MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
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Julia Phillips

Press Packet

Phillips, Julia, and Michelle Millar Fisher. "Julia Phillips: Giving Form To The Attachment And Ambivalence Of Motherhood." *Artforum*, September 16, 2022.

Remick, Rachel. "Julia Phillips: New Album." *ArtReview* 72, no. 7, November 2020, p. 100.

Quinton, Jared. "Julia Phillips." *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2020, p. 83.

Phillips, Julia, and Brandon Sward. "Witness and Event: Julia Phillips Interviewed by Brandon Sward." *BOMB*, November 11, 2019.

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

Hatfield, Zack. "Julia Phillips." *Artforum* 57, no. 1, September 2018, pp. 291–92.

"Julia Phillips: Failure Detection." *The New Yorker*, May 7, 2018, p. 10.

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ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

JULIA PHILLIPS

Giving form to the attachment and ambivalence of motherhood

September 16, 2022 • **As told to Michelle Millar Fisher**

Julia Phillips, *Nourisher*, 2022, ceramic, medical PVC tubes, stainless steel, and steel cable, 69 1/2 x 32 x 24". © Julia Phillips.

While Julia Phillips's visual language remains informed by functional tools and ceramic body casts that serve as metaphors for social and psychological experiences, recent motherhood has complicated and expanded her visual and emotional arsenal. Her exhibition " Me, Ourself & You" is on view now at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York through October 29. Below, the German-born, Chicago-based artist discusses her recent work in the context of the longer arc of her practice.

Phillips, Julia, and Michelle Millar Fisher. "Julia Phillips: Giving Form To The Attachment And Ambivalence Of Motherhood." *Artforum*, September 16, 2022.

MY WORK OFTEN STARTS with a title that describes a relation, a role, a person, a function all at once. My first language is German, and my distance from the English vocabulary lets me think about titles in abstract and visual terms. I think about relationships and how they translate into mechanical and bodily metaphors. I'm particularly interested in relations that exist on an intimate, interpersonal level and translate to a structural and political one.

The focus in my work has shifted from mechanisms of oppressive relationships to relationships that allow for horizontal power dynamics, with a potential for reconciliation. In the last two years, I have taken a closer look at relationships with the self and what I call "imaginary organs," like the soul or the spirit. I see that investigation as part of the development in the wish to become a mother.

During the months I tried to conceive, I had a sort of art crisis, a literal crisis of creation. The only creative expression I had was the "Conception Drawing" series (2021–22), driven by what I call my conception anxiety. The process was also influenced by past experiences, a whole spectrum from abortions to ectopic pregnancies to miscarriages. These medical experiences have made me more aware of my physical and imagined insides. What do you really know about the inside of your body? This endless inquiry is represented by the question mark after the title of each drawing. I went into the series wanting to articulate the separation between the pregnant person and the embryo or fetus. I was trying to draw borders, but also enclosures and passageways, curves that could be the inside of the body or negative space.

Julia Phillips, *Conception Drawing VIII (Cell Accumulation / Embryo?)*, 2020–21, oil pastels and vegetable oil on Dura-Lar in artist's frame, 41 7/8 x 26 7/8". © Julia Phillips.

Phillips, Julia, and Michelle Millar Fisher. "Julia Phillips: Giving Form To The Attachment And Ambivalence Of Motherhood." *Artforum,* September 16, 2022.

Julia Phillips, *Aborter*, 2022, ceramic, stainless steel, and plastic tubing, 37 x 19 1/2 x 19 1/2". © Julia Phillips.

Julia Phillips, *Impregnator*, 2022, ceramic, stainless steel, and plastic tubing, 37 x 19 1/2 x 19 1/2". © Julia Phillips.

For this show I imagined taking a break from body casts because they're physically taxing. But there was an urgency to make *Nourisher*, 2022. I was processing what it means to experience stress, inner turmoil, and sadness while breastfeeding. The sculpture consists of a face and a breast cast, with the face looking down toward the imagined infant, a moment I find so beautifully intimate between mother and child. The eyes of the face are pierced holes showing the residue of wet clay making way on the inside and outside of the eyes, a symbol of the gaze going both ways, from infant to mother and back. Medical tubes come out of the figure's mouth and nipples and pool on the ground. It's a metaphor for the sharing of resources, the intake of the nourisher becoming the infant's nourishment, almost an environmental statement. What if the nourisher's situation is unsafe? Is it that harm passed on?

I conceptualized this exhibition in a celebratory mood, awaiting child and motherhood. But my pregnancy also coincided not just with ongoing horrific global news, but with the overturning of Roe in this country. I realized that I wanted to account for this political climate and how it influences questions around longed-for, anticipated, dreaded, and unwanted motherhood. I had made works in the past that included titles, such as *[R]Ejecter*, 2018, and *Aborter*, 2017, that represent the uterus as a refusing entity, one that can miscarry or abort. With the two works in this show, *Impregnator*, 2022, and a new work titled *Aborter*, 2022, I try to highlight the complex dynamics of pregnancy by pointing at the two parties involved, the impregnating one and the conceiving, potentially aborting one. Handles appear on both devices as ambiguous elements representing who is in charge of such operations.

As more women become outspoken about their abortion experiences, complex and unique histories on various sides of such events are told. It's been powerful to discover stories like Alice Walker's *The Abortion* (1971). I just recently listened to an episode of the *New York Times* podcast, *The Daily*, titled "Pregnant at 16." It was an eye-opening moment that led me to empathize with two women who had similar experiences yet turned into opponents: one pro-life and the other pro-choice. No matter how difficult it is, hearing women share their stories is politically important work and personally liberating.

Phillips, Julia, and Michelle Millar Fisher. "Julia Phillips: Giving Form To The Attachment And Ambivalence Of Motherhood." *Artforum*, September 16, 2022.

Julia Phillips, *Attachment V, Flexible with Quick Release*, 2022, ceramic, medical PVC tubes, stainless steel hardware, and wire rope, 33 3/4 x 13 1/2 x 5". © Julia Phillips.

My experience of pregnancies that did not result in the birth of a child has been an important subject of inquiry for me and has become part of my personal and artistic identity. Before there was a well-articulated wish for motherhood, there were—of course—also phases of ambivalence. Psychoanalysis has served as an important resource, but also a judgment-free field where feelings of repulsion and anxiety can be expressed and studied. One of my great influences is the work of Dr. Jennifer Stuart, particularly her text "Procreation, Creative Work, and Motherhood" (2011) and her articulations of attachment and autonomy.

The "Attachment" series (2022) explores this theory of mother-infant relationships in physical terms. I wanted to make devices with hand grips on both sides, informed by an infant's instinct to grab. One side is a more rationally shaped handle, whereas the other is malleable and unbuilt, a reference to an infant's presence. One piece has mechanical quick releases, found for instance in climbing gear. I was interested in the shape, but also the metaphor. Where does the need come from to quickly release what before has been attached?

The title of the show "Me, Ourself & You," is a play on Joan Armatrading's album *Me Myself I*. The sense of self and state of being alone is at stake with the development of becoming a mother and experiencing the body as a shared space, during pregnancy and after. I play with the word "ourself," oscillating between singular and plural, pretty much what I felt when looking at a positive pregnancy test.

— As told to Michelle Millar Fisher

Phillips, Julia, and Michelle Millar Fisher. "Julia Phillips: Giving Form To The Attachment And Ambivalence Of Motherhood." *Artforum*, September 16, 2022.

ArtReview

Julia Phillips *New Album*

Matthew Marks Gallery, New York 10 September – 17 October

Deploying her characteristic fragmentary visual language, Julia Phillips's most recent sculptural installations investigate the mechanics of human relationships. *Mediator* (all works 2020) consists of two ceramic moulds of the area of the chest around the collarbone, glazed in layered, flesh-coloured tones and mounted at either end of the crossbar on a T-shaped stainless-steel fixture. Atop the vertical support sits a microphone inside a metallic ring, its position between the two ceramic moulds implying a discourse. The title invokes the legal process of mediation as a negotiation between two parties in conflict. Yet in viewing *Mediator*, the viewer is left to guess who mediates between whom and what is in dispute. Maybe it's divorce proceedings, or political debates, or arguments with family members that spin around the microphone like a centrifuge. This equivocal connection between the sculpture and the viewer, where the viewer extrapolates the sculpture's indeterminate meaning, is critical to Phillips's work, allowing it to function as a machinic representation of a psychological relationship.

At the same time, Phillips's use of fragments of the human form signals the embodied experience of relationships, like the chest pieces in *Mediator* or the clenched knuckles in *Negotiator #1*. These corporeal traces are reminiscent of Ana Mendieta's *Silueta* series (1973–80), in which the outlines or indentation of the body implies its presence. The largest work, *Oppressor with Soul, In Treatment & Suppressor with Spirit, In Treatment*, places such bodily fragments in a symmetrical arrangement; opposing groups of elements feature a mould of shoulders and the base of a skull mounted on a vertical pole, near a hollow mould of shoulders revealing a chest-cavity-like shape that rests on a nearby metal table. Here, Phillips pairs the oppressor and suppressor, where both are in positions of power but are depicted 'in treatment'. One chest cavity, whether the 'Soul' or 'Spirit', is largely intact, but in its opposite, the ceramic flesh curls with sculpted flames.

This tableau suggests treatments that are perhaps more torturous than therapeutic, recasting the stainless fixtures and white walls of the gallery as a more sinister or surgical environment. In her installations, Phillips dissects power dynamics, leaving only corporeal fragments or cross-sections of oppression, negotiation, mediation or observation. Yet these fleshy icons prevent any reading of the social identities of their implied bodies (racialised, gendered or classed). By avoiding such constructs, Phillips invites the viewer to imagine whose bodies might be enacting these psychological relationships – a symbolic elasticity that permits the works to act as mirrors for the viewer. In contemplating *New Album*, I questioned the ways in which I allow myself to be vulnerable, to conciliate or to exert power in my own interactions. *Rachel Remick*

Mediator, 2020, ceramic, stainless steel, granite, nylon hardware, 175 × 285 × 285 cm.

Remick, Rachel. "Julia Phillips: New Album." *ArtReview* 72, no. 7, November 2020, p. 100.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Julia Phillips, *Mediator*, 2020. Ceramic, stainless steel, granite, nylon hardware, 69 × 112 × 112 inches.
© Julia Phillips. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

JULIA PHILLIPS

Julia Phillips
New Album
Matthew Marks Gallery
September 10 – October 17, 2020

BY JARED QUINTON

The sculptures in *New Album*, Julia Phillips's first solo exhibition at Matthew Marks, align in a haunting, slightly sinister mise-en-scène. With delicate ceramic body fragments on armatures of steel and stone, Phillips beckons viewers into an ambiguous physical and psychological space, where agency and desire meet subjugation and violence.

As usual, Phillips has titled her works with tool-like functions, whose human implications are directed by ceramic elements cast from her own body. Until now her sculptures have embraced a darkly psychosexual ethos, mostly conjuring single bodies, coded female, and subjected to violent penetrations, as in the particularly vicious *Positioner* (2016) and *Extruder* (2017). These latest works offer something slightly more neutral, suggesting mutualistic exchanges between two agents. In *Mediator* (2020), for instance, two partial upper torsos

Quinton, Jared. "Julia Phillips." *The Brooklyn Rail,* October 2020, p. 83.

glazed in contrasting skin-like tones balance at either end of a suspended metal rod, each angled to face a central stainless-steel microphone. The large circumference of the work's granite base keeps viewers at a distance, even as the angle and scale of the cast forms seem to invite intimate human engagement. *Negotiator (#1)* (2020), meanwhile, consists of a large wheel with opposing handles and grips molded for use by two imagined participants—handles which also restrict the wheel's range of motion. Positioned with its "gaze" over the rest of the exhibition, *Observer II* (2020) is a fleshy set of two-way binoculars that suggests the potential of both looking and being looked at.

Phillips' works can sometimes seem overtly didactic; it's tempting to read them as Foucauldian commentaries on the subjugation of bodies within systems of social control, especially given her stated interests in feminist, psychoanalytic, and decolonial theories. Viewers are invited to participate in this discourse by "using" or imagining using the implements and thus implicating themselves in the brutal power dynamics. And yet, Phillips does a lot to undermine this implied functionality, most notably in her use of delicate ceramic itself, the fragility of which is exaggerated by its proximity to rigid metal. In *Mediator*, the delicate sternums of each body casting are pitilessly bolted to their armature; the ceramic spokes of *Negotiator (#1)* look precarious enough to collapse at the slightest touch.

Perhaps even more ambiguous is the artist's treatment of the body itself, which she indexes in familiar ways and yet subjects to uncertain ends. "By showing the body in fragments I am hinting at a potential presence," she says. "What exactly the suggested body is doing with the parts that aren't visible is up to the viewer to imagine … Letting viewers fill in the blanks hopefully allows them to adjust the work to fit their own realities and imaginations."[1]

It is from this troubled space between recognition and alienation, implication and estrangement, that Phillips's work draws its uncanny energy. Interior is made exterior, and subject is made object. It feels fitting that Phillips should be showing with Matthew Marks, the longtime champion of Robert Gober, whose likeminded embrace of an aesthetic of body horror makes equally apparent how grotesque desire can be, and how alluring abjection can be. Despite her keen awareness of history and theory, however, Phillips's work is unlike anything being made today.

1. Brandon Sward. "Witness and Event: Julia Phillips Interviewed by Brandon Sward." BOMB Magazine Online. November 11, 2019.

JARED QUINTON is a writer and curator based in Chicago.

Quinton, Jared. "Julia Phillips." *The Brooklyn Rail,* October 2020, p. 83.

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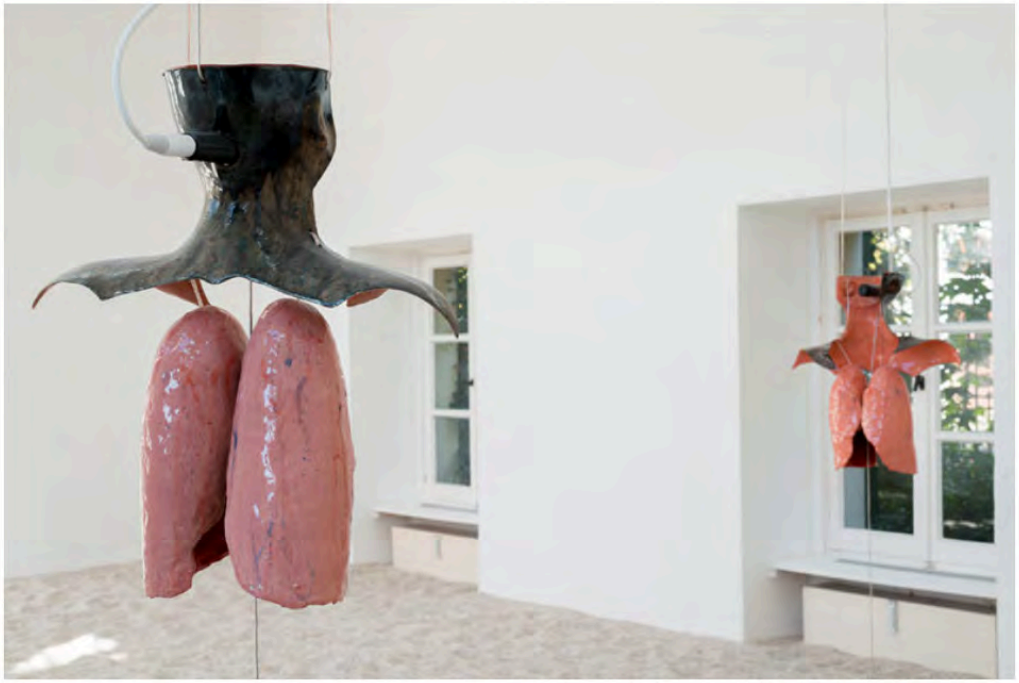
BOMB

Witness and Event: Julia Phillips Interviewed by Brandon Sward

Sculpture and installation that investigate subjective perspectives.

Nov 11, 2019



Installation view of *Julia Phillips: Fake Truth* at the Kunstverein Braunschweig. Photo by Stefan Stark.

Julia Phillips is a German American artist who was born and studied in Hamburg before moving to New York to complete an MFA at Columbia University and participate in the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program. Her sculptures imply new uses for the body that hover uneasily between desire and violence. Last year, she had her inaugural solo show in the United States, *Failure Detection*, at MoMA PS1 in New York City. This year, Phillips returns to Germany for her first institutional solo exhibition in her home country at Kunstverein Braunschweig. While there are several continuities between her new project, *Fake Truth*, and Phillips's earlier work, such as her use of metal and ceramic to suggest fragmented humanoid forms, she also charts new territory with sound and socially responsive sculpture.

—Brandon Sward

Phillips, Julia, and Brandon Sward. "Witness and Event: Julia Phillips Interviewed by Brandon Sward." *BOMB*, November 11, 2019.

Brandon Sward

Witness I–III (2019) enlists the viewer as an active participant in the work. What's at stake for you in implicating audiences in this way?

Julia Phillips

The installation *Witness I–III* is equipped with contact and cardioid microphones that pick up sounds that viewers unavoidably produce. The floor of the space is covered in gravel, and every footstep produces a sound that, in addition to oral sounds, is "witnessed" by three ceramic sculptures suspended from the ceiling. The sculptures play back the sounds through speakers embedded in them.

In this project, viewers' actions are amplified, interpreted, and reproduced. The sculptures therefore become active agents. The playback sounds confront viewers with an interpretation of their own actions that clearly deviates from reality or truth. Viewers stand in relation to three sculptures—a group, a formation—and hear their actions and sounds reflected back to them in various ways and with different sound effects. The sound is played back at an intimate volume, encouraging physical proximity to the work and only allowing them to hear one interpretation at a time.

