



Doreen Garner,
*Roughly Documented,
Three Million Eight
Hundred Ninety Four
Thousand and Fifty
Six, 2021*, steel,
silicone, glass
beads, hair, staples,
36 × 50 ¼ × 10".

those of viral infection while white right-wing politicians around the world exploited the moment by reactivating old tropes associating immigration with the spread of disease. Instead of refuting xenophobic narratives, Garner inverts their rhetoric and redirects it toward the one historical form of migration in which the association between travel and disease is historically substantiated fact: the conquest by white settler-colonialist nations. As Garner clarifies in the video, the pale pockmarked skin of the Portuguese and British flags drives home the fact that “white bodies and pale bodies have been sharers and distributors of disease and virus.” When the artist engages in symbolic violence against actual murderers, she raises crucial questions about the value of revenge, retribution, and political violence that polite liberal discourse is wont to sidestep.

Garner’s work is strongest when it is explicit, rather than opened and allegorical, and the presentation in Graz too often left such kinds of questions tacit. Whereas the ubiquity of pandemic discourse made recent pieces legible, the show’s only prepandemic work exemplified the types of challenges that attend the transplanting of antiracist discourse from the US to European countries that have yet to meaningfully address their own racist pasts and presents. Given pride of place in the show’s central gallery, *Red Rack of those Ravaged and Unconsenting*, 2018, featured eight pieces of silicone flesh decorated with pearls and suspended with meat hooks from an industrial steel frame. Garner made this work following extended research into the career of James Marion Sims (1813–1883), an American physician known as the “father of modern gynecology,” whose medical advances were almost exclusively based on ruthless experimentation on enslaved Black women, without anesthesia. The lumps of roughly pinned-together hands, bellies, fat cells, and muscle tissue seem to mirror Sims’s horrific practice of slicing open and stitching together the living bodies of Black women. Although the wall text in Graz dutifully explained this connection, it did not mention that this is just one of several works Garner created around Sims’s legacy. Crucially, when the artist first showed a similar group of silicone parts at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, the sculpture was accompanied by a performance titled *Purge*, 2017, in which Garner and other Black women performers circled around a replica of a statue of Sims that then stood in Central Park (it was removed the following year). Together, the performers brutalized his silicone flesh by subjecting it to a version of vesicovaginal fistula repair, the same surgery that was Sims’s claim to medical fame. Without the retributive symbolic violence of the performance, an otherwise powerful sculpture appears merely descriptive. The presentation in Graz risked allowing a largely white Austrian art audience to behold tortured and murdered

Black bodies as artifacts of a static distant history, not as the unhealed injuries and calls to action they are for Garner.

—Gregor Quack

BERLIN

Phung-Tien Phan SCHIEFE ZÄHNE

“Stop Dreaming,” commanded the title of Phung-Tien Phan’s exhibition. But this imperative was only the first card in the deck of language that made up the tight presentation. What followed added both contradiction and humor but—in the best way—offered no resolution. *Girl at heart 2* (all works 2021) consisted of eight white sheets of fabric lining the walls and blocking the entrance, each with a letter burned onto it with a flat iron. In different shades of toast and with a still-fresh scent of fire on fabric, they spelled out the word TRIPLETS. Or, read the other way: LET STRIP OF LETS TRIP. I prefer the latter. But where does that leave the indictment against dreaming? Are we tripping or not?

Girl at heart 2 is the sequel to a collage of home-video-style footage from 2020 (which was not on display in this exhibition). It has little in common with that work however, save for similarly autobiographical scraps of humorous and wistful sentiment: two identical photographs of a young woman—the artist, I learned—on a beach, wind in her hair. (It is not only heat, then, that etches things into our memory.) Was this the girl that one remains at heart? Three tables with round saw blades lodged into them (again, you could almost smell the scorched wood) suggested a certain frustration with the repetitive and restricted nature of adult domestic life. But the aerodynamic shape of the iron gave the letters on the walls the character of airplane writing in the sky, or a fat bee floundering at the end of summer. There was a tongue-in-cheek goofiness to Phan’s works that lent the seeming violence of charred textiles and embedded saw blades a more complex flavor. The signifiers were tripping, producing a tension between humor and aggression. The point here was not critique, but rather a self-consciously slapstick testimony to the weirdness of everyday life.

“Three’s a Crowd,” read the title of the accompanying text by Steven Warwick, but it was another of the exhibition’s linguistic ruses, at once description and diversion. The three tables were respectively titled *Twenty-Something*, *Mid-Thirties*, and *Ü40 (weiss auch nicht)* (Ü40 [don’t know either]), the abbreviation referring to parties for people *über* forty. With these jokes on the way people are pigeonholed according to age, the tables functioned less as sculptures than as part of a layering of signs that began with the metatexts and continued with Phan’s highly indexical, almost rebus-like choices of materials. Like her videos and sculptural works, this language game could be understood as a kind of verbal collage that thrives on randomness and incongruity, the adept stylization of which is the heart and muscle of Phan’s artistry.

In “Stop Dreaming,” letters and objects appeared equally literal, but the sentence they spelled out in the room was looped and layered, found no closure, and continued to chase its own tail. The show’s message was that life means a lot of hours spent ironing, that after a certain point there will no more windy beach days full of the promise of what’s to come, and that you’ll instead be left feeling trapped around a dinner



Phung-Tien Phan,
Mid-Thirties, 2021,
table, circular saw
blade, 28 ½ ×
27 ½ × 27 ½".

table thinking about cleaving it in half. But it also implied that this repetition, this loss, and this belligerence are not drawbacks of existence but its ornaments: something funny and off-kilter to remind us that what happens when we stop dreaming can be just as much of a trip.

