

Hordaland kunstsenter



Sick and Desiring

• CURATORIAL CONTRIBUTION BY NORA HEIDORN

- SARAH BROWNE
- JULIANA CERQUEIRA LEITE / ZOË CLAIRE MILLER
- FEMINIST HEALTH CARE RESEARCH GROUP (JULIA BONN AND INGA ZIMPRICH)
- JOSCELYN GARDNER
- PAULA PIN / BIOTRANSLAB

Sick and Desiring is an ongoing curatorial research project that asks, *how can we politicise sickness and organise around shared vulnerabilities to live the body as a space for resistance?*

The project encompasses an exhibition, workshops and screenings. Discursive, research-based and activist practices reveal and subvert historical and ongoing patterns of medicalisation and pathologisation of gendered and racialised bodies. Together with its audiences, the project aims to consider and problematise the complex ways in which different modes of power are exerted to impact on health, sexual and social reproduction, and bodily autonomy and dignity.

Sick and Desiring is set against our present culture which fetishises notions of health and wellness that are in the service of ever-increasing productivity. On the flipside of this lifestyle phenomenon is the decimation of infrastructures of care in contexts impacted by neoliberal policies and austerity measures. By drawing on activism, histories of radical healthcare and feminist group-work techniques, the contributors nurture practices of self- and collective care, reclaim medical and pharmaceutical knowledges that have become professionalised and monetised, undo the separation between human life and ecology, and demand agency and self-determination.

Sarah Browne

b. 1981, Dublin, Ireland

The Shambles of Science, 2019

4K video, 27', sound

Epigenetic Activity Mat, 2019

Sculptural installation; textile, aluminium, silicone rubber, HD video

Dimensions variable

Sarah Browne presents two new, closely intertwined works. Her film *The Shambles of Science*, featuring human and canine protagonists, makes a connection between two historical events: the involvement of Swedish physiology students Lizzie Af Hageby and Leisa Schartau in anti-vivisection protests in London; and the contemporaneous force-feeding of suffragettes held in Holloway prison. Central to the film is the way the bodies of both the dogs and the women were represented in the contemporary press as prone and unspeaking, whether subject to illegal experiments or resisting state-sanctioned 'care' in the prison system. This could help to explain some of the affinity the women felt for the dog, which led to an unusual coalition of the vulnerable across the political spectrum. The image of the dog is here taken to ventriloquise proto-feminist ideas about bodily autonomy, dignity and political voice.

Like the film, the installation *Epigenetic Activity Mat* resonates with current concerns of co-habitation and interspecies solidarity. The textile mat incorporates printed images and cast objects inspired by tools of play and domestication, with an implicit warning of violence. The installation also encompasses two text excerpts presented as video: first-person testimonies of force-fed suffragettes and witness descriptions from the 1903 diaries of Af Hageby and Schartau that would ignite the so-called 'Brown Dog affair'. With this work, Browne speculates on the intergenerational effects of trauma, even between bodies that may not be obviously related.

Sarah Browne is an artist concerned with non-verbal, bodily experiences of knowledge and justice. This practice involves sculpture, film, performance and public projects, as well as forms of writing and publishing in diverse contexts.

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Juliana Cerqueira Leite / Zoë Claire Miller

b. 1981, Chicago, USA; lives in New York City, USA and São Paulo, Brazil /

b. 1984, Boston, USA; lives in Berlin, Germany

Phytogyne Garden, 2019

Site-specific installation, mixed media, dimensions variable

Co-produced by Bergen Assembly 2019

Phytogyne Garden is a site-specific installation containing diffused oils, sculptural planters, medicinal herbs and grow-lights for cultivation. As an indoor sculptural garden, Juliana Cerqueira Leite and Zoë Claire Miller's collaborative artwork celebrates the empowering relationship that women have, and have had throughout human history, to medicinal herbs. The work specifically includes plants historically used in Scandinavia as emmenagogues and abortives, herbs which regulate female hormonal cycles and that can soothe menstrual cramps, PMS and menopausal symptoms. It is thus an investigation and celebration of the HERstory of HERbs.

In the installation, living herbs inhabit large planters while engaging the tactile, bodily and process-oriented nature of the artists' practices. A plant-based digital collage printed on chiffon encourages the re-popularisation of a branch of women's knowledge that has been largely lost as healing became de-personalised and claimed as the specialism of doctors and pharmaceutical companies. It shows how certain plants can be said to have a sisterhood with female chemical body language, and can help expand female agency and self-care today, as well as pointing to a form of resistance to the capitalisation of health and well-being.

