

Press Release, Sep 19, 2018

ZOLLAMT<sup>MMK</sup> 27 October 2018 – 6 January 2019

## MARIANNA SIMNETT



Marianna Simnett, *Blood In My Milk*, 2018, Courtesy the artist and Jerwood / FVU Awards

“‘Head down’, she said. And I did. She said that I was too beautiful to play outside.” – *Blood in My Milk* (2018)

“So we had done her an injustice; she was not at all abnormal....” Letter of 8 March 1895 from Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess

As legend has it, Abbess Saint Æbbe the Younger of Coldingham cut off her nose to avoid being raped by the Vikings. Based on that story, in the work by Marianna Simnett a young girl maims herself. For the sake of her innocence and the promise of freedom, she seeks by these means to escape the threat of male violence. Unadulterated purity and beauty face impending invasion and sickness. Only absolute sterility offers protection from the onset of disease. Within the protective zone, however, the body takes on a life of its own and technological apparatuses gain sovereignty. In a nightmare-like sequence, removed body parts develop consciousness and become vengeful opponents to the body that has shed them. A “minimally invasive” vein operation is performed on a patient unwilling to move. The camera shots blend seamlessly with laboratory experiments on cockroaches whose movements can be controlled by way of targeted shocks. As remote-controlled “biobots”, the extremely resilient animals are to penetrate regions uninhabitable for man. The animal thus technically manipulated and degraded to an object at the same time possesses a superiority that makes the human body seem all the more vulnerable, powerless in its conditionality and dependent on medical intervention.

In the video installation *Blood in My Milk* by the British artist Marianna Simnett, the individual episodes merge to form a drastic narrative about present-day mechanisms of control that survey gender and the body as contested territory. Obscenity and immersion come about precisely there where the camera does its invasive work, where the closeness of what is shown exceeds our natural faculty of sight and penetrates the body. Every pore, every secret becomes visible. The result is horror, brought about not

by fiction but by the realism of the flesh, of the body, of mechanical objects ranging from simple gadgets to high-end technologies. The film sequences are infused with hierarchical power structures and categorical dichotomies that drastically dissolve, or are painfully defeated by the protagonists, as the narratives unfold.

Medical, technological and pharmaceutical interventions in the human and animal body alike, and their underlying economic, social and patriarchal power structures, form the dominant narrative in the work of Marianna Simnett. The boundaries, both cultural and ideological, that the protagonists constantly run into are invisible, but none the less violent. The constant control exercised by everyone over everyone and by the self over the self brings about a rigid system with conditional loss of control from which it is impossible to escape unharmed. Simnett's figures seek their freedom in places where, from a position of powerlessness, they are forced to act while at the same time they are incapable of acting. Their actions are drastic, irrational, violent. Their bodies become objects of negotiation only to be reconquered bit by bit in the course of the film.

The film script of *Blood in My Milk* is based on a long research process during which Marianna Simnett held conversations with doctors, farmers and students – also as a means of developing a language for the protagonists. All roles were played by non-actresses and non-actors who are shown carrying out their real professions in the film. The five-channel video installation *Blood in My Milk* is the first exhibition of Marianna Simnett's work to be held in Europe outside England.

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