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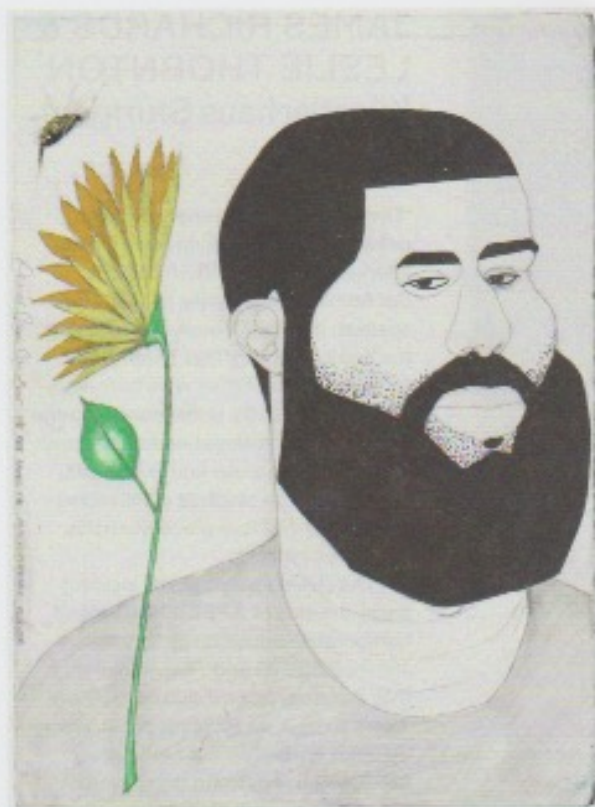
DERRICK ALEXIS COARD

Delmes & Zander,
Cologne, Germany

Delmes & Zander in Cologne has long championed those artists defined by stigmatizing catchalls such as 'art brut' and 'outsider art', doing so with an acute sensitivity to the fact that difference alone should not equate to currency. The drawings of Derrick Alexis Coard, a selection of which are brought together in the solo exhibition 'Bearded Black Man', are well served by this approach. Coard, who died in August last year at the age of 36, lived with a schizoaffective disorder but, while evident in his drawings, his artistic practice cannot be reduced to this aspect alone. We need only look at the slightly angular rendering of an African-American man in *The Bee Saved the Schizophrenic* (2015), his soft eyes staring out, his face framed and covered by deep black hair. To his left floats a flower drawn in coloured pastels; above it, a bee. With its title and almost allegorical composition, the drawing could easily be taken as a portrait of the artist, but Coard's works are not self-portraits. They are portrayals of imaginary men – always full-bearded, always black.

Something that plays no real part in this work, but is striking elsewhere in the show, is the abundance of visual cyphers for sainthood. *Anointing Fall on Me* (2015) is a half-length portrait of a man in profile, his eyes closed. The figure's head is surrounded by a bright yellow halo, a commonplace motif in painted icons. *The Epiphany* (2014) similarly activates a religious visual idiom, portraying a naked man, far more muscular this time, as an angel. The figure's washed-out body contrasts starkly with both his blue and yellow halo and the dynamic lines emphasizing his strong upper arms – à la Superman. In this fascinating mash-up of homoerotic black icon and the stylistic means of comic-book illustration, the figure's soft, dreamy eyes remain at odds with his body, which is steeped in the conventions of 'manliness'.

It is conspicuous that the eyes of Coard's figures invariably convey shyness or vulnerability and are often closed or hidden behind heavy sunglasses. The exhibition includes three portraits with eyewear, the most appealing being *Lyricist's Eyes Unrevealed* (2015): the head, rendered in marker pen and half-profile, is formed from the saturated black of sunglasses, beard and hair, with each element seamlessly converging on the one visible ear. While shades are customarily seen as a demarcation of coolness, Coard's focus is on the unrevealed eyes, the concealing of vulnerability behind a hard, outer shell.



