

AMANDA WILKINSON

Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė *Hexanol*

Private view: 7 February 2020, 6-8 pm
Exhibition dates: 8 February 2020 - 21 March 2020

Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė are the founders of Young Girl Reading Group, a platform through which feminist and queer texts are shared and read out loud, collectively spoken and disseminated. This practice evolved into performances where the act of reading becomes a physical as well as an oral gesture and the performers use phone cameras to record the sounds and movements of each other as well as surrounding objects.

Their interest in creating a multisensory collective experience reached a new level at the 6th Athens Biennial where Gawęda and Kulbokaitė presented a new performance piece titled *YGRG159: SULK*, 2018, during which the fragrance *RYXPER1126AE* was conceived in collaboration with International Flavors and Fragrances Inc.. Together with a chemist, perfumer and smell designer from IFF Inc. they produced a synthetic molecular replica of the smell collected during the performance with the use of headspace technology. The scent is an olfactory distillation of the performance and the artists also see the production of the scent as a performative blending of the real and the virtual, human and machine, organic and inorganic.

In this exhibition, the blurring of these dichotomies is played out in a speculative landscape of sculptural objects, video, scent and sound. The scent *RYXPER1126AE* is dispersed throughout the exhibition using a raw industrial scent dispenser. *Hexanol*, 2019 (the term used for a single molecule that represents the smell of cut grass) consists of fresh hay gathered together in a shape used by traditional field workers in Eastern Europe. Hay was used in the performance *SULK* and is one of the constituents of *RYXPER1126AE* (Hexanol is also the smell of old books, since this molecule is also the scent of decomposing cellulose/paper). This is placed next to a sculpture consisting of small distorted glass structures hanging precariously from a giant rake, once again alluding to nature (the gathering of hay) as well as science (manufactured laboratory tubes). The work's long title is the following quotation from Sappho's description of the Adonia rite in Ancient Greece, in which women mourned the death of Adonis, the consort of Aphrodite:

For when I look at you for a moment, then it is no longer possible for me to speak; my tongue has snapped, at once a subtle fire has stolen beneath my flesh, I see nothing with my eyes, my ears hum, sweat pours from me, a trembling seizes me all over, I am greener than grass, and it seems to me that I am a little short of dying.

The title of the video in the exhibition, *Fledgling*, 2019, comes from Octavia Butler's eponymous science fiction novel, which originally influenced the script for the performance *SULK* from which the video's footage is taken.

The screen is split into two parts, bringing together shots of the performers recording each other and intense close-ups of eyes, accompanied by descriptions of a supernatural landscape where bodies and nature morph into each other.

Infinite shades and intensities of green, violet, purple, brown, red. Vegetable colors and shadows. Infinite silences. Hot summer morning; all the vines in flower, perfuming the air, all the gardens blooming, bearing, fruiting. We were on the ground. Couldn't get up. Our faces were in the dirt, in that soft leaf mold. It was in our nostrils and eyes. Couldn't move. Couldn't see. As if we were in the ground. Sunk into it, part of it.

Enclosure II (an LED display), on the other hand, quotes directly from Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, the words invoking both female persecution and fear of empirical knowledge.

The woman-as-witch was persecuted as the embodiment of the 'wild side' of nature, of all that in nature seemed disorderly, uncontrollable, and thus antagonistic to the project undertaken by the new science.

The porosity of the objects, words, sounds and scent in this exhibition (both literally and metaphorically) is part of Gawęda and Kulbokaitė's investigation into the notion that we can no longer understand bodies as finite unities, but instead as fluid cartographies or distributed networks of corporate agency. The works in the exhibition are a physical embodiment of the themes of the texts read out in the performances. Scent has a particular power to evoke the unpredictable, the experimental, it is nomadic and volatile; when it is released it cannot be fully recaptured; Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė believe it a site that can resist the capitalist imposition of universal exchangeability in a society that created 'Young-Girl', consumer culture's ideal product and model citizen as theorised 20 years ago by Tiqqun.