

***Feets, Don't Fail Me Now*****Curated by Ilaria Puri Purini**

03.09.15 – 10.10.15

PRIVATE VIEW: THURSDAY 03 SEPT 2015, 6 – 8 PM



Débora Delmar Corp  
 Michela de Mattei  
 Tamara Henderson and Jeannine Han  
 Paul Housley  
 Birgit Jürgenssen  
 Paul Kindersley  
 Christodoulos Panayiotou  
 Renee So

“In 1921, when Klee came to the Bauhaus, he installed himself in a studio next to mine. One day I heard a strange din, as if someone was stomping rhythmically with his foot”, recalls the artist George Muche. As Klee paced about his studio his work was accompanied by a rhythmic, energetic metre that announces artistic activity, experiment and physical action. Such anecdotes of noisome pacing, leaping, tapping and tripping highlight the overwhelming power of our feet to put us in step with new ways of doing and making. Herbie Hancock exhorted his feet not to fail him because they are extremities which bring the contingencies, limits, and extremes of artistic desire into embodied action, signalling a thrilling sense of physical collaboration and autonomy.

The exhibition at Belmacz brings together artworks that represent shoes in their manifold meanings. Like Klee who used to walk around his studio, let's imagine the artworks in *Feets, Don't Fail Me Now* as 'shoes,' taken off by the artists at the end of a productive day. What seems to be an exercise in still life unwraps the temporalities and spatialities of the use of shoes, their making, their movement and the conditions of their immobility. Shoes come as a pair but exist on their own; they are functional objects but can be descriptive, decorative,

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For more information please contact Rebekah Standing at Belmacz: [rebekah@belmacz.com](mailto:rebekah@belmacz.com) or call +44 (0)20 7629 7863  
 Belmacz ■ 45 Davies Street • London W1K 4LX ▲ England ■ TEL: +44 (0)20 7629 7863 ▲ [www.belmacz.com](http://www.belmacz.com)

sculptural and desirable; they partly embody the past action and facilitate thinking invested in an artwork. As things compelled to move, the still life of shoes moves us to challenge economies of fashion, display, desire and necessity.

Renee So's giant Boots stand around the gallery, as if they were left behind by a fairy tale giant, referring ironically to what can be masculine but simultaneously the exaggerated size of the boots and their shining glaze suggest the possibilities of an object to become something other than itself while maintaining its shoe nature. Somehow similarly, the paintings of Paul Housley are an exercise in observation, recalling Vincent van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) which depicted a pair of dirty boots after a day in the fields (or in a studio?), made of leather, nails and soles; while also the paintings of Philip Guston; in all these examples shoes are the sole characters of an interrupted narrative. Suddenly, the *Pairs of Handmade Shoes* of Christodoulos Panayiotou bring temporality to this useful object. Where is the owner of the green-moccasins? Made with leather from purses and bags that belonged to women close to the artist; the shoes address about craftsmanship behind their making; while transforming this pair of identical shoes into charged objects of affection. Undeniably shoes can be identity-makers but the tennis shoes in the rounded sculpture of Débora Delmar Corp *Body Blend Trade Culture* acquire a political meaning. The once-white Ked's trainers have been stained with coffee, blending with the coffee trade in South America and its production, distribution and consumption. The tennis-shoes packed into one another into a spherical form then illustrate the circular on-going relationship between environment and trade. Circular is also the impossible stride that takes the work of Michela de Mattei — her singular ice-skate deformed is in its function; it can't slide anymore, the *slit-shoe* (German for ice-skate) can only circularly go *round and around* — as the title confirms — a thinking that takes itself circularly.

