

ASHLEY HANS SCHEIRL
TRANNNY'S PLEASURES: PAIN_THINGS IN A CRAZY WORLD

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“They say they are inventing a new dynamic. They say they are throwing off their sheets. They say they are getting down from their beds. They say they are leaving the museums the show-cases the pedestals where they have been installed. They say they are quite astonished that they can move.”¹

London, the 1990s. Hans Scheirl (also known under the successive given names of Angela, Hans Angela and, most recently, Ashley Hans) is at the heart of the queer and lesbian scene. Their gang joyously and ironically calls itself the Proud Perverts. At the time, the artist is a brilliant proponent of experimental film, unabashedly mixing genres, playing on the ABC of B movies and low budget genres. They have a particular penchant for home movies, which allow them to present their extended family, founded not on the logic of biological reproduction but rather on a love nourished by friendship, collaborations, queer sex and polyamory. Their watchword is beginning to take shape: “trans-media, trans-gender, trans-genre” – and they will not deviate from that direction.

Paris, autumn 2021. At Galerie Loevenbruck, Ashley Hans Scheirl turns the space into an artwork in its own right. And that space is inhabited: by the works on show, by the bodies of visitors moving around, by the ghosts of what has happened and what will happen. All this energy, the artist points out, “activates” the exhibition, annihilating the “distancing machine” that is the white cube. If you google “Tranny’s Pleasures” you will not get some tearoom in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, but a host of porn videos showing trans sexuality, as indicated by the pejorative term for trans people, “Tranny.” To choose this title is to turn the insult into a badge of pride, just as terms like woofah or dyke have been assimilated and transformed into a militant gesture.

But what exactly is happening in this exhibition? The starting point of it all is drawing, which is a fundamental act for this artist. Here we have before us oversized drawings, exaggerated linear objects that, cut out into forms, posing on metal legs, become co-protagonists in space, like so many subverted clichés, gendered archetypal figures. These flat sculptures are like cartoonish, disguised figures. The exhibition presents a *mise-en-abyme*: the paintings are converted into accessories, into décor, a staging of our bodies – bodies being at the heart of Ashley Hans Scheirl’s artistic process. From experimental film to painting both abstract and figurative, the libidinal impact remains intact: the point is to scrabble at categories. Financial fluxes, body fluids, the spread of desire are constantly flowing, sometimes meeting, before making a sudden deviation, changing their rhythm, forming a host of transverse networks.

The patriarchal and capitalist system is like a hen whose head has been cut off, running around all over the place, not knowing that it’s already dead. Let us follow Ashley Hans Scheirl’s banner, an indeterminate form surmounted by a shower of gold, not unreminiscent of Zeus having his way with Danaë locked up in her tower, but in a new version of the mythological tale in which not only does Danaë get away, but she also takes the opportunity to change sex en route. The violence of social power is transformed into libidinal energy. Hanging from the outside of the gallery, this banner shows us the way: “There is one more revolution for us to experience (and make happen), that of the desexualisation of the way we perceive the body and live our own corporeality.”² This desexualisation is reconfigured by Ashley Hans Scheirl into resexualisation. The idea is to imagine a sexuality that is not centred on the “bio-penis” (to use their words), but on fantasies and on a practice exploring other gestures, other paths, as they do so well in their life and in their art – multigendered and transformative as they are.

Daria de Beauvais

1. Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (1969), University of Illinois Press, p. 173.

2. Camille Froidevaux-Metterie, *Le Corps des femmes. La bataille de l'intime*, Paris: Philosophie magazine Éditeur, 2018, p. 108.