

The approach

Shapeshifters

Sascha Braunig | Sandra Mujinga | Maria Pinińska-Bereś

12 January – 10 February 2019

Preview: Saturday 12th & Sunday 13th January 2019, 12-6pm

Coinciding with CONDO 2019

The Approach is delighted to present *Shapeshifters*, a group exhibition featuring work by Sascha Braunig, Sandra Mujinga, and Maria Pinińska-Bereś. The show will focus on how these artists deal with the ambiguities and slipperiness of subjectivity, identity and visibility within their painting, sculpture, video, and performance work.

Bewitching bodily presences are evoked through symbolic and metaphoric references. Throughout history, the feminine has been considered an untrustworthy, unwieldy and emotional force. But what happens when this stereotype is deconstructed and reclaimed? In these works, the figure – or its absence, a spectre – looms; forms become de-gendered and disembodied; shifting, transmuting and negotiating their own selfhood against that of the assumptions and judgements projected onto them by external social, cultural and historical traditions. The artists conjure human/animal/witch/alien hybrids from a landscape of sensual materials and settings. The body and its fragmentary parts are broken down and abstracted; re-formed as a kind of corporeal architecture.

Sascha Braunig's bodily forms emerge from shadows of themselves; like mirages, we see figures appear from liminal surroundings. In Braunig's new painting, ghostly silhouettes that have seemingly been lurking around a dark corner emerge. Bodies tip-toe into sight, creeping up on the viewer from out of the polka-dotted painting; the two-dimensional painting comes alive as a three-dimensional object. The subject manifests in multiple versions of itself, the figure – painted from life and being a stand-in for a basic female archetype – infinitely mirrors itself, illuminating the flimsiness of female representation and unhelpfulness of stereotyping.

The curtain, as depicted in *Shower Scene*, becomes a useful prop in Braunig's work and is featured in varying forms throughout her practice. The hanging fabric, not only alludes to a kind of physicality, in evoking fleshy, labial folds of skin, but also, in referring to the stage, it suggests a performance or masquerade. The curtain acts as a threshold, a border; it creates a tension and dialogue between what is revealed and what remains concealed, illuminating a constant state of existential instability: the figures in Braunig's work are never one thing or another, they are always changing, morphing and mutating.

Sandra Mujinga also explores questions of visibility and representation through her performance and sculpture. Her work highlights the conflicting nature of online visibility, which, whilst serving as an ever-expansive platform for promoting diversity and difference, simultaneously increases unwanted cyber-surveillance and data collection. This observation is portrayed in *Disruptive Patterns*, a three-screen video where we see a faceless transparent figure dancing whilst amorphous sinewy shapes come and go across the screen, obscuring and camouflaging the already invisible liquid-like dancer.

Mujinga has stated that she has a 'fear of solipsism', that is, she is anxious that we experience a loss of subjectivity when the self becomes mediatised and thus stuck in a self-referential feedback loop (through social media platforms). To combat this, the artist suggests that people need to become more adaptable to their environments. Like Braunig, Mujinga celebrates the ambiguity and anonymity costume affords us, enabling us to hide in plain sight. Her wearable sculptures, *Shawls*, made from sensual skin-like fabrics such as PVC, latex and faux-leather, act as erotically charged shields; their deep opacity deflecting the panoptic digital gaze. Half-elephant, the *Shawls* suggest an exterior toughness, a durability that will protect and preserve the wearer. But more than this, Mujinga's fusing of animal with human (alongside the elephant, she has also made octopus hybrids) honours the symbiotic relationship between man and nature.

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The anthropomorphic forms in the work of **Maria Pinińska-Bereś** also challenge and deconstruct notions of the embodied self, gender and representation. Colour plays a major part in Pinińska-Bereś's work, which has a distinctively 'feminine' palette of primarily pink and white. The work rejects arbitrary associations of these colours with girlishness, and instead they appear simply flesh-like and charged with a powerful sexual energy. In sculptural pieces such as *Swirl on San Marco* and *Window. De-Construction of the Leaning Tower*, the body is broken down and de-hierarchised into an abstract mass, all erotic fleshy folds and soft sensual squishiness.

Pinińska-Bereś was preoccupied with, what she described as, the existential problem of bearing the burden of the 'standard' of femininity. Her work confronts a generally felt condescending attitude towards the feminine or acts relating to female labour (domestic, reproductive, emotional). The artist used symbols which play off standardised notions of femininity, taken from both everyday experience and the mythological. The broomstick, *Sabbath*, is exemplary of this, both being a household cleaning utensil (a tool which Pinińska-Bereś included in performances such as *Just a Broom*, 1984), as well as a symbol of magic and witchcraft. Pinińska-Bereś transforms rituals of the everyday into something more potent, mystical and mysterious. The symbol of the witch (as featured in Sascha Braunig's *Floe* and *Shower Scene*), or its absence (as in Pinińska-Bereś's *Sabbath*), evokes a feminine being that has the ability to shapeshift. Appearing and disappearing, it is a reminder that our selfhood is constituted from the ability to perform and negotiate many selves at once.

The artists in *Shapeshifters* explore the universal experience of embodiment, and question what happens when the 'body' manifests in newly imagined ways. How does this affect our concept of our own subjectivity? And, when we are liquified or broken down into parts, stray limbs, or data, how does this change our ability to relate to the world around us, both in terms of our relationships with other people as well as our environment?

Sascha Braunig (b. 1983, Qualicum Beach, BC, Canada) lives and works in Portland, ME. Recent exhibitions include *The Crease*, Office Baroque, Brussels (2018); *An Assembly of Shapes*, Oakville Galleries, Oakville, ON, Canada (2018); *Free Peel*, Foxy Production, New York, NY (2017); *Bad Latch*, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA (2017); *Shivers*, MoMA PS1, New York (2016-2017); *Torsion*, Kunsthall Stavanger, Norway (2016); *The Trick Brain*, Aishti Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon (2017); *Stranger*, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, OH (2016); *Surround Audience: 2015 New Museum Triennial*, New Museum, New York, NY (2015). Braunig's works are in the permanent collections of Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Zabłudowicz Collection, London and New York; Aishti Foundation, Beirut; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio.

Sandra Mujinga (b. 1989) lives and works in Berlin and Oslo. Recent exhibitions include Bergen Konsthall, Bergen, Norway (forthcoming); *ILYNL (It's Like You Never Left)*, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA (2018); *Hoarse Globules*, UKS, Oslo, Norway (2018); *Calluses*, Tranen, Copenhagen, Denmark (2018); *Skip Zone*, Magenta Plains, New York, NY (2017); *Clear as Day*, performance for the Norwegian Sculpture Biennale (2017); *APPARAT*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, Germany (2017); and *Subjektiv*, Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden (2017).

Maria Pinińska-Bereś (b. 1931, Poznań, d. 1999, Kraków) has shown in major solo and group exhibitions, including *The Performer*, Galeria Monopol, Warsaw (2017); *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London (2016); *Three Women – Maria Pinińska-Bereś Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, Ewa Partum*, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (2011); *Maria Pinińska-Bereś* Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Bunkier Sztuki w Krakowie, Krakow, touring to Galeria Bielska BWA w Bielsku-Białej, Bielsko-Biało and Galeria Miejska Arsenal w Poznaniu, Poznań (1999-2000). Pinińska-Bereś's works are in the National Museums of Krakow, Warsaw and Poznań.

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