Julia Phillips, *Witness I–III*, 2019, glazed ceramics, cables, cardioid microphones, contact microphones, speakers, subwoofer, gravel (misc. technology), dimensions variable. Photo by Stefan Stark.

Phillips, Julia, and Brandon Sward. "Witness and Event: Julia Phillips Interviewed by Brandon Sward." *BOMB*, November 11, 2019.

BS
Could you speak a bit about the title of the exhibition, *Fake Truth*?

JP
The title *Fake Truth* speaks to subjective perception, and truth as an unreliable value. Truth, in the context of language and emotion, does not seem to exist as an objective fact, but instead is dependent on subjective perspectives of an event. Similar to previous works, I am examining a specific relationship, in this case the relationship between witness and event, both on an intimate, interpersonal level and on a social, structural level.

The title plays with the term "fake news," which has become part of our information reality. I was educated to understand "real news" as an accurate, objective narration of past events, with a moderate amount of subjective interpretation. The concept "fake news," as paradoxical as it is, helps me think about the line between subjectivity and inaccuracy. How do we choose a narrator of the past, a witness? And how consciously do we evaluate the mental health of a witnessing subject who is responsible for reconstructing the past?

BS
The word "witness" has strongly judicial connotations. Is there a relationship between *Witness I–III* and law?

JP
Definitely. We can look at criminology, for instance. In order to get an accurate description of a past event in court, at least two witnesses are brought in. Judges listen to one piece of evidence at a time, attempting to use fragmented information to construct a reliable narrative. And the constructed truth is based on and overlaps with the assessment of a judge, which again is subjective.

BS
The fragmented way you portray the human body has always had an unnerving effect on me. What meaning does this fragmentation have for you?

JP
Ambivalence. By showing the body in fragments I am hinting at a potential presence. What exactly the suggested body is doing with the parts that aren't visible is up to the viewer to imagine. I like creating scenes and narratives that set a tone and give hints, but I am less interested in making a completed statement—at least not visually. Letting viewers fill in the blanks hopefully allows them to adjust the work to fit their own realities and imaginations.

BS
What form does this fragmentation take in *Fake Truth*?

JP
The three sculptures resemble human upper bodies. The hanging pieces are casts of partial heads, ears, necks, and shoulders. Suspended underneath the shoulders, within the imaginary torso, are lungs, representations of breathing entities.

Vocal microphones are embedded in the sculptures, facing the viewer at approximate mouth-height to pick

Installation view of *Julia Phillips: Fake Truth* at the Kunstverein Braunschweig. Photo by Stefan Stark.

up oral sounds. The back of the head casts each have a hole that holds the microphone, which I consider to be a surreal moment in the work. While a microphone stuck through a skull can be interpreted as a violent act, it also turns the three entities into uncanny robot-like presences.

BS

Could you speak a bit about the materiality of these works?

JP

The outside, glaze surfaces of the casts are more realistic than in my previous work. They carry identity markers like scars, hair texture, and complexion. Bodies with histories. Still, the aspect of anonymity remains, since the casts don't portray any facial features.

This work has motivated me to use glaze more experimentally. I have introduced bright flesh colors to my palette and created glaze layers that resemble the surface of internal organs with blue veins and bloodred edges.

The lungs are imagined, hand-built shapes that vary texturally from the casts. The casts show recurring elements from previous works, combining smooth surfaces with ruptured holes. Their ears are all somewhat torn and open. I wanted to portray the ears as orifices that lead inside the body where hearing, interpreting, and playback take place.

Phillips, Julia, and Brandon Sward. "Witness and Event: Julia Phillips Interviewed by Brandon Sward." *BOMB*, November 11, 2019.

BS

Have you worked with sound before? What role does the aural play in *Fake Truth*?

JP

I have not; this is the first time. I got the idea for this project when I was at a residency in Salvador, Brazil. One of the fellow residents was Pauchi Sasaki, an amazing artist who uses sound very expressively and physically. When she introduced me to her work, I understood the potential of digital sound as an animating, almost visceral element, like the sound of breath. Breathing does not produce much sound, but when our ears pick it up it symbolizes that another human is present, and that's where a story can begin.

Julia Phillips: Fake Truth *is on view at the Kunstverein Braunschweig in Braunschweig, Germany, until November 17.*

Brandon Sward is an artist and writer who splits time between Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City.

Julia Phillips, *Witness I–III*, 2019, glazed ceramics, cables, cardioid microphones, contact microphones, speakers, subwoofer, gravel (misc. technology), dimensions variable. Photo by Stefan Stark.

Phillips, Julia, and Brandon Sward. "Witness and Event: Julia Phillips Interviewed by Brandon Sward." *BOMB*, November 11, 2019.

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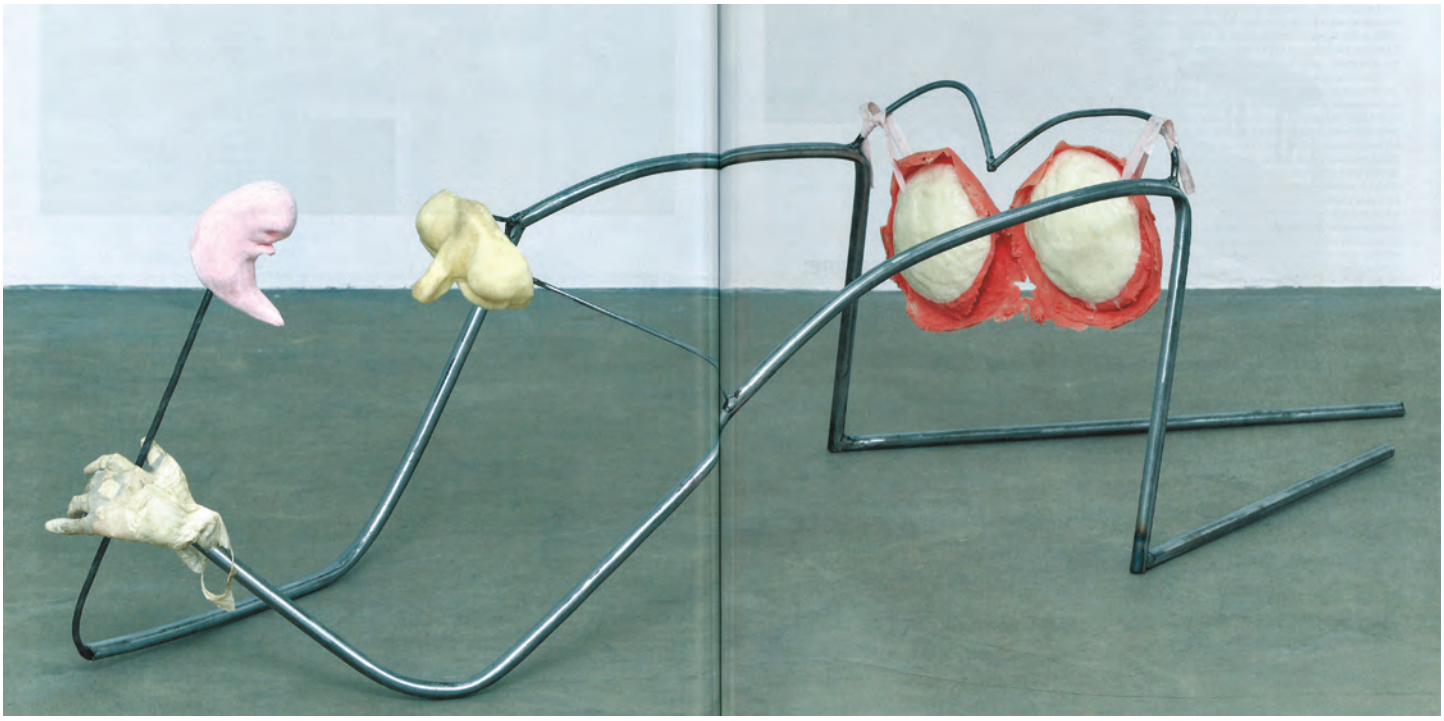
frieze

NO MIRACLE CURES

Essay: In Catholic tradition, ex votos are objects offered to saints in supplication or thanks for a miracle, often likenesses of the afflicted person or bodily organ. In recent work by JESSE DARLING, JULIA PHILLIPS and DIAMOND STINGILY, as well as that of the late DONALD RODNEY, corporeal stand-ins demand a different form of healing for ills both personal and social *by Sinéad Gleeson*



Jesse Darling, *Ass Priest*, 2017, welded steel, foam, cast silicone, silk ribbon, jesmonite, 195 × 55 × 53 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Sultana, Paris; photograph: Aurélien Mole

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

The German artist Peter Dreher, who died earlier this year at the age of 87, painted the same glass of water over and over. Beginning in 1974, he rendered the glass more than 5,000 times ('Day by Day, Good Day', 1974–2020). Dreher believed that returning to the same subject allowed him a new vantage point each time. In a 2017 interview with *Studio International*, he described himself as 'a happy Sisyphus': 'because I succeed in seeing my subject (the glass) afresh each time – as if I were seeing it for the first time'. The glass-as-subject to which I find myself repeatedly drawn is the body in pain; I gravitate towards artists and writers – from Frida Kahlo to Lucy Grealy – who took this as their subject.

This piece was originally commissioned with a specific group of young practitioners in mind. But, following the brutal murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police in May, I kept circling back to one artist in particular, whose work felt newly resonant amidst the ensuing urgent calls for racial justice. British artist Donald Rodney was born in Birmingham in 1961 and he was just 36 years old when he died from sickle cell anaemia in 1998. He centred his illness in what he created, while exploring racism, bodily autonomy and inequality. *Psalms* (1997) consists of a motorized wheelchair to which Rodney added a neural computer. It moved around the gallery, a kinetic mapping device made up of sensors and a camera. Visitors could ignore or engage with the chair as it circled the space in sequences, and the camera operated as both Rodney's eyes and his presence in the gallery. The chair refutes the gaze of strangers who stare at disabled or non-conforming bodies; it is also a stand-in for a body of colour in the overwhelmingly white space of the art institution. *Psalms* was originally shown as the centrepiece of Rodney's exhibition '9 Night in Eldorado' at the South London Gallery, which took place in 1997, the year before his death. Rodney was too ill to attend. The chair is an ex voto: a stand-in for the artist, making both him and his illness visible, while critiquing the invisibility of Black and disabled artists within mainstream artistic culture.

In the House of My Father (1996–97) is a close-up photograph of Rodney's palm, holding a small house: a symbol of security and belonging. Closer inspection reveals that the structure is made from the artist's own skin, which was removed during his treatment for sickle cell anaemia, a disease that disproportionately affects people of colour. It's a powerful image, encapsulating the politics of illness and inequality. 'Ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects,' wrote Walter Benjamin in his 1931 essay 'Unpacking My Library'; never is that more evident than in being the owner of a sick body.

The accessories of illness as externalized cure: a prosthesis as prayer, a cane as a stand-in for disability.

This page above
Donald Rodney, '9 Night in Eldorado', 1997, exhibition view, South London Gallery. Courtesy: Estate of Donald Rodney and South London Gallery

This page below
Donald Rodney, *In the House of My Father*, 1996–97, photograph, C-print on paper, mounted on aluminium, 12 × 15 cm. Courtesy: Estate of Donald Rodney

Opposite page
Donald Rodney, *Psalms*, 1997, installation view, Cell Project Space, London, 2019. Courtesy: Estate of Donald Rodney and Cell Project Space, London; photograph: Rob Harris

Ex votos were objects originally offered to a saint in return for protection from illness or death. In South America, they were usually paintings of the peril from which a penitent wished to be saved. But they are not just depictions of distress: each one is a repository of future hopes, of a different set of possibilities. As a teenager, I developed an orthopaedic illness that led to years of immobility and surgery. There was one spell of 18 long months on crutches, during which time my school organized a trip to the French pilgrimage site of Lourdes. There was a raffle for places, such was the demand, but I was given priority because my illness offered the possibility of a miracle. I was, in a way, my own ex voto. I believed. I thought I would be cured. At a candlelit procession, psalms were sung – the sacred songs invoked by Rodney in his installation – and, at the Grotto of Our Lady, I saw medical supports hanging as offerings or as proof of miracles. The accessories of illness as externalized cure: a prosthesis as prayer, a cane as a stand-in for disability.

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

Jesse Darling, 'Selva Oscura' (Dark Jungle), 2019, exhibition view, Galerie Sultana, Paris. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Sultana, Paris; photograph: Aurélien Mole

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

'Having a body in the world is not to have a body in truth: it's to have a body in history.'

Anne Boyer

Years later, when I first encountered Jesse Darling's sculptures, I was struck by how they transformed these objects, reclaiming and reinventing them. *Collapsed Cane* (2017) is a hospital-issue, metal walking aid distorted out of shape, unusable. The curve resembles a pelvis, mirroring the bone it is meant to support. It was shown as part of Darling's Tate Britain show, 'The Ballad of Saint Jerome' (2018–19), which drew on the fable of the lion who had a thorn removed from its paw by the titular saint. The duality at the heart of this is Christianity's insistence on the redemptive power of healing, but also the power imbalance in being ill. The act of healing is often underpinned by a notion of value: who or what is worthy of cure? *Epistemologies (shamed cabinet)* (2018) resembles both a museum vitrine and a case for relics. The legs are warped and unsteady, implying a sense of brokenness, while the glass receptacle reinforces the sacredness of its contents, which resemble binders of medical notes. Every patient is familiar with having their history, their pain and their treatment collated in these corporate folders – reduced to a vocabulary and logic that is as powerful as it is inadequate. Darling looks at how ill or disabled bodies navigate the capitalist structures of hospitals and their hierarchies of knowledge.

In her 2019 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Undying: A Meditation on Modern Illness*, the poet and essayist Anne Boyer writes: 'Having a body in the world is not to have a body in truth: it's to have a body in history.' The historical body is utilitarian, erotic, aesthetic but also an intersection of gender, race, class, sexuality and ability. As with the lion, which represents the intrusion of the wild or exotic into the realm of Western Christianity, the othering of the patient is a consistent part of the medical narrative. A patient learns early on that absorbing pain is a means of martyrdom, inching them closer to a kind of religious ecstasy and the idea that there is meaning in suffering. In their 2018 'Support Level' show at Chapter NY in New York, Darling explicitly investigates this, using eerie doppelgängers of medical supports. *Comfort Station* (2017) is a twisted commode that appears to drag itself towards the viewer while, in *Cut Curtain* (2017), a PVC curtain displays a gash, rupturing its intactness and underscoring the lack of privacy in hospital spaces. It reminds me of a line from Anne Carson's book of poems *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001): 'a wound gives off its own light'. The source of pain can turn into an articulation of it. The wound has a voice: it speaks and it tells its own metonymic story of embodiment – as do medical aids. By resisting the objects of support as signifiers of dependence, Darling destabilizes assumptions around what sick bodies are capable of.

Right
Jesse Darling, *Epistemologies (shamed cabinet)*, 2018, mahogany, glass, steel, linen, archival binders, concrete, 125 × 110 × 50 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Arcadia Missa, London; photograph: Matt Greenwood

Below
Jesse Darling, *Comfort Station*, 2017, steel, aluminium, rubber and lacquer, 76 × 140 × 84 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Chapter NY, New York

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

I once spent nine weeks in a medical support: a hip spica plaster cast, which went from rib cage to toe tips. It was its own kind of sculpture, a fibreglass tomb. When the time came for it to be removed, a doctor did so with a cast saw. But something was wrong. Heat seared and I screamed. The doctor, however, insisted the tool could only rotate back and forth: there was no way for it to penetrate the skin. The next day, when the cast was finally removed under anaesthetic, six large gashes congregated on my legs. I still have the scars. I thought of that saw when looking at Julia Phillips's *Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)* (2017), glazed ceramic implements arranged on a metal surgical table. The objects look medical: a reminder of how tools used to heal and repair the body can, if misused or repurposed, become objects of torture and control, used to silence and maim. They acknowledge, too, how Western medicine has a history of its own kind of violence, across gender, race and class. It reinforces the concept that authoritative dismissal is another form of silencing. ('Calm down, the saw isn't cutting your skin.')

Phillips's work, like Darling's, draws on the medico-mechanical. It accepts the necessity of medical supports, but is wary of their potential to harm, to hurt rather than to heal. Her surgical objects are an ex voto to ward off pain and to give back autonomy to the patient. Much of her work is life-cast from her own body. In *Witness I–III* (2019), for example, ceramic heads, shoulders and lungs hang as austere proxies. The pink lungs are threaded with blue capillaries and are uncomfortably lifelike. The viewer enters a room with a gravel floor, where microphones in each piece pick up on the inevitable underfoot crunch as well as other ambient noises and voices, which are played back – repeated or distorted by sound effects – through speakers. The lungs, discarnate in their suspension, will not be silenced. At the heart of Phillips's work is the question of who has a voice, which often intersects with questions of class, race and gender.

Western medicine has a history of violence, across gender, race and class.