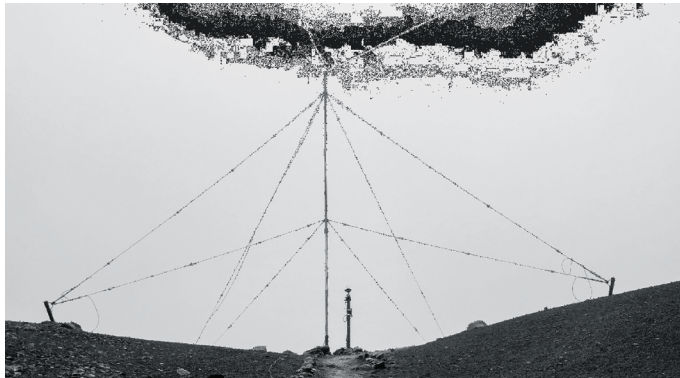
—Kristian Vistrup Madsen

MUNICH

“im/possible images”

LOTHRINGER 13 HALLE

In 2015, following the investigations into digital faults and breaks that had culminated her 2010 *Glitch Studies Manifesto*, artist Rosa Menkman embarked on a concentrated period of research into “how resolutions inform both machine vision and human perception.” These eventuated in the 2020 book *Beyond Resolution*, its epigraph “Refuse to let the syntaxes of (a) history direct our futures.” Menkman’s practice may have its roots in the post-internet art scene of the early 2000s, but it has always been guided by a para-academic enthusiasm for artistic



Rosa Menkman, *Whiteout*, 2020, video, color, sound, 15 minutes. From “im/possible images.”

inquiry into the technical limitations of the (digital) image and their consequences. In 2019 Menkman was awarded a residency at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, in the suburbs of Geneva. Her recent exhibition project in Munich was in part a way of thinking through the responses of scientists at CERN to a question she posed: “Imagine you could obtain an impossible image, of any object or phenomenon that you think is important, with no limits to spatial, temporal, energy, signal/noise or cost resolutions, what image would you create?” The question underpinned the structure of this group show, titled “im/possible images,” where colored stripes on the floor and walls delineated axes that both offered orientation and demonstrated the artist’s penchant for taxonomy.

Thus an original X-ray—a once-impossible image—by Wilhelm Röntgen, here shown on a magazine page from 1896, was on the axis “chronologies of im/possibility” along with *Pale Blue Dot*, a photograph of our tiny Earth taken from a distance of 3.7 billion miles by the *Voyager 1* spacecraft in 1990, and a recent example of 3D medical imaging rendering visible the interior of a wrist. Another axis, “images based on speculation, dis/belief or imagination” featured a 2017 work by Ingrid Burrington in which the quotation FOREVER NOON ON A CLOUDLESS DAY aptly described the adjacent satellite imagery of the globe, revealing the absence of the night and the inconsistent shadows in satellite imagery, as well as Susan Schuppli’s *Can the Sun Lie?*, 2014–15, a discursive video essay about changes in the position of the Arctic setting sun detected by First Nations peoples and how this relates to climate change and the history of photography as evidence. A highlight of the “low-fidelity images” section was Peter Edwards’s *Nova*

Drone, 2012, which created a flickering rainbow via the “rolling shutter effect” when visitors attempted to photograph the unremarkable-looking LED light at the top of this wall-mounted installation.

Two works in the show were Menkman’s own: *Shredded Hologram Rose*, 2021—a voice-over retelling of the corruption of an NFT, the flower of the title, ending with the repeated warning “This render may populate fungible strains”—and *Whiteout*, 2020, which offered a conceptual framing for the exhibition and was projected in a large, curtained-off space. Here, Menkman narrates the loss of sensory reference points as she hikes up a mountain during a snowstorm. In extended sequences with zero visibility, all we see is a blank off-white rectangle. As the camera keeps pixelating this fluctuating plane of oversaturated grays, a GPS dot tracks movements and we hear the buzzing of a device that makes electromagnetic radiation humanly audible. Menkman, in voice-over, switches to a tutorial-like excursus on the question she asked the scientists at CERN before the video cuts to another episode of autobiographical storytelling involving a road leading to “a pillar of light peeking over the rim of a mountain . . . shining with immense intensity” at a solar plant in the Mojave Desert in California. The whiteout is theorized in hindsight with a riff on lines, scales, and reterritorialization.

This collision of rationalism with the sublime recurred again and again throughout the show, pointing to a kind of mysticism that constantly builds a tension between earnest academes and a more faltering, broken, and beautiful emotional and linguistic register. If lyricism was unarguably present here, it felt, in fascinating ways, inchoate, as if its full unfolding were prevented through an allegiance to the format of the performative lecture that I suspect has to do with the implicit codes of artistic research, “media art,” and pedagogical intentions. In another artistic tradition, the muteness of the monochrome could outsource its exegesis and speak for itself.

—Alexander Scrimgeour

AALST, BELGIUM

Dora García

NETWERK AALST

As a justification for incrementalism, President Barack Obama leaned on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s sentiment that while the moral arc of the universe is long, it bends toward justice; the quotation was even stitched into an Oval Office carpet. Said another way, our leaders have made us a promise: If we place our confidence in them, and in the system of liberal democracy, progress is inevitable. But what should those who have waited so long do, and what is the effect when such pledges remain unfulfilled? Such is the crux of Dora García’s *If I Could Wish for Something*, 2021, the film that lent its title to her most recent



Dora García, *If I Could Wish for Something*, 2021, 4K video, color, sound, 67 minutes.