

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Tribeca Art Spaces Yearn for Love in the Time of Cholera

We're not the first, or last, to live in dark times, but artists are continuously finding new ways to cope with these everyday realities through art. Daniel Larkin



Mundo Meza "Merman with Mendolin" (1984) (collection of Jef Huereque, photo by Fredrik Nilson)

On the evening of the 2018 Summer Solstice, more than 20 art and design spaces in Tribeca stayed open late for The Tribeca Art + Culture Night, which is part of the River to River Festival, and what stood out immediately was how many spaces decided to explore the darker side of sex and desire, all with a critical edge.

Love in the time of Trump may be a buzzkill, as it's often hard to enjoy a romantic evening as democratic norms are violated almost daily. All this is coupled with the past year's revelations from the #MeToo movement, which are forcing us to reconsider social mores that encourage exploitation. We're all doubting, ruminating, and wondering how to cherish one another in these dark times. A lot of us are looking to art to

lubov.nyc
info@lubov.nyc

(347) 496-5833

373 Broadway, #207
New York, NY 10013

LUBOV

grapple with the social implications of these questions. To steal a page from Gabriel García Márquez, what does it mean to Love in the Time of Cholera?

And in space after space in Tribeca, it was fascinating to see contemporary artists rising to the occasion — offering commentary on what it means to love and desire today. It was also intriguing to see organizers bringing voices back from the 1980s that we can now appreciate in a whole new light given recent events.

For example, the 205 Hudson Gallery invites us into the rainbow of the City of Angels, circa 1960–90s, for *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA*.

A giant monochromatic painting by Mundo Mera, “Merman with Mendolin” (1984), depicts a stud of a merman. It was painted the year before Meza died of complications related AIDS. It’s hard not to connect these bleak colors with how this plague darkened the gay sexual liberation of the 1970s. The artist’s sister, Pat Baeza, was at the opening and explained to me that the exhibition really “helps to put the mourning aside and to celebrate his life now. It’s been 30 years.”

Looking at the entire show, it was striking to see the willingness of these individuals to invent a new language for their desire and love, even during the dark days of AIDS, which I think offers a lesson as we search for our own answers in 2018.



Raul Guerrero “Desire” (1985) Courtesy of Ortuzar Projects, Collection Mary Donkerslot)

We all know that desire is often complicated and impacted by race. A painting at the [Ales Ortuzar Gallery](#) from the 1980s by Raul Guerrero “Desire” (1985) juxtaposes a woman of color with the Venus de Milo. Do we want to stay trapped in the classic white definition of beauty this painting forcefully asks? Guerrero’s entire show masterfully probes this difficult intersection of race and desire

Venus’s son Cupid was also greeted with a healthy dose of irreverence at the [Postmaster’s Gallery](#). Kensuke Koike had a show of mesmerizing cut out postcards and other manipulated ephemera. The urinating Cupid was a hilarious reminder that we shouldn’t be taking the classical past and its

lubov.nyc
info@lubov.nyc

(347) 496-5833

373 Broadway, #207
New York, NY 10013

LUBOV

baggage too seriously.



Kensuke Koike, “3-2-1-Liftoff / Rocket boy” (2018) (image courtesy of the artist and Postmasters Gallery, New York)

Kazumi Yoshida also re-negotiates classical ideals at the [Cheryl Hazan Gallery](#). Her series of gouache & vintage wallpaper cut out decoupages recast the muses of antiquity. Here we have Erato, muse of love and erotic poetry.

So, let’s be honest, there’s only so much we can mine from old symbols like Venus, Cupid, and the Muses. And while it’s definitely one strategy to adapt them to a contemporary idiom, other artists are feeling the pull of more recent icons.

Who can resist Ziggy Stardust? At her basement studio on White Street, [Erin Ko](#) created this impressive stained glass window. His famous album *Aladdin Sane* was released in 1973 right at the height of the Watergate era. Maybe Bowie had it figured out with his idea to counter corruption with dark glamour?

lubov.nyc
info@lubov.nyc

(347) 496-5833

373 Broadway, #207
New York, NY 10013

LUBOV



Erin Ko, "Saint Ziggy" (2016) (courtesy of the artist)

Bill Travis offers an homage to Walt Whitman's homoerotic poetry at the [Soho Photo Gallery](#). The poets words were put up on the wall and then viewers could gaze down at little erotic queer miniatures in cases. This is an example of the set of blue nudes.



Bill Travis, "Untitled" (from the Walt Whitman series), 2018. (images courtesy of the artist)

Moving from men to women, it's a bit more daunting to figure out how to confront the male gaze and the desire for the female body, especially given the past year. But contemporary artists never shy away from a challenge. And it was really great to see how they approached these paradoxes.

At the [Untitled Space](#), there was a rich selection of video art exploring the body. In one work, [Iris Brosch](#) also took on the mermaid in the second part of her trilogy exploring the relationship between

lubov.nyc
info@lubov.nyc

(347) 496-5833

373 Broadway, #207
New York, NY 10013

LUBOV

feminism and ecology, “Women and Nature near Extinction” (2013). This project was performed at the 2013 Venice Biennale but the videos are attractive and stand on their own. Brosch entangles women’s objectification with environmental degradation as subversive mermaids that bend the rules in polluted water.

Another strategy is to re-appropriate the objectification of women and throw it in the viewers face. At Lubov, the drawings of Manuela Soto indict the hyper-sexual caricatures of women circulating online. It’s a powerful moment to walk in the space and just think about the messages many young men take on board. This is how many of them discover their sexuality — secretly poking around the internet as teenagers in mom’s basement.



Manuela Soto, “Meant to Be” (2015-2018) (photo by Francisco Correa Cordero)

The other way to approach the female nude is to conceal it, and to deny the viewer full access. Patricia Beary’s series of nudes at the Soho Photo Gallery took this approach. Although I got the impression the primary goal was formalist, notably to explore chiaroscuro with special exposure photographs and custom printing. “Reincarnation” (2014) was haunting in light of recent events. Somehow the blur over the face felt like it was capturing the zeitgeist.

Patricia Beary, “Reincarnation” (2014) (image courtesy of the artist, who provided the image with a watermark)

El amor en los tiempos del cólera doesn’t fully translate into English, Francisco Correa Cordero explained to Hyperallergic. It conveys not only the need for love despite a disease or plague, but also loving amidst

lubov.nyc
info@lubov.nyc

(347) 496-5833

373 Broadway, #207
New York, NY 10013

LUBOV

deep sadness, anguish or depression, deriving from its etymological root of the medieval humor of choleric. We are not the first, nor the last, to live in dark times. What emerged walking through Tribeca is that we can face this bitter moment with irony, humor and guts, while pioneering new ways to love and support each other.

The Tribeca Art + Culture Night was part of the River to River Festival and it took place June 21, 6–9pm.

<https://hyperallergic.com/448514/tribeca-art-and-culture-night-river-to-river-festival-2018/>

lubov.nyc
info@lubov.nyc

(347) 496-5833

373 Broadway, #207
New York, NY 10013