

Katie Shannon

Last song for a waterbaby

23.03.19 – 05.05.19

Time, Technology and the Bath

Emmie McLuskey

It's Sunday morning. The window is shut but the broken air vent lets in an icy draft. Two half-clothed women are sat in the bath. You can hear faint *end of the night music* in the background, the door's closed muffling the sound but the water is lightly vibrating from the bass. One woman with her knees bent up towards her chest, supports the second woman's torso with her thighs. Her arms raised, massaging the other's head, soap foams and falls on the surface of the water. They sit casually absorbed in each other.

This image hangs on the artist's studio wall.

Katie's work moves fluidly between spaces, occupying different states, it's boundaries malleable and in some cases open. The club, the flat, the bath, the studio. Work and leisure blur, their categories unclear. Ecstatic yet fragile, the materials the artist selects mirror the protagonists and environments she chooses to depict. Latex, welded steel, projection butt up against each other to create a world that is cyclical, claiming a space of communality, where exchange between people is required. A shared cigarette, becomes a stain on the hand, becomes a mark on the print, becomes a ghost on the shirt, these elements reprocessed and configured dependent on context, begin to fold in on themselves.

Last song for a waterbaby references the Charles Kingsley novel *The Water Babies*

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The water is hot.

written in 1863. The novel describes a twelve year old chimney sweep falling into a river, drowning and being transformed into a *water baby*. Leaving a life of extreme poverty he joins the fairies, insects and water nymphs to begin an adventure in an exciting new landscape. There is a parallel here between the world described by Kingsley and that of the artist; although the central characters differ in age, both are looking for an escape route, a reality free of class pressure, social division and melancholy.

The water is lukewarm.

Cultural theorist Jack Halberstam raises the idea of an elongated period of adolescence in their essay *What's That Smell?*, 2003, stating that 'queer subcultures offer us an opportunity to redefine the binary of adolescence and adulthood'¹. The relationship between subculture and time refers to an individual's internal biological time as well as time spent externally with others. Halberstam's argument that the rejection of heteronormative models of time i.e. those that revolve around home, family and reproduction allows for a deeper, prolonged engagement with subculture, moves it away from 'youth in crisis,' and opens up a space for alternative support networks and forms of community. The artist's centring of *the waterbaby* alongside the spaces she occupies in her images appear to allow for a death to transform into a possibility, a place where another form of consciousness can usher in a more appealing reality, one built on

alternative forms of kinship.

But what had to die?
Or is the death still hovering in the
background?

The layers of production in the work, the mechanisms and means that allow that production to take place, exist across multiple planes of time, yet the identity we are presented with is specifically that of the night. What does it mean to see night during the day and when witnessing these objects and figures on their *off-beat* what does this displacement say? 'Music culture is in many ways paradigmatic of the fate of culture under post-Fordist capitalism. At the level of form, music is locked into pastiche and repetition,'² running with this idea, not in the form of critique but of embodiment, a far less reductive outcome is obtained. Katie's body and camera infuse, she witnesses, describes and takes part without fixed diagnosis, allowing us to explore where we end up standing. There is a danger here in reading too quickly, to the lazy eye these scenes could feel like relics of a time past, lives lived, dances danced, but what's found in the nuance, in the slowing down we are confronted with relics that belong to a future. This presence is felt in Katie's approach to the cover song. For the exhibition, the artist has worked with Cucina Povera a.k.a. Maria Rossi, a Glasgow-based sound artist she regularly performs, records and makes artworks with. The pair's reworking of *The Last Song* by Trisomie 21 acts as an ode to the end of the night. With an estranged familiarity you're given permission to fall into the comfort of a lack of direction, move and exist in that particular present for a while, no need for urgency. Relaxed with a slight numbness, you can just float.

The water is cold.

Endnotes

1. J. Halberstam, *What's that Smell?: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives*, September 1, 2003.
2. Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, 30 May, 2014.

Emmie McLuskey is an artist based in Glasgow. She works with other artists to produce collaborative work; this has previously taken the form of publications, events, objects, conversations and exhibitions. In 2018/19 projects included *To: my future body*, with Janice Parker, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; *The Perfect, Perfect Look* with Jude Browning and Amelia Barratt, Glasgow International Festival, Glasgow; PAC Festival, Marseille, with Sarah Fastré; and the Summer Residency Programme, Hospitalfield Arts, Arbroath. This summer Emmie will be in residence at Dogo Residenz fur Neue Kunst, Lichtensteig. Emmie was Associate Producer at Collective and has been commissioned to develop texts as part of Satellites Programme 2018.

Satellites Programme is Collective's development programme for emergent artists and producers based in Scotland. Satellites aims to support practitioners at a pivotal point in their careers through a critical programme of retreats, workshops, studio visits and group discussions, public exhibitions, events and publishing. Artists are selected from an open submission by a new panel each year. The 2018-19 participants are Helen McCrorie, Emmie McLuskey, Kimberley O'Neill and Katie Shannon.