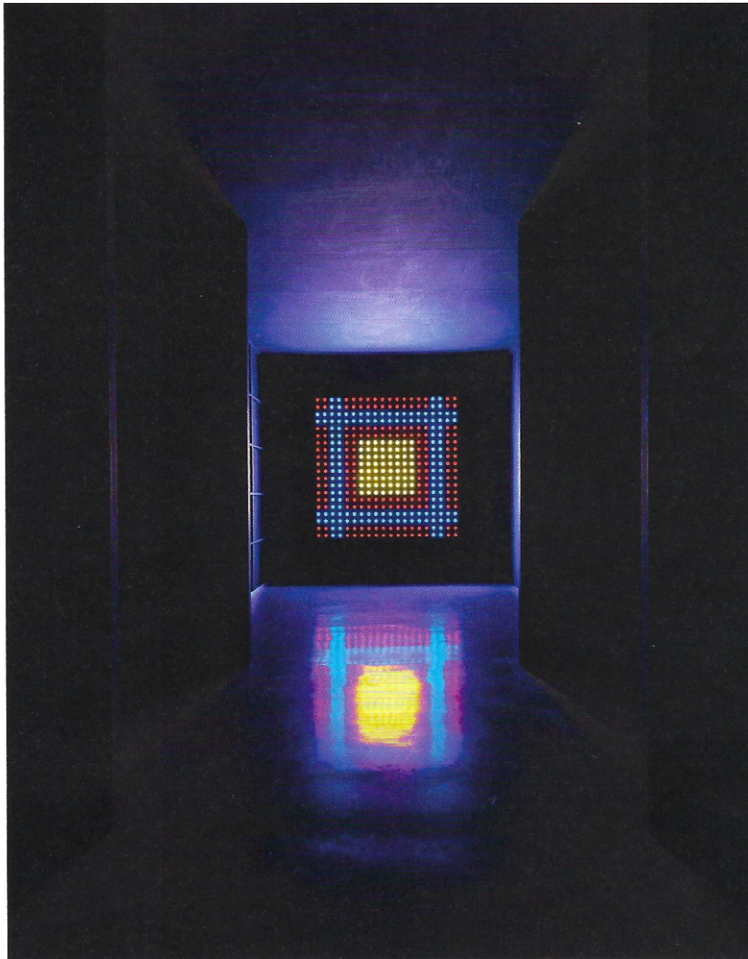


# AROUND TOWN: BERLIN



Taking place at the end of April, this year's Berlin Gallery Weekend comprised 47 exhibitions. Common themes to emerge were changing gender dynamics in the midst of the growing visibility of female artists; the inevitable return of the repressed; and how emblems historically seen as the negative sides of binary oppositions – such as the moon, the feminine, the left hand, the animal or the extra-occidental – can be rendered positively.

In the film *Enter the Dragon* (1973), Bruce Lee instructs his pupil to channel his energy 'like a finger pointing at the moon'. Lee then slaps him for gazing at the finger and missing the 'heavenly glory' above. At Dan Gunn's group exhibition 'The Finger that Shows the Moon Never Moons', Lee's quip is formulated as a political parable: the finger represents

