



Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, *Silent*, 2016, HD video, color, sound, 7 minutes.

Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz

MARCELLE ALIX

In the recent exhibition “*Silent*,” Berlin-based duo Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz used a self-described practice of “queer archaeology” to out archetypes of modern art.

Attaching themes of self-censorship (closeting) and silent protest to monochrome painting, geometric sculpture, and—most specifically—John Cage’s resounding silences, the artists debunked canonical heteronormative interpretations. Whereas Boudry and Lorenz have previously relied heavily on archival documents to expose systemic homophobia (which has resulted in some very dense, didactic works), the pieces presented here were refreshingly object-oriented.

Black walls created a theatrical, anti-white-cube setting for four curtain-like rectangles of synthetic hair installed in the gallery’s main space. Boudry and Lorenz’s “*Wig Pieces*,” 2017, are what Donald Judd described in 1965 as “specific objects,” neither painting nor sculpture. The hairy material, however, with its references to drag, femininity, and corporeality, confounds Minimalism’s macho bravado and austerity. *Wig Piece (Entangled Phenomena III)* reads as a silken Frank Stella or Ad Reinhardt black painting, the juxtaposed brunette and raven locks of *Wig Piece (Entangled Phenomena II)* echo Mark Rothko’s subtle chromatic shifts, and the thin blonde shock that vertically bisects *Wig Piece (Mimicry)* is a hirsute Barnett Newman zip.

Displayed on the floor amid the “*Wig Pieces*,” a low circular white platform, recalling

Robert Morris's pedestal-free and generally spare geometric sculptures, is a prop from Boudry and Lorenz's 2016 film *Silent* (on view in the gallery's basement). Its inclusion in the show begged a comparison with Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1991, which transformed a quintessential Minimalist form—a low painted box—into a stage for a male dancer in silver hot pants. Subtler in their queering, Boudry and Lorenz present an endlessly spinning empty platform as a memorial to unheard voices and unaddressed issues.

In the seven-minute *Silent*, a spokesperson finally does take the stage. Sporting a silver dress and platinum tresses, Aérea Negrot, a Berlin-based singer, stands on an unseen rotating podium (the one we saw upstairs) in Oranienplatz, a tree-lined square in Berlin's Kreuzberg district that, notably, was home to a pro-refugee encampment from 2012 to 2014. In this politically charged setting, in front of a bouquet of microphones, Negrot appears poised to give an official statement. She looks directly at the camera, drags on a cigarette, clears her throat, sips water, and remains silent for five minutes. Only once she moves away from the microphones does her internal monologue pour out—in the form of a melancholic pop song. Addressing an unspecified “president,” Negrot croons provocative lines, such as “I need makeup, underwear and hormones!” and “Is a lie more feminine than allies?” Cage famously stated, “I have nothing to say/and I am saying it.” Inspired by this self-imposed silence, Boudry and Lorenz's works speak volumes about prejudice and oppression.

—Mara Hoberman

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