

drawings – which flip the sculptures, by contrast, into a contextual terrain or prop, roles in which they seem safe from being taken as too complacent in the primacy of their merely formalistic function. It is a move which raises the question, on her behalf, of why it should now seem insufficient for an artist to consummately arrange aesthetically satisfying sculptures in a gallery, and why would their adoption of the look of something else – manufacture, decor, the fabric of the space itself – seem a solution to that lack.

The final room is crowded with a landscape of objects – folded carpeting, foam offcuts, hand-moulded clay, paint-smeared Plexiglas, chopped timber – precisely arranged to look arbitrarily so, the haphazardness slightly theatrical. It is hard to say what is found or made. Things are leaned against the walls or piled on top of one another. Perhaps there is an echo of Robert Morris's scatter works, and more particularly his *Continuous Project Altered Daily* installation of 1969, in which a mess of various raw materials, which looked like junk, was modified every day to form a photographic narrative. Djordjadze's sculptural 'environment' gestures towards this performative exposure of art to the perils of entropy only to settle on the fine distinctions of a fixed formalist vocabulary of texture, surface and distribution. Form may be contrasted, not only with content or matter, but with process and practice. Her prevarication in the face of these options, rather than the sculptures which are its issue, becomes the primary issue. It makes her work appear passively representative of an epistemological paradigm shift, since the 1960s, from the aesthetics of autonomous form to a step back towards exploring how that autonomy is figured, by whom, and what value it may have. But in assuming such an exemplary position, she would be relinquishing her own autonomy. I'm not sure, as I look at the installation, whether to see the irresolution as dynamic or disingenuous – the latter in the sense of trying to have your cake and eat it – and settle on productively conflicted.

**Mark Prince** is an artist and critic based in Berlin.



Gregg Bordowitz, *Only Idiots Smile*, 2017, video

## Gregg Bordowitz: I Wanna Be Well

**MoMA PS1, New York, 13 May to 11 October**

During a lecture-performance at MoMA PS1 in September, American artist, writer and activist Gregg Bordowitz confessed that he never imagined having a career retrospective, 'Because', he explained, 'I was wondering if, in fact, I *had* a career.' Now in its third iteration, 'I Wanna Be Well' has decidedly proved him wrong (the exhibition was previously hosted by Portland's Reed College in 2018 and the Art Institute of Chicago in 2019). Occupying nine rooms, this latest instal in Queens – Bordowitz's native borough – spans film, poetry, works on paper, archival material, performance and sculpture from across four decades. As a prelude to the survey, a red-on-yellow banner à la Barbara Kruger crowns the building's entrance announcing that 'The AIDS Crisis is Still Beginning'. Inside, the same banderole – which evokes the aesthetics of early AIDS activism popularised by Gran Fury – guides us to a vintage derby soap box plastered with stickers of pharmaceutical companies. On the wall, a framed press clipping of a young Bordowitz competing at a 1974 Boy Scouts' soap box race is flanked by two circular clocks, one set to New York and the other to Cape Town local times. Titled *Drive*, the work was first exhibited in 2002 in Chicago alongside *Habit*, 2001, a documentary shot at the 13th AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa. Bordowitz's Barthesian sensitivity for language and signs shines through. The race-car becomes a *race for care* – care for racial disparities in the age of global pandemics, and everything else in between.

Bordowitz's films – for which he is most known – are screening across the exhibition: some continuously

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on TV sets and others projected at set times against the walls. His early video works – starting in the mid 1980s – were largely the product of his involvement with ACT UP, which he joined the year before he tested positive in 1988. After dropping out of NYU to focus on activism, Bordowitz began to document actions under various video organisations he co-founded, included Testing the Limits and DIVA (Damned Interfering Video Artists). Arguably, the most significant work from that era is the autobiographical documentary *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, 1993, dubbed the ‘first meta-AIDS video’ by film scholar Alexandra Juhasz. Fusing footage of demos, archival material and mock interviews – featuring cameos by art-world figures such as Andrea Fraser and Yvonne Rainer (Interview *AM379*) – the 54-minute experimental film draws on Bordowitz’s experience as a young queer Jew living with HIV. Its comedic critique of mainstream media’s stigmatising gaze is exemplary – a ‘queer structure of feeling’, to use Bordowitz’s term from his seminal 1993 essay ‘The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous’, which he expands on as ‘a set of cultural strategies of survival for queers’, ‘marked by an appreciation for the ridiculous’ and ‘values masquerade’.

Thankfully, the exhibition shows that there is more to Bordowitz than filmmaking. Delightful glimpses into his life are available through archival material too: press clippings, memorabilia and photographs of protests, drag parties and other flamboyant gatherings. Together, they paint a tableau of ‘friendship as a way of life’ – as Michel Foucault would have it – whose recurring cast includes the likes of Mark Dion, Douglas Crimp, Kendall Thomas and Moyra Davey (Profile *AM441*). Another equally insightful addition is the artist’s vast library. Spanning philosophy, critical theory and Jewish theology, it is populated by hundreds of publications accumulated between New York and Chicago, where Bordowitz is a professor at the Art Institute. Who cares to see it, you might ask? Well, aside from research geeks like this reviewer, it is unclear. However much you care, though, this inclusion does something undeniably important: it establishes reading as a discipline. (Come to think of it, solo exhibitions should always come with the artist’s library as a testament to intellectual diligence.)

But the most surprising features of this exhibition are two mixed-media sculptures inspired by Viennese memorials. The first, titled *Kaisergruft*, 2008–21, is an elegantly curved white structure made of plaster, paper plates and wire form contour mesh, and is inspired by the baroque clouds which decorate the Capuchin church’s imperial crypt. In another room,

the second – titled *Pestäule (after Erwin Thorm)*, 2021 – is a far more exorbitant site-specific triangular structure made of masked mannequins posed as protesters, and is modelled after Vienna’s Trinity Column, which was erected in 1679 to commemorate the Great Plague. While the latter looks disappointing on its own, it resonates meaningfully with the former, quietly nodding to the intricacies of monumental culture. I was reminded of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s claim that ‘every work of art is a monument’, one which doesn’t commemorate the past but, rather, preserves sensations by providing ‘the event with the compound that celebrates it’. (Needless to say, the poststructuralist duo is prominently featured in Bordowitz’s library.)

However exhaustive, the survey suffers from a few unfortunate omissions. Assuming they still exist, works from the pre-ACT UP era, when Bordowitz attended the School of Visual Arts and later the Whitney Museum’s Independent Study Programme would have made valuable additions. More regrettable, however, is the near-complete absence – aside from one brochure in a display cabinet – of the Michel Foucault-inspired operatic production *History of Sexuality Volume One*, made in collaboration with artist Paul Chan. To my chagrin, none of its fabulous costumes, designed by Chan and Kristine Woods, video documentation from its 2010 premiere at Vienna’s Tanzquartier Wien or the ensuing event with David Hoyle at Tate Modern are featured.

As a long-term survivor of HIV, Bordowitz once believed that he wouldn’t live long enough to have a career, let alone a retrospective to commemorate it. This suspicion isn’t just palpable in ‘I Wanna Be Well’, it acts as a structuring principle. The work is here, with the living, but it’s also over there, with the departed. ‘Everything is itself and its own negation,’ Bordowitz insisted during his lecture-performance. This maxim alone sums up much of the work. In fact, I am increasingly convinced that it was never about AIDS, but always about care. And it doesn’t just take a great artist to navigate this terrain, but a skilful fabulator too.

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