"Trans Bodies: Race, Gender, Myth, and Performance"

Study Day/Giorno di Studio
American Academy in Rome
March 8th, 2018
3:00 to 6:00 p.m.

As part of the exhibition Cinque Mostre 2018 – The Tesseract, the American Academy in Rome is pleased to announce a day of encounters between artists, critics and scholars dedicated to the history, mythology, and contemporary significance of transsexuality in western painting, sculpture, film and performance. Inspired by the work of current fellows and important figures in Italian art from the Cinquecento until the present, this series of presentations and screenings will explore how evolving representations of transfigured, transgender, or non-binary bodies have created discursive links between bodily hybridity, creativity, and power.

The presentations will be conducted in English.
Schedule of Events

Part 1: Trans Bodies and Alternative Histories

3:00 – Introductory presentation by Leslie Cozzi, “[M]othering: Carol Rama and the Non-Normative Body in the Visual Arts”

Situating this afternoon of discussion and film screening, the introductory presentation by Leslie Cozzi (Andrew W. Mellon Foundation/National Endowment for the Humanities Post-Doctoral Rome Prize in Modern Italian Studies at the American Academy in Rome) offers a brief visual history of the representation of transgender and hybrid bodies from the early modern period until the present. Encompassing paintings, drawings, sculpture, and performance by Carol Rama (1918-2015), Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), Forrest Bess (1911-1977), Howardena Pindell (b. 1943) and others, this talk explores non-normativity as an ever-present foil for classical norms associating ideal nudity with political hegemony.

3:30 – Lecture by Jessica Gabriel Peritz, “The Voice 'Between': Castrati in Rome and Beyond, 1589-1913"

The category of singers colloquially known as “castrati”—those mutilated as young boys for the purposes of preserving their high voices—has never fit comfortably into binaristic constructions of sex and gender. In the castrati’s heyday in the eighteenth century, Italy’s opera houses featured such singers as heroes like Julius Caesar and as heroines like Iphigenia, while its chapels (including the Vatican’s Cappella Sistina) became famous for the angelic and presumably “unsexed” voices of castrato choristers. This presentation by Jessica Gabriel Peritz (Marian and Andrew Heiskell Pre-Doctoral Rome Prize Fellow in Modern Italian Studies at the American Academy in Rome) traces the history of castrati in Rome and across Europe, from their official acceptance into the papal choir in 1589 to the retirement of the “last castrato” in 1913. Drawing from a network of texts, images, and audio recordings both modern and historical, the talk takes a tour through the cultural phenomenon of castrati in order to consider how their liminal bodies and voices resonated with trans-historical notions of gender as performance.

Question and Answer session to follow both talks.

Part 2: Queering Contemporary Space

4:30 – Two readings by writer and architect Alessandro Bava

La Cura di Se by Alessandro Bava
“L’ermafrodito” from the work Ver-Vert by Filippo de Pisis

Alessandro Bava (b.1988) is an artist and architect based in London and Naples. He is the founder of the art collective åyr, researching contemporary domesticity, and the independent ecology magazine and publishing platform ECOCORE.

4:50 – Screening of A.L Steiner and A.K. Burns, Community Action Center, 2010 (69 minutes)
Community Action Center incorporates the erotics of a community where the personal is not only political, but sexual. This project was heavily inspired by 1970's porn-romance-liberation films, such as works by Fred Halsted, Jack Smith, James Bidgood, Joe Gage and Wakefield Poole, which served as distinct portraits of the urban inhabitants, landscapes and the body politic of a particular time and place. Community Action Center is a unique contemporary womyn-centric composition that serves as both an ode and a hole-filler.

Burns and Steiner worked with artists and performers who created infinitely complex gender and performance roles that are both real and fantastical, set to a soundtrack of music culled from the worldwide sisterhood: Chicks on Speed, Effi Briest, Electrelane, Chateau featuring K8 Hardy, Lesbians on Ecstasy, Light Asylum, MEN, Motherland, NGUZUNGUZU, I.U.D. (Lizzi Bougatsos & Sadie Laska), Kinski and Thee Majesty (Genesis P-Orridge), and featuring original compositions by Justin Bond, Nick Hallett & Sam Greenleaf Miller, Ashland Mines & Wu Tsang, Sergei Tcherepnin and Tri-State Area with A V Linton. The video seeks to expose and reformulate paradigms that are typical of porn typologies, intentionally exploiting tropes for their comical value, critical consideration and historical homage. The artists have created a reason to reflect on the cultural realness of homo-grown lesbian sexuality, and the work aims to be a hedonistic and distinctly political adventure.

**Participants and presenters are invited to gather in the Academy bar after the screening for an informal discussion and reflection on the day’s events. The exhibition will be open on 8 March from 4pm to 8pm.**

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