

MARCH 19 – JUNE 13, 2020

LIV SCHULMAN: THE GOVERNMENT

CURATED BY SYLVIE FORTIN, BEMIS CURATOR-IN-RESIDENCE

Feat. Françoise Adnet, Geneviève Asse, Maria Blanchard, Anne Bonnet, Lorenza Böttner, Marcelle Cahn, Claude Cahun, Esther Carp, Leonora Carrington, Lygia Clark, Irène Codréano, Germaine Derbecq, Suzanne Duchamp, Jenny-Laure Garcin, Artemisia Gentileschi, Shirley Goldfarb, France Hamelin, Louise Hervieu, Lois Mailou Jones, Maria Lassnig, Lea Lublin, Mariette Lydis, Dora Maar, Marta Minujín, Marcel Moore, Vera Mukhina, Juana Muller, Aurélie Nemours, Chana Orloff, Alicia Penalba, Valentine Prax, Carol Rama, Germaine Richier, Fan Tchunpi, Toyen, Karin van Leyden, Remedios Varo Uranga, Marie Vassilieff, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Hedwig Woermann, and Pan Yuliang

Liv Schulman: The Government (2019) speculates on the work and destiny of unconventional and often forgotten women, lesbian, and genderqueer artists who lived in Paris between 1910 and 1980. Formally, the work refuses recuperation and uniformity. It exists as both a feature-length film and a six-channel episodic video installation, hovering between these two forms: one ghosting the other.

Venturing beyond the mere critique of phallogocentrism's hold on twentieth-century art, *The Government* playfully weaves together lived and imagined alternative stories that defy the dictates of rationality, reverence, and linear history. Tellingly, the work's intentional titular misspelling enacts a productive refusal, destabilizing its authority. The title's intrusive "b" condenses several key dimensions of Schulman's work: the inventive multilingualism of cosmopolitan discourses ("v"

sounds like "b" in Spanish); the body's wondrously elusive performances (nasal congestion's highjacking of pronunciation); and deception (the strategic use of misspelling to evade online surveillance). In French, the language in which the project was initially developed, the verb "berner" means to deceive or delude, adding weight to this last reference.

For its presentation at Bemis Center, the multi-channel version of *The Government*—an exhibition-cum-art tv series—immerses us in a genealogy that refuses to conform or inform, fictionalizing the archive as it stages the desires, challenges, and contributions of twentieth-century women and non-binary artists. Populated by cosmopolitan femizens in full effect, this text-driven, performative work rejects the primacy of history, social and political orthodoxies, and the rules of representation. Instead, we encounter pirated



Liv Schulman; *Le Gouvernement* [The Government] (still), 2019; Video; Courtesy of the artist; © ADAGP 2019.

narratives spoken in provocatively defiant tongues and women unapologetically on the move.

A radically reconfigured gallery with no single entry point or sequence of works, no hierarchy, no center or periphery, welcomes visitors. Architectural interventions, sculptural objects, and theatrical props jostle with six moving-image channels, vectorizing a space that mobilizes all of our faculties. At every turn, we must make a decision. This augmented experience offers a glimpse into a different, more egalitarian world, where power is offset by self-determination, diverse knowledge, sensuality, imagination, and becoming.

In the videos, seven actresses—Eden Tinto-Collins, Agathe Paysan, Catherine Hargreaves, Chloé Giraud, Manuela Guevara, Viviana Méndez Moya (Curtis Putralk), and Nicole Mersey—play over forty-five female-identifying artists. Roles are fluid; time is non-linear. Different actresses take turns playing an artist/character, accentuating different dimensions of their life and work. An actress may also play several roles simultaneously, layering life stories and aesthetic pursuits. Identities circulate, evolve, and sometimes dissolve, echoing the circulation of social, political, and psychological constructs at the heart of the artist's practice. Real stories, anecdotes, and fictions interweave and shuffle temporalities into a provocatively uncertain present of collective becoming.

Neither a realistic film, a period fiction nor a rational history, *The Government* is a speculative rendering that turns words, speech, and images into fluid characters emancipated from phallogocentric discourse.



Liv Schulman; *Le Gouvernement* [The Government], 2019 (installation detail), Villa Vassilieff, Paris; Dimensions variable; Courtesy of the artist; Photo: © Aurélien Mole.



