

Galerie Neu is pleased to present *The Same Room: Julie Becker in dialogue* — an exhibition exploring the singular vision of American artist Julie Becker (1972 – 2016) through a selection of photographs, drawings and a video alongside recent works by Jesse Darling, Win McCarthy and Ima-Abasi Okon.

Deeply rooted in the mythology and economic realities of the city, Julie Becker, who grew up, lived and worked in Los Angeles, produced a remarkable, yet underrepresented body of installation, sculpture, drawing, photography and film constantly oscillating between reality and fiction, truth and fantasy.

Reflecting on her own personal experience of precarious living, Julie Becker investigated the psychologically charged spaces of architectural interiors, where built scale models, staged photographs and mystical drawings of interiors turn into sites of refuge and fantastical escape.

Her powerful aesthetic visions articulating the fantasies, nightmares, and dispossessions underpinning late capitalism, with particular emphasis on the loneliness and estrangement that result from social inequity, vividly resonate in the different approaches and visual languages embodied by the recent works of Jesse Darling, Win McCarthy and Ima-Abasi Okon.

Through the narratives of history and counter-history, the work of Jesse Darling addresses the vulnerability, fallibility and adaptability of being a body caught in the structures of the social and material world.

Haunted by the financial and psychological precarity of city life, Win McCarthy's work reflects on the complex construction and representation of the self within New York's ever changing and gentrifying landscape.

The aesthetic of administered scarcity of this economic and political landscape finds itself further exposed in the works of Ima-Abasi Okon who uses industrial objects and "repurposes" them by removing their function in order to raise questions relating to value, productivity and excess.

The four artists of the exhibition cast light, all in very personal ways, on the language and constraints imposed by the architectural, social and economic structures of our urban reality.

Born in Los Angeles in 1972, Julie Becker briefly studied at the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, in 1991 before returning to Los Angeles and received a BFA in 1993, and an MFA in 1995, from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). In 1996 she was the youngest participant in the 23rd São Paulo Biennial, exhibiting her early acclaimed work, *Researchers, Residents, A Place to Rest* (1993 – 1996), subsequently exhibited the year after at the Kunsthalle Zürich (1997). In the following years, she has had solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2001), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2003) and Greene Naftali, New York (2016). Becker has taken part in notable group exhibitions including *Stills: Emerging Photography in the 1990s*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1997); the Seville Biennial (2006); *The Shapes of Space*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2007); and *Nine Lives*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2009). Julie Becker died in Los Angeles in 2016. In 2018, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, organized the first survey exhibition devoted to the work of Julie Becker. The exhibition *I must create a Master Piece to pay the Rent* travelled last year to MoMA PS1, New York.

Jesse Darling (b. 1976, Portsmouth, UK) is a Berlin based artist working across sculpture, installation, drawing, text, video, sound and performance. Recent solo exhibitions include *Selva Oscura*, Galerie Sultana, Paris (2019), *Crevé*, Triangle France – Astérides, Marseille (2019); *The Ballade of Saint Jerome*, Tate Britain, London (2018); *Support Level*, Chapter Gallery, New York (2018); and *The Great Near*, Arcadia Missa, London (2016). Recent group shows include *Transcorporealities*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2019); *May You Live in Interesting Times*, 58th Venice Biennale, Venice (2019); *A cris ouverts*, Biennale d'Art Contemporain, Rennes (2018); *Give Up The Ghost*, Baltic Triennial 13, Tallin (2018); *Cellular World*, Glasgow International (2018); *An unpredictable expression of human potential*, Beirut Art Centre for Sharjah Biennale, Beirut (2017).

Win McCarthy (b. 1986, Brooklyn, US) is a New York based artist working across sculpture, installation, photography and text. Recent solo exhibitions include *God Shaped Hole*, Atlantis, Marseille (2019); *Apartment Life*, Svetlana, New York (2019); *Gridlock Person*, Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam (2018); *Mister*, Silberkuppe, Berlin (2017). Recent group shows include *Delirious*, Lustwarande, Tilburg (2019); *Smart to the Core: Embodying the Self*, SMART Museum of Art, University of Chicago, Chicago (2019); *Mirror Cells*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); *Night Thoughts*, CCS Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (2016); and *Puddle, pothole, porthole*, Sculpture Center, New York (2014).

Ima-Abasi Okon (b. 1981, London, UK) is a London and Amsterdam based artist working across print, sculpture and moving image. Recent solo exhibitions include *sur— [infinite Slippage:*

production of the r ~e ~a ~l as an intensive magnitude starting at zero-eight] —plus, Void, Derry – Londonderry (2020), Infinite Slippage: nonRepugnant Insolvencies T!-a!-r!-r!-y!-i!-n!-g! as Handclaps of M's Hard' Loved' Flesh [I'M irreducibly undone because] —Leanage-Complex-Dub, Chisenhale Gallery, London (2019), sur— [MIX-USE COMMODITY] —plus, two person show with Alessandro Raho, Kingsgate Project Space, London (2018). She is currently participating in the residency programme at Rijksakademie voor beeldende kunsten (Academy for fine arts), Amsterdam.

