

BUNNY ROGERS PECTUS EXCAVATUM



ZOLLAMT^{MMK}

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BUNNY ROGERS
PECTUS EXCAVATUM



26.01.-28.04.19

The real constitutes itself by permanently overlapping with the symbolic and the imaginary. The relative emphasis assigned to the relationships between each of these three elements depends on the individual as well as on his or her presence. In the work of Bunny Rogers, affect, experience, identification and community, fiction and reality, imagination and physical presence merge into a present subject whose altered perception represents an entire generation.

We have little knowledge about the invertebrate beings in the pitch-black depths of the oceans; all the wilder have we imagined them for centuries. Giant squids, for example, have never before been seen in their own habitat, only debilitated and confused in harbors or dead on beaches or in the stomachs of sperm whales. As studies of smaller squids show, their sensoria and their brains are highly sensitive, their perception finely discriminating. Their eyes—extremely responsive owing to the relatively low degree of light loss—have insights into the abysses of the seas that remain hidden to us.

In her exhibition *Pectus Excavatum*, the American artist Bunny Rogers (b. 1990) is creating a landscape that subtly intertwines inside and outside, mountain peaks and ocean depths, thus exposing the framework of our conceptions of nature—as precise as they are oversimplified—in which knowledge and experience are inseparably linked with the imagination. Smells give rise to memories, hands freeze in ice. All elements are situated on the boundary between naturalism and fiction; they are both physically present and digital, both experiential space and two-dimensional image.

Conversation

Bunny Rogers / Susanne Pfeffer

SUSANNE PFEFFER During the preparations for your exhibition, I was reminded of Jacques Lacan's three "registers," whose relationships to one another he describes: Lacan differentiates between the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. He conceives of them as inseparably interwoven, like a Borromean knot. In a sense, your work seems to me to be an in-depth examination of that idea. Through the changes in technology taking place these days—changes as rapid as they are violent—, the distinctions between the real, the symbolic and the imaginary have become fluid. Their relationships to one another are always in a state of flux and rapid change, particularly when we look at the past decades.

BUNNY ROGERS I think that, because of the way I work, I often have a general idea of an exhibition but, within that idea, certain themes are present that I don't really understand until I complete the exhibition. It's part of my process: working with something like a language that is subjective and personal. You can't really separate your subjectivity and the imaginary, the real and the symbolic. It kind of gets meshed into one. Your real life might as well be imaginary; your imaginary life is as surreal as your real life is, in a certain way, for me. And then symbols become so loaded with value systems that you're hanging onto them for dear life. Whether or not you follow them or acknowledge them, you're afraid of them or you hate them—those are the symbols that define your life. And I recognize them in my work often after I've made things. I've always had a hard time separating the real from the imaginary because I don't want to and I don't really feel a need to. Even though it can be difficult, one of the benefits is that you end up getting a more accurate picture of what a memory really looks like. How do you remember the death of a loved one and a funeral? You walked around, ate lunch earlier that day and talked to a friend, you saw posters as you were walking by or you read a few pages of a magazine—that's all going to affect that memory and how you remember it. So, I always keep in mind that nothing is too random to be related to a memory. If you're making the connection, there's a reason.

This is related to an aspect of my work that people can find offensive. If you remember the death of a loved one and you combine it with your favourite cartoon, people are probably going to find that strange because they expect you to differentiate a seemingly minor event from a personal, very real one, grounded in the real world—that is, literally the death of a living person. But when you combine that with a cartoon, which is supposedly not real and in a fictional setting, well, that’s blasphemous: “How can you do that?” But to me it’s easy to do that, because my brain works that way.

S.P. It’s just the way Marcel Proust describes it in *In Search of Lost Time*: A certain taste can trigger everything and it’s all part of your thinking and your memory. I really like what you recently said, that through dealing with memories you change all of the memories. Smell and its relationship to memory is also an element of your show at ZOLLAMT^{MMK}. But maybe we should talk about it more generally first: for a long time, a lot of your work revolved around the Columbine High School massacre. The show you’re preparing now is the first one that doesn’t.

