

The approach

The problem with having a body

is that it always needs to be somewhere

Alexandra Bircken
Heidi Bucher
Kiki Kogelnik
Juliana Cerqueira Leite
Paul Maheke
B. Ingrid Olson
Zilia Sánchez
Ana Vieira

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Curated by Nora Heidorn

Across generations and geographical and political contexts, the artists in this group exhibition share a concern with the way the female body occupies and structures its surrounding space. *The problem with having a body / is that it always needs to be somewhere* will suggest correlations and reciprocities between the practices of Heidi Bucher, Kiki Kogelnik, Zilia Sánchez and Ana Vieira in the 1960s and 1970s and recent work by Alexandra Bircken, Juliana Cerqueira Leite, Paul Maheke and B. Ingrid Olson. Methods of casting and the direct contact between the body and the material are prevalent in the exhibition, exploring the human scale, performativity and spatiality through movement and physical labour.

Some of the artworks will themselves perform: posing for pleasure, they seem self-aware of their capacity to incite desire and of their status as beautiful objects in the gallery, offered up to the audience for inspection. Other pieces construct the body as a living political and biohistorical archive, an interconnected system traversed by flows of materials, desire and power (with reference to Paul Preciado, 2014). The works employ latex, video, plaster, sculpted canvas, photographic processes, mirror, textiles and wax, to address both haptic and scopic senses, making the visitor subtly aware of their own body moving through the exhibition space.

The curves and protrusions on the Cuban artist **Zilia Sánchez'** canvases turn the image plane into a sculpted surface, whereby the stretched canvas figures as the skin of the form. From the 1960s, she made works using acrylic on canvas, that function less as pictorial planes, and behave more like sculptures, or bodies even, as they occupy space. The paintings of Sánchez have been described to "oscillate between inciting and reciprocating desire" (Irene Small, 2014). The surface and its erotic connotation with skin, implying touch, is apparent in several works in the exhibition, such as the leathery latex casts by Heidi Bucher or the grainy texture of the sculpture by B. Ingrid Olson.

If taken releasing heat by **B. Ingrid Olson** resembles a mould in its concave and modular form. The absorbent, receding nature of the wall-mounted sculpture juxtaposes the inflated and generous protrusion of Sánchez' painting.

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In Olson's photographic works, a fragmented body appears in cropped compositions that destabilise the pictorial spaces. The lack of wholeness of both the subject and its surrounding space leads to a loss of orientation, an effect that is furthered through a layering of spaces and times that Olson achieves by inserting smaller prints into larger pictures. Colours and textures of backdrops and sculptural props accumulate into complex sets within interior spaces. The photographs that the artist takes of herself remain largely anonymous, and yet, her gestures and poses suggest intimate communication.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Swiss artist **Heidi Bucher** developed a practice of embalming architectural elements in latex. When the liquid had dried into a thick skin, she stripped it off, casting facades, floors, and entire rooms. The cast of a parquet floor displayed on a low platform in the gallery invites the viewer to imagine entry into the work, subtly addressing the viewer's own body and its movement through the exhibition.

While Bucher had dipped garments and bedding (the objects that directly envelop our bodies) into latex when she first began to work with the material, the bodysuit is one of the only pieces she made on the living body. Whilst making architectural casts in a former women's prison, Bucher applied the method to one of her assistants, resulting in the body of work *Der Schlüpfakt der Parkettlibelle* (which translates to *The Hatching of the Parquet Dragonfly*). Rubbed with iridescent mother of pearl, the hanging garment looks at once like an ancient archaeological finding and a futuristic worker's overall.

Employing equally performative working processes, the Brazilian, New York-based artist **Juliana Cerqueira Leite** makes movement, intense physical labour and the direct contact of her body against the materials central concerns in her practice. The Cyanotype *Summertime Blues* shows a fragmented or collaged body in motion. Limbs, hair, and droplets of sweat are transferred onto the blue textile through a photographic process, whereby the outlines of the artist's body, lying on the fabric, are printed onto the treated textile by exposure to sunlight.