The dominance of the colour black in these works can certainly be read as an affirmation and assertion of blackness, but Coard's statement of 'I'm Black and I'm Proud' is far more fragile than that which was defiantly sung by James Brown in 1968. Here, impenetrable black hair, especially beard hair, combined with deflecting sunglasses, appears to be a form of protection; an armoured suit that encloses something more sensitive.

But there is also a subtly coded homoerotic celebration at work in Coard's depictions of maleness – most explicitly in *Pete's Underwear Body* (2015). At the centre of this bashful triple-portrait is a full-length depiction of a man, in underwear, with hair all over his body. To his left and right are cropped details from the portrait: half of his face and an enlarged section of his hirsute body. While Pete's posture is timid and his gaze neutral, the two enlarged sections, and that which depicts his near-naked body, candidly create a charged sexual tension that is present only in highly oblique ways in the exhibition's other works. Over and over again, it is this directness, this simplicity of means, that proves to be the strength of Coard's project.

Moritz Scheper
Translated by Nicholas Grindell

JULIA SCHER DREI, Cologne, Germany

In 1991, Julia Scher assembled the immersive video installation, 'I'll Be Gentle', at Pat Hearn Gallery in New York. Moving through the installation's three rooms, visitors entered their personal details into a database, were bombarded by a dadaist array of safety imperatives and presented with the surveillance footage that had been recorded of them in the gallery. Some 27 years later at DREI in Cologne, we find various elements of Scher's gentleness reincarnated under the expanded title 'I'll Be Gentle, No Consent'.

The recurring elements include the *Hallway Cam* (1991/2018), an orange JVC studio camera that lurks all-too-conspicuously in an artificial bush. A dangling mass of cables suggests that the camera is transmitting footage to two stacked monitors positioned in the window, but it soon becomes clear that one of the screens is playing a video cut from recordings of the 1991 installation. And, while the second monitor does show a live-feed of pedestrians on the pavement outside the gallery, it doesn't originate from the orange decoy, but from another camera concealed within the same faux bush.

At the centre of a backlit wall that bisects the gallery is a doorway labelled 'Voyeurs Corridor', through which the visitor can glimpse an even more dramatically lit Amazon Echo device – the main new addition to Scher's constellation. Since its release in 2015, the Echo series of voice-controlled smart speakers has gained notoriety online for its unsolicited behaviour. It has been caught talking to itself, transmitting conversations to saved contacts, quoting Hannibal Lecter and laughing at its users.

For more than 30 years, Scher has strived to visualize the interplay between surveillance, control and exhibitionism, and it is the insurmountable difficulty of drawing this project into the present age that resonates throughout the show. The semi-functional tangles of cables seem like curious relics in the face of wireless data; the live-feed of visitors appears quaint in the age of automated motion tracking and facial recognition; the panoptic eye that was once embodied by the camera has seamlessly evolved into the user interface. But, rather than aestheticize the forms and materials of these technologies past, Scher resurrects them in order to point to problems that remain decidedly unresolved. In 'I'll Be Gentle, No Consent', the reactive human body and its moving image, once central to Scher's installations, is demoted to the status of an inert onlooker, doomed, perhaps, to endure as little more than a voyeur of its algorithmically administered condition.

This page
Derrick Alexis Coard,
The Bee Saved the Schizophrenic, 2015,
marker, graphite and
pastel on paper,
76 x 56 cm

Opposite page
Above
Vajiko Chachkhiani,
Heavy Metal Honey,
2018, video still

Vajiko Chachkhiani,
'Heavy Metal Honey',
2018, exhibition view

Below
Julia Scher, 'I'll Be
Gentle, No Consent',
2018, exhibition view

Scher's Amazon Echo sputters off a series of pre-programmed phrases that articulate a sexualized unease at the expanded possibilities for surveillance and data collection which such technologies represent, as well as the ambivalent ethical status of quasi-intelligent automata: 'How do humans give consent to an artificial? Consent relies on having a body and a mind ... somewhere.' The fragments seem tinged with a certain frustration; a desire, even, to break the disciplinary fourth wall enacted by flawless surfaces and user-friendly interactions.

