

Not All There

Not All There is a group show that revolves around works of art by international women-identifying artists who use humor to explore serious social and political issues. The exhibition took place at Human Resources in Los Angeles in January 2018 and was unconventional because none of the actual artworks were present in it. Instead, the space was filled with black voids representing each work of art. These voids were activated by live, guided tours given by actress and comedian Davie-Blue.

The text for the tours was co-written by all of the participating artists, in collaboration with critic Cassie da Costa, playwright Rachel Kauder Nalebuff and curator and organizer Emily Mast — 21 abundantly subjective voices in total.

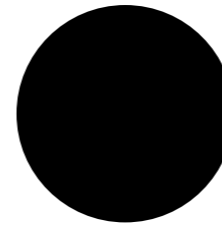
Why didn't visitors to the exhibition get to see any of the artwork? Was it to make fun of them? No. Was it to make fun of the art world? Maybe. Was it because we were examining our shifting relationship to viewing art? Probably. We were wondering: how is it possible to support each other without the resources necessary for installing a traditional show? What can we learn from working together as an organically structured, non-hierarchical, collaborative team of artists? And with the deliberate erasure of physical art objects, can we create resonance with a larger erasure of marginalized voices? When we these voids, what opens up? What do we take in? In many ways, this exhibition is more

about what's missing than omission.

In an age when time and ideas are considered commodities, this exhibition proposed a different kind of attention — one where we use our imaginations, where we are encouraged to spend both real time and virtual time experiencing artworks, where unpacking of messy and often confusing ideas is paramount. This required explicit negotiation and a clarity of communication between everyone involved — which allowed the messiness of our multiple voices to exist together without it feeling like one's own authorship had been violated or negated. This exhibition rejected the status quo of the art world and asked for exactly the opposite: generosity, consent, trust, transparent communication, organization, attention and intention. In this context, the art market was useful only as a tool for antagonization and activation.

The exhibition was prefaced with a performance by the Paris-based artist Bettina Atala and concluded with a round-table conversation that included the artists, assistants and audience alike. There was an upstairs reading room and lending library c/o The Feminist Library on Wheels. And all proceeds from the guided tours went to Write Girl, a non-profit creative writing and mentoring organization that promotes creativity, critical thinking and leadership skills to empower teen girls in L.A.

Girls like us



This is a small, black button. A pin. It says: GIVE. A. DAMN. PERIOD. In all white caps. It was created just before the 2016 presidential election by an art student in response to an assignment for a performance art class. The student, Anna Ayeroff, who was frustrated by her peers' pervasive I DON'TGIVEAFUCK attitude, decided to do something about it. She made a deal with each of her colleagues: if you promise to vote, I will give you a button. A few of them took her up on the offer. Many did

not, but believe me, they cried about it on November 9th. Now, thanks to this pin, we have the language for what apathetic people do: they TAKE A DAMN. So really, we should either always be wearing a GIVE A DAMN or I AM TAKING A DAMN pin. Which also sounds a like I AM TAKING A SHIT, which it kind of is, socially speaking. Anna Ayeroff, GIVE A DAMN., 2016, 1.25 inch pinback button, unlimited edition

Here we see ten vintage photographs of children framed with family style mounting, like, the sort of frame you might see at your grandmother's house. In one of the photographs, a naked baby lies belly down on a Persian rug. The baby wears a black ski mask with holes for eyes and one larger hole for the mouth and chin. She examines a small, black revolver with puckered lips and seems eager to taste the weapon and smother it with drool. In another, the child is maybe seven years old. She's wearing a patchwork dress with puffy white sleeves. Chin up, she stares defiantly into the camera lens. A black bandana covers the lower half of her face and a rifle, which is almost as tall as her, is tucked under one arm. The series was created in response to propaganda being circulated in the United States, that Muslim children were all being trained to be future

terrorists. The language around many antiterrorism efforts makes it seem like children are trained to be threats, not raised, nurtured, neglected or traumatized. The piece is called "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Rebel" by the Iranian artist Amitis Motevalli and these absurd images are of her as a child. Even though the guns are clearly drawn in with Sharpie markers, it becomes an almost truthful documentation of her childhood because someone somewhere is telling themselves that it is true — it is their truth. Double consciousness is the condition of seeing and seeing how you are seen. These images assert that not all consciousnesses are created equal. Amitis Motevalli, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Rebel, 2005, Sharpie on family photographs, 16 x 24 inches