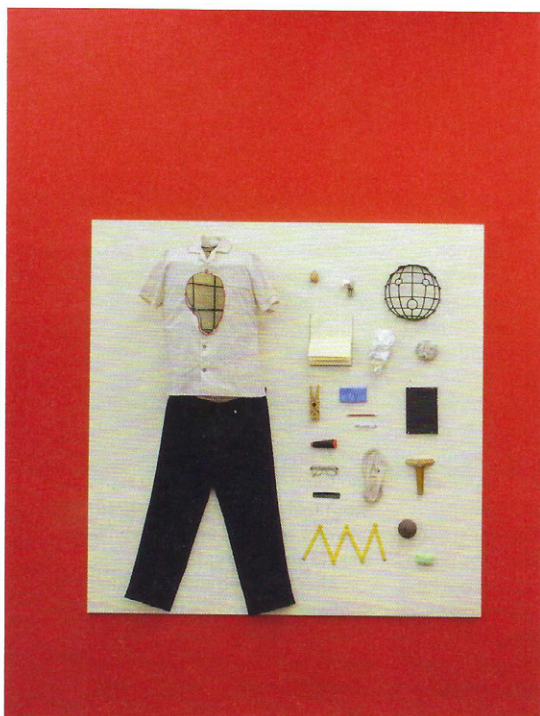
the weaponized masculinity that blocks our view of the moon's radiant body: the collective body of Turkish citizens who voted 'no' on the constitutional referendum. On view were videos and photographs by Marie-Louise Ekman, Azin Feizabadi, Evelyn Taocheng Wang, Viron Erol Vert and Apichatpong Weerasethakul, among others. For Turkish curator Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu, the moon is both a leitmotif and an emblem for the labour of resistance: not so much a gendered concept but a political subject that can be activated allegorically. Originally an Ottoman imperial insignia, the Turkish flag's crescent moon symbolizes the patron goddess of ancient Byzantium, Hecate: deity of crossroads and entrances. From our current political playing field of autocrats, primal fathers and

klepto-fascists, it is easy to forget that, only a few years ago, in Tahrir, Syntagma and Taksim squares, in Gezi Park and on Wall Street, the multitudes said 'no' in order to undo this wretched present. Now, brute force is the order of the day: while those in Berlin were enjoying Gallery Weekend, Turkey was shutting down Wikipedia.

The play between information and what to make of it re-appeared in Guan Xiao's 'Living Sci-Fi, under the red stars' at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, in which the artist asks: can financial capital be made visible? Her three-channel video installation *Dengue, Dengue, Dengue* (2017) dives into the diffuse world of post-Fordist economies and their incongruous temporalities: the products of uneven technological and social development. Guan is at her strongest in her sculptures – *Wild Dirt* and *Bamboo* (both 2017) – which metabolize these asymmetries and render them into vegetal-industrial hybrid life forms. For Guan, our media-saturated technosphere is paradoxical: while we are surrounded by images, the sociopolitical events that surround us seem impenetrable. Lurid and morbid, Kasia Fudakowski's meandering installation is one highlight of this year's Gallery Weekend. For 'Double Standards: A Sexhibition' at ChertLüdde, Fudakowski draws on gender and political binaries. Upon arriving at the exhibition space, the visitor is presented with a sign: he or she must choose to enter either the space by the left or the right door. Enter through the right side to find male genitalia hanging on bamboo stems, a ceramic mouth, nailed to the wall, phallic bolster pillows and a hanging publication, written by Fudakowski. For the artist, political antagonism is transplanted onto archetypal gender binaries and ultimately reconciled as erotic fiction, personified in a story about Lee Lozano and Andy Kaufman's putative one night-stand.

In Eva Kot'átková's 'Diary of a Stomach' at Meyer Riegger, digestion becomes a metaphor for the artistic process: the stomach is the great equalizer, the archive of the Id, and the artist is seen as a figure who gulps down appliances and artefacts, experiences and anecdotes. A series of collages depicts voracious creatures. Others sit at a table installation: like reflux, everything that goes in comes back out, distorted, disfigured. For Kot'átková household objects point to social exteriorities, and are repurposed.





into human-like forms: pots, pans, shelves and forks gaze back at the viewer with gaping, omnivorous mouths.

Another highlight is Teresa Burga's 'Conceptual Installations of the '70s' at Galerie Barbara Thumm. A member of the group *arte nuevo* in the late 1960s, Burga was a pioneer of pop, op art and conceptualism in Peru. As a feminist working under a military dictatorship, Burga struggled for recognition as an artist, and her satirical take on domesticity and gender stereotypes is now due for recognition. Burga exhibits *Obra que desaparece cuando el espectador trata de acercarse (propuesta III)* (Work that Disappears when the Viewer Tries to Approach It, Proposal III) (1970/2017): a light installation that progressively switches off as the viewer approaches it, (de)constructing the aesthetical sublime: the closer you get, the more the work evades you. Also on display is an exquisite series of drawings in which Burga transposes the poetry of Jorge Luis Borges visually, rendering its semantics in colour block compositions.

