

**BASEMENT ROMA**  
**18.09.2020**

## **INCORPOREA**

**Kate Cooper | Hannah Levy | Ebecho Muslimova | Berenice Olmedo**

INCORPOREA is a year-long choral exhibition conceived by CURA. and set up as to develop and transform itself over time, and aimed at investigating the body in all its folds and meanings: The body in its presence and absence, the social body, the body as a revolutionary space, of antagonism and freedom, expression and research, self-definition and power, identity and gender.

Going across different generations and media, starting from new artistic expressions and going back towards the historical avant-gardes, INCORPOREA will investigate the practices that have uncovered, transformed and re-imagined the body and the speculations it has inspired.

Moving around the boundaries, meanings and shapes of the body, the exhibition intends to introduce a new corpus of works every month in a sort of endless movement, a constant flow of addition and subtraction, with the aim of exploring an urgent and significant theme, articulating the elements that define it beyond preconceived categories, in today's ever-shifting scenario.

The first body of works of INCORPOREA includes Kate Cooper (UK, 1984), Hannah Levy (NY, 1991), Ebecho Muslimova (Russia, 1984), Berenice Olmedo (Mexico, 1987)

### **KATE COOPER**

Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) begins with a pixel, to create a texture, an image. Primarily used in commercial production, CGI is associated with images of enhanced productivity, fantastical landscapes, and idealized humanoid bodies that perform superhuman feats. [...] This cloud of digital, visual information can be seen as a kind of second skin, a layer of seemingly banal yet pervasive matter that might have the power to shift attitudes almost invisibly. The images slowly and subtly creep in, infiltrating culture as a virus on an unsuspecting host. Artist Kate Cooper creates works that seek to penetrate the surface of this digital membrane, exposing how these new visual languages might complicate divisions between our physical and virtual selves. Her CG protagonists bleed, bruise, tire, and get sick, displaying a fragility that defies their presumed immortality and ceaseless output. Using an uncanny mix of photographic and pixel-built images, Cooper operates in the increasingly intertwined space between technology and the self. [...]

In *Infection Drivers* Cooper explores the body under attack. In this video, we find Cooper's CG figure trapped in a translucent bodysuit, as she struggles to move and breathe. The suit inflates and deflates around her body, taking it through transmutations of stereotypically masculine and feminine physiques. Her face, the only area not covered by the translucent material, is bruised and scarred. There is a question as to whether the suit is protecting her or harming her—preventing her from hurting her body or limiting her range of motion. She presses her hands up against an invisible pane of glass. In one moment, we see a fire emanating from within her, which might suggest a desire to feel, to transcend the invisible barrier of her own form, which might give her the illusion of safety, yet trap her. In another scene, she pinches her suit and takes the material away from her body, making it appear thin and fragile—perhaps she is able to rip it apart and break her own chains? Her own gendered container?

*Infection Drivers* investigates how images might come to act autonomously to transcend the exploitative systems that created them and might give rise to new possibilities that go beyond their intended use.

*(excerpt from Second Skin. Kate Cooper, by Margot Norton)*

*KATE COOPER* (b. 1984, Liverpool, UK) lives and works in London and Amsterdam. Her work has been shown at The New Museum, New York, The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Public Art Fund, New York, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Serralves Museum, Porto and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

### **HANNAH LEVY**

[...] At a moment of material self-inspection, I find Hannah Levy, who explores the figure and its politics through the objects we surround ourselves with. In her world, the living and the inanimate act as one—all gesturing in their own way towards the same truths.

Levy stresses this fluidity by taking conflation to its logical extreme. In her sculptures, the things we consume (baguettes and croissants) are indistinguishable from the surfaces (tables, tiles and chairs) upon which we serve them and the structures (arms and hands) that bring them inside us. Her work disguises itself as mundane to hide its ambition. It is not about creating bodily ambience; it's about looking at the values these relationships betray. It is a big, vicious mouth licking its teeth, repeating: "You are what you eat."

At first, the message feels universal, almost a trope. But Levy's investigations are more pointed than that. She wields the clichés and triumphs of modern design as a mirror—one that reflects back a disturbing predilection for the white body. [...] In staring into her recent window display at Bergdorf Goodman's on New York's Fifth Avenue, I not only saw my reflection but its inanimate counterpart: a faceless mannequin clad in beige tulle surrounded by sharp claws offering floppy spears of asparagus as if they were accessories rather than sustenance. It felt like fashion had finally come full circle. We are selling us back to ourselves.

