

CURA.

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AT FIRST GLANCE, ZOE WILLIAMS' WORK CAN SEEM UTTERLY SLICK AND DECORATIVE; ALTHOUGH THERE IS SOMETHING SLIGHTLY DISTURBING ABOUT HOW SHE EMPLOYS A NON-HIERARCHICAL SYSTEM OF OBJECTS AND IMAGERY. THROUGH THEIR USE, REUSE AND MISUSE, SHE IRREVERENTLY RECONFIGURES THE ORDER AND AGENCY OF THINGS, RITUALLY PLAYING WITH THE TRANSFORMATIVE PROPERTIES OF CERTAIN OBJECTS (JEWELS, GEMSTONES, VESSELS) AND SUBVERTING THEIR CONDITION OF APPEARANCE. DISPARATE REFERENCES THUS COME TOGETHER TO PRODUCE DIALOGUE OR TENSION. "FOR SOME TIME NOW IN MY PRACTICE," SHE WRITES, "I HAVE BEEN CREATING CONFUSIONS BETWEEN CATEGORIZATIONS SUCH AS COMMODITY, CRAFT, ARTIFACT, AND FETISHIZED AND SYMBOLIC OBJECTS. THROUGH THE JUXTAPOSITION OF OBJECTS FROM DIFFERENT EPOCHS AND MATERIAL DOMAINS, I AM KEEN ON SEEING THE NORMAL ORDER OF OUR READING OF THESE OBJECTS AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT DISTURBED."

ZOE WILLIAMS HAS A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF MISE EN SCÈNE, PREDOMINANTLY INFORMED BY CONSUMER CULTURE AND FASHION ADVERTISING. THROUGH A WIDE USE OF EMBELLISHED ARTIFACTS, SHE SEEKS TO INTENSIFY THE SENSUALITY OF THE IMAGE, BLURRING ANY BOUNDARIES BETWEEN COMMERCIAL AND CONCEPTUAL SYMBOLS. AS IN TRADITIONAL STILL LIFE, WILLIAMS OFTEN DEPICTS INANIMATE SUBJECT MATTER – BOTH ORGANIC (SEASHELLS, CORAL, PRECIOUS STONES, FLOWERS) AND MAN-MADE (VASES, LACQUERED SURFACES, LUXURY GOODS) – LYING ON TOP OF A GLOSSY FABRIC.

THERE IS AN EXPLICIT ALLEGORICAL SYMBOLISM RELATING TO THE OBJECTS REPRESENTED IN THESE BODILY LANDSCAPES: SHELLS, FOR INSTANCE, ARE A RECURRENT MOTIF SYMBOLIZING FERTILITY AND SENSUALITY. THEIR FLESHY INTERIOR AND GLISTENING PINK LIPS CONVEY THE SENSUOUS EFFECTS OF SURFACE AND DEPTH, WITH CLEAR EROTIC IMPLICATIONS. COSMETIC CREAMS BECOME A MALLEABLE MATERIAL, BOTH SCULPTURAL AND SENSUAL, SUGGESTING CONTACT AND INTIMACY. OTHER WORKS EVOKE THE POSSIBILITY OF A PENETRATION: RINGS, VASES WITH ORIFICE-LIKE PROTRUSIONS, PRECIOUS ANUS-LIKE CASTS IN GOLD, BRONZE OR PORCELAIN, GEM-ENCORUSTED DILDOS AND, MORE RECENTLY, ORNAMENTED PUBIC HAIR. "I AM INTERESTED IN CREATING THESE SLIPPAGES BETWEEN



THE HIGHLY FINISHED ALMOST STERILIZED SURFACES ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH-END LUXURY AND DESIGN, AND SOMETHING MORE VISCERAL OR ABJECT. I WORK WITH SUBTLE JUXTAPOSITIONS AND AWKWARD COMPOSITIONS PLACING OR INTENSIFYING REFERENCES TO THE BODILY NEXT TO THE HIGHLY MANUFACTURED," SHE EXPLAINS.

