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Andrea Crespo: *virocypsis*

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REVIEWS

First," lithographs that caustically poke fun at the early-twentieth-century slogan promoting tourism throughout America's national parks. In Westermann's version, volcanoes erupt, ships burn, glaciers melt, and rising sea levels threaten high-rises. While the exhibition presented only two preparatory works from this series, it showed them alongside a splendid collection of illustrated letters to dealer Allan Frumkin, written during the 1964 cross-country trip that inspired it. In these works Westermann exhibits enough self-awareness to implicate both himself and, by extension, us, in the grandstanding and bombast that have shaped—and continues to shape—this nation's landscapes and its foibles.

—Rachel Churner

Andrea Crespo SWISS INSTITUTE

Cynthia and Celinde share a body. They have two heads, three legs, a slightly widened torso, and sixteen amphibian-like toes. Wearing a midriff-exposing tank top and short shorts, the two are rendered simply, as an anime-inspired sketch, and barely animated (they blink). But, though this is how they appear in *virocypsis* (all works 2015), the centerpiece of Andrea Crespo's exhibition at Swiss Institute, we soon learn that the artist's conjoined protagonists weren't born this way—or born at all. At the start of the looping video, the vertical bar of a scan head travels across the screen slowly, back and forth with its cold light, as we see a fragmented hand wearing grown-out periwinkle nail polish, then a shot of a robotic lab dropper and petri dish. Next, we're peering through a cracked window, or maybe into a damaged monitor. Gradually, Cynthia and Celinde appear, a white line drawing against black, and a narrative emerges: "At last..." begins one of them, "... we have a body." The other continues, "We've been waiting for a very long time."



Andrea Crespo,
virocypsis, 2015,
digital video, color,
sound, 16 minutes
5 seconds.

Their communication is silent, telepathic; white captions pop up on either side of the frame to denote which of the two is speaking. Bluntly expository, plot-establishing dialogue soon spins off into a kind of philosophical poetry, short lines of text brightening a backdrop of flickering black-and-white footage and a sound track of grainy synths. To powerful effect, Crespo repurposes the terminology of psychiatry, cybernetics, hacking, data management, microbiology, and romance to craft Cynthia and Celinde's clever dialogue. In detailing the technical and psychic process of entrapping, inhabiting, and mutating their host, one says, "We began zeroing in during its adolescent years—" The

other picks up the story line, "—we zeroed out our nervous system." Here, "its" is the same as "ours." Their possession of a body, initially liberating, eventually tragically subjects Cynthia and Celinde, who are now outwardly perceived as a single entity, to a series of diagnoses: obsessive-compulsive, bipolar, autistic.

This semi-abstract, politically melancholic love story was shown as a floor-to-ceiling projection in Swiss Institute's basement gallery. Just two other works, digital prints on saten, were on view, stationed at the darkened room's entry. For these, the fabric was stretched over curved wire rods that held the pieces away from the wall, making them into screens, literally, while they resembled the other kind of screen, too, their bedsheet sheen like the luminous surface of a computer display. In *attracting*..., Cynthia and Celinde are shown with two legs instead of three. Strands of hair connect their scalps, and they cross their arms to sweetly cradle the opposite face. The other print, *patient(s) history*, lists their traits and stats beside a friendly portrait. They are twenty-two years old and six feet tall; their sex is "male (intergendered)"; and among the "special abilities" indexed are "echolalic lullaby" and "memory encryption."

The blank cuteness—or cyborgian innocence—of these tender and ambiguously erotic depictions is characteristic of the subcultural fan art they reference. Drawing from the figurative vernacular of online communities such as DeviantArt, where users share images of the detoured or invented fantasy characters they identify with or desire, Crespo invokes a field of highly imaginative posthuman discourse—a theoretical, speculative, and self-referential world driven by the intense emotional and sexual investments of its far-flung participants. *virocypsis* shares that obsessive, generative energy, and, with a palpable sense of longing, explores all available—which is to say, popularly unavailable—technologies of the self. (Or of the selves.) Perhaps this moving work's most impressive achievement is its use of a superspecialized, sometimes incomprehensible language to make us care about the flat and inscrutable Cynthia and Celinde, as well as (maybe especially) their elided living host.

—Johanna Fateman

Jane Freilicher TIBOR DE NAGY

"She is not dangerous or rare, / adventure precedes her like a train, / her beauty is general, as sun and air / are secretly near, like Jane." So wrote Frank O'Hara in an ode to Jane Freilicher that ably describes the art of his friend: Her paintings highlight the simplest subjects of wildflowers stuck in soup cans and pitchers, vast tracks of land on the East End of Long Island, and still lifes set up in her West Village apartment studio, often against a window looking out over the city's rooftops and water towers. This exhibition, the artist's twenty-first at Tibor de Nagy, was called "Theme and Variations." Freilicher's theme has always been the presence of living nature (even indoors and in the city). But the variations are what make that motif, in all its "general" beauty, empathetic—especially considering that she painted the same view for more than five decades, until her death in 2014 at the age of ninety.

Freilicher's still lifes are rarely still. *Butterfly Weed and Goldenrod*, 1967, has a great messiness and expedience to its marks that reflect both the artist's roots in Hans Hofmann's school of abstraction and the composition's own wild subjects brought inside. (Exceptions feel purposeful, such as her watercolor of hydrangeas here from 1990, in which the entire page takes on the brittle properties of a dried flower.)

Like her friend and fellow Southampton painter Fairfield Porter, Freilicher absorbed Pierre Bonnard's and Henri Matisse's subtle devas-