

# GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

## **Dissonant Healing**

Vanessa Conte, Jesse Darling, Marie Matusz  
Curated by Balthazar Lovay

07 June - 27 July 2019

*Dissonant Healing* gathers the works of three artists addressing the complex conditions of control and power on the body and individuals in our contemporary age. Underlying or celebrated violence create contemporary tales inspired by premodern history, allegories, myths and forms of representations. Vanessa Conte is not only informed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini or Goya, but by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652) who was one of the first women painter to be officially accepted and who painted women bodies subjected to suffering and pain (from ancient myths or the Bible). Jesse Darling overtakes the figure of Saint Jerome whilst Marie Matusz uses the suggestive power of medieval torture. In the context of body representation, self-portraiture is also at stake in these works that discreetly bring autobiographical strata below the surfaces.

The three paintings by **Vanessa Conte** belong to a larger series of about 8 works that each captures a moment of submission. The almost slapstick treatment and the humor Conte deploys in these compositions bring up the ambiguity of desire and physical brutality, or lust and humiliation. These paintings discomfit the viewer's emotions and subvert the moralistic and philosophical ties to her body. In "Blackwater" for instance, the symmetrical splash and the body's bubbling descent make the assault a spectacular act of grace and cruelty. If the bodies depicted are anonymous, one includes Justine, one of Conte's character that she stages in other works. In the three drawings of smaller formats, these forces are much more exaggerated through the narrative repetition inherent in the durational comic strip form. Where the paintings show female bodies subjected to unidentifiable forces, the drawings show a cause for punishment or why the flesh is being bent, distorted and pushed to its extreme limits.

**Marie Matusz's** work explores the complex identities of objects that are both attractive and frightening. In the exhibition, she creates a dialogue between two works, one on the floor, the other pending above our heads. These objects originating from a past era, simultaneously appear to potentially exists again on our contemporary days.

*The World Wants To Be Deceived, Therefore Deceive it (Mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur)*, 2019, deals with the aesthetization of history. The shape of the sculpture was inspired by a medieval torture instrument, reproduced in aluminum and taken to pieces, displayed as a DIY kit. Whilst opening up the possibility of self-torturing within the environment of our own home, it addresses the commodification of violence, through the seduction of the consumer. Like a jewel that ruins us. *The Future Is Already Sold*, 2019 is composed by three bunker lamps. As these defensive fortifications are not in use in the Western world anymore, those lamps are mere design. In the exhibition, they serve to artificially illuminate the gallery space as much as they herald a return to an aesthetic, a potential survivalism. Considering these two sculptures together within one space, they take on the characters of religious icons, almost forcing the viewer to kneel in their presence, one illuminating us like a candle, the other transforming into a Pietà.

**Jesse Darling's** works address complex issues spanning from physical disability to power of knowledge through the figure of Saint Jerome

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(whose most iconic representation was painted in 1474-1475 by Antonello da Messina). Saint Jerome through his extensive knowledge applies his power onto the world. In the original fable, Saint Jerome cures the wounded lion as a symbol for taming the wild nature. Both his knowledge and his healing gifts are tools of control and supremacism (of any kind). These considerations are reflected in Darling's titles such as *Regalia & Insignia (The staff of Saint Jerome)*, 2018: *Insignia* are patches indicating military ranks when *Regalia* are emblems that prove royalty and the privileges that accompany it.

As Darling states, it, « Saint Jerome, for me, becomes a stand-in for all those who claim knowledge and exercise sovereignty: the patriarch, the imperialist, the supremacist, the taxonomist and the practitioner of the medical/psychiatric/diagnostic industrial complex. He becomes a symbol for the academy, the church and the museum - all of which preserve the status quo in gloved hands, a soft violence. And so I wanted to think about the story from that perspective, acknowledging all the while that I' am both Jerome and his lion in this context, both the beneficiary and the victim of these various systems. » (Jesse Darling quoted in: Tate Etc. *Issue 44: Autumn 2018*, The Ballad of Saint Jerome. Tate Modern, London).

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