

GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

Orphan at the Cemetery

Miriam Laura Leonardi

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The artists she is thinking about when making her new sculptures, Miriam calls them by their first names: Meret, Isa, Lutz. On a hot summer day, in her studio, she told me she liked it better that way, partly because family names are inherited from the father or acquired from the husband, enforcing a form of patriarchy that doesn't interest her. I thought about my own name, a double one, both inherited and acquired from male individuals. I also thought about Lutz Bacher's possibly masculine name and the kind of anonymity or neutral identity she is or was seeking by adopting this chosen name, or pseudonym as they say. But of course we all know Lutz Bacher is a woman... The flowers in Miriam's studio are certainly not genderless, but they are also anonymous in the sense that Miriam doesn't really care to identify the kind of flower they are, or to make them resemble any existing flower.

A couple of days after we spoke, Young Thug's new mixtape, *Jeffery*, was released. Young Thug's birth name is Jeffery Lamar Williams. In a teasing video he is seen interrogated by different police officers who insist his name is Young Thug, to which he replies repeatedly: "No, my name is Jeffery". The mixtape was accompanied by his decision to abandon the stage name Young Thug in favor of the new moniker "No my name is Jeffery" or just his birth name Jeffery. Each track on *Jeffery* is named after an artist Jeffery / Young Thug admires and is a song for them: *Riri* (for Rihanna), *Guwop* (for Gucci Mane), *Kanye West* (for Kanye West), etc... And also *Harambe*, for the gorilla who was shot in a zoo in Cincinnati after he'd grabbed a kid who'd managed to enter the enclosed perimeter of the gorillas. No one really knows if Harambe was putting the little boy's life at risk or if he would have protected him like one of his own children. Harambe is a Swahili term for "communal labor". It is also the title of a song by Rita Marley, who took her name from her husband Bob; Harambe was named after this song by Rita.

The artwork for *Jeffery's* cover features Young Thug / Jeffery with a baby blue dress reminiscent of a flower with many layered petals. He is wearing a hat in the shape of a paper umbrella, chastely covering his face resembling a prude and sophisticated lady or geisha; the outfit was inspired by Japanese kimonos and trousers. It sparked many conversations around the aesthetics of masculinity in rap and youth culture and about the confusion of identities. Jeffrey / Young Thug's choice of character for crossdressing is that of a woman looking like the old-fashioned

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symbol of a very high form of entertainment and social life. I would have preferred a woman looking more like a worker. Of course, geishas are somehow workers, at least they are pretty much in Miriam's sculptures.

In Miriam's sculptures the women, whose faces are also covered, or whose faces are flowers, are dressed in working attire. Their profession is astronaut or actress or columbine or the more generic "worker" with its orange overall. When we met during that hot summer day, we spoke about actresses, dancers, the music-hall, the theater, and about a film whose title forecloses the family names of its two protagonists: *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*. Céline (or maybe it is Julie) is a music-hall actress and dancer. At some point in the film, Julie has to get on stage to play Céline's part, because Céline is away somewhere dealing with very important matters and she can't work. Julie covers her face for quite a long time before revealing it to her audience and unveils she's not the one they think. But they probably didn't need to see her face to find out she wasn't the one she pretended to be. Or did they? This makes her whole performance quite arousing, only her body is to be seen under bright theater lights: long legs, fancy shoes, high waist, red hair...

Céline and Julie keep swapping (or confusing) identities and roles throughout the whole film, and it feels like a possible definition of friendship. Friendship is often not about publicly declared admiration, or singing a tribute, but about being able to not be perfectly recognizable or differentiable from the loved one anymore. If I may risk here yet another definition of something (it is corny I know, to try to define such things) Miriam's exhibition is like a reunion of friends who have been playing the game of confusing personalities for quite a long time now. Lutz, Meret and Isa reunited. In the midst of all this, Miriam's face, the only human face to be seen here -or maybe not to be masked, or covered- is morphing owing to a fairly simple device: a sheet of plastic mirror cut in the shape of one of Jeff's flowers...

Miriam, Meret, Isa, Lutz, Jeffery, Riri, Guwop, Kanye, Harembe, Rita, Bob, Lady, Geisha, Astronaut, Columbine, Actress, Worker, Céline, Julie, Jeff, Miriam.

Lili Reynaud Dewar