

## *Hungry Is My Favourite Word*

Hungry for evidence from what is underneath the canonical re-telling of histories, *Hungry Is My Favourite Word* invites to fantasise about the past, future and present. How can we relate to the obscured past in which marginalised existences have been neglected? Weaving together references of historical role models, ephemeral gestures, more recent pop-cultural moments and contemporary visual culture, the exhibition creates an emotional landscape that constantly evolves. There is not one truth, nor one answer and there is no last word.

Archives and historical records consist of gaps, decisions and absences: Scholar Saidiya Hartman's speculative method of writing history which she describes as 'critical fabulation', enables her to imagine what could have been and challenges the authority of historical archives. In her essay 'Venus in Two Acts' (2008), Hartman states: '*By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.*'

Hartman's thoughts are a strong influence for London-based artist Ebum Sodipo. Sodipo's large collage *I get mine quietly* (2022) meets the visitors on the stairs towards Julius Koller Society. Her collages consist of low-resolution found footage from film and the internet, often paired with archival material. Sodipo researches historical references and constantly thrives on seeking more information; drawing on the past to visualise her idea of an alternative future. In Sodipo's work *Madeline et Margo* (2022), two women from different times are depicted. It is a cropped version of Marie-Guillemine Benoist's *Portrait of Madeleine (1800)* showing a free Black woman painted in the years following the French abolition of slavery. It is believed that Madeleine sat for Benoist, one of the very few women Salon artists, in Paris. The image is paired with an archival photograph of a trans woman, Margo, wearing a leather dress. Their pairing presents us with bodies who simultaneously symbolise freedom and exploitation. Sodipo's work *General Partition* (2022/2024) brings together photography, collage, sculpture and material surfaces such as printed PVC. The use of these textual components speaks to the blurring and obscuring of Black trans history, whilst Sodipo's fabrications bring moments of clarity and recognition. Through sensitivity towards spatial relationships and texture, visual motifs and historical figures are summoned creating moments which speak to the past, present and future.

Miriam Kongstad's *Metanoia/Bunnyland* (2021, in collaboration with Johan Bech Jespersen) takes modernist architecture with its dedicated use of steel, glass and concrete as reference points. In 1953, the first Playboy magazine was launched and grew into one of the biggest promoters of modernist architecture worldwide. In his book 'Pornotopia - An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics' (2019), Paul Preciado writes '*Far from being simply an erotic magazine, Playboy forms part of the architectural imaginary of the second half of the twentieth century. (Hefner) had somehow understood that in order to sculpt a new masculine subjectivity, one had to design a habitat: to create a space and invent a series of practices and uses of the domestic that could function as techno-habits of the male body.*' Founder Hugh Hefner called Playboy a 'Disneyland for adults' - inventing an alternative for the idea of the suburban family home which dominated in Northamerican post-war culture.

In 1937, Walt Disney Studios launched 'Snow White and the seven dwarfs' and became groundbreaking for family entertainment - another recognisable reference in *Metanoia/Bunnyland*. Through experimentation with cathode rays passing through sheets of glass, Roentgen invented the x-ray, later developed and made widely accessible by Marie Curie; omnipresent glass architecture in cityscapes and the scanning of bodies cried for transparency and the ultimate truth. Kongstad and Bech's work guides through the metanoia (mindshift) of the 20th century and gives a new perspective on the relationality of events.

Jumping to 2003, Miriam Kongstad's performance *Take My Breath Away* (2023) refers to the iconic moment in pop historical culture when Madonna kissed Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera on stage at the MTV Music Awards. Based on the Greek term catharsis (cleansing/purification), the performance refers to various forms of emotional release experienced through intense physical exercise, cognitive reflection, or sensory impressions. The performance comprises a trio choreography and a musical composition for oboe and saxophone, which quotes fragments of emotional pop classics intertwined as an electronic and acoustic soundscape. The work is composed as a symbolic, ritualistic sequence of events concluding with the kiss, simultaneously catalysing a global sensation of collective catharsis. The kiss on live TV is a moment well remembered by the queer communities: A scandal for many, validation for others and for some it was the first moment of feeling queer shame watching the scene on their family's TV as a teenager.

Outside of still limited mass media representation, queers have always found coded, less visible, ways of communicating. Luki Essender's *Trapezoid Eyes* (2024) is an intervention in the gallery

space. Using hand-written text and applying it to different surfaces and spaces is a reference to the way how queer bodies historically claimed public spaces. The messages to lovers, peers and oppressors are ephemeral gestures - often removed, painted over, disappeared - and evidence of queer lives.