Thinking about an interaction with the body, is another possible way to engage with these objects taking us back to the quote that gives the exhibition its title *Feets, Don't Fail Me Now*. Tamara Henderson's painting refers distantly to oniric and hypnotic experiences, when the body loses awareness and falls into streams of consciousness. Paul Kindersley's video illustrate how feet can be failed by heels that are too high to govern in risky situations. Shoes become a performative element, an excuse and something to discuss about; displaying and parodying its power of shoes as conversational pieces; while also recalling the videos of Sylvie Fleury's where shoes are contextualised, used and consumed. The photographs and drawings of Birgit Jürgenssen come from a shoe-serie part of her oeuvre realized between 1973 and 1976. An aesthetised 'foot hold', a radical exploration of the female body and of its cultural

construction, in these works the body engages directly with the form and with the elements that make a shoe. An arm moulds itself to fit into a high heel and suddenly it's the surrealism of what we see that captivates us, blurring the definitions of what a shoe actually is; displacing them from where they usually function: tied to our feet.

*Feet, Don't Fail Me Now* refers to this possibility of putting gloves to our feet, to their forcefulness to live a different life from those feet that govern them. The shoes presented — crafted and sculpted; deformed and exaggerated; painted and recorded are a sample of the thinking of artists. *Feet, Don't Fail Me Now* is a form of thinking around their practice with the most banal and humble and overseen object — a shoe without its purpose displayed for their manifold connotations; portraits of the artists that worked with, around and about them.

## Artists

**Débora Delmar**, 1986 Mexico City. Débora Delmar Corp, is the name Débora Delmar adopted for the creation and distribution of her artwork. Working with sculpture, video and installation, Débora Delmar Corp explores the way in which globalised consumer culture structures everyday lives and routines. Past exhibitions include a solo show at the Museo Universitario del Chopo in Mexico City titled *Body Blend Trade Culture*, from which the piece exhibited at Belmacz comes from. Originally part of a large installation of works stylized around the aesthetics of coffee shops exploring how consumer products influence world markets, producers and consumers. Solo exhibitions include; the Biennial of the Americas in 2015 and a solo exhibition at Modern Art Oxford.

Débora Delmar Corp  
*Trade Circle — Europa*, 2014  
From the series *Body Blend Trade Culture*  
Astra brand Colombian Arabica coffee,  
tennis shoes  
59.9 × 59.9 × 10.2 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Seventeen gallery

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**Michela de Mattei**, 1984 Rome. de Mattei thinks about sculpture in an intermedial way, encompassing mixed media which she uses in her installations, drawings and sound pieces. Having recently moved to London, this is the first time she exhibits internationally. Recent shows were all based in Rome; a solo show at Radio Ex-Elettrofonica, group shows at Casal Bertone, Eni Talent Prize, smART — Polo per l'Arte Contemporanea and Sala Santa Rita. She studied Philosophy at the University of La Sapienza in Rome and assisted artist Giuseppe Gallo from the San Lorenzo School. She is currently an artist in residence at the Cité International des Arts in Paris.

Michela de Mattei  
*Round around*, 2015  
Steel, blue wax and plaster on wood  
6 × 30 × 16 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

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**Tamara Henderson**, 1982 Sackville. Henderson's writings, paintings, sculptures and 16mm films often suggest an escape from conscious experience. Her process of translating her experiences of various altered or unconscious states such as sleep or hypnosis, into sketches, notes and recordings into films, sculptures or other works. Since 2011, Henderson has been reconstructing pieces of furniture she imagines under hypnosis. Henderson studied at NSCAD and Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main and she holds a MA from the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. She has exhibited at Western Front, the Walter Phillips Gallery, Kunstverein Nürnberg and Documenta 13, where she presented *Sloshed Ballot & Anonymous Loan* (2011), a 16mm film depicting everyday objects being manipulated by invisible hands.

Tamara Henderson  
*Gliding in on a Shrimp Sandwich*  
(Scene 2), 2013  
In collaboration with Jeannine Han

Sand, canvas, paint, wood  
79 × 54 cm  
Courtesy the artists and Rodeo Istanbul/  
London

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**Paul Housley**, 1964 Stalybridge, Manchester. Housley's paintings often remind us of art history — Picasso or Rembrandt — reworking the grandiose matters with low-key subject matter and humble scale. Housley had solo exhibitions in London and internationally (Copenhagen, Palermo and Toronto). Although his paintings recall the history of art, Housley opts for humour over grandeur. Modest in scale, his expressive paintings often feature un-heroic subjects like shoes, vases, toy figurines, cats and stuffed animals. His portraits portray ambiguous, blurred out faces. Housley has shown across Europe and in the United Kingdom.