Tactile seduction is germane to Levy's installations and sculptures. Its nature is documented in the superlatives lavished on it in the press: "quietly kinky," "fleshy but slick," "erotic." This physical collapse between intimate and commercial space helps sew together Levy's thesis. Material attraction becomes more than a punch line or come-on. It is a skin that reminds the viewer of their own touch.

The close-to-home-ness of Levy's message is the source of its horror and its humor. In placating her viewer with the familiar and its antecedents, she buries them alive. The body is not a safe space but a battleground, and the consequences of that conflict extend into everything that surrounds us. [...] How does one escape these insidious patterns? Levy doesn't offer us an answer, but she does offer hope. Like her sculptures, these ideas are not impervious but fragile and impermanent like their models. Capable of breaking under the slightest tug or bite, her dysfunctional furniture and food suggest that the values they hold are just as malleable, and that perhaps other values, and another world, may yet be possible. So, strap on your watch, your couch, your lamp, your countertop, and let's head towards death together—arm in arm, foot in mouth.

*(excerpt from Design Within Reach. Hannah Levy, by Kat Herriman, CURA. 28)*

*HANNAY LEVY* (b. 1991, New York, NY) lives and works in New York. Among her recent solo shows: *Hannah Levy: Pendulous Picnic*, Casey Kaplan, New York, *Bone-In*, Jeffrey Stark, New York, *Panic Hardware*, Mother's Tankstation. Selected group exhibitions include: *The new frontiers of the contemporary*, Fondazione Coppola, Vicenza, Italy, *Campi Magnetici (Magnetic Fields)*, Gio Marconi, Milan (curated by Ceclia Alemani), *Wege zur Welt – Hildebrand Collection*, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig, *Insane in the Membrane*, Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf and *The Artist is Present*, Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China (curated by Maurizio Cattelan).

### **EBECHO MUSLIMOVA**

In a nightmare common to fits of insecurity, you walk the halls of your office or college campus, naked and unkempt. You recognize the reality of your hunching body and exposed privates, but only after they have been the focus of peer attention for an ambiguous amount of time. You've forgotten a step between one existence—the sleep state, in which the body is not under one's control—and another—the professional performance, in which a person's appearance proves just how much control she has over her body. [...] The concern is not

necessarily that it happened but that you did it unintentionally—you somehow let this happen, which means you have lost the essential part of your mind that compartmentalizes these two selves.

The artist Ebecho Muslimova invented Fatebe (pronounced “fat eebee”) when she had a day job at a corporate office. Fatebe was all ego, a version of the artist’s self sans inhibitions. In an immediate interpretation of the typical insecurity nightmare, she finds herself in public with no beautifying ephemera. But Fatebe feels no shame from this predicament. Instead, she finds pleasure experiencing her precariousness fully, splayed and physically vulnerable while expressing an almost arrogant joy from the amount of space she inhabits. An alter ego, Fatebe is allergic to elitism, and so the luxury of rejecting commercial work while one’s potential simmers is something Fatebe, the cartoon character, would scoff at if she could pause long enough to care.

Her own haplessness, an accidental disregard for societal norms, and a balloon-like body excite Fatebe. In pen and ink drawings and large-scale paintings of mixed detail, every misstep she takes proves she can take more, that the outcomes can’t hurt her pride if she has decided against any kind of preciousness. [...] In much of the world, the amount of space a woman’s body takes up has an almost directly inverted relationship to the amount of respect she is rewarded. In Fatebe’s world, she appears to believe the opposite is true—and that exposure is everything. Sometimes, she is mural-sized, expanding across an entire building floor, her cartoon holes and nipples punctuating a clumsy pose. She dares you to call her unsexy, a joke, or unworthy of your attention. Even if you did, she wouldn’t believe it.

In early drawings, Fatebe illustrated a preference for the comedic over the expected, and the act of intentionally avoiding the goal of integrity. She morphed from a paper cutout perched on pencils to lovingly framed portraits. [...] The Fatebe series is brilliant in part because it presents itself as Fatebe herself does—as in, everywhere at once. [...] As her life continues, Fatebe is faced with newly articulated objects, stretched over landscapes that are populated with new temptations and ghosts. With adoring precision, Muslimova codifies the echoes of domesticity, luxury, nature, education, psychology, fetish, and art itself—images that have the capacity to haunt her. Nothing can deter Fatebe, though. From her gleeful smile we can assume that her convictions only gain momentum with every new opportunity to test them. *(excerpt from Ebecho Muslimova, by Natasha Stagg, CURA. 30)*

