

Jurga Barilaitė

BBB (Bamba Big Band)

16 January 2018 – 3 February 2018

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„BBB“: A Revolution Re-sung

The "Bellybutton Big Band" ("BBB") project by Jurga Barilaitė is a performative space where the body-orchestra resings the history in a punk manner. For the beginning of Barilaitė's studies at Vilnius Academy of Arts coincided with the singing revolution of the 1990s – the spirit of freedom, rebellion, and barricades has overwhelmed the work of her generation of artists. Jurga does not set up a monument to protesters – instead, she builds a stage for live action.

Walking around Vilnius with her bush of bright red hair, Barilaite looks like an allegory of revolution. Liberty leading to the barricades. In her artworks, Jurga is also rebellious. First of all, against the concept of painting – and generally, art – being treated as scenery. Also – against the very type of court painter. In short, against any set of mandatory rules in life and art. Lithuanian critic Alfonsas Andriuškevičius once wrote that Jurga Barilaite dislikes both ends of the paintbrush. In fact, she does not care about either paintbrushes or the ends. The artist has knocked abstract expressionism cold with her boxing gloves. She has swum drowning in a glass of milk and wept in the most distant outskirts of Europe, has danced with her shadow and played the role of mum. Jurga's works have long exited the plane of the picture: her steps have been documented and stored in museums. And she continues to create her own stories, characters and discursive context. "BBB" is the process of writing a biography by one's body and performing it in different voices. Simultaneously, it is a simulation of the beginning and the end of the world.

The starting point for "BBB" is the author's size drum in the shape of bellybutton, created specifically for this project. Each artist is a Navel of the World, but Jurga's personal and creative biography is just a pretext for us to remember our own origins. Where have we come from, and where are we going? What is there, casting light at the end of the tunnel? No less important element of the exhibition is the "Old C" sculpture. This is a see-through tent made of old films that display accidentally encountered folk erotica. The lean-on on its own, as well as the content of the films, is associated with Gustav Courbet's work "The Origin of the World" (*L'Origine du monde*, 1866). Except that the beginnings of the world that Barilaitė has found were recorded on 8 mm amateur film strips rather than painted. This parapornographic documentary is a kind of prehistory of the "BBB" project. It is a cultivated construction of "nature", or a celluloid womb.

Barilaitė's performances revolve around herself. But by doing that, they take in the people and things around them. For her diploma work at the Vienožinskis Art School, Jurga painted a self-portret in the background of a stadium. The background has changed many times, but the author has remained at the center of her own attention. She is the navel of the world, who deliniates the world by the Vitruvian caliper. Still, being a starting point for her own performances, she is also the most critical evaluator of her work. That is why, when one is viewing Barilaitė's artworks, the feeling is that their author is watching us. She is watching us watching her. However, this does not prevent her from incorporating viewers into her story or karaoke.

Barilaitė's criticism is poetic. Even more, it is meaningless. More specifically, it is unarticulated. It's intentionally hidden under the *na-na-na* and *la-la-la* refrains. But the failure to say something is not a pause. It is destruction of the usual order, a punkish protest against the petit bourgeois system of values. The screaming author is a photographic negative of the artist. Screams and

wordless refrains spoil the sheer pleasure of observation, which prevents the viewer from appropriating either the body of the author or its part. "BBB" is a bellybutton and bellyache, anxiety and insanity, finality and infinity. It is not just a surrealistic orchestra, but also a model of Barilaitė's artistic world, a system of inhabited and uninhabited planets. The author employs the sound to define her own epoch and field of study: it is the body and the transmission of its senses, a performative action and critical reflection.

Both the lean-to and the drum are housebodies, or inner spaces that the artist has dreamt. Their connecting point is the performance given by Jurga Barilaitė, repeated in the actions of the visitors of the exhibition. By beating the drum and freely improvising, the author throws the Vitruvian man out of the circle, and settles down inside the drum like Diogenes in his barrel. When entering the lean-to, the viewers step out from a rational world of rules and logic and step into the lust zone. No one can tell what these initiation rituals will end up with. Can it be that *Bellybutton Big Band* will turn into *Bellybutton Big Bang*?

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