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Beauty is in the Street

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Curator: Elle Loui August

Beauty is in the Street

20 Aug
—
24 Sept
2016

Areez Katki
Sione Monu
Lula Cucchiara
Ash Mosen / Mosen Studios
Rawiri Brown
Luisa Tora and
Molly Rangiwai-McHale
Liv Worsnop / Plant Gang
Eleanor Cooper
Oliver van der Lugt
Luka Mues
Dawn Blood
Lulu Fang
Annie Mackenzie
Jack Tilson
John Mutambu
Bridget Riggir
Lana Lopesi
Ella Sutherland
Biljana Popovic

Sione Monu, Blanket Couture Series, 2016

Objectspace

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ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND / TOI AOTEAROA

**FOUNDATION
NORTH**
Te Kaitiaki Takekōwhiri o
Tāmaki o Tai Tōhenua



Rain beads in my hair and weaves its way slowly through the fibres of my coat. The winter downpour moves audibly beneath the grass, draining toward where a stream once ran. Tuna Mau, flowing to Waiatarau-the bay of one hundred reflections. No longer a bay, an eeling ground, and no longer a slum, or an enclave of affordable social housing...

The water pools among the grass, simultaneously moving downward toward the aquifers and caverns and drainage tunnels of the city's subterranean infrastructure. The rain, filling the aquifers and dams, moves beneath the city, through the city, emerging through pipe systems and household taps to nourish the lives of an increasingly diverse populace. It will sweat out through skin, in the streets, in schools, in hospitals, workplaces and on dance floors across Tamaki Makaurau. It will mingle with the fabrics and fibres of the factories, fields and workrooms of a globalised textile market—in t-shirts, denim, work wear, dresses, slacks...

The decision to respond to the themes of this years symposium of unrest, change and activism by focusing this exhibition through the medium of adornment and streetwear, is by no means a glib attempt to connect to any simplified notions of the 'contemporary' and its languages. Instead, it seeks to connect these broader discussions to the terrains of self-determination which take place in our everyday lives. To signal—albeit gently and incompletely—a connection to traditions of transformation and resistance by viewing the fierceness of transformative thought through its nuanced manifestations in aesthetic gestures, and in practices of love, care and energy.

The re-imagination of selves, of the city through the body, through the particulars of subjective experience, and the manner in which these intersect with the experience and practices of making—and wearing—and the communities we create in our actions and works.

For an emergent generation of designers, artists, crafts practitioners and writers, not only are our own labours and the conditions in which these unfold, of immediate and pressing concern, but so too is the awareness of the labours and working

conditions of others. The brute exploitation and environmental degradation experienced by those with whom we share our world, and our own participation in flows of increasing material inequity, are clear. The materials that we acquire and exchange, the materials that we work with, all impact upon other beings in various ways. Our public spaces, our shared, and our meeting spaces which flux online/offline we find regulated by private, financialised and militarised interests. We cannot be sure that they are public, we cannot be sure that we want to participate, yet we are in it. We call to each other from across the street, the bar, the parent teacher meeting, across reading groups, and parks. How do we transmute this world into another, with whatever it is, and who ever we have at hand?

'We went to the public hospital but it was private, but we went through the door marked 'private' to the nurses' coffee room, and it was public. We went to the public university but it was private, but we went to the barber shop on campus and it was public. We went into the hospital, into the university, into the library, into the park. We were offered credit for our debt. We were granted citizenship'

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons¹

To a generation largely shackled by the debts incurred by study, creative practices are frequently etched out of working weeks either long or casualised and underpaid —each terrifying in their own confines and precarities. As Luka Mues writes of the his collection Hang in there Baby,

'I made this capsule collection while working a day job 60 hours a week and it took me nearly a year and a half to complete. I felt overwhelmed and unsure for a lot of this time, always

questioning what I was making and what I was working towards. In my mind the title is a reassurance for spare-time labourers scratching together creative capital after hours.'

