

and was filmed in 4K, a high-resolution format, finished in digital post-production and made in collaboration with technicians who generally work for Hollywood movie studios. The one he made just before it, however, showed a subtle glitch. *Contrapposto Studies, I through VII* (2016) multiplies the

artist's Renaissance-motif stance by seven, and, occasionally, fourteen, as the row of images duplicates and reverts. He filmed himself walking backward and forward, rendered in both positive and negative images. The young man animating the "counterpose" for the early-model Sony Portapak in 1968 wears

a similar outfit in 2016, but his body is noticeably cumbersome, heavier in its movements, tender; it is difficult to keep watching him give the same performance decades later, even as his image covers every surface. In an unlikely moment, the artist fills the room.

## Adelita Husni-Bey: Adunanza

Text by Ilaria Bombelli

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comune.modena.it/galleria  
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Their backs are turned. Three men and three women raise their fists. The gesture is clear—militant, political. We understand the intrinsic symbology, the nature of a certain discourse about what they are doing (solidarity, struggle, rebellion). And yet the pose—and not just the fact that their backs are turned to us, some are kneeling, one has his head bowed—exhausts all the possibilities of making it a dominant and definitive image. It is this photograph (from the *Agency* series: *Activists*, 2014) that Adelita Husni-Bey has chosen as the poster for her solo exhibition in the seventeenth century building that houses the Galleria Civica di Modena, the Palazzina dei Giardini, originally a place of amusement for the Estense court. It is a wide-ranging exhibition—films, installations, paintings, photographs, drawings and posters, produced over the last ten years—put together by the Italo-Lebanese artist and the curators Diana Baldon, director of the Fondazione Modena Arti Visive, and Serena Goldoni under the title of *Adunanza* (*Congregation* in English, a term that was preferred to *Gathering* and to the first version, untranslatable into Italian, of *Heal Fatigue. Touch Inventory*).

Figures with their backs turned have a marginal role in the history of painting: wayfarers, shepherds, servants. Socially inferior, they are placed in out-of-the-way positions, on side panels, depicted on a smaller scale, in subordinate roles. Onlookers or bystanders, they are figures, in the worst of cases, to whom not even the right to a face is recognized, and in the best, who play the part of a comment on the main scene. Rarely do we give them a glance. It could be said that this is the same way in which Adelita Husni-Bey observes life, the kind that we lead under the current capitalist and neoliberal economic system of the West: not in its more conspicuous and successful aspects but in ones that tend to be hidden from view. Her approach is that of the pedagogue. The educational theories of collectivist anarchism and experimental teaching practices are the subjects that have most stirred her

curiosity. Radical thinkers like Leo Tolstoy (*The School at Yasnaya Polyana*), Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia (*The Origin and Ideals of the Modern School*), Augusto Boal (*The Theatre of the Oppressed*), Paulo Freire (*Education: The Practice of Freedom*) are the ones who have inspired her most.

In her work Husni-Bey slowly gets to the heart of questions about which she feels deeply, such as civil disobedience, physical pain, the right to public space and the freedom of the body, to self-determination, to failure. She puts these messages of hers in a bottle and entrusts them to a group of people (injured athletes, evictees, schoolchildren), who come together for a few weeks in workshops, often held at public venues like schools and museums. There she invites them to unroll the messages before her eyes, to illustrate them, suggest solutions, improvise choreographies. Collective forms of conversation and representation emerge spontaneously. The discussion becomes civil, political. Husni-Bey leaves a lot of room for interpretation, pushing the *mise-en-scène* beyond the spirit of role play. Her works are like trunks filled with stories, things, memories (the products of these workshops are drawings, photographs and films, which are then cobbled together and reworked in composite installations). The initial premises, rigorously established by the artist, are never lost from sight. It is not clear where the collective ends and the happening begins.