B.R. Yes. To be clear, there were two shows very explicitly about Columbine. The first one dealt with the library (*Columbine Library*, 2014), the second one with the cafeteria (*Columbine Cafeteria*, 2016). They dealt with these real spaces that existed in time during the massacre. And then the third show, *Brig Und Ladder* (2017) at the Whitney Museum in New York, was the third and final part of the *Columbine* trilogy. But I didn’t make it explicitly about the massacre because I wanted it to be something of a resolution. There are still the elements of Columbine in it. The video takes place in the school auditorium, for example, which is a more abstract place because it wasn’t a main setting of violence during the massacre. But there’s a performance taking place in an animation in the auditorium, and the sculptures that are used in the performance are copies of furniture that were present in Columbine High School, but personal colour coding and numerology take precedence.

For *Columbine Library*, the first part of the trilogy, the show was overloaded with visual symbols of my childhood, whether it was sculpture incorporating “items” originating from Neopets or the fifteen portraits with each one referencing at least one to three or more tele-

vision shows, movies and books. When I look at it now, I think, wow, there’s a lot going on and maybe it’s a bit convoluted or overly complicated. However, I can’t control how I connect and register memories, and the artwork follows that logic.

Although I feel like *Columbine Cafeteria* is pared down a little more, it’s still quite loaded. In the *Cafeteria Wardrobe*, there’s the Pokémon upholstery fabric, there’s a Picasso Harlequin outfit, there’s the wench outfit, there are the three sweat suits inspired by *My Little Pony*, there’s the love lock, there are pointe ballet shoes; there’s so much going on. It’s a good representation of how my mind looks when I’m thinking about a show. I want to make a display case, but now it’s a wardrobe—what am I going to put in it? And it fills out in this way. With *Brig Und Ladder* I got a lot of the symbolism out of my system, which I think is important.

S.P. And do you feel haunted by the symbols?

B.R. I try not to be. I’m haunted by subjects and I’m haunted by people. I feel like I’m less haunted by, for instance, a show, where I may be messy in the presentation or may have overshared information. Making art for me is embarrassing by default but it’s something I swallow. Being vulnerable is generally uncomfortable, but it’s important. I’m more haunted by the fact that I won’t remember why I did things in five years. I’m comfortable with “laying it all out” in a sense, because I see value in it, in archiving.

In *Brig Und Ladder* there was much more restrained colour coding and a new logic going on. I didn’t oversaturate the space with things that weren’t needed. I needed to do that show in order to talk about this one relationship that I had. It was painful to do it. And then, the Louisiana show followed immediately, where I did a funeral for myself. When I look at them now, the four shows, it was a very heavy series of shows, autobiographically. I was admitting a lot about my personal life and myself. And then I lose everything and I’m alone. That’s how I break up the shows in terms of an arc of events. *Columbine Library* and *Cafeteria* go through the rage, the alienation, then solace in obsession, and redemption. *Brig Und Ladder* is utter despondence. Finally, death in *Farewell Joanperfect* (2017). It’s so dramatic and theatrical. But I meant it. I meant every part of it. I didn’t know where

it was going at the beginning. Looking back, I have to wonder if that was where it would go, where it will always go.

I think it makes sense that the show we're working on now is heavily about my personal spirituality, my feelings about death and life after death and mythology. It may be dark, superficially, but to me it's optimistic.

S.P. The elements you chose for this show—the fence, the iceberg, the squid—remind me of very different landscapes. You mentioned that the fence could be from a cemetery but also from a zoo or a museum. Then there's this giant animal, a giant squid, which has never before been seen in its original natural habitat, and when it is seen, it's usually dead. And then there's this idea of the iceberg—you never know where it starts and where it stops. You can touch the iceberg; it's really cold and you can really imagine what it's like to freeze, or even what it's like to freeze to death.

B.R. And even the fence smells; compared to my previous work it feels like a different approach. But the direction is very important to me, because each object is so big and separate. It's not just veiled hyperdetailed confession, where I'm desperately asking, "Can you see what I'm talking about? Do you know what I'm talking about?" It's more like "Here's the room; look at it, feel it and experience it." I don't mean that in a cheesy way, because it can feel forced when stuff is interactive. The implied interactivity is nice in a sense, because exhibits I saw at natural history museums as a kid, with their theatrical props and dead displays, have always stayed with me. I mean the space to be overwhelming in its coldness, and the elements in it. The stairway at ZOLLAMT^{MMK} leads to a large open space in which the body of a luminescent giant squid is the centerpiece. The squid is somewhere between a beached animal and a toy. On either side are ominous fences that reference morbid deaths and horror tropes. At the back wall is a large ice structure made to resemble part of an iceberg featured in a Titanic exhibition that toured the US in the late nineties. The idea of the original "iceberg," and also the intention here, is to hold your hand on it and see how long you can stand the cold.

