

ART

Monthly

No. 441, November 2020 £6 US \$9

Hannah Black

Interviewed by Larne Abse Gogarty

The Limits of Subjectivity

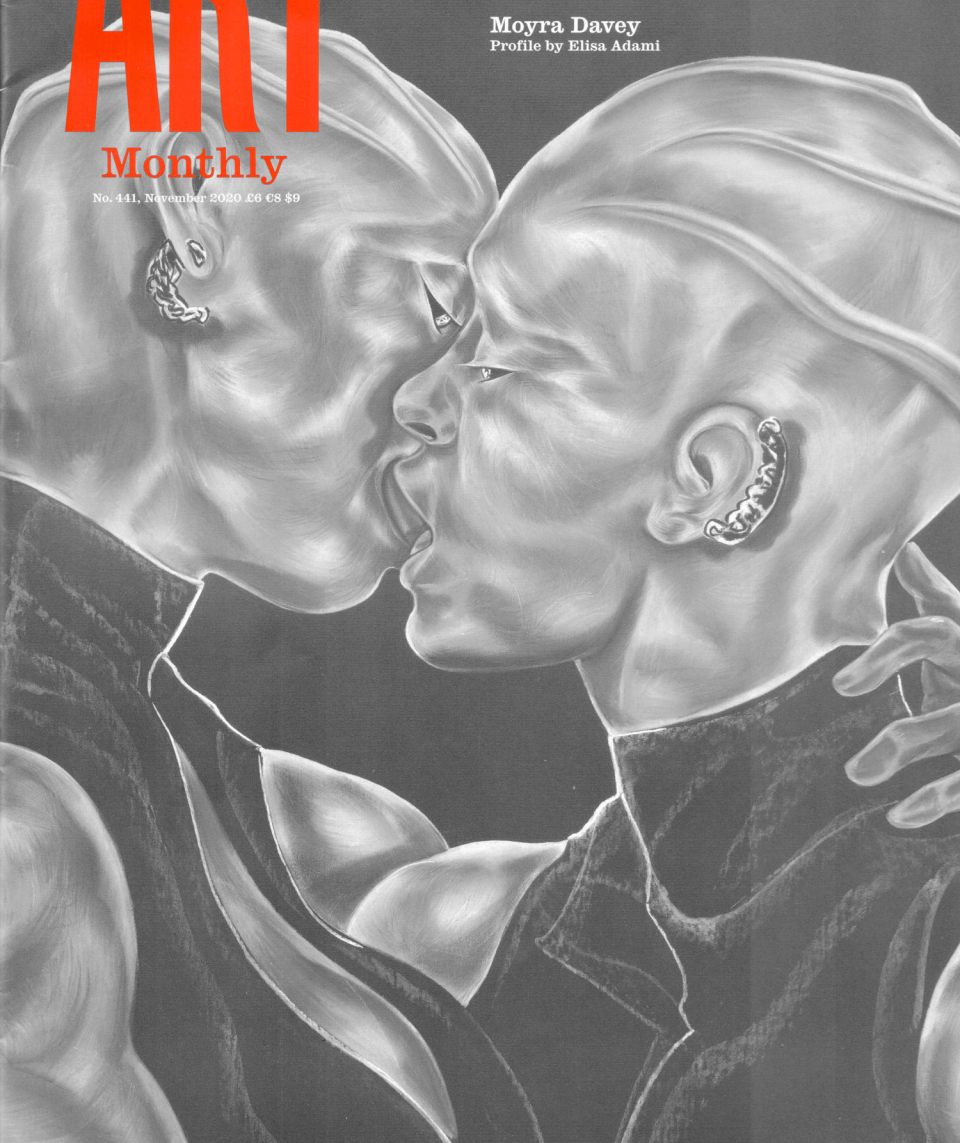
Tom Denman

The Ties that Bind

Sophie J Williamson

Moyra Davey

Profile by Elisa Adami



as a high-status woman (she traced her lineage to the first Maori settlers in the 14th century) as well as a tour guide and interpreter for Maori culture. Makereti married an Englishman and moved with him to Oxford in 1912, returning to New Zealand only to gather material for *The Old-Time Maori*, published posthumously in 1938.

