

CAN THE
FLOWER
SPEAK?

YEAR PROGRAMME 2025 BEYOND POLITICAL LIMITS

Alongside the overarching title BEYOND POLITICAL LIMITS, the 2025 year-programme at RADIUS focuses on developing new language templates informed by the convergence of art and science. Through a program revolving around observation, fieldwork, reflection and imagination, RADIUS aims to offer a counterpoint to the language of status-quo politics, currently failing to create a shared desire to collectively confront and mitigate climate change.

Whether we are talking about the nitrogen crisis, the protection of the Wadden Sea against oil drilling, floods in Limburg, or earthquakes in Groningen, the political reality seems extremely malleable while the boundaries of our ecosystems are fixed. Against this capricious background, RADIUS presents BEYOND POLITICAL LIMITS, a year-programme on the political representation and advocacy of the more-than-human, and the ongoing need for collective political resistance within a highly polarised political climate. By means of four exhibitions and a public and educational programme, we aim to present the work of visual artists to imagine the ways by which humans and non-humans alike can emancipate and organise themselves politically beyond the current political status quo. Within this programme, we thus focus on restoring relations between humans and non-humans, zoom in on the emancipation and representation of multispecies worlds and the fundamental notion of interdependence on a microbiological level on the one hand (exhibition chapters I and II). In the second half of the year, on the other hand, we focus on a further reconstruction of social groups that have traditionally been ignored, marginalised and dispossessed through binary and dualistic thinking in politics and science (exhibition chapters III and IV). How can we (re) introduce new voices into the political arena, so that the climate, non-human life forms, oppressed and marginalised groups are granted a voice and can be heard?

Building on this, RADIUS intends to become a space and platform that promotes and supports resistance to current political and socio-economic hegemony, moving towards a multispecies political ecology. In other words, we want to generate space for challenging dominant values, ideas and existing power relations. In our view, this hegemony is overly focused on the, for both humans and the living environment, exhausting effects of neoliberalism, advanced capitalism, as well as the polarising effects of far-right politics and consequent populist thought patterns. With the 2025 year-programme, we aim to formulate a counterpoint that instead promotes affect, solidarity, reciprocity and interdependence in the interest of systemic change and countering anthropogenic (man-made) climate change. Here, we see an important role for art, which provides the key element for action and agency through imagination. Or as French philosopher and activist Michel Foucault noted, "Where there is power, there is resistance."

We hope to meet you at RADIUS in 2025 during the BEYOND POLITICAL LIMITS year-programme!

* The year-programme BEYOND POLITICAL LIMITS is developed as a continuation and extension of the 2024 year-programme THE LIMITS TO GROWTH, which explored the increasing imbalance between economy and ecology.

BEYOND POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Chapter 3

CAN THE MONSTER SPEAK?

6.12.2025—22.02.2026

Sharan Bala

Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz

G. Gamel

Hudinilson Jr.