This page
Julia Phillips, *Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)*, 2017, partially salt-glazed ceramics, brass screws, stainless-steel plate, metal wheel table, 104 × 117 × 46 cm. Courtesy: the artist; photograph: Jeffrey Sturges

Opposite page
Julia Phillips, *Witness I–III*, 2019, glazed ceramics, cables, cardioid microphones, contact microphones, speakers, subwoofer, gravel, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist; photograph: Stefan Stark

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

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Diamond Stingily has thought a lot about such issues. 'Surveillance', her 2017 show at Ramiken Crucible in Los Angeles, explored how observation can be used as a tool of systemic racism. Cameras scanned two of the gallery rooms, lit by imposing light towers with televisions displaying the footage. The cameras were omniscient, offering the insistent gaze of a panopticon: the watched did not know how frequently they were being viewed or when. The position of the lights was crucial – elevated, intimidating – and the objects they illuminated were Stingily's *Hergott Dolls* (2017). Based on Amish folk objects, the dolls are constructed in dark materials, rough-edged, with arms splayed, their position Christ-like or, perhaps, invoking an act of surrender. In 2018, they lined the walls and floor of Freedman Fitzpatrick gallery in Paris for her show 'For the People of [_____]'. In the press text for the exhibition, Stingily imagined them as belonging to the traditions of an unnamed people who 'disbanded from colonized countries in the early 1800s[,] mostly of African, Asian and Indigenous descent': who stepped out of the capitalist, imperialist world and formed a culture apart, where 'very few non [_____] have visited'. From a certain angle, one doll looks hooded, crumpled in a heap with hands bound behind its back, an image redolent of police brutality. Anonymized bodies of colour, the dolls may symbolize the victims of racism or act as an ex voto of hope and supplication that another way is possible.

'Surveillance' also featured the work of Bri Williams, whose own dolls are more detailed: clothed, specifically positioned and with braided Afro-Caribbean hair. Initially playful, the childlike figure of *School Mates* (2017) lies on the floor, hands over its eyes, as if playing a game of hide and seek. Another doll stands in a corner shielding its face, attempting to resist surveillance, not wanting to be complicit in the voyeurism of others.

These dolls are a specific kind of doppelgänger: corporeal ex votos that ask for a collective form of healing. Viewed from the vantage point of this summer, as protests for racial justice roil the US and elsewhere, Stingily's ideas around visibility take on renewed relevance. It was the hypervisibility of Black bodies in white spaces that led to the shooting of the unarmed Ahmaud Arbery while he was out jogging in a residential neighbourhood in Brunswick, Georgia, in February. But it is the ongoing presence of Black (as well as white) bodies in the streets, demanding change, that might lead to a more just society, in which people of all colours can thrive. In the bright, white, illuminated space of the gallery, Stingily's dolls may seem small and powerless, but their presence attests to collective resilience and its possibilities. What's at play here – as in the work of Darling, Phillips and Rodney – is a kind of visual parataxis: *see us, include us, stand with us.*

See us, include us, stand with us.

I keep returning to the articulation of pain – of how to put it on the page and how art can speak for the 'misbehaving' body (to borrow from the title of the Wellcome Collection's 2019–20 exhibition of work by Oreet Ashery and Jo Spence). A couple of years after the Lourdes trip and the permanent leg scars from the saw, I discovered Kahlo's work. She remains one of the most unflinching chroniclers of the body and injury, and of the injustices of othering – medical and otherwise. Kahlo collected hundreds of Mexican ex votos, painted on wood and metal, many of which still hang on the walls of her famous Blue House in Mexico City. She also painted her own – not to seek protection, but to document her suffering, while believing that healing could come from making the work. An ex voto is also an informal remaking of a scene, a kind of rearrangement. Never has the world felt more like it should tilt towards new structures and new ways to live **END**

Sinéad Gleeson's award-winning essay collection, *Constellations*, was published by Picador in 2019 and in the US by HMH Books in 2020. She is currently working on a novel. She lives in Dublin, Ireland.

Jesse Darling is an artist. In 2019, they had a solo exhibition at Triangle France, Marseille, and their work was shown at the 58th Venice Biennale, Italy. Their solo show at Kunstverein Freiburg, Germany, runs from 19 September to 1 November. They live in Berlin, Germany.

Julia Phillips is an artist. In 2019, she had a solo exhibition at Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany, and her work was shown in the group show 'Feminist Histories: Artists After 2000' at Museu de arte de São Paulo, Brazil. She lives in Berlin, Germany, and Chicaco, USA.

Donald Rodney (1961–98) was an artist.

Diamond Stingily is an artist. In 2019, she had solo exhibitions at Kunstverein München, Germany, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, Germany, and CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, USA. She lives in New York, USA.

Opposite page
Diamond Stingily, 'Off Kedzie', 2019, exhibition view, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin; photograph: Roman März

This page
Diamond Stingily, 'Surveillance', 2017, exhibition view, Ramiken Crucible, Los Angeles. Courtesy: the artist and Ramiken, New York; photograph: Dario Lasagni

Gleeson, Sinéad. "No Miracle Cure." *frieze*, no. 213, September 2020, pp. 68–77.

ARTFORUM

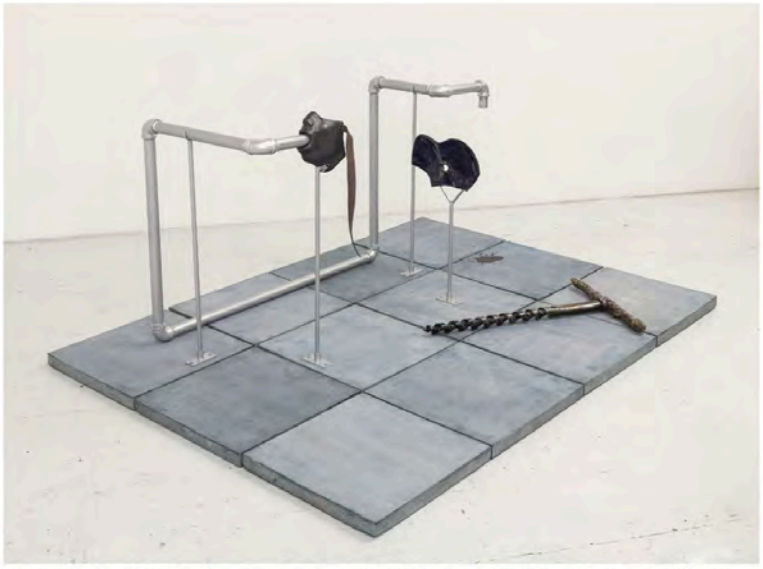
REVIEWS

Julia Phillips

MOMA PS1

Blinder, Intruder, Distancer, Muter, Aborter: Julia Phillips titles each of her sculptures after its purpose. Who carries out these functions? Ambiguity menaces the Germanborn, New York-based artist's work, in which intimacy, race, and power are interrogated—to use one of art criticism's most trite verbs, but one that aptly captures the spirit of Phillips's first museum solo exhibition, "Failure Detection," whose austere rooms conjure both torture chambers and medical facilities.

Ceramic utensils meant to sunder and separate flesh lie grimly on a hospital trolley with white handle grips in Operator II (with Opener, Destabilizer, Distancer, [R] Ejecter), Partially Dismantled, 2018. Distancer, two black facial casts linked by a thin metal pole, sits beside Opener, a fanged shearing device (made the same year). In the nearby Drainer, 2018, a black female pelvis, its interior glazed with weals of purple and pink, dangles from cables above a steel drain. Phillips's ominous conflations of desire and trauma are explicitly demonstrated in the smallest pieces, such as "Expanded, In Treatment," 2013–, a quartet of what seems to be delicately hatched Rorschach tests monoprinted with ripped, mottled hosiery. The show's centerpiece echoes MOMA PS1'S exposed piping: Extruder (#1), 2017, includes two ceramic casts—of an ass and a partially rendered head with a pole rammed down its throat—held at roughly the same height by metal stands bolted to a cement-tiled platform. By abbreviating the figure to only two orifices, Phillips invites viewers to complete, and imagine the gender of, the body in between. The metal pipe kinks at right angles from the mouth to an anus, under which pool a few drops of inky, oleaginous liquid on the platform, where a phallus-handled auger augurs future evisceration. In some ways, Phillips's work cuts to the chase: One person's aftermath is another's opportunity.



Julia Philips, ***Extruder (#1)***, **2017**, partially glazed ceramics, nylon screws, metal struts, metal pipes, concrete tiles, lacquer, 33 7/8 × 51 1/4 × 68 1/8".

"The absence of pain is a presence of world; the presence of pain is the absence of world," Elaine Scarry tells us in The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (1985). "Across this set of inversions pain becomes power." Phillips realizes this idea with works whose fragmented states convey the indivisibility and thus invisibility of a person in pain, while masks, buckles, and straps—objects claimed by the realms of both hurt and pleasure—insist upon an intimacy that tests the limits of safety. If industrial and clinical motifs such as metal piping and tile allude to systems of oppression, the ceramic casts—some molded from the artist's own anatomy—evoke bodies in their thrall, and how easily they shatter. Rather than provide emblems of security, works titled Protector, 2016/2018, and Fixator (#2), 2017, offer those of dystopic bondage, suggesting the harm meted out by institutions of "care" such as asylums, profit-driven health centers, and, indeed, museums.

In the opening weeks of the show, visitors could find Phillips's Fixator (#1), 2017, at the New Museum's 2018 Triennial, "Songs for Sabotage," which ostensibly addressed art's ability to tamper with colonialist structures. This vertical fixator resembled its twin at PS1: a gag and a pelvic cast fastened to silver poles on a tile platform. Like many of the exhibition's offerings, Fixator (#1) proved less an act

Hatfield, Zack. "Julia Phillips." *Artforum* 57, no. 1, September 2018, pp. 291–92.

of interference with the status quo and more of a diagnosis, or even a gesture of futility. Still, in a triennial that often appeared more of a shrug than an act of sabotage, Phillips achieved an ambitious defeatism, and "Failure Detection"—the title a phrase for preventative measures against computer crashes—arose from a generative kind of failure. By eschewing both bodily representation and entirely abstract forms, Phillips demands that viewers discover the gaps in their own imagination and empathy. For instance, are the five wall-mounted, medieval-looking sculptures, Manipulator I–V, 2016–18, meant to serve as weapons of abuse? Or might they be reclaimed as tools of redemption? Scarry asserts that tools make, weapons unmake. But as Phillips's art implies, some things do both.

—Zack Hatfield

Hatfield, Zack. "Julia Phillips." *Artforum* 57, no. 1, September 2018, pp. 291–92.

THE NEW YORKER

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

MOMA PS1

"Julia Phillips: Failure Detection"

This young German artist combines glazed ceramic elements with hardware to haunting effect. Sculptural vignettes allude to anatomy with handprints, masklike casts, and mysterious implements whose uses might be surgical, hygienic, or sexual. In "Extruder (#1)," a fragmentary figure, suspended from an armature of metal pipes, is reduced to its orifices and seems to have become one with the plumbing. Beside it, on a platform of concrete tiles, lies a very large, very dangerous-looking metal helix. Phillips's sculptures are singular, but they do have affinities with pioneering works that preceded them. The surreal air and corporeal references of her tableaux recall the oneiric installations of Louise Bourgeois; a quartet of monoprints, made using the crotches of panty hose to create webbed and ragged forms, nod to Senga Nengudi's innovative use of nylons to conjure the predicaments and potentials of the human body. *Through Sept. 3.*

"Julia Phillips: Failure Detection." *The New Yorker,* May 7, 2018, p. 10.

JULIA PHILLIPS

Four rectangular indentations press sharply into the white paper, their edges deep and precise against the swollen surface of the page. Stretched between the geometric depressions is a monoprint of a sheer fabric that splays like a dissection display. The tension of the stretch reveals rips within the printed material, which appears held together by a dark seam that runs down its length; the seam separates at the center and reconnects a few centimeters down, forming a diamond shape at the core. The sheer material represented in the print, stretched and pulled at the seams by a ghostly set of constraints, is the crotch of a pantyhose. Part of a series of relief ink prints on paper, *Expanded V* (2016) elicits a psychosomatic punctum particular to Julia Phillips' practice: a combination of vulnerability and control that rests unresolved.

The integrity of boundaries has been an ongoing interest in Phillips' oeuvre; the artist's sculptures examine and critique the interrelated discourses of space, race, gender, and psychoanalysis. Phillips constructs fragile ceramic objects and stages scenes that study the power dynamics informing public and intimate social relations between differing bodies. The concept of penetration, as both a physical and psychic act, serves to interrogate ways in which power is exerted over other subjects, their bodies and their unconscious, in the service of disembodiment and objectification. Traces of the artist's body abound in the scenarios of unequal exchange, questioning and disrupting the historical and phenomenological constructs through which the viewers order their physical and unconscious worlds. These are constructs which, more often than not, work in the service of dominant and disempowering ideals. The works implicate the bodies of both the artist and the viewer, revealing the ways in which, as Hortense Spillers points out, certain subjects are flesh but not necessarily body, and pulling the viewer into considering those positions.

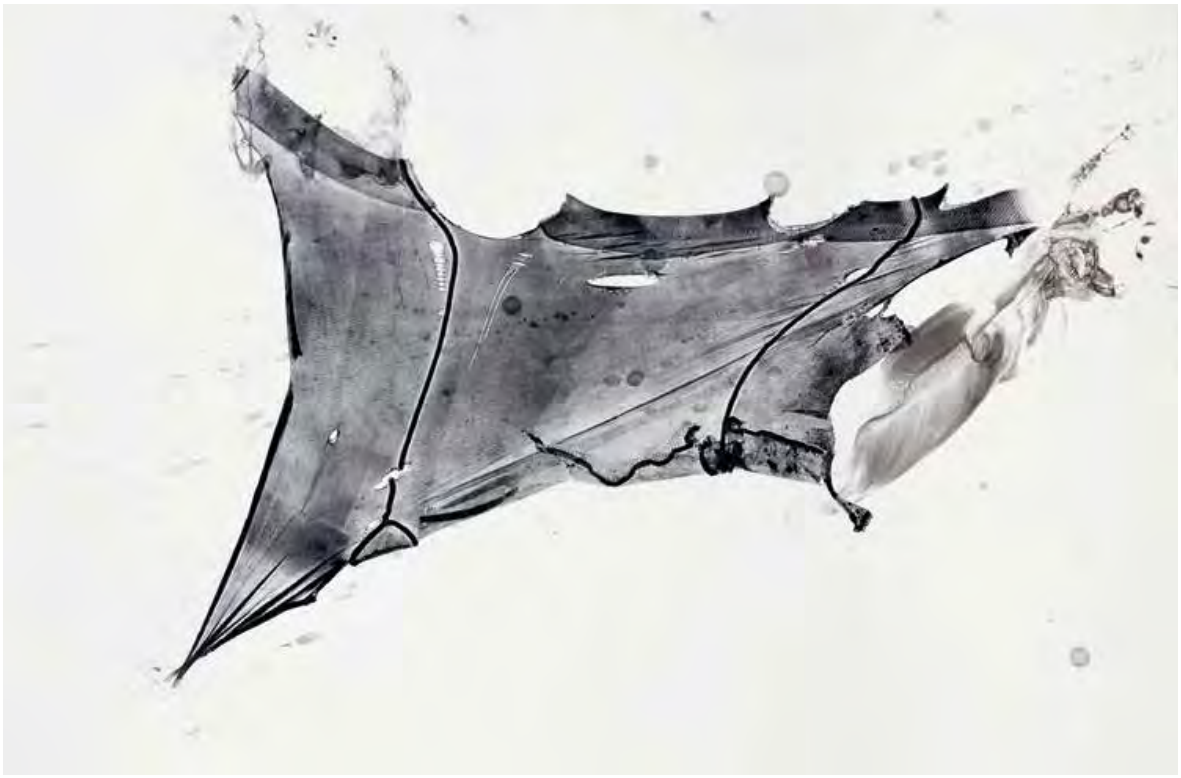
The splayed and broken hosiery in *Expanded V* reminds us of the protective role of pantyhose as a second skin, and through its rupture, of skin's vulnerability. The prints are as tactile as Mona Hatoum's rubbings on wax paper from the mid-1990s, which transformed the domestic into the provocative and often menacing. Both the relief ink print of the pantyhose and the indentations that hold it in position serve as indexical markers of violent power that render both print and paper vulnerable. The black ink of the print harkens to Zora Neale Hurston's note of feeling one's blackness most poignantly when "against a sharp white background." The marks holding the pantyhose in place exhibit what Édouard Glissant describes as the powerful ploy of transparency, which insists upon full exposure under the guise of equality, all in the service of control. However, such acts of transparency and pure indexicality further entrench subjectivities that can only affirm their identity in relation to their othered referents. As Phillips extends the series of *Expanded* prints, the ruptures in the hosiery are sutured; much like in the work of Louise Bourgeois, deconstructive and reparative impulses oscillate in the work—as in our psyches, which can be obliquely revealed but remain ambivalently refractory.

—Nomaduma Rosa Masilela

Expanded IV, 2015
Relief ink, offset lithography, acrylic ink on paper
66 × 102 cm

Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter), 2017
Partially salt-glazed ceramics, brass screws, stainless steel plate, metal wheel table
104 × 117 × 45.5 cm

Masilela, Nomaduma Rosa. *We Don't Need Another Hero*. Berlin: DISTANZ, 2018, pp. 84–85.



Masilela, Nomaduma Rosa. *We Don't Need Another Hero*. Berlin: DISTANZ, 2018, pp. 84–85.

C&

10TH BERLIN BIENNALE

IN MINIMALISM EVERYTHING COUNTS

The German-born artist **JULIA PHILLIPS** met C&'s **WILL FURTADO** to talk us through her inspirations and the work she has decided to present at the 10th Berlin Biennale

Julia Phillips, *Exoticizer, Worn Out* (Josephine Baker's Belt), 2017.
Courtesy the artist and The Studio Museum in Harlem

Furtado, Will. "In Minimalism Everything Counts." *Contemporary&*, no. 9, May 2018, pp. 15–17.

