

Lizzi Bougatsos

Stage Exit

Opening:

11 September

6—9 pm

Exhibition:

12 September —

24 October 2024

Lizzi Bougatsos' *Stage Exit* emerges from the creative wake of a life lived performing and on stage, from fledgling ballerina to the post-punk voice of a generation. (Nothing is hidden, all is vulnerable, everything turned to face the crowd.) Visual artist and musician Bougatsos' seminal post-punk bands Gang Gang Dance and I.U.D. determined the course of a new, New York sound: the rhythmic dance beats of a post acid-house generation soaked in the energy of late twentieth century punk attitude. This is no exit—instead, it is an act of transference, a turning away from the crowd to an internalized language and expression. Here, all that pop, subcultural and liberating expression is turned inward, presented with the poise and self-awareness of one who expresses the desires of a generation: freedom from the empty, stillborn gesture and sign. The gallery becomes her rearticulated stage.

Bougatsos looks to the studio and the gallery as a stage where objects coalesce, articulate now to speak dynamically of the absent body. In *Closeted* (2024), a folded, crisp white dress shirt with human hair sprouting horsetail-like from its folds and a pair of bound stiletto heels to its right lies in a shallow vitrine bathed in green light. In *Blade Out* (2024)—the readymade as vitally dangerous object—switchblades shod in ballet shoes replace candles in a chandelier. It's like the teenage Damned's proto-punk, driving guitar riffed punk lyric "I'm born, born to kill" rendered as shamanic object. In *The Frenzy (for Vito Acconci)* (2024), Bougatsos nods to Acconci's seminal performance *Seed Bed* (1972), now transfigured as a vibrating massage chair populated with eggs and sticks of charcoal and charged with a fragility that suggests the potential of life, of the cradled unborn, moving beyond Acconci's masturbation. *Stage Exit* defines the new body as a contemporary surrealist object, hair-sprouting and alive not the fearful male touch of the female form but the (and forgive the blunt portmanteau) the "sexperimental" vision of an artist who understands how presence waxes and wanes. *Stage Exit* positions the delinquent silhouette as vitally realized adult form, looking beyond generational discord and moves towards sanitized and policed expressions of identity.

It is an act of considered reflection, if the performer is literally removed what remains? The question conjures the last works of the late Mike Kelley: the mechanized, plastic barking innards of all those stuffed animals stripped of their fur and placed sacrificially before us. Hers is a ritualized reflection on female rebirth and the spirit that endures. I'm reminded of Neil Young's maxim "it's better to burn out than to fade away," as Bougatsos asks what

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as Bougatsos asks what happens after the burn, what to do with the track marks of a lived body. Baring all, from heart to breast to body to mind, this is no stage exit. This is a curious return, from the studio to the stage to the studio; from A to burning B and back again.

– Mark Beasley