The garments, objects, texts and spatial gestures included in this exhibition are all touchstones for rich and diverse practices which develop within their own specific domains, and yet, which also intersect with other makers, communities, environments and modalities of practice. They follow diverse paths of inquiry, speak through different embodiments and contribute to different histories of practice.

From Areez Katki's synaesthetic meditation on Istanbul's Bosphorous Strait in Constantinople Dress—a garment which responds to the environment, history and movements of this body of water, translated through Katki's craft and care—Luisa Tora and Molly Rangiwai-McHale's playful crystallisations of performative and affective online embodiments, to Ella Sutherland's graphic inquiries of printed spaces as public spaces.

Activated outside of this exhibition across many mediums and multiple platforms, each practitioner in their own vernacular attends to the situations and sensations of our environment as sites of embodiment and life. In approaches both humorous and hopeful, they move through cities, streets, meetings and parks, emerging in new constellations of practice.

Elle Loui August

1_ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons, Minor Compositions, 2013

Design by (dis)location

I saw a video recently, in which Good Winter designer Jared Faasalele spoke of his new collection of leather bags as being based on the principles of tatau. Although visually the references to tatau are invisible (to me) this is one example of how young designers living in the diaspora combine traditional design principles with contemporary design technologies.

I first caught a glimpse of Good Winter online—black and brown handbags which were modelled by two people of colour. The bags were classic, simple designs. I thought they were marketing to the wrong the audience.

For my 24th birthday my parents and sister brought me one of these leather bags. I had warned them to order far in advance because, as the designer makes them by hand, they may not have the one I wanted in stock. My mum didn't listen, of course, but Jared pulled through anyway.

I really wanted that leather bag. Because I live in New Zealand where an all black leather bag is a common and desirable aesthetic. But, I wanted a Good Winter bag specifically because the company is owned—and the bags are made and designed—by Samoans.

—

It's very easy in New Zealand, for us to place our own assumptions about design culture onto designers from the diaspora. But where within that would we place the black leather bag? We assume an interest in 'inherited' aesthetics which reflect tradition and familial design culture. But we can too easily forget, that these designers are influenced by multiple worlds.

Question one:

what is your relationship to tokenism?

We live in a world where cultural capital or the capital of difference is both paradoxical and contentious. The relationships between culture, power, privilege, design and fashion are undeniable, and such 'capital' can be a dangerous reminder of the oppression and 'othering' which often outcasts certain social groups. On the other hand in a global world where people position themselves across a number of identities and lifestyles, capital—only naturally—seizes upon difference to create new markets and products.

Question two:

who is producing and who is profiting?

In the dynamic which exists between commodification and resistance, difference itself becomes a site of conflict and struggle, over bodies, desires, land, labour, and the distribution of resources. It is within this space—between conflict and commercial appeal—that difference itself carries a legacy of disruption and political struggle. It is within this space that there is an ever-present potential for colonising (once again) diverse and already marginalised markets, individuals and communities.

Lana Lopesi



Luka Mues Hang In There Baby Campaign
Film still, 2015. Directed by Juliet Carpenter

Local Star Logic

Taking forged, lived, and hurt meanings and reinstating these as sign values, fashion incorporates, fractures, and returns to us the splayed events, attitudes, and shifts of the present as a constellation of cartoon parts. The feedback cycles of fashion leave the subject to compose itself from its own, and from others' splinters—to rebuild a self from an exploded and tactile view of the present.

The substance of the fashionable subject is repetition. Event, Self, and world desirously spiraling as colourful textile pictographs,

and embodied by the individual who composes itself from the soft cues of a collective history.

Pilgrim buckle slipper, refugee peak cap, reworked high-rise relaxed-skinny jean. White face spool loom sweat-pants, cop-badge gold. Hidden gender-open anonymity uniform, cold war epaulette.¹

In our repetition we are instantly historic subjects. Made from, and reliving stasis and crisis, the historic subject existing in a backwash state—a local contour of the same fabric that precedes and prevails it. This subject is elastic, a material that when bent finds new form but remains the same—elasticity as the masking of change, as the transference of form and not the transition of material.²

Formed of reprocessed symbols and materials the fashionable subject can only be caught between itself as it is and the world as it is. The new does not emerge. Coded only through the preexistent, the fashionable subject finds itself trapped by the myths already given.