THERE IS AN INTENDED VOID IN ZOE WILLIAMS' VIDEOS, MIMICKING A PORN/PERFUME AD AESTHETIC, EXCEPT THERE IS NOTHING FOR SALE AND NO TANGIBLE CULMINATION. THE OVERLOADING OF REFERENCES TO WEALTH AND CONSUMPTION, AS WELL AS THE POROSITY BETWEEN ORGANIC AND LUXURIOUS SUBSTANCES ALL LAYER UP IN A TASTELESS MAGMA WHERE THE REPULSION-SEDUCTION DIALECTIC COMES INTO PLAY. THE DRAMATIC OUTCOME OF ULTRAVIOLET LIGHTING AND AMBIENT MUSIC, THE EXAGGERATION OF MOVEMENT AND THE HEIGHTENED ATTENTION TO DETAIL, THE DECORATIVE EXCESS AND THE POMPOUS AESTHETIC CHARACTERIZE ZOE WILLIAMS' RHETORIC OF THE BAROQUE. THE CURVILINEAR MOVEMENTS OF CURTAINS, CREAM SWIRLS, SEASHELLS AND UNDULATING HUMAN SILHOUETTES ALL EVOKE THE BAROQUE TROPE OF THE FOLD. THIS FOLD IS AT ONCE A SENSUOUS, MOBILE AND TEXTURED FIGURATION OF THE BAROQUE. FUNDAMENTALLY EROTIC, THE FOLD IS THE PRINCIPLE THAT INFORMS A PENETRABLE HIGH AND LOW, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE, IN AN INFINITE FLOW. THE BAROQUE DRAPERY ENVELOPING WILLIAMS' SETTINGS ADDITIONALLY RECALLS TWIN PEAKS' RECURRING RED ROOM: AN EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL PLACE DRAPED WITH RED VELVET CURTAINS ONE COULD PENETRATE TO ACCESS DIFFERENT REALITIES, CARNAL AND INTANGIBLE NONETHELESS.

WILLIAMS' CLINICAL YET EROTIC MIX OF ULTRAVIOLET LIGHTING, LOUNGE MUSIC AND LAVISH LUXURY DESIGN FRAME INTRICATE COMPOSITIONS WHERE OBJECTS ARE DORMANT BEINGS WAITING TO BE ACTIVATED BY HUMAN CONTACT. THE STAGING OF DIFFERENT OBJECTS AS TOOLS OR PROPS SUGGESTS A POTENTIAL MANIPULATION. SCULPTURES ARE TO BE WORN, TORN, USED AND ABUSED. THE ARTIST REFERS TO THEM AS "CATALYSTS FOR PERFORMATIVE ACTIONS" WITHIN HOSTED ENVIRONMENTS THAT ENABLE THINGS TO HAPPEN. THIS ZONE OF CONTINGENCY CAN BE THE BODY ITSELF, CURRENTLY DEFINED BY ZOE WILLIAMS AS A SPACE ONE CAN OCCUPY, SCULPT AND SPECULATE UPON.

*BY FLORENCIA CHERŇAJOVSKY*



Zoe Williams, Fur Constellation, 2014 (cover) O, 2013 (p. 50) Lashings, 2014 (p. 52) All images Courtesy: the artist and Antoine Levi, Paris

**EDITORS IN CHIEF**  
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Andrea Baccin

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
Costanza Paissan

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**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**  
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**MARKETING & ADVERTISING**  
advertising@  
curamagazine.com

**WEB EDITOR**  
Federico Florian

**COPY EDITOR**  
Mike Watson

**DESIGN**  
Walter Santomauro

**INTERN**  
Leonardo Caldana

**DISTRIBUTION**  
info@curamagazine.com

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**  
Lorenzo Benedetti  
Jean-Max Colard  
João Mourão and Luís Silva

**CONTRIBUTORS OF THIS ISSUE**  
Noah Barker  
Myriam Ben Salah  
James Cahill  
Florenca Chernožovský  
Martha Kirszenbaum  
Sam Korman  
Déborah Laks  
Frances Loeffler

Hans Ulrich Obrist  
Laura Phipps &  
Elisabeth Sherman  
Kari Rittenbach

**ARTISTS**  
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Puppies Puppies  
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Haim Steinbach  
Andra Ursuta  
Zoe Williams

**TRANSLATIONS**  
Teresa Albanese  
Matthew Cunningham  
Flavio Erra  
Costanza Paissan

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