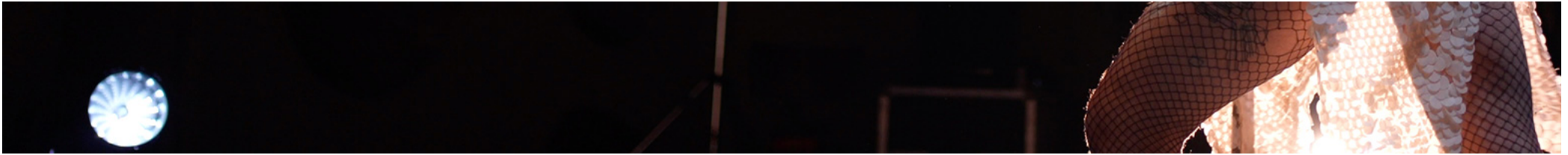


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WE TELL OURSELVES STORIES IN ORDER TO LIVE [1]

Jenni Tischer on Lost at Sea with Puddles and Sunny by Jeremy Wade





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Jenni Tischer on *Lost at Sea* with Puddles and Sunny by Jeremy Wade

Berlin-based performer Jeremy Wade takes us along to sublevel nine of a cruise ship on a queer sci-fi trip in the open sea. The journey also leads us through the tragic life story of Miss Puddles, the pelican, who was rescued from an oil slick by the crew and has been working as a cabaret singer on board ever since. Every night, she enters the stage, shakes her plumage, smoothes it down, adjusts it and takes up a pose. “We do this night after night – it’s the magic of continuity.”[2] She is accompanied by Quentin Tolimieri on the piano, whose dramaturgically sophisticated music guides us from a happy showbiz melody down to the dark, apocalyptic depths of ‘Dead Flag Blues’ by Godspeed You! Black Emperor. But hey, “It’s time to put on a show!” The ‘little bird’ (as Puddles was affectionately called by her sister, who perished in the oil disaster) stretches her wings up in the air, makes the oil-smearred plumage gleam, pushes the down back from her face, winks with one eye and – singing, croaking, and dancing – winds her way through what is probably the most difficult story of all: one’s own biography. A tale of becoming, ruthlessly insisted upon by the audience and by a society generally regarded as hungry for sensation. This very special night marks the fourth anniversary of the ‘little bird’s’ rescue, and we witness the struggle for survival and the grief that has inscribed itself in the bird’s body. “We all have to come to terms with our bodies”, the ‘fluffy lady’ encourages us. Once a glamorous bird with the most brilliant plumage, now, with the wounds inflicted on her, she moves, dances and sings in a new, old, timeless, queer, complicated, strange, very unique way. At the same time, she reminds us: “This horizon of possibilities is not an endless phallic version of the future, it is not infinite. This earth is our home, it is a dome, it is a site of trauma, it is our womb, it is a wound.”

The emancipatory act of speculating creates the present and, at the same time, designs the future. Puddles reminds us of the real material limits that we all reach in our own different ways and that point out our mutual dependencies, vulnerabilities and our finite nature. “Where is we we weeee?” How can we move together in recognition of our differences in an open, dialogic approach that does not strive for unity and uniformity but understands love as an invitation to the unknown?

To the pelican, her rescuers and their language were unknown too: “I awoke in the infirmary to the voices of witches who held their hands over me, nurses chanted things.” They encourage the bird to regain her strength, to face life and, above all, to go on stage. “You got shows to do, little bird!” And so Puddles takes on her task again every evening to entertain the audience – us. The microphone stand that the bird clings to, along which she pulls up her tired body, to which she clings lasciviously and that she drags behind her like a weight, alternates between technical assistant and pole dance pole. In the spirit of posthumanism, Puddles reminds us not only of the mutual dependence of human and non-human actors but also that we are embedded in much larger organic-biological and inorganic-technological structures.

The more entangled we get in the story of the ‘little bird’, the more obvious it becomes that we have long since reached sublevel nine. Deep down in the belly of the cruise ship called Capitalism with a steady course “into the great nothingness”.

And we should be grateful that Puddles, the pelican, sings her sister’s song for us: “It’s gonna be okay, little bird, even if it is not okay, little bird.”

[1] Joan Didion, *The White Album*, New York 1979.

[2] All quoted text passages are taken from the performance (text: Allison Wiltshire and Jeremy Wade).

Jenni Tischer is an artist and teaches at the Department of Art and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Most recently, works by Tischer were presented in solo exhibitions at Galerie Krobath, Vienna, Kunstforum Baloise, Basel, mumok, Vienna, and Bielefelder Kunstverein, as well as in group exhibitions at MAK Center, Los Angeles, after the butcher, Berlin, Kunsthalle Tübingen and Kunsthalle Wien. In 2013, she was awarded the 15th Baloise Art Prize at Art Basel, the catalogue *Jenni Tischer.PIN* was published by Sternberg Press, Berlin to accompany the solo exhibition of the same name at mumok. Jenni Tischer was Artist in Residence in the scope of the MAK Schindler Scholarship Program in Los Angeles. jennitischer.com