S.P. What I wanted to say is that all these objects are at boundaries. They're real objects, but you play with the idea that they're fictional. For example, the squid is made of

the material we're familiar with from the "Creepy Crawlers." The fence is non-functional; the iceberg is physically present and at the same time appears two-dimensional, like a picture. You move exactly on the boundary between naturalism and fiction.

B.R. The exhibition is almost like a very weird natural history museum—which I like! The giant squid is in a way a symbol of our capacity to acknowledge a simultaneously real but unbelievable creature, but also, in a sense, symbolic of this vast alien underworld that we'll never be able to touch. There's a study that says that about eighty per cent of the ocean is still unexplored or unmapped.

Just like hell, because hell is supposedly beneath us. There are early descriptions and illustrations of hell as blue-flamed and cold. In Dante's *Inferno*, the ninth circle of hell is frozen. Like I said, I think about color coding a lot. I think about how we think about netherworlds, "As Above, So Below," various ideas of inversion.

S.P. When you mentioned that we don't know very much about the ocean, it reminded me of a work by Susanne M. Winterling that I showed in *nature after nature* which deals with the biofluorescence of jellyfish. And there are a lot of animals that communicate with light, a phenomenon scientific research is just beginning to explore. You told me about the glowing "Creepy Crawlers" that you could make yourself when you were a kid and I remembered those creepy monsters that grew when you watered them.

B.R. I had a couple. But they were always so gross. They get big and then fall apart in your hands. But yeah, this is definitely related to my childhood. It's funny, because I'm focussing on the glow-in-the-dark "Creepy Crawlers." I made other ones, but I like the glow-in-the-dark ones more, because they reference the biofluorescence that deep-sea creatures have.

S.P. What I think is interesting is that the fluorescence is also like a memory. It fades when the actual event is over.

Bunny Rogers

Poems

Cunny Poem Vol. 2 (Selection), forthcoming 2019

branching in(definitely)

While it is of utmost importance
Please take your time

all quiet on all fronts

why keep me here? in this place? alone,
where i've been.
there is no big, dark secret
i am keeping from you

i dont understand the last sentance

gentleness is remarkable considering how intolerable
we all are
if someone is kind to you remark at this mercy

Tinman

Let me stop you
Co-opt cold
Fix you to a slump
Eyes stinging and hands folded
I love you

Am I missing Something

Counting the hours minutes
Shells and rings
Lies committed and lives lost
Youve done and youve told
I cant hide for you
WE dont have it anymore
Time locked and time lost
I was swallowing my pain
I was swallowing my pain
No more listening

Beta constrictor

I think about you all the time
and how much I hate you
How much you have failed me
And Thank God
How far you have failed me
and how hard so far
For what I am responsible
and for what I've allowed
I cant question
And Thank God
I will let you keep talking
your language to yourself

Safe vices and chocolate pig

You want to work undisturbed
And How much you will consume
undisturbed

Source of my joy source of my pain

as ladders they have poorly excused themselves
as bridges this is one thing we have not tried
and I cannot give you a date as to when
we would try
given our circumstances
something compels me to burn them all

Fire is not dark enough

you are paying for color and finish
and we desire a deep, rich finish
while the outcome of the fire may give us the
aforementioned desired finish
the process should also be deep and dark
And fire can be deep but not dark

Vegetative state

Don't we owe it to ourselves
Don't we deserve something stable
Can't we depend on each other?
I ain't gonna depend on you
And I ain't gonna depend on anybody
And I'm gonna leave you

See whos dead first

It's a catch 22 enjoy the flight

school bell rings

The Classic "If I CAN't jave you, No on Will"

