



CONTINGENT
BRIGITTA KOCSIS
BODIES





Catalogue for the exhibition *Contingent Bodies*
By Brigitta Kocsis



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Vancouver, BC
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March 3 – April 15, 2017

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Printed in Canada
Edition of 400

ISBN # 978-1-988708-01-0

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Publication 2017 grunt gallery
Artwork 2017 Brigitta Kocsis
Text 2017 Clint Burnham

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grunt gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Province of BC through the British Columbia Arts Council and BC Gaming, the City of Vancouver, the Audain Foundation, our donors and volunteers.

Funding for this project was obtained through The Hamber Foundation



SEND

CLINT BURNHAM

CRIPS

In photography there's a weird anxiety people have about posed figures who are pretending not to be posing. Critics will complain that they look too self-conscious, that there's some "ineffable but fatal difference in attitude between people behaving naturally and people behaving naturally for a camera" as Peter Schjeldahl says somewhere. (Michael Fried adds, when "faced with seemingly straight photographs dealing with absorptive scenes, viewers unthinkingly crave the seduction of the human subjects' expected obliviousness to being beheld".) But no one really complains about painted figures looking unnatural. This is for two reasons: one, the painter typically is not trying to capture a scene of people doing things (or if he is, as, say, with Caillbotte or Seurat, it's the formality that is captured), and, two, she can always give the figure's face the look of absorption. This is not a problem that Brigitta Kocsis has, however, for the paradoxical reason that she is painting from photographs (especially I think mostly from internet photographs of people, perhaps even often nudes), and so the figures are aware, as it were, that they are being looked at. As we learn, it may be this insouciance (call it theatricality) that most troubles us – we do not like it when sexy or otherwise libidinal pleasures are being enjoyed and known, for then we have to think about where our own pleasures are located.

For even here we have to be careful. Because Kocsis' process is to take images from the internet, mix and match the bodies and heads (or limbs, and so on), a subtle disjunction is at work between, or rather, immanent to the bodies themselves. The artist's layering of medical, biological, prosthetic, or straightforwardly painterly abstractions over and among the bodies is uncanny: figures may be incomplete, with outlines left unrendered, with a trachea over a torso, a crude or lifelike lower leg. The end result is a just-this-side-of-Bacon figural abstraction, where Bacon's disavowed photographic dimension returns to haunt any too-neat feminist distinctions between the painting and the photograph.

Kocsis's abstractions have not merely to do with the figures she represents: her abstraction of background as often gives a sense of a room's half-painted but also out-of-scale machinery, frames, mechanical systems or saran-wrapped out-of-date computer monitors, an abstraction that finally is historical. It is historical because now we see what happens when

1980s and '90s computer technology joins the junkheap of superseded commodities (we now have our phones, we don't need cumbersome desktop machines). Kocsis relates, for instance, that the image of wrapped monitors in the painting *BK2353* is from China. In effect, by Photoshopping in, as it were, those monitors, she accomplishes in painting what Martha Rosler did with photography in her *Bringing the War Home* series, where images from the Vietnam War were collaged into domestic American interiors. In that earlier example, the power of the work came from its juxtaposition of the violence demanded by imperialism with its sublimation in a proper suburban home. At the same time, the quality of those images as photographs (one from the image economy of war journalism, the other from advertising) means that aesthetics does an end run around what was a political practice – both of images and their juxtaposition – or, as Rancière would say, distribution. This Baudrillardian endgame quality can be seen in Rosler's return to the project after 9/11, when suddenly cellphones take on a diabolical presence in her work.

With the painting *BK2353*, then, a certain strategy in Kocsis' work is apparent. First we have the painterly figuration of a scene of women's selfies and other narcissistic aesthetics. Then we see that aesthetic's material (obscene?) underside: the mechanical furnishings, junked tech, and cancelled out (*Aufhebung*) computer systems. Digital trash – so-called “e-garbage” – is returned to these digital-bourgeois scenes from China, which is a metonym for the internet more generally (the internet is, perhaps, the last frontier, our Orient). And this digital garbage also is apparent in the paintings in their form, their collaged composition, heady mix of styles, off-register pixellation that suggest Warhol as much as such recent “post-internet” art as that of Laura Owens or Wade Guyton.