Deco blossom exit, lacquered mule knit, double-faced Persian lamb. Leather checkerboard leather stole, black bugle bead futuristic lone wolf geta sandal. Gold foil acrylic drop. Baby slogan T drill.³

Like any system, fashion incorporates and reshapes events and deviancies occurring at a local level. Fashion adapts, almost synchronously, with local and lived courses.

An individual subject as a component or agent of any given system, is connected to many more systems and subjects. The behaviour of a system's subjects inform its function at a larger global scale. The local and the global incorporate and account for

one another. If either deviates, the other will react, causing an adaptation of the whole—a co-adaptation and an emergence.

The subject that Self-fashionings—instead of simply being fashionable—consciously acts as an agent connected co-adaptively to other—both Human and nonhuman—agents and systems. This is to act inside a margin of difference which exists within continual repetition. To labour difference into being in the chance that it may emerge throughout a system at large and cause change greater than the local to occur. To cause the emergence of not only new forms, but also new substances and relations is to engage with the Self-fashionability of life.

A Self-fashioning subjectivity inhabits its agency to manipulate symbolic and material difference at both a local and global scale. Self-fashioning, is an act of group survival, change, and construction; a local star logic.

Bridget Riggir

1_Miu Miu Fall 2016

Ready-To-Wear

Vetements Spring 2016

Ready-To-Wear

J.W. Anderson Spring 2017

Menswear

2_Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans by Carolyn Shread (New York. Columbia University Press, 2011).

3_Prada Fall/Winter 1996

Prada Fall/Winter 2003

Prada Spring/Summer 1996



Luka Mues, Hang in there Baby Campaign, 2015. Photo: George Rump



Areez Katki, Constantinople Dress, 2016

(untitled)

In the work Buenos Aires Tour (2003), by the artist Jorge Macchi, a cracked pane of glass is superimposed onto a city map, determining, through its fissures, eight aleatory itineraries running across Argentina's capital. Along these journeys Macchi records items he comes across; archiving, photographically, fragments of the city. The resulting panoply of objets trouve not only imply their significance, metonymically, as parts of anonymous lives from which they have been cast away, they further coalesce—contracting and expanding between macro and micro in the viewing subject's mind—to suggest narratives surrounding their present union as a grouping of otherwise disparate forms.

Within Macchi's practice one finds all types of ephemera and found objects: newspaper clippings, city maps, sheet music, obituaries, broken glass and a range of other common items that are given new life. Against the call for art to be spectacular he looks to the modest, unnoticed, mundane; those parts of material culture dispensed with in a quest for novelty. Here the incidental is made to take pride of place within a theatre of the quotidian as evocations transform into elaborate compositions in languorous and often understated ways.

Just as an elision of opposites takes place in Macchi's work—light and dark, presence and absence, chance and fate—so, too, can the city itself become a space where extremes coincide: 'extremes of ambitions and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space.'¹

Where the-city- as-macrocosm intersects with the-body-as-microcosm, the former seems to dominate, persistently and with little regard for the latter. So, then, how do we entwine the two into a generative dialectic of contemporary urban life?

To lead a daily urban life against the abstractions of urban planning.

To encounter the city not as seen from above but to be immersed within it.

To exist within the shadows of the state-sanctioned view of the city as a plan, drawn to scale, and mapped as a totalising whole.

To make embodied, subjective and personal the organised and intelligible orderings of the city by re-formulating its syntax along personal lines.

To erode the ambitious hyperbole and idealism of those purveyors of progress: the bureaucrats, the developers, the real estate agents.

To find the 'rhetoric of walking' in the city and to search for an alternative rhythm.²

To uncover the poetics and politics of lived experience, by turning to the subject adrift.

John Mutambu

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1_Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Steven Rendall trans.) Berkeley: University of California Press (1984), 91.

2_Ibid.