



Foreword / Acknowledgements

The Contemporary Art Museum and Graphicstudio are now working together to offer artists opportunities to make new works. Under the auspices of the Contemporary Art Museum, Janaina Tschäpe was commissioned to produce *Blood, Sea*. This project—shot at Weeki Wachee Springs, Florida—allowed her to use High Definition (HD) video for the first time. In addition, she worked at Graphicstudio, pushing the limits of contemporary printmaking methods to produce several new editions using lithography, photogravure and direct gravure.

Jade Dellinger, Independent Curator is acknowledged for initiating and coordinating the project at Weeki Wachee Springs. I extend my appreciation and thanks to the staff of the Contemporary Art Museum for their coordination of the project and organization of the exhibition. Don Fuller, New Media Curator, researched and managed the video production, assisted by David Stringfellow, Digital Media Specialist. Alexa Favata, Associate Director, coordinated the details of the exhibition and Tony Palms, Exhibitions Coordinator, assisted by James Rodger, Hector del Campo, Stephen Giunta, Lloyd Brown and Alex Costantino managed the design and installation of the exhibition. I thank the Graphicstudio staff for collaborating with Janaina Tschäpe on her new editions of prints: Deli Sacilotto, Director of Research, Tom Pruiitt, Shop Manager, Marcia Brown, Curator and Sarah Howard and Tim Baker, Printers.

I also thank Gean Moreno for his thoughtful essay and Michael Rush for his participation in the symposium. A special thanks to Meg Malloy and Teka Selman at Brent Sikkema Gallery, New York and to Heige Kim at Janaina Tschäpe's studio. We continue to be indebted to Marty Schaffel at Audio Visual Innovations for his generous assistance. Most of all, I wish to extend my thanks to Janaina Tschäpe for her generous contributions to the Institute.

Margaret A. Miller
Director, Institute for Research in Art, University of South Florida



Building Up To Bring It Down

The baroque, poor thing, like an ear of corn in a world of pervs, has suffered misuse. This is particularly true when it is applied, as it seems to be fashionable at the moment, to contemporary works of art. But the problem lies neither with the concept of the baroque, which is what it is, nor with the particular work it is applied to, which, again, is what it is. The problem lies in what the application glosses over, in the ignored nuances that disrupt the perfect alignment of concept and thing. I guess I've begun with a presumption that I hope isn't too untoward. Some folks would like to quickly catalogue Janaina Tschäpe's work under the rubric "Baroque" or the sexier "Ultrabaroque" (probably interchangeable terms, seeing as definitions change and don't change all that much, always chasing essentialism they claim to be eschewing) and leave it at that. But shoving Tschäpe's work into this category too hastily would demand that we turn a blind eye to what it really does: it builds up, in a way not dissimilar to baroque objects, but only in an effort to, un-baroquely, bring the whole house of cards down.

First things first: let's agree, for the sake of brevity, that the baroque is an aesthetic, or a way of being in the world, whose DNA compels it to gather and synthesize disparate elements into complicated systems. Its natural proclivity is toward arabesque and metaphor, rather than linearity and metonymy. Discourses are layered, incongruent visual styles are mixed, historical lines are intertwined, countless signifiers are gathered and left to mingle and meld, and incongruent realities—the world is a stage, night is a dream—are confounded.

All this happens in Tschäpe's work. Synthetic materials and natural settings, oneiric sequences and factual occurrences, painterly deployments of space and kinetic use of compositional elements—these are the antithetical lines that twirl, in her work, into complicated braids of meaning and action, and ultimately coalesce into densely operatic images. But the more Tschäpe's images swell with references and ornament, the less they seem to be about this very process of growing. In fact, they seem to be stripping down. This would be paradoxical only if the stripping down were actually physical—a reduction of ornament or a turn toward austere use of color. But Tschäpe chips away at the images and conventions that we've inherited as a culture by activating parody and teasing out ambiguity. The classical female body, so often draped in her videos and photographs with yards of flowing fabric and dozens of water-filled condoms that seem like sprouting appendages, grows comically deformed; it takes on Rabelaisian proportions and invites comparisons to Hans Bellmer's dolls and the marshmallowy Michelin tire man. Mythical Earth goddesses start looking like Divine. Distressed damsels morph into strange sea creatures with endless tendrils for tentacles. Tschäpe indisputably loves to pile on in a jubilantly exaggerated manner, but each new element is corrosive to what it is gleefully grafted onto, like pancake make-up on a sweet face. She knows that hyperbole is as much the domain of the drag show and the roadside attraction as it is that of the opera, and that at times it is at the fault line between opposites that one ought to set up camp.