Paul Housley  
*Old Red Boot*, 2015  
Oil on found object  
25 × 22.5 cm

Paul Housley  
*White Harp Shoe*, 2015  
Oil on found object  
33.5 × 29 cm

Paul Housley  
*Painters Boot*, 2008-12  
Oil on canvas  
44.5 × 55 cm

Paul Housley  
*The Inky Kinks*, 2015  
Oil on found object  
20 × 14.5 cm

All courtesy of the artist and Belmacz

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**Birgit Jürgenssen**, 1949 Vienna-2003. Issues of gender are apparent in Jürgenssen's photographic works, sculptures, and drawings from every period of her artistic career which started in 1968 while studying at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, where she later became a lecturer. Focusing on the female body and its constructions, the body is implicated in several of her works. Jürgenssen's self-portraits often represent hybrid human forms, showing the female body adapted and armored, demystifying gender codes and roles. Jürgenssen has exhibited across Europe and North America since 1970, including the recent inclusion in *The Great Mother Fondazione Trussardi*, 2015. Her work is present in the collections of important international museums.

Birgit Jürgenssen  
*Untitled (Improvisation)*, 1976  
b/w photograph  
12.7 × 17.8 cm

Birgit Jürgenssen  
*Muscle Shoe*, 1976  
Pencil, coloured pencil on handmade paper  
31 × 44 cm

All courtesy of the Estate Birgit Jürgenssen

**Paul Kindersley**, 1985 Cambridge. Kindersley's multifaceted work is situated in the cultural interface between the viewer and the 'film moment'. Representing the extremities of exploitation movies of the 60s and 70s, his references explore the exaggerated filmic concepts and emotions of tragedy, eroticism, melodrama, violence and the tacky. His installations or 'sets' include constellations of found objects and images, arranged and filtered through convoluted and esoteric amalgams of histories and personal experiences. The objects function as 'props', which Kindersley also describes as 'gifts to the filmic moment'. Kindersley assisted the artist Marvin Gaye Chetwynd for several years and is now living and working in London.

Paul Kindersley  
*Mild Peril*, 2015  
Digital video  
4:59 min  
Courtesy of the artist and Belmacz

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**Christodoulos Panayiotou**, 1978 Limassol. Panayiotou's multidimensional work addresses issues ranging from what constitutes "the public" to the construction of national identity and history. His manifold production also expands into the building and re-building of memory from fragmented residues, like the pair of shoes exhibited here. He frequently takes ceremonies, festivals and theatrical spectacles as points of departure from which to explore the structures and customs that inform social experience. He has exhibited and performed in several institutional frameworks in England including the Wysing Art Centre; and participated in shows across the world such as the Deste Foundation in Athens, Salt in Istanbul in 2015; the Museion in Bolzano, the Berlin Biennale and the Kunstlerhaus in Stuttgart in 2014 to name a few. Panayiotou is currently representing Cyprus at the Venice Biennale.

Christodoulos Panayiotou  
*Untitled*, 2013  
1 pair of handmade leather shoes and 1  
cardboard shoe box  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Rodeo Istanbul/  
London

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**Renee So**, 1974 Hong Kong. So's ceramic and knitted work play with the formality of abstraction. The figures and objects convey a quiet and poetic dignity but are also humorous in their depictions. She has had exhibitions in London, Melbourne and New Zealand and will present a whole new body of works next spring.

Renee So  
*Boot*, 2013  
Glazed ceramic  
65 × 52 × 14 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry  
gallery

Renee So  
*Boot*, 2015  
Bronze  
40.5 × 29 × 11.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