Julia Phillips is a Hamburg-born artist based in New York City whose work addresses the body and mechanisms of oppression, among other subject-object relationships. Through video, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking, the artist uses materials metaphorically to create artworks that are both sensual and conceptual. In addition to taking part in the 10th Berlin Biennale, Phillips currently has a solo show at New York's MoMA PS1 and is included in the New Museum Triennial. We spoke to the artist to discuss the problematics of an assumed shared knowledge, how growing up surrounded by Bauhaus-inspired materials has shaped her mentality and aesthetic, and how Germany's post-WWII reparation payments could work as a model for other types of reparations.

CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) What sort of culture and media did you grow up on?

JULIA PHILLIPS I wasn't allowed to watch TV as a child or teenager, except the news and a very small selection of harmless programs. Of course when I was visiting friends' houses I got my MTV fix. Music-wise I was influenced by a broad range of artists. I've been a Michael Jackson fan from the moment I can remember music. My mother also brought my attention to the opera singer Jessye Norman, who is still a major inspiration to me – her dedication and the integrity with which she approaches her art. As a teenager one of my biggest influences in terms of female empowerment and Black female role models was Destiny's Child.

C& Your works have titles in English. Why not in German?

JP I remember being influenced by Sol LeWitt's work quite a bit when I first started traveling to New York in 2008. I kept finding reasons and ways to come to New York and loved going to Dia:Beacon and looking at LeWitt's wall drawings and the precise descriptions of what they are. For instance *Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane* (1984). I mean, it's just fantastic. It tells you exactly what it is, and it is so much more than that, to a degree that it really isn't what the title says it is. Beautiful. There is something about English being my second language, and the desire to express something precisely in its alienness, that I find attractive. My sculptures have specific functions and each element – also in other works that aren't sculptures – have a purpose. A deliberateness. If Minimalism taught me one thing it is "everything counts."

C& One of your titles refers to Josephine Baker. Why her?

JP Speaking of identification. There are a few markers to Josephine Baker's persona that I can identify with or see family history reflected in. A Black American woman from the South, who, tired of segregation and violence against Black people, migrates to Europe with the hope of a serious career and more opportunities. Who finds herself exoticized in a predominantly white country, eroticized as well. As a fair-skinned, slender, energetic joyful source of endorphins. Who has a complex mind and a developed intellect, is engaged with the political situation but known and represented as a sex symbol.

C& How do you negotiate your German background in your work, as an artist who is based in NYC?

JP I don't really – at least not consciously. My German education just reminds me of the fact that assumed shared knowledge – anywhere really – is a problem. Our knowledge is informed by so many influences, and education is just one of them. Many things that I learned in school and that I simply could not identify with just passed right through my brain and didn't stick. And some knowledge did. But then I also sought out certain knowledge by surrounding myself with certain people. It's so subjective. If I navigate anything, it is the voices that I choose to listen to. In terms of my German background and heritage, I think Germany shaped a big part of my mentality. And of my aesthetics. My father, as a Bauhaus-inspired architect, built the house that I grew up in. I was surrounded by glass and steel (and some concrete). My sculptures consist of ceramics, steel (and lately concrete). Another thing that comes to mind is a job that I had in 2015/16. I was working as a telephone operator for the German missions to the UN and the consulate. I handled all incoming calls and a lot of them I had to transfer to "Wiedergutmachungen" – German reparation payments to those Jewish people who qualify, living in the New York area. Just recently I was thinking about guilt and responsibility and reparations. And how such payments would work for the historically colonized people living here in the US.

C& What is the concept behind your work at the 10th Berlin Biennale?

JP There is one sculpture and a series of prints. The sculpture is titled *Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)*, 2017. The piece resembles a surgeon's trolley, with four "tools" on top, which the titles in parentheses refer to. I think of that object as an analogy to a relationship, that's why there are two sets of handles attached to the trolley, to underline the collaborative aspect. The work is quite personal, and at the same time addresses mechanisms of oppression that can exist on social and political levels as well. "Muting" for instance is a mechanism that can appear within an intimate relationship, but it can happen systemically as well by violating freedom of speech rights. And the prints that were selected for the bienniale are part of a series called *Expanded*, collagraphs that show stretched pantyhose printed on paper.

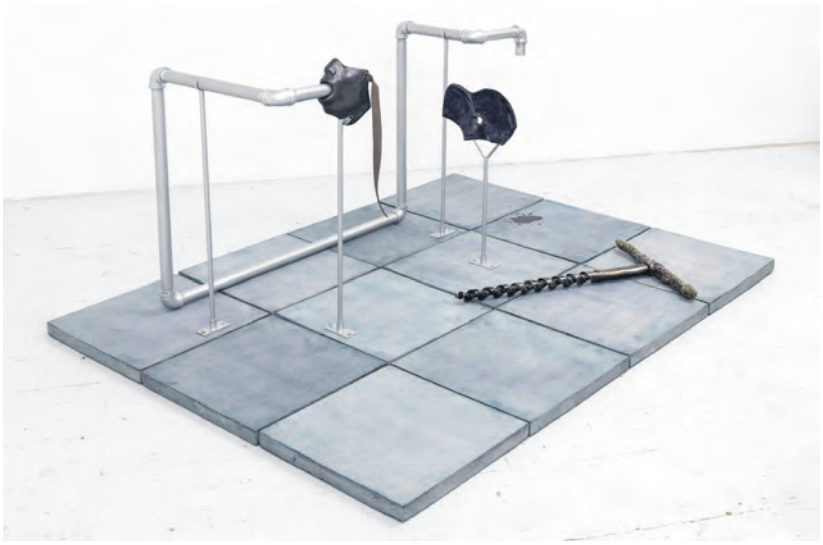
C& What does it mean to you to show your work in a German context?

JP When I think about my art education in Hamburg, it was very common to hear the term "Frauenkunst" – "women's art" – especially when looking at a print that shows pantyhose. So the reading of the work will be different I think. But I don't think that my work selected for this exhibition is very nation-specific. I think it borrows quite an ancient language of tools and human gesture that ideally is relatable to a broad audience. But I am sure the language used for unpacking the work will be different, and so will the references.

Julia Phillips is a participating artist in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, taking place from June 9 to September 9, 2018.

top Julia Phillips, *Protector I*, 2016
middle Julia Phillips, *Extruder (#1)*, 2017
below Julia Phillips, *Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)*, 2017 (detail view)
all images Courtesy the artist

Furtado, Will. "In Minimalism Everything Counts." *Contemporary&*, no. 9, May 2018, pp. 15–17.



Furtado, Will. "In Minimalism Everything Counts." *Contemporary&*, no. 9, May 2018, pp. 15–17.

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FLASH ART

Julia Phillips' sculptures beyond the binary

By Nana Adusei-Poku

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Adusei-Poku, Nana. "Kopfkino: Julia Phillips' sculptures beyond the binary." *Flash Art,* no. 320, May 2018, pp. 70–75.

The artist Julia Phillips (b.1985, Germany; lives in New York) and I meet for a chat in her temporary studio in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, on a Sunday morning; to be precise, it is 10:30 a.m.[1] It's an outrageous time for a meeting, if I want to apply the average German work standards. Sunday mornings are a time to rest, recreate, and recharge for the demands of the week ahead. Not to mention coffee and cake in the afternoon. But that kind of day planning is as far away from us as Germany, the place where Julia and I were born. Phillips laughs, amused when I bring up German (whatever that may mean) leisure time, and she perfectly understands my sentiment. The pulse and restlessness of New York City have left their mark on the artist, whose warmth and charm made a vivid impression on me at our first meeting in 2015. Her diligence and thoughtful precision are already reflected in the way she has arranged the not-yet-assembled ceramics, tiles, and firing components on her studio table. Phillips and I share a strange double bind as mixed-raced women who grew up in Germany, existing in several places simultaneously, across geographies and cultures that come with different desires, notions of (dis) comfort, and habits — embodied binaries that multiply according to space and context.

Places and cultures consistently create different modes of performativity and engagement; they leave imprints on us, our bodies, modes of being, thinking, and perceiving the world. That Phillips's body has been a source of inquiry is thus no surprise. It is an integral part of her artistic toolset, not in a figurative and representational way, but more in the sense of leaving traces, imprints — negative spaces. This notion is also reflected in the following statement by Phillips from a conversation with the artist Aaron Gilbert: "I think of the body as a symbol to make psychological, social, and emotional experiences and relations visually accessible. Sometimes the body can help us to identify with experiences that are not our own." She further stresses: "The body allows us to determine a common ground, a familiarity and mutuality. It somehow allows for communication about relational ideas beyond verbal language. We can better identify with the sensual ideas and experiences of others if we understand how they affect us, physically and psychologically. [...] Using the body as a metaphor is a way of drawing the viewer into an idea that also exists on other levels."[2] The imprints of her body not only point toward relationality but also conversations with the mechanical and clinical: an almost-sterile questioning and visualizing of what the French poststructuralist Michel Foucault called *dispositive* — in short, the ways in which institutions "function" or "work." This can articulate itself in sculptures such as Operator I (*with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, and Aborter*) (2017), in which white ceramic handles seem to push or pull a rolling steel cart carrying the "ceramic tools or instruments" listed in the title; or the similar *Operator II (with Opener, Destabilizer, Distancer, [R] Ejecter), Partially Dismantled)* (2018), which is part of Phillips's first New York solo exhibition, "Failure Detection" at MoMA PS1. The titles of her sculptures, prints, and videos carry as much weight and space for connotation as their formal expressions vary.

I mention poststructuralism because the artist has been invested in notions of understanding, dismantling, and narrating structures. She moved to New York in 2013 after graduating from the HFBK (University of Fine Arts in Hamburg). At the end of her time in Hamburg, Phillips was predominantly interested in questions of breaking regularities. How can "regular" form become destabilized and irregulated, she asked. In response she welded three-dimensional geometrical steel sculptures based on the five platonic solids — in geometry representative of particularly stable structures — then heated the pieces to a glowing state in a ceramic kiln in order to destroy/smash the very same into "two-dimensional" piles using a crane, thus proving their fragility (*Platonic Solids, 2 Dimensional*, 2010).

To break boundaries and challenge institutionalized norms, paradigms, and knowledge has been an ongoing aesthetic investigation for Phillips. Her desire to jeopardize regularity led her to *Pattern of Denial* (2010), a grid of slightly non-orthogonal ceramic tiles, all adjusted to each other's irregularities. The title already points toward Phillips's interest in psychology, since the term is often used to describe people suffering from addiction or codependency who have developed patterns that allow them to disavow their condition. Phillips's fascination with and commitment to working with ceramics intensified in 2014. The structures that she investigated this time moved away from abstract forms toward "functional" performative objects. Her *Objectifier* (2014) series consists of white glazed ceramics and metal bracket sculptures that suggest medical instruments, however without disclosing any clear purpose. Although many of her works insinuate an idea of functionality due to their titles and mechanical construction, they are not usable due to their ephemeral fragility.

The work betrays a delicateness that is not just physical, but also delves much deeper into a social psyche — into which the artist invites her audience. The piece *Fixator* (#2) (2017), for instance, makes me feel uncomfortable. In the piece, a hypothetically human form is fixed in a seemingly distressed position, head bent backward through a stabilizing device that holds the chin up and pushes the head back. The pelvic area of this fixed, imaginary person is attached to a mold that suggests the shape of an erect penis. Maybe they are bleeding, as the tiles beneath reveal drops of dark blue glaze. Another ghostly figure, apparently engaging with the fixed body, leaves shiny footprints on the matte tiles. One figure must submit or obey while the other is in control: one plays sovereign, the other is forced into subordination. The remnants of glaze and other elements make me wonder whether I simply don't see the bodies or if I am witnessing the scene of a crime that has just happened or will be repeated soon.

Phillips's work speaks to the simultaneous fragility and power of the ideologies that dominate our lives, interactions, and emotional landscapes, whether they are normative, gendered, or racialized. *Kopfkino* — "cinema in the head" — is a word that emphatically comes to mind whenever I look at her sculptures and prints. In the collagraph print series in which ripped pantyhose has been stretched across paper like animal skin (*Expanded IX, Quickly Fixed*, 2016), I see a poetic and long-standing history of feminist investments in effeminized materials such as stockings, ranging from Senga Nengudi's performance and installation series *R.S.V.P.* (1975–77) to Sarah Lucas's sculpture *Pauline Bunny* (1997). In Phillips's work I see the century-long hypersexualization of the female-sexed body and cultural techniques of fetishization through a loose concealing of the very same. I see an intersection of race and class and economic targeting of gendered ideas of beauty; I'm aware that not everyone was able to afford precious stockings, and that "nude" colors constituted a limited color range.

Because of the way in which the tight gusset is isolated and spanned, I am reminded of animal carcasses hung to be dried or smoked; and due to the way in which ink stains are dropped all over the gusset, I see rape and I see female genital mutilation — especially in her latest prints incorporating thread, called *Expanded X, Treated Twice* (2018). Here, I see repeated attempts to fix what has been broken, whether it is the illusion of wholeness or centuries of exploitation and the idea of repair. I am an accomplice to the narratives that her work evokes; I am a spectator of my own internalized violence. Phillips's psychosocial panopticon makes the act of looking painful while at the same time holding the viewer accountable.

As I walked around her sculptures at her artist-in-residence exhibition at the

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Adusei-Poku, Nana. "Kopfkino: Julia Phillips' sculptures beyond the binary." *Flash Art,* no. 320, May 2018, pp. 70–75.

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v

Adusei-Poku, Nana. "Kopfkino: Julia Phillips' sculptures beyond the binary." *Flash Art,* no. 320, May 2018, pp. 70–75.

Studio Museum in Harlem, titled "We Go As They," or during the New Museum's Triennial, details made me continually aware of the dualisms of power. Despite their abstract nature, the works educe the relationship between historically oppressed and commodified human beings. I am caught in a desire to identify the oppressor and the oppressed, which reminds me of my first perception of Kara Walker's cut-outs, in which the artist engages with the highly complicated and delicate psychology of enslavement on a figurative level. Walker's compositions open up entangled narratives that speak to sexuality and relationality, as well as the consistent exploitation of the black body on a psychosocial level; they are disturbing sites for viewers, because their complexity addresses the intimacy and sometimes dependency that enslavement violently produced. Julia Phillips, however, moves between narratives, both those that remain binary and those that are ambiguous.

When I look at the instruments on display in *Operator I* and *II*, and learn their names, it makes me think of the history of medicine in the United States and Europe — or, more precisely, gynecology and how black female-sexed bodies were used without consent as "objects for experimentation," being made to endure insurmountable pain and sometimes even being dissected postmortem, as in the case of Saartjie Baartman.[3] Phillips's works constantly emphasize that medical institutions and practices are built upon the pain of "othered bodies," which complicates the notion of the hegemonic state apparatus, ideology, and ideas of norms and culture. A very dark blue-to-black-colored glaze emphasizes my reading, as these imprints insinuate race. When I ask her about this dark color during my visit she explains that it is inspired by the painter Kerry James Marshall, who paints figures in what he calls a "rhetorical black." This aesthetic, signifying a relationship between language, the non-color black, and performativity, is echoed in Phillips's sculptures. Black bodies bleed, they are fixed or hang from the ceiling (as in *Drainer*, 2018), while the inside and outside is always clearly determinable. In the case of *Operator I* and *II*, the handles are covered in white glaze, whereas the brown matte tiles in *Scene I* (2018) show evidence of a body thrown against them, articulated through remnants of blue glaze.

Clean but somehow messy, static yet dynamic, exposed and introverted: these are some of the words that repeatedly mark my impressions. These binaries — like the embodied binaries that come from being in the world as a mixed-raced person — are bound in ambiguity yet cannot be dissolved. I realize after leaving Phillips's studio that these morning hours are indeed recreation time; her creative investigations, however painful the subject may be, are part of her path to healing, to making peace, and to processing through the imaginary of a collective past that remains in our shared presence.

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JULIA PHILLIPS'S solo exhibition "Failure Detection" is on view at MoMA PS1, New York, through September 3, 2018.

1 The author expresses gratitude to Julia Phillips for her support and insides while writing this text.
2 Julia Phillips and Aaron Gilbert in conversation, "Do You Believe In Evil?: Julia Phillips and Aaron Gilbert," Mousse Magazine, February 2018, p. 147.
3 Also see: Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 31–60; Deirdre Benia Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2017.

i *Intruder Study VI*, 2017. Partially salt-glazed ceramics. 24½ × 9½ × 1⅝ inches. Courtesy of the artist.
ii *Objectifier I*, Slightly Used, 2015. Partly glazed ceramics, metal bracket. 71 × 19 × 9 cm. Courtesy of the artist.
iii *Fixator (#1)*, detail, 2017. Partially glazed ceramics, screws, metal structure, partly glazed ceramic tiles. 177 × 64 × 79 cm. Courtesy of the artist.
iv *Protector II*, 2016. Partially glazed ceramics, metal screws, metal brackets. 63 × 57 × 10 cm. Courtesy of the artist.
v *Intruder Study V*, 2017. Partially salt-glazed ceramics. 23⅝ × 7⅛ × 1¼ inches. Courtesy of the artist.
vi *Platonic Sold*, 2 Dimensional, 2010. Nickeled mild steel. Courtesy of the artist.
vii *Expanded V*, 2016. Relief in on paper (collagraph monoprint). Courtesy of the artist.

Adusei-Poku, Nana. "Kopfkino: Julia Phillips' sculptures beyond the binary." *Flash Art,* no. 320, May 2018, pp. 70–75.

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Adusei-Poku, Nana. "Kopfkino: Julia Phillips' sculptures beyond the binary." *Flash Art,* no. 320, May 2018, pp. 70–75.