The exhibition at the Palazzina dei Giardini opens with the video installation *Postcards from the Desert Island* (2011), in which we see a class of children, aged between seven and ten (later we find out that they are from the École Vitruve experimental elementary school in Paris) create a desert island and an ideal community in their classroom, taking William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* as their scenario. Not far off, more students, this time from a high school, who during a workshop at the MAXXI museum in Rome had held a discussion on relationships of power in contemporary Italy, putting themselves in the shoes of figures like politicians, bankers and activists, are the subjects, in highly choreographed poses, of the photographs of *Agency* (2014). The roots of the sense of social defeat evoked in *Agency* are explored in the video *After the Finish Line* (2015), in which injured young athletes are called on

to speak of failure, competitiveness and feelings of inadequacy. Visitors are invited to sample the conditions of physical deficit and disability, and do so seated on shower stools designed to meet hygienic and sanitary needs in the installation *Shower* (2013), while it is physical pain (a pain often de-individualized and the consequence of an act founded on the forced smile: the exhibition is dotted with posters of distorted smiles taken from the covers of manuals "of the perfect something") that Husni-Bey conjures up in a diagnostic manner in the drawings of human outlines stained with red of *Encounters on Pain* (2015). Other works, a dozen in all, follow. What they have in common is a playful exposure of the reality of the existential disaster to which a certain set of economic and social ideas has led us and the stubborn desire to seek liberation that stems from a critical, shared and collective position.

This exhibition opens a few days after the closure of another solo exhibition, held in the spaces of the former tobacco factory known as MATA (Manifattura Tabacchi) and also promoted by the Fondazione Modena Arti Visive, by the American photographer Sharon Lockhart (curiously here too an image a woman seen from behind, with her fists clenched around a stick, had been chosen for the poster). On that occasion I confessed my doubts to Lockhart: onto the stage of her art, I told her, and the same can be said here for Husni-Bey, come what we might call "ordinary" people (teenagers, workers, et cetera), placed alongside a representation of themselves as a function, at bottom, of a system alien to them and one of which we need not infrequently to be wary. To what extent they have a real awareness of their location within the picture is a question that I also put to Husni-Bey. She smiled, giving me to understand that this was an argument in her favor: "At the start of every project the use that will be made of it is immediately made clear," she said. "It's the less eye-catching but distinctive character of my work. And an agreement is made over the way any proceeds from the sale of the work will be divided up: one third goes to the artist, one third to the gallery, one third is shared among the participants." As their role is not confined to a participation in the representation, this gives them right not only to a face, but also to a voice.

## Kerstin Brätsch\_Ruine / KAYA\_KOVO

Text by Bianca Stoppani

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Through November 11

I heard a popular common saying on my way to the city center: "Vedi Roma e muori," which

means that if you've been to Rome, you've seen everything, and so you can peacefully die. Notwithstanding the more or less candid affirmation of Western cultural supremacy, I was interested to think about how it conveys an ambiguous dimension, as if the Eternal City and its symbols belong to an exceeding spatio-temporal continuum. And in fact, ruins are these quintessential sites of material and temporal ambivalence, for they are both

products and events, constantly embedding and heralding their mutations. In this guise, *Ruine*, the German word for "ruin" and the title of Kerstin Brätsch's solo exhibition at Fondazione Memmo in Rome, is an architectural *capriccio*, a fictitious uber-ruin that brings together an ANTICAMBER, a CRYPT, and a FORUM in the same space-time. Brätsch magically spells it out by distributing monumental wooden frames that stretch







