

WHEN THE SICK RULE THE WORLD

February 22 – March 22, 2020

With works by Sabian Baumann, Jesse Darling, Demian DinéYazhi', Eva Egermann, Magdalena Fischer, Justin Fitzpatrick, Carolyn Lazard, Park McArthur, Annie Sprinkle und Beth Stephens, Patrick Staff, Sunaura Taylor, Romily Alice Walden, What Would an HIV Doula Do? and Triple Canopy, and Constantina Zavitsanos

“Disease is never neutral. Treatment never not ideological. Mortality never without its politics”.¹

Anne Boyer

The group exhibition *When the Sick Rule the World* brings together the practices of fourteen artists and two collectives that destabilize the dominant conceptions of health, productivity, and ability. The exhibition borrows its title from the author and novelist Dodie Bellamy's eponymous essay in which those considered sick, weak, or inefficient and therefore 'less valuable' are alternatively celebrated as bearers of hope within a system that is itself inherently broken².

The malleable social construction of 'sickness' has been decisive for the development of Modernity in its contribution to the relations between production and reproduction and the violent denial of bodily autonomy and agency to specific subjects in society and/or entire groups. Today, 'sickness' continues to serve as a violent category to justify systemic oppression beyond medical wisdom, instead unfairly motivated by class, gender, racial discrimination, and the specifics of individual mental or 'functional diversities' (a term coined in the mid 2000s by the Spanish *Foro de Vida Independiente y Diversidad* in order to surpass the normative distinctions between abled and disabled³). Although constituting the largest minority, people with functional diversities are predominantly rendered invisible in the social, cultural, and political strata that structure our society. Our economies produce fragile environments in which human and non-human bodies suffer in pain and/or depression, indefinitely waiting to receive treatment and auspicious results or mentally prepare themselves for the worst. In 'The Undying', author and poet Anne Boyer makes manifest that "no patient is sovereign" by attesting that "the history of illness is not the history of medicine - it is the history of the world - and the history of having a body could well be the history of what is done to most of us in the interest of a few."⁴

¹ Anne Boyer. *The Undying: Pain, vulnerability, mortality, medicine, art, time, dreams, data, exhaustion, cancer, and care*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.

² Dodie Bellamy. *When the Sick Rule the World*. New York: Semiotext(e)

³ Javier Romañach & Manuel Lobato. *Functional Diversity, a new term in the struggle for dignity in the diversity of the human being*. Leeds: The Disability Press, 2005.

⁴ Boyer, 2019.

Following Dodie Bellamy's prophecy that anticipates an inversion of the regime that capitalizes on sickness, the exhibition *When the Sick Rule the World* rethinks the resistance to power from the perspective of those treated as weak, deviant, and, consequently, non-compliant. The invited artists explore critical (self-)care work and alliances in and through sickness, potentials of opacity for generating one's own infrastructures and a visual language beyond representational politics, strategies that unsettle the chrono-normative principles, and, ultimately, forms of living together beyond ruling or being ruled.

The group exhibition presents local and international artistic positions that build a dense network of references, emphasizing the importance of alliances and solidarity beyond time, space and vulnerabilities. In addition to the media of painting, sculpture, graphic art, photography and video, the exhibition also includes the presentation of magazines and publications.

Sabian Baumann's (*1962, CH) *Reliefserie* (2013/2014) takes up horizontal activities that are considered inefficient within a neoliberal system of global capitalism. Understanding sleep, sex, illness or death as anti-capitalist strategies, Baumann subverts the capitalist demands of productivity and efficiency into delicate figures made out of unfired clay. The sensitive human and nonhuman beings that decidedly stay in the horizontal open up spaces to rethink the role of embodiments in society, suppressed desires, libertinage and shamelessness, thus reflecting upon the disparity of the now. Though not directly presented within the exhibition, Baumann's drawings—constituting, perhaps, the largest body of Baumann's oeuvre—are nevertheless present in the exhibition space: featured in Eva Egermann's wall installation of her self-published *Crip Magazine*, two reproductions of Baumann's drawings (from the *Steineserie*, 2009) introduce fractures and paradoxes beyond social ideals.

Jesse Darling's (*1981, UK) sculptures, drawings and objects explore the vulnerabilities of the human body while resisting the constraints imposed on our lives by social and political forces. Often examining and queering the hegemonical structures of established art histories and hierarchies, Darling's works challenge the religious, political, and cultural institutions and legacies of modernity. Initially conceived for the exhibition *The Ballad of Saint Jerome* in 2018 at Tate Britain in London, the two sculptures *Epistemologies (Limping Cabinet)* and *Brazen Serpent 2 & Bowl of Hygieia* (both 2018) are inspired by the story of Saint Jerome, a fourth-century Christian scholar who, instead of reacting fearful in front of an apparently ferocious lion, recognized and healed a wound in its paw by removing a thorn there stuck. Once tamed, the lion became his lifelong companion. Taking on the appearance of both wounded and liberated shapes, the sculptures are made from materials and objects commonly used to exhibit artworks or artefacts in museums or churches. By subverting the conventions of museum displays, Darling's sculptures explore how objects and bodies are perceived, and how meaning and value are assigned through the authority of institutions.