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Studio

We Go as They
Artists in Residence 2016–17

Knight, Autumn, Julia Phillips, and Andy Robert. "We Go as They: Artists in Residence 2016–17." *The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Fall/Winter 2017–18, pp. 10–15.

A portrait of the artists, in their own words. The 2016–17 artists in residence Autumn Knight, Andy Robert and Julia Phillips discuss what it means to make work in Harlem, how their practices have developed during their residencies and their plans for the future. Their exhibition *We Go as They: Artists in Residence 2016–17* opens at The Studio Museum in Harlem on September 14, 2017.

Julia Phillips: What's it like being a resident at the Studio Museum? It's been a great experience working in the geographical and intellectual environment of Harlem. If I want to research certain figures in black history, or a specific discourse in black culture, I can go to the Schomburg Center. One night, spontaneously, I went to see *I Am Not Your Negro* at Maysles cinema. Being surrounded by an audience that was in Harlem during the period the film documents felt precious. Harlem is also a political environment and this influences how I feel in the studio. Commuting from Bed-Stuy has shown me how unique Harlem is, with its street stages, protests, concerts, performances—you name it. This is what makes the experience at the Museum so different from other institutions, and I have such a good dialogue with Autumn and Andy. I think we're really lucky that we all went to Skowhegan [School of Painting & Sculpture] together and came into the residency having already bonded. We talk to each other quite a bit.

Autumn Knight: I was very fortunate to have known Andy and Jules before coming to the program. They are wonderful artists and wonderful people. I moved to New York from Houston, Texas, for the residency. I moved to Harlem, specifically, to be closer to the studio. Living in Harlem has deepened my appreciation of it as a residential area as well as a creative space.

Opposite:
Andy Robert
Check II Check, 2017
Courtesy the artist
Photo: Adam Reich

Below:
Julia Phillips,
Autumn Knight and
Andy Robert in Harlem, 2017
Photo: Texas Isaiah

Knight, Autumn, Julia Phillips, and Andy Robert. "We Go as They: Artists in Residence 2016–17." *The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Fall/Winter 2017–18, pp. 10–15.

Andy Robert: The thing about Harlem and being here is you get home, you get Mecca, the black metropolis. You also get ghetto, isolation, a type of history of neglect, ruin. You also get culture and music and community and humor, just by walking down the street. Being here is like an event. Every day that you're outside you are going to encounter something.

Being around each other, things rub off. Not necessarily directly, but there are certain things that we share: a sense of humor and a poetic play with language, but also a strong, serious view of the world.

JP: Yet it's very funny how differently we think about exhibition planning, or even how to navigate open studios. Each time I walk into Autumn's or Andy's studio I am surprised at how well we've gotten to know each other, yet how fresh and surprising their practices still are to me.

When I started the residency, I approached the idea of making work about specific bodies of historical figures, as opposed to the body in a more general sense. One body is that of Josephine Baker and the other is the body of Saartjie Baartman. One of the pieces in the show is titled *Exoticizer*. The concept of the title is very much aligned with how I usually work—the title refers to the function of the work, but also to the person who could potentially operate the tool. It's a belt that suggests the insertion of banana stems by the wearer.

AK: I've always really loved different art forms and hybridity. When I learned about performance art,

Knight, Autumn, Julia Phillips, and Andy Robert. "We Go as They: Artists in Residence 2016–17." *The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Fall/Winter 2017–18, pp. 10–15.

I was like, "Oh, yes, that's my tribe. I've gotten better at sensing where the audience is at, really manipulating that distance between artist and audience.

AR: With painting there's the beginning, there's the middle and then there's the end, and it's about being self-reflexive and asking yourself what happened in between those stages. I've been making works that have a certain type of light, which embodies the kind of thought and reflection that happens at the end of the day. I see them a little bit like nocturnes, a thinking about tomorrow.

I think it's difficult not to look at what's going on in the world. My painting might not necessarily be a direct response to something that happened today, but a reading, an address nonetheless; I think that current events do shape the way that I create my paintings. There are beautiful moments that happen, moments that I find enduring. There are moments of tragedy, too, but there are also everyday moments where people are holding hands or embracing. It's a space of chaos and terror, but also romance, care, kindness, hope or love that happen in the world. I always try to balance the two: the terror and the tragedy that occur with hope. There is always hope.

I've become more aware of composition, where things are and where they could be, and what should happen in a specific area of a painting. When I'm thinking about these things it's often when the painting is almost done,

Opposite:
Julia Phillips
Muter (#2), 2017
Courtesy the artist

Below:
Julia Phillips
Protector II, 2016
Courtesy the artist

Knight, Autumn, Julia Phillips, and Andy Robert. "We Go as They: Artists in Residence 2016–17." *The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Fall/Winter 2017–18, pp. 10–15.

because in the beginning there are too many moments of possibility. Finishing a work is about making decisions and editing, unlike the beginning stages when you're trying to put some marks down and build, build, build.

JP: I struggle to answer that question, "When are you finished?" Ideas linger for a long time. It can easily take a year for me to complete a work. [Laughter] A lot of contemplation goes into it, and research, failure and rejection. I know that a work is finished when the three-dimensional object lives up to, or is stronger than what I had in mind.

AK: The questions, "When do you know it's done, when do you know it's good?" make me realize I've been stepping away from those ways of thinking. I'm trying, for my sanity and longevity, to think of each performance as part of a continuous body of work, or even a single work. I construct my projects or performances so there are multiple entry points, for the viewer and for myself.

In the future, I'll continue to apply intellectual curiosity to my work and engage with ideas that speak to my political, social and personal interests. After the residency, I'll stay in New York and continue to work on upcoming performance projects.

AR: After the residency, my plans are to keep exploring and experimenting, and to keep painting. I see myself as a painter. That said, in the future I don't want to restrict myself from making a film or a sculpture. It helps having a primary mode of thought that I can bring to another medium or another discipline. I can look to a photo or a film and ask how a cut or a montage or a certain cinematic/photographic vocabulary can function in a painting. I've collected so much imagery over the past couple of years that I feel like I have much work to do. I'm looking forward to returning to Los Angeles and have a solo show there in November. Harlem is amazing; this year in New York has been amazing. For me, Harlem is the center, it's international, it's what it means to be black and modern. I've come to realize Harlem has been with me all my life and it's the soul I'll carry wherever we go.

JP: After this residency ends at the Studio Museum, I'll be doing a one-month residency called Denniston Hill in upstate New York. Autumn and Andy will be up there too!

Autumn Knight
Untitled (rehearsal views), 2016
Courtesy the artist

Knight, Autumn, Julia Phillips, and Andy Robert. "We Go as They: Artists in Residence 2016–17." *The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Fall/Winter 2017–18, pp. 10–15.

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MOUSSE

DO YOU

BELIEVE

IN EVIL?

Gilbert, Aaron, and Julia Phillips. "Do You Believe in Evil?" *Mousse*, no. 62, February / March 2018, pp. 146–55.

The artists Julia Phillips and Aaron Gilbert discuss their respective practices, and respond to each other's, in this discussion. Gilbert calls Phillips's work "equally delicate and devastating," both "calculated" and "intense;" she calls his "free of decorative elements" and possessing "undeniable beauty." He describes his own work as about "love as the way we experience, and come close to knowing, the divine or the sacred;" hers, in her words, involves "forceful transgressions of boundaries."

JULIA PHILLIPS AND AARON GILBERT IN CONVERSATION

JULIA PHILLIPS
Aaron, I came across your work at the Brooklyn Museum when I went to see the show *American Identities: A New Look* in late 2016. I was by myself and remember encountering the painting in an intimate way. There was no one else interrupting my physical approach to the modestly sized canvas showing a scene that my eyes had trouble removing themselves from. In the scene, a woman seems to be kneeling by a bathtub and bathing a young child. With careful focus, she lifts the young one's head above the water by the chin. She holds a bar of soap, ready to clean the small person. The child is in a surreal and awkward proportion to the woman. It seems to be two-thirds of the length of her body and too big for what clearly seems to be an infant. The body language of the child is helpless as it floats in the water with just one toe touching the surface, and at the same time trusting whatever it will receive from the woman. The woman seems to concentrate on what she is doing and empathizes with the child, whose eyes are open, directed upward, not clearly toward the woman. There are no smiles or attempts to cheer up. The woman must be on her knees, gracefully and effortlessly bending over the edge of the tub. Her hands are delicate and soft as if the child's chin had no weight. A watch is carefully placed on the slippery edge of the tub; maybe she has taken it off a sense of care, to avoid scratching the skin of the child. There is a beautiful sense of time in the painting. It's not so much the watch, but the water freshly dripping down from the child's hairless head. Another object is resting on the edge of the tub, possibly clothing for the naked child, or a washcloth that is thoughtfully placed close to, but not touching, the water. There is wholesomeness to the home this scene takes place in. It is a warm place where the woman can wear short sleeves. The door frame is painted in a warm pastel pink, and the woman, who seems to be so deliberate in all her gestures, lets the child float very closely to the bath curtain that was pulled to the side and must be clean of mold. The painting is free of decorative elements and the undeniable beauty of it lies in the moment of the scene.

Opposite, top - Julia Phillips, *Extruder (#1)*, 2017. Courtesy: the artist
Opposite, bottom - Julia Phillips, *Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)* (detail), 2017. Courtesy: the artist

AARON GILBERT
That painting, *The New One* (2007), was a birth painting. So it's this mother pulling the child from the water; from one plane of existence to another. It's so interesting to see how the precision with which you describe my work is a reflection of how calculated, and how intense, your own work is. When I first visited you at the Studio Museum, your composure and presence felt so specific to your sculptures. Not in the choice of content, but in its exactness of execution, and in how far you were willing to pursue a question that is difficult to confront. This work is equally delicate and devastating. It is too fragile to be utilitarian, but it presents itself in front of us, at the scale of our bodies. These sculptures feel like a direct document of a certain kind of poison in this world. A physical symbol of the metaphysical. To experience this work is to feel the presence of an idea being crystallized.

JP
Yes, crystallized in human-relating form. I think of the body as a symbol to make psychological, social, and emotional experiences and relations visually accessible. Sometimes the body can help us to identify with experiences that are not our own. The body allows us to determine a common ground, a familiarity and mutuality. It somehow allows for communication about relational ideas beyond verbal language. We can better identify with the sensual ideas and experiences of others if we understand how they affect us, physically and psychologically. And because these two are so connected, the body and the mind, and the body is visible, the mind can visually manifest itself in bodily form. Using the body as a metaphor is a way of drawing the viewer into an idea that also exists on other levels.

AG
What is the nature of these ideas? They touch on pain and abuse. Do you use intimacy to depict personal interactions, or as a metaphor for the societal and political?

JP
Extruder (#1) (2017), for instance, is exactly that for me. Yes, we see a cast of a behind, and a partial mask with a pipe going through the mouth, and an auger as a potential penetrator, and most of the round pieces in the work resemble a phallic proportion and

Gilbert, Aaron, and Julia Phillips. "Do You Believe in Evil?" *Mousse*, no. 62, February / March 2018, pp. 146–55.

diameter. It can be read sexually. And, as you say, even in reference to intimacy. This reminds me of the text "Sex in Public" (1998) by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, where they talk about the societal idea of intimacy, having to exist in the most private and isolated space. Well, that's how I read it. And that it can actually cause a problem in terms of protection, as the private space in its isolation has no third-party monitor. What is so desirable about intimacy, as depicted in your work, can be a big thread on the flip side. Nobody to interfere or step in, or regulate except the two (or few) entities.

AG There's always this phantom presence of the human body in your work, but the materials you depict implicate industry, and institutions.

JP Yes, back to *Extruder (#1)*. The piece is very metaphorically composed, in terms of its elements. There is a violent interaction, and an intended result: the spilling of the liquid that is coming out of the end of the pipe. It is therefore a forced extrusion: taking out something that was meant to stay inside. An exploitation, a possible analogy to a colonial intervention. And the pipe could serve as a signifier of an industrial force. While the body that is marked by the two casts is not specific to one gender, there is the idea of a forced penetration: the strap and buckle underlying a controlling aspect, and the ruptured holes in both casts symbolizing forceful entry.

AG You mention colonialism, and truly the first thing that came to my mind when I was trying to decipher your work was *Open Veins of Latin America* (1971), Eduardo Galeano's seminal book documenting the plunder of Latin America's natural resources by U.S. corporations. The book's title is bodily in a way that mirrors your work. Your sculptures summon a conversation about the sadistic. They call up these existential questions about our nature as humans: questions that go all the way back to our origins. How ancient of a language do you put on these questions? These pieces could be described as artifacts that have a sole purpose of committing evil acts. Do you believe in evil? Which is a certain inverse of saying: Do you believe in the sacred?

JP I do believe in evil acts. And I am interested in what drives us humans to commit them. Forceful transgressions of boundaries being one example. Self-serving manipulation being another. And both are based on the idea that—not necessarily sacred—but ethical acts are led by the understanding that the human body, as well as the psyche, shall be maintained in their wellness. I like to think of evil as one end of the spectrum of the human psyche's capacity. I believe that we have it within us and have ideas for it. Otherwise there wouldn't be a market for horror movies and thrillers. A fascination. I remember the mindset I was in when I had the idea for the piece *Exoticizer, Worn Out* (2017) in reference to Josephine Baker's banana costume. I wanted to be in the position of the freak designing such a thing, with as much attention to detail and strategy. How far does the distance have to be between the banana stems, so there are enough gaps to peek through at the wearer's crotch? I was fascinated by and wanted to make clear the distinction between the person wearing the costume and the person putting it onto somebody. In my work many of the subject-object relationships are controlling and oppressive. I am starting to become interested in those relations, where it's not clear which side you'd rather stand on. One work that feeds into this idea is *Observer* (2016). Observation is something that can happen with a whole range of intentions, and it can happen within a trustful relationship.

AG You refer to these as manifestations of the inner psyche. But this work is so intense, there is no neutral position in it. It makes me want to keep flipping to this older language. Are these profane objects? Do you believe there is a sacredness to the human body?

JP The pieces are manifestations of psychological experiences. And sometimes tragedies and failures. For instance, some of my works show drips of liquid. It's a recurring element that I use. It is a metaphor for the result of failures to contain or hold together a state. The spills reference bodily liquids like blood, unbirthed

matter, and undigested substances that weren't supposed to leave the body in the shape of spilling. Like ruptured skin, our protective layer. Liquid as a symbol is an ambivalent bodily trace. Just like sweat can be a result of a healthy and intended physical challenge, or it can represent a dramatic exhaustion. When I think about sacredness and the body, I think about respecting the body's protecting boundaries.

AG Octavia Butler, in *Parable of the Sower* (1993), laid out a template for a near future where a breakdown in reliable infrastructure ushers in a semi-anarchic society where bands of people use guns and technology (for instance control collars) to force their will on others. It seems, in this moment, we are standing at the advent of two things: incredible technological breakthroughs and a breakdown of the necessary infrastructure to protect us from an escalation in fascism, or its inverse, anarchic vigilante groups. Either one conjures a return to the overt cruelty and barbarity that existed in the Americas those hundred and fifty or five hundred years ago.

JP I am thinking they still exist. What I have in mind is police brutality and mass incarceration on an industrialized and institutionalized scale. Only today—as opposed to a hundred and fifty or five hundred years ago—fake justification has to be put around it, like the instrumentalization of drugs. Not on the consumer level, but the state level. Grada Kilomba speaks about it in an interview linked to my website, it's part of a documentary called "White Charity" (2011).

AG Absolutely. I was just speaking with my teenage son about Kalief Browder, privatization of prisons, and the utter pathology of a society that creates institutions that steal people's lives for profit.

Above - Aaron Gilbert, *The New One*, 2007. Courtesy: The Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York
Opposite, top - *How A Man Gets A Woman Back*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist
Opposite, bottom - Aaron Gilbert, *Grace*, 2018. Courtesy: the artist

Gilbert, Aaron, and Julia Phillips. "Do You Believe in Evil?" *Mousse*, no. 62, February / March 2018, pp. 146–55.

Aaron Gilbert, *Phantom Limb*, 2014. Courtesy: Nick Cave

Aaron Gilbert, *Love Scene 2*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist

Gilbert, Aaron, and Julia Phillips. "Do You Believe in Evil?" *Mousse*, no. 62, February / March 2018, pp. 146–55.

Julia Phillips, *Positioner* (detail), 2016. Courtesy: the artist

Julia Phillips, *Positioner*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist

Julia Phillips, *Exoticizer, Worn Out (Josephine Baker's Belt)*, 2017. Courtesy: the artist

Gilbert, Aaron, and Julia Phillips. "Do You Believe in Evil?" *Mousse*, no. 62, February / March 2018, pp. 146–55.

Julia Phillips, *Observer*, 2016. Courtesy: the artist

Gilbert, Aaron, and Julia Phillips. "Do You Believe in Evil?" *Mousse*, no. 62, February / March 2018, pp. 146–55.

Aaron Gilbert, *CitiBank*, 2016. Courtesy: Nick Cave

Julia Phillips was born and raised in Hamburg. She studied visual arts at the Academy of Fine Arts Hamburg before attending Columbia's MFA program. After graduating in 2015, she attended the Whitney Program, followed by a residency at Skowhegan, a yearlong residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, and two short residencies at Denniston Hill, upstate New York, and at the Goethe-Institut in Salvador, Brazil. In addition to video and works on paper, Phillips works primarily with ceramics and metal, creating sculptures reminiscent of functional objects that relate to the human body. Her most recent exhibitions were a group show at The Kitchen, Dreamers Awake at White Cube, and the A.I.R. show *We Go as They* at the Studio Museum in Harlem, which now holds her work in its permanent collection. Her next upcoming shows are the New Museum Triennial and her first institutional solo exhibition, at MoMA PS1, titled *Failure Detection*.

