

Numéro 17 • Fall/Winter 2017-2018 • 18€

Frog



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Wade Guyton

photographed by James Campbell

in the Phlegraean Fields (Campi Flegrei) west of Naples, Italy.

Donna Huanca

O

h, you've got a book?

Yes! It's my first book. The skin-like porous paper has my SCRAWLS as the cover heat raised so they can be felt as Braille. The Zabłudowicz Collection published four years of works in a chronological order. Since then, I have made a mini-version at the Julia Stochek Collection, where we are doing another performance for Gallery Weekend. This piece is mainly a stage that acts as a vibrational sound massage that the models are live on, embedded with subwoofers that can go no higher than 25 decibels, so all it creates are deep bassy sounds. The track is 32 minutes, and is a collage of various sources, including binary beats that are helpful for transcending the body, my voice, and even a Why Be song. I wanted it to feel like a message for the models.

*Interview
by*

*Lucas Leclère,
portrait*

*Tobias Willmann
photography*

Thierry Bal

— *It's odd to think that low bass was also an instrument of torture during wartime.*

I know the military uses it as proximity sensors to scare people off, but I didn't know they used it for torture too.

— *They do, because deep bass can really fuck you up when used really low and receptively.*

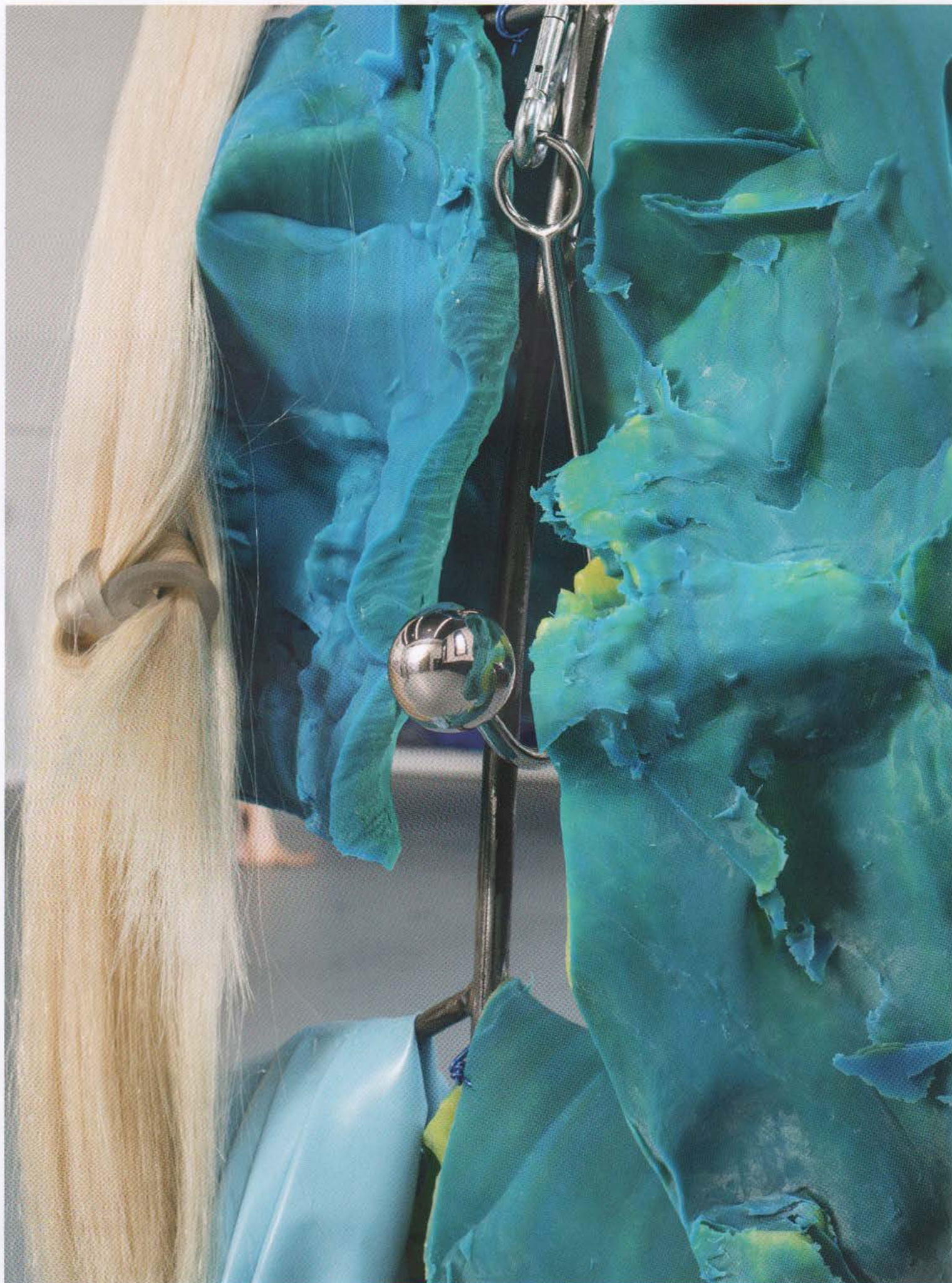
Oh god, I thought of it like a healing process for the models. I guess after eight hours, it's a bit tough, though it goes by waves,

