

# COMPANY

Melendez, Franklin, *Cajsa von Zeipel: Body Electric*, Kaleidoscope, Spring/Summer, 2018, print

## KALEIDOSCOPE

SEASON: SS 2018

Cajsa von Zeipel: *Body Electric*

At first glance, Cajsa Von Zeipel's clubland denizens seem conjured from the mist of an ecstasy-laced Valhalla. Lanky and lithe, her alabaster avatars tower over mere mortals, their extravagantly long limbs contorted into passionate couplings or simply rolling solo in perpetual bacchanal bliss. Such is the general mood in "Insulting The Archive," her 2017 solo exhibition at London's Arcadia Missa, with its gathering of sexually polymorphous she-warriors who don their nightlife gear—including fun fur jackets, platforms and g-strings—with the bravado of battle totems. Or more elaborate still, there's the underwater afterhours of *Alpha State* (2017), which unfolds as a parable of the legendary 1980s club AREA, reincarnated on the ocean floor. Here, mer-creatures and revelers condescend with other organic matter, including coral, mollusks, fish-eggs-like-pearls and ejected bodily fluids, to form a great bar-cum-barrier reef. Nearby, a scale-skinned deep sea diver is frozen in back-arching plunge as an eternally squirting fountain. Behind them, a cresting discowave teeters near a functional bench formed by two crouching humanoids, each decked out in alluringly plush puffer jackets and drop-crotch sweats.

If this sensorium overload feels like too much, it's because it is—and therein lies the rub for Von Zeipel, who harnesses the body electric in order to mine the status of the figure in contemporary sculpture. Not unlike William S. Burroughs' hallucinogenic orgies (see *Wild Boys* and *Cities of Red Night*), her appeal to the fleshy is designed to both scintillate and unsettle. Through this, she enacts an astute interrogation of classicism, its entrenched gender optics and their persistence through the pedagogical, from the halls of the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (where she studied), to the stately galleries of the Met.

It is a skewed view to be sure, but one that engages the inexorable persistence of idealized forms, from Michaelangelo's *David* to Kylie Kardashian. Von Zeipel herself is not exempt from this allure—in fact, she indulges in it, advancing her own ilk of classical studio labor. Each character is meticulously carved out of polystyrene blocks and assembled limb-by-limb, only to be smoothed over by the glossy patina of aqua resin. The grandiose posturing and rococo flourishes thus stand in tension with more ephemeral materials and situated details that complicate the trans-historical aspirations of the canon, while conjuring new models for inhabiting the monumental. Traces of fantasy, sci-fi and fan fiction and nods to musical subcultures take on new resonance as they foreground the possibilities of customization, self-fashioning and the ability to envision hybrid identities and the places these might inhabit. In this, Von Zeipel echoes fellow archeologists of nightlife—among them, Mark Leckey, Wolfgang Tillmans and Juliana Huxtable—who look to the club as an indeterminate, queer space where bodies can be shifted and shuffled to unexpected beats. This is its own utopia to be sure, and one with political import, as it sets out possibilities for collective encounters that give us a reason to venture out. **K**

words by Franklin Melendez



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CAJSA VON ZEIPPEL (SWEDISH, B. 1983, LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK) CREATES LARGER-THAN-LIFE FIGURES THAT SPEAK TO FEMALE SEXUALITY AND GROUP IDENTITY, CHALLENGING CLASSICAL SCULPTURAL TROPES. IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. PHOTO CREDIT: JEAN-BAPTISTE BÉRANGER.

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