



# Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl “PRIVATE” PARTS!?

Jakob Lena Knebl's (1970-) and Ashley Hans Scheirl's (1956-) practices revolve around what they call 'trans-...' processes: transmedium, transmateriality, transgenre, transcontext, transidentity. Whether proceeding from cultural materials — high to low — or taking flight from binary notions of identity and selfhood, both artists share a common belief in the possibilities afforded through anomalous juxtaposition. Partners in life and art, each artist has their own distinct practice but come together to work on projects as companions, seeing this multiplicity as a more capacious method through which to confound notions of identity, sexuality, and the sociopolitical forces mediating humanly becoming. For their first UK exhibition as a duo, *“Private” Parts!?* (Belmacz), the pair enter into a trans-generational conversation with Duncan Grant. Working with the material sensitivities and sensuality seeping from Grant's erotic drawings, the pair break with their usual aesthetic of excess to subtly complicate ideas of sexual freedom.



**Installation view:**

**Jakob Lena Knebl**

*I am he as you are he as you are me. And we are all together, 2019. Belmacz, London.*

*Photo credit: Belmacz 2022.*

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**Jakob Lena Knebl and  
Ashley Hans Scheirl**

*Soft Soft Softmachine,*

*Photo credit: Christian Benesch*



**Installation view:**  
**Jakob Lena Knebl**  
*Oh... Jakob Lena Knebl and the mumok Collection, 2017.*  
 mumok Wien,  
 Photo credit: mumok / Lisa Rastl

**K**nebl's practice expands from staged photography to immersive mise-en-scène. Across this output, the histories of art and design collide with a theatrical androgyny — think Ziggy Stardust. These scenes of shadowed vivacity challenge viewers to consider how desire operates upon bodies. With a background studying fashion and textual sculpture, Knebl's practice weaves together different historical moments, differing art and/or craft forms, materials, as well as attitudes together to produce 'spaces of desire' — locations where taxonomic thinking is blurred through voyeuristic delight — that allow new ways of thinking to emerge. An example of this collapsing of times, life and art can be seen in

**Ashley Hans Scheirl**  
*Dandy Dust, 1998.*  
 94 min 16mm film [detail:  
 cyberdykes in the bladder of 307%].





**Installation view:**

**Ashley Hans Scheirl**

*Golden Balls, 2017, acrylic on papier-mâché and chicken wire (left), Balls, 2017, digital video (center), Golden Shower (L'origin du monde), 2017, acrylic on canvas and cardboard (right), installation view, Neue Galerie, Kassel, documenta 14,*

*Photo credit: Milan Soremski*

Knebl's 2017 exhibition *Oh... Jakob Lena Knebl and the mumok Collection*. Here she conceived a bold rearrangement of the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien's collection; specifically, their classical modernist and 1970s collections — two periods of renewed utopian expression. Appearing as an avatar, here Knebl placed herself beside the numerable other objects — now protagonists — within the installation; in doing so, aiming to democratise the exhibition space by opening an inquiry into how the topics, things, places, people and contexts that surround become co-creators of our identities.

In the late 1970s, Ashley Hans Scheirl completed their studies in Vienna before spending some 20 years traveling between New York — where they were deeply engaged in the underground performance scene — London as well as other cities. Between 1979 and 1998 they produced over 50 short films, as well as their acclaimed feature *Dandy Dust* (1998). Appearing as some kind of Artificial Hell (to riff off André Breton), *Dandy Dust* works with a particularly raucous visual language to narrate its fluid gender cyborg protagonist's journey across time and space. Working at the fringes of media, Scheirl's practice radically challenges norms of sexuality, gender identity as well as medium specificity itself. The post-human sensuality, developed in Scheirl filmic work, has more recently been used to corrupt the formalities of painting. Scheirl's conceptual paintings abound with surreal energy; bringing print and people, architecture and objects together in a pointed critique of contemporary world systems. Scheirl's presentation at *documenta 14, 2017* provides a pertinent example of how their dissonant bricolages unsettle fixed systems; specifically, how sexuality becomes an optimizable commodity under neoliberal economics.

Together, Knebl and Scheirl have established a practice of fabulous excess. Their installation-based works deploy a process akin to parataxis to allow numerable fragments, details from histories and/or parts of larger bodies, to sit in proximity to one another without subordination. Often accentuated, indeed activated, by bombastic colour and their own bodily presence, the inter-subjective narratives emerging from their theatrical stages rupture binary

world views, of public and private life, creating a place where one can begin to re-conceive a social self. *Invitation of the Soft Machine and Her Angry Body Parts*, Knebl and Scheirl's installation at the Austrian pavilion for the 59th Venice Biennale, embraces this practice of overabundance to establish a place “outside of all places” (to quote Micheal Foucault [*Of Other Spaces*]); one where the pair's trans operations allow us to experience the thin line between ideas of the real and the fantastic. In doing so, they expose the common-sense fallacy that insists on singular notions of gender and identity.

Sitting with the sensual caresses sketched by Duncan Grant in his erotic drawings, “*Private*” *Parts!?*, foregrounds the intimacy of raw sexual expression; specifically, the freedom found in erotic desire as it is given visual form and passed to another. In this way, the exhibition can be seen as a transgenerational, transnational, conversation about erotics, sexual expression, as well as alluding to how bodily acts of desire become censored by sociopolitical norms. Instead of juxtaposing or using Grant's works as part of a larger immersive narrative, this exhibition situates Scheirl's ob\_scene drawings from the late 1980s and early 1990s in proximity to Grant's own. Created at a time when Scheirl was discovering the queer clubs of London, the drawings translate the grainy materiality of their filmic work into more inward expressions of sexual delight and liberation. Held by a rhizomatic wall painting, in keeping with Knebl's practice of creating affective mise-en-scène, the private dialogues writhing beneath the painterly surfaces of both Grant and Scheirl's drawings flourish, passing between one another like quotes lovingly reaped from private diaries or letters sketched for a lover ●



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**Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl**  
*Invitation of the Soft Machine and Her Angry*  
*Body Parts, Austrian Pavilion for the 59th*  
*La Biennale di Venezia International Art*  
*Exhibition, 2022.*  
*Photo credit: Georg Petermichl*



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