a plastic film, thus tapping into the ubiquitous transparency of glass. Their function is to expose and blur, to separate and merge. In fact, these rectangular devices play supporting-surfacing roles: they become the recurrent signs bordering the area of the show where one is (and, constitutively, is not), while they also become the press releases for *\_Ruine* and *\_KOVO* (more soon about the latter) all handwritten by Brätsch on the semi-transparent sheets. The reference is to the partitions used by Allan Kaprow in *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), his seminal elaboration on the legacy of the performative aspect of Jackson Pollock's painting that eventually made him abandon the latter for the making of ordinary events.<sup>1</sup> Brätsch does not reject painting, but she contests its apparatus of interpellated, and thus individuated, gestures via the redistribution of her authorial role to collective enterprises, such as the import-export agency DAS INSTITUT (2007–ongoing, with artist Adele Röder), or the entropic accrual of subjectivities KAYA (2010–ongoing, with sculptor Debo Eilers and Kaya Serene), as well as to the other artists and craftspeople she collaborates with. In her many hands, painting is licensed by different ventures, thus becoming a “performance or a performative backdrop” to stress test the stability of those assumptions.<sup>2</sup> For example, the intense blue tempera that covers the cross-vaulted ceilings of the ANTICHAMBER (*Ave Giotto \_Cielo* [2018]) was actually applied on Brätsch's behalf by master stucco marbler Walter Cipriani and conservator Carolina d'Ayala Valva.

My gaze was already caught up in this imaginative open sky—its sheer opacity being as light and volatile as Hans Haacke's *Blue Sail* (1964–1965)—such that I could not but notice the Palazzo's supporting beams, wrapped in digital prints of marble patterns where images of dinosaurs, marblings, and agates miraculously float together (*Dino Runes (towards an alphabet)* [2018]). This constellation of immemorial yet digitally produced forms offered itself coextensively with those displayed in the CRYPT. Inducing a sense of wonder, its lowered ceiling dramatized the scale of *Psychopompo* (2017), the latest iteration from the *Unstable Talismanic Renderings* series of marblings realized by Brätsch with master marbler Dirk Lange. The aforementioned black partitions—now leaning on the walls in their traditional role of frames for large-scale works—were accessorized with pairs of asymmetric fluorescent lights, thus saturating the blue color of the room (*Ave Giotto \_Stanza* [2018]) in a glossy, retro-illuminated effect. The *Psychopompos* depict the process of their creation, that is, the “[drop of] a drop of ink from high (the height determines the width of the mark)” into a tray full of solvent.<sup>3</sup> But despite its original decorative purpose, marbling operated here as a pictorial hydromantic practice, its

magic embedded in the acts-at-a-distance, affecting a responsive surface placed below and resulting in revelatory shapes adhering on paper. This process-as-figure saw globules of bright colors coming together through a sequence of baths, intentionally or casually, in heads of shamans, deep-dreamed faces, apotropaic septarias, dendrites, insects, et cetera. Emerging from the grayish-white background of the first color bath, these fine-textured substances were arranged in delicate, centrifugal circles, swirls, and veinings, their wavy color bands radiating in recombinant flames, rills, and ridges. Mesmerizingly, Brätsch's *Psychopompos* are not only the result of material metamorphoses, somehow reflecting the metamorphic nature of the marbles they imitate, but also their own harbingers, for the figure of the psychopomp is at once the alchemist transmuting matter through fire, the demon who transports the soul through death, and the transfer between the conscious and the unconscious.<sup>4</sup>

In this vein, and possibly unearthed from the psyche's deep time that is inhabited by archetypes, as Carl Jung would have it, the FORUM is populated by *Psychic Fossils \_Stuccomarmo* (2018), a series of medium- and small-size shiny plates hung on the walls. Brätsch was proposed by Fondazione Memmo to team up with Cipriani and experiment with *scagliola*, a technique invented in the seventeenth century to mimic, once again, the more expensive marble or *pietre dure*.<sup>5</sup> As such, they can be mistaken for stone formations unless one decides to touch them and realizes they are room temperature. Arcane and unsettling, the writhing acid-colored slimes and Precambrian organisms that, if any, can be described there become the objects of worship for the material mystic, their verisimilitude so startling that they effect what Roger Caillois called the drive of dissolving one's self in the “inhuman immensity” of matter.<sup>6</sup> Brätsch's plaster-based fossils, together with her talismanic minerals on paper, graft the human scale of agency into that of the geological, and eventually displace her artistry to the interaction of matter. Take also for example *Brushstrokes Fossils* (2018): loosely arranged in three stretchers on the floor of the FORUM, they are the repository of the movements that created them, whether human or tectonic.

