

Revolt Against the Sun!

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Amidst Revolt Against the Sun! at Kunsthhaus Baselland

Sanna Helena Berger (b. 1983, Sweden) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. She works with, in, and around language.

Francesca Brugola (b. 1996, Carate Brianza, Italy) lives and works in Milan, Italy. She works with, in, and around language.

Wisrah C. V. da R. Celestino (b. 1989, Brazil) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. They work with, in, and around language.

Jason Hirata (b. 1986, Seattle, USA) lives and works in New Jersey, USA. He works with, in, and around language.

Florence Jung (b. in France) lives and works. She works with, in, and around language.

Ilja Zaharov (b. 1998, Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan) lives and works in Basel, Switzerland and Freiburg, Germany. He works with, in, and around language.

Speculatively I, suggested to Jason that in speaking of the conversational artworks that inhabit this exhibition, one might just as well speak of any other artwork and still get to the point. Allow me! then, to make an attempt. For that we shall begin not at the beginning but in the middle.

Revolt Against The Sun : To borrow Moyra Davey

Act One

To borrow Moyra Davey's words from her film "Notes on Blue":

I began with a first note to myself. I made a list. But I'll start in the middle...

Scene One

We hear HER words (following a quiet voice emitted from her earphones while she is) pacing-through-a-section-of-her-apartment-moving-in-and-out-of-awkward-camera-frames

Frame is: a key word here: door frames, windows, parallel lines... but also frames of reference.

[As the film keeps rolling, the time line on Vimeo dyes blue]

Scene Two

Her frame becomes MORE PRONOUNCED, wedged MOST FIRMLY between Derek Jarman's oeuvre, yet also engaging a larger cast of writers, poets, filmmakers: artists working with, in, and around (language).

NARRATOR:

Language, I'm setting up a frame as well.

This exhibition, which I shall from now on refer to as a conversation, began likewise with notes on artists and a list, though as Davey admits, "Not everything on my list, penned quickly, made it into the film at the end" which also applies in my case. As the film kept rolling my list soon assumed its own existence, proceeding to rewrite itself and, in turn, what I took for granted as the beginning of the conversation. Hence I find myself unable to start a conversation, only capable of continuing one. Once again, I begin in the middle, mid-thought, mid-conversation, and I know that might make it difficult to follow, but I trust you can bear this inconvenience, or have already accepted it as a condition. The middle, this being-thrown-into-something, this distance, which Blanchot associates with a certain kind of weariness, is the line along which my conversation(s) with Francesca, Jason, Florence, Sanna, Wisrah, and even myself teeter(ed).

[A conversation is a framework that wanders, it roams the alleys where it assembles and dismantles a frame in perpetuity, drawing, effacing and retracing its contours is its mode of being.]

Scene Three

Exactly this sort of frame allows for a closer proximity and one's own conditions of perception and the world (not world, I mean the work).

NARRATOR:

There is another frame, a more formal and tangible one, that left its imprint on the conversation from the very beginning. This branch of the exchange rests on the inner mechanisms of a program: an institutional frame. In fact, it operates on two levels simultaneously. The first is the graduation from an art school, which carries with it the expectations, codes, and legitimizing structures of academic training. The second is the publicly funded exhibition program, an apparatus that not only provides resources and visibility but also inscribes the work within a frame of cultural policy and collective validation (or rejection). Together, these overlapping frames circumscribe the conversation. They form the conditions under which gestures, materials, and even the language of expression resonate, at times reinforcing and at other times constraining what could be said or done.

(This space of regiment became most fruitful to my interlocutors and myself, not just in subject matter but also in shaping expressions almost on command, whether material or otherwise constituted.)

NARRATOR:

It is not despite but because of the setting of boundaries that certain conversations have taken shape, the exclusion of certain frames, provided a generous space for this to happen.

[Davey is filming the moon.]

NARRATOR:

As if one just had to plug in one's own frame into this one, and like putting a soft square peg into a round hole, it may just take on the desired shape if one is willing to squeeze hard enough to alter its form. This takes me from the middle back to the beginning, to a title as seemingly inevitable as "Blue" must have been for Jarman. The peg may not fit perfectly snug, yet one could agree that it hardly feels out of place either, even if it complicates things. Is it round or square now?

(The title I'm speaking of is "Revolt Against the Sun!" There is (at least) one other conversation in that space claiming this imperative as its title: Oh, how else? All these frames, all these suns, all these revolts!)

NARRATOR (to the audience):

A conversation always conjures another. Following that line I like to ask: What if Davey named her film simply "Blue" instead of "Notes on Blue," or what if Borges' "Poem Written in a Copy of Beowulf" was also just titled "Beowulf." The work title in that case takes a step closer to its subject matter. Too close perhaps. Would this proximity be so close that it and its subject matter become indistinguishable, so much so that, somewhere, somehow, the typically distinct voices begin to parrot one another? Is it doubling the conversation or dare I call it a conversation inside of a conversation?