Value is certainly redistributed when Tschäpe introduces a beautiful image of a maiden doing her sublime aquatic ballet, conjuring up timeless metaphors and narratives of the sea, and we then learn that the video was filmed in the Americana world of Weeki Wachee Springs, Florida.¹ It's almost as if the most refined part of the culture meets its opposite—Homer in kitsch crackerland. Synthesized, these opposites become a strange and funny thing. References crisscross, clash and reformat each other. All of a sudden, our maiden, so Nijinsky-like in her grace when we first saw her, is sublime in the way that a lava lamp is sublime in the thick incense fog and Marlboro smoke of a trailer. So, Tschäpe's initial—archetypal, some may contend—image is now tweaked. The friction of opposites bumping and grinding as they fuse sets the sparks of ambiguity and parody in Tschäpe's work flying.

"The transvestite does not imitate woman," writes Cuban novelist Severo Sarduy. "For him, al límite, there is no woman, he knows—and paradoxically he may be the only one to know this—that she is just appearance, that her world and the force of her fetish conceal a defect."² Transvestism, then, is simulacrum without original, the last link in a chain of appearances. As such, although an extravagant imitative drive may ostensibly be its most telling feature, what drag does, as it appropriates and supersedes the elements that designate "woman," is more consequential. It chisels away until it unearths the contingent nature of the codes and conventions that hold a monopoly on definitions of the feminine. Just as tranvestism shakes up calcified notions of gender, Tschäpe taxes and debunks esteemed cultural images and narratives. She chips away. Or, rather, to be more precise, she undoes, like the transvestite, by piling up. Instead of the quick blast of macho demo work, Tschäpe opts for a patient deconstruction that works by accumulating incompatible elements that slowly break each other down.

The comparison with drag sheds light on Tschäpe's work because both work through humorous reversals, always piling on and building up in a way that undoes existing codes and narratives until they morph into their own contradiction. Stifling certainties are quietly transformed into agents of something like indeterminacy, of fluidity and playfulness. In the process, essentialist narratives, fixed meanings, and the logic that may ascribe priority to one cultural tradition over another, are incessantly taxed. Tschäpe's work huffs and puffs and blows down the house of cards that we call identity, which allows all sorts of simplistic us-and-them hierarchies and organizational schemes that serve those who establish them. Tschäpe's work constantly reminds us that cultures are always, in Edward Said's words, "made up of mixed, heterogeneous, and even contradictory discourses, never more themselves in a sense than when they are just not being themselves..."³

Gean Moreno, 2004

1. Weeki Wachee Springs is a famous Florida tourist attraction featuring live mermaid shows.
2. Sarduy, Severo, *Written on a Body* (Lumen Books: New York, 1989), p. 93.
3. Said, Edward W., *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2002), XV.

Curatorial Statement

Born in Munich, Germany in 1973, Janaina Tschäpe now divides her time between New York and Rio de Janeiro. She has shown her work widely in Europe, South America and Asia—including recent solo exhibitions at the prestigious Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain), Centre d'Art a Albi (Toulouse, France), Nichido Contemporary Art (Tokyo, Japan) and the Brent Sikkema Gallery in New York City.

The title Janaina Tschäpe eventually settled on for this, her first one-person museum exhibition in the United States, was *Blood, Sea*. With the debut of newly commissioned works, the artist was striving for words to signify the complexity of the endeavor, her intent and to broaden the potential for interpretation. *Blood, Sea* and the written introduction she selected for the wall as visitors enter the USF Contemporary Art Museum's West Gallery, were appropriated from and are respectfully credited to one of post-modernist Italo Calvino's finest works of fiction. Formerly, this title served only to designate a chapter in *t zero*, a book which according to Gore Vidal, "describes imaginary worlds with the most extraordinary precision and beauty." As I delve through his pages once again, it now seems particularly fitting.

Our discussions about the African-based Brazilian religion of Candomblé, the derivation of the artist's given name from "Dona Janaina" (better known as Iemanjá, the Goddess of the Water), the mythology of ocean deities, sea creatures and mermaids, and even talk about the Florida Gulf Coast's roadside Weeki Wachee Springs attraction began in New York City in 1997, but with announcement cards in preparation and press deadlines looming, assigning a name—giving a title to this show—had proven somewhat difficult. Tschäpe has created far more than simple illustrations for a pre-existing text—the artist and author Italo Calvino have a shared affinity.