The photographs fill four Victorian display cases from the common stock held by Oxford's Natural History Museum and the Pitt Rivers. A fifth is empty, but it speaks to us – as voiced by Deball – through the audio work *his heart rested at the site named the MIDDLE PLACE*, 2020. 'I have been waiting in a dusty storage for many, many years,' says the cabinet, 'a month ago someone removed my heavy blankets ... and I thought wow, I'm finally going to host a beautiful object.' But the case is 'taken to another museum' and kept waiting, eventually realising in the lightest of references to current restitution debates that 'probably the object that I was supposed to exhibit couldn't be shown, but why? Was I left empty as a symbol of respect for all those objects which have been taken without consent?'

We can enjoy 'Between making and knowing something' as an informative account of social and institutional history, anthropology and anthropologists, and traditional techniques and aesthetics. Yet Deball is also provoking the question: how far does the show go beyond 'the art of curation'? There are several ways in which one can read it as doing so. The primary focus, made explicit by the empty cabinet's monologue, is on the effect of how knowledge and cultural heritage are produced, organised, authenticated and displayed. Deball demonstrates a way to engage with artefacts from different cultures, how in her words 'recreating an object makes one understand and read the object in a different way'. There is a parallel engagement with people: Deball provides and enacts refreshing examples of how contrasting cultural traditions and ethnic origins can come together and, through the lead characters summoned, reflects on comparatively unacknowledged female roles which prove as prevalent in anthropology as in, say, painting. That is part of Deball's wider project of advocating an alternative view of history which, she says, 'is always viewed from the point of view of power, so how can you go down into the sources and find the history of people who have no voice?'

Paul Carey-Kent is a writer and curator based in Southampton.

Manifesta 13 Marseille

28 August to 29 November

The 13th iteration of the 'nomadic European Biennial' is the first edition in France since its inception in 1994. The biennale partly opened in early June without a preview, before all venues opened from October, with an emphasis on engaging with local instead of international visitors.

A lot has happened since the organisation and curatorial team began preparations in Marseille back in 2018. A global pandemic, yellow vest marches, postponed city elections, anti-racist protests and the collapse of two buildings in the city caused by sub-standard housing conditions that killed eight people.

In press material and interviews, the Manifesta organisation and the artistic team sought to use

political and social approaches to the works and artists selected, as well as the mode in which they presented projects. Through subjects such as migration, social injustice and the environment, Manifesta attempts to blend the poetic and the political, hovering somewhere between 'art and sociology'. Therefore, alongside the 'artistic' projects, there are concrete policy outcomes, for example, plans to turn an unused ship into mixed housing and to maintain a permanent citizens' assembly.

The previous edition of Manifesta in Palermo opened up new spaces, uncovering neglected parts of the city. This year's team decided to work with existing museums and institutions instead of moving into other areas of Marseille, which has seen over 20 years of aggressive gentrification. It's an appealing decision in a city where local engagement with museums is low.

Introducing new work within existing institutions and collections makes for productive new readings and it's where the biennale feels sharpest curatorially. Though institutional pieces can appear weighty and loaded, the combination of new references and conversations allows them to be revisable, permeable – or 'vulnerable', according to Stefan Kalmár (one of this year's Manifesta curators). The artistic team is careful to frame the insertions of works into local museums and institutions as 'complicating' the narratives of the host collections rather than appearing antagonistic. But, while falling short of full critique, the interventions are sometimes forceful or at least charged. In the Musée des Beaux-Arts, sculptural works by Lebanese artist Ali Cherri are pointedly placed in the entrance to the museum's collection of paintings made during the height of the French Empire (Lebanon being a former French colony).

Within the displays of wealth in the rooms of Musée Grobet-Labadié – a private-house-turned-museum with affluent interiors full of lavish furniture, paintings and other objects – is *Behavioural Intervention* by Cameron Rowland, an electronic detention tracker presented on a wall opposite an arrangement of harpsichords and other grand instruments. The work is presented like other *objects d'art* whilst also functioning as an artefact, and raises issues around home detention and immigration detention as well as the economic confinement of users paying fees for their own monitoring. In an adjacent room is Black Quantum Futurism's *Oral Futures Booth*, a listening station and recording booth with an archive of responses to questions about people's housing journeys, and the use of land and public space in Marseille. Rasheedah Phillips (of Black Quantum Futurism) is also a housing-rights activist and lawyer, and while this project was conceived before Covid-19, the work of both Black Quantum Futurism and Rowland carry an additional resonance after national lockdowns.

Dominating the second floor of the Natural History Museum is a large array of videos and multimedia documents by Center for Creative Ecologies, a collective that spans a number of participants and projects researching experimental art, political ecology and environmental justice at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Situated in the museum, the works infer a relationship, if not complicity, in the acquisitions and colonial past that the museum represents in capitalist extraction and the destructive effect on the environment.

