Lili Reynaud-Dewar
Over the years, Lili Reynaud-Dewar has developed a practice in which she explores points of encounter (and of potential friction) between the public and private spheres. Such relationships between context and individual are key to her approach: how do we define ourselves? In relation to what? With which communities do we ally ourselves, and at what price? What forces shape us, and to what end? What happens when we contest them? How can our bodies express themselves freely? What can we do to stand out, to be unique? Where does our subjectivity end?

These questions underlie Reynaud-Dewar’s interest in both biography (and, by extension, in autobiography) and politics: with an approach that sometimes resembles autofiction, her works shift between her own life (and those of members of her family and friends) and that of subjects drawn from historical avant-gardes, creating nexuses of tension and collusion. Her method bears similarities to fandom in that being a fan means having an irrational attachment to a person (real or fictional) whom we feel is part of us, of our identity, and forming an emotional rather than analytic, link with them.2

Over the course of her career, Reynaud-Dewar has drawn on the history of activist and alternative cultures, summoned through both canonic and marginal figures. Among them are performer Josephine Baker; authors Kathy Acker, Guillaume Dustan, Jean Genet, and Walt Whitman; composer and musician Sun Ra; intellectual Donna Haraway; performance artist and musician Cosey Fanni Tutti; and, in the case that interests us here, author and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. These sometimes-controversial individuals share an emancipatory quality that is expressed by a certain corporeality.3

Reynaud-Dewar’s approach goes beyond citation or reference. Her aim is not to establish a genealogy (passing on of influences) in order to consolidate a canon (and, by extension, her position within it); rather, she performs a displacement (a psychoanalytic transfer), a return of an attachment to a person or object from the past that takes on a different form in the present. And so, as we shall see, Reynaud-Dewar regularly performs repetitions (sometimes recurrent ones), but with subtle differences that enable us to comprehend the present through an activation of the past.4

INITIALS PPP
During her residency at the Villa Medici in Rome in 2019, Reynaud-Dewar conceived and began
producing a project on the celebrated Italian author and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975). More particularly, she delved into Pasolini’s tragic end: on the early morning of November 2, 1975, he was murdered – hit and crushed by his own car – on a beach in Ostia (on the outskirts of Rome). Reynaud-Dewar’s four-channel video installation, *Rome, November 1st and 2nd, 1975* (2019–21), looks back at Pasolini’s final hours: the work reconstructs almost in its entirety his last interview, with journalist Furio Colombo, as well as the circumstances around his murder. For her fragmented reinterpretation of the facts, she collaborated with some twenty of her friends and family members to play Pasolini and his young companion, Giuseppe Pelosi, who, alone among the assailants, was found guilty of the murder.5

Delving into the biography of a cultural monument of the second half of the twentieth century (and especially examining his murder), risks flirting with cliché – creating a situation in which the source material overwhelms the artist’s treatment of it. When we take a closer look at Reynaud-Dewar’s body of work, however, it quickly becomes obvious that her practice and Pasolini’s have many themes in common. In his work, Pasolini explored suffering, martyrdom, sensuality, and taboos. As a total intellectual, he rose up against fascism, consumerism, and conformism in all its forms. He was a communist by allegiance (a follower of Marx and Gramsci), even though he was barred from the party in 1948 because of his homosexuality. A towering thinker, he explored the pleasure of being shocked (in the lineage of Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty) and sought to avoid moralism and oversimplification.

For her video installation *Rome, November 1st and 2nd, 1975*, Reynaud-Dewar is inspired by Abel Ferrara’s film *Pasolini*, but she also borrows the narrative mechanism from Pasolini’s last novel, *Petrolio*, which he was writing when he died.6 The main character in the novel, Carlo, is doubled: the first Carlo, a hydrocarbon engineer, navigates behind the scenes of political and economic power; the second is an erotomaniac searching for transgressive encounters. And during the story a metamorphosis takes place when Carlo becomes a woman. In Reynaud-Dewar’s work, this polymorphous corporeality is expressed by multiple embodiments of the protagonists in the drama: Pasolini, his lover/killer Pelosi, and the pack of murderers are all played in turn by different performers, often without regard to age, gender, and language. Only the character of the journalist Furio Colombo remains constant, played exclusively by Reynaud-Dewar. The narrative is in three parts: the interview between Pasolini and Colombo; an encounter between Pasolini and Pelosi in a pizzeria; and, finally, the murder. The dialogue on each of the four screens overlaps:
different versions of the same scenes are projected simultaneously. The action takes place under monochrome (blue, red, or green) lighting, making the scenes abstract and almost dreamlike. Occasionally, seemingly arbitrarily, the screens go blank, interrupting the plot and lighting up the gallery, creating a break in the work’s fictional space-time by exposing the physical conditions of the installation (the black box).