Demian DinéYazhi's (*1981, Diné) practice is rooted in a decolonial and queer critique concerned with the historic and contemporary struggles of Indigenous communities. Born to the clans Naasht'ézhí Tábaqahá (Zuni Clan Water's Edge) and Tódich'í'í'nii (Bitter Water), DinéYazhi' is merging traditional Diné practices with the aesthetics and strategies of digital dissemination. They are founder and director of the R.I.S.E. (Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment) initiative and have since 2014 created numerous posters to raise awareness of HIV within Indigenous communities, many of those made to share via social media or downloadable for analogue circulation. For *When the Sick Rule the World*, DinéYazhi' presents a site-specific iteration of the poster *POZ SINCE 1492* (2016/2020), combining digitally manipulated paintings of the first Thanksgiving with the word POZ (an abbreviation for living with HIV) and the date of

Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World. The posters traverse the hegemonic narration of settler colonialism by placing the HIV pandemic as by-product of the violent history of colonization, continuing through higher infection rates and unjust access to health care and education within marginalized communities. Originally conceived as a single poster, the work has been expanded into a series of four posters, referring to .gif and animation technologies and paying homage to the poster works by Felix Gonzales-Torres, to be taken by the visitors.

Eva Egermann (*1979, AT) is an artist, academic and one of the leading scholars in the field of Crip Theory in the German speaking countries. For *When the Sick Rule the World*, Egermann presents a wall installation related to the self-published magazine project *Crip Magazine* that explores forms of representation that oppose the conditions of normality/abnormality. Initiated by Egermann, the magazine is released on an irregular basis; the first issue was published in January 2012, the second followed in May 2017, and a third in 2019. *Crip Magazine* comprises theoretical as well as artistic contributions on subjects such as crip pop culture, the history and presence of radical crip movements, and subcultural, left and queer contexts of disability. It assembles cultural artefacts of a trans-historical crip (sub)culture, visual activism and crip art resources. In the context of the exhibition, printed copies of the third issue are available for the visitors and can be downloaded under: www.cripmagazine.evaegermann.com. Egermann further presents the photo series *On Uncanny States and Bodies Archive* (2013/2020), reconfigured for this exhibition. Allying herself with and referring to British photographer Jo Spence (1934-1992), Egermann explores the relation between 'sickness' and productivity by reinterpreting hospitalization as artist residencies and spaces of solidarity.

Magdalena Fischer (*1987, AT) presents a selection of her *Life Merch / kinship apparel* (2017/2019), re-conceptualized and re-produced for the exhibition in collaboration with Eva Egermann. They present silkscreen T-shirts with the writings "Krankenstand", "When the Sick Rule the World", and "Team Dyslexia" as editions, as well as an engraved glass necklace with the Jo Spence quote "middle class values make me sick". Fischer's editions are accompanied by further apparels and merchandise from the private collection of Eva Egermann.

Justin Fitzpatrick's (*1985, IR) paintings and sculptures borrow their visceral imagery from medieval illuminations, anatomical diagrams, Art Nouveau, and Constructivist design. Interested in questioning our society's benighted attitude towards both normative and non-normative forms of human intimacy, Fitzpatrick's oeuvre blends the everyday with allegorical symbols of censorship that dissect the socio-political parameters of sexuality and reproduction. In the context of *When the Sick Rule the World*, Fitzpatrick's sculptures *Sodomy*, *Self Love* and *Coitus Interruptus* (all 2017) comment on the allegorical representations of excess and wastefulness, once catalogued as a taxonomy of sexual sins by the Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas, now incarnated as four Art Nouveau table legs attached to sweeping brushes and dustpans. By recalling the historic and political frameworks in which sexuality has been internalized into our bodies as shame and guilt (and therefore "sin"), Fitzpatrick's works make reference to the ways in which church, state and capitalism have privatized bodies and pleasures.

Carolyn Lazard (*1987, US) uses the experience of chronic illness to explore the aesthetic and political dimensions of consent, dependency, and intimacy as well as the ecology of care and labor. In their video work *Consensual Healing* (2018) the artist follows this trajectory through the lens of trauma. Inspired by the sci-fi short story *Bloodchild* by afro-futurist author Octavia Butler, the video centers around an audio conversation between a therapist and their client reprocessing a repressed memory that unfolds as a yellow ball swings back and forth on a large monitor. Replicating simple animations of online EMDR videos used to treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, *Consensual Healing* employs therapeutic protocols to destabilise relations

between coercion and consent, and works through the Black trauma by touching upon issues of co-dependency, surgical violation and biopolitical exploitation

Park McArthur's (*1984, US) sculptural and text-based practice, formally aligned to the traditions of conceptual art, engages with the relations, conditions and temporalities of autonomy and dependency. For this exhibition, McArthur presents two work series: The three questionnaires *These are the questions I would ask* (2013), *Some follow up questions* (2017), and *Synthetic questions* (2019) have been instructed by the artist to be printed out by the curators from the websites of their mail providers, asking both pressing and poetic questions around intimate and institutional organizations of care. Together with artist and long-time collaborator **Constantina Zavitsanos** (*1977, US) the artist presents the vinyl works *Scores for Before* (2013), instructive performance compositions for lifts and transfers as much as of care and intimacy. These and further scores have been merged with their seminal essay "Other forms of conviviality: The best and least of which is our daily care and the host of which is our collaborative work", published in *Women & Performance* in 2013.

