

Nina Könnemann
 "Que Onda"

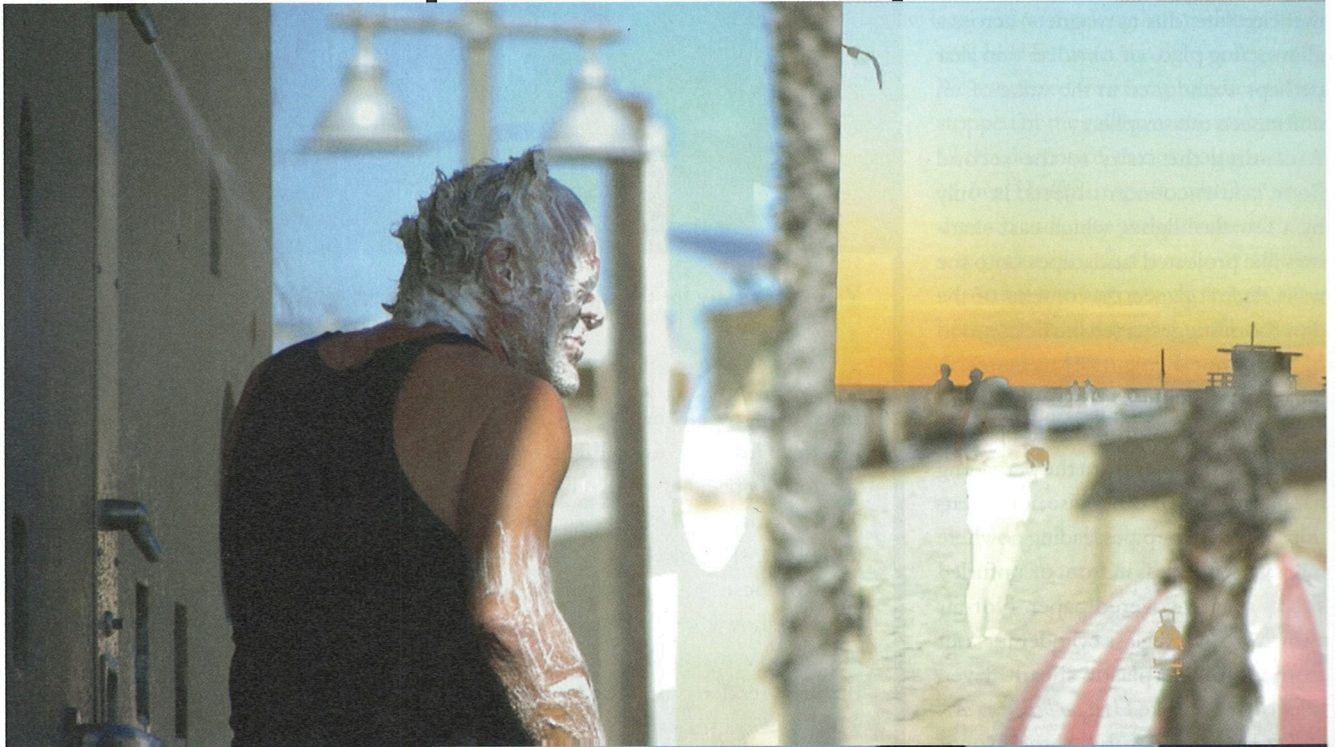
House of Gaga
 28.01. – 10.03.2018

Qué means "what" in Spanish; *onda* means "wave". Together, however, *qué onda* is slang for "what's up?" And most folks' first impression of Nina Könnemann's exhibition at House of Gaga in Los Angeles would likely compel them to ask that very question about the work. After shredding through the social free

jazz of MacArthur Park and stomping up the stairs of the exquisitely weathered initial interior of the joint enterprise of Gaga and Reena Spaulings—a space that somehow suggests it was transported to Southern California from elsewhere, yet simultaneously has more of an "LA vibe" than almost any other in the city—the visitor immediately encounters ceramic shards laid out on a shelf that is equally elegant and industrial. These shards (*Lithic Reductions*, 2015-2018) are the shattered remains of bathroom

fixtures—toilets and a sink. The stem of the latter stoically stands to the right of the rest. A memorial? A monument? The monochromatic porcelain pieces on the slim and snug 90-degree wall unit resemble archaeological remains—arrowheads, shells, pottery, etc.

Isn't it curious that Könnemann used the Toto brand, of all the available options at a retail supplier? After all, a band that shares the name with the flushable empire had a hit song in 1983 called *Africa*—the continent many claim



Nina Könnemann, *Que Onda*, 2018, HD Video, 2'15"

to be the birthplace of civilization and culture, the enormous land of lore that has also routinely been exploited without any regard for its significant history or integrity. Isn't it curious that the fractured remains of two types of water basins are easily more captivating than much of the ceramic wares nowadays appearing in storefront galleries, up and down Instagram feeds, and all around the international fair circuit? After all, it takes a lot more effort to create something than it does to destroy it; but then again, destruction is only destructive if you don't pick up the pieces.

On the other side of the wall, in the next room, is a seemingly never-ending single-channel video of various individuals utilising public sanitation facilities on Venice Beach, a little over fifteen miles west of the gallery. This video, which shares its name with the exhibition, synthesises pre-recorded footage with that which was filmed via livestream during the opening of the exhibition. Unlike the more direct objects in the preceding room, this digital work presents a multitude of unresolved problems. The intention is unclear – it appears to aim for the type of poetic strut present in a Jonas Mekas piece, for example, yet it feels forced and fumbled; it also seems to want to carefully present a contradictory type of politic à la *The Truman Show*, yet the ambivalence eventually becomes confusing which becomes boring which becomes annoying.

If there is no profundity or position, is there a point? Perhaps. But in America, when there are presently reality shows as dramatic and entertaining as roman candles on Bravo and CNN, it's difficult to become enraptured by a slow-burning (and somewhat sinister) sparkler at an art gallery.

So then, what's up with this show? It's curious and it's difficult. And ultimately, that's more than what most artists are willing to offer an audience, thus urging those in attendance to match her generous efforts with sufficient time. **Keith J. Varadi**

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