In resonance with the “final interview” between Pasolini and Colombo, Reynaud-Dewar interviewed each of the performers about their personal and professional lives, using a more or less standardized questionnaire. Transcripts of the interviews are printed in leaflets and left scattered on the floor of the gallery, available to read on site or take away. This “documentary” aspect of the installation reinforces (paradoxically) the fiction of the video, creating a contrast with what it represents in terms of abstraction: the public will potentially learn more about the lives of the actors by reading the leaflets than about those of the characters they play by watching the film.

Reynaud-Dewar is attracted to Pasolini not only because of the themes that they share but also by his persona. Pasolini was inevitably marginalized due to his singularly and vigorously unconventional positions. His iconoclasm made him difficult to classify, and the independence that he cultivated throughout his life isolated him somewhat. As Pasolini himself put it, “The small number of men who have made history are those who say no, never the courtiers and valets of cardinals. To be effective, the rejection must be big and not small – total, and not be directed toward one or another point, ‘absurd,’ contrary to common sense.” And it is precisely this clash between conformism and freedom of thought and action, revisited in a contemporary light, that Reynaud-Dewar finds particularly important.
DANCING ALONE IN A MUSEUM

Reynaud-Dewar’s interest in the power dynamics between individuals and institutions, between private life and public situations, certainly resonates with Pasolini’s ideas. This interest partly underlies the long series of videos begun in 2011 in which, alone, she dances naked, her body covered in makeup, in the exhibition and residency spaces within which she has worked.9

Having previously staged performances for the public and the camera, working with performers/collaborators, Reynaud-Dewar eventually chose to perform herself in her studio and in exhibition venues. In doing this, she offers a critique of the power relations between artists and institutions. She develops this idea further:

At some point in my work I decided to dance instead of talk, that dancing inside the perimeter of the institution could be an elaborated form of discourse. The silence that comes with dance leaves plenty of room for contradiction, blind spots, irresolvable issues, yet physical engagement is also at times the only possible way to assert the desire to come to terms with the issues of our time.10

For her videos – some shot in black and white and others in colour – she paints her body black, red (orangey-red), or metallic grey (silver). Her painted body is thus abstracted, becoming simultaneously a representation of every body and no body.11 Over the years, she developed a vocabulary of dance movements borrowed from a variety of sources and styles, to which she has added...
“ordinary” actions: she walks, smokes, examines nearby artworks, scrolls through her phone, and so on. Her performances are always shot without an audience or accompaniment of any sort; they take place following the closing or before the opening of the venues, and their tone oscillates between the lyrical and the comical.\(^{12}\)

The first dance films that Reynaud-Dewar produced explored the limits of identification with the other through abstraction. She filmed herself nude, her body blackened, dancing in her studio and in exhibition spaces, reproducing poses drawn from performances by the artist and musician Cosey Fanni Tutti (1951–)\(^ {13}\) and, later, dance steps by Josephine Baker (1906–1975).\(^ {14}\) Her interest in these figures is explained, among other things, by their respective feminist positions: although from different generations, each rose against the institutionalization of gender roles (and, in Baker’s case, racial prejudice) by using desire and seduction as tools of creative emancipation.\(^ {15}\)

The painted body is disengaged from its specificity: the body makeup hides the undressed body, underlining the formal dimension of Reynaud-Dewar’s performance and countering the vulnerability associated with nudity in public space.

Although the nature of the dynamics that Reynaud-Dewar establishes in her works arises from a sociological specificity (the art world that she spends time in, her experience of the power relations in play in the field of contemporary art), the intimate dimension and solitary nature of her actions are not to be overlooked. In the preparation for the present exhibition, she described how bringing together many of these videos felt like publishing passages from her diary.\(^ {16}\) Overall, these works represent a dozen years of a professional career (“All of the Above”), but also the time a body – her body – has lived. Notwithstanding the abstraction mentioned above, these works also convey realities linked to her personal life: a kind of echo or shadow of all that is inaccessible to us, what was happening in her life at the time she was making these films. This autobiographical aspect is a counterpart to the work’s sociological aspect and reinforces the notion of risk associated with it.