*EBECHO MUSLIMOVA (b. 1984, Dagestan, Russia) lives and works in New York. She has presented solo exhibitions at: Magenta Plains, New York; Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich; 247365, New York; White Flag Projects, Saint Louis; ROOM EAST, New York. She has participated in several group exhibitions including at: FRAC Île-de-France, Paris; Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen; Ellis King, Dublin; Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin; Eva Presenhuber, Zurich; Ramiken Crucible, Los Angeles; Tanya Leighton, Berlin, Delmes & Zander, Cologne. Muslimova created a large-scale mural for in The 32nd Biennale of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia in 2017. Muslimova is included in Jeffrey Deitch’s book, Unrealism, featuring 27 artists and major essays by Johanna Fateman, Alison Gingeras, and Aria Dean.*

## **BERENICE OLMEDO**

What is normal? What is not? In any field, be it sociology, culture, economics or politics, an attempt is made to identify a “standard.” Somehow, the idea that a rule to which everything must conform has become the norm. [...] What does not fall within this framework is thus considered abnormal, as if it were an aberration, an obstacle. And this is what happens with minorities, with those who think differently, with people with disabilities; it even happens with minor physical defects such as a simple hip dysplasia. What does not comply is forcedly made to do so, because that is normality.

The mexican artist Berenice Olmedo focuses on these reflections and themes, explores them, and creates publications, sculptures, installations and performances. Her exhibitions are preliminary reports of all research. The question of the norm, which she investigates in the most varied cases, thus becomes for Olmedo a deep analysis of very different aspects, including contrasts and contradictions, legal conflicts and painful personal stories.

Man, or rather the human body, becomes part the central part of the artist's installations, after a long period of incubation. In 2018, I saw Olmedo's work for the first time during her solo exhibition, entitled *Anthroprosthetic*, at the Jan Kaps gallery in Cologne. On the gallery floor lay two leg prostheses, artificial devices that replace missing body parts. An orthosis, which is a corset that, externally applied to the body, modifies the muscular and skeletal system of the body, was hanging on the wall. Size and decorations suggested they were children's orthoses, and wear made them look older. [...] On the one hand, one feels upset, challenged: these children's orthoses also represent the vulnerability of small, innocent bodies. At the same time, however, the observation of these sculptures has an entrancing element. The "being different" is therefore as fascinating as the technical aspect of the bodily extensions/corrections. The two contrasting impressions are enhanced by Olga's kinetic effect: by means of thin, almost invisible nylon threads, the prosthesis is constantly raised, looking like it was trying to stand up on its own, only to keep collapsing again, failing in its attempt.

In another recent exhibition, at the Lodos Gallery in Mexico City, Olmedo's work takes on a more conceptual and sculptural character. [...] The installations play with the original purpose of orthopedic devices, i.e. to keep the human body erect, in a vertical position, helping it to maintain its specific biological functions. What is wrong must be corrected. The medical images created here by Olmedo take on a symbolic value and represent a society that constantly expresses rejection, discrimination and marginalization of people with some kind of disability, and thus concern those groups of people who are considered marginal by society on a political and social level.

A healthy body exists in nature, if we think of nature as ecological balance, but a problem arises when we speak of an ideal body which, in many cases, is achieved through correction. [...] Berenice Olmedo questions the dominating models of thought and categorization in our society, models that always depend also on social class and income. With her works, the artist critically addresses the difficult issue of homogeneity of object and body within our society, thus our seeing the body as an object, which implies it being granted very few rights. In all of this, the dissolution of borders is most interesting: technical objects become fragile bodies; bodies are transformed into objects and devices. The close link between work and research allows us to see Olmedo's sculptures and installations not necessarily as "finished" objects, but as complex matters ranging from language to politics to medicine and law.

*(excerpt from Berenice Olmedo, by Fabian Schöneich, CURA. 33)*

*BERENICE OLMEDO (b. 1987, Oaxaca, Mexico), lives and works in Mexico City. Selected solo shows include: CsO, haecceidad, Jan Kaps, Cologne (2020); Toraco-Lumbo [SKOLIÓPHYSIS], Lodos, Mexico City (2019); Anthroprosthetic, Jan Kaps, Cologne (2018); Bioethics and Biopolitics: The Entry of the Stray Dog into the City System, Escuela de Humanidades, Puebla (2012). Selected group shows include: Dream Baby Dream at Haus Moedrath, Kerpen (2020); and suddenly it all blossoms, 2nd Riga Biennial, Riga; How to Survive, Kunst als Überlebensstrategie, Sprengel Museum Hannover (2020); Selfreconstruction: Detritus, (curated by Abraham Cruzvillegas), Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte (MUCA), Mexico City (2018); CyberArts, OÖ Kulturquartier, OK Center, Linz (2017).*

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Info: [hello@basementroma.com](mailto:hello@basementroma.com)