José Esteban Munoz writes in 'Cruising Utopia (2009)': *'When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight presence, who will labor to invalidate the historical fact of queer lives - present, past and future. (...) The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumour.'*

Quotidian and rarely obvious, these gestures are still to be found in queer bars, on the street, in public bathrooms, universities, schools and other public places. They are the evidence of queer acts and stories, a map of social relations. The words of Essender's intervention *Trapezoid Eyes* stem from their upcoming publication of the same title that will launch with a reading in May at Julius Koller Society. The publication is a poetic auto-fictional journey of memories of relationships, domestic environments with class signifiers, family constructs and mental health struggles.

The public programme (conceived with Katarina Slezakova) is an integral part of the exhibition in the attempt to make space for gathering, conversation and exchange for the opening, we invited Bratislava based artist and musician Michal Dore for his first live performance. In February, Julius Koller Society invites for *Coffee & Cake - Intergenerational Queer Story-Telling*; in March, there will be a workshop on *Queer-Feminist Diaries with Lucie Jarkovská*; in April there will be a *Queer Walking Tour of Bratislava with Jana Zedulova*; concluding with *The Launch of Luki Essender's Publication and a Performance of Aliza Orlan* in May.

*Hungry Is My Favourite Word* aims to spark thoughts on constellations and relationality, to critically interrogate what is visible and absent and what lives in our collective memories. It brings together many thoughts with three artists at the core that advocate for looking closely at the past, present and future. As the curator of the project my hope is that it will revoke memories and make new ones, that we will find company, comfort, joy and empowerment. The imaginary is powerful as much as it is necessary. To close with José Esteban Munoz words: *'We must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world and ultimately new worlds.'*

Nora-Swantje Almes,  
Curator

Further reading:

Munoz, José Esteban: *Cruising Utopia*, 2009

Hartman, Saidiya: *Venus in Two Acts*, 2008

Preciado, Paul B.: *Pornotopia (An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics)*, 2019

Ebun Sodipo is a London based artist making work for those who will come after: the black trans people of the future. Her interdisciplinary practice narrates her construction a black trans-feminine self after slavery and colonialism. Regularly working within installation and performance, Ebun Sodipo collects visual historical fragments and weaves narratives together, part fiction, part record, to craft intricate and intimate stories not commonly found within archives or historical records—unearthing lineages and pathways for Black trans people.

Miriam Kongstad is an artist based in Berlin and Copenhagen. Expanding from a background in choreography and performance, her practice is anchored in investigations of embodiment and the human body, whilst materializing as images, installations, performance, sculpture, and sound. Her work takes place in a social realm, visually depicting cultural and political structures surrounding the human body, with specific attention to habitual and naturalized movements and their identifications in popular culture. Miriam's work questions how currents and societies are changing bodies and ideals; and how bodies and ideals are changing societies, by exploring the metaphysical, organic, social, and spiritual aspects of inhabiting a body - the extended experience of being flesh.

Johan Bech Jespersen is a visual artist who graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Through sculpture and performance, he explores the relationship between architecture, performativity and sexuality. Together Kongstad and Bech Jespersen unite their interests in architecture, choreography and art, by creating spatial installations dealing with space, sexuality and popular culture.

Luki Essender is a Berlin based artist working in mediums of sculpture, installation, performance, and text. Central to their work is a careful analyses of phenomena where the realms of private and public intersect. Employing diverse materials and architectural typologies, the artist creates sculptural installations inspired by folklore, rural landscapes, urban environments, and the nuanced realm of queer spaces. In their text works Essender delves into themes encompassing human relationships, identity, and the influence of consumerism on queer lives.

Nora-Swantje Almes is a curator, based in Bergen, Norway, where she works as Bergen Kunsthall's Live Programme Curator. Her research explores topics of intersectionality, queerness and gatherings as a performative format for platforming a multiplicity of voices. Previously, she held positions at Glasgow International, PARTICIPANT INC, Art Angel London and Schinkel Pavillon Berlin. Independently, Nora co-curated 'Aggregates' at Raven Row London and Ausstellungsraum Klingental Basel, 'love and other rhythms' at Kunsthalle Exnergasse Vienna and curated the exhibition series 'What's good for me is good for you? A physical multilogue' at Mimosa House London, amongst others.