Furthermore, this solitary, intimate action leads us to think about how solitude, as the capacity to keep oneself company, allows for meditation and reflection. These works are a form of claiming one’s own space, carving it out of the institution – creating relationships between sometimes chaotic spaces (especially when the filming takes place as an exhibition is being mounted or taken down) and an abstracted body. As Reynaud-Dewar stated at the time of the exhibition My Epidemic (a body as public as a book can be) at Clearing in Brussels in 2015,
Virginia Woolf spoke about the necessity for an artist to have *A Room of One’s Own*, but what if being an artist today means having many rooms of many owns? This idea of the private, mental space might be somehow washed out, too. Is there really a thing such as a private space today?  

When we compare the intimacy of these videos to that of a diary or notebook, the spontaneous (almost ephemeral) nature of the former’s critical positioning becomes obvious. Indeed, institutional critique denounces museums (and the art world in general) as systems that are exclusive and instil a certain conformity and are subjected to and reverberating with dominant ideology. Reynaud-Dewar’s critique is not, however, analytical, quantitative, or objective; rather, she adopts and adapts the slogan “The personal is political” to stage the iniquity of relations between artists and institutions. For instance, these dance videos – like her body of work as a whole – evoke the dangers of ideology as raised, notably, by Pasolini, but also as analyzed by Hannah Arendt when she delves into the distinctions between solitude and isolation. Unlike solitude, which is essential to the articulation of intelligence and development of sensitivity to the world, isolation – or the desolation that results from it – is, in Arendt’s view, a condition fertile for the emergence of totalitarianism. An individual isolated from others is less likely to develop a critical perspective and, given the complexity of the world, may be more likely to adopt an ideology’s ready-made responses.
METALLIC BODIES
In 2019, Reynaud-Dewar took a new approach to these questions by beginning a series of polished-aluminum sculptural self-portraits. As she had for her dance videos, she established a protocol for deploying the project over time: for every new season (or thereabouts), a life-size cast is made of her body sitting on the ground, each one capturing her current haircut and choice of clothes and accessories. However, considering what I have described above, the fact that she portrays herself alone, inward-looking and self-contained (in quiet contemplation?), evokes a condition that goes beyond a record of the passing of time.

By deflecting the gaze, these self-portraits contrast with her dance videos, in which, within the tradition of emancipatory feminist imagery, the artist’s nudity is deployed as a gesture of empowerment. But like the videos, the sculptures mark the repetition of gestures (the act of casting her body, a repertoire of movements) performed in different contexts. Both series of works mark time by the presence of the body in institutional contexts (museums). However, one, functioning as a mise en abîme, represents the artist’s body nude and in motion in spaces closed to the public, whereas the other represents the artist’s clothed body, immobile and acting as an index of her presence.

Despite these differences, the poses in the sculptures are reminiscent of the “less-danced” moments in the videos. In addition, the representation of her body in polished aluminum harkens back to the silvery-grey-painted body found in the dance videos in the series TEETH GUMS MACHINE FUTURE SOCIETY (2017–18) as well as evoking gelatin silver process photography. Thus, she exposes another abstraction by representing her body in metallic grey: historically, the absence of colour in an image was the mark of realism, whereas colour imagery was associated with fantasy and the imaginary.

These works represent the artist absorbed, disengaged from her surroundings, and even
from the potential presence of an audience. The poses are anonymous, even banal: they are minimal variations on the theme of “woman sitting,” released from all narrative or psychological context. Reynaud-Dewar represents herself as a (silver) screen onto which one can project any emotion or affect. Thus, these works can be read as anti-monuments; rather than being imposed on the space that they occupy and the audience that surrounds them, they propose a discreet, almost accidental, co-presence in their environment that is completely at odds with the idea of hierarchy traditionally associated with monuments.24

These solitary figures, as well as those in the dance videos, offer a counterpoint to the approach adopted in Rome, November 1st and 2nd, 1975 (and other of Reynaud-Dewar’s projects, such as Teaching as Teenagers [2012–13], Beyond the Land of Minimal Possessions [2017], and Gruppo Petrolio [2020, ongoing], which are more specifically oriented toward participatory collaboration). This fluctuating back-and-forth between the individual and the collective is at the core of Reynaud-Dewar’s work – and of identity itself. It is manifested by the fluidity between abstraction and concretization, between chimera and object. There is something ghostly in Reynaud-Dewar’s approach: the past haunts the present, her body haunts the spaces of museums, and she wears these spaces like a habit, occupies them, infects them, blends herself with them, and becomes sculpture.  

