# DORA BUDOR

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# Desperate Things

*Boško Blagojević on the work of* Dora Budor

What does a thing know of its own production? The language here isn't mine, but rather comes from the title of a recent work by the New York–based Croatian artist Dora Budor (b. 1984). I've turned her title into a question. The work that it refers to (*What Does a Thing Know of Its Own Production*, 2016) is a kind of sculptural relief incorporating a disarray of materials: laboratory glassware, cement, silicone tubing, rocks, resin, soil and other similarly brown, earthly colored things making their way into what looks like topsoil taken from some far-off, dystopic junkyard. All of this is wall-bound and framed in an elegant stained walnut — a sculpture in the drag of painting. Most prominent in the display is a large scrap of prosthetic flesh, a blooming wart in the lower right-hand side of the muddy stream. Reading the materials list for the work you might learn that the flesh, unconvincing but evocative in form, is zombie skin taken from the schlocky, mostly derided (but commercially successful) sci-fi horror film *Underworld: Evolution* (2006). Like much of Budor's work, the piece is an example of her reanimation of Hollywood film props sourced from memorabilia and collectables dealers. So often central to these wall-bound and free-standing sculptures, various special effects props and architectural models previously used in film productions are acquired by the artist and elaborated into something quite different than (but aware of, in touch with) their former screen destinies. The composition — which is based on a heart-lung machine diagram, a medical device used to sustain the body during open-heart surgery — calls to mind familiar systems and narratives. In it we see an ecology shaped by human endeavor, the folly of technological ambition and the tension between the organic and inorganic. But what to make of the skin prop's past life and its relation to its present reality?

At New Galerie in Paris in early 2015, Budor presented *Mental Parasite Retreat 1* (2014), by now one of her more well-known works. A freestanding sculpture, it consists of a cinema chair reupholstered with silicone and implanted with a prosthetic cyborg chest in its center. Within it, an unseen animatronic device creates a subtle motion. The chest prop is from the American science-fiction film *Surrogates* (2009) — a thriller, starring Bruce Willis, based on a comic book about a near future in which people live vicariously through immersive, remote-controlled robot avatars. For a film with an eighty-million-dollar production budget, the leading man's prosthetic that Budor has buried in her work looks rather modest — the kind of thing you might expect to find in a high-end costume shop. But herein lies a truth about film production's increasing immateriality. The special-effects prop is more and more akin to a rough sketch in a film's genealogy, a kind of material starting point that's later refined and sutured into the final work during the heavy lifting of digital postproduction. These props, then, share a common ramshackle materiality: they are things that

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were never meant to persist in their thingness. Before they find their way into Budor's sculptures — that is, in production and on the screen — they are objects (or lenses) through which we see and make sense of the cinematic narrative. In both design and manufacture, the props are intended to be photographed and discarded, to be incorporated fully into the shadow world of the movie screen as images without a referent, what Derrida might call *ghosts*. Outside of the image they become something else. Like the cinema chair itself, usually cloaked in the darkness of the theater, the prop referent of these images often relates to our own bodies — which, again like the cinema chair, we readily use without noticing or contemplating. It's a fact not lost on the artist, and certainly not unrelated to her process. In her operation of dislocation, she renders her source material awkwardly incomplete and highly conspicuous. Rather than simply collecting them as bits of Hollywood fiction, Budor seems to instantiate a desire to inhabit their decrepit insufficiencies. To understand something of the use trajectory of these props, imagine, for a moment, the desperate world of the unnoticed throwaway — the plastic fork shoved into your Chinese takeout bag, the disposable headphones handed to you by a distracted flight attendant high on Xanax.

If you were to try and identify a definitive trait of experience under Western technocratic capitalism during the past decade, you could do worse than talk about images. Images, in a sense, are the things that bind individual experience most closely to the increasingly networked economies of surveillance and exchange that shepherd us through daily life. They are the postproduction of the everyday, what sutures the rough sketches of our lived reality into the sensible narratives from which we derive the pleasure and purpose of our public selves. In this regard, the digital image has firmly ensconced itself in the constitution of post-Internet selfhood. To be a person today, especially a person of a certain age or generation, is to project images of yourself onto the world — at least that seems to be the case for now. If we accept this assertion, its dialogic extension becomes one in which experience is increasingly guided by the future point at which it becomes an image. Much of Budor's output over the past few years has focused on several related ideas of projection. In many works, she enacts a kind of reversal of the material film prop's projection into the phantom image narratives of Hollywood fantasy, taking them out of this orbit and reinserting them into the dense materiality of her sculptures. Likewise, she models Hollywood's forward projection in the imagined futures of the science-fiction genre in many of her works.

Consider Budor's photographic suite *When the Sick Rule the World*, *Conference of Psychotic Women* and *Allergic to the 20th Century* (all 2015). In these three works we see a type of cool but deeply saturated shallow-focus photography that could have been lifted from *The Bourne Identity* or a similar thriller. The photographs actually are inspired by Robert Altman's *3 Women* (1977) — all feature a single figure in the shape of a tall, slender female. She wears unremarkable streetwear in gray, black and white. Her body is youthful and attractive, always alone, and moves through nondescript urban environs. Her face, however, is at a disjuncture with her body, inundated with patently artificial wrinkles, the battered skin of a woman deep into advanced age; her hair, likewise, is a strung-out and dusty gray. In the photographs, she seems like the target of surveillance. She is self-aware as she moves through the city, in some instances warily studying the landscape about her, though never locking eyes with the camera that peruses her.

In 2015, Budor's work was included in "Inhuman," a group exhibition at the Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany. Curated by Susanne Pfeffer, the museum's director, the show presented the work of a number of artists who imagine the human figure diverging from socially or biologically determined destinies into sometimes monstrous formations. Budor presented several works in the show, not least of which was a new series titled "The Architect." These were screen-like wall works made from metal frames and semitransparent silicone sheets. On the silicone sheets were compositions of SFX transfer scars used in the making of *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), the sequel to the fantasy war film *300* (2007). Budor further adorned these screens with her own electrical fuse boxes, stainless-steel conduit, silicone-cast wiring and electrical fittings — all stuff that anchored each work to the architecture of the museum's exhibition halls, making them prosthetic outgrowths of some internal biology of the historic German institution. The resulting forms, with their cold stainless steel and spills of fake blood, call to mind some transitional fantasy tech hybrid between a flat-screen television, a malfunctioning light box and a medical gurney — all devices before which (and on top of) human bodies come to rest, to look, or to die. The body scars from the *300* sequel push the work toward a weird, disjunctive untimeliness. The original *300* film, in all of its vulgar American chauvinism, captured rather distinctly the bellicose and fascistic energies of a collectively hallucinating nation at the tail end of the Bush era — and it reaped in box office revenue close to half a billion dollars for its success in playing to the national mood.

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Its deflated sequel, on the other hand, was a more costly and less successful spectacle. It had much less traction at the moment of its making; it lacked the overwhelming vulgarity that made the original such an odious marker of its time. The scars in Budor's work were created to adorn the porny, muscle-bound fantasy bodies for which the *300* franchise is known. Now on her hospital flatscreens, these artificial scars evoke that body in absentia — but is it the human body in the cinema hall or the bodies portrayed on the screen? In a way, Budor's strategy mimes the work of the prostheses that form the bedrock of cinema's special effects: she evokes the image's insufficient material origin in order to turn back the clock and allow its chromosomal blueprint to evolve into something divergent from its original screen-based destiny.

Though the *300* films are fictions under the rubric of fantasy, most of Budor's film references, both in her work and in interviews the artist has given, are science fiction. The two genres are first cousins of course, sharing a common trait in their projections through time. While fantasy war porn like *300* projects post-9/11 American jingoism into some imagined antiquity, it says more about the moment of its making than about anything that came before or after it. That fact resonates distinctly today, on the verge of an American election in which the political discourse from the right continually gestures toward a glorious past that must be restored. Science fiction also performs this type of projection, but in the other direction, into the future. Like fantasy, it fixes the work of fiction to the era of its origin by articulating that era's fantasies about the future. This temporal displacement, so often central to both genres, is a familiar current in Budor's work.

