

Encounters I May or May Not Have Had with Peter Berlin

Mariah Garnett, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Neal Tait
curated by **Caroline May**

Opening Friday 19 May, from 20:00
19 May - 29 July 2017
Friday and Saturday 12:00 - 18:00 and by appointment

Vamiali's gallery presents the exhibition "Encounters I May or May Not Have Had with Peter Berlin", curated by Caroline May. The exhibition borrows its title from Mariah Garnett's homonymous work and refers to "Peter Berlin" as a concept and as a metaphor to illuminate the notion of desire, highlighting the impulse to "meet with our heroes". Through these encounters, as real or imaginary, intellectual or deeply personal as they may be, our sense of identity is reshaped and consequently, the process of art making is recharged, re-positioned and re-defined. Peter Berlin is a photographer, artist, model and filmmaker. Serving as his own photographer, model and fashion designer, Berlin redefined self-portraiture and became an international sensation.

Mariah Garnett's film highlights the artist's desire for the extravagant gay icon and mystifies the 70s as a decade of sexual liberation. Partly documentary, partly biopic, the film features the artist herself re-enacting Berlin's erotic persona. As Garnett inhabits the filmmaker's signature manner of style and dress, she presents a film that galvanizes the kind of gender misidentification that is a consistent point of interest throughout her practice. Garnett's other film in the show, *Other & Father*, is a re-enactment of footage that narrates the relationship of her Northern Irish Protestant father and his Catholic girlfriend, aired by BBC in 1971. The original broadcast, which was riddled with half-truths to suit the BBC agenda, led to death threats and his eventual flight from his home. Garnett re-enacts the documentary, starring herself and a trans-woman shifting focus from the ethnic/religious tensions to sexual politics and gender dynamics. Through her deeply personal lens she mediates her own subjectivity as well as that of her chosen medium, which systematizes definitions of identity. The process of filmmaking, the de-mystification and re-mystification of the process, the negotiation of actor/performer and filmmaker are integral to Garnett's project.

Similarly, Paul Mpagi Sepuya studies how photography (mis)represents or dissects his own identity and exposes the mechanisms of picture making. He documents his subjects in a formal studio setting, at the same time deconstructing and mystifying the process of photography and the relationship between model and photographer. His intimate portraits follow a long tradition of photographers such as Lyle Ashton Harris, Peter Hujar and Rotimi Fani-Kayode. The dignity with which he arms his subjects, black and white men, led the writer

and critic Hilton Als to include Sepuya in his 2016 exhibition on James Baldwin, poetically situating him as one of Baldwin's creative "children". Speaking about his work, Sepuya claims: "every photograph contains within it the instances of what preceded it. In thinking of photography this way, I am able to bring together and embrace the contradictions that photographic production generates: in its accelerated gratification of desire and simultaneous displacement of its subjects by the resulting image-objects. It allows me to hold, within the studio, all material as potential. Each enters into the frame of another within a chain of production, revision, destruction and re-production".

This accentuation of desire is central in Neal Tait's work. His intellectual encounters with his heroes, like Leger and Guston, are prevalent in his works. His interest is in ghosts, spirits, hauntings and the idea of possession. Using found imagery he starts a painting without having a pre-conceived idea of how it will end. In this sense the painting process is the subject of his work and its perhaps the openness of painting that allows this to happen- through cancelling out or obliteration. His identity as a painter is in a constant flux during this process: both doubting and asserting himself in his attempt to capture the essence of desire, employing a dark, unruly and idiosyncratic vocabulary, which poses open-ended questions which alert the viewer.

About the artists:

Mariah Garnett (b. 1980, USA) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her films have received awards from Artadia Los Angeles (2016), Rema Hort Mann Foundation (2015), Sarah Jacobson Film Grant (2015) and California Community Fund (2014). Selected solo exhibitions include the Metropolitan Arts Center, Belfast, UK, Ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, Human Resources, Los Angeles. Her work has been included in group shows at SF MoMA, San Francisco, Chisenhale, London, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, wellwellwell, Vienna, REDCAT, Los Angeles, White Columns, New York, Ann Arbor Film Festival (Ann Arbor) and in the 2014 Made in LA Biennial at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, where the LA Times called her piece "Best in Show." Her work has been reviewed in Bomb Magazine, Artforum and in The LA Times.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya (b. 1982, USA) lives and works in Los Angeles. Sepuya's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions including at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Franklin Art Works and The Artist Institute, New York. He recently had a solo exhibition at Yancey Richardson, New York. Public collections featuring Sepuya's work include The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland and MOMA, New York.

Neal Tait (b. 1965, UK) lives and works in London. In the last decade, his work has been included in seminal exhibitions such as 'Painting on the Move', Kunsthalle Basel, 'Direct Painting', Kunsthalle Mannheim, 'Hoch Hinaus', Kunstmuseum Thun and the 'Watercolour' exhibition at Tate Britain. Solo exhibitions include White Cube, London (2000, 2003, 2006, 2009), Tanya Bonakdar, New York, ACME, Los Angeles, Douglas Hyde Gallery (2002) and Museum DhondtDhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2006). His work is in important collections such as The David Roberts Collection and others.

Caroline May is an artist (b. 1975, GR). She lives and works in Athens. She has had solo exhibitions at The Freud Museum, London, Artist Curated Projects and ONE Archives, Los Angeles, and The Apartment, Athens. Her work has been featured and reviewed in Camera

Austria, Attitude, artforum.com and Art Monthly. She currently works at the George Economou Collection, Athens.

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