Aaron Gilbert is a painter whose work depicts symbolic and psychological narratives. He is a 2015 Louis Comfort Tiffany Award recipient, and has been awarded by the American Academy of Arts and Letters as the 2010 "Young American Painter of Distinction." His work is in the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Residencies include 2013 Fountainhead Residency, a 2012 Yaddo, a 2008 LMCC Workspace Residency, and a 2008 Affiliate Fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. He holds an MFA in painting from Yale University, and a BFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design.

Gilbert, Aaron, and Julia Phillips. "Do You Believe in Evil?" *Mousse*, no. 62, February / March 2018, pp. 146–55.

The work feels intentionally located in the past: depicting metal pipe, leather straps, iron prods and skewers. These feel like meditations on past acts of cruelty. Are there specific histories this work is calling our attention to? Of colonialism? German history?

JP I felt like German history was brought to me only through one lens as a young person growing up there. The history that we were taught focused on World War II. The broad approach to face that history was important, yet it came at the cost of other histories. It took me well into my twenties to learn about Germany's colonial history. In terms of the formal elements in my work that you address, visually I am influenced by functional objects like furniture and armor. I like the idea of a chair. The only language you need to know for using it is your body. There are particularly intuitive mechanical elements that have become part of my visual language: wing nuts, straps, spikes. I think these are what some viewers might associate with torture and BDSM. I get it. These are elements that can be read as stimulating and simultaneously aggressive and therefore evoke the coexistence of pleasure and pain. Personally, if something as psychologically delicate as sexual desire can be found in the form of an object at a store with a bar code, the desire simply dies. So I am not interested in that industry. The theories that feed my interest are colonial histories, gender studies, Black feminist thought, psychoanalysis, and questions of belonging. The conceptual framework my work originates from is about observations of relations. Oppressive, codependent, but also supportive. I think of my shows and bodies of works as musical albums, following a certain concept and mindset. I would like my work to turn in a direction with a more reconciling and redemptive tone. Some titles already exist, like *Stabilizer* and *Supporter*. I just don't know what the works look like yet. There are plenty of relationships that I find particularly metaphorical to the human, social, and political condition and that play a role in our intimate as well as our public lives.

AG It's interesting to hear you speak of reconciling. Is it part of some desire to prevent past horrors from revisiting us?

JP I think part of my desire is to give the psyche a visual, nonverbal language, and a voice that can be heard by a broad range of audiences, ideally. What we do with what we hear is our own responsibility.

Your work often depicts touch. The nature of the touch, and the fact that there is touch, seem equally important. And furthermore, when looking at the work it has a symbolic meaning, a "stand-in" dimension.

AG Touching is a way of knowing, of reaching beyond ourselves. The specifics of how we lay our hand on a thing or a person says everything. I think your work and mine examine two opposing ends of intimate human interaction. Much of my work looks at love as the way we experience, and come close to knowing, the divine or the sacred. There is a special flame or light that exists in humans that we call love. And if that were to be extinguished entirely, sadism and cruelty would be all that remained in its wake. This opposing end is where I see you focus your work. What are these things, love and cruelty? Why do they exist? I'm interested in the answers that people have built to these questions since ancient times through mythology.

To me love is the most powerful, most transformative thing I've experienced. I have a girl who is two and a half. There was a moment when she was weeks old, and I was holding her and gently talking to her, and her eyes locked in to my lips. She knew, in that moment, that the noises coming from them carried meaning. They weren't arbitrary. My father used to talk to me about how language, in its essence, is metaphysical. And in that moment of holding her—which inspired the painting *Grace* (2018)—I felt like both the words coming from my mouth, and this new being in my arms, were alien, and magical.

JP The agents in your paintings find themselves in the safety of their own constructed intimacy, away from a third-party gaze. You speak of agents and entry points. What is it that the viewer is invited to enter? Do you think about outside forces that are banned and have been overcome in your intimate scenes? What are the agents isolating themselves from?

AG I like domestic scenes because they can display the messiness of conflicting impulses that are inside of us. A painting of a love scene can lay bare these truths of what happens when two people become entangled in each other's lives. At the same time there are outside forces whose weight we have to contend with in our most private interactions. When you say "banned" it makes me think of anti-miscegenation laws. Echoes of those legacies are always in my work, but it's not usually a starting point. With *Phantom Limb* (2014) I wanted to make a painting about how the ghost arm of an amputee still visited his estranged lover at night and touched her in a way that he was no longer emotionally able to. And my desire is for the lives of the people I paint to be as multifaceted as my own world. So as I'm initially drawing the image, I'm thinking of how legacies of racism and colorism add layers to their interaction. None of these histories define these figures, but they add nuances to the power dynamics. With *CitiBank* (2016) I show a bank teller and a customer engaged in a conversation that goes beyond protocol. A note is held up to the glass. I leave the specifics of the interaction open to multiple interpretations (a flirtation or a heist), but what is clear is that the power and agency of both figures is not owned by any institution.

In *CointelPro, The Pestilence that Crawls by Night* (2014), I wanted to show the intrusion of CIA surveillance into the most private shared moments of the families of civil rights activists. It was important to me to show a thin wall separating the humans who sell themselves to be agents of a surveillance state, and those who sacrificed personal safety for a liberation cause. To place them in adjoining rooms, fully human, breathing on opposing sides of the wall. Any fascist apparatus is made up of humans with the same base desires as those they are harming. Looking back I remember stories my mother would tell of my parents being surveilled during the 1970s and early 1980s. So I think my way of processing the political has always been through the personal.

JP I remember taking the past election personally. In times where the personal is so political, I am drawn to artists who work autobiographically. Especially in contemporary Black popular music, I am struck by the amount of expressions of vulnerability and their political significance, thinking of Nneka, Jay Prince, Beyoncé, Kendrick Lamar, and Tyler, the Creator. Are you consciously depicting alternative, counter images for pop-cultural depictions of love? Our youth culture obsession conversation comes to mind. And the question of the need for love, and the kind of love as something that matures with us as we go through different ages in our lives. The images easily accessible and brought to us through media in an overflow are the ones of youth culture. Is your work a reaction to a drought?

AG I love that question. I think love fills this profound need at all stages of our lives, and the nature of how we need it shifts as a newborn, as a young child, as someone elderly. I'm weary of the way youth culture is placed front and center in the art world. Artists are the worst. Their content and focus is so shaped by market values. A result of neoliberalism and secularism is this trend where all spiritual and mystical experience is discarded, and the only acceptable transcendent experience is the kind of falling in love that is idealized in pop music and rom-coms. And there's this dual mechanism reinforcing it: corporate marketing that places teenagers and young adults as the center of the universe, and Cold War propaganda where youth culture and its raw individual self-expression were the prized jewel of capitalism. In the end, it's a question of where we place value. Of all the pop songs in the past twenty years, how many of them place the voice or the needs of a young child or an elderly person at the center? I'm sure I'm missing a few outliers, but it feels like we have to go back to Michael Jackson or Stevie Wonder with this one ("They Don't Care About Us" and "Earth Song" at least felt age-neutral). I think we often are too narrow in who we give voice to in our narratives. There's room for a fuller breadth of human experience, and I pose this mostly to myself as a question of what work I should be making in the present.

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JULIA PHILLIPS 211

Carrion-Murayari, Gary, and Alex Gartenfeld. *Songs for Sabotage: New Museum Triennial* 2018. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018, pp. 211–16.

BORN 1985 IN HAMBURG, GERMANY
BASED IN NEW YORK, NY

In Julia Phillips's video *Becoming (The Hunter, The Twerker, The Submitter)* (2015), the opening subtitle reads, "She tells me, if the female body is a vessel, she is a vessel with agency. As opposed to this object transgressing the boundaries of that object, *this* object places herself around that object." This extended title is a kind of codex to the video, in which Phillips repeatedly and emphatically fits a cupped piece of clay over a phallic-shaped form. A short clip of an older woman thrusting her hips follows, and then a young woman twerks stiffly, as if she were seeking to make visible the technique that generates this dance movement. *Becoming (…)* sets up propositions that weave through Phillips's artistic practice, including a psychoanalytic subversion of power relations rooted in the body that places the transgressor as dominant, and the malleability of boundaries through free dance and counterintuitive movement. Phillips's sculpture—the format in which she predominantly works—mobilizes these concepts viscerally, elaborating upon themes from the video through imaginative, sensory, and spatial invention. The artist's inversion and disorientation of the power structures to which the body is subject, in both her film and sculpture, aims to disrupt the areas of the subconscious where such structures originate.

In her sculptural work, Phillips's process begins with language that problematizes how power relations mediated through the body: *Intruder* (2017)*; Regulator* (2014)*; Exoticizer* (2017)*; Fixator* (2017)*; Extruder* (2017). She meticulously designs apparatuses that grapple with each titular concept. Using her own body to shape the clay works, she builds them through a process of molding, puncturing, firing, and fixing, resulting in structures that invite unfamiliar engagement. Entangled dialogues of interiority, exteriority, visibility, and objecthood persist in Phillips's glaze on the clay body casts. The exterior body is represented in a deep black—an exaggerated visibility and nod to Kerry James Marshall's work on the color—and the interior in exquisite gradations of blue that signify drama, melancholy, depression, and the potential of the psyche. The artist creates loose, painterly areas that meditate on skin, flesh, color, and the subconscious. The act of painting itself gestures to the medium's ongoing preoccupation with visibility and representing the exterior world, but its footnoted position in Phillips's sculptures suggests that she has reprioritized probing the interior psyche that shapes it.

Conceptualism flirts with didacticism in Phillips's work, the latter typically a descriptor in the service of the former, yet one that the artist believes should not be entirely dismissed in urgent times. Encountering Phillips's sculptures, the viewer sees where to grip their hands, where to place their feet, and where to position their face. Phillips is exceptionally intentional and spare with the details: every screw, adjustor, strap, and cast counts. However, these same details also confound the viewer. *Fixator (#1)* (2017), with handgrips located near the ankles, a pelvic rest to scale, and footprints on the tiles indicating two people engaged in the use of the apparatus, asks: Who is "fixated"? What forces have provoked this physical exchange? The two individuals in the sculpture's negative space are in close contact—one body upright and one folded—but the contorted exchange is ambiguous and cannot actually occur due to the physical fragility of the ceramic casts. Instead, the work indexes imagined interactions that disrupt socio-physical boundaries. The impossibility of using the apparatus impels the viewer to consider the scenario psychologically and emotionally, implying that these works are not about the body itself, but the body as a mediator of agency. Throughout their lifespan, the sculptures will come apart and be reassembled as they travel, challenging installers to piece together the counterintuitive structures and viewers with reconsidering the potentials of their own bodies.

As Phillips squeezes and reshapes a piece of clay in *Becoming (…)*, the young woman abandons her rigid twerk, instead engaging in a free dance, spinning with disjointed gestures. A subsequent subtitle in the video reads, "She believes that if matter is particularly flexible in her nature, the matter is asking to find her full potential within self-determined limitations." Phillips's interest in how dance functions as a means of liberating the body physically and politically is evident in the video, which considers the potentials of free movement of the racialized female body within colonial structures. As in her sculptures, the reconfiguration of matter in space is catalytic and implies the transgression of boundaries and a revisceralization of intuition.[1] The oscillation between inviting and repelling interaction that occurs in sculptures like *Fixator (#1)* can only be resolved through questioning sociopolitical, physical, and psychological power dynamics. Phillips's sculptures penetrate the infrastructures of these learned laws, making power relations malleable and unstable; the walls of the "vessel" reveal their porous, mutable nature.[2] The repetition of this process is a praxis of destabilizing and reconfiguring hierarchies of power, where the psychological and political intersect with physical mobility.

MAGDALYN ASIMAKIS

1 The term "revisceralization" is borrowed from Lauren Berlant's essay "Austerity, Precarity, Awkwardness" in which she argues "[…]learning to be awkward, to be graceful, to leap, and to fall is a training in attention and also in revisceralizing one's intuition. There can be no change in life without revisceralization. This involves all kinds of loss and transitional suspension." Lauren Berlant, "Austerity, Precarity, Awkwardness." November 2011. <https://supervalentthought.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/berlant-aaa-2011final.pdf> (accessed 2017).

2 For more on the construct of the female as penetrable, porous and mutable, see Anne Carson, "Dirt and Desire: Essay on the Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity," *Men in the Off Hours* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 143.

OPPOSITE
Fixator (#2), 2017. Partially glazed ceramics, metal screws, metal structure, and partly glazed ceramic tiles, 25 x 70 x 31 in (63.5 x 177.8 x 78.7 cm)

PREVIOUS
Intruder Study VI, 2017. Partially salt-glazed ceramics, 8 x 24 ½ x 1 in (20.3 x 62.4 x 2.5 cm)

Carrion-Murayari, Gary, and Alex Gartenfeld. *Songs for Sabotage: New Museum Triennial* 2018. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018, pp. 211–16.

Carrion-Murayari, Gary, and Alex Gartenfeld. *Songs for Sabotage: New Museum Triennial* 2018. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018, pp. 211–16.

Carrion-Murayari, Gary, and Alex Gartenfeld. *Songs for Sabotage: New Museum Triennial* 2018. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018, pp. 211–16.

TOP
Exoticizer, Worn Out (Josephine Baker's Belt), 2017. Partially glazed ceramics, brass screws, and metal pedestal, 18 x 39 x 18 in (45.7 x 99 x 45.7 cm)

PREVIOUS
Tuner, 2016. Partially glazed ceramics, metal screws, and metal bracket, 12 x 11 ½ x 5 in (30.4 x 29.2 x 12.8 cm)

Carrion-Murayari, Gary, and Alex Gartenfeld. *Songs for Sabotage: New Museum Triennial* 2018. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018, pp. 211–16.

WE GO AS THEY

We Go as They brings together the work of Autumn Knight, Julia Phillips, and Andy Robert, the 2016–17 artists in residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem. In many ways, each resident artist engages understandings of liminal space—in concept or form—and stages his or her practice firmly between defined modes of working. Stemming from this ambiguity, the title of the exhibition, *We Go as They*, reflects Knight's, Phillips's, and Robert's deep investigations of the undefined.

Knight, for example, explores the flexible boundaries of identity and psyche through her serial performance piece *Sanity TV* (2017). Knight stages a fictional talk show and conducts interviews during the course of the performance to create an atmosphere that oscillates between tense and absurd, leaving audience members second-guessing their responses to both the artist and fellow viewers. Each of Knight's prompts takes on multiple meanings, creating a duality in participants' conscious. Promoting neither sanity nor insanity, she complicates our understanding of language and pushes the boundaries of mental health, humor, and performance.

Phillips's enigmatic ceramic sculptures invite both associations with tools and with the body, yet their true functions remain uncertain. Viewers are invited to imagine potential purposes. The surface of each work is packed with tension—Phillips experiments with the malleability of clay to form metal-like rods, belts, and machines. Even the glazes she uses emulate their perceived industrial material sources, though their extreme fragility renders them useless as utilitarian objects.

ANDY ROBERT
Nocturne 125 in Gold and Silver, crossroad between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X Boulevard (2nd Take), 2017

While Phillips engaged in this form of making—seemingly functional tools about the body—during the residency her sculpture has further addressed specific historical figures, such as Saartjie Baartman and Josephine Baker.

In his poignant series of nocturne paintings of Harlem, Robert formally engages the histories of painting, from French Social Realism to the Harlem Renaissance to conceptual abstraction. Rearticulating these styles into a new, radical pictorial language, Robert works in the space between the abstract and the figurative. They are generally understood as separate styles, but Robert posits them as existing in a continuous dialogue and, in turn, draws together seemingly opposed methods of painting to explore an undefined space between the two. His contemplative nightscapes capture the ambiguous future of Harlem, a place in constant transition as gentrification threatens businesses,

Opposite: AUTUMN KNIGHT's studio, 2017

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

homes, and people who have lived here for generations.

As an exhibition title, *We Go as They* implies a group, a communal sense of being or witnessing that anchors each resident's practice. Knight quite literally uses community in her work—audiences who, during her performances, collectively share psychological and emotional experiences. In one video work, *Meesh* (2017), Knight slowly climbs a staircase and examines the access to spaces, both physical and social, political, economic, and intellectual privileges. The video is partly inspired by the administration of Barack and Michelle Obama, whose ascension to the presidency symbolically and tangibly proved that access to power and space was possible for African-American men and women. At the same time, Knight critiques the treatment of the Obamas by members of the press and opposing political party during their time as President and First Lady.

In her sculptures, Phillips engages black feminist thought and feminist art history. Each work in the exhibition serves as metaphor for social hierarchies and power dynamics. *Exoticizer, Worn Out (Josephine Baker's Belt)* (2017), composed of a banana skirt fashioned into a belt, makes reference to Josephine Baker. A dancer, entertainer, and political activist whose banana-skirt performance was popular during the 1920s and 1930s, Baker was often fetishized in the overwhelmingly Eurocentric spaces where she performed. Like *Exoticizer*, Phillips's other works, including *Extruder* and *Fixator* (both 2017), follow the artist's function-like naming convention, which emphasizes perceived uses and metaphorical content.

Thinking of the community around the residency, Robert's nightscapes are each a mediation on the nighttime rituals that take place in Harlem, acts that, however small, determine the future of the neighborhood. Paintings such as *Check II Check* (2017) reference local residents' financial preparations for the upcoming day. In others, such as *Platinum Blonde SaVonne* (2017), Robert articulates the future of the place through a specific subject—one who, through Robert's references to artists such as Barkley L. Hendricks and Jacob Lawrence, embodies the past and future of Harlem. In each, Robert speaks to an indeterminate black future in the neighborhood.