No... I doubt it's that simple, since it's not that simple. What I believe in our case, however, is that one cannot exist without the other. I utter this cautiously. And of course, it also depends on which poster you're looking at, and who framed it. A book is also a frame. Was it Wisrah who wanted to read the institution like a book? I cannot recall anymore, since all these conversations are entangled beyond singular authorship. To engage this frame of the institution as a book, and the book as a conversation, I challenge you to read the institution's library, where you'll find all the works, not works, I meant words the institution knows. Between the tomes and picture books of art you'll encounter the conversation inserted in between. Remember "Poem Written in a Copy of Beowulf."

[The conversation spills across moments and speakers, while the speakers spill into other speakers, and the moment into other moments.]

NARRATOR:

I am once again reminded of "Notes on Blue." Although we hear Davey's voice throughout, she is not the sole proprietor of this speech. Once we attune ourselves to the densely populated text she reads, her utterances unfold as a polyphony.

[The question of who says what fades into inconsequence.]

(Just listen)

MOYRA DAVEY?:

Beyond my anxiety beyond this writing, the universe waits, inexhaustible, inviting

[It is more than a quotation of Borges; in that moment, Davey's voice and Borges' become indistinguishable.]

Scene Four

NARRATOR:

This leads me back to our conversation. I take this fluidity to be constitutive of it, which is why I hesitate, why I resist the impulse to claim ownership over whatever it produces. Florence's gesture slipped sideways, less an intervention than an escape, handing the conversation over to another artist. This exchange, this outsourcing of the conversation condensed as a faint apparition on a jacket left to rest in the wardrobe of the institution. You will only be able to read it if something in the following phrase glistens: The jacket is an oak tree, or perhaps only a glass of water. It's hard to say...

The following paragraphs recount events closely linked to these conversations, though their status remains, in my view, uncertain. Let me preface that I speak for myself in calling them consequences of the conversation rather than the artwork itself—but that is merely the frame I have chosen for this text.

(If you ask me in person the frame will most likely have shifted, wandered off into another room to find a new angle.)

Scene Five

The institutional frame is closely tied to its financial counterpart, those conditional allowances that, in our case, materialized as a literal pair of frames, tinted and branded,

shading the conversation in their own way.

SANNA HELENA BERGER (used the term):
mnemonic

NARRATOR:

Sanna used the term “mnemonic,” suggesting a detour of thought, an awkward path, and perhaps an absurd turn. A mnemonic as an attempt to summon the conversation itself, a revolt against the sun that, in turn, dissolved into a sun against the revolt.

MOYRA DAVEY (echoes anew):

Struggle is a word I used a lot. I used to disparage art made on demand. I felt you could tell that certain things had been made solely because there was a budget. And now I do almost only that. I’m doing it now, I’m working on commission.

NARRATOR:

Davey echoes anew: “Struggle is a word I used a lot. I used to disparage art made on demand. I felt you could tell that certain things had been made solely because there was a budget. And now I do almost only that. I’m doing it now, I’m working on commission.” I’m speaking of something acquired with funds bound by restrictions, guidelines; money that cannot be given to others, nor exchanged for services. I cannot pay you directly, only in a mnemonic manner. You don’t yet know what it is, though you will once the presentation has concluded. Until then, it lingers as a kind of Schrödinger’s gift within our conversation: it’s there but it’s being withheld. Some might call it an expensive but cheap gag.

[Davey now speaks off-screen]

NARRATOR:

Davey now speaks off-screen, speaks of physical blindness(es), her own, that of Jarman, and that of Borges. “Blue” becomes a stand-in for what is not there anymore for Davey, the film has new meaning for her since she lost vision on her left eye. For Jarman, the only thing left to see is that expanse of Yves Klein blue; for Borges, it is yellow. Both of their worlds, I mean their works, turn into images of a non-image for Davey. It is here that I begin to hear the voices again, detached to any visual, precisely because no image could accompany them.

Scene Six

Sanna, Francesca, Wisrah, Florence, Jason, Ilja: these particular voices have sought a kind of solace in a continuous transcript, shuttling back and forth between speech and writing, attempting to talk themselves out of stale notions of art.

Other voices with their own kind of frame chime in, framing the institution. They join into the canon, VernissageTV, they speak in pictures, in watermarked frames, in video tours, for the purpose of this conversation adopting the framework of the conversation to tour it faithfully. The pictures frame the conversation, in particular its vernissage.

[The image precludes the event.]

You take a seat, while the subtitles keep rolling, while the establishing shot holds its breath, and we wait for it to exhale but there's no expiration, again I'm reminded of "Blue."

Jason

By now, a checkered pattern has pressed itself on your butt, left by the instruments borrowed from the institution.

[These institutional chairs are frames, too, but you knew that.]

NARRATOR:

If you sit a while longer, it may reveal itself as a cutaway. It exists to conceal something else, to disclose by not disclosing what would resist being shown, a cutaway from the conversation that it cannot ever fully contain. For it is not supposed to be contained but continued. Perhaps, I am sitting next to you, perhaps we conversed already. If you sit long enough, you might come to feel that the image is not complete in itself but a cutaway from the tableau vivant you now inhabit. You're part of this conversation, I don't have to tell you. You may sit there while the vernissage fades into the night, into a retelling, which is actually never re- but always anew-. At that point in time, in a future, this text might not be a piece of paper but a movement on stage. Francesca has threaded this possibility, this theatrical frame into it.

[*Francesca knows a theater director.*]

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