

*Sultana*

PAUL MAHEKE

«Aqua Alta»

Galerie Sultana

Apr-Jun 2017

Paul Maheke, «Acqua Alta»  
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All the volcanoes, and their sisters

On the numerous nights I find myself thinking of Paul Maheke's practice it often leaves me in tensed obscurities : it triggers the same kind of mental translations as the sight of high tides - which makes me very aware of the competing forces (or the combined effort?) of the moon and the sun and makes me wonder about water's gravity - The type of questions you ask yourself while whispering to your own ear, and which, in a quarter of a second, allow you to draw far fetched connections between individualness and the black holes of the universes. While avoiding the pitfall of systemisation it would be then interesting to use this observation look at the artist's work through a concept, a gesture: that of cross-referencing. An entry point that becomes particularly telling if one looks closely at Paul Maheke's project «Becoming a Body of Water or How to Unlearn Resistance as Opposition» that he has developed over the last few months (August 2016 · June 2017).

Grounded in Astrida Neimanis' research on hydrofeminism, the scientific explorations of Dr. Masuru Emoto and Dr. Luc Montagnier into memory of water, and most probably informed by a residency the artist took part in at the Impulstanz Dance Festival in Vienna during the summer of 2016, the project materialised in three performances (Union Pacific, London, The Showroom, London, Tate Modern, London) and three solo shows (Center, Berlin, Assembly Point, London) ~ the last one being «Acqua Alta» at Sultana gallery in Paris. However, it is rather unsatisfying to section the different iterations of the project in such ways as they seem to operate vis-a-vis and echo one another.

For instance, a video can be used in one exhibition and then be repurposed for a performance, similarly, a performance can become the central element of a video installation. For «What Flows Through and Across» at Assembly Point (January · February 2017), Paul Maheke used the exhibition space as a screening room for his latest video, an environment to house his latest sculptures and a dance studio for a series of open rehearsals which culminated in a closing night of performance. In order to get a better understanding of where the necessity of these overlaps seats we must pay particular attention to the performative nature of the artist's practice as it is there that we can witness the first crossovers.

As a self-taught dancer, Paul Maheke has nurtured a specific relationship to his body and his movements which led him to develop, in the first instance, a body of work exploring the connection between a desired body - the fetish -, the colonised body - whose subjectivity is denied -, its spectacularisation in relation to the dominant external gaze. With «Becoming a Body of Water or How to Unlearn Resistance as Opposition» the artist was interested in locating the energies and multi-layered stories stocked in the movements his body is able to generate, spontaneously, or in response to a rhythm, to a music. This ability is then scuttled through two different processes: the struggle/conflict and the loop.

The struggle and the loop are two recurring motives in Paul Maheke's last performances. The struggle in which the dancer engages with his body as well as the battle between the water contained in this body and the envelope that contains it. This performed struggle is also a fight against performativity itself : the refusal to buy into what is expected from a body as his (as in masculine, brown and queer). This is where the loop comes into play. The repetition of the same movements, sequenced and repeated, is a way to fight against the understanding of performance as the staging of an isolated body that would be looked at as a surface. For the artist, the process of becoming a body of water strangely implies to partly break with a sense of fluidity in the movements.

Paul Maheke's sculptures and installations have similar functions but operate on a rather different mode. While often playing with transparency, micro-sensitivity and the presence of printed texts, they mostly take the form of either objects that are used to show better - shelves, fish tanks... - or hide better - curtains - to in turn subvert their original function. In this twist the sculptures too seem to resist performativity. They then become the secondary subtitles to the artist's videos and performances - and again, allow us to hear their multiple resonances.

At Sultana, once again, Paul Maheke's works echo to one another and to the sonic ripples of Sophie Mallet's soundwork, this time to flood the space of the gallery. Here we hear the volcanoes coming to life beneath our feet.

Cédric Fauq

«My current research imagines the body as an archive using its waters as pathways to information and knowledge. This personal inquiry occupy a metaphorical space wherein which the body resonates and echoes with the broader geographical, socio-political and historical context that have birthed it. With particular attention to dance, it proposes to rearticulate the representations of queer Blackness that emerge from Western imaginations by addressing History through non-human subjectivity. .» —Paul Maheke

Paul Maheke (b.1985, Brive-la-Gaillarde) lives and works in London. He completed his MA in Art Practice at l'École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy (2011) as well as a programme of study at Open School East, London (2015). Maheke was awarded the South London Gallery Graduate Residency 2015-16 culminating in a personal exhibition 'I Lost Track of the Swarm' in late spring 2016.

His recent projects include: «Diaspora Platform Pavilion», cur. David A. Bailey, Venice, (2017, group); «Ten Days Six Nights » cur. Catherine Wood and Andrea Lissoni, Tate Modern, London (2017); 'Acqua Alta', Sultana Gallery, Paris (2017, solo exhibition); «What Flows Through and Across », Assembly Point, London (2017, solo show); 'In Me Everything is Already Flowing', Center, Berlin (2016, solo show); «No Ordinary Love», Galerie Sultana, Paris (2016); «The Rebel Man Standard Festival», Guest Projects, London (2016); «I Would Have Done Anything For You / Gimme More», cur. Cédric Fauq, London (2016); Festival de l'Inattention, Paris (2016); «I Lost Track of the Swarm», South London Gallery (2016); Artist-in-Residence at Fonderie Darling, Montreal, Canada (2015); «ODRADEK», Les Instants Chavirés, cur. Mikaela Assolent and Flora Katz, Montreuil, France (2015); 59th Salon de Montrouge, Montrouge, France (2014)