We see a young Angela Davis to the left, Oprah Winfrey in the middle, and Beyoncé on the right. We are meant to imagine that they are seated around a table, discussing what it means to be a woman today. The clips are highly edited, and extracted from different decades and sources, yet it all feels timely. They are not in the same room, but we sense an intimacy and complicity between them. They smile, they sigh, they nod in agreement, they finish each other's sentences. Beyoncé has a few outbursts with some singing and

dancing, Oprah weeps at one point, while Angela's voice never once falters. In their words, which are collaged together to form a composite discussion, being a black woman means giving 100% of yourself all the time. It's exhausting, but it feels good to feel powerful, and they refuse to beat themselves up about it anymore. They know they were born for greatness, but they had to work extra hard to get there. Maybe it's wrong to say that if you're a black woman you'll just get this piece. Maybe you won't. But there's some-

thing specifically about Oprah and Beyoncé and Angela that seems to cut across diaspora, even across sexuality and class. Which is that constant searching of black female identity and how we must posit that searching as perseverance. How sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't and sometimes I don't know what it is. As Beyoncé puts it, she just wants to be a queen. Marisa Williamson, 2011, Black Dinner Party, three channel video, 4'14"

Here we see a black and white photograph of a white woman's flexing arm that is reminiscent of Rosie the Riveter. The arm flexes casually, almost lazily, and wears a stuffed and sagging prosthetic bicep that ties at the shoulder. A protruding nipple appears in the lower righthand corner of the photograph. The woman has young looking hands, her nails are clipped short, and we might even see a hint of dirt underneath them. Her armpits are hairless. The background, which has a bit of sheen, is creased and crumpled. The artist, Arden Surdam, made this piece while working on a series devoted to fetish. Who is looking here I wonder? Whose sexual appetite is this boob whetting? What masculinity is this weird muscle proving? The body is returned to being a shape, an organ. A woman's body doesn't have to be either an object or an agent— it can be a sensory organ that slips

between all these impossible feminine, and masculine, spaces. What does it mean for a woman to pay attention to her own desire, and her own body's way of inhabiting a space, the feeling of a garment or an ornament on her body? A Fetish Room of One's Own. Arden Surdam Muscle Milk, 2016, archival ink-jet print, 20 x 24 inches

The emcee of a standup comedy night explains that comedian and performance artist Kristina Wong needed to cancel last minute, but her vagina is able to perform as her replacement. Kristina then emerges in a giant vagina costume. Kristina's vagina is shy, remarks on how cold and drafty the room is and tells crude jokes straight off the internet. The performance of a vagina is remarkably brash and unsexy the antithesis of the stereotypical Asian woman, according to Kristina. Her vagina ends her set with a spoken word poem called "Not Just a Hole" that is dedicated to the critics who say that "women comedians talk about their vaginas too much". Kristina Wong Vagina Performs Stand-up for the First Time, 2014, fabric, 48 x 72 inches

What is a show about comedy without a reference to anti-gone, am I right?! This is a performance where we see a huge, and I mean MASSIVE, stuffed monkey lying face down on top of a plastic tarp. It is called "Monkey King Creon" by Olivia Mole. In front of the monkey is a large, legal pad that has a list called CREON'S VERBS: Adjudicate, Legislate, Scandalize, Capitalize. And CREON'S NOUNS: Men,

to the sound of 90's video game music. These drawings are in reverence to their fallen leader and his awe-inspiring penis. Then the boss monkey puts a stop to everything—breaking the fourth wall. She dons a lab coat and explains the pictographs to us using a smart-looking laser pointer. She notes that language is a value system and the value here is on grotesque manliness and the legacy of macho language. Eventually we gather