In a more tangible sense, *We Go as They* defines Knight, Phillips, and Robert's close conversation with each other as they negotiated the physical and psychological boundaries that come with working in close proximity. Their practices, though different in form, are united by an investment in exploring space, identity, and power. The exhibition title also suggests the cohort the three artists have formed, bound by their experience in the residency, as well as the community of artists, curators, and Museum staff that surround and nurture the program.

—Hallie Ringle, Assistant Curator

JULIA PHILLIPS
Fixator (#1), 2017
Courtesy the artist and Campoli Presti (London/Paris)

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

JULIA

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

PHILLIPS

by Daniella Rose King

Julia Phillips notes that her sculpture-based practice has undergone a transformation—from "tools" to "apparatuses" to "scenes." The narrative thrust of these "scenes," her latest group of sculptures produced while in residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem, moves the audience through distinct theaters of reflection, pleasure, submission, pain, and domination, and back again. The work is a complex negotiation of space (domestic, public, and intimate), boundaries (psychological, material, and bodily), and transgression of both of these categories. It is a site where language and meaning are manipulated, informed by black feminist thought and theory, as well as feminist art history and artistic practices, and indebted to critiques of the intersection of race, gender, colonialism, and psychoanalysis.

Driven by an autobiographical register, her ceramic, steel, and concrete sculptures portray imagined bodies in moments of exchange, loosely characterized by a passive recipient and an active agent. This binary of giver and receiver, active and passive, is particularly informed by her reading of "penetration" as an abstract concept, marked by biological determinism and tied to feminist discourse.[1] Penetration is interpreted by the artist as a psychological and biological position that has shaped, and continues to permeate, our understanding of heteronormative gender positions and identities (penetrator=male, penetrated=female). The persistent logic of the binary reveals itself and is reaffirmed even in the material and technical aspects of the work; it is not rare to find fixings and parts technically described as male/female.[2]

The penetrator/penetrated dichotomy further leans on an understanding of power relations that underlaid the antebellum era. How have certain legacies of slavery, subjugation, and sexual violence informed ideology, society, our understanding of the psyche, the economy, and histories of art and ideas? Ariane Cruz coins the term "racial sexual alterity" to describe a "perceived entangled racial and sexual otherness that characterizes the lived experience of Blackwomanhood . . . [that] expresses the importance of both race and sexuality as complex social constructions that are imposed on the Black female body."[3] This call for an intersectional approach to (black female) sexuality was made by artist Lorraine O'Grady in her seminal essay "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity." In her opening paragraphs, she writes, "A kaleidoscope of not-white females, Asian, Native American, Latina, and African, have played distinct parts in the West's theater of sexual hierarchy. But it is the African female who, by virtue of color and feature and extreme metaphors of enslavement, is at the outermost reaches of 'otherness.'"[4] Phillips's object-based study of seemingly contained and intimate power dynamics acts as a viewfinder for locating the multivalent roots of this pervasive phenomenon.

It is through four works that act as "scenes" or microcosms—in concert with a

Operator (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter), 2017

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

number of wall-hanging "tools" and works on paper—that Phillips makes manifest these preoccupations, titled *Operator*, *Fixator*, *Exoticizer*, and *Extruder*. As with many of Phillips's sculptures, these titles guide the viewer and hint at the intended use of the apparatuses, as well as the exchange or extraction of power they involve. Verbs become nouns, as her subjects become objects—transformations that can, and do, oscillate in the work.

Operator (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter) (2017) is a mise-en-scène that unfolds on what appears to be a clinician's trolley. Constructed of brushed steel, with two pairs of glossy white ceramic handles on each side molded by the artist's hands, the trolley displays a disconcerting array of objects. Are these a doctor's tools (one, titled *Aborter*, suggests this)? Or weapons of torture (*Muter*, *Penetrator*, and *Blinder* seem to allude to this purpose)? Or perhaps they belong not to a single person, but to a number of agents with conflicting intentions. The objects form a narrative of seemingly contradictory readings: sexual violence, medical procedures, objectification and subjection, pain and pleasure, sensory deprivation, domination and submission—all means of exerting control and power over a body. Whether these objects were born of personal experience is of less significance than the structural and systemic realities of exploitation and objectification from which they take their cues. They are hybridized forms that amalgamate histories of medieval, antebellum, and very modern devices for control and submission, while borrowing from a surrealist repertoire. *Aborter*, a rudimentary egg-shaped tool in two halves, one with a saw-toothed edge, seems destined to inflict pain through an almost unspeakable extraction; *Blinder* is a ceramic eye mask with its two holes blown through, with torn edges evocative of a forced entry; *Muter* is a ceramic lower-face mask that appears to fit over the end of the nose while covering the mouth area to prevent speech; *Penetrator* consists of a foot-long poker, again made in ceramic, that has pierced through a cast of the artist's closed lips. The powerful, visceral nature of these four objects ties them intimately to the body, and therein lies much of their representational and symbolic power. It is hard not to look at these pieces and imagine their effects on one's own body, and the resulting discomfort, pain, or obliteration.

Fixator #2 (2017) suggests a discomfiting, contorted meeting of two bodies. Four key elements of the sculpture allude to this, from the bottom to the top of the human-scaled structure: two pairs of glossy footprints on the tiled floor, one pair of hand grips, a cast of the front of a crotch, and a chin rest. This combination of components calls to mind a convoluted exercise machine, or slightly ridiculous sex toy, in which the persons using it are both reduced to their sexual organs and positioned front to back, with no means of eye contact, recognition, or contact besides a direct, forceful imposition of the penetrator onto the penetrated. Not to mention the acrobatic proclivities assumed in at least one of the users. This fixation on particular organs works with the title, and could be extended to readings of the hypersexualization of our culture in general, as well as the primacy of

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

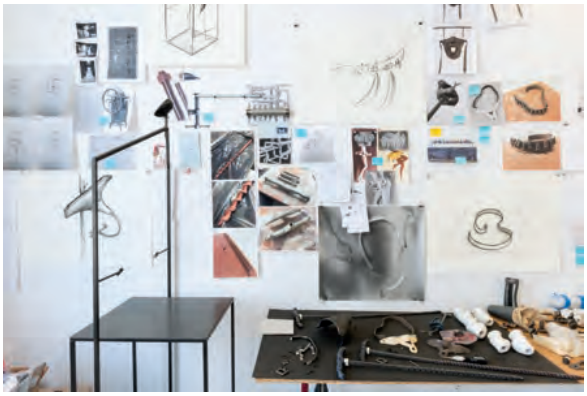
not only the male gaze, but also the phallus itself in contemporary pornography.

A banana-yellow glazed ceramic belt-cum-holster is laid upon a hip-height metal pedestal bearing the name *Exoticizer, Worn Out (Josephine Baker's Belt)* (2017), in reference to the complex and pioneering transatlantic entertainer, activist, and French resistance agent, and one of her most famous performances and enduring images—dancing in a skirt fringed with bananas. The belt is made up of holster-like receptors that look to be able to hold the stem of a banana, itself a powerful symbol of the phallus, or perhaps a more protective object—a bullet. Baker stands as not just a symbol of colonial desire and racist stereotyping, but as a slippery figure: entertainment icon and international superstar, intellectual, government agent, exuberant exhibitionist, and civil rights activist. Phillips's presentation of a fictional girdle for Baker, placed almost clinically on a plinth evocative of industrial surfaces is at odds with the folly and ecstatic character of Baker's performances and self-presentation. Yet the artist seems to foreground those complexities of her subject, at once exoticized and self-exoticizing, while conjuring a fantastical apparatus that Baker could utilize for a performance and a military operation in turn. (Legend has it that she smuggled photos for Allied forces in her underwear during World War II.) As the title suggests, the belt is "worn out," and displays signs of physical overuse and subsequent fragility. This is a sentiment that the prolific performer Baker may have appreciated, and that resonates with the historicized, overdetermined tropes, symbols, and images of the (desired) black female body. The title is further ambiguous about the nature of the belt. Without a wearer, how does it function, and whom does it exoticize? Could it be repurposed? It also complicates the aspect of agency, a key factor in understanding Baker's work as an exercise in self-exoticization.

Exoticizer, (Josephine Baker's Belt), 2017
Courtesy the artist and Campoli Presti (London/New York)

The final work in Phillips's presentation, *Extruder* (2017), could be described as an architecture of exploitation, a closed loop that contains traces of violence, sexual desire, and humiliation. Working with concrete for the first time, in combination with premade metal piping, the artist has given the work a distinctly industrial feeling. Yet handmade ceramic fixtures and tools—including a mask with a gaping, gagging mouth, a rustic auger with an almost decorative handle and traces of an indiscernible liquid, and an ambiguous orifice—introduce a human scale and tactility, and further heighten the tension of the installation. As with Phillips's "scenes," the viewer is invited to encounter the work like the scene of a crime, and piece together events from recognizable tropes such as

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.



body parts, via casts of mouths, hands, and abdomens, and any other visual information we can grasp. *Extruder*, like *Fixator #2* is suggestive of a compromised body, made vulnerable by the contorted position it is forced into.

Phillips's sculpture embraces the messy, fleshy, contradictory realities of intimate relations and the social, imaginary, and physical institutions that they impact and conspire with. There is an urgency to the work that seeks to identify, reveal, and undermine the power dynamics that she observes, and to suggest new means of locating agency and pleasure. The haptic tendencies of the work—from their human scale, to the utilization of glazes to invoke bodily textures, surfaces, and interiors—coalesce as an "abstract convergence of touch, feeling, and relation . . . attempting to translate a thought about feeling in advance of and in the midst of feeling."[5] In many ways her work is a critical excavation of histories of power dynamics through the lens of specific acts of physical exchange. By narrowing her field of investigation to the unequal transactions between certain bodies, and creating a visual vocabulary to communicate this, Phillips engenders a new ground from which to imagine alterity in relation to power. Complicating the immutability at the core of the male/female, penetrator/penetrated binary, with imagined bodies that corrupt or exist outside of that dichotomy, the artist performs a "retrieval of the mutilated female [and othered] bodies."[6]

NOTES

1 Julia Phillips, "NLS In: Autumn Knight, Jessica Bell brown, Joiri Minaya, Julia Phillips, Oneika Russell," streamed lived on December 11, 2016, accessed July 28, 2017, www.youtube.com /watch?v=IDdzHTulVVg&feature=youtu.be&t=346

2 Ibid.

3 Ariane Cruz, "Beyond Black and Blue: BDSM, Internet Pornography, and Black Female Sexuality," *Feminist Studies*, 41 (2015): 411.

4 Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," in *New Feminist Criticism: Art/Identity/Action*, eds. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven (New York: HarperCollins Icon Editions, 1994), 153.

5 Rizvana Bradley, "Introduction: other sensualities," *Women & Performance. a journal of feminist theory*, 24 (2014): 130.

6 Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17 (1987): 68.

JULIA PHILLIPS's studio, 2017

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

PHILLIPS

Born 1985 in Hamburg, Germany

EDUCATION

2016 Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, New York
2015 MFA, Columbia University, School of the Arts, New York
2012 Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg (University of Fine Arts of Hamburg)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 *Impenetrable Entry*, Campoli Presti, London
2013 *Several Reasons to Migrate*, Hinterconti, Hamburg

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017 *Dreamers Awake*, White Cube Bermondsey, London
That I am reading backwards and into for a purpose, to go on:, The Kitchen, New York
2016 *Whitney Independent Study Program Studio Exhibition*, Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York
In Place Of, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
2015 *A Constellation*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York
Floating Point, Judith Charles Gallery, New York
MFA Thesis Exhibition, Fisher Landau Center for Art, New York
New Work New York, biennial survey of work by New York City MFA students and recent graduates, 695 Grand Street, Brooklyn
The Feminist Sex Shoppe, On The Ground Floor, Los Angeles
2014 *Temporary Autonomous Zone 3*, with *ff*, Teatr Studio, Warsaw
MFA First Year Show, Wallach Gallery, Columbia University, New York
Read Your Call, Galerie Diane Kruse, Hamburg

Expanded V, 2016

Networking Tips for Shy People, 200 Livingston Street, Brooklyn
Erogenous Zone, Galerie im Körnerpark, Berlin
2012 *Index 12*, Kunsthaus, Hamburg
Summer Intensive Show, LeRoy Neiman Gallery, Columbia University, New York
Benefit Auction, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg
Thesis Show One.Equal, University of Fine Arts, Hamburg
2011 *Index 11*, Kunsthaus, Hamburg
DASO PK, Westwerk, Hamburg
What the Fox, Goldsmiths, University of London, London
February 4th, Forum Factory, Berlin
2010 *Zu den Dingen und zurück*, Collection Lenikus, Vienna

RESIDENCIES AND AWARDS

2016 Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME
2015 Arts @ Renaissance Residency, Brooklyn

Zhao, Doris, and Hallie Ringle. *We Go as They*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2017, pp. 1–3, 10–15.

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CONSTRUCTING AMBIGUITY: THE SCULPTURAL WORK OF JULIA PHILLIPS AND KEVIN BEASLEY

MAGDALYN ASIMAKIS

Asimakis, Magdalyn. "Constructing Ambiguity: The Sculptural Work of Julia Phillips and Kevin Beasley." In *That I am reading backwards and into for a purpose, to go on.* New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2017, pp. 21–28.

To be sure, if I am affected by what does not yet appear to me as a thing, it is because laws, connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition me. That order, that glance, that voice, that gesture, which enact the law for my frightened body, constitute and bring about an effect and not yet a sign.[1]

1 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 10.

Composed of a waist-level bar with handgrips on either side, *Positioner* (2016) is a ceramic apparatus with an indeterminate, imaginary function. Julia Phillips, the artist, uses her own body to shape and puncture the materials before they are fired. Though one may understand the ways the individual technical parts of the apparatus are utilized, it is unclear how, and to what end, one's entire body may function within in this larger structure, causing one's cognitive recognition of the apparatus to oscillate between invitation and disorientation.

Phillips invents apparatuses that work on an imaginary level rather than a physical one. She describes her sculptures as existing in a physically passive state, which is further emphasized by their material fragility.[2] Her sculptures aim to take the mind to unconscious spaces where desire and power exist and to disrupt those relations. Despite the familiar shapes of the tools that make up the works and the references to bodily interaction, the functions of the sculptures do not align with the structures that govern our bodies. When encountering her finished works, one may be viscerally repelled as quickly as physically invited to interact with the imprints of Phillips's body. This phenomenological destabilization is generative for Phillips, who notes "the negative space in my objects is what I intend to be the site for the unsaid and unshaped," prompting those who encounter the sculptures to question the relationship between the physical body and the unconscious.[3] Because the negative space she creates intimates physically ambiguous interactions between body and structure, the mind is necessarily turned to question the structures, how they may or may not support the body, and in turn where the limits and potentials of power in this relationship are located.

2 Julia Phillips, "Introducing the 2016–2017 Artists in Residence," *Studio: The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Winter/Spring 2017, 9.

3 Julia Phillips, "Julia Phillips," Columbia University School of the Arts, Visual Arts Program, 2015 MFA Thesis Exhibition, http://arts.columbia.edu/visual-arts/2015/thesis/julia-phillips.

The fluid on the floor tiles, for which there is no visible source, refers to the bodily interior. The remnants of fluid that recur in Phillips's works, as well as the use of the artist's body to mark and impress the sculptures, explore and question the power dynamics between the dominant penetrator and the penetrated, as outlined in psychoanalytic theory.[4] By referring to both the interior and exterior of the body and the unresolved relation between the two, Phillips explores the agency in being the penetrator or penetrated and, more broadly, tensions between inside and outside, interiority and exteriority, and the politics of the body. While psychoanalysis considers the body more directly, Phillips indexes the body in her sculpture in order to think broadly and abstractly about identity, social structures, and post-coloniality as constructs to be penetrated or disrupted. Phillips cites Angela Davis, who describes social realities such as white supremacy as seemingly

4 See Diane Elise, "Unlawful Entry: Male Fears of Psychic Penetration," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 11, no. 4 (2001): 499–531.

Asimakis, Magdalyn. "Constructing Ambiguity: The Sculptural Work of Julia Phillips and Kevin Beasley." In *That I am reading backwards and into for a purpose, to go on.* New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2017, pp. 21–28.

Julia Phillips, *Positioner*, 2016. Glazed ceramics, metal screws, metal structure, partly glazed ceramic tiles, 44.1 x 24.4 x 30.7 in. (112 x 62 x 78 cm). Private collection; courtesy the artist and Campoli Presti, London/Paris

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impenetrable, but which become malleable when they are penetrated.[5] Phillips mobilizes the concept of penetration in her work through direct references to the body—her own footprints and mouth holes, for example—and extends this idea into post-colonial thinking by dismantling the structures that govern the body via sculpture. Her artistic strategies work on both a physical and conceptual level to disrupt the ideological constructs around identity and the body. For example, the idea of "regulation," explored in the work *Regulator* (2014), can be understood as governing the space between bodies both in a physical sense and in a broader social and psychic sense. Ideology codes gender, race, sexuality, and class identities in ways that regulate the movement, behavior, production, and freedom of bodies. By drawing on constructed physical and unconscious orientations of the body, Phillips points to the spaces where structures of power and control are formed, as well as to their limits and their potential for disruption.