Liv Schulman; *Le Gouvernement* [The Government] (detail of still), 2019; Video; Courtesy of the artist; © ADAGP 2019.

Episode 1, 6:20 minutes, French, English, and Spanish with English subtitles

Evoking the freedom and excitement of summer camp, *Episode 1* takes us on an adventure. A monologue interweaves languages and ideas, inviting us to develop a new system of thought to experience *The Government*.

Episode 2: The New Subjectivity, 30:24 minutes, French, English, and Spanish with English subtitles

Taking place in the early twentieth century, this episode depicts the collective invention of a new artistic movement: the New Subjectivity, replacing Surrealism. The succession and posturing of artistic movements fuel the self-fulfilling prophecy of the avant-garde, which is defined here as a big sex party for white men. The avant-garde thrives on mental contortions that firmly deny women artists: they are always in the wrong place, the wrong movement, at the wrong time. Their bodies get in the way. Neither here nor there, they are forever too early and too late. The artists Maria Blanchard, Esther Carp, Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, Marcelle Cahn, Suzanne Duchamp, and Pan Yuliang intersect with Marie Vassilieff—who is possessed by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and dreams of dialogues between Valentine Prax, Jenny-Laure Garcin, Karin van Leyden, Leonora Carrington, France Hamelin, and Lorenza Böttner.

Episode 3, 16:25 minutes, French, English, German, and Spanish with English subtitles

In a sequence filmed in the Montparnasse neighborhood today, a group of artists (Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Artemisia Gentileschi, Louise Hervieu, Lea Lublin, Chana Orloff, Carol Rama, Juana Muller, Toyen, Dora Maar, Remedios Varo Uranga, and Marie Vassilieff) takes turns in and out of the frame, in a visual and narrative relay that navigates through the century. One after the other, as they walk down city streets facing the camera, they deliver monologues glossing their eccentric lives and punctuated by a central question, often repeated: Do you see me? Masculinity is a Dadaist performance, we are told. These women arm themselves with patience, insistence, and irreverence for they know that the stakes are far greater than representation.



Liv Schulman; *Le Gouvernement* [The Government] (detail of still), 2019; Video; Courtesy of the artist; © ADAGP 2019.

Episode 4, 8:14 minutes, French with English subtitles

Featuring Germaine Richier, Fan Tchunpi, Lois Mailou Jones, and Mariette Lydis, this episode addresses the issues of exile and travel as affective forms that constitute the life of some artists.

Episode 5: The Custom Officers, 21:30 minutes, French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish with English subtitles

This episode takes place between 1950 and 1960, as we meet Marta Minujín, Alicia Penalba, Germaine Derbecq, Shirley Goldfarb, Maria Lassnig, Françoise Adnet, Geneviève Asse, Lygia Clark, Anne Bonnet, and Aurélie Nemours in a Montparnasse office

tower. Conversations shuttle us between the latest modernities, the pharmaceutical industry, novel drugs, and new performative forms of gender. The body becomes a metaphor for customs, with bodies, desires, and their elaborations tightly controlled by different power apparatus, including states and the economy.

Episode 6, 8:54 minutes, French with English subtitles

This episode takes place in Antoine Bourdelle's former studio, now inhabited by four of his ex-students, Irène Codréano, Hedwig Woermann, Germaine Richier, and Vera Mukhina. How are artistic identities impacted by national or nationalist representations? How do gender and nationalist ideology negotiate? How does the nation co-opt women artists, using their promotion as propaganda? What affects do nationalist ideologies and totalitarian systems produce?

The Government is accompanied by a survey of Liv Schulman's video works, on view in the video room, and the world premiere of *The New Inflation*, a new performance in three episodes that explores the multivalence of inflation. Developed, written, cast, produced, and filmed in Omaha, *The New Inflation* will be presented at Bemis Center on March 26 and 28, May 7 and 9, and June 4 and 6. Free and open to all but space is limited. RSVP required at bemiscenter.org/thenewinflation.

Granting Bemis's visitors unprecedented access to Liv Schulman's work, ideas, and creative process, this tripartite project is the first North American presentation of her work.

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