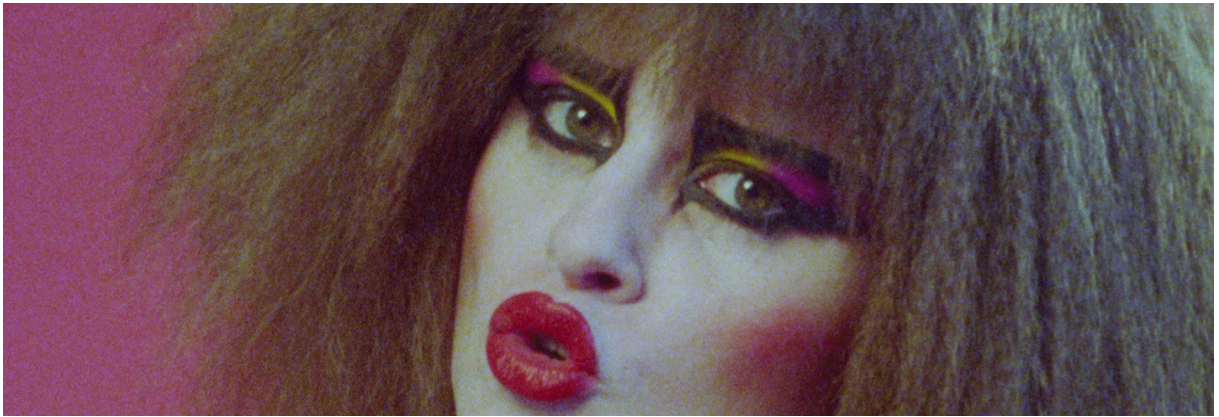


Kayne Griffin Corcoran

frieze

Review: Dara Friedman at Supportico Lopez, Berlin, Germany



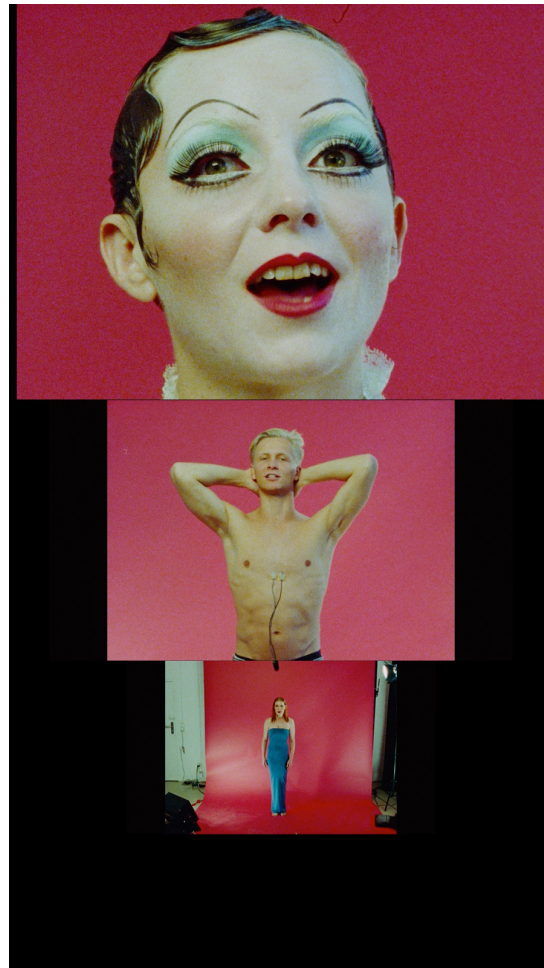
Dara Friedman, *Dichter*, 2017 four-channel video projection, 16mm film transferred to HD video.
Courtesy: the artist and Supportico Lopez, Berlin

Shortly before Christmas in 1967, the poet Paul Celan travelled to Berlin to read at the Academy of the Arts. A friend lent him a book about the 1919 murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, in which Celan read a court testimony that violently described the way 'Liebknecht was shot full of holes like a sieve'. On 20 December, Celan walked down Berlin's Budapesterstraße and noted the cruel historical irreverence wherein the house in which Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered had been renovated as a luxury hotel called the Eden. Celan's trip resulted in a poem that I cherish in which the language of violence is used to redeem the violence of language: it rhymes Eden (Eden) with Jeden (everyone), and tells of 'the man' that 'became a sieve'.

For Dara Friedman's 'Dichter' (Poets, 2017), the artist held an open call asking performers to recite a poem that is meaningful to them. After selecting 16 individuals, the German-born, Miami-based artist filmed them one by one against a pink backdrop, as they embodied rather than recited their poems, an adaption of the innovative Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski's technique of speaking through the entire body. She presents the resulting 16mm films in a many-part installation: voices shouting, simultaneously, at times incomprehensibly, in German, or lulling us sweetly with words alone. Some faces sprout up from different corners of the room; others are stacked like the multiple windows within a screen. If it sounds like the cacophonous experience we often have these days, in which a plurality of voices and faces flicker from one to the next, then consider how deftly Friedman has mobilized the alienation and earnestness of poetry to capture this.

Larios, Pablo. "Dara Friedman at Supportico Lopez" *Frieze*. 5 May 2017. Web.

Some performers chose familiar poems from the likes of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Rainer Maria Rilke. Others opted for dramatic monologues in which the first-person is seen sentimentally, and the performance comes close to the self-expression in the verse. One poem, well-known in Germany but unknown in English, attributed here to Christian Morgenstern, is titled '*Dunkel war's, der Mond schien helle*' (1898), which translates to: 'It was dark, the moon shone brightly'. The Jabberwocky-like poem contains a series of paradoxes, such as 'sitting people standing in a room'.



Dara Friedman, *Dichter*, 2017 four-channel video projection, 16mm film transferred to HD video.
Courtesy: the artist and Supportico Lopez, Berlin

Poetry is a paradoxical art: it attempts to resuscitate language and thus redeem experience in a manner that is at once alienated and songful. It resonates today due to our difficulty to parse individual expression from collective solipsism. How do we, like Celan, distinguish the violence done to and by language – the decline of speech and its rejuvenation? Such questions are central to Friedman's piece, which represents a paradoxical moment of collective self-expression.

Friedman's usage of poetry, German literary history, self-expression and preciousness, is not always legible. There are also some holes in the presentation – the decision to use mostly German-language

poetry, for instance, may lead some to struggle. Yet 'Dichter' is legitimated due to the way it captures today's collapse of signal and noise, poetry and detritus, volubility and distance, individualism and history. Preciousness mingles with refuse, and we struggle to parse what is valuable from what is not. (In another room stands a vitrine filled with rings made by Friedman, which seem to stand for the specialness, cherishment or talismanic aspects of poems). On one screen, we see a performer reciting a poem entitled 'I Love You So' (1928), by a Berlin artist and writer named Joachim Ringelnatz, who showed artworks at the Academy of the Arts before his practice was denounced as degenerate by the Nazis. The poem ends with a sweet antinomy: 'The main thing about a sieve / is its holes. / I love you so'.



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