

Escaping definitions,
including this one,
since 1949

ArtReview

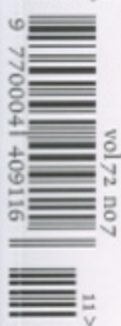
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Nicole Eisenman



A little surreal, a little subversive,
very funny, often obscene

UK £6.50



Vienna's annual *Curated by* festival went ahead this year, despite COVID-19, with 23 participating galleries temporarily handing the reins to guest curators; the pandemic, though, couldn't help but leave its mark on the 2020 edition. The pressure under which the virus has put gallerists and curators was tangible, almost visible. Some shows even felt like they were organised across borders by video call – not unimaginative, nor simply messy, but rushed and unsettled. We'd like to think curators were fastidious creatures, but, at times, it appeared as though this year's theme, *Hybrids*, came second to the urge to put something – almost *anything* – together.

Even if the theme wasn't clearly explicated in most of the shows, it doesn't lessen the theoretical importance of hybridity. On the one hand, we might argue that the latter is a kind of default position in globally connected multicultural societies, even if artists and curators don't go out of their way to acknowledge it. The savvy curators know this full well, and this came across in the most coherent shows, considered below; but many others seemed to expect hybridity to pop up as if by magic when they threw together disparate things. On the other hand, artists, curators and critics can themselves produce hybrid forms by making diverse materials and approaches collide with each other in a conceptual space where each is given equal importance. Nearly every exhibition in *Curated by* is a group show, so there was plenty of opportunity for this, but it was easier to spot time/place/culture montages in individual works from different shows than whole exhibitions supposedly dedicated to this idea. To use three examples, works by Sarah Lucas at Meyer Kainer, Hale Tenger at Georg Kargl and Kayode Ojo at Sophie Tappeiner all hybridised different kinds of ancient symbolism. These objects don't simply refer to hybridity but exemplify it in terms of the body (Lucas), styles of empire (Tenger) and the global antiques market (Ojo).

At Meyer Kainer's show, curated by Lucas and Kris Lemsalu, Lucas's *DICK 'EAD* (2018) asked what it means to be prurient in an age when we can choose to hybridise our own bodies as never before. A spindly bronze body, faceless but with breasts like odd, staring, googly eyes, sat coiled into an old-timey

barber's chair while a huge, wildly disproportionate red phallus bounded from its loins. A phallic theme continued at Georg Kargl, where curator Alistair Hicks placed Hale Tenger's tiny *Turkish Delight* (2003), alone on a plinth in the huge space downstairs. The majolica terracotta figure, based on Anatolian fertility god Priapus (originally found in Ephesus, Turkey), has a tiny body but boasts an enormous penis. Hybridity here derived from overlapping eras and belief systems, since the work is decorated in a cobalt blue and turquoise Iznik palette with floral designs, like the kinds of tiles produced during the height of the Ottoman Empire five centuries ago. The connection between empire and hybridity should, one hopes, not need explaining.

At Sophie Tappeiner, curator Jeppe Ugelvig positioned Kayode Ojo's *A Very Unusual but Very Elegant Gesture* (2018) front and centre of a diverse show. This 56-second-long video shows a besuited white art dealer describing a wood-carved divination cup from nineteenth-century Nigeria, explaining how it is one of the finest examples of its kind that he knows of. The viewer heard the bristling hum of hundreds of other voices in the background, as if we were attending some hellishly refined antiques fair of similarly expensive trophies.

Marina Fokidis imagined what alternative, hybrid forms of social and cultural cohesion could look like at Christine König by, as she states in her curatorial booklet, 'dig[ging] into the future', exploiting material from the gallery's vaults, pairing new and old works from different times and places. The exhibition was bookended by two works by Gerhard Rühm which express an absolutely certain sense of identity. Both titled *erweitertes ich-bild* (2000/2020), each consists of the word 'Wir' ('We') with a hugely extended letter 'i'. The newer one, a mural painted directly onto the gallery wall, was visible from the street and greeted the visitor on entry; the earlier work, in collage and pencil on thin cardboard, stood at the back of the show. Rühm's apparent confidence in collectivism came under question in Christian Nyampeta's 38-minute film *Sometimes It Was Beautiful* (2018), a complex study of Sweden's role in colonialism as articulated

in films, social and religious attitudes, and museum acquisition practices.

As *Time Went On, A Rumour Started* at Gianni Manhattan, curated by James Lewis, concerned itself with our subjective experiences of time, and contained just three works. Guillaume Maraud's *Untitled* (23.10 — 5.12.2015, PARIS) (2015/2020) is a series of funeral urns connected to unused pieces of furniture (including chairs and a mini-refrigerator) belonging to the gallery. In the middle of the gallery space was an authorless, mysteriously compelling YouTube clip bringing together a ten-minute looped section of *Stone in Focus* by Aphex Twin with a single shot from Ron Fricke's non-narrative documentary *Baraka* (1992), showing Japanese macaques bathing in a hot spring. The most visually arresting piece, however, was Mire Lee's *Made of only hearts at gianni manhattan* (2020), an infernal zombie fountain made from severed parts of her other sculptures, spurting out and recirculating a slimy pinkish material from a flailing pipe at the top, collected in a metal tray at the bottom.

Despite the presence of works by Eliza Douglas and Iván Argote, the art of Jojo Gronostay dominated Chiara Vecchiarelli's *Ups and Downs of a Flipped Planet* at Hubert Winter, a show about how human beings position themselves in relation to the surface of the planet as a whole and what this does to constructions like the 'Global South'. Amid broken-off stiletto heels that Gronostay found in a Ghanaian market, scattered liberally on the floor throughout, were hangers showing black and white leather jackets from the artist's clothing range *Dead White Men's Clothing* – a phrase deriving from the Ghanaian *Obroni Wawu*, used in the 1970s to refer to the second-hand clothes worn by new arrivals from the other side of the world. The five-part photographic series *Chateau Rouge Displays* (2020), meanwhile, shows us the cardboard boxes used by African street sellers in Paris to sell fake designer gear, quickly abandoned once the police show up. One of the prints presents boxes with the words 'Highness', 'New Dream', 'Aesthetic' and 'Europe' printed on their sides: reminders that hybrid styles come with an emotional as well as a monetary price-tag.

Max L. Feldman

facing page, top Sarah Lucas, *DICK 'EAD*, 2018, bronze, concrete, cast iron and acrylic paint, 172 × 78 × 116 cm. Photo: Robert Glowacki. © the artist. Courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London and Meyer Kainer, Vienna

facing page, bottom Kayode Ojo, *L'Amant Double* (Vienna), 2020, mixed media, 115 × 183 × 60 cm. Courtesy the artist and Sweetwater, Berlin

