

The Kitchen

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Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin: *Vomitorium*
February 22–March 22, 2020
Queenslab, 1611 Cody Street, Ridgewood, New York

Opening Reception: February 22, 7–10pm
Gallery Hours: Wednesday–Sunday, 1–7pm

Vomitorium is a tragicomic reflection on the history of metatheatres from religious ritual to livestreaming. Part of Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin’s ongoing analysis of madness and mimesis in drag and trans performance, this video installation is their largest-scale project to date, spewed via massive projections across Queenslab’s expansive open space.

The work traces the titular structure from its origin as the passageways through which crowds entered and exited Greek amphitheaters to one of its current manifestations as socially reflexive architecture built for Instagram selfie-stories. In both settings, people watch each other watching each other before, during, or after the act of bingeing and purging media. *Vomitorium* additionally uses illuminated commentary to map a lineage that spans from the contemporary digital emphasis on comment, fandom, remake, labels, and frames to ancient theatre via the chorus and religion.

Within *Vomitorium*, Bernstein and Rubin transition between genre, gender, and age. Playing through multiple tropes, eras, and personae, the artists juxtapose baroque complexity with the currently fashionable metaphysics of presence, transparency, and immersion. Bernstein plays Onkos. Named after the tumorous masks of Greek tragedy, the festering Onkos narrates and annotates performance documentation in a degenerative feedback loop. In contrast to Onkos, Rubin plays the cherub-like Eroses, the gods of love and sexual desire—Eros, Anteros, Anti-Eros, and Seraphim. These sparring angels demonstrate a rivalrous split in love between cruelty and tenderness, virtue and vice.

As in Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*, where the protagonist listens to old recordings of himself, in *Vomitorium*, Bernstein and Rubin replay on loop their own digitally mediated grief as it is transmuted and transposed into their embodiment of Greek archetypes. Rubin, often appearing nude within the videos, applies the Beckettian theme of “self”-reflection across increments of age to the context of gender transitioning. But as he enacts the Eroses personae, even the so-called purest vision of self-exposure—the nude—appears buried under layers of performativity, becoming another alienated and impersonal presentation. At the same time, masks, camp, and artifice become intimate, immediate, and revealing.

The expanded installation at Queenslab features a miniature stadium made of screens and risers, as well as a movie poster by artist Nick Mauss.

This exhibition is curated by Tim Griffin and Matthew Lyons.

Notes About Exhibited Work

VOMITORIUM, 2020 (4-channel video; 3 hrs.)

Eris and Harmonia lead Onkos through a memory palace made up of broken automated tropes from the history of metatheatre, as he attempts to cease looping through the stages of grief. Eris and Harmonia teasingly reveal stage sets and show off their stagecraft to Onkos in an adaptation of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *The Impresario*. Eros and Anteros stage interludes from Theocritus and Ben Jonson to Edna St. Vincent Millay and Heiner Müller. Anti-Eros attempts to teach Onkos to eject himself by negating all forms of gazing, but Onkos relapses by binging (and purging) on Metatron, yet another Caravaggiati angel.

Vomitorium screens at Queenslab from 1–4pm and 4–7pm.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Onkos (ὄγκος): Named after the tumorous masks of Greek tragedy, Onkos narrates and annotates performance documentation in a degenerative feedback loop. He mirrors the navel-gazing of a culture that constantly re-views and revues—where preview precedes essence.

Eros (ἔρως) & Anteros (ἀντέρως): Rival mimes in the Stade du Miroir engage in a mimetic rivalry between vice and virtue; cruelty and tenderness.

Eris (Ἔρις,) & Harmonia (Ἄρμονία): Commentating sirens, pupils, influencers, muses, who guide Onkos in a debate between theater-y immersion and theatrical alienation.

Anti-Eros (ἄντ' -ἔρως): Dark angel who replaces the panoptic gaze (and the critique) as the loci of subjectivity with Ejectivity, a vacant, automated watching towards death.

Metatron (מֵטַטְרוֹן): The last last angel, who re-performs the final devalued revelation.

Production Credits

Onkos: Felix Bernstein
The Erotes: Gabe Rubin
Costumes: Martha Tuttle and Sophie Kay
Director of Photographer: Bayley Sweitzer
Production Design: Marie de Testa
Choreographer: Greg Zuccolo
Gaffers: Jay Warrior and Ryan McCluney
Grip: Diego Llaca Ojinaga
Production Assistant: Carola Pellegrino
Art Design: George DuPont
Scenic Design: Emma de Kooning-Villeneuve

Makeup Design: Paige Fallon
Musicians: Michael Foster and Joe Moffett
Sound Mix: Andrew Barker and Liam Fox O'Brien
Sound Engineer: Leila Bordreuil
Animators: Courtney Dreher, Dara Hamidi, Kiara Doerr, Greyson Horst
Editors: Emanuele Michetti and Michael P. Conroy
Production Manager: Ben Heyer
Technical Director: Zack Tinkelman

Special thanks to Katie McCarty, David Lewis, Marianna Ellenberg, Ken Okiishi, Nick Mauss, Leah Newman, Caitlin Wood, Jay Sanders, and Greta Hartenstein

About Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin

Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin are New York-based artists working across theater, film, poetry, and digital media. *Vomitorium* is part of their ongoing analysis of madness and mimesis in drag and trans performance.

They began developing these personae for *Bieber Bathos Elegy* at the Whitney Museum in 2016 and in *Folie à Deux* at David Lewis Gallery in 2018. Their work together has also been presented at MOCA Los Angeles, Issue Project Room, Anthology Film Archives, the Drawing Center, Reena Spaulings Fine Arts, and Pilar Corrias Gallery.

Funding Credits

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About The Kitchen

The Kitchen is one of New York City's most forward-looking nonprofit spaces, showing innovative work by emerging and established artists across disciplines. Our programs range from dance, music, performance, and theater to video, film, and art, in addition to literary events, artists' talks, and lecture series. Since its inception in 1971, The Kitchen has been a powerful force in shaping the cultural landscape of this country and has helped launch the careers of many artists who have gone on to worldwide prominence.

Facebook: facebook.com/TheKitchenNYC

Twitter: twitter.com/TheKitchen_NYC

Instagram: instagram.com/TheKitchen_NYC

About The Kitchen at Queenslab

Since fall 2019, The Kitchen has presented programming at Queenslab, creating opportunities for artists outside the Chelsea building in which we are based (512 West 19th Street). Through The Kitchen at Queenslab initiative, we present residencies and events here in Ridgewood developed specifically for this space.

The Queenslab building is wheelchair accessible, and an ADA compliant restroom is available. All bathrooms are gender inclusive.

Press Contact

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