



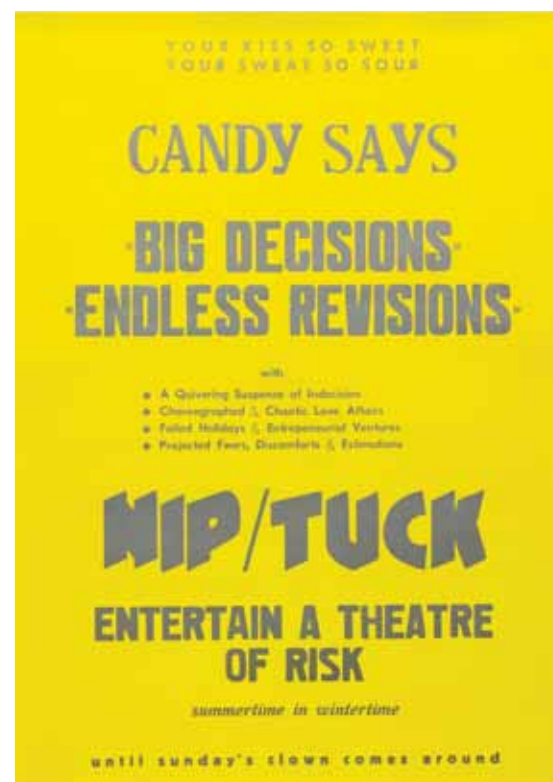
Gerry Bibby, *Candy Says Big Decisions Endless Revisions*, 2008, silk screen on paper. Installation view, Mica Moca, Berlin. Photo: Nick Ash.



OPENINGS

Gerry Bibby

JOHN BEESON



Above, from left: Gerry Bibby, *Compensation Action. 2nd Season*, August 20, 2011. Performance view, Studiolo, Zurich. Photo: Tim Standring. *Works from Gerry Bibby's series "The Screens/The Islands,"* 2009, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, 2010.

Left: Gerry Bibby, *Untitled Euro Vision*, 2011, letterpress print on paper, 33 1/2 x 23 3/4".

"CANDY SAYS, 'I've come to hate my body and all that it requires in this world.'" Against a sugar-sweet melody, Lou Reed opens the first track of the Velvet Underground's 1969 self-titled album by quoting Warhol's beloved superstar Candy Darling, who resolutely revised her body as well as her gender identity via hormone injections and drag. One could say that such a state of exhausted subjectivity and fractured self-image is a pervasive contemporary condition; this is, in fact, a central premise of Gerry Bibby's performative encounters with a wide range of media. In chorus with sources of cultural critique including avant-garde literature and post-punk music, Bibby works to transform the structures, whether institutional or linguistic, that produce a subject's experience of that condition—an aspiration that resonates with the Berlin-based artist's formative years of social and political activism in his native Australia.

So, in a gesture of solidarity with Candy, Bibby's 2008 work *Candy Says Big Decisions Endless Revisions* quoted the same song and dressed a Berlin building in drag: By affixing paper screenprinted with a pattern of red bricks over both interior and exterior double doors at an art collector's exhibition space, itself a brick building, Bibby created a kind of

Bibby destabilizes his own materials and procedures and pressures them to perform: to act, interact, and react.



Gerry Bibby, *One of Nine Places to Sit (Fields/Dick/Eski)*, 2012, bar stool, sticker, safety wire, padlock, performance sound file, dimensions variable.



Gerry Bibby, *One of Nine Places to Sit (Notes)*, 2012, office chair, sticker, performance sound file, dimensions variable.

Gerry Bibby, *Reading Liberated Fraction*, 2010. Performance view, The Artist's Institute, New York, October 20, 2010. Photo: Takako Oishi.



representational excess. As the doors opened, the paper split down the middle; it was then plastered over again and torn several times more, reiterating the building's appearance but drawing attention to the potential for and reality of its rearticulation over time.

We inscribe meaning in commodities and other cultural constructs during their production and exchange, and so they undergo a perpetual revision of identity in relation to the contexts in which they appear. In discrete works, as well as their re-presentation, Bibby destabilizes his own materials and procedures and pressures them to perform: to act, interact, and react. "5 Stages Liberation Project," first executed at the Artist's Institute, New York, in 2010 and then in a second, vastly modified iteration at Studiolo, Zurich, in 2011, thematized this process of reinvention using an object found at the exhibition site and four people from Bibby's social network. In the work's New York version, Bibby cut a leg off a high-modern Danish rosewood table used by the gallery for administrative and social events. (The iteration in Zurich relocated a metal balustrade inside the space, with lounging performers' bodies blocking the gap left by this architectural feature's removal during the opening.) He attached the leg, erect, to the gallery wall, with scraps of shredded white paper—rephotocopied photocopies of an auction catalogue for postwar and contemporary design—spilling from the tip. Bibby then hung pages of his own literary texts—each a few

sentences evoking characters, settings, and sentiments, often in scenes of queer desire—on the walls, so as to send the project reeling in the direction of poetic red herrings: "He disappeared into the two-storey warehouse full of second-hand goods hoping that protruding limbs, upturned receptacles, torn fabrics and curlicued embellishments would provide him with enough camouflage."