I went through all the motions

but I still didnt care

I said I will carry it

AS long as you live

No matter

Snowing in Helsinki

Ull b happy to know not much has changed

Desperation is a virtue

Its hard knowing you have to disappear

when all you wanna do is prove youre a person

I been lying to myself

I was blind to it

Dear God

Please Heal My Heart

I Deserve Something in my deference

May

Our feelings coincide

Should

You want blood

(You've Got It)

starstripe

He said Wait to bleed

and held me

I wont need what I want

I wont say what I need

And I trusted him

In a world where she counts

Nonexistent shapes

imaginary remainders

Bed of memory shells

Oddly she counts

And escapes nonetheless

Vampire (And On His Worst Day, He Had Such an Amazing Gift)

What do you want from me

Besides the four legs I rip off my seat

and the physical embodiment of permission

Besides soft legs

Besides all bodies future and past

Their hardcoding and last meals

Their Phantom limb and trauma Shadows

Besides any patterned moth that might

in a flutter flash my face

And the assymetric assemblages you will build

Playing Memory with the wings

Besides the encompassment of all space

For all my bodies, wherever they hide

And all time

For all my bodies, wherever they rest

Besides any balls and all implicated cups

That were at once housed and not housed

Besides the stretch of all shells

Surrounding all seas

With the sliver of thought to reflect you

And not the soft animals

They once protected

christian diazepam

snakes in the grass

A snake in my bed

I thought nothing could surprise me...

but this is a different kind of pain

Even their malice is dishonest

equally exciting

premise what promise?

I'm sure somewhere she's geting fucked

very very very hard

everbefore saw

generous ever make u cry

Cassidy keeps her guilt in check

a habit of the worse lay in history

Someone care in his own strange, selfish way

our book of chalk

in my minds eye I see the outline of a hand on a wall
n its ours
its one of the many drawings we put on the walls of
this tunnel
without light and wet
most in chalk but feel permanent

Michael and change

Michael would have told me this in a way that was gentle
he was sitting in the same room
taking the same test
We turned in blank papers
He said class will be over soon
and can he take me home

Texas blue

radiant me, radiant you
the curtain on the texas revolution rose
and shown a love
as tried as you

List of Works

Creepy Crawlers (Giant Squid), 2019.
Urethane, pigment, glow powder
model

Flames of Hell fan (Red), 2019
Chrome-plated steel fan, wooden
plate, Christmas lights, fabric, thread

Flames of Hell fan (Blue), 2019.
Chrome-plated steel fan, wooden
plate, Christmas lights, fabric, thread

Mount Olympia, 2019. Wood
construction, synthetic rubber
(EPDM), glycol

Ouroboros Fence (Side B), 2019.
Steel, aluminum, *As Above So Below*
perfume (Régime des Fleurs x
Bunny Rogers)

Ouroboros Fence (Side J), 2019.
Steel, aluminum, *As Above So Below*
perfume (Régime des Fleurs x
Bunny Rogers)

Collage (Window), 2019. Collage
made from polyester color foil

Collage (Door), 2019. Collage made
from polyester color foil

Zombie Mop (J), 2019. Stained wood,
metal, cotton, polyester, steel yarn

Zombie Mop (F), 2019. Stained wood,
metal, cotton, polyester, steel yarn

Zombie Mop (L), 2019. Stained wood,
metal, cotton, polyester, steel yarn

Mourning Mop (for Leo), 2019.
Stained wood, metal, cotton,
polyester, glow-in-the-dark yarn,
silk patches

Zombie Mop (Find Him and Kill Him),
2019. Stained wood, metal, cotton,
polyester

The Snake and the Butterfly (1-4),
2019. Stained wood, *Sakura Gelly*
Roll pen ink

Three Hares Mandala (Red Hell),
2019. Stained wood, *Sakura Gelly*
Roll pen ink

Three Hares Mandala (Blue Hell),
2019. Stained wood, *Sakura Gelly*
Roll pen ink

Silk Touch Cobweb (1-10), 2019. Yarn

Maud Pie Scarf, 2019. Silk scarf,
acrylic

Minkie Pie Scarf, 2019. Silk scarf,
acrylic

Zollamt Bricks, 2019. Mondo Bloxx,
acrylic

Shadow Person, 2019. Video
projection

As Above So Below, 2019. 25 perfume
bottles with 25 silver charms
(Régime des Fleurs x Bunny Rogers)

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Bunny Rogers
Pectus Excavatum
curated by Susanne Pfeffer

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