oscillating between tensed and more relaxed moments. Actually, before I made art, I used to play drums, so sound is still a part of the bigger body of work. I'd love to play drums again, but I don't have a drum kit. Sound is a tremendously important element of my work and performances. My installation at Unlimited during Art Basel will have a heavy sound component and live performance. This is a continuation of the recent London show, *Scar Cymbals*, which was heavily layered. In the back room, the visitors' body heat would activate 40 infra-red sensors in the ceiling, linked to a sculpture made of speakers and latex, which I called *The Mother* the closer you would get to her, the louder she would get. The audience would create their own sound as they walked around. This created a personal experience and individual performance for the audience.

It was important to have an active piece in the back, as the front space was always occupied by two performers. For three months, two performers were present every day to activate the piece, but during special events, such as the opening and closing, and Frieze, we had ten models. In the front space, the performers were creating their own sounds by manipulating two KAOS pads. These pads are from the early 2000s, and they use touch screen technology, so they're easy to use without any previous knowledge, easily manipulating the original soundtrack as they performed. The space was a former Methodist chapel, with 40-foot high ceilings, which amplified the sound, heightening the echo. The smell of Palo Santo incense was constantly burning in the old church to scar your memory even more...

— *So the piece behind was a recording?*





Now I made peace with not knowing where I belong, although it sounds so fucking dramatic.

Yes. It had forty different tracks, with recordings of random samples, poems, analog sounds, voices and lots of bass!

— *Poems you wrote?*

I like to collage text, but I don't call it poetry.

— *You DJ words.*

Exactly. Especially words that are esthetically pleasing. I use this as the titles of my shows. For example, *Scar Cymbals* took me a long time to get, because I really was craving a juxtaposition of the evocation of sound and skin. But it's not my best title. My favorite so far is *Echo Implant*, because I'm implanting something, and echo has an endless repetition to it. *Surrogate Painteen* was more based on the word «pain», for example, and drew inspiration from a punk band in Houston from the 1980s that was called The Painteens. Although I was born in Chicago, I spent my formative years in Houston, where I finished high school and went to on to study geology, then quit and ended up in a public art school. I have a soft spot for Houston, because a lot of good sound comes from there. I'm really inspired by the music that comes from the weird swamp that this city is to me. I guess the oil money and its preppy side triggered a counterproductive, dark underground scene. Both DJ Screw and Beyoncé came from there, and I appreciate weirdos from there, though I wouldn't call it my hometown.

— *Do you feel it is important to have a hometown at all?*

Not anymore. I used to really obsess with it, with tracing my background. Now I've made peace with not knowing where I belong, although it sounds so fucking dramatic.

— *Like the first lyrics of a song full of tears, "I don't know where I belong..."*

Haha! Exactly! I fell in love with Berlin, for example, because I still feel danger in the club is real here, and its rawness is

invigorating. I did go out with friends to all the clubs last summer, and was recording information whilst they were doing their usual sexual tourism. But I don't necessarily like trashy places. I love the party Makumba, for example, because people here are not so self-aware. It's accepted to contemplate and take time to think. It's more relaxed here. I had come before because I had worked on a big performance with AIDS 3D at the old Program. It was during the Myspace boom, so people who were linked by aesthetics would meet, and that's how I met those kids who are now adults. It was my first introduction to Berlin: a two-hour-long sound performance in a courtyard. As for New York, it's clearly not my jam any more. It became corny and corporate. A lot of the people who survive there do so because they secured a flat and a situation in the 1990s, which is not my case, because I lacked the resources to do so when I moved there in 2007. My flat was 30 square meters for \$2000 a month, two hours away from my studio. Going out at night is a mission, where you would have to pass 40 security guards to find yourself in a room full of uptight yuppies. I feel that anywhere in the US, institutions pump an art that's about making money, which is regretful, because a lot of artists end up making really shitty work just to make a living.