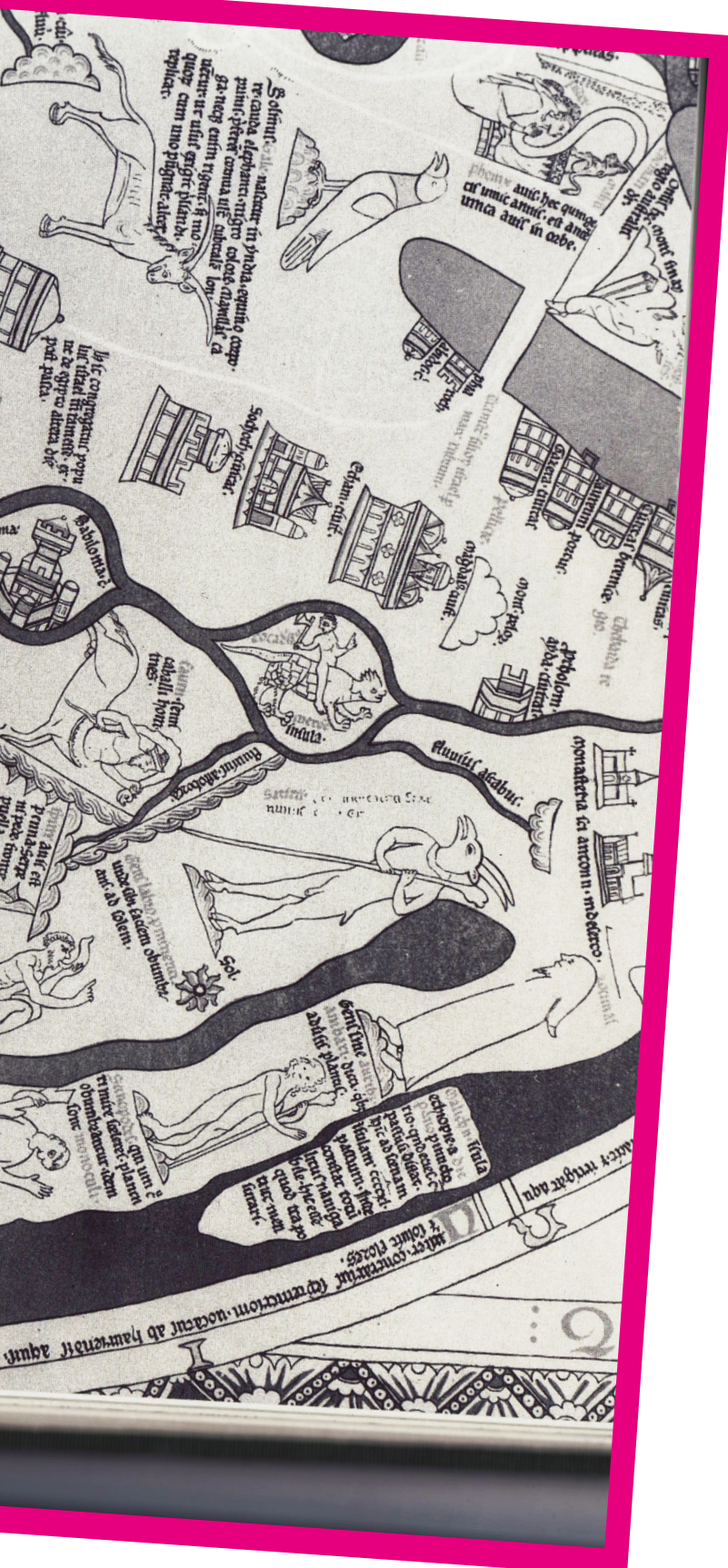
Dae Uk Kim

Xie Lei

Sasha Litvintseva & Beny Wagner

Clémence Lollia Hilaire

Luiz Roque



RADIUS closes its 2025 year programme BEYOND POLITICAL LIMITS with a group exhibition on monstrosity as foundational to queer ecology. Through the work of eleven artists, CAN THE MONSTER SPEAK? examines the historical, scientific, and cultural construct of queerness as monstrous and explores monstrosity as an emancipatory and desirable political aspiration. By embodying notions of transformation, ambiguity, and deviancy, monsters upset constructs like race, gender, purity, and beauty, and thus represent a transgression of the norms that make up the dominant cisgender, binary, patriarchal, heterosexual, and white system of power. At the same time, monsters are necessary to define what is considered "normal" by contrast and exclusion. This exhibition unpacks this duality and explores different embodiments, affects, and considerations of monstrosity as a tool of resistance, a mode of becoming, and a political position. In doing so, it advocates for ecologies beyond binaries, beyond the human, and beyond the constraints of gender, sex, and identity as enforced by Capitalism. In other words, a way of inhabiting the Earth around the celebration of difference, where monstrosity is a radical refusal to normativity, and where queerness is the relentless practice of freedom within systems not meant to be surpassed.