An important motif relating to projection in the artist's practice — both methodologically and materially — is the architectural model. Models have appeared in Budor's work numerous times, often with organic-seeming outgrowths that frame her cinema relics with a rusty patina. In *Slow Ticking of a Callous Mind* (2015), we see one such architectural model depicting a city rooftop used in the production of *Batman Returns* (1992), an urban fantasy adventure trapped in a kind of permanent night, in which Batman leaps across such dilapidated structures and restores order to a world where a failing state cannot. Turned on its side, the model's triangular geometry is made into something of an arrow sign, the referential becoming graphic. The beautifully weathered and intricate details of the model invite a leaning-in on part of the viewer — a reverse projection. This work is all about size: the size of the sculpture in relation to the size of its beholder, the virtual shrinking it seems to solicit when apprehended as a set ready to be inhabited. Captured on motion-picture film, this same rooftop is transposed by light and scaled beyond its celluloid confines to create a giant cinema image. Through the superstructure of film editing and superimposition, the material becomes virtual in terms of its limitless potential for scaling and projection. Budor's sculpture seems to challenge us: Can we, personally saddled as we are with all of the technological powers of outward projection and reach, do the reverse?

In the spring of 2016, Budor presented an ambitious new work at Ramiken Crucible in New York. Here, her former hobbyhorse strategies of projection, reanimation and prosthetics were set in a kind of tense, bullying proximity to each other. The exhibition "Ephemerol," named after the experimental drug in David Cronenberg's movie *Scanners* (1981), featured a single work whose title is too long to print here. Budor had scaled her work up for the show, moving closer to the grandeur of the cinematic image and, maybe for the first time, requiring viewers to circle around the work in order to fully experience it. Not having read about the piece before I went to see the show, my first few minutes with it were lost in a kind of hazy abstraction. Because the work occupied so much of the gallery's modest floor space, I had failed to see the (later) clearly discernible face on the giant head she had created out of semitransparent resin — an inversion (mold versus cast) of something that appears in Cronenberg's film. Inside this mold, I also failed to make sense of the undulating forms that mimic some '70s utopian furniture design, literally turned on its side. The seating modules inside were, in their original design, intended for human bodies, of course — they constitute a living environment, however reconfigured it might be here. Consequently, the piece made me aware of my own bodily envelope like only a recent doctor's visit had. Later, I remember reading something in which a New York critic had challenged Budor's work on the grounds that, while interesting, it perhaps did not surpass its cultish subject matter (Cronenberg's film). Finally, I thought, it was in this critic's slight misreading that the artist meets a challenge worthy of her abilities. Rather than reshaping the film narratives that inspire her, she was attempting, rather, to reverse the operations of the cinema apparatus, that which fashions so much of our longing for the transformation of the present.

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# *DORA BUDOR*
# *by Noah Barker*

Dora Budor has a reality complex. Perhaps it's a symptom of her cinephile youth spent wandering a mental "wilderness of elsewheres," as Robert Smithson describes the mind on movies.[1] In further evaluation we might query Lacan: does the gaze engrave? In other words, as an image in the eye, does an object impress permanently upon vision? And if that object were so frequently film, "wrapping [Budor] in uncertainty," as Smithson continues, how might the world continue to appear? For a proper diagnosis we should observe the artist's contagion in which cantankerous objects formed by the mode of spectacular production infect consciousness, reined by empirical reality, with sublimated specificity.

Along these lines, the hall of *The Architect's Plan, His Contagion and Sensitive Corridors* (2015) bore a prosthetic infrastructure fixed with scars from *300: Rise of an Empire*. Criss-crossing electrical panels and broaching the wall, silicone intestines run alongside metal piping. The size of large televisions, the wounded planes recall a healed Lucio Fontana. Mara Hoberman noted in *Artforum*, April 2015, the perversion of "screens of skin" made from the false skin on-screen. Yet their surgical grade stainless steel framing mildly deters Kristevan abjection: closer to a cadaver of the cinematic illusion than its corpse. Certainly they are specimens of violence: on, towards, and of the screen. As such, perversity is not found in the manufactured wound, but in the act of grafting the detritus of spectacle into real space, doubling the *suture* of cinema. Originally anatomical, suture, a conceptual transplant of Lacanian psychology into film theory, describes the outside spectator filling an absent subject signified by the frame, so as to close the fourth wall. It is the cinematic mechanism that wraps the wandering Budor in elsewheres. The atopia of the cinema long ago replaced the utopia of the future. Seated, looking out at the cultural landscape, it's no secret that blockbuster science fiction has inherited the role of proposing other worlds, once the pursuit of bestselling utopian novels in the nineteenth century. It's these productions Budor prefers to exhume, resuscitating their unsettled remains.

In *Mental Parasite Retreat 1* (2014) Budor plays Dr. Frankenstein, integrating the 'Surrogates' chest plate worn by Bruce Willis into the backrest of a pale fleshy cinema seat. What was a fabric cushion has been lifecast as silicone substitute, utilizing the transformative technologies of Hollywood makeup reserved for mutant beings and Benjamin Buttons. The chest expands and retracts: lungs or motor? As a new nightmare, the chair is less chair than appears. Though without the cameo object, as a seemingly benign element of theater architecture, the seat situates the body in the movie machine to suffer the duel violence of ritualized architectural space and the dislocating suture. In its fleshly state, the work, with others of Budor, reconstitutes existing orders of determina-

tion: the intrusions of a body in architecture and upon screen are exchanged for the infectious relations of surface and structure becoming premediated flesh. Symbolically, flesh is liberated from cognitive constraints, evoking the body horror of David Cronenberg, who attempts to depict the "independence of the body, relative to the mind, and the difficulty of the mind accepting what that revolution might entail."[2]
Analogous to the fractious flesh, the artifact gains autonomy living within a new illusion, free from its circulated image. As subordinate, the body yields action to thought, which in turn is regulated by empirical reality and its governing principle of *sese conservare*. However, in absorbing and amplifying the dialectical specificity of the captured, projected, and consumed prop, an original for what was only intended as simulacrum, the new illusion sublimates this principle of self preservation, in which a subject individuates itself from the world by inflecting the world with identity.

In the continuous vein of corporealization, the cast iron radiators of *Spring* (2015) feature blistered spans of horror movie sourced flesh swallowing the detritus of Sci-Fi establishing shots: warehouse, garage, living unit. Yet, for the difference between the films from which the model buildings are sourced [*Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), *The Fifth Element* (1997), *Batman Returns* (1992)], the scale structures are remarkably similar in industrial aesthetic and patina. The movies are from an era just before the industry wide transition into the primarily digital. Such productions, in fixing the worlds they postulated in images, left behind small (very small) cities as fragments of the memories they became. As temporality impedes, the nineties were long enough ago to have forgotten its fictions. And where was the artist when these films were released? In Zagreb, enduring civil war. Like Johnny Mnemonic, who gave up his childhood memories to become a human hard drive, Budor filled her early life with foreign data made on a soundstage 6,000 miles away. Unspecific memories of uncertain futures forgotten en-mass by a global audience. A population of Johnny Mnemonics would really be closer to an army of *Blade Runner* replicants. At the end of Ridley Scott's director's cut, Harrison Ford, having dreamt of a mythical horned horse earlier, glances an origami unicorn on the floor beside the android he's been hunting. He simultaneously acknowledges his cognition as constructed and a solidarity with the female replicant. Likewise, Budor impregnates our reality, made fertile by spectacle, with its own negation: a fragment of a shared mirage materializes to reveal common comatose, as Smithson wrote, "somewhere at the bottom of (our) memory are the remains of all the films (we've) ever seen."[3]

1. Robert Smithson and Jack D. Flam, *Atopia of Cinema in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996).
2. David Cronenberg, "Interview with David Cronenberg," *Mondo 2000*, 2000. Available at http://www.davidcronenberg.de/mond2000.html.
3. Robert Smithson and Jack D. Flam, *ibid.*

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Interview

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# THE WAY THEY HAVE SEX IS TO CUDDLE, THEN THIS STRANGE ECTOPLASM

BY KATHY NOBLE

Kathy Noble met with Dora Budor—an artist of Croatian origin based in New York—to discuss the influence of cinema on her work, interweaving the staged fiction of film with lived experience: ranging from cyberpunk and symbiogenesis, to the endless worries and politics of being a human body and mind, via physical scars, infection, illness, ageing, the survival of our psyche, and the body's lymphatic relationship to physical environments—all of which manifest in Budor's work. Discussing ideas related to science fiction—from the disturbing visions of David Cronenberg, to popular Hollywood blockbusters—they consider cinema as a space in which alternative worlds can be constructed to form a social commentary that addresses contemporaneous issues and anxieties; from ecological apocalypse to the evolution of artificial intelligence. And situated this in a wider consideration of the affect of conscious and unconscious fantasy in relation to "real" experience.