This essay's title, “Send Crips”, refers first of all to an abundance in the paintings I saw recently in Kocsis' studio, a plethora of what seem to be prosthetics attached to bodies or lying there on the floor, or merely outlined, or attached to other hazily present objects and structures. This is, I think, a mark of the paintings' universality: the prosthetic is by now a universal and transcendent object, in that we are all of us crips, medicalized, bare life, either actually or potentially (airport security, hospices), formerly or soon-



BK2353



BK2353 - detail



BK2967



BK2967 - detail

to-be, temporary or always-already. But this essay title also refers to the recent internet meme of “send nudes”, something that began in the lower echelons of digital behavior (“sexting” or sending obscene texts or selfies to one’s boyfriend or girlfriend – the 2015 film *Weiner* is a good ethnographic document) but then, via the baroque user culture that is the internet, becomes a proper meme, with its own codified explanation, and mutation into the phrase (thus made anamorphic or spelled out in cereal, for example). It’s important to keep in mind, however, that the obscenity of the phrase is only because of the “born-digital” status of its etiology. Nudes very precisely represent, in classical art, the proper sphere of the body in a figural sense (and indeed, is opposed in Sir Kenneth Clark’s well-known formulation, to the naked body, which is properly pornographic).

Are Kocsis’ paintings, then, nudes or naked? Or: are they paintings of nudes or of naked people, and which nude do we mean – the classical nude (proper, art historical, up to and including its recent avatars with Lucien Freud or Maria Lassnig) or the digital nude (of “send nudes”), which then means naked?

My first answer to this question would be: Kocsis is sending us nudes. Paintings in which we look at the various women’s breasts – mostly although not always pert, sometimes a bit paler than the rest of the figure (these are mostly white people, which means, in painting, not white), the men’s six packs or man-boobs or dicks, the women’s bikini line or smudge. However, as we look at the manner in which Kocsis paints the body, the traditional pleasure in looking at or painting the nude – looking at the form, the colour and shade, the contours, the poses – is troubled, for a number of reasons. First of all, there are these intrusions mentioned above – the Salle-ish outlines or blocky abstractions – in *BK2967*, for instance, where a male figure in the foreground seems to wear a heavily outlined t-shirt but only has one arm, with his lower body painted out, and the woman at the back, on the right, has what seems to be a schematic of a tube or esophagus painted onto her body. Such intrusions not only remind us of the painterly, they also effect a kind of sublimity, where our attempts at categorizing are stymied. So, the “tube or esophagus”, about which I just wrote, is “painted onto” the body, as though the painted body were itself another surface, but of course it is painted on paint. It looks a bit like graffiti, and the point, I think, of such layering

(which really is not layering) is to render our looking at these bodies uncertain. Or, the other way around: the *dis*comfort we may feel in looking at nudes, whether for Puritanical or political reasons, is then itself made problematic. To put it bluntly: why shouldn't crips have porn? Or, even more mediated: why are we thinking these are bodies on the canvas, when we evidently have collaged representations? "Why shouldn't crips have porn" in the sense that if our gaze is bothered by these fragmented, collaged, imperfect bodies, when we should also be bothered by how sexy these crips look. That just won't do, for two reasons. These have to do, first, with the excremental characteristics of paint itself, and secondly with prostheses as abstractions. As Mira Schor famously comments in *Wet*, "Pigment is matter that interferes with the idea of color. Its excremental nature makes any individualized manipulation of it distressing, and so it must be bleached out, cleansed, expurgated, photosynthesized." But now the problem is that Schor's defence of painting from theorized media arts on the one hand and misogynistic, capitalist paintings on the other, has, again, suffered an end run in Kocsis' practice. For what if all the earthy, bodily, excremental excesses of paint are devoted to depicting or riffing off of photographs (and digital or screened photographs at that)?