*\_Ruine* occupied the main space of Palazzo Ruspoli, and darkened into the smaller stable overlooking the courtyard where KAYA staged their solo exhibition *\_KOVO* (both shows were curated by Francesco Stocchi). It was a cave-like space where KAYA aggregated on the walls, on the floor, and was suspended from the ceiling through demonic painting-sculptures. If the press release tells of a rite of evocation, I would provisionally point elsewhere, maybe to an underground place

plunged into the unconscious dimension of a libidinal economy, whose residents reflect what is happening above. Among them, different leathers stitched together and painted with bright-colored roundnesses—actually, some elements reminded me of the eyes of Leonora Carrington's characters—supported shiny black biomorphic shapes tied together with studded belts, and was also embellished with souvenir-size reproductions of the heads of famous soccer players, Donatello's *David*, and Pinocchio (*KAYA Pelle* series [2018]). Actually, these hallucinatory assemblages seemed to have been in contact with the horrors of late capitalism, their infected bodies mutated with purulent cultural commodities.<sup>7</sup> The amber glass lanterns there (*KAYA Lanterna Lamentosa* [2018]) could then not but sardonically smile at those schizoid entities, while emitting an ominous track into insect-shaped microphones. As much as ruins (that is, “allegories of thinking itself,” according to Walter Benjamin<sup>8</sup>), *\_KOVO* and *\_Ruine* triggered a sensual and intellectual speculation on ambivalence that paved the way for the transformation of discrete units and categories into something else, something unstable and liminal. This does not mean that identification was altogether dismissed. On the contrary, carefully administered with the possibility to be *somebody*, the slipperiness of the subjectivities involved in both exhibitions was a powerful strategy to assert the complexity of their identities—a furtive shift of the question that yawned at the enigma.

1. See Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1–9.
2. Kerstin Brätsch, “My Psychic Atlas,” in *BRÄTSCH*, ed. Patrizia Dander (Berlin: Walther Koenig, 2017), 13.
3. Allison Katz, “WHAT IS AT HAND?,” in *Kerstin Brätsch: Unstable Talismanic Renderings* (New York: Gavin Brown's enterprise, 2014), 179.
4. See Arturo Schwarz, *Cabbalà e alchimia. Saggi sugli archetipi comuni* (Milan: Garzanti Libri, 2004), 13.
5. Stucco marble is obtained by mixing pigments with plaster and glue, kneading the compost into doughs, and cutting them in the preferred directions (this would give different gradients), dimensions, and shapes. Finally, the pieces are either amalgamated in order to get an abstract, marmoreal pattern, or organized on a pre-arranged drawing, then squashed onto the support and waxed.
6. Roger Caillois, *Pierres*, trans. Jean Burrell (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 90–91.
7. See Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2009), 5–6.
8. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 177–178.

## Hyperobjects

Text by Marie de Brugerolle

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Through Fall 2018

In Marfa, Texas, to screen my film *Tell Me More*, about Guy de Cointet, I saw the *Hyperobjects* exhibition at Ballroom Marfa, curated by Timothy Morton and Laura

Copelin. Having read Morton's *Hyperobjects* some years ago, I was intrigued to see what kinds of objects could be hyperobjects; for Morton, it seems that the hyperobject is not an object per se. Entities that are massively distributed in time and space that we humans can only see or deal with little pieces of them at a time—they might not even look as if they're present or real, especially if we find that we are inside them or are parts of them as being a part of the biosphere, according to Morton. The key point is that an “entity” is not an ob-

ject. An object is literally something thrown at us: “alea jacta est” (*ob + jacta* = off scene, coming to us). An object has a subject; without a person to consider it, it is a thing.

My questions at the exhibition were: What do I look at? and How do I look at it? What are the curatorial proposals that put me, the visitor, in a position to look at things and make them objects? How can the exhibition transform the agitated witness into a conscious observer?