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# LIQUID COMES OUT OF DIFFERENT PARTS OF THEIR BODIES

**Dora Budor** (b. 1984 in Croatia) lives and works in New York. Her work considers the representation of emotional and physical experience within the ideological subtexts that occur in mainstream cinema—particularly within Hollywood production methods, where ideas transfer between different states of materialization, fictionalization and digitalization. Budor makes sculptures and architectural interventions, which are often built around screen-used cinema props, special effects, and production methods, and employ the capital of cinematic strategies of affect. She approaches this as an act of "reanimation": acknowledging their fictional histories, while radically recontextualizing them in a second life. Budor has exhibited extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe. Recent exhibitions include "The Architect's Plan, His Contagion and Sensitive Corridors", at New Galerie, Paris; "Believe You Me" with 247365, New York and "Flat Neighbors" at Rachel Uffner, New York; and group exhibitions such as "Inhuman" (2015) at the Fridericianum, Kassel. Recently she participated in panel discussions at Judd Foundation, Art Basel Miami Salon and the Whitney Museum of American Art. She is also a winner of the Rema Hort Emerging Art Award (2014) and is co-director of the project space Grand Century in New York. Budor has a forthcoming solo exhibition at Swiss Institute, New York (opening June 23, 2015).

Opposite - *Mental Parasite Retreat 1*, 2014.
Courtesy: the artist and New Galerie, Paris

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**KATHY NOBLE**

When did you start working with film, or the movies, as a subject, and why?

**DORA BUDOR**

My interest began when I was very young. My grandfather was an actor for television and theatre in Yugoslavia where I grew up. And my grandmother was one of the first female television directors. My parents were both painters and would take me to see art house films all the time. I remember watching Fellini's and Bergman's films when I was about six, and being totally unable to understand them.

**K N**

Did you enjoy them?

**D B**

I enjoyed them, but I didn't get them properly. I remember really loving *Amarcord* (1973). I could relate to it because the characters were insane and loving at the same time. They reminded me of my family where everyone had their own very peculiar story. The scene where crazy uncle Teo climbs up the tree and screams "*Voglio una donna!*" ("I want a woman!"), and then the people from the asylum march up the ladder to return him to the asylum. "We are all mad at times," sighs his brother afterwards. My grandad would smoke 3 packs of cigarettes per day, and there were always ashes in the really delicious meals he would prepare for hours. He wrote poetry, and when he was 65 he ended up becoming a general in the Yugoslavian war. He taught me how to shoot like a sniper, too! My grandma liked to drink a lot; she was kind of a wild one. And my parents were "normal," though not at all normal in comparison with all the other families from my school. I remember when my peers saw my dad digging through furniture and garbage on the street looking for some old etchings; I was so embarrassed that I cried afterward: "I just wish my parents worked in a bank and were normal!" I began to go to film festivals when I was a teenager, but the blockbuster industry was considered very trashy.

**K N**

But your work deals with these very clichéd popular movies.

**D B**

I did watch some blockbusters, but when I moved to the US seven years ago my friend took me to the cinema. The experience was radically different from going to the cinema in Europe. In the States people got involved in it as a kind of public event. Ten friends together, eating popcorn and screaming at the characters on the screen. It felt so different than the solitary art cinema experience I was used to.

**K N**

Yes, that's true! I had that experience in a cinema in LA; the audience was so excited and so vocal. Like a mass, communal experience. The repressed English person in me was really confused.

**D B**

Everyone had a strong emotional reaction and connection with what was happening in the movie. I became really excited.

**K N**

Cinema is often talked about as a collective experience.

**D B**

I also noticed how Americans referred to television and cinema much more in their daily lives than Europeans do.

**K N**

Almost as if these things are non-fiction and a part of their emotional reality?

**D B**

Yes. And it's a kind of American cultural legacy, which artists like Warhol of course tapped into. During my first week in New York I felt like I was actually living in a film set, since I knew those environments already, from watching them.

**K N**

The architectures become like characters in themselves.

**D B**

It was an extreme form of déjà vu, quite surreal. I began researching props and staging, out of pure obsession. I wanted to know how these things were structured, staged, made and performed.

**K N**

So you were seeing this dominant Western mainstream thing in reverse, as an outsider, as a kind of "other."

**D B**

In an odd way. I felt very much a foreigner. European cinematography is extremely different. So this helped me to understand American culture and the way people communicate.

**K N**

It sounds like a kind of anthropological investigation that you were making, in relationship to the tools and mechanics used in production.

**D B**

I became fascinated by the tropes that are created and repeat themselves. Blockbusters at surface level might seem entertaining and flat. But there are many different sublevels of political and social relationships or commentaries that occur in them too.

**K N**

Yes. Certain story lines are infinitely repeated and become part of the "real" social narratives we live in, though they are fictional; a kind of soft or covert indoctrination into certain politics, behaviors or patterns of thought.

**D B**

Yes, and the genres—such as sci-fi or action—reinforce this. If you look at the last few years of sci-fi blockbusters, there are specific topics that get focused on all at once. This year has been about artificial intelligence, with movies such as *Transcendence* (2014) and *Ex Machina* (2015), or *Lucy* (2014). But two or three years ago it was the imminent apocalypse and global warming destroying the world, with scenarios about what happens afterwards to rebuild humanity, such as *Snowpiercer*, *After Earth* or *Pacific Rim* (all 2013).

**K N**

So they were dealing with the actual social situations and politics of the moment, forming fictional paradigms of what's happening in reality.

**D B**

Scientists and researchers are exploring these fields via experimental and philosophical research. In film there is this wide-open playground where you can actually imagine and test out these scenarios in the most extreme form of speculation. Film enables these propositions to become a temporary reality.

**K N**

Why did you become interested in science fiction in particular—for this relationship between reality and imagination? In some ways sci-fi seems almost religious—as a form of myth making and creation of belief systems, or alternative realities.

**D B**

I loved *Blade Runner* (1982). When I was a teenager I was into cyberpunk. But the works translated into Croatian were really bizarre. Like the B or C versions of cyberpunk books. I developed an obsession with the future scenarios: who are we going to become, how are our bodies going to improve, or degrade? How will our emotions change when we become different kinds of beings? Are we still human if we gradually integrate AI into our lives? What are the limits of being a human?

**K N**

So what constitutes being a "human"? Is it our consciousness that makes us human?

**D B**

This is the question that *Transcendence* and all those AI movies are asking. But of course it is a real question for scientists working today. And various approaches appear—firstly, a fear of robots taking over humanity, becoming more evolved than us, and destroying us, in a Darwinian way. I am more interested in the idea of "symbiogenesis" that Donna Haraway wrote about in the book *When Species Meet (Posthumanities)*, 2007.

**K N**

All of her thoughts around this began in the 1980s when she wrote

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the *Cyborg Manifesto* in 1983, which was extremely radical and interweaves this all in strong socialist-feminist politics. I re-read it recently when I was writing about Lynn Hershman Leeson, who was also way ahead of her time in exploring human relationships to technology and alternate forms of "being."

**D B**

And Haraway's book *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 2003, about dogs and people's relationships in the evolution of humans, is important—where species are not pitted against one another, making it necessary to destroy in order to evolve, but things can evolve in relationship to one another. If robots or AI start existing *en masse* in the human world and become more "human," then we will need to evolve together.

**K N**

Which goes back to the question of what we consider human. Does human mean a sentient being with its own unique thought processes? In relationship to your recent work, the fact that you use props that have been created and used in films seems to fetishize these things' existence. Although you speak of being an outsider to American culture, rather than a critique this seems like a kind of love, of wanting to own a part of this industry.

**D B**

The movie memorabilia community does fetishize these objects. They all have their own provenance, based on which characters used them in which scenes. The actor touching it is digitalized and will exist forever. All have the "two" copies—their "real" physical existence and their digital existence. They have fictional histories of their own. We remember these scenes as if they exist, a kind of alternative reality, in our common hive mind.

**K N**

Well, it is then part of human history or a form of collective consciousness.

**D B**

There is also some kind of sadness around these objects. Their real-life being is never as perfect as their on-screen being. You can see chipped paint and their fakeness, or the way they have a perfect front with unfinished back, filled in with expandable foam. They are made to exist as a perfect image on screen.

**K N**

That's not very different from stage sets and theatre props. They exist as temporary images.

**D B**

When I work with them I try to reanimate them.

**K N**

Bring them back to life.

**D B**

I think a lot of my work is about reanimation.

**K N**

The relationship between the body and consciousness, or physical and psychological feelings?

**D B**

Yes. I make them actors in a new narrative. But they are still in between being alive and being dead. For example the series of works "The Architect…," 2014—which are these infested electrical wall pieces—there is some kind of life about them, because they are familiar enough that they could be part of a human body. Or the "breathing" chairs with Bruce Willis' prosthetics from the movie *Surrogates* (*Mental Parasite Retreat 1* and *2*, 2015).

**K N**

I was thinking about the rupture between the inside and the outside in your work, and what it means in terms of a physical body and a psychological body, since you are dealing with broken, wounded bodies. Is the physical rupture also a metaphor for a psychological rupture or feeling of pain?