And prosthetics, finally, are central to post-painterly questions of abstraction and the figural. That is, we can think of prosthetics that are abstractions (the functional but also oddly aesthetic look of the *Bladerunner's* artificial lower legs), or that are more figural – the old prosthetic hand – and some that are both – a prosthetic breast, for instance. Michael Ondaatje has a wonderful story about his aunt, who had a prosthesis because of a mastectomy (this was in Ceylon in the 1950s), and she was on a bus and a man groped her false breast. But to this simulacral joke we can add a further refinement: what if the man was himself using a false hand? What if he got off on groping with a prosthetic? In addition, then, to the figural or abstraction of the prosthetic, we can add the question of whether it itself is nude or clothed (and also, if it is nude or naked). That is, can a prosthesis be naked? And, to return to this essay's opening conundrum, can a prosthetic pose? If Kocsis' paintings make it difficult to tell what is a pose and what is a prosthetic, that problem is perhaps one central to painting – *and photography* – today.







BK0146
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2017

BK0187 (opposite page)
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2017



BK2967
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2017



BK2970
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2016



BK2968
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2017

BK2364 (opposite page)
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2016





BK2353
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2016

BK20 (opposite page)
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2016







BK16
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2016

BK15 (opposite page)
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015



BK13
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015



BK12
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015



BK10
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015



BK09
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015





BK03
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015

BK04 (opposite page)
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015



BK02
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015

BK01 (opposite page)
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 in
2015



BROS

The image features the word "BROS" in a large, bold, blue-outlined font. The letters are filled with a photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white short-sleeved shirt and black shorts. She is smiling and holding a mobile phone to her ear. The background of the photo is a bright, outdoor setting with a blue sky and some architectural elements. The letter 'B' is the largest, followed by 'R', 'O', and 'S'.

Brigitta Kocsis is a Hungarian born Canadian Painter. In 1988 she moved to the UK where she learned English in Brixton and after two years there, relocated to Montreal in 1990 to pursue her education at Concordia University Fine Arts. She received her BFA from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2005 and has dedicated herself to painting since then. For the last five years, she has travelled abroad and exhibited internationally. Her paintings have been shown in solo and group exhibitions in Canada as well as in Switzerland, Hungary, and Finland. She is a recipient of a Canada Council Assistance to Visual Artists - Project Grant in 2010 and spent 5 months researching and creating in Paris and Berlin. She also received a Canada Council Travel Grant to mount her first European solo show in Geneva, Switzerland for the Geneva Art Biennale. Her 2014/15-exhibition calendar included two solo exhibitions in Alberta, Canada with assistance from the BC Arts Council, as well as solo exhibitions in Hungary and Finland with the support of the Canada Arts Council. Brigitta Kocsis lives and works in Vancouver, Canada.

Glenn Alteen is a Vancouver based curator and writer and Program Director of grunt. He has worked extensively with performance art and is cofounder of LIVE Performance Biennial (1999, 2001, 2003, 2005). His writing on Performance was recently published in Take No Prisoners-the Performance Work of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (MOA 2016), Making Always War (Stride Gallery, Calgary 2009), Access All Area (grunt 2008), Rebecca Belmore (Sydney Biennial Catalogue, Australia 2006), Caught in the Act (YYZ Books Toronto, 2005). In recent years Alteen has been involved in archival projects as a producer of websites including Medicine (2008), Beat Nation (2009) through grunt gallery, Ruins in Process -Vancouver Art in the 60's (2009) produced through grunt and the Belkin Gallery at UBC, Activating The Archive 2011, Background ThisPlace 2013, Taking Advantage – The Mainstreeters Redux 2014.

Clint Burnham was born in 1962 in Comox. He teaches at Simon Fraser University; recent publications include books of poetry (Pound @ Guantánamo) and film criticism, and essays on oral history, indigenous art (Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Dana Claxton, Raymond Boisjoly), and photography (Kelly Wood, Walker Evans, Henri Robideau, Edward Burtynsky).

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