

I met her in New York, where she rented a storefront in South Bed-Stuy and would occasionally organise exhibitions. At the time, I was sharing a loft a few blocks away with a community of Swiss expats. The day we met, 30 minutes before our appointment, I remember memorising the L-shaped path that connected our two temporary homes. It was a hot summer's day.

When I arrived, soaked in sweat, she was waiting for me on the stoop, wearing the shortest shorts I had ever seen and smoking a cigarette with a casual bravado. Her gracious body contrasted strongly with her manly attitude. Hands in her pockets, she invited me in. We walked through her miniature loft and went straight to the backyard. Sparsely furnished, the space was full of light, with cheap furniture painted in white and some French novels lying on the cracked wooden floor. Outside, we sat down on Mexican string stools in the shade. A chicken was roasting in the oven. With her strong French accent, she told me the story of her first Thanksgiving in the US, involving a 10kg turkey and over 30 guests. She was very specific about numbers and proud of French hospitality. We talked relentlessly. We drank all night and by the time I left we had plotted to curate our first exhibition together.

During our first collaboration I began to understand her obsession with numbers. Though she had been happily living in New York since leaving Paris four years ago, she could not come to terms with the inches to centimetres conversion. This threat of imprecision was at the core of all her anxieties, and as an artist and occasional art handler, she was confronted with it fairly often. The inch/cm relation has been redefined a few times throughout history, but even though equivalences follow a protocol, "a huge deal is left to intuition!" she kept saying with sad resolution. Like many, her decimal education was struggling to adapt to the dyadic fractions, and the rough rounding off was always performed shamefully. Like taking a ride on a roller coaster and closing your eyes when the wagon is looping.

The multiplication of imprecisions could potentially make the world we live in a complete fallacy, "an approximate territory of the worst kind". The fact that two conflicting systems were simultaneously in operation was troubling her deeply, but this error zone was at the same time a great source of inspiration. Her work was based on what she called the Grey Zone. She explained it as everything in-between ; the potential of historic interpretation, the fruitful flaws of mistranslation, cultural

collisions, hybrid monsters, vernissage faux pas and 'What If' scenarios.

Our first project together was a group exhibition we co-curated in her space. Elegantly bypassing the inch issue and with a hint of national arrogance, we opted for inviting Swiss artists only. We made it our topic. Both she and I were penniless, so we asked the invited artists to send us emails with instructions to make artworks, and we spent our 200\$ budget on materials. I was unemployed at the time and would spend the day writing and preparing the exhibition while she was at work. She would come back at night, prepare dinner, and get on with the heavy stuff that she loved doing, like drilling and sawing. At that point, my primary residence had become a futon in her living room.

Her work for the show was a toe cast in resin hung on the wall at eye level. I could easily picture Queen Elisabeth buried upright in that Brooklyn wall, with her toe sticking through the plaster, as a result of a long line of unexpected circumstances. In *The Big Toe* Georges Bataille retells the story of the Count of Villamediana who was appointed gentleman-in-waiting to Elisabeth of France, with whom he was secretly in love. Surrendering to his passion, the Count conspired to start a fire that would allow him the thrill of carrying the queen in his arms. The night of the fire, during which the entire castle burnt, he took advantage of the situation and brushed the queen's big toe while he was holding her. A guard spotted this fatal gesture, and the Count was executed by the King shortly after. As if she wanted to break the spell, the artist was encouraging any visitor to brush the resin toe. Conscious that no patina would ever tarnish it, no matter how regularly caressed it might be, she promised me she would recast the work in gold. "One day, when you and I are rich." I loved the fact that we already had a future together.

Throughout the course of our long friendship, I understood the artist was using the anecdote as a humble door to explore the vicissitudes of humanity: the Grey Zone of the world. She had a talent for unearthing tragicomic episodes.

Concerned with genealogy, in a surge of innocent egotism, she soon found out she was a descendant of Chevalier d'Eon, a French spy, diplomat and transvestite operating during the reign of Louis XV. The man had been simultaneously portrayed as Chevalier D'Eon and Mademoiselle de Baumont and spent half of his life presenting

himself as a man and the other half as a woman, leading a complicated yet romantic life. He was one of the earliest cross-dressers History has celebrated. Not only was the artist proud to be a far offspring of a nobleman, she also loved being connected to an eccentric and courageous character; it illustrated her belief that mavericks embodied the Grey Zone of humankind.

I was sympathetic to her aspirational inclination, as for years I believed my grandfather was the heir to a royal family. As an early 1900s young impoverished gentleman, my mother's father moved to the city where my yet to be grandmother lived and took advantage of his relocation to tweak reality to his advantage. Based on his surname, he re-wrote a section of his family tree, and turned his Middle Age ancestors from the servants of the kings to the kings themselves. With a little creativity, he copied the appropriate coat of arms and commissioned a jeweller to create a vintage-looking seal ring. Though my grandmother considered such biographical details irrelevant, he kept his secret until his death, and the noble seals still adorn my mother's middle finger. I felt comfortable to show the artist I had my share of eccentrics in the family and like her, secretly hoped to have inherited their unique unorthodoxy.