— *However, you have still managed to make your voice through this path, haven't you?*

I have, and it's been useful, because instead of going into academia, I went to school in Frankfurt and did some residencies. In the U.S., grad school is such a huge deal, because they try to keep you within the system, because without a graduate degree, you're not allowed to teach or become a teacher. I never wanted to be a teacher. I was craving something else. The Stedelschule, Skowhegan, LMCC—I even did a Fulbright and lived in Mexico City in 2012. I was always interested in the community. We had that at the Stedelschule in Frankfurt. One needs a space for mistakes and trials, and at the Stedelschule, for example, we were free to show things in progress, and that was significantly nurturing for me. I feel that my part is half of the work, for example, and the models activate the other half. The piece itself

depends on the trust we have for one another. I always think about my performance crew as a traveling band. We work together, and some people drop off, others continue to hit the road.

— *Why do you seek the community more?*

Because most of the people I know and care about are people I've met through my work. I used to do psychedelics with people when I really wanted to get to know them, and now that's evolved into asking them to participate in my work.

— *You said Scar Cymbals lasted three months in London. How did you manage to paint the models every day, because you couldn't stay the whole duration of the show?*

Well, it is something extremely intimate. It was actually very hard and challenging for me to let go of this process. That show forced me to break open a lot of things that I had been used to. But I made sketches for different archetypes of body paint, and in the end, they would paint themselves in order to paint this big altar, so they were changing constantly.

— *Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't see you working with assistants, for example, because your work feels very hands on.*

I have one assistant and could use more, but it has proven hard to find a good match. In London, I was working with my good friend Richie Shazam, who was amazing, but she is busy being a superstar. My perfect assistant would be able to read my mind. To be fair, they just have to be chilled and go with the flow. My work is a symptom of life, so there are many layers. Ultimately, it's all dependent on a subliminal communication.

— *Can you tell me about what you're preparing for Unlimited?*

It will be a durational performance piece for seven days, the entirety of the fair. It will include a new sound work, including sculptures as well. The piece will include smell too, and will be a full world you walk into. I want to create a very intimate setting.

— *Do you feel a pressure to justify what you're doing with a narrative from critics or spectators?*

At this point, no.

— *When did the paintings start?*

They started as zoomed-in photographs of the body painting. I would scan them to find a perfect collage of colors. I blew them up and started painting on them. It is important for me that the materials I use have a history—not so much to trace it back, but because I use the emotion as a trigger. It's quite a violent process though, to paint these. The sculptures are different, because they are more alluring and sexy to me. I feel like I'm dressing a person when I do it, and it feels almost like a styling job, if that is what styling is. I'm always using materials that are a part of my life, as well as using leather and silicone.

— *How did you collaborate with Women's History Museum?*

I met Mattie when we worked together at a thrift store in Manhattan. She would come in every day, and I admired how she treated her body, like a sculpture. She told me how she was starting a label with her friend Amanda: Women's History

Museum. I offered them a space in the storefront of the Joe Sheftel Gallery in Chinatown, where I had a solo show. We had four weekly presentations during the show, with two of their models and two of mine. That's the only thing I was ever involved in, fashion-wise, but this is actually anti-fashion. They gave me some garments that currently oscillate between performance garments, sculpture materials, and things I wear. The other day, I just ripped one of their pieces out of a frame and wore it.

— *Your work has such strong aesthetics that are linked to the body: have you ever worked in fashion?*

Not really. When I lived in Frankfurt, I interned with a shoemaker in an attempt to make shoes. This had been a secret dream of mine. I failed miserably at making shoes, but since then have designed one-off shoes for myself, though I would love to collaborate with a mega-brand or a no-name brand, designing shoes for example. I've already done this with Women's History Museum, gluing lychees to fur and covering them in silicone, etc. I've been approached by some brands, but none of them felt right for some reason. I make wearable pieces for my shows. I like the idea of wearable objects, but I don't need to convolute two things unless I have the freedom: then I would most certainly go for it. Good fashion can be inspiring when it's like a timeless collage.

— *Are there any galleries or museum you like here?*

The Natural History Museum and the Anthropological Museum are my two favorites. The latter is closed, but I love to look at things that are not supposed to be art unless it's extremely ancient.

— *Do you find it more freeing?*

I do, because the context is different. It's supposed to be about education, and it has an innocence to it. Factual things, such as geology, speak to me more somehow. I honestly don't like contemporary art. I will support people I like, but I'm not seeking it out. I guess I'm lucky that my gallery represents artists I admire and not just random people. I haven't seen anything here that blew my mind. I don't know where I should go—what do you think? Take me! I guess I have little patience, when it comes to it.

Scar Cymbals, shoot 28 September 2016.