Appropriately, here through the debut of this site-specific installation of High Definition video projection, a digital video on wall-mounted plasma screen, Cibachrome photographs, watercolor drawings, lithography and photogravure, Janaina Tschäpe walks the line between dream and reality with her own equally compelling and unique visual language. I can only assume that the late, great Calvino would take great pride in the association, as like the author of *t-zero*, Tschäpe creates narratives that challenge commonly accepted mathematical and scientific principles (about gravity, time and space) while revealing the magic in nature and the human body (in her case, the female form, more often than not).

As Italo Calvino writes, "We undulate with no sense of direction, drawn by an obscure current so light that it seemed downright impalpable and yet strong enough to drag us up in very high waves and down in their troughs." In this context, it seems entirely possible that the author is referring to Tschäpe's *Blood, Sea* or the strong tides that bind her to her Brazilian home. Perhaps he too has experienced the monotonous, rhythmic sound of ritual drums ("atabaques") and the fragrant scent of thousands of flower garlands in Bahia as they are carried by the sea on wooden rafts in honor of Iemanjá.

Jade Dellinger, 2004



Blood, Sea

The conditions that obtained when life had not yet emerged from the oceans have not subsequently changed a great deal for the cells of the human body, bathed by the primordial wave which continues to flow in the arteries. Our blood in fact has a chemical composition analogous to that of the sea of our origins, from which the first living cells and the first multicellular beings derived the oxygen and the other elements necessary to life. With the evolution of more complex organisms, the problem of maintaining a maximum number of cells in contact



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with the liquid environment could not be solved simply by the expansion of the exterior surface: those organisms endowed with hollow structures, into which the sea water could flow, found themselves at an advantage. But it was only with the ramification of these cavities into a system of blood circulation that distribution of oxygen was guaranteed to the complex of cells, thus making terrestrial life possible. The sea where living creatures were at one time immersed is now enclosed within their bodies.

- Excerpts From *t zero* by Italo Calvino

Exhibition Checklist / Illustrations

1. *Ague*, 2004
Cibachrome print
50 x 64 inches

2. *Blood, Sea*, 2004
4-channel video installation /
DVD loop

3. *Cambrian Dream*, 2004
Watercolor on paper
27 feet x 12 inches

4. *Her*, 2004
Mixed media on paper
Dptych: 41 1/2 x 29 3/4 (each)

5. *Inaie*, 2004
Lithograph
27 3/4 x 22 1/2 inches
Published by Graphicstudio

6. *Lambis*, 2004
Photogravure
37 3/4 x 27 1/4 inches
Published by Graphicstudio

7. *Mimosus soli*, 2004
Direct Gravure
40 5/8 x 48 3/4 inches
Published by Graphicstudio

8. *Naiad I*, 2004
Photogravure
37 3/4 x 27 1/4 inches
Published by Graphicstudio

9. *Partenope*, 2004
Lithograph
27 3/4 x 22 1/2 inches
Published by Graphicstudio

10. *Undine*, 2004
Lithograph
27 3/4 x 22 1/2 inches
Published by Graphicstudio

11. *Untitled*, 2004
DVD loop

12. *Volva*, 2004
Photogravure
37 1/2 x 30 1/2 inches
Published by Graphicstudio

13. *Volva Volva*, 2004
Cibachrome print
50 x 64 inches

All works Courtesy of the Artist
and Brent Sikkema Gallery, NYC



5.

Janaina Tschäpe Bio

Since 1997, Janaina Tschäpe has employed the female body as her muse, creating universes of polymorphous landscapes, embryonic forms and ambiguous characters. Tschäpe's drawings, photographs, films and installations seek to give form to the trance of art making, portraying not a dream world, but the sensation of being in one.

Tschäpe was born in Dachau, Germany, and raised in São Paulo, Brazil. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg and her Master in Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts, New York. Tschäpe's work has been shown in numerous exhibitions throughout the world including Tokyo, São Paulo, London, and Berlin. Recent projects include *The 59th Minute with Creative Time* in Times Square, New York, the *Centre d'Art a Albi* in Toulouse, the *Fotomuseum* in Winthethur, and the *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia* in Madrid.

Tschäpe lives and works in New York.

Artist's Thanks

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Janaina Tschäpe, 2004

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Janaina Tschäpe: *Blood, Sea*