Which is quoting Anne Carson's translation of Antigone. Enter two "flunky stooges", played by Olivia and her partner David, both of whom wear fake beards, prosthetic butts and stuffed cocks. One wears a tie to show that she's the boss. The submissive monkey shits into a free-standing toilet and they use his shit, (which is really black ink), to paint symbols onto the walls

is speaking to us from some post-apocalyptic future and the asses, I mean apes, are US. Olivia Mole, MUNKEY KING CREON, 2017, mixed media, performed by Olivia Mole and David James

Here we see a video of the artists Roxy Farhat and Zhala standing very close to one another. In fact, they're standing so close that it almost appears as if they're holding each other up in a sort of half embrace. Their hair, makeup and outfits are done up in middle eastern pop star fashion. Roxy's wearing a shiny bustier and red lipstick. Both their eyebrows are heavily manicured, their eyeliner is heavy. They lick their teeth and grin, or grimace, at each other to see if they have anything stuck in their teeth. Do I have anything stuck in my teeth? They then strike a pose,

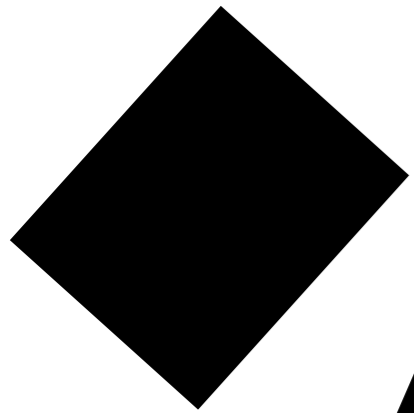
like this, and smile broadly at the camera. They continue to hold this pose for the duration of the video, which is a looong 5 minutes. As the video progresses, they fidget, and start to sway. A vein pops up on a forehead. Upper lips tremble. Roxy eventually starts drooling, her saliva falling into her cleavage. But neither one of them ever breaks their smile. This makes me wonder if performing femininity is the ultimate marathon. Roxy Farhat & Zhala, Untitled, 2017, HD video, 5 min 04 sec

The artist performs a standup set in a small, dank theater in Hollywood that's filled with folding seats, all of which are empty. There is no audience. She's performing standup all alone. Performing for an invisible audience has analogies to a woman's agency in the world: the feeling of not being heard, being invisible, her words falling on deaf ears. If no one witnesses her standup, does it even exist? Is her experience of it alone of value? The standup comedian is always waiting for the audience to tell her how she is doing, which is not unlike the experience of being a woman. If you remove the

audience, you remove its reassuring laughter – and one is then forced to grapple with what it means to exist without validation. I think we have to imagine this show a major network, where Claire is the performer and also the showrunner and everyone behind the scenes. It's just HER SHOW. Playing by itself for itself on all these TVs across America. But it's Claire, doing comedy by herself. The truest definition of a one woman show. Claire Titelman, The Audience is Not Present, 2017, performance & silent video

Can you all please close your eyes for a moment, if you feel safe? Self Brainwash Meditation #404 by the artist duo mothertongues, which is Meital Yaniv and Kim Ye is a thirteen minute sound piece that asks us to engage with issues of struggle revolving around women's bodies as a dominant and dominated site. The work is a guided meditation, and borrows from the principles of aikido, where the practitioner defends herself while protecting her attacker from injury. For example, the speaker asks the listener to imagine a location where rape might happen. "Don't limit yourself to dark alleys or rough neighborhoods", the voice says, "you may do just as well to imagine your own bed, a house party, or the couch of a friend." This work, complete with calming chimes, teaches us to "bless ourselves" and weap-

onize the power of surrender. It blurs the line between fantasy and reality and proposes tactics to empower those who are on the receiving end of sexual aggression. "This is where you stitch together your eroticized armor" the voice urges, and asks you to listen carefully to the words the rapist utters so that you can reflect them back at him, I mean them, in an act of what they call "willful generosity". "Self Brainwash Meditation #404" proposes an alternative form of resistance where one's vulnerability has the potential to become one's greatest strength. MOTHERTONGUES (Meital Yaniv & Kim Ye), SelfBrainwash Meditation #404, 2017, sound, 12'44"



