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New Museum to Open “Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon,” a Major Exhibition Investigating Gender’s Place in Contemporary Art and Culture

September 27, 2017–January 21, 2018



Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *Darkroom Mirror (0X5A1531)*, 2017. Archival pigment print, 51 × 34 in (129.5 × 86.4 cm). Courtesy the artist and Yancey Richardson, New York

New York, NY...This fall the New Museum will present “**Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon**,” a major exhibition investigating gender’s place in contemporary art and culture at a moment of political upheaval and renewed culture wars. The exhibition features an intergenerational group of artists who explore gender beyond the binary to usher in more fluid and inclusive expressions of identity. Occupying the three main floors of the New Museum, the exhibition will be on view from September 27, 2017, to January 21, 2018.

The New Museum has been committed to urgent ideas since its inception, devoting many exhibitions and programs over the years to issues of representation with regard to gender and sexuality: “Extended Sensibilities” (1982), “Difference” (1984–85), “Homo Video” (1986–87), and “Bad Girls” (1994) are just four notable examples. Following in this tradition, and in the Museum’s 40th anniversary year, “Trigger” extends the conversation around identity, considering how even a fluid conception of gender is nonetheless marked by ongoing negotiations of power and cannot be understood outside its complex intersections with race, class, sexuality, and disability. The exhibition’s title, “Trigger,” takes into account that word’s range of meanings, variously problematic and potent; the term evokes both traumatic recall and mechanisms that, set into motion, are capable of igniting radical change.

The exhibition will feature more than forty artists working across a variety of mediums and genres, including film, video, performance, painting, sculpture, photography, and craft. Many embrace explicit pleasure and visual lushness as political strategies, and some deliberately reject or complicate overt representation, turning to poetic language, docufiction, and abstraction to affirm ambiguities and reflect shifting physical embodiment. Representing no single point of view, and in some cases presenting productively contradictory positions, “Trigger” will assemble artists for their singular efforts in considering gender’s capacity to represent a more general refusal of stable categorization—a refusal at the heart of today’s most compelling artistic practices.

The artists in “Trigger” share a desire to contest repressive orders and to speculate on new forms and aesthetics—a desire to picture *other* futures. For many, developing new vocabularies necessarily entails a productive reworking

of historical configurations. A number of artists in the exhibition—including Josh Faught, Reina Gossett and Sasha Wortzel, Ellen Lesperance, Mickalene Thomas, and Candice Lin—return to archival materials in order to critique, build upon, and explore longstanding dialogues and debates around intersectionality, alliance, and the project of world-building. Beauty is not supplemental to politics here, but central to the process of positing new worlds and building new social structures. The exhibition brings together a range of practitioners, some with a longstanding commitment to activism—such as Nancy Brooks Brody, an original member of the collective Fierce Pussy, and Vaginal Davis, who has long critiqued systematic oppression tied to gender, race, class, and sexuality—alongside emerging artists such as Sable Elyse Smith, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, and Chris Vargas, whose works variously plumb mechanisms of regulation.

The exhibition will include a number of commissioned works, including a major new braided sculpture by Diamond Stingily that pierces through gallery floors, trailing from the Fourth Floor all the way down to the Museum's Lobby, and alludes to the racial dimensions of beauty conventions as well as to Medusa, the mythological snake-haired woman whose gaze could turn men into stone. Nayland Blake will produce a life-size suit of his "fursona" named Gnomon, which will be periodically inhabited and activated throughout the course of the exhibition. Tuesday Smillie will continue a recent series of textile works that both refer to significant historical protest signs—such as those constructed by Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, and other members of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries—and present new slogans. ektor garcia will present a series of site-specific, readymade sculptures that evoke S&M fetish gear and Mexican housewares while suggesting movement away from definitive gender and sexual roles.

Commissioned performances will feature prominently in the exhibition, with the premiere of a two-part musical by Morgan Bassichis that returns to the influential 1977 publication *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*, live music organized by Simone Leigh and staged inside her installation, and a series of performance-lectures on masculinities by Gregg Bordowitz. The exhibition will also include a special three-episode reunion of Dyke Division's *Room for Cream*, the live lesbian soap opera presented at La MaMa theater in New York from 2008 to 2010.

The exhibition is curated by Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement, with Natalie Bell, Assistant Curator, and Sara O'Keeffe, Assistant Curator. It will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue designed by Joseph Logan and published by the New Museum. The catalogue includes essays by Rizvana Bradley and Jeannine Tang, as well as a conversation between Mel Y. Chen and Julia Bryan-Wilson. It also includes genealogies organized by Sara O'Keeffe, an institutional archival portfolio, and transcripts of roundtable conversations between members of the exhibition's advisory group: Lia Gangitano, Ariel Goldberg, Jack Halberstam, Fred Moten, and Eric A. Stanley.

Artist List (as of June 22, 2017)

Morgan Bassichis (b. 1983)
Sadie Benning (b. 1973)
Nayland Blake (b. 1960)
Justin Vivian Bond (b. 1963)
Gregg Bordowitz (b. 1964)
Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz (working together since 2007)
Nancy Brooks Brody (b. 1962)
A.K. Burns (b. 1975) and A.L. Steiner (b. 1967)
Leidy Churchman (b. 1979)
Liz Collins (b. 1968)
Vaginal Davis (b. 1969)
Harry Dodge (b. 1966)
Dyke Division of the Two-Headed Calf (founded in 2008)
Josh Faught (b. 1979)
ektor garcia (b. 1985)
Mariah Garnett (b. 1980)
Reina Gossett (b. 1983) and Sasha Wortzel (b. 1983)
Sharon Hayes (b. 1970)
House of Ladosha (founded in 2007)
Stanya Kahn (b. 1968)
Carolyn Lazard (b. 1987)

Simone Leigh (b. 1967)
Ellen Lesperance (b. 1971)
Candice Lin (b. 1979)
Troy Michie (b. 1985)
Ulrike Müller (b. 1971)
Willa Nasatir (b. 1990)
Sondra Perry (b. 1986)
Christina Quarles (b. 1985)
Connie Samaras (b. 1950)
Curtis Talwst Santiago (b. 1979)
Tschabalala Self (b. 1990)
Paul Mpagi Sepuya (b. 1982)
Tuesday Smillie (b. 1981)
Sable Elyse Smith (b. 1986)
Patrick Staff (b. 1987)
Diamond Stingily (b. 1990)
Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971)
Wu Tsang (b. 1982)
Chris E. Vargas (b. 1978)
Geo Wyeth (b. 1984)
Anicka Yi (b. 1971)

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ABOUT NEW MUSEUM

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

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