**D B**

I often use prosthetics of scars or wounds that have been made for movies. When they are applied to an actor's skin they look believable and become real. I am interested in bodies that have histories—they change and are scarred by events we live through. The body has survived those events. These are not bodies given by nature, but engineered by existing in the world. I find scars empowering, as reminders and as "objects" that tell a story.

**K N**

They are a physical embodiment of something that was probably also psychologically traumatic.

**D B**

Yes. Among David Cronenberg's films, *Crash* relates to this in particular. And to how wounds turn into characters of their own, how the body can be ruptured and penetrated in so many different ways. Male bodies become "female" bodies via their wounds. I think it inverts the biological gender roles in some ways.

**K N**

I think a lot of Cronenberg's movies address the relationship between the mind and body, and also conscious and unconscious thought, which is played out by these openings in the body—as if the unconscious were seeping out, or penetrating into the conscious.

**D B**

Yes, parasites or things both entering your body or oozing out of your body. In his second movie *Crimes of the Future*, 1970—which is set in the future but actually looks like some Eastern European socialist country—after a catastrophic plague resulting from cosmetic products has killed the entire population of sexually mature women, there is a world of only men. The way they have sex is to cuddle, then this strange ectoplasm liquid comes out of different parts of their bodies, like a foot or a nipple.

**K N**

It sounds a little like lactating, like oozing breast milk, not necessarily sexual.

**D B**

Somewhere between breast milk and semen, and other bodily fluids. I was reading a book about viruses, *A Planet of Viruses* (2011), which discusses how the word *virus* came to exist. They were first called contagious living fluids, and afterwards we inherited the word from the Roman Empire, where it meant both the venom of a snake and the semen of a man. Which relates to the idea of the body of the film as a virus, thus both visually and in terms of narrative. Like a virus, it is "alive" in some ways, yet not completely. It replicates itself and gets spread quickly through space and people. In the same way viruses carry genes, films carry codes, information and meaning.

**K N**

Yes, and then the same constructs are reinterpreted and repeated.

**D B**

They can mutate and change, and then imbed themselves in the body of the spectator, which becomes the host. This is something Cronenberg has spoken about. These ideas inspired the works in my exhibition "The Architect's Plan, His Contagion, and Sensitive Corridors" (2015) at New Galerie. I wanted the works to somehow infect the space and spread like a disease.

**K N**

These works themselves look like infected bodies, all broken, wounded or ruptured. You are clearly drawn to a form of abjection.

**D B**

Everything was made more alive. The chairs "breathed" and you could hear this and see a slight pulsation. I like to create a tension between seduction and repulsion.

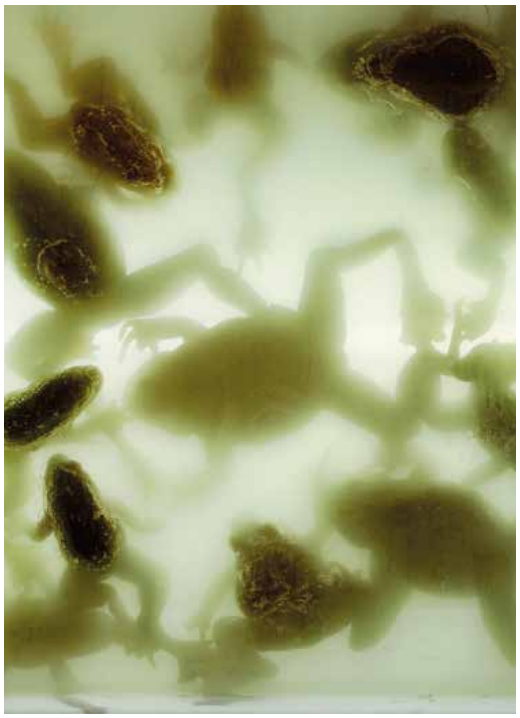
**K N**

Yes, that is what I meant by abjection. The fascination of the horror.

**D B**

I wanted to merge bodies with environment, or the architectures we live in. The objects we touch and inhabit become more like us and we become more like them. Also the relationship between the body and the infrastructure of a building—the

MOUSSE



*Kata Doksa* (detail), 2014. Courtesy: NoirmontArtProduction, Paris

pipes and electrical systems that run through it to keep it alive with water and heat.

**K N**

Architectures as living entities.

**D B**

We build our surroundings to host our bodies. I am making new sculptures for a solo exhibition at the Swiss Institute in New York that are a hybrid of arteries and veins with radiators and heating infrastructure. I was thinking about how energies travel through "bodies." The sculptures are going to come out of the floor and walls. I was also thinking about the living parts of a building. There is a kind of grime or dirt that I find very specific to New York. Which also appears in the movies—there is always dirt in the subway, or grimy shots of Chinatown, with mold and other things growing and living on the infrastructure.

**K N**

I think this kind of growth of dirt and bacteria conjures up the abjection of sci-fi or horror, where what is "natural" mutates and becomes another being, or entity, that is uncontrollable.

**D B**

Which I think relates back to Donna Haraway, because we need to live alongside these things and work with them, not fight them. Sci-fi is also very Freudian.

**K N**

Yes, completely, particularly in relationship to the hidden or unseen becoming seen or remembered—the uncanny—or the unconscious surfacing and becoming reality. What else are you working on now?

**D B**

I'm doing a series of photographs for which I hired five special effects artists to do old-age prosthetics and make-up on the same model. I asked them to create the oldest woman in the world. Their interpretation was very different.

**K N**

I feel like there is a social pressure to be repelled by our decaying bodies. As if we were watching our own slow death.

**D B**

When we went to shoot on the streets people really stared. On one level you could see that it was fake, or mask-like. But it looked almost real—which is fascinating to observe, it makes you believe in it and distrust it at the same time. Plus she had this very old face on a very young body. It really changed her behavior and how I related to her, too. It was not really a character we created or performed, but something that was psychologically very different and affecting with each version.

**K N**

What made you want to think about the physicality of ageing?

**D B**

In some ways this whole body of work is about time. Which is a very general thing of course. But how do you track time? What are these moments of degradation or that mark it?

**K N**

It's also a psychological construction of your consciousness that can change, without the system of markers we have in place.

**D B**

By tracking time using her body we changed feeling and behavior. But also—as Ted Pikul says in the film *Existenz*: "I am very worried about my body." I am very worried about my body, too!

**K N**

So am I! In that I have a hypochondriac fear of it being out of my control.

**D B**

Yes. It's not just being young. It's also being capable of things. Whilst you are "healthy" you are not a burden to others. Particularly in American society with the current health system.

**K N**

Then it becomes an extremely political site. If you are not a capable working body then you are a social problem. Which is a very frightening idea. But it also feels true in relation to recent decisions by the UK government regarding mental and physical health and disability in terms of benefits and work. You become a social burden because you are deemed a financial burden.

**D B**

Once you are 18 in America you move away from your parents. I grew up in a socialist country where my parents lived with their parents until they were 30, even though they were married. It was a little like being part of a tribe. In America it feels like survival of the fittest.

**K N**

In one sense, to be a good, successful citizen, you have to keep "control" of your body. Achieving this control of ageing, health and looks means that you will be more and achieve more, and therefore be "better." A good robot.

**D B**

Exactly. But can you imagine waking up as a 400-year-old? What would the world feel like?

**K N**

Do you know the work of Aubrey de Grey? He is a biomedical gerontologist who came to do a talk with Cécile B. Evans and me. He believes that by solving the factors of mitochondrial aging using regenerative medicine, we could live to the age of 1500 in the near future. The audience reaction was not related to the facts of the science. People were horrified by what life might be like, or feel like. Would you remember your life? Would it have any meaning? The construct of meaning to us is divided up by time, and also by marker points of achievement in that time.

**D B**

Would you become lazy and desensitized? As nothing would matter. Where is the urgency?

**K N**

Decaying and dying is frightening. Death is my biggest fear, because I can't fathom my consciousness never existing again. But the idea of going on forever is equally terrifying.

**D B**

That is what hell is. Being human forever is suffering.

Contemporary Art Review .la

# Dora Budor Interview

Feature

The stereotypical view of Hollywood is a scintillating dystopia, where the produce is 100% organic and the people are 100% plastic.

Even though she visited Los Angeles for the first time just this month (for a screening she curated at Fahrenheit), Dora Budor's works are a perfect reflection on that Hollywood real/fake hybridity. She is interested in virtually every aspect of Hollywood: its materials, ideological aspects, and how we react to them. Her carnal sculptures and installations are anthropomorphic renderings of film props and prosthetics, resembling something like physical CGI or special effects transformed into a tactile reality, her work seems to have fallen out of a blockbuster movie.