AND THE MONSTER SPOKE BACK

*I am the monster who speaks to you.
The monster you have created with
your discourse and your clinical practices.
I am the monster who gets up from the
analyst's couch and dares to speak,
not as a patient, but as a citizen,
as your monstrous equal.*

Paul B. Preciado

On November 17, 2019, philosopher Paul B. Preciado was invited to give a speech on the 49th Study Day of the École de la Cause Freudienne in Paris on the theme 'Women in psychoanalysis'. Preciado, a transgender man whose philosophical work has long been denouncing and dismantling different constructs of gender and the body, confronted the three thousand five hundred psychoanalysts in the audience with a particular violent history: that of the pathologisation of queer bodies and sexualities.² Sharp-witted, incendiary, and defying, Preciado weaved an autobiographical account of transitioning with a critique of the gender binary, the historical establishment of which was aided by modern scientific disciplines—and specifically psychology, psychiatry, and pharmacology from the nineteenth century onwards.

Deemed mentally ill, monstrous, deviant, and abnormal, queer people have long been pigeon-holed in arbitrary medical categories such as "homosexual". First coined by human rights activist Karl-Maria Kertbeny in 1866 to argue against anti-sodomy laws in Prussia,³ it was medicalised in 1866 by Richard von Krafft-Ebbing as a "sexual inversion". Homosexuality was not removed from the World Health Organisation's list of International Classification of Diseases until 1990. "Transsexual", on the other hand, was first classified as a sexual psychosis and fetishist transvestism in 1953 by sexologist Harry Benjamin.⁴ It was not until 2013 that the DSM replaced transsexuality with 'gender dysphoria'.⁵ Although it paved the way for gender-affirming care, critics like Preciado argue it keeps on pathologising trans identities, it reinforces a medical model where one must prove distress to receive care, and it frames gender diversity as a disorder.

On November 17, 2019, the monster spoke back to its creator. Yet Preciado could not finish his speech as he intended to because he was halfway booed off stage. A year later, he decided to publish the speech in its entirety, and he titled it *Can the Monster Speak?*.⁶ Preciado's powerful speech ignites this exhibition as it intends to carry on his contestation to scientific and cultural discourse around queerness and explore the political potential of monstrosity.

A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.

Julia Kristeva⁷

Vampires, werewolves, zombies, demons, witches... Monsters have long animated our horror imagination. Traversing all kinds of cultural production and media, monsters are portrayed as dirty, ugly, menacing, and undesirable creatures that disrupt human order and that must be eradicated. As Jack Halberstam has argued in his analysis of monstrosity in Gothic literature and cinema, monsters are vessels of many anxieties, fears, and threats to the nation, Capitalism, and the upper class.⁸ Monsters trigger dread and terror as they estrange the categories of beauty, humanity, and identity that have shaped what a "normal" person should be and behave. Whatever falls outside the margins of normalcy within a dominant cisgender, patriarchal, heterosexual, and white society immediately adopts a certain degree of monstrosity and abjection, and therefore needs to be antagonised, surveilled, and controlled. This is particularly evident in queer bodies like intersex babies, transgender people, the sissy child, sodomites, masculine women, and effeminate men. All of these bodies display difference outside the dominant system of representation and reproduction. They are particularly terrifying because they reveal the truth of such system as a made-up, biased construction that can only be kept in place by exerting violence, both physical and epistemological.

It is not the lack of cleanliness, health, beauty, intelligence, or decorum that defines monstrosity and causes abjection. Monstrous is what disturbs identity, system, and order; what does not respect borders, positions, and rules, as it vagrantly exists outside the parameters of decency and challenges the status quo.⁹ Paradoxically, by embodying what is considered inhuman, the monster produces the human as a discursive effect. Judith Butler summarises it by saying that "it is not just that some humans are treated as humans, and others are dehumanised; it is rather that dehumanisation becomes the condition for the production of the "human".¹⁰ The production of monsters is necessary to keep systems of oppression ongoing:

a necessary enemy that can legitimise the border that draws the normative enclosure where the human lives.

