakt-skulpturales Körperstillleben anmutet – Lorenza Böttners Kopf und Oberkörper unter Stoff verborgen, nur die überkreuzten Schenkel freigelegt – entpuppt sich als gänzlich unvertrauter Anblick eines An- oder Entkleidens ohne Arme, dem zugleich das Manko der physisch »norm-konfor-



Lorenza Böttner: Requiem für die Norm / Requiem for the Norm.

Mit einem Textbeitrag von Paul B. Preciado (ger./eng.). Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart 2019. 44 Seiten, 14,8 x 21 cm, zahlreiche SW- und Farbbildungen. Download via Homepage