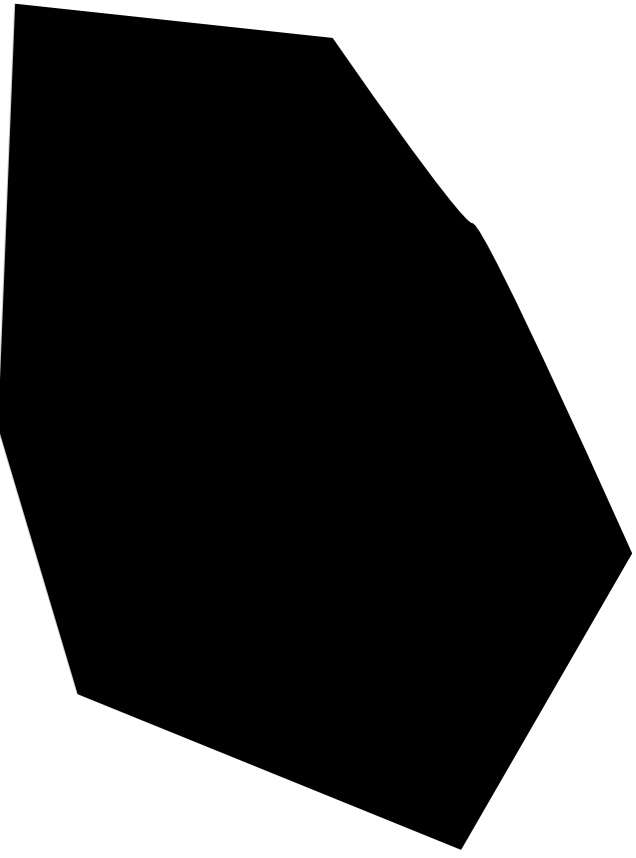
My dad used to tell me that if you laugh, burp, fart and sneeze at the same time then you die. If an artwork sounds through opposite registers simultaneously—if it is both intellectual and a dumb joke, open ended to a viewer's interpretation as well as a vulnerable memoir—does that happen too? This piece is called "More Stupids: A Tarot" by Emmy Bright. It's 45 silkscreened cards, and a book of interpretation which is actually a combination of autobiographical stories and theoretical texts. Emmy refers to the cards as "Stupids" and they each display a reproduction of her artwork. One of the tarot cards, for example, has a stupid, pink gumdrop-shaped blob in the middle with "IF ONLY" written underneath. In using this deck Emmy gets to hear what people project onto her work, and because the work itself is often disarmingly weird or funny, it invites the participant to move beyond the giggle and dig into the hard stuff. Tarot is an elaborate process of mediation; therapy without having to eventually talk to your therapist about the dynamic you have with them. By openly acknowledging the cards as "stupids," we fixate on the silliest things because, for some reason, they matter to us. Emmy embraces the absurdity of this. You have to get over yourself and then get over yourself getting over yourself. You know. Emmy Bright, *More Stupids: A Tarot*, 2016, deck of 45 individual cards, 5.5 x 6.5 x 2.5 cardboard box & 107 page publication