The fabrication of monsters for the establishment of hegemonic systems of power is inseparably connected to processes of racialisation and segregation. Postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha uses the term 'metonymies of presence' to describe the way colonial discourse constructs the colonised subject. The coloniser sees the colonised—or, interchangeably, the doctor and the queer, the politician and the migrant, the supremacist and the uprooted—as both an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible within the coloniser's framework of knowledge. This creates a situation where the oppressed are both distinct from the oppressor—an "other"—yet subjected to the oppressor's systems of representation and control.¹¹ Trapped in a lesser form of being, an impoverished or corrupted version of the ideal man, the monstrous Other can only be understood, represented, and managed under systems of repression, enslavement, isolation, and exploitation.¹²

Monsters are also ecological subjects, not only as entanglements of different human and nonhuman parts—mermaids, harpies, werewolves—or as representation of ecosystems—the swamp, fungal zombies—but also because they often represent warnings of natural transgression. Monsters often symbolise pollution ('Godzilla') and natural disaster (Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu'). Monsters are also byproducts of extractive capitalism ('The Worm' in *Dune*), and manifestations of the repressed costs of industrial progress (Cordyceps fungus in *The Last of Us*).

The monster is the abject Other that enables the formation of all kinds of identities—personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal, particular—and the container of sexual, cultural, and ecological anxieties. However, the production of monsters as a main condition to the continuity of Capitalism makes their existence a powerful site of political counter-power.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT ON THE PRODUCTION OF MONSTERS

What am I doing here? I have
I am a monster, you say? No! I am
No! I am the rule; you
You are the chimera; I am the real

Even though monsters have been part of the human imaginary since Antiquity, it is in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when they start becoming object of study, writing, and theorisation in Europe. In the wondrous and mostly fantastical descriptions of peoples, landscapes, and stories from the East, European authors raved about the diversity, novelty, and strangeness of exotic lands. Tales of centaurs, satyrs, hermaphrodites, and cross-dressers fascinated Europeans. This fascination was at first benign, satisfying curiosity rather than posing a moral threat, as they were found in remote lands. However, a distinction between what was considered *wonderful* and what was *monstrous* gradually began to take place. Wonders (*mirabilia* in Latin) were understood as permanent and regular findings in the physical world, emerged from natural causes and

part of God's original creation: unicorns, the phoenix, and the mandrake root, for instance. Monsters (*monstra* in Latin), on the other hand, were considered supernatural and usually ephemeral carriers of omens and divine messages: common examples were meteorites, comets, conjoined twins, and werewolves. Monstrous beings and rare natural events were thought to foretell, to show (*monstrare* in Latin, hence the word 'monster') and predict future catastrophe. Whereas marvellous-looking peoples, animals, and plants were lensed through an exoticising gaze and rendered cultural objects under a taste for curiosity and recreation, individual monsters found in the European continent represented a suspension of the natural order, a manifestation of God's wrath, and warnings for upcoming punishment. As a consequence, tales and representations of monsters in printed media infused people, regardless of their class, with horror, anxiety, and fear.¹⁴

*We come to terrorise you!
 from the people! I am the exception?
 you are the exception!
 ality!*

=Victor Hugo¹³

The animal/human hybrid was one of the most common types of monsters to populate medieval and early Renaissance literature. In contrast to animal/animal composites, which were considered exotic races and only scary in their physical danger, the animal/human individual evoked utter terror since it was perceived as a violation of sexual norms—in other words, the result of bestiality or sodomy. The horror was not only provoked by the confusion of categories like “animal” and “human”. It emerged from what was perceived as a corruption of sexuality and morality in the shape of a beastly human or human beast, thought as harbingers of divine retribution as a response to human sin. This discourse of the monster as sexual deviance prevailed in the historical discourