

In the last several years, Lili Reynaud Dewar has created a complex oeuvre that continuously revolves around the concepts of cultural, social and even emotional identities, that recalls various artistic and social liberation movements and subcultures of the 20th century. She deliberately breaks with conventions and traditions in order to explore them and to create a space for thought in which the viewers can and must form their own opinions.

In her first large solo show at the Kunstverein in Hamburg, the artist brings together elements of science fiction and rap with discourses on emancipation and colonialism in an installation that pushes against the boundaries of its space. The core of the exhibition is formed by a large-format video piece that depicts the before and during of a performance in Memphis, Tennessee. On a shell-shaped concrete stage a woman recites excerpts from a socialist-feminist manifesto while four local stand-up-comedians improvise alongside her. This chorus of voices is further accompanied by a noise-musician.

Reynaud Dewar chose the place of the performance for its particularly controversial and diverse background. The metropolis, situated on the Mississippi delta, is on the border between the affluent Midwest and the poorer South of the United States. This city was the epicenter of the American slave trade and the later Civil Rights Movement. The latter culminated in the Sanitation Strike of 1968, which was further intensified by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. after he took an active role in these demonstrations. Memphis is also an iconic location in the history of American music in the United States. It is widely known for its Blues music and as the final resting place of Elvis Presley. In more recent years, the city has evolved into a vital center of rap culture in the US.

Working alongside the local comedians, Reynaud Dewar uses this specific historical and socio-political backdrop to negotiate the appropriation of a certain cult object. A central element of the film, exhibition, and overall performance is the so-called grill—a jewelry worn over the teeth, which is typically made of precious metals. In Black music, especially in rap and hip-hop, the grill functions as a sort of relic and status symbol. Through her adoption of these objects as a white, European artist, Reynaud Dewar knowingly raises provocative questions of cultural appropriation, impression, and transformation, as well as the legitimization of these acts. The connective link in this work is Donna Haraway's 1985 text, *A Cyborg Manifesto*. This treatise—a feminist essay that employs, albeit in a partly ironical sense, a cyborg as a metaphor for the dissolution of conservative borders between humans, machines, and animals—propagandizes a state of chimerical fusion in which normative categories like class, gender, or race are discarded. Excerpts from Haraway's text are part of the performance, while the grills themselves are reminiscent of a cybernetic body modification. Moreover, the discussions between the artist and the comedians consistently revolve

around the reasons behind the discrimination of minority communities in Memphis and elsewhere.

In addition to the video, the exhibition at the Kunstverein in Hamburg incorporates props from the performance and detritus that was collected in Memphis that are scattered throughout the space and inside oversized grills, which, in their exploitation as trash cans, are reminiscent of the Strike. Adjacent to these are large format boards on which quotes from the *Cyborg Manifesto* form a contextual and physical framework for the discordant relics, ideas, and performances that will culminate in this exhibition. Thus, Reynaud Dewar not only transforms time and space within the performance, but also further removes the grills from their own heritage and embeds them into a new context. In times of conflicting forces between cosmopolitan utopia and rising nationalistic ideologies, the artist poses immediate questions of the articulation and translation of cultural identities, their conditions, consequences, and limits.

Lili Reynaud Dewar (*1975 in La Rochelle, France; lives and works in Paris and Grenoble) received her Master of Fine Arts from the Glasgow School of Arts. In 2013 she was awarded the Prix Fondation d'entreprise Ricard. Solo exhibitions and projects by Reynaud Dewar have been shown at, among others, the New Museum, New York, the Studio Museum, Harlem, the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Kunsthalle Basel, Generali Foundation and the 21er Haus, Belvedere, Vienna, and Index, Stockholm. In 2015 she took part in the International exhibition of Biennale di Venezia, curated by Okwui Enwezor. Along with Dorothée Dupuis and Valérie Chartrain, she is co-founder and editor of the magazine *Petunia* for feminist art and entertainment.

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