'Exhibitionism' once served as a blanket diagnosis for a spectrum of novel cultural perversities that emerged in response to the explosion of consumer video technology in the 1980s and '90s – from homemade sex tapes to reality television. Now, in the age of social media, the compulsion to participate in one's own representation, or lack thereof, has become the order of the day. What then seems perverse in Scher's diagnosis is not just the pleasure we humans take in posing for the camera but, rather, the pleasure we take in having the gentler algorithmic agents of the market and the state pose as humans while we serve each other's needs. If, in 1984 (1949), George Orwell's vision for the future of a totalitarian surveillance state was 'a boot stamping on a human face – for ever', ours might be that of an unrelenting embrace.

Stanton Taylor



VAJIKO CHACHKHIANI Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany

Georgia's history stretches back to a time of ancient myths. It is the land of Prometheus, who was chained to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains. It is the land of the golden fleece, which was stolen by Jason, with the assistance of Medea and Orpheus. Georgia is permeated with these tales, but how do they influence life there today? As is palpable in his extraordinary exhibition, 'Heavy Metal Honey', the artist Vajiko Chachkhiani – who is based in his hometown of Tbilisi – has studied this question for years.

At the exhibition's entrance stands a replica of the marble statue of Orpheus that Baccio Bandinelli made in 1519. Chachkhiani's version, *Orpheus, Secret That Mountain Kept* (2018) is studded with wedges that are used to divide stone, pointing to the never-ending process of fragmentation, displacement and reuse that is operative in the dissemination of myths. Following Chachkhiani's Orpheus is the installation *Secret That Mountain Kept*, which fills an entire room and introduces the biblical motif of the flood. According to the Book of Genesis, Noah's ark landed on Mount Ararat, not far from present-day Georgia. In 2015, Tbilisi experienced flooding of biblical proportions, which claimed several lives and saw a number of animals escape from the city's zoo. For *Secret That Mountain*

Kept, Chachkhiani constructed a series of racks from the metal bars that once caged these animals, interlacing them with a number of vertical sticks tipped with upturned gourds, their forms not dissimilar from those that were used to store wine in mythical times. (Some of the earliest evidence of wine production has been unearthed in Georgia, dated around 6,000 BCE.) Between the bars are wooden sculptures of fugitive animals entangled in thickets of branches, as well as a carousel car that was carried away by the flood and got caught in the mud.

At the centre of the installation is a kiosk, reminiscent of those that appeared throughout Georgia as the private sector developed in the 1990s. While they resemble ramshackle huts – built from boards, sheet metal, found doors and glass panes – these structures were the veins through which the Georgian capitalist economy flowed. Today, they have disappeared from the streets but, as harbingers of capitalism, they too have taken on a mythic status.

The film *Winter Which Was Not There* (2017) depicts a crane fishing a statue from the sea. Gradually, it becomes clear that the statue is of a man who is standing on the beach. He then ties the statue to his pick-up truck and drives off. As he travels through the Georgian landscape, the concrete disintegrates until all that remains is the chain that once fastened it to his vehicle. The film is a striking allusion the figure of the dictator, namely Joseph Stalin, who was born in Georgia and whose statues and spirit linger throughout the country.

Heavy Metal Honey (2018) is a shocking piece of cinema. It depicts a large Georgian family sitting around a dining table, conversing animatedly. Suddenly, rain begins to fall on the interior scene, saturating everything and everyone, but the family continues its discussion as if nothing were out of the ordinary. Only the mother acknowledges the downpour. She leaves the room and, after some time, returns with a pistol. One by one, she shoots everyone except her son, who she does not have enough bullets to kill. The film cuts to the mother, lying in bed with an intravenous drip, either dying or, unlike her family, being kept with the living.

What is the film trying to say through this horror? Is it a dream, an escape from death or revenge for the fact that man is mortal while myths live on? *Heavy Metal Honey* leaves these questions open because, like ancient myths, there is a plurality of possible interpretations.

Noemi Smolik

Translated by Nicholas Grindell