Juliana and Zoë met during the Moscow International Young Art Biennale in 2016. They have since produced a number of collaborations taking the form of site-specific installations with a focus on representations of female sexuality and agency. Working with sculpture, light, scents, printed fabrics and organic elements such as plants, gelatin, clay and earth, their artworks elaborate on a tactile and sensual experience of form. These immersive installations are informed by feminist theory and a focus on undermining the body's insulation and segregation from its environment, through shapes that drip, dribble, spill and squish their way into existence.



Feminist Health Care Research Group (Julia Bonn and Inga Zimprich)

Established in 2015, Berlin, Germany

Radical Health Care: Materials, Methods and Activation, 2018–ongoing

Installation and poster, dimensions variable

Co-produced by Bergen Assembly 2019

Through zines, collaged materials, posters and workshops, the Feminist Health Care Research Group activate and actualise the ideas and methods of the alternative health care movement in West Berlin of the late 1970s and early 1980s through their installation *Radical Health Care: Materials, Methods and Activation*. Existing between the emancipatory politics of feminism and the self-organisation of the squatting movement, the alternative health movement created radical, self-empowering and collective approaches towards one's body and health, including reproductive health. The artists ask how we can archive, recapture and employ the strategies and tactics developed then, in our times and for our purposes.

As an artistic research project, the Feminist Health Care Research Group documents its questions and findings in self-published zines, posters and exhibitions. These zines – and the archival, historical material in their ever-growing research library – will form the basis for a series of displays to be activated during a feminist health workshop. Indeed, the work of the Feminist Health Care Research Group is not primarily archival, but rather has an activist approach to the context of the art world and cultural labour. Their installations and workshops aim to create a space in which to share vulnerability, to acknowledge and respond to access and other needs, and to interrogate the internalised, ableist paradigms of the body and psyche that determine our understanding of productivity in the art field.

Feminist Health Care Research Group currently consists of the artist, body worker and mother Julia Bonn (b. 1975) and artist, curator and mother Inga Zimprich (b. 1979). Their work is dedicated to generating artistic and self-empowering, emancipatory approaches to healthcare.



Joscelyn Gardner

b. 1961, Bridgetown, Barbados; lives in Ontario, Canada

Convolvulus jalapa (Yara) and Bromeliad penguin (Abba)

From the series *Creole Portraits III: 'bringing down the flowers...'*, 2009–11

Hand-coloured stone lithographs on frosted Mylar, 91 × 61 cm

The hand-coloured lithographs in the series *Creole Portraits III* show the backs of women's heads with intricately braided Afro hairstyles caged within iron slave collars. Sprouting from the base of the head, as if part of the same organism, are species of abortifacient plants that were secretly used by enslaved women in the 18th century. This risky strategy to reclaim control over their bodies through abortion was an act of political resistance against their twofold exploitation as enslaved workers and as 'breeders' of the next generation of slaves.

The fetishistic slave collars in these prints are artistic interpretations inspired by historical documents. Similar necropolitical torture-apparatuses were used to punish female slaves accused of inducing abortion, some of whom were forced to wear the contraptions until becoming pregnant again. Delicately hand-painted with watercolours, as was characteristic of natural history engravings of the period, each portrait is 'named' for one of the botanical specimens using the established Linnaean binomial system of nomenclature of the period in tandem with each slave's plantation name, thereby parodying imperial taxonomical systems.

Joscelyn Gardner is a Caribbean-Canadian artist who primarily makes prints and multimedia installations. Her practice probes colonial material culture found in British and Caribbean archives in order to explore her (white) Creole identity from a postcolonial feminist perspective. She is a Professor in the School of Art & Design at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, Canada and founder of the artist collective Print London.



Paula Pin / BioTransLab

BioTransLab, 2012–ongoing

Paul Pin's project BioTransLab is presented through posters, zines and the so-called *HardGlam Kit*, an open-source gynaecological kit for self-diagnosis, originally designed as part of the transfeminist GynePunk project. These materials will be activated during a workshop conducted by Pin.

BioTransLab is an activist education project and mobile lab that promotes self-knowledge and learning for women and trans women about their bodies. The *HardGlam Kit* is a portable lab containing DIY gynaecological tools for basic self-diagnosis. It was conceived in resistance to experiences of humiliation, discrimination and judgment in public gynaecology clinics. The *HardGlam Kit* infuses medical hardware with glamour, and consists of an open-source microscope, a 3D-printed speculum and a centrifuge.

The kit, its uses and politics will be explored during a workshop with a group of participants in Bergen. Interested individuals from any background are invited to participate, and the workshop is designed to encourage learning and discussion about not only the political implications and limitations of the kit itself, but also as ways of learning to conduct basic self-care, free from the medical gaze of the clinic.

Paula Pin was a founding member of the Pechblenda laboratory and one of the initial developers of GynePunk in Barcelona. She has been involved in the biohacking Hacteria network since 2012 and has since initiated BioTransLab as a mobile lab working in the intersection between human health (focusing on womxn) and ecological concerns.