Years later, I went to visit her in her studio in Berlin where she had moved with her fiancé, an androgynous pop singer she had met while bowling in Manhattan. The studio was full of reproductions of hermaphrodites of all kinds. After telling me the story of her ill uncle-in-law, who was patiently waiting at the hospital for a liver donation and happened to be a specialist on Italian Renaissance painting, she described her next exhibition. While forging a bond of kinship to Mademoiselle de Baumont, she had been researching historical figures of queers, feeding a new obsession with meticulous care. I visited the exhibition the following week.

Upon entering the room, I was blinded by a gigantic gold-plated panel printed with a reproduction of Bernini's Sleeping Hermaphroditus. A life-size sculpted figure of a sleeping Venus, casually exhibiting male genitals; it was the male version of Aphrodite. The artist told me it was worshiped during transvestite rites in Cyprus in the fourth century BC, consequently giving its name to Hermaphroditus and to the modern concept of the hermaphrodite.

cream carpet, lit only by dimmed light bulbs mounted on industrial concrete structures. To contemplate the tableau, I sat on the palm of a golden hand that was not

without reference to the Joe chair by Italian designers De Pas, D'Urbino and Lomazzi, designed in homage to Joe DiMaggio. I told her the story of Glenn Burke, the baseball player who "invented" the high-five in the 1970s. Irony has it that the official greeting of locker rooms and frats was a gay invention, and has become a symbol of gay pride for a small community living in the Castro in San Francisco. Interpretation can be farfetched, but it all made a lot of sense to me. The whole environment was charged with erotica, like the set of a porn movie from the 70s, something one can contemplate with nostalgia and harmless amusement. She told me young lovers would sneak into the exhibition booth at night and that one morning she found three naked pubescent boys asleep next to her she-male Venus. Covered with paint, their bodies had left stains on the cream carpet. A week after the opening, the sleek carpet was filthy.

The artist always had something to celebrate, and she would find any excuse to fight the ordinary. Every meal, every walk, every situation was an occasion to do something exceptional. Once she invited me to spend a holiday at a house that belonged to her boyfriend's producer in the outskirts of Chicago. It was a modernist house sitting in the middle of a dense forest, the exact same glass house where Cameron Frye crashes his dad's Ferrari in Ferris Bueller's Day Off. The artist was fascinated by modernist architecture, and even more by the potential of its destruction. She had been listing all possible cinematic iterations of such destruction — from King Kong scaling the Empire State Building, to The Black Cat, starring Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff, in which architect Hjalmar Poelzig falls through a glass screen in a Bauhaus-inspired house — which all featured the ravaging of modernist icons. Similar to her obsession for numbers, she had an almost autistic obsession for taxonomies of all kinds. Her systematic research into architecture was again a way of unveiling something that was profoundly human, and rather than celebrating the lorded efficiency of modernist buildings, she uncovered the human dramas that fuelled their making or un-making in the first place. That night, she whispered in my ear that it was a chance to spend an evening in one of her artistic fantasies, but spend down I knew the situation was anything but coincidental.

Lunatic as she could be, she prepared an all-pink themed dinner; everything had to be soft, round and pink. She spent the day casting breast-shaped plates, and prepared wobbly aspics of beetroot juice, pink risotto, shrimps

in cocktail sauce, raspberry coulis, boozy watermelon, grape-fruit cocktails, ham mousse and so forth. Everything was presented in a pyramidal display; she improvised a miniature landscape with a fur blanket on which she displayed each element of what looked like a surreal model of a decadent city. It was so pretty and precious that guests could not believe it was food. She lit candles, solemnly addressed her guests and started drinking a thick red juice out of a flat champagne flute. She gently spilled the blood-like liquid with a malicious smile, as if she knew she was being filmed in slow motion.

Her all time favourite among architects was Le Corbusier. Faithful to her sidetracking approach, the artist was not content with looking at anyone's obvious achievements, and would always prefer to highlight their idiosyncrasies. Once she raised funds and invited a Jamaican Dance Hall Queen to perform a series of suggestive dance moves in the many rooms of La Maison Blanche, the first house Le Corbusier ever built in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. Shot in 16mm, the film is as much an homage to the architect as it is a scornful comment on his remarkable misogyny. Turned into a museum, the artist had to convince the mayor of the town to let her spend a weekend in this sacred temple of architecture. She instructed the dancer to perform a different move in each room, from the kitchen to the living room, study and bathroom. As if the naked performer could revive the abandoned place with the energy of her own physical exhaustion, the artist would not stop filming until the end of each roll of film. Like teenagers having sex in their parents' bedroom, the sweat was dripping off the dancer's body, leaving invisible drops of heresy everywhere in the house.

Her expert irreverence was a gift. Exploring and further defining the Grey Zone would very often put her on fragile paths, and I can't re-count the many times she fell out with people because of her naive honesty and hunger for success. Later in her career, and after our friendship had been severely tested many times, (our most epic fight resulted in a 48-hour silent road trip between Los Angeles and Marfa), she asked me to write an essay for her first monographic book. Not being a very keen critic, I suggested I wrote a new section of my fictional critique novel, in which I have been detailing my relationships with the artists with whom I work.