Mark Lanctôt, Curator

**BIOGRAPHY**

Born in La Rochelle in 1975, Lili Reynaud-Dewar lives and works in Grenoble. She is a professor at the Haute École d’art et de design Genève. She has had solo exhibitions in Europe, North America, and Australia; in addition, her work has appeared in countless group exhibitions and is included in numerous collections, including those of the Centre Pompidou, MoMA, the Pinault Collection, the Centre national des arts plastiques, the Capc Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, and several Fonds régionaux d’art contemporain (regional funds for contemporary art in France). She is the recipient of the 2021 Prix Marcel Duchamp.

As the art historian Catherine Grant has noted, “Rather than an appropriation strategy that privileges irony and distance, the action of a fan focuses on attachment and desire.” In Catherine Grant, “Fans of Feminism: Re-writing Histories of Second-wave Feminism in Contemporary Art,” Oxford Art Journal 34, No. 2 (2011): 265–86, doi: 10.1093/oxartj/kcr021.

Pasolini had previously been invoked in Reynaud-Dewar’s Cléda’s Chairs (2010).

This notion is borrowed from the discussion about the work of Nancy Brooks Brody by Lex Morgan Lancaster in Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2022), 51.

Pasolini’s murder still retains a whiff of conspiracy. Pelosi, who died of cancer in 2017, several times changed his version of the facts surrounding Pasolini’s death, and evidence that surfaced over time confirming that other people were involved and that it’s possible that the murder was a hit.

Uncompleted, Petrolio was only published seventeen years after Pasolini’s death. It would be the subject of another of Reynaud-Dewar’s projects, the collective Gruppo Petrolio.

They will also be compiled and published in the form of an artist book for the exhibition at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (MAC).


Reynaud-Dewar also mentions Hannah Wilke and Adrian Piper as references in the development of her approach.

Conversation with the author.


The videos are produced in a few shooting sessions, without a team, script, or storyboard.


It goes without saying that the advent and subsequent hegemony of information technologies (continuous information flows, omnipresent social networks) have exacerbated the phenomenon.

From this tradition, Reynaud-Dewar mentions Hannah Wilke as an influence, but we could also mention the work of Valextra, among others.

See also the store mannequins presented in the exhibition Lady to Fox (2018).

For example, the movie The Wizard of Oz: Kansas is in black and white, and Oz is in colour.

This anti-monumentality is also expressed by the absence of a pedestal (or a platform of any sort) and by the horizontality of the composition.
LIST OF WORKS

Live Through That?! (The 5th Dimension, Chicago), 2013
Single channel video, colour, silent, 5 min 14 s
Courtesy the artist and Layr, Vienna

Live Through That?! Green (New Museum, New York), 2014
Single channel video, colour, silent, 5 min 56 s

Live Through That?! Green (New Museum, New York), 2014
Single channel video, colour and black and white, silent, 6 min 3 s

Live Through That?! Pink (New Museum, New York), 2014
Single channel video, colour, silent, 5 min 18 s

Live Through That?! White (New Museum, New York), 2014
Single channel video, colour and black and white, silent, 5 min 14 s

My Epidemic, Small Modest Bad Blood Opera, 1
(Carlo Scarpa Apartment, Calle degli avvocati), Black and White, 2015
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 4 min 24 s

My Epidemic, Small Modest Bad Blood Opera, 2
(Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Palazzo), Black and White, 2015
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 3 min 18 s

My Epidemic, Small Modest Bad Blood Opera, 3
(Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Biblioteca), Black and White, 2015
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 3 min 59 s

My Epidemic, Small Modest Bad Blood Opera, 4
(Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Mari Botta Lobby), Black and White, 2015
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 2 min 33 s

My Epidemic (Teaching Bjarne Melgaard’s Class), 2015
Single channel video, colour, silent, 6 min 59 s
Collection of the Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris

I Sing the Body Electric (Arsenale, Venice), 2016
Single channel video, colour, silent, 6 min 57 s
Private collection

I Sing the Body Electric (Padiglione Centrale, Venice), 2016
Single channel video, colour, silent, 7 min 31 s

Monsieur Kiesler I Am Wearing Your Endless House, How Does It Suit Me?, 2016
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 9 min 2 s
Collection of the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna

Safe Space 1, 2016
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 15 min 55 s

Safe Space 2, 2016
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 13 min 9 s

Safe Space 3, 2016
Single channel video, black and white, silent, 18 min 5 s

TEETH GUMS MACHINE FUTURE SOCIETY
(Le Musée Absent, Wiels Brussels), 2017
Single channel video, colour, silent, 16 min 2 s