During an included performance, *Compensation Action*, Bibby's four friends took turns sitting on the corner of the table opposite where the leg had been removed. In the same way that their weight offset the table's imbalance, allowing it to stand, their physical presence functioned as a foil to the texts' abstraction and also found counterbalance in the plastic bags that each performer brought into the space and hung on a hook on the wall; the bags contained one quarter of each individual's body weight in hardened concrete. Together, these components wove the table into an allegory of contrasting gestures and forms that liberated the functional piece of furniture, particularly the severed leg, from its designated use, attributing to it symbolic value. The walnut-wood prosthetic leg created by Bibby and left, after the event, to replace the amputated one affirmed the way in which the table's appearance was upended following its interaction with other bodies and another system of thought: In contrast to conventional cultural production, Bibby's project stymied

the perpetual replacement of goods as demanded under mass consumption (as well as current pressures regarding creativity, or innovation, in late capitalism) by designating counternormative terms of productivity.

Although it is possible to conceive of the body of the table as similar to the body of the performer, subjected to the same rules of identification and behavior in consumer culture, Bibby draws the connection between subject, object, and performance even more directly in "The Screens/The Islands," 2009. Images of three people carrying out this group of works' "projective performance" in the main gallery of the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel before it was shown there in 2010 reveal formal similarities between the figures' postures and the bends and folds of the finished works. Coating the surface of the broad sheets of poster paper was a rough layer of hand-applied concrete, giving each sculpture its body; applied to this material was screenprinted text written by Bibby. Stylized in cursive script and big block letters in bold colors, the words sprawl across the sheets, breaking into often incomprehensible fragments. At the opening, Bibby and two other performers read these syllables and phonemes aloud for the audience, indicating the way in which the form

served as both site and sign of the correspondence between the artistic work and viewers' engagement with it in this context.

Bibby's use of text—whether composed scripts or snippets of language culled from the spectacle of culture—is of great consequence, since it determines the ways in which objects and performers behave. With a method of appropriation inspired by Jean Genet and that great poet-thief's politics of otherness, exhibitions such as "Last Call," this past fall at Silberkuppe in Berlin, embody the free rein that Bibby takes with poetic, commercial, and bureaucratic language. Onto chairs chained together in the form of punctuation marks—a bench and a stool composed an exclamation point, a single stool a period, a chair a comma—the artist and his performers affixed sheets of paper containing various texts: one originally written for Bibby's 2010 work *Include Me Out*, the drink list from the bar where the opening's afterparty was held, and a section of the script for "5 Stages Liberation Project," among others. Sitting on these chairs during the opening (visitors were left to stand), Bibby and his performers recited the texts—"language costumes," as the artist calls them—clothing the scene in multiple frames of reference and creating a murmur that mimicked that of the social-

izing crowd. In holding such an event (this one called *Congress*) on such an occasion, as Bibby often does, he connected his own social body and the community of cultural producers from whom he draws inspiration—and reflected on the constitutive influence that each has on him and his work.

In a turn of phrase that takes after Bertolt Brecht, a section used in the scripts for both iterations of "5 Stages Liberation Project" (now glued to the front of a black leather office chair as *One of Nine Places to Sit [Notes]*, 2012) includes earnest reflections under the heading "Notes to the Players." Bibby's work shares an affinity with that of Brecht, whose theater of social association strove to wrench viewers from their passive consumption of the performed spectacle and bring players and audience into a communion of shared experience. To incorporate the words of the later German playwright Heiner Müller regarding his own appropriation from Brecht: Throughout his work, Bibby shows that to use material—whether preexisting or his own—without criticizing it is treason. In Bibby's hands, both revision and rearticulation presuppose a political imperative, since a promise for agency—however fragmented and depleted the subject—resides in each of them. □

JOHN BEESON LIVES IN BERLIN AND IS THE EDITOR OF *TEXTE ZUR KUNST*.



Gerry Bibby, *Compensation Action*, 2010. Performance view, The Artist's Institute, New York, October 20, 2010. Lily Hodges. Photo: Takako Oishi.