Talking on the phone with Dora about Hollywood—an industry, a phenomenon, and a place that inspires her practice—got me excited about things I have previously been reviled by: *Elysian*, blood splatters, and decaying zombie flesh.

**Char Jansen: I'm in Chinatown in Los Angeles, and you're in Chinatown in New York City. It makes me think of that John Carpenter movie, *Big Trouble in Little China*.**

Dora Budor: There is something about John Carpenter movies that really drive me nuts. I think it's the way he imposes '80s driving music onto every single scene, and then whenever anyone starts talking he just lowers the volume. It's like there's a radio playing next to your head all the time…

**CJ: Lol. I guess I was thinking about that peculiar exchange of culture that happens between Hollywood and Eastern film production companies.**

DB: One of my favorite movies last year was *Snowpiercer*. It's a Korean-Hollywood production of a feature film by Joon-ho Bong, who made it after finding this French graphic novel called *Le Transperceneige* about the only survivors of frozen apocalypse on a train that endlessly circles the globe. It's incredible because it has all the Hollywood tropes, but it's acted out in a super hysterical way, with very exaggerated emotion—people are laughing and screaming it's like Kabuki theatre—it's almost too much for the screen. But when this very specific Asian treatment (influenced by history and theatre) protrudes through the glossy Hollywood surface it becomes really interesting.

**CJ: Funny you use the word "protrudes," because in your work you often seem to perform dissections, exposing all the layers that might lie beneath a surface or skin.**

DB: Recently I've been making new sculptures reusing screen-used architectural miniatures from *The Fifth Element*, *Batman Returns* and *Johnny Mnemonic*. The miniatures are captivating, and strange. They are all made to look aged, and document the passing of real time. The oldest one is 20 years old, so it shows actual wear and tear. You can see that the layers of what is supposed to be rooftop tiles are made out of pieces of sandpaper that have come unglued. All of them have been physically weathered in different ways with this dystopian filter added onto them: they

Char Jansen is currently *Elephant* magazine's Editor-at-Large, Senior Editor at *ArtSlant*, Art Editor at *OffBlack* magazine, and contributes regularly to *Dazed & Confused*. Char is the director of NO WAY, an independent curatorial label founded in 2011 for which she has curated 15 exhibitions in London, Lisbon, Tel Aviv, Oslo, and Los Angeles.

**Char Jansen**

often represent our future environment as very derelict, because of too much pollution, global warming, or some other catastrophe.

Today, with CGI, the first sculpting layer is always a pristine surface, and then layers of weathering and dust are added on top. There's an interesting reference between reality and fiction with this type of aging because in order to believe and connect with the narrative, the cinematic environments have to have a history as well as a present. They need to look as though they have been lived in, or touched by a human/alien hand. But in real life, when something that has aged too much, we have an urge to replace it, or we want to repaint it, iron out the wrinkles. Or treat it with botox.

**CJ: You seem interested in drawing analogies between the human and the nonhuman. Your current work up at Various Small Fires, as part of the exhibition *The Slick and The Sticky*, reveals the hidden electrical infrastructures in the gallery building, turning the walls inside-out to expose this network of veins carrying energy.**

DB: I'm interested in bringing objects to life, or to the point they start to resemble life—sort of like when you see zombies reanimated and you think "oh they're alive, but there is something really off about them." Many interesting characters in films are created from parts of different bodies. I like partialized objects like that, different types of hybrids of us and our image.

For my installation at Swiss Institute in New York I'm texturing the walls and floor with the black goo that resembles the kind you'd find in a sci-fi film, this type of black matter that can contain life—like in *Prometheus*, it contains an alien DNA structure that can reanimate, or like in *X-Files* it's "the black cancer" that invades another body. I read recently that in Chinchorro, mummies that have been preserved for 7,000 years are starting to decompose into black slime. Because of global warming, the bacteria buried in their mummified skin has come back to life. Once understood as dead, biological and ecological forces have suddenly revived these ancient bodies in a Frankensteinian way—a symbolic indication of the current moment.

**CJ: How do you manage to get so deep behind the scenes of Hollywood?**

DB: I'm a bit of a film nerd when it comes to production and "making-of" footage. I find breaking down Hollywood visuals one of the most beautiful things in the world.

But it's almost more interesting to look at what the fans are obsessed with, what scene produces an emotional effect or which character is particularly problematic for them. The audience tells you how it works: what excites us, what emotions trigger us. Or, why do we want violence? What

Dora Budor (b. 1984 in Croatia) and lives and works in New York. Recent exhibitions include solo presentations '*Spring*' at Swiss Institute, New York and *The Architect's Plan, His Contagion and Sensitive Corridors* at New Galerie, Paris; group shows *The Slick and The Sticky* at Various Small Fires LA, *Believe You Me* with 247365 New York, *Flat Neighbors* at Rachel Uffner, New York; and institutional group exhibitions such as *Inhuman* at Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany and *DIDING – An Interior That Remains an Exterior?* at Halle für Kunst & Medien (KM–) in Graz, Austria (2015). Recently she participated in panel discussions at Judd Foundation, Art Basel Miami Salon, and Whitney Museum of American Art, and the writings on her work have appeared in Art in America, Flash Art, Artforum, Modern Painters, Frieze and Mousse magazine. She is also a winner of the Rema Hort Emerging Art Award (2014) and is co-director of the project space Grand Century in New York.

form do we enjoy most? Films with super high box office ratings often contain a theatrical kind of violence. American movies in the '70s and '80s used to be about guns and knives, it was more realistic, but now there's incredible versatility to it. The different types of blood splatter you can get in CGI are like a science all of their own.

**CJ: So has looking at the audience reactions to these mainstream movies affected how you make art, and for whom?**

DB: I don't make art for the gallery, or at least don't perceive that to be the ultimate purpose of it. I'm making sculpture now, but that's not to say I might not make a mainstream movie one day. What I find exhilarating about mainstream film is that it becomes part of collective consciousness. Certain events, fictional or real, feel as though we've been through them, and we re-experience them by triggering the subconscious. That's how I approach making art.

**CJ: You'd rather go to a movie than to a gallery**.

DB: I don't want it to sound like I'm dissing art, but I rarely find inspiration *looking* at art. Being involved in this thing that is so different makes my brain way more open. I guess I tend to move more towards creating environments, an overall experience that is static, but can give a feeling like a movie does. I am always thinking about how I can make a movie without using moving image, to create a film without film.

**CJ: Many people criticize Hollywood and the effect of "Hollywoodification" on culture.**

DB: I think Hollywood is absolutely amazing. It's so democratic and so undemocratic at the same time. It's a playground for exploring all the ideas in the world, almost without limits. Of course it has this completely rotten infrastructure and it is a money-making machine, but what is being created in spite of this is incredible.

1
Dora Budor, *The Architect's Plan, His Contagion, and Sensitive Corridors* at New Galerie, Paris (2015), installation view. Image courtesy of the artist and New Galerie.

2
*Our Children Will Have Yellow Eyes* (2015), Screen-used miniature living container from *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), steel armature, epoxy clay, infected silicone prosthetics, acrylic polymer with pigment suspension, sfx and weathering paint, assorted metal hardware. Image courtesy the artist and New Galerie, Paris in collaboration with NOIR-MONTARTPRODUCTION.

ARTFORUM

# Dora Budor

NEW GALERIE

**View of "Dora Budor," 2015.** From left: *The Host, or You*, 2014; *Mental Parasite Retreat 1*, 2014; *The Architect, Slowly Crawling*, 2014.

Creepy as a scene from a sci-fi blockbuster, Dora Budor's exhibition "The Architect's Plan, His Contagion and Sensitive Corridors" invaded the gallery with swaths of synthetic skin, severed cyborg prostheses, and images of smoldering, wreckage-filled landscapes. In fact, it's all "screen-used" stuff you might have seen at the movies. Budor reclaims the materiality of silicone scars, cyborg body parts, and other substances specifically designed for digital capture, manipulation, and consumption. Removed from their original contexts, these artifacts of imaginary worlds appear significantly less convincing than they do at the multiplex, but no less menacing. The threat she describes is neither space invaders nor robot time-travelers, but the disintegrating boundary between the virtual and the actual. In doing so, she reconfigures what feels real in a culture increasingly obsessed with artificial experiences.

The most straightforward example of fantasy clawing its way into reality could be found in a group of postapocalyptic landscapes. Digitally collaging sketches by Industrial Light & Magic (George Lucas's visual-effects company) of a scene from *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) with found images of actual car crashes, Budor seals the resulting fantasy/reality composites under a thick layer of clear resin. Like glass in front of a framed painting, this glossy varnish physically and metaphorically separates the viewer from the image. In these works, however, the barrier is breached. A slender protuberance identified in the checklist as a "screen-used melted cyborg finger prop" reaches past the rubble, out of the picture plane, through a once viscid, now hardened membrane, and into real space.

Appearing to colonize the gallery walls from the inside out, four wall-mounted sculptures—*The Architect, Loss at the Surface*; *The Architect, Slowly Crawling*; *The Architect, Infected at the Bone*; and *The Architect, Offsite Injection* (all works 2014)—conjured another alarming rupture into real space. Supported by a network of pipes and conduits, TV-size stainless-steel armatures displayed large rectangular sheets of pale-pink silicone decorated with production-quality SFX transfer scars designed for the 2014 fantasy film *300: Rise of an Empire*. Turning the walls inside out to expose an alarmingly corporeal matrix, Budor uses materials intended to represent skin on-screen and, perversely, creates screens of skin.

More fleshy silicone appeared in *Mental Parasite Retreat 1* and *Mental Parasite Retreat 2*, state-of-the-art cinema armchairs whose original cushions the artist has replaced with replica casts made of "Dragon Skin." Soft and tacky, this material is used by special-effects-makeup artists to create zombies, werewolves, aliens, and other popular on-screen ghouls. By bringing behind-the-scenes movie magic into the audience's domain, Budor challenges the passivity of the viewer comfortable and untouchable in his double-cup-holder throne. Out of the back of each seat a chest plate worn by Bruce Willis in *Surrogates* (2009) breaks through the fleshy upholstery and appears to breathe, thanks to interior animatronics. The movie-chair-come-alive recalls a vibrating-seat gimmick used by theaters screening *The Tingler*, a 1959 horror film about a human parasite that feeds on fear. Though that stunt seems quaint compared to today's 3-D and IMAX experiences, Percepto, as the tingling-seat technology was called, contextualizes Budor's work within a long history of Hollywood's attempts to encroach on reality.

*—Mara Hoberman*

frieze

April 2015

From *Frieze* Review

Issue 170

# Believe You Me

247365, NEW YORK, USA

Henry Gunderson, *Pure Energy (Blue)*, 2014, Flashe on canvas, 36 × 48 cm

There's a title, but no press release, wall text, or any other attempt at giving a reason why these five artists were grouped together in this exhibition. You can guess, of course: they are mostly young and mostly based in New York. And at first, it looks like any other show of Brooklyn artists ('Brooklyn' here used as an adjective meant to denote sameness, a certain New York cool which disguises a hyperawareness of the market). This leads us to ask the question: Do we still think in terms of the zeitgeist? If yes, it's hard not to conclude that Ryan Trecartin is its embodiment.

Trecartin is showing an uncharacteristic work: a video on a small flat screen. *Junior War* (2013) was edited from footage the artist shot when he was a teenager in Ohio. *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) had just been released and Trecartin was fascinated by the night-vision camcorder. The grainy video shows his friends bumming around the American suburbs, looking for trouble: they drink, smoke, throw rubbish out of a moving car, run from the cops. It's like a mini version of *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) but with a Trecartin-like reflection – the teenagers talk directly to the camera, and even if all they say is 'damn right we're fucking shit up', it reads like a statement on youth and boredom in the US: all the components of a classic Trecartin video. But, unlike typical Trecartin, it isn't shown as part of a large-scale installation, nor is it even a huge projection. The subdued presentation contrasts with the chaotic pace of the video and allows the viewer some space to really focus on a document that gives background to the development of his practice.

Though Junior War is modest compared to other Trecartin works, it still commands the most attention in this small show. However, it doesn't overshadow the two vinyl-paint pieces by Henry Gunderson. A small blue canvas (*Pure Energy [Blue]*, 2014) includes a leaf and a road emerging from it. A slightly larger painting, *8 Speed* (2014), has a skull serving as a stick in a manual transmission gearbox where all the gears are marked N, though it's far from neutral. The imagery in both paintings is inexplicable, but it resonates with contemporary viewers well versed in the proliferation of hard-to-pinpoint images. Another painting, Jamian Juliano Villani's *Rocky II* (2014), depicts a broken version of Sylvester Stallone's youthful face and, in the background, a piece of ham stamped 'Villani'. Like the cute pun on the artist's name, the internet-sourced material is familiar enough to make it seem like a joke the viewer is in on. Next to this is Frank Benson's Fragment from proposed sculpture of Alexander Selkirk (2014). A Scottish sailor who was a castaway on a desert island in the South Pacific for four years, Selkirk is thought to have inspired Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Benson's monument to Selkirk is a work in progress and currently consists of a helmet made of crab shell complete with a plastic headrest. Placed on a pedestal, the empty helmet hints at the missing head, at the fragmented body that isn't there. It's a powerful monument to absence, in a way befitting of its subject. The broken-down body is also the focus of Dora Budor's *The Architect, Mind Falls Apart* (2014). The wall-sized sculpture, made from two fuse-boxes connected with metal pipes, features stretched silicone swabs onto which Budor fastened pieces of skin – actually the lumps of special-effects makeup used to create scars on the actors in the movie *300* (2007). The sculpture looks human – the fuse-box a body, the pipes limbs – but its eerie similitude to real flesh enhances its Frankenstein-like artificiality.

When Selkirk returned to Scotland, his four years of solitude turned into a lifetime infamy. There is so much in these works about how imagery – whether created by a camera, mass media or popular imagination – shapes stories and our understanding of the body, its absence or enhanced presence, the anxiety about the way one presents oneself to the world. If only any of these connections were made more apparent in the space itself. Given the absence of text, the viewer is left scrambling for any understanding of what the works are or what they're supposed to do together. It creates the lingering feeling that the exhibition failed while the works succeeded – but there's something comforting in that.

**Orit Gat**

March/April, 2015
From *Flash Art*

Flash Art

REVIEWS

# Dora Budor

## New Galerie / Paris

**Dora Budor**
*"The Architect's Plan, His Contagion and Sensitive Corridors," installation view at New Galerie, Paris (2015)*
*Courtesy of the Artist and New Galerie, Paris*

Indebted to a techno-gothic aesthetic with roots in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* and David Cronenberg's cinema, Dora Budor's first solo show at New Galerie explores a post- and transhumanist corporeity. Since early in her practice, the body and its materialization has been a central concern. *Bodysurfing* (2012), a black and white video that she directed with Maja Cule, depicted four models rehearsing the basic grammar of fashion poses inspired by a Hollister ad campaign. More recent projects like *New Lavoro* (2013) and a series titled "Action Painting" (2013) commented on the body's role within the realms of social competition and action movies, respectively.

Titled "The Architect's Plan, His Contagion and Sensitive Corridors," this exhibition is a further development of her "TimeToDie" (2014) series in which she reproduced on acrylic screens the bruises and injuries appearing in the movies *Blade Runner* and *Elysium*. She has organized the gallery's space around props, skin appliances and other memorabilia related to sci-fi movies. Translucent silicone sheets gridded by electrical switches, metal pipes and other hardware cover part of the walls, suggesting an architectural metastasis. Scars from the movie *300: Rise of an Empire*, recreated on the skin-like surface of these structures, accentuate this Promethean dystopia. Central to this staging are two cinema chairs in which red velvet has been replaced by dragon skin silicone. They are animated by the respiratory tempo of the cyborg chest that has been embedded in their backrest.

Substituting a cyberpunk aesthetic for the "corporate Bruce Weber" line of research that she previously pursued, Budor's exhibition oscillates between Paul Thek's early fascination with carnal excisions and Tetsumi Kudo's post-Hiroshima terrariums. Indeed, Mike Kelley's analogy between Kudo's installations and "movie props from lurid science fiction scenes" could be perfectly extended to this exhibition. But unlike those artists, Budor does not embrace a pop euphoria. The only thing that remains from her prophecy is the wedding of a Mecha and a street sofa.

*by* Charles Teyssou

February 2015
From **Artforum.com**
Critic's Picks

# ARTFORUM

## Dora Budor

**NEW GALERIE**
**2 rue Borda**
**January 17–February 28**

As with any good flick trafficking in the alien, one likely hears *the thing* before seeing it. *The thing*, in this case, is a cinema chair in the middle of the gallery. Its back gently, almost imperceptibly, expands and contracts in motored respirations. A robotic chest plate pierces the skin of the upholstery—not cloth, neither leather nor vinyl, but something fleshy and moist—revealing its mechanical core. It wants to be touched. This work, *Mental Parasite Retreat 1* (all works 2014), introduces Dora Budor's exhibition, which gleefully cloaks itself in the trappings and tropes of science fiction and fantasy. But the show also probes such conventions, breaking their surfaces as though to see what really lies beneath. Wounds are the central figures of Budor's critical method, blistering across exposed electrical panel works and puncturing glossy resin picture planes. Such tactile effects seduce.