Institutional spaces outside of museums and their collections include Peter Fend at Ciguigne Sanitaire,



Alli Cherry, *Tiger fed by a Raven after Giovanni Lanfranco's Elijah, fed by a Raven (1624–1625), 2020*



Installation view of Peter Fend's work at Consigne Sanitaire

Amy Lien & Enzo Camacho at La citerne des moulins and a group presentation at Le Conservatoire national à rayonnement régional de Marseille. Fend's project is one of his largest exhibitions in Europe to date, combining both newly commissioned and historical work. The Consigne Sanitaire was originally built to quarantine potentially contagious sailors at Marseille's port before entering the city. Fend has been working on ecology for the past 40 years and the exhibition lays out the results of his research on Marseille and the surrounding region, including a prototype model for using algae to filter out contaminants from sewage discharges on the coastline of a nearby national park. Anecdotally, it was Fend who, in the curatorial team's meetings with the city mayor, suggested testing for Covid-19 in the sewerage system as an early detection method for infection spikes – Marseille became the first city to use this technique.

The pandemic foregrounds the contingent, mutable relations of society and the sociological intention of the biennale to examine migration, ecology and inequality, all of which take on a different weight this year. As the pandemic reveals structural inequalities, it becomes an opportunity to rethink how we want to shape those relations in the future. The parts where the biennale is most successful are when the 'participants' are working directly with specific social and political issues of the city that also often resonate further afield. For example, Samia Henni's *Housing Pharmacology*, hosted in the Marseille History Museum, looks at the right to housing and documents conversations with the city's inhabitants after lockdown through published material and audio extracts. Henni, a theorist, architect and researcher, offers up a complex and useful network of experiences looking towards new possibilities for dwelling.

Where Manifesta is less convincing, however, is in the sometimes overwrought framing and packaging of the numerous different curatorial threads. According to my Airbnb host at least, the dialogue and terms were too complex and impenetrable to him and other local visitors. The complexity sets up an expectation of an unvisited and expansive amount of work and number of spaces, yet the moderate scale of the material and locations doesn't seem well served by being split into multiple curatorial components.

The scale is in part because projects had to change and be drastically reduced. Marc Camille Chaimowicz, for example, had planned to build the largest exhibition of his work in France by taking over the entire Cantini Museum and its collection to rebuild the interior of Villa Air-Bel. During the 1940s, the American journalist Varian Fry established the villa as a refuge and network for communists, Jews and members of the Resistance, housing major artists and thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Jean Arp, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Max Ernst, André Breton and Marcel Duchamp among many others. Because of the pandemic, however, Chaimowicz was unable to travel and in place of the ambitious project visitors find a constellation of works paying homage to the original concept. Aside from a presentation of a Chaimowicz installation originally shown at the Hayward Gallery in 1978 and a newly commissioned video, there are 'exquisite corpse' drawings produced by the Surrealists during their stay at Villa Air-Bel, Reena Spaulings sculptures, an Ernst painting, an Arendt interview and a collection of works by Hannah Black (Interview p1). In an attempt to represent the cratering absences left by the pandemic there are screw holes and hooks in every room leftover from a previous hang, unrepainted walls, readable gaps and blank spaces.

Early on in lockdown, I read Octavia Butler's *Parable* from the 1990s about the near future breakdown of society brought about by environmental crisis, wealth inequality and extreme politics and corruption. Talking about historical social transformation, the protagonist remarks 'it took a plague to make some of the people realise that things could change'. Without flash or pomp, the biennale makes the systematic social inequalities that the pandemic exposes a little louder.

Tim Steer is an independent curator and writer based in London.

Making It

The Box, Plymouth, 29 September to 24 January

'Making It', a portfolio of exhibitions by five international artists, is the first public demonstration of The Box's commitment to contemporary art. Plymouth's multimillion-pound, four-year revamp of its city museum and library building, which opened in September, inherits a role shouldered by the city's art centre until it closed after 62 years in 2019 and now shared with the Arts Institute of Plymouth University and the so far admirably dynamic KARST, the independent organisation founded by local artists in 2012. Themes in this show exist that are many and varied, although the processes of production offer the clearest link, contextualised with the historical and contemporary situation of Plymouth as a post-industrial and post-imperial port city.

The bell-ringer of the project, in terms of marketing profile at least, is sited on the small, Victorian West Hoe Pier. Antony Gormley's *Look II*, 2020, is twice life-sized