Annie Sprinkle & Beth Stephens (*1954, US und *1960, US) are pioneers of the radical feminist art and the founders of the eco-sexual movement. The works on view challenge the relation of femininity and 'sickness'. Taking Sprinkle's personal experience of being diagnosed with breast cancer, the two collages *Breast Cancer Ballet A* and *Breast Cancer Ballet B* (both 2006) interweave the visual repertoire of illness with erotic and pin-up photographs, documentations of their iconic performances and ephemera, thus moving the body to the core of political devices at hand and at stake. While, in the medical-industrial complex, the visual material of clinical data such as MRI images or radiation treatment plans have become the main device for representing and understanding the human body and its condition, the work of Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens add a sensory dimension to this visual vocabulary of medicine. Further, the exhibition presents their *Chemo Fashion Walk* (2005/2020), originally conceived as a live performance lecture and here translated into a slide show projection, showing Sprinkle's and Stephens' re-staging of a cancer treatment facility into a catwalk, thus further subverting the realms of objectification and representation.

Patrick Staff's (*1987, UK) multidisciplinary work challenges the violent histories of binaries by opposing them with modes of queer dissidence and care. For *When the Sick Rule the World*, the artist presents two moving image works: *depollute* (2018), originally conceived as looping 16mm film and here transferred to video, serves as instructional movie to perform a self-orchestration, the removal of a single or both testicles, as part of a surgically safe and self-caring process towards self-actualization. *The Prince of Homburg* (2019) reinterprets the eponymously titled play by Heinrich von Kleist (1810) that has explored states of exhaustion as means of free will. Merging the theatrical and the essayistic, Staff seeks out for contemporary strategies of dissidence and autonomy. The work gives voice to peers and allies such as writers/activists Sarah Schulman and Che Gosset, singer-songwriter Macy Rodman, actress Debra Soshoux or artist Nour Mobarak, and writer/artist/musician Johanna Hedva in the dual role of narrator and the Prince.

Sunaura Taylor's (*1982, US) paintings open up spaces where disability and animality meet. Embedded in her academic research and activism, they explore the interlaced relationship between techniques of oppression against entities considered less valuable than able-bodied humans, from the violent histories of pathology to factory farming to the climate crisis or the destruction of land and water bodies. In this exhibition, Taylor presents works that depict scenes situated sometime before or after ableism's hegemonic reign: For *Wildlife* (2014), the artist painted representations of her own naked body onto each page of a wildlife photography book, belonging and binding with what are considered wild animals, from polar bears to wild oxen, to assert their subjectivities within an exponentiated vulnerability in the moment of

environmental catastrophe. In her seminal book *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (The New Press, 2017), Taylor asks in her prologue: “If animal and disability oppression are entangled, might not that mean their paths of liberation are entangled as well?”

Romily Alice Walden's (*1988, UK) transdisciplinary practice engages with stable and unstable embodiments beyond hegemonic categories and binaries. They present the text *Notes From The Underlands* (2019), in this exhibition performed through video, audio, subtitles and an accompanying publication. Originally commissioned by HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin for their 2019 performative symposium “Manifesto for Queer Futures”, the text demands the Able-bodied regime to collapse in the now and imagines a future shaped by “Hybrid, Techno-Reinforced, Ism-Resistant SUPER-CREATURES”.

Care community **What Would an HIV Doula Do?** and magazine and publication platform **Triple Canopy** present the jointly produced questionnaire *Twenty-One Questions to Consider When Embarking on AIDS- Related Cultural Production*, that has been inspired by the 2018 symposium *How We Do Illness* and organized by Corrine Fitzpatrick and writer, organizer and artist Theodore (ted) Kerr, editor of the 2019 compendium issue of the ZHdK postgraduate magazine ONCURATING titled *What You Don't Know About AIDS Could Fill A Museum: Curatorial Ethics and the Ongoing Epidemic in the 21st Century*. For *When the Sick Rule the World*, the questionnaire was translated for the first time into German. The document will be handed out over the course of the entire year of the curatorial fellowship of the Gebert Stiftung für Kultur 2019/2020 to continue the dialogue around institutional responsibilities and the need for structural changes considering functionally diverse and/or care-dependend bodies.

EVENTS

Guided Tours with the Curators on:

- March 15, 2020 at 3pm
- March 22, 2020 at 3pm

For questions or further information please contact

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With the kind support of:

Stadt Rapperswil-Jona, Kanton St.Gallen Kulturförderung | Swisslos, Ortsgemeinde Rapperswil-Jona, EWJR AG, Bundeskanzleramt Österreich, Hans Kohler AG

With special thanks to Fidel Morf, Niklas Goldbach, Philip Ortelli, Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler.