

(SUB)sonic

27 - 30 October 2022

Curated by Teagan Ramsay

Ophelia Bakowski, Majella and Indra Liusuari

(SUB)sonic seeks to draw connections, create fragmentations and call attention to the influences of institutional systems on bodily queer experience and memory. The exhibition embodies queer as an umbrella term for the Other, an Other that resists traditional categories, focuses on much more than “same-sex” desires and pushes beyond the question of identity itself. The artworks exhibited in (SUB)sonic fluctuate between discomfort and ethereal tranquillity, provoking affective experiences and recollections. By employing reclamation tactics, rebirth and satire; the works critique religious, social and racial institutional systems. (SUB)sonic highlights work that speaks to spatial, audio and visual architectures that converse with the audience’s senses to elicit deep bodily responses. The conversations between the artworks and the body investigate notions of power dynamics, Othering, and coercion. Through visually and sonically articulating queer methodologies and rituals; these practices cultivate forms of visibility that go beyond the optic and soak into normative structures to reframe them. (SUB)sonic draws on a spectrum of emotions to explore the relationship between the body, desire and environment, and questions the ingrained structures of social and religious institutions.

Embrace; A river runs through (2019) sets an ethereal tone for the exhibition and creates space for meditation and stillness. In the video artwork by Ophelia Bakowski, the rhythmic sounds of a singing bowl and tranquil visions of glistening sunlight on running water transport us to an alternative realm. River water dances across a partially submerged body and trickles

over rocks, uniting flesh, liquid and earth. These elements allow for a rumination on the arcane relationship between the body and nature, amplifying notions of decay, transformation, and rebirth. With Bakowski’s body and the landscape intertwined, the traditional binary perceptions of nature fade and the paradoxical reality and fluid qualities emerge. The connection between their body and the body of water highlights queer identities’ ability to be; malleable, and fluid, and have profound ties to the spiritual self. With visuals emblematic of the religious ceremony of baptism, Bakowski reclaims and transforms the rite of passage, forming a queer bath and immersing their body in the river. Here they are reborn, liberating their flesh and spirit from the rigid structures of social and religious institutions. Through reverent reclamation and queering of religious ceremonies, Bakowski assumes a process of re-examining their identity within the deep histories of nature. By forming connections with nature, engaging with memory and employing tactics of reclamation - Bakowski accentuates queer contexts and significance to healing.

Eerie whispers oscillate from side to side, electric repetitive beats layered with intermittent religious chanting cleanse the ears, driving forward tension and anticipation until eliciting a calming release. Jarring, percussive and squelching, Majella’s six-minute and thirty-four-second soundscape titled *Blue Morpho* 2020 reverberates from beneath a parabolic speaker. Majella is inspired by their continuous engagement with their cultural and post-religious identity and rituals; addressed within their use of sampling field recordings of

folk choirs, church bells and religious proceedings combined with highly processed electronic sounds and beat sequences. Majella recollects their Maltese Roman Catholic heritage and reworks the sonic motifs heard in parishes and churches to form the percussive techno soundscape. By auditorily reshaping Hymns and choir songs, Majella cultivates a revised language that profoundly connects to their past and contemporary selves. This queering of vocal sensations and amalgamation of contemporary styles elicits an extension of the body, a sonic body that Majella employs to liberate themselves from the immutable religious structures of their heritage. Queer voices have been hidden and subsumed by normative institutional structures and have resorted to forming communities and identities through visual and gestural motifs. Here, Mejjalla freely expresses their post-religious non-normative identity by transforming and reaching across religious structures to connect with queer bodies through auditory effect. Instead of acting as a direct critique of religious institutions, Majella suppresses the vocal timbres of the church and accentuates tempos to highlight the need for deep listening and feeling queer needs and desires.

Interrogaysian (2022) drastically shifts the tone of the exhibition from queer memory and religious institutions to hyper-self-deprecating homoerotic experiences and critiquing social institutions that uphold white supremacist ideals. Indra Liusuari's seven-minute and thirty-eight-second video is exhibited on a CRT television mounted on an installation consisting of; concrete, galvanised steel, boxboard, and eight computer-rendered prints. The video depicts Liusuari declaring their interest in dating and cruising for exclusively white men and spirals to form a conceptual critique on gay Asian men upholding white supremacist ideals. Liusuari confronts the audience using homoerotic imagery, coarse language and self-deprecating humour to interrogate this notion. The disordered visuals are reminiscent of mid-late '90s European rave footage, with rolling text, visual static and inverted strobing

throughout the video. The work is abrasive, stimulating sensations of shock, curiosity and meta-humour to accentuate the problematic racist undertones flooding Asian queer dating culture. Although conceptually divorced from Bakowski and Majella's works, Liusuari delves into the insidious power dynamics, Othering, and coercion experienced by queer people within social institutions and their own "safe" spaces. Similar to religious and patriarchal structures, white supremacy ideals are deep-seated within society, which has been permeated by colonisation and sustained through capitalism and directly affect queer and non-queer bodies.

By critiquing these institutions through a queer lens of memory and experience, we can begin to map the constellation of intertwining structures that form oppressive conditions. We can then highlight the tactics in which queer people heal, forge visibility, and challenge internalised oppressions in order to establish and embody new queer structures.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Ophelia Bakowski's practice engages with performance, image, sound and installation, to explore the inherent fluidity and interconnectivity of nature and identity through queer ecologies. Through experiences of hardship and trauma, states of transcendence and enlightenment allow for a cosmic communion with the sacred and unknown self, as pain becomes pleasure. The rituals performed in their work, become a form of healing and celebration of selfhood. Bakowski explores the intersection of queering and spiritual praxis by employing rituals in the form of performative gestures that reclaim religious practices.

opheliabakowski.com

Majella is the solo experimental electronic music and sound project of **Isabella Darcy**. Majella is inspired by Isabella's continuous engagement with their cultural and post-religious identity, amalgamated with their interest in concepts around dystopia and ethereality.

isbelladarcy.net

Indra Liusuari is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice includes audio-visual media, performance, installation, and publication. Conceptually, Liusuari is focused on critical discourses around white supremacy in gay culture, which is formed via exaggeration and appropriation in their artworks. Brutalist architecture, industrial design, audio-visual remnants of the 1980s and 1990s, and the underground rave scene have become paramount influences in their practice. Liusuari's current practice elaborates on the tendencies of gay Asian men to promote and reinforce white supremacist ideologies through a process of fetishising white homosexual men, while simultaneously projecting sexual discrimination onto other gay, Asian men.

Indraliusuari.com

LIST OF WORKS

1. Ophelia Bakowski

Embrace; A River Runs Through, 2019.

5.32 minutes, single-channel HD video with sound.

Courtesy of the artist.

2. Majella

Blue Morpho, 2020.

6.34 minutes, sound collage exhibited through a parabolic speaker.

Courtesy of the artist.

3. Indra Liusuari

Interrogaysian, 2022.

7.38 minutes, single-channel video on CRT television with sound, concrete, galvanised steel, boxboard, computer-rendered prints on 80 gsm papers, and ink.

Courtesy of the artist.

The curator and artists wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the country where the *(SUB)sonic* takes place and where the artworks were developed, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boonwurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, sea and community and pay our respects to their Elders both past and present.