

KUNSTVEREIN GARTENHAUS

25 January – 15 March 2025

RAQUE FORD

Cry Baby

I feel like you are not worthy
of my word
of my feelings
but they still exist and need a place to go.¹

What's the etymology of a cry-baby ?

1. Doctors in France are studying how infants can be taught rudimentary sign language in order to express their needs more directly and efficiently, and (optimally) spare their caretakers the decibels: *It is impossible to determine the difference between a cry due to hunger and a cry due to thirst.*²
2. In John Waters's musical romp *Cry-Baby* (1990), it is the band of delinquent youths –viz. Johnny Depp, Ricki Lake, and daddy Iggy Pop – who display their feelings plainly at moments of crisis and/ or sudden beauty. An emotional intelligence expressed from the dead-center of the eye, in tears viscous as cum.
3. In 1966 an engineer at the Thomas Organ Company in Sepulveda, California invented a midrange resonant boost (MRB) circuit and placed it in a volume pedal to sell to electric trumpet players. Frank Zappa applied the wah-wah to his Switchmaster in 1967 at a gig in New York City and gave one to Jimi Hendrix shortly thereafter. Also known as the Cry Baby, the pedal profoundly infected the psychedelic atmosphere of Hendrix, rising: *I come back to find the stars misplaced / And the smell of a world that has burned.*³
4. A sore loser, especially in politics.

¹ Raque Ford, *Cry Baby*, ed. Attilia Fattori Franchini (Vienna: Wild Seeds 4, 2025), 53.

² H. B. Valman, "Crying Babies," *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 280, No. 6230 (Jun. 21, 1980): 1522.

³ The Jimi Hendrix Experience, „Up From The Skies," *Axis: Bold as Love*, Polydor/Track, 1967.

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The simple schoolyard taunt – die-cut and reflexively articulated in mirror-tile, here (*Cry Baby*, 2025) – reverberates with the ongoing shame of the vulnerability-slur. Your feelings don't belong to this para-pedagogical environment...

*Who does not feel in the flows of his desire both the lava and the water?*⁴

What remains is the impression: impactful psychic hurt (and shaped plexi) rolled through a press with sufficient tension, heat, and plenty of ink to pull a relief print. And on repetition: overlapping ghosts, stray geometries, broken phrases. This cumulative concrete poetry (*FAKE*, 2025) results in part from the randomness of the physical process, and fury; much like the pattern of footprints left by ecstatic high steps on the nightclub's checkered dancefloor (*intimacy a better place*, 2025). Exertion as a kind of reclamation; re-constitution.

Expelling hourly on a thermal printer, the re-programmed poem-machines transmit emotional residues differently – lighter in letter, longer in lyric. Whereas printed receipts mark our transactions and cash exchanges daily – measuring time, place, and experience via exponential accrual; stubs gathered and stuffed deep into pockets, billfolds, handbags – Ford's *printer paintings* (*I* and *II*, both 2025) instead perform an actuarial accounting for the tender-hearted.

Won't you pull up a stool and spill your guts?

Go ahead and cry, baby.

–Kari Rittenbach

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 67.