

MUSEUM FRIEDER BURDA
SALON BERLIN

Press Release



CANDICE BREITZ: SEX WORK
In Dialogue with Works by William N. Copley from the Frieder Burda Collection

Exhibition Dates: 21 September 2018 - 5 January 2019

Press Preview: 20 September 2018, 11h00–17h00

One-Day Symposium: 26 September, KW Institute for Contemporary Berlin (registration required)

Since it erupted into mainstream discourse, the #MeToo movement has sought to analyse and expose the systemic nature of gender-based violence, giving rise to one of the most urgent and charged debates of our times. In seeking to map the dynamics of gender and power that determine relationships in the workplace (and in the world at large), the movement has arguably focused a disproportionate amount of attention on incidents of harassment and abuse reported by privileged and/or media-favoured individuals. Though the video works presented in *Candice Breitz: Sex Work* were shot shortly before #MeToo went mainstream in October 2017, they resonate poignantly within the debate, re-focusing questions that are central to the movement in order to address the rampant gender-based violence that sex workers contend with on the job and beyond.

As a whole, the exhibition spans a discursive arc from the work of American artist **William N. Copley** (1919-1996), a renowned outsider figure of the twentieth century, to the work of Berlin-based South African artist Candice Breitz (born 1972), a leading contemporary voice. In the works included in the exhibition, both artists vehemently contest the stigmatisation of sex work, albeit from radically different perspectives.

The autodidactic precursor of Pop Art, **William N. Copley**, whose practice reflects the banality of consumer life as much as it channels Surrealism, was enamoured with women (and with sex workers in particular) to the point of obsession. While seduction is a central motif across his oeuvre, he also repeatedly evokes 'the battle of the sexes,' most notably in his celebrated painting, *West* (1974). Married six times, Copley was a communist, a pacifist, and a fan of sexual hedonism, which he sought to free from the stigma of pornography. Over the course of his career, he made countless drawings and paintings portraying faceless, caricature-like protagonists engaged in erotic acts. These ornamental and stylised works lovingly fetishize the services provided by sex workers. In 1966, Copley devoted an entire exhibition to the subject: *Projects for Monuments to the Unknown Whore*. His *Tomb of the Unknown Whore*, presented at the New Museum in New York in 1986, ironically memorialised sex workers (as opposed to fallen soldiers) with a call to, "Make Love, Not War." But even as he seeks to oppose the vilification of prostitution, Copley offers his female subjects to the viewer primarily as objects of pleasure, as such extending a long art historical tradition. From Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and Toulouse-Lautrec's dancers and barmaids, to Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907), prostitutes and courtesans have typically served as models and muses who offer their allures passively (and often nakedly) to the almost exclusively male gaze of the artist.

In **Candice Breitz's** video installations *TLDR* (2017) and *Sweat* (2018), by contrast, sex workers come strongly to voice. Both works grew out of a series of interviews and an intensive workshop with the featured participants, extending an ongoing conversation between Breitz and SWEAT (the Sex Workers Education & Advocacy Taskforce), the non-profit organisation with which the represented sex workers are affiliated.

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In the first room of **TLDR**, a 12-year-old narrator occupies the central screen of a three-channel projection. He recounts a true story from the recent past, vividly evoking an ideological battle that pitted feminists against feminists, and human rights organisation Amnesty International against an awkward coalition of prominent Hollywood actresses and sex work abolitionists. A Greek chorus composed of eleven sex workers responds to the story as it unfolds, animating the boy's words from the flanking screens to his left and right. The chorus offers comment via dozens of protest posters bearing slogans drawn from the archives of sex work advocacy: 'NOT YOUR PITY PORN,' 'NOT YOUR PRETTY WOMAN,' 'WE ARE NOT YOUR DEMOISELLES.' The collective's call for the decriminalisation of their labour is additionally articulated via synchronised gesture, 'white privilege masks,' over-sized emojis, hand-painted signage, a grim reaper figure and the power of protest song. The work's soundtrack bounces between improvisatory performances of a range of protest songs drawn from the portrayed community's shared repertoire (sung predominantly in Zulu and Xhosa), and bite-sized sound samples derived from popular hits that reference sex work (from Tina Turner to Rihanna, from Roy Orbison to Donna Summer). The viewing duration is 60 minutes.

In the second room of **TLDR**, visitors are invited to spend time with a series of intimate interviews via which the same sex workers offer frank comment on their labour, describe the socio-political conditions under which they found their way into sex work, and articulate their political goals as sex work activists. Collectively, their spoken testimonies add up to approximately eleven hours of viewing.

Very much a sequel to Breitz's **Love Story** (2016), **TLDR** invites viewers to reflect on the relationship between whiteness, privilege and visibility; and on the shrinkage of attention spans within an information economy that fetishizes celebrity and thrives on entertainment. Addressing the fraught relationship between art and activism, the work points a finger at itself to bluntly ask whether and how artists living privileged lives can succeed in amplifying calls for social justice and meaningfully representing marginalized communities.

TLDR is narrated by Xanny 'The Future' Stevens and features Zoe Black, Connie, Duduzile Dlamini, Emmah, Gabbi, Regina High, Jenny, Jowi, Buhle Nobuzana, Tenderlove and Nosipho 'Provocative' Vidima. The work is dedicated to the memory of Nokuphila Kumalo.

IMAGE:

Candice Breitz

TLDR, 2017

13-Channel Installation

Projection Room: 3-Channel Projection, colour, sound

Duration: 60 minutes

Interview Room: 10 Suspended Monitors, colour, sound

Duration: Approximately 11 hours

Commissioned by the B3 Biennial of the Moving Image, Frankfurt

Courtesy: Goodman Gallery (Johannesburg), Kaufmann Repetto (Milan), KOW (Berlin)

VIEWING TLDR ONLINE:

<https://vimeo.com/273615691>

More information and images: www.museum-frieder-burda.de

Opening Hours: Salon Berlin, Auguststrasse 11 – 13, 10117 Berlin

Tuesday through Sunday, 10am–6pm, all by appointment

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