TEETH GUMS MACHINE FUTURE SOCIETY
(One Body Two Souls, Clearing Brussels), 2017
Single channel video, colour, silent, 4 min 34 s

TEETH GUMS MACHINES FUTURE SOCIETY
(Kunstverein in Hamburg), 2017-18
Single channel video, colour, silent, 3 min 55 s

TEETH GUMS MACHINES FUTURE SOCIETY
(Museion Bolzano), 2017-18
Single channel video, colour, silent, 6 min 3 s

TEETH GUMS MACHINES FUTURE SOCIETY
(Vleeshal Middleburg), 2017-18
Single channel video, colour, silent, 6 min 25 s

I Want All of the Above to Be the Sun (Dancing with Myself, Venice), 2018
Single channel video, colour, silent, 15 min 39 s
Pinault Collection

Lady to Fox, 2018
Single channel video, colour, silent, 6 min 28 s
Private collection

I Want All of the Above to Be the Sun (If the Snake, Okayama), 2019
Single channel video, colour, silent, 46 min 12 s
SU Collection

I Want All of the Above to Be the Sun (Villa Medici), 2019
Single channel video, colour, silent, 30 min 9 s
Collection Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, n° 2022.8.1

Oops... I think I lost my lighter somewhere on the ground. Could someone please be so kind to come here and help me find it? (Clearing, Brooklyn), 2019
Single channel video, colour, silent, 4 min 21 s

Untitled, 2019
Aluminum, 76 × 97 × 66 cm
Private collection, Berlin

Rome, November 1st and 2nd, 1975, 2019–21
Four-channel video installation, color, sound, 35 min 1 s

I Want All of The Above to Be the Sun (Camila), 2020
Single channel video, colour, silent, 5 min 58 s

I Want All of the Above to Be the Sun (Tabakalera), 2020
Single channel video, colour, silent, 26 min 48 s

Untitled (Autumn 2019), 2020
Aluminum, 140 × 50 × 72 cm
Private collection, Vienna

Untitled (Winter 2022), 2022 (cover and page 8)
Aluminum, 134 × 49 × 78 cm
Collection of the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal. Purchased with the support of the Collectors Symposium 2022, National Bank Private Banking 1859

Untitled (Winter 2022), 2022
Aluminum, 121 × 92 × 75 cm
Courtesy the artist and Layr, Vienna

Untitled (Summer 2022), 2022
Aluminum, 60 × 90 × 80 cm
Collection SûArts, Vienna

I Want All of the Above to Be the Sun (MAC Montreal), 2023
Single channel video, details unavailable at time of print

Unless otherwise indicated, the videos are courtesy the artist and CLEARING, New York/Brussels/Los Angeles & Layr, Vienna
EDUCATION

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Artist’s talk by Lili Reynaud-Dewar
Tuesday, May 16, 2023, at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, at 6 p.m. (in French)

Walkthrough
With Mark Lanctôt, Curator of the exhibition
Visit in French: Wednesday, May 24, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.
Visit in English: Wednesday, May 31, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.

Viewpoints
Lili Reynaud-Dewar as seen by Marie Claire Forté (in French)
Wednesday, June 21, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.
Lili Reynaud-Dewar as seen by Luca Caminati and Frédéric Moffet (in English)
Wednesday, June 28, 2023, at 5:30 p.m.

ART WORKSHOPS

En famille at the MAC: for the entire family (4 and older) ($)  
On Saturdays, June 3, July 8, August 5, and September 2, 2023  
On Fridays, July 7 and August 4, 2023

Creative Moments: Workshops for adults ($)  
On Saturday, June 10, 2023. From 1:30 to 4 p.m.

Tandem Workshops / Group Visits
School groups (free)  
Community groups (free)  
Adult groups ($)  
From May 24 to September 17, 2023

ART MEDIATOR IN THE GALLERIES

An art mediator is present in the galleries to exchange with visitors on the issues raised by the exhibition and answer questions. 
Bilingual interactive tours are offered without reservation during these periods (included with admission).

SCHEDULE

Thursdays and Fridays  
Presence of an art mediator from 4 to 7 p.m.  
Interactive tour at 5:30 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays  
Presence of an art mediator from 2 to 5 p.m.  
Interactive tour at 3 p.m.

Tours are also offered with a reservation for groups of 10 or more.  
Reservations and information at 514 847-6253 / reservation.education@macm.org

Please visit the Musée’s website for more details and other events to come.

ACCESSIBILITY

Many resources are available online, as well as on-site at the Museum, and include large-print texts and an audiodescribed tour.
www.macm.org/accessible