DOWNSTAIRS

A lowered ceiling using a standardised modular system, commonly found in offices, waiting rooms, retail spaces and other administrative spaces, has altered the original architecture of the entrance room. The grid of 104 white-fissured ceiling tiles composing the work of Ima-Abasi Okon creates an oppressive clinical space while pointing to a hidden space above it, a negated zone.

Lodged within this hidden space, two automatic air fresheners distill at 6 minutes intervals a unique and personal fragrance composed of the artist's jewellery, black soap, insulin, kinesiology tape, home-made lychee serum, morphine oxtail, palm oil, scotch bonnet, soursop, and ultrasound gel. Directed at what could be described as the underneath of the industrial tiles, the collective works highlight an excess normally hidden from view and in turn point to an absent body.

This constructed and controlled environment operates as a gateway and junction point, giving access to the gallery's main room and the room upstairs.

In 1993, while still studying, Julie Becker started photographing corners of both existing rooms and of fabricated scale models based on her imagination or memory of actual interiors. Closely cropped, the images of the *Interior Corners* series obscure the scale of the spaces, blurring the line between the real and the staged places. Illuminated by the flare of a flashbulb, the empty corners evoke views of crime scenes, film sets or vacated apartments.

In the series *The Same Room* (1993 – 1996), Julie Becker would alter the decor and the tone of the same scale model staged room. The cropped photographs of this series are mysteriously inhabited by objects (here, shelves), giving the space a sense of ambiguous utility.

Similarly enigmatic items populate Jesse Darling's works *Virgin Variations* (2019). Reminiscent of lockers and relics of one's personal intimate world, the wooden and plexiglass display cases – whose surfaces have been brutalised and often scratched, painted or fixed with tape – all individually integrate various items stuck on them, penetrating them, or assembled inside of them: cemetery rose, egg timer, table cloth, stickers, piano keys, toilet brush, porn, pipe cleaner or sceptre among others. All together the works stand as an unmonument to all the (precarious) lives and bodies that history doesn't care to name or remember.

Variouly subtitled, Win McCarthy's works *Street Scene* (2019) revolve around photographs the artist took of architectural maquettes housed in the developer's sales office or situated in the lobbies of the newly constructed condominium buildings of Essex Crossing, a major under-construction mixed-use real estate development project in New York City's Lower east Side. The images feature faceless buildings populated by figures, pausing, walking or sunbathing. Printed in a grainy black and white, the closely cropped images of the real estate promotional architectural models turn into street scenes of dystopian film noir.

Empty Volume (2019), a sculpture consisting of refrigerator doors, partially enclosed in glass, complete the previous series. Domestic remains (a dishtowel, decaying food products, probiotics) inhabit the sculpture that seems to re-create the cold facade of a multi-storey glass tower of the Manhattan skyline.

UPSTAIRS

In 1999, Julie Becker began an ongoing project titled *Whole*.

The project was initiated when Julie Becker moved to a neglected building owned by the California Federal Bank located in Echo Park, a then run-down neighbourhood on the edge of downtown Los Angeles that was home to a predominantly Latino community and had not yet undergone dramatic shifts due to gentrification and real estate speculation. The bank let her occupy the space for a reduced rent in exchange for clearing out the basement containing the unclaimed belongings of its former inhabitant, who passed away from an AIDS related illness.

Instead, she spent several years digging through his personal belongings: "No one ever came to collect [his] things. It's like he mattered to no one. He was about as invisible as a person could be. I guess I wanted to bring him to life again and ask him some questions... as well as honour him just

for making it through life as long as he did”.

Haunted by the presence of the former inhabitant, *Whole* centred on the echo Park building, operating both as a studio and as a stage, and its ambiguous relationship with the California Federal Bank. At a time, the bank was not only the landlord of Julie Becker but also one of the buildings that she could vividly see when looking outside the window. The spectral architecture of this imposing modernist building looms into many of *Whole's* series of photographs, drawings, notes, and video.

In *Federal Building with Music* (2002), the bank becomes the main character of the psychedelic journey of this 29-minute shaky video shot on Super 8 cutting between blurry shots of the building itself and its scale model, winched through a hole connecting Julie Becker's ground floor and basement. The video is set to the soundtrack of the Mexican technobanda outfit Banda Arkángel R-15, from a cassette Julie Becker found discarded in the car park of the bank.

In the video, a sign briefly appears:

“IF YOU CAN KEEP YOUR HEAD IN ALL THIS CONFUSION YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION”

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