This same desire to touch and to demolish distance is shared by memorabilia hounds. Indeed, much of the material Budor incorporates into these works was manufactured for major film productions and then purchased through a collector's market that thrives on translating cinematic artifice into covetable artifact. The attraction of both these commodities and their afterlives as artworks lies in the appropriation of technologies that films engineered to meld with the body. The props and prosthetics subsumed into works such as *The Architect, Loss at the Surface* previously rendered dystopian narratives and moments of catastrophe when the social order reached a violent breaking point. Like much sci-fi, Budor's works also move between figures of connection and rupture. The implied reciprocity of these poles suggests this might be the key to the exhibition's politics as well as its erotics.

**Dora Budor, *Mental Parasite Retreat 1*, 2014,** original-production cyborg chest prosthetics from the movie *Surrogates*, cinema chairs, dragon-skin silicone, assorted hardware, animatronics, 41 x 27.5 x 28".

*— Phil Taylor*

May 1, 2014
From ***artinamericamagazine.com***

Art in America

# CORPORATE AESTHETICS: DORA BUDOR

by Matthew Shen Goodman

In conjunction with a special section in Art in America's April issue (select articles available here, here and here), A.i.A. presents a series of Web interviews exploring the role of corporations in contemporary art, architecture and design.

In an update of those Beuysian/Warholian bromides of yesteryear—everyone being an artist or having 15 minutes of fame, or both—everyone today is a content creator. The average consumer now has in their hands and pockets DSLRs and smartphones able to take professional-seeming photo and videos; postproduction has become a populist pastime, courtesy of Final Cut and the mighty Adobe Photoshop; and circulation is easier than ever, requiring little more than access the distribution networks like YouTube or Instagram.

Of course, home productions, however polished, rarely match the scale of blockbusters from major film and media corporations, still a fount of fantastical world creations with their own research and development departments and budgets in the hundreds of millions. Hence the supremacy of ripping, copying and imitation in today's world of content creators, both in the sense of piracy, and user-generated takes on the entertainment industry mainstream—song covers, movie parodies, shanzhai everything. So while content creators are everywhere, they're mostly likely imitating or knocking off.

That tension between the democratization of cultural production and the ever more immersive (and pricey) spectacle of commercial entertainment lies at the heart of Dora Budor's work. The artist, born in Croatia and now living and working in New York, first came to prominence as one half of Dora + Maja (2007-12), a collaborative project with Maja Cule. Keenly attuned to both the art and advertising worlds, the duo destroyed replicas of Chinese vases in a sleekly shot basketball game in Porcelain (2011), explored male modeling tropes as performed by aspiring semi-professionals in BodySurfing (2012), and created performance knockoffs of the '90s Jean-Claude Van Damme vehicle Knockoff.

As a solo artist, recent efforts have included 2014's "Action Paintings," a series of video works mimicking and deconstructing action movie choreography and cinematography, and the eclectic New Lavoro (2013); a project for the Palazzo Peckham at the 55th Venice Biennale that consisted of, among other things, a "mixtape/soundscape," an onsite café and a slightly counterfeit-feeling reality show in which young artists in New York competed to win a free trip to the Biennale. As Budor herself described in an interview with DIS, New Lavoro-as-reality-show explored her interest in that liminal stage between amateur and professional, "when things are not completely there yet, [in terms of] intentions to succeed or aspirations to . . . achieve excellence in a desired (in this case creative) sector."

Budor talked to A.i.A. at her Chinatown studio and over e-mail about "importing" Hong Kong directors, horror movie prosthetics and post-Fordist editing techniques.

MATTHEW SHEN GOODMAN Going back to your work with Maja Cule, I'm really struck by the "KnockOff" performances, which foreground numerous aspects of commercial filmmaking that are usually glossed over—shadow economies of bootlegs and rips, intensive physical labor, the actual technological apparatus used by corporate image production. It'd be great to hear about the series's origins, given that it seems an early example of what's become a touchstone for your work.

DORA BUDOR "KnockOff" is based on a 1998 action movie of the same name. It's an incredibly unusual action movie, as it's simultaneously a mash-up of different ideologies and cultures, a transformation of the language of violence into an escapist outlet, and a deep homage to cinema and its own replicating nature. Filmed in Hong Kong and starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, the movie's directed by Tsui Hark, who was one of the first directors that Hollywood started "importing" shortly after the UK returned Hong Kong to China. Van Damme plays Marcus Ray, a naive sales representative of a knockoff factory that's actually a cover-up for a Russian mafia/international terrorist operation inserting nano-bombs into products being exported from Asia to the U.S. From this initial setup the movie rapidly spins into a set of boldly composed action scenes. There's a disembodied camera flying around the set, showing the world through an actor's earring or from the point of view of a bullet bursting through a can of soup. Besides being an orgy of fighting, knock-off brands and an almost poetic cinematography, the film has this underlying sociopolitical narrative, where the terrorist operations amplify a culture of fear between the East and the West, using Eastern knockoff products to literally convey threat to Western structures.

For "KnockOff," we used the movie as an initial script for a hybrid performance and video work casting local mixed martial arts fighters in the production of its live "re-making." Choreographed fight scenes were performed in front of a green screen, digitally composited into new scenery and projected in real

May 1, 2014
From **artinamericamagazine.com**

# Art in America

time, allowing the audience to see the same story from different perspectives. The work, which had iterations in Berlin, Zagreb and Bergen, takes its production mode from the phenomena known as a "mockbuster." A B-movie of often foreign origin, the "mockbuster" is a derivative copy that reproduces elements of the genre, script and techniques of blockbuster movie on a significantly smaller budget. The cast was taken from underground fight clubs and were passionate but not professionally trained. It's more interesting casting amateurs than professional actors, because they bring a more subjective interpretation to the piece.

During the rehearsals we worked with choreographer and stuntwoman Helga Wretman to shape the fighters' "subjective remakes" into a series of highly controlled movements that looked as if they were being controlled by a remote control. The choreography ranged from gentle scenes of finely tuned, tai chi-like movements, as if in slow motion, all the way to more explicit full-force fights with exaggerated illustrative movements, as frequently seen in TV commercials. Each following group would get the previous performance as an initial input, so each consecutive performance one would become a copy and a sequel of the previous one.

SHEN GOODMAN "KnockOff" has a knowing, slightly bootleg quality also seen in later works like BodySurfing (2012) that I'd almost describe as "willfully prosumer": not so much blatantly amateurish as slightly off-kilter. It fits really well in an age where everyone's very media-savvy, both in terms of understanding how images get produced and how to produce images themselves.

BUDOR With the rise of YouTube and the online distribution of film, there are two really interesting anomalies occurring: digital ripping and bootlegging (as in Hito Steyerl's "Poor Image") and the culture of remake, both of which this project pulled inspiration from. There's something awkwardly miraculous and wonderful when users produce lo-fi remakes of their favorite pieces. Nowadays, as user-friendly software for image manipulation, high-end cameras and other production materials and equipment are available to a wide range of users, we all contribute in the power structures of content creation. I think it's interesting to create an alternative to existing models-for example, working with non-actors in "KnockOff" or casting aspiring male models in BodySurfing. I'm curious about the new subjectivity enabled by re-performing cinema, injecting mainstream image creation with individual imperfections that expose the tactics of its production.

Working with those modes of content production and image making also means locating the power structures operating behind the entertainment industry. In the same way that the older Hollywood continuity editing system was a mirror to the Fordist mode of production, today's editing methods and digital media postproduction mirror the information technology infrastructure of contemporary neoliberal society. I'm also fascinated with what Steven Shaviro located in mainstream blockbusters as "blocs of affect." Movies are simultaneously symptomatic and productive of complex social processes, meaning they both reflect and actively constitute them. This includes not only monetary capital, but emotional capital as well. We could see those processes as formative forces, working copies and critiques, living alternatives, experiments in possible futures and embodiments of our deepest human fears and desires. Hollywood to me is a big laboratory, where ideas can be tested out with insane budgets and master skills, all the while formulating possible existences for the outside world.

SHEN GOODMAN How has that played out in your more recent solo work? You said that you've been working a lot with prosthetics and movie props.