This drawing, made with graphite on white paper, spells out the words "Maybe I'm just like my mother" in an italic, classical serif font rendered in smudged graphite. The text "She's never satisfied" faintly hovers backwards and underneath the first part of the lyric, a scratchy indentation that is only really visible if you lean in quite close. The artist Samantha Roth always heard the lyrics from Prince's *When Doves Cry* as "Maybe I'm just like my mother" rather than "Maybe you're just like your mother." It doesn't quite make sense when you listen closely to the words, but rarely is logic a factor in how one sings along with songs. Sam imagined the lyric as the perfect epigraph for an autobiography not yet written – it was open ended enough to apply to many situations and frankly, she's rarely satisfied and painfully similar to her own mother in many ways. We want to see ourselves in other people, but we just keep seeing our parents in ourselves. You know what, I'm going to text my mom right now. Samantha Roth Epigraph, Epithet, Epitaph, Epigram, 2017, graphite on paper, 19 x 24 inches

This piece involves a lot of cardboard, crayon and Crayolas. The idea is that seven girls of varying heights, hairstyles and skin colors, many of them wearing tiaras and/or tutus, march around the gallery carrying handmade signs and chanting, though probably not in unison. The artist, Hazel Haendel, who is four and a half, started planning this event last year shortly after she attended her first protest with her mother. To decide on a message, she made two lists. In the first, entitled "This Needs To Be The World" she lists the things she wants more of, including rainbows, popsicles and hearts. In the second, "No More of This", she lists all the things she doesn't want: NO MORE SCARY SUPERHEROES,

NO MORE ROARING, NO MORE BITING MY TOE, NO MORE INTERRUPTING, NO MORE KNOCKING ON THE DOOR, NO MORE FART SOUNDS, NO MORE RUNNING AWAY FROM ME, NO MORE BOYS AT MY BIRTHDAY, NO MORE BUMPING, NO MORE HUGS I DON'T WANT, NO MORE TOOTING IN CLASS. The resulting performance (if you could call it that, and she does) is chaotic, overwhelmingly pink, purple and red, and punctuated by laughter and occasional tears. Hazel Haendel *This Needs To be The World*, 2018, cardboard, paint, Cray-Pas, Crayola marker and used paint stirrers

What if we said children were the original punks—funny and filthy and crude as they are? This shape represents an angular, igloo like capsule that you have to crawl into in order to view Eva Medin's nine minute experimental sci-fi film "Smars," which she shot in a French daycare facility over the course of six months. Toddlers with knobby knees wander around what appears to be spaceship, wearing giant spherical helmets. Every time their helmet hits the ceiling, we hear a comical "clonk!" The children wander back and forth, some clutching their headgear to keep it on. Later, they have a snack of opaque blue-green jello and weirdly dense marshmallows. We watch them with some degree of concern (the degree depends on how much you give a damn) as it becomes progressively more clear that they are on their own in outer space. A siren starts to sound and the toddlers hustle through tunnels, bumping into each other, falling, crawling and wading through smoky rooms full of ferns. The artist was interested in using science fiction as a medium for addressing questions about groups, human rituals, and the future of our society in a world where ecology and humanity feel increasingly uncertain. Eva Medin Smars, 2016, experimental science fiction film, 9 minutes



So I have a joke for you: "How do you know if an exhibition will include only women?" Anyone? "It will tell you. And it often tells you loudly, and in advance." Right? I didn't make that up myself. The artist and writer Lindsay Preston-Zappas did. So here is roughly the amount of space that Sarah Johnson's "Untitled Sportsbar Performance" took up. This was in a weird sports bar slash performance space in the East Village that she no longer remembers the name of. The venue was strange because you walked through a bar of beer-drinking sports fans to get to a back room performance space, where someone had curated a "feminist" themed show. Sarah introduced herself to the audience, put a song on, and left the room. While the song played she went and got a number of men from the bar, took them to the backspace, and had them figure out how to pick her up and hold her over their heads for the duration of a second song. So we have this image of men carrying Sarah out of the bar and into this feminist backspace. Could this technique heal us as a nation? She's not asking you to have a conversation with her or donate any money. She's just asking you to carry her full body weight into the feminist space. Does that seem like a lot to ask? Sarah Johnson, Untitled Sportsbar Performance, 2013, live performance with music and 3 men