Colour blocks resurfaced in 'Linear', Kapwani Kiwanga's exhibition at Tanja Wagner. Following Faber Birren's theories, Kiwanga examines how spaces for work, learning and healing all came to be colour-coded in pastel shades. The exhibition revolves around the subconscious effects of soothing colour, such as beige or greyish-green. Along with several large-scale paintings, Kiwanga displays the video *A Primer* (2017), in which prison walls, operating rooms and hospital cells become a filmic exposition of therapeutic tones and mood-influencing hues.

Though the notion of 'media' is today allied with technology, throughout the modern age the concept also included spiritual registers. For her solo exhibition at Archive Kabinett, 'I stick my hands into the earth, and I think for a while', Gitte Villesen revisits the figure of the medium as a conduit between the natural and the supernatural. In the video *I had no other choice than to jump from one pile to the other, as there was nothing in between* (2012), Gambian musician Amadou Sarr performs a parable about competing animals, on his calabash, an instrument imbued with spiritual force. Here, disassociation from reality is a socially sanctioned experience. The video and photo installation *deeply immersed in the contents of a learning stone* (2016) approach the reading of feminist science fiction as a passing from one state of consciousness to another.

SAVVY Contemporary opened 'EVERYTHING IS GETTING BETTER. Unknown Knowns of Polish (Post) Colonialism'. Curated by Joanna Warsza, the exhibition examines Poland's cultural identity via historical Polish colonial aspirations and expansionary fantasies. In the multimedia installation *Sea and Colonies* (2006–ongoing) artist Janek Simon surveys the undertakings of the Polish Colonial and Maritime League, which in 1937 devised a plan to deport the Jewish population of Poland to Madagascar, then a French Colony. Later the plan was sold

to Nazi Germany, which had acquired sovereignty over the island. In a lecture-performance *I Utter Other* (2014–ongoing), Slavs and Tatars examined the iconography of the bicephalous imperial eagle, a geopolitically ambiguous, bisexual emblem, unable to decide between East and West, and the phonetics of orientalism. These frictions between the grand political narratives of modernity, artistic modernism and the more recent processes of modernization in Eastern Europe could be extrapolated and generalized to broader geopolitical dimensions. At the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Anselm Franke and Hyunjin Kim opened an exhibition, '2 or 3 Tigers', which explores the mediated nature of sociality and subjectivity via the figure of the weretiger. At its centre is Minouk Lim's sculpture *L'Homme à la Caméra* (Man with a Camera, 2015): a feathered man with a camera head. The work points to the cyber-modulated threshold between material and spiritual worlds. From the perspective of these exhibitions, the year 2017 appears as a liminal stage populated by transitional figures and unstable images: weretigers, astral bodies, bicephalous eagles, colour blocks and body parts. In times of affliction and upheaval, the lure of nihilism is powerful. But the future is female, in flux and ontologically ambiguous. Just try not to focus on the (tiny) fingers, or you'll miss the 'heavenly glory' above.

Ana Teixeira Pinto

#### Opposite page

Teresa Burga, *Obra que desaparece cuando el espectador trata de acercarse (propuesta III)* (Work that Disappears when the Viewer Tries to Approach It, Proposal III), 1970/2017, installation view

#### This page

**Above**  
Eva Kot'átková, from the series 'Diary of a Stomach', 2017, metal, textile, wood, paper, shoes, soap, glass, plastic, 180 x 180 x 38 cm

#### Below

Guan Xiao, *Callimico*, 2017, rim, resin, acrylic paint, artificial flowers, camera tripod, 100 x 70 x 64 cm