Leite's sculpture *Transitional* is part of a series in which she cast her own body in consecutive stages of movement in relation to quotidian objects. In this piece, she made casts of herself getting into a bathtub, where the resulting forms, although rather cryptic, can be deciphered as the negative space created by her movement. The plaster is died with a different pigment for each layer, to cast her body during each shift on her way into the tub, so that the different coloured layers read as a three-dimensional graph of movement over time. The work was made directly on the wooden base on wheels, so that it in turn becomes a new utilitarian object attached to the sculpture. In this work, the artist explores the interdependence and resulting choreography between the body and the supporting structures we use every day.

The Lady M.M.T.S. is from a series of wooden cut-out silhouettes by Portuguese artist **Ana Vieira** from the late 1960s. The sculpture with a mirror inset is reminiscent of decorative wooden furniture, such as a mantelpiece or a dressing table. Installed next to Bucher's parquet floor, the sculptural

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hanging creates the impression of a domestic space, hinting at a scenographic arrangement of an imagined room within the gallery.

Vieira painted a silhouette in profile onto the mirror in vibrant blue, superimposing two perspectives - a frontal and a side view - onto a generic bust. Although the title of the piece seems to allude to a specific person, the silhouette behaves as a placeholder, a mere outline onto which to project our desires, as well as our own mirror image as we approach the work. "Subjectivity is thin, and radically so", writes the critic Alex Kitnick about the stencilled and cut-out human figures in Kiki Kogelnik's work, and the statement resonates just as much in the context of Vieira's piece.

Kiki Kogelnik created a number of 'female robots' and 'human spare parts' during the 1960s and 1970s, following her move from her native Vienna to New York. In an era shaped by the space race and cold war, Kogelnik proposed fragmented technobodies, mechanically supplemented cyborgs floating weightlessly in colourful compositions. The scale and shapes of the torsos, hands and limbs in her works result from outlines taken from friends who 'posed' for the artist. The joined red hands on view in this exhibition, one of the 'human spare parts', is made of the then new material polyurethane, a plastic which the artist quickly assimilated into her practice.

There is a distinctive X-Ray aesthetic to *Female Robot*, for which Kogelnik used black spray paint over stencils. Cog-like circles on the armless torso are reminiscent of the DialPak dispenser of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s. Kogelnik offers up vision of the inside of the body, where a stylised network of internal organs suggests that her robot is also a reproductive organism. A pair of scissors lies at the ready; a symbol Kogelnik used to represent both violence and emancipatory power.

Doris by **Alexandra Bircken** equally proposes woman not as natural and essential, but as technologically and pharmaceutically supplemented. The German artist's sculpture is made from a mould taken from an eponymous friend, in which crumpled pieces of clothing are cast in liquid wax. The 'body slice' is headless and has been halved lengthwise to allow for internal views, similarly to an anatomical sculpture. Screws and bolts are scattered within the body of the sculpture, along with a contraceptive coil in the position of the uterus. Bircken makes us complicit in a medicalised and pathologising mode of looking at the female (reproductive) body that is itself violent.

The wholly artificial body of *Doris* hangs in stark contrast above the latex parquet by Bucher, an architectural cast that appears utterly organic, like a leather hide.

The two-channel video installation *Mutual Survival, Lorde's Manifesto* by French, London-based artist **Paul Maheke** is presented in the second gallery. Featuring the dancer Jamila Johnson Small, as well as the Tropical Isles Carnival Dance Troupe rehearsing for London's Notting Hill Carnival, Maheke proposes dance as a practice of resistance. As if we were witnessing a contagion between the two screens, the separate improvisation and routines of the individual dancer and the troupe at times synchronise.

In this piece, Maheke is neither performer nor choreographer, but a cautious onlooker. His hand-

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held camera cautiously follows the movements of the dancers, resisting a voyeuristic gaze. The word 'performance' does not seem to apply, as in these videos we become part of intimate practices that are pursued in an ongoing mode of working through the body.

Committed to uncovering pathways to knowledge and memories held in the queer black body, Maheke has subtitled his footage with a fictional manifesto: Phrases on survival and decolonisation of the body by the feminist writer Audre Lorde contextualise the video. Accompanied by reverberating base sounds as if one were approaching a club, the work is felt reverberating deep within.

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