As historically constructed subjects, we are conditioned to adhere to identity categories by ideological systems of coding defined over time by dominant ideals.[6] The structures that govern the body are multiple and entrenched. In the history and context of these structures, the marked body has been defined by its variance from the unmarked body.[7] It is from this difference that colonial concepts such as the "other" were developed. This distinction between marked and unmarked bodies is rooted in a vocabulary of signification that defines the "other" as a fixed, unchanging being that is at once foreign yet completely visible and knowable.[8] At moments such as the present, when state control of marked bodies, based on essentialist identification, intensifies, the arbitrary nature of these classifications and assumptions of fixed identities becomes increasingly legible. The gaping holes created by this distorted categorization of people provide spaces for the abject body—which exists in "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" spaces outside of established identity categories—to disrupt the fixity of those categories through active ambiguity.[9]

In Kevin Beasley's *Untitled* (2015), the artist reconfigures a pair of gray Levi's jeans by reorienting them upside down, unstitching the inseams of both legs, and filling them with polyurethane foam to create a single, cylindrical column. Resin stains drip down from the top of the sculpture and debris from the artist's studio is visible throughout. The established function of the jeans causes the viewer's body to respond viscerally to the foam that fills them, expands, and seeps out at the base of the sculpture by imagining it as their own body. However, one cannot understand the foam as a surrogate body because Beasley's narrow molding of the sculpture prevents movement of the legs—and they are oriented upside down. As the eye moves up to where the ankles would be, the perception of physical space for accommodating the human body diminishes; these are no longer jeans as we understand

5 Julia Phillips, interview with Deborah Anzinger et al., "IN: Black Female Subjectivity," New Local Space (NLS), livestream, December 11, 2016, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDdzHTulVVg.

6 Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of Ideology," in *Culture, Society, and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1983), 71.

7 See Brooke Holmes, "Marked Bodies: Gender, Race, Class, Age, Disability and Disease," in *The Cultural History of the Human Body in Antiquity*, ed. Daniel H. Garrison (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 159–83.

8 Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question," in *The Politics of Theory*, ed. Frances Barker (University of Essex: Department of Government, 1983), 23.

9 Kristeva, 4.

Asimakis, Magdalyn. "Constructing Ambiguity: The Sculptural Work of Julia Phillips and Kevin Beasley." In *That I am reading backwards and into for a purpose, to go on.* New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2017, pp. 21–28.

Julia Phillips, *Regulator*, 2014. Partially glazed ceramics, metal stand, screws. 44 x 25.6 x 19.7 in. (112 x 65 x 50 cm). Courtesy the artist and Campoli Presti, London/Paris

them. The oscillation between visual recognition of the filled garment and consciousness that a familiar embodied relationship has been blocked, as well as the incompleteness of the figurative sculpture, all destabilize viewers' mastery over bodily orientation. This process divorces the jeans from their ascribed function and suggests that objects and beings may exceed dominant understandings of fixity.

Beasley's sculptures are made of mass-produced objects indexical to the body. His work manipulates the contact between the physical, live body and culturally specific material products such as housedresses, hoodies, and Air Jordan sneakers. The artist carefully considers the spaces in which these garments are and were active: *Untitled (meeting)* (2016) is made of housedresses that Beasley purchased from a storefront in Harlem where the women in his family would shop. The garments in this context are

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Kevin Beasley, *Untitled*, 2015. Polyurethane foam, resin, gray jeans, underwear, studio debris, 47 x 17 x 20 in. (119.4 x 43.2 x 50.8 cm). Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

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tied to the body's visibility as well as its habitation and negotiation of community and domestic spaces, which are complicated by the redeployment of the clothes as sculpture. Beasley also uses his own body and various adhesives like resin, tar, and polyurethane foam to shape the clothing. This process reactivates the objects and proposes alternative embodied relationships between structure (in this case, clothing) and individuals (artist and viewer). The duration of Beasley's sculpting process is dependent on the length of time required before the adhesive hardens. During this time, the relationship between body and materials alters: from the materials habilitating the body to the artist intervening and reshaping the garments' function. These instabilities and transitions work together to trouble the bodily constructions of visibility we orient ourselves around and to speak to larger potentialities of the body.

By engaging with the abject, Phillips and Beasley interrogate constructions of visibility and they gesture to possibilities outside the codification of fixed identity categories, pointing toward hypothetical, indeterminate, embodied relationships.[10] Both Beasley and Phillips defamiliarize and repurpose objects, creating new apparatuses with ambiguous functions. Their work complicates the concept of fixity on which the colonial othering and categorizing of marked bodies depends.[11] Beasley does so by retooling and reanimating bodily objects and Phillips by exploring psychic power dynamics that manifest through the body. The doubling back and questioning that occurs in both practices can be understood as something larger than troubling physical relationships in space. Questioning the limits and potential of an object by imagining alternative functions for its physical form mirrors structures of identity formation. What is essential and what is imposed? The artists point to the impossibility that physical appearances equate to fixed subjective identity formations. By exploring the ambiguity of the abject and using the indexicality of their own bodies in their processes, Beasley and Phillips establish a parallel between the forms in their work and the politics of the body. These works convey that the modes of categorizing physical bodies are not absolute but a result of history.

In advance of their assembly, the parts that make up both Phillips's and Beasley's works inhabit spaces of neutralization for varied periods of time. In Beasley's studio, one encounters mass-produced objects fabricated to protect the body—clothing, car seats, and shoes, often dipped in resin, which renders their original function null. These objects are placed carefully yet tentatively around the studio where they idle in the space, their function neutralized until the artist reactivates them in alternative ways. Though Phillips plans her sculptures in advance of their physical materialization, the component parts, often tools, that will comprise future works remain functionally indeterminate both prior to and after their assembly. Her studio is a meticulous, operating-room-like display of molds of her mouth, hands, and feet alongside spikes, metal rods, and hinges that have yet to

10 On the social sense of the outside, Stuart Hall writes, "To be outside the consensus was to be, not in an alternative value-system, but simply outside norms as such: normless—therefore, anomic." Hall, 62.

11 Bhabha, 18.

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Kevin Beasley, *Untitled (meeting)*, 2016. Resin, housedresses, 70 x 21 x 17 in. (177.8 x 53.3 x 43.2 cm).
Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York. Photo: Jean Vong

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be assembled, their functions individually and collectively uncertain. There is an evident tension between the potentials of these tools and their powerlessness in these decontextualized positions. In a later interview, Jacques Derrida described deconstruction not as a technical device for mastery but as a reminder of the limits of power and the memory of powerlessness.[12] This can be a generative framework for understanding Phillips's and Beasley's practices, not only in the way they question agencies and structures, but also in the way they imagine potential alternatives as a result. These artists' works do not defamiliarize mundane objects exclusively in order to disorient those who encounter their sculptures. By repurposing objects, as in the case of Beasley, or appropriating their form, as in the case of Phillips, the artists consider the arbitrariness of these objects' assigned functions. By stripping down the object, freeing its form from imposed structures, their work reveals the powerlessness of the identifying categories that make sense of these objects.

In moments of political urgency it is counterintuitive to resist direct reactions and choose instead to reflect on history and the constructs that preceded the present. This pause contrasts with the social acts of resistance that are necessary for progress, particularly in moments when bodies are endangered by aggressive state control. Beasley and Phillips acknowledge pausing and rerouting as ways of accessing and activating unconscious spaces to question the structures around which we orient ourselves. They defamiliarize the component parts that make up their works, destabilizing the traditional distinction between figural and phenomenological sculpture. It is in this space that they explore the limits of power and question structures that govern the body. In considering the futility of the identities, systems, and orders imposed on objects and bodies, Beasley's and Phillips's works question structures of visibility and essentialist identification. Their works inhabit a space both physically and conceptually ambiguous that troubles the power of the works' component parts and collectively proposes alternative positions that counter fixity. The works do not languish as composite constructions of powerless parts: indexed to both the artist's and viewers' bodies, the sculptures implicate those with whom they share space, disorienting assumptions. In so doing, they disrupt the fixity of bodily identification and locate the ambiguous body as a site of the present.

12 "Deconstruction, from that point of view, is not a technical device for mastering texts or mastering a situation or mastering anything; it's, on the contrary, the memory of some powerlessness . . . a way of reminding the other and a way of reminding me, myself, of the limits of the power, of the mastery—there is some power in that." Jacques Derrida, quoted in Elisabeth Weber, "Passages—From Traumatism to Promise," in Jacques Derrida, *Points . . . : Interviews* 1974–1994, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 385.

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CURA.

JULIA PHILLIPS

BY RUBA KATRIB

Sculptures become actions with titles like *Positioner*, *Objectifier*, *Muter*, and *Penetrator*. Julia Phillips creates objects that threaten to do something. Although made with elegant restraint, her works are at once menacing and attractive. They are simple and efficient forms, yet they suggest complex scenarios. Combinations of extreme psychic, social, and physical situations and interactions are evoked by her sculptures. Resembling esoteric tools, with such direct and instructional titles, Phillips' ceramic sculptures are active objects, even when resting on the wall or another support structure. The body is directly engaged with her works, it shapes and alters its behavior, sensation, and perception. Her sculptures are minimal pieces that connect to the human form, either by suggesting entry or augmentation.

In a series of objects that attach to the body, such as in *Tuner* (2016), Phillips has created a ceramic collarbone form with a butterfly screw attached to the center point, which would fall at the Adam's apple. With unglazed ceramic straps—resembling leather that dangle frozen in place with the entire object resting on a metal bracket on the wall—*Tuner* indicates something to be worn and tightened. However, it is unclear what effect it achieves, what point it stimulates or constricts. This ambiguity of purpose invites the viewer to speculate on what it would be like to wear it, or if instead, they would prefer to put it on another person. Wondering, who turns the screw? *Protector II* (2016) is another work that attaches to the pelvis with ceramic straps affixed to the ceramic body. Resembling a jockstrap, the area for the crotch (also ceramic) is hinged to easily open and close. Is it a device for protection from harm or from potential engagement—as with a chastity belt?

Objectifier II (2014) is a cool white ceramic object, like a prosthesis or medical tool; the elongated sculpture is unmistakably formed to be in contact with the body. Resembling a complex chin rest, the need for the tool prompts questions into the type of repose it assists. The object puzzles human anatomy. It engages with the imagined space between its parts, it makes visible the internal and external facets of the body, anatomical and psychic. It is part of a grouping of five *Objectifier* sculptures; each also suggests an external affixation as a type of prosthesis with a vague purpose. Although, perhaps they are meant to "objectify" as their title suggests. Their presence in proximity to a body turns the user into a thing; in these depictions the body's role is to activate the sculpture. The sculpture makes the negative space between the chin and whatever other surfaces it uses to prop it up. A work like *Penetrator* (2016), however, has a more forceful relation to the invisible spaces surrounding the body by moving into its interior. Resembling a fire poker, the salt glazed ceramic has a lip that fits to the human mouth—pun intended—with the double-pronged edge entering, and most likely piercing the throat. The fifth in the series, *Objectifier V Slightly Used* (2015), rests on a table; its title underscores the nar-

Katrib, Ruba. "Julia Phillips." *Cura,* no. 25, June 2017, pp. 182–87.

Katrib, Ruba. "Julia Phillips." *Cura,* no. 25, June 2017, pp. 182–87.

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Katrib, Ruba. "Julia Phillips." *Cura*, no. 25, June 2017, pp. 182–87.

rative of "almost" functionality within Phillips' work—suggesting that the object has been retired from use.

These objects that could be worn, or in other cases, inserted, are endowed with a perverse sense of humor. The directness of the forms and the titles of the works are befuddled by the incongruity of their proposed use and their material fragility. Ceramics, a domestic and delicate material, brings the severity of the objects into a more intimate realm. Could these objects be found in the kitchen cupboards, next to the mugs and bowls? The glazed ceramics are shaped into restrictive forms, however their organic quality and texture summons domesticity and the decorative. The warmth in the hand-worked quality of the material is put into contrast to the coolness of the objects and the assertiveness of their proposed functions.

The performative violence of some of Phillips' objects is mitigated by the more subtle quality of others, however they all put the body into a particular perspective, such as in *Positioner* (2016). A partial ceramic cast of a face from the nose down, features an agape mouth. The mask is suspended on a metal structure that includes ceramic handles to place the hands. Ceramic straps hang from the face, suggesting that a person holds on to the armature and is strapped into place. On the base of the sculpture are ceramic tiles, with a few drips of glossy blue paint on, the same blue that covers the interior of the face. The exterior of the face is a matte black. Standing only 44 inches high, whoever is implicated in the sculpture must be on their knees to fit into it, a position emphasized by the presence of glaze prints that suggest an imprint of knees on the tile base. It is a position of discomfort, but not of acute pain. It is related to another work, *Observer* (2016), where a pair of binoculars rendered in ceramic rests on a metal pole at 5 feet 9 inches tall. Hovering at the height of the artist, the binoculars place us in her perspective. One that is impossible to achieve.

With *Muter* (2016), another salt glazed ceramic piece is attached to a ceramic strap that could fit around the head. Pressing on the mouth, the ceramic form would potentially silence any wearer. The absence of speech suggested by this work becomes an essential element of Phillips' investigation. The thing that isn't said, the space that isn't visible, the subjective position that is unattainable. Absence and impotence run through Phillips' works. Violence is paired with absurdity. Hardness is joined with delicacy. The direct address of Phillips' works pit action against restraint, the objects are active while their effect on bodies is one of restriction, filling, or subduing. These are some of the effects of the actions her objects could perform. The visible aggression of the objects emphasizes the invisible and immeasurable impacts on the space of the body—taking on subjective conditions such as silence, objectifying, and observing, as much as the physical directness of penetrating, tuning, and protecting. The ungraspable experience is key to her work, as Phillips' sculptures articulate and adjust to the negative space in and around the human form and psyche.

Bender, 2014-2015 (opposite page) Positioner, 2016 (detail) (p. 183)
Objectifier I, Slightly Used, 2015 (p. 184) Connecter, 2015 (details) (p. 185)
All images Courtesy: the artist and Campoli Presti, London/Paris

Katrib, Ruba. "Julia Phillips." *Cura,* no. 25, June 2017, pp. 182–87.

Katrib, Ruba. "Julia Phillips." *Cura,* no. 25, June 2017, pp. 182–87.

Studio

Introducing the 2016–17 Artists in Residence

Julia Phillips

I invent tools and apparatuses of imaginary functions. The objects relate to the human body and I often create them with an interaction between two bodies in mind. My primary medium is ceramics, which I combine with metal structures and hardware that hold the ceramics in place.

The functions of each object are ambiguously revealed by the title, but also by some identifiable body casts, such as handles, footprints or partial masks, and by mechanical adjustments, such as wing nuts, hinges and straps. The titles suggest subject-object relationships—*Regulator, Positioner, Observer* or *Objectifier*—the "doer" and the "done-to." These titles and relations that I intend to visualize through objects are metaphors and can be understood on a broader sociopolitical level. For example, the concept of "regulation" can happen physically between two bodies, but also applies to gender and colonial relations.

Because the functionality of an object serves as a metaphor and a play with imagination, I think of the tools and apparatuses as being in a passive state. They are nonactivated devices, almost like domestic tools hanging in a broom closet. The fragility of ceramics also negates actual use.

The functions of the objects remain unresolved. The oppressive and forceful elements in the objects hint at the power dynamics between two entities. In the larger apparatuses the tile elements often carry glaze traces that indicate a specific position of an absent body.

I like it when viewers approach my objects like crime scenes and make assumptions about potential use. Viewers are invited to identify with either side of the subject-object relationships, which brings them closer to the function and hence the meaning of the work.

Julia Phillips
Positioner (installation view, top, and detail, bottom), 2016
Courtesy the artist and Campoli Presti

"Julia Phillips." *The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Winter/Spring 2017, p. 9.

Studio

Studio Winter/Spring 2015–16 48

Julia Phillips on Mel Edwards

The sculptures of Mel Edwards initially attracted me through our shared interest in functional objects. His use of tools provides points of familiarity and access to the viewer. My sculptures also incorporate functional elements, though in each piece the combination results in one specific tool of an imaginary use. Another shared interest lies in forms that provoke harmful meanings. Several of Edwards's works, including the "Lynch Fragment" series, evoke an interpretation of violence and domination. The relation between the body and functional devices is a core interest in my work as I pose questions about the power dynamics generated by the imaginary interaction with the tool, and the role of the body operating it. Edwards's open compositions blur the line of subject-object relations and complicate the reading of power dynamics, which in my work is further complicated by indicated aspects of gender.

Left Image:
Melvin Edwards
Working Thought
(from the "Lynch Fragment" series,) 1985
The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of the artist

Right Image:
Julia Phillips
Regulator, 2014
Courtesy the artist

Phillips, Julia. "Julia Phillips on Mel Edwards." *The Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine*, Winter/Spring 2015–16, p. 48.

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18

Julia Phillips

Julia Phillips creates ceramic sculptures that mimic functional objects or imagined tools. Each of the artist's "tools" are characters that refer to an invisible body, or suggest interactions between physical bodies, as seen in her videos and installations. Much of her work, created with clay and metal, is performative, either as allusion to a physical entity (some objects ooze glaze), or in the manner of their presence in an exhibition space. Gender, sex, power and control are the works' primary themes. *Regulator* (2014) stands as an awkward body, immobilized, without arms and with the ghostly impressions of its inverted feet registered with a slick black gloss. It is representative of the artist's interrogations of concepts of physical dominance, material and human determination. Phillips received a BFA from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg in 2012 and her MFA from Columbia University in 2015.

—

Julia Phillips
(b. 1985, Hamburg, Germany;
lives and works in New York)

—

Regulator, 2014

Hunt, Amanda. "Julia Phillips." In *A Constellation*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2015, p. 18.