BUDOR Once a movie's production is done, it leaves this physical detritus—props, skin appliances, theatrical sets, storyboards—which carry the history and cultural significance of the film and become collectibles for memorabilia fans and film collectors. Identified by screen-matching (being able to recognize the piece in a specific scene) and Certificates of Authenticity (COAs) issued from film studios, the objects are valued according to their uniqueness, the craft of their production and how they were used in the film—by the main character in the foreground (called Hero props), or as screen-used stunt and background props, or finally as prototypes and production-made multiples. There's a specific aura that's similar to the valorization of art objects. I use those elements as raw materials, purchasing them from movie auctions and incorporating them in my work.

I'm interested in the technical processes behind the visual effects like prosthetics or make-up that are used to simulate bodily sensations or to transfer ethereal instances of emotion onto the screen. My recent body of work utilizes special effects materials that are commonly employed in the representation

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of pain or injury upon the screen. I worked with a special effects studio to reverse engineer the bruises that appear on characters in Blade Runner and Elysium, then placed them inside of transparent screens which exposed the "bone structure" of the television mounting systems behind them. Other pieces in the series feature multiples of skin prosthetics leftover from gory scenes in various horror movies. When extracted from that context they become beautiful and fragile abstractions of pain which expose the physicality of their cinematic illusion. These screen works each have view control filters (optical louver films) that cause them to change in appearance as the viewer walks around them in a physical space. Some "fade out" to black, others create a motion blur or chromatic aberration—all accomplished through analog optical techniques. In effect, the position of the viewer's body in space plays or rewinds a digitalistic film transition to the work. I am hoping to integrate new advancements coming from 7D cinema and gaming—including haptic sound, motion control, tactile qualities/vibrations and olfactory elements—in order to further merge the viewer's body with the piece.

An interesting thing about the bodies and effects active in cinematic space today is that as filmmaking has shifted from analog to digital over the last 20 years, production no longer takes place only on the surface of the image but also under its digital skin. As we understand the body as a product of encoded genetic information, we begin to understand images as digital files—mosaic arrangements (pixels) extrapolated from binary code. What has been happening in biotech and genetic engineering is then in some way parallel to the changes that digital postproduction brought to film—it's not only that the surface of film is being affected, but that its DNA is being restructured through digital manipulation, CGI, motion capture performances and software-assisted effects. Postproduction extends before and after on a timeline, actually blurring the time of actual production—similar to the shift in post-Fordist societies from a specified time of production to flexible working hours and freelance lifestyles blurring the lines of work and leisure, as we actually work all the time now without even noticing it.

SHEN GOODMAN Labor and entertainment are also at the heart of your "Action Paintings" series (2014), right?

BUDOR For the "Action Paintings," I hired Helga again, this time to act as my stunt and body double in a series of three videos that produced indexical prop paintings. Each of the videos resembles the choreography and scenery of a blockbuster film—specifically The Hunger Games, Mission Impossible and The Bourne Supremacy—as does their respective color treatment and editing.

Throughout the videos, the stunt double and the main actor switch roles and bodies, constantly alternating between main actor and extra. In the videos Helga performs her "job": action stunts such as falling down the hill, being hit by a car or being chased through forest, in abstracted takes on action-genre scenarios that constantly oscillate between immersing you in the situation and pulling you out. Scenes are being repeated ad nauseam, forcing viewers to think about scene construction and simulation. Helga carries a "blank" object—a newly stretched canvas—in each movie that could be a shield, weapon or stolen good. It's inevitably marked by her activities, indexically documenting all her falls, cuts and other destructive actions. In the physical installment the prop canvases are sculpturally attached to screens, turning them to screen surfaces which become at the same time documents of their creation, or "making-of" videos.

SHEN GOODMAN That making-of aspect is really appealing. It's funny, because in the art world people are often oohing and aahing over a secondhand spectacle aping contemporary production values as developed by these massive tech and entertainment corporations-be it a particular facility with Photoshop (that might never approach the level of someone like Pascal Dangin), or Jordan Wolfson's recent animatronic piece at Zwirner, which seems to speak much more of the skills of Spectral Motion, the special effects and animatronics laboratory that produced it, than the artist's. It seems that, at least on the level of the sensory and the spectacle, art is somewhat behind the corporate model of aesthetics, if only because artists don't quite have the money to pull some sort of James Cameron-esque maneuver.

BUDOR Artists are double agents, having a need to partake in the economy but also feeling aversion to it taking control. Most commonly the level of skill becomes the actual source of power, because if we want to take part in these economies or criticize them, production techniques become the language that we use to create meaning, and to actualize our distorted forms of dominant visual media. For me, it becomes compelling to produce works that aren't "about" something, but rather that are things, which transparently employ the actual apparatus behind the spectacle.

For me it is more interesting looking at those things at their source, where they grow and belong, and when using them in artwork being aware of complex politics and the meanings they transverse. To be quite sincere about it, I find it almost equally intriguing, if not more so, going to cinema and watching Catching Fire with other people than going to see a show at a museum. Such movies are part of our contemporary digital, post-cinematic "media ecology," where they are dispersed as digital codes, constantly modulated and simulated, branding our most "inner" experiences. We can't look at them simply as signs nor images any more, as they are no longer representational singular instances, but clusters of relations. They are not something "outside" of us, they become us, and if you don't "remember who the real enemy is," to quote The Hunger Games, it is difficult to position yourself towards it.

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# SFAQ REVIEW: DORA BUDOR'S "ACTION PAINTINGS" AT 247365, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

By Courtney Malick

Croatian artist Dora Budor's most recent solo exhibition "Action Paintings" took the form of a three-channel video installation that also included three monitor-sized canvases and an elaborate floor piece made of "dirt makeup." Budor's three videos each subtly take on the combinational emotional tone, blocking, and energy of some of the most internationally popular action movies: "The Hunger Games," "The Matrix," "Mission Impossible," and "The Bourne Supremacy." While the mood of each video relates to these films, the role of the protagonist is played by professional German stunt double Helga Wretman in all three of Budor's videos. These basic qualities of tone, movement, and narrative tension become distinctive to each video as they have been specifically "scripted" by Budor, who gave a different treatment to the film crew and individualized scripts that focused on emotion and facial expressions; for Wretman, a kind of acting she rarely employs as a body double. By utilizing the singular painting as a substitutive object in her video narratives, through "Action Paintings" Budor has at least termporarily remedied the oft-confronted impasse of many video artists with regard to editions and the medium's endless multiplicity, while at the same time dissecting and magnifying some of America's most common action movie tropes.

The implications of doubling continue to permeate through "Action Paintings" as Budor, whose blonde hair, height, and body build closely matches Wretman's, also appears in the videos at certain points during high-tension chase scenes in which distinctions between the "good guy," or in this case woman, and bad woman, become blurred. Even in Budor's installation an inescapable duality is reinforced, as each monitor is connected by its frame and hinges to a tarnished and beat up white canvas, which, during filming, was used by Wretman as yet another stand-in for various shields, weapons, and gear used to protect oneself and engage in physical battle.

By attaching the corresponding canvases to each video (a clear, metaphoric superimposition), the videos become dependent upon the paintings' singular physicality, somewhat ironically rendering both the videos and the entire installation impossible to remake or duplicate. Each video, complete with a generic, suspense-driven original score that loops and loops, conjures the sensation of waking up to the DVD menu playing the same excerpt of a theme song on repeat. Through this looping effect, viewers watch the fearless Wretman, the illusive Budor in the background, and the canvases as proxy–now imbued with the precious status of paintings withinin the white cube–courageously journey through forests, shadowy abandoned parking lots, and other stereotypical settings for "high voltage ACTION." During these battles, conquests and defeats we see each canvas endure a new scar as they are torched, slashed, ripped and bent, all of which is then present within the work in front of us. Here, the symbiotic, inherent relationship between video and canvas becomes seamless.

Budor's transformation of the gallery floor gels these three video-paintings into one complete installation that cannot be broken up into individual works. Under sheets of clear plastic is a layer of brown, caked material that appears to be simply a sampling of dirt, but is in fact a special kind of makeup made to look like dirt or soot that is used on movie sets. Budor combined two hues of this makeup and applied it liberally to the gallery floor. Then, sealing it over with plastic, she created a new, flat surface that mimics the façade of the face of the actor.

Altogether, the three videos, three paintings, and the applied flooring combine to produce a strange effect that is both familiar and yet vastly eschewed from our normal experience of movie watching. In this way, Budor highlights aspects of such box-office shattering, blockbuster films that get utilized over and over again in order to produce sensationalized effects that over time become dulled like a pleasure center in the brain that gets overwrought with stimulants and malfunctions. The "Action Paintings" videos, in their striking similarity, begin to reveal an unspoken language within which audiences can identify the kinds of default dichotomies that most often structure such movies. This repetition creates cues for viewers' standard emotional highs and lows through such binaries as heroes and villains, danger and complacency, victory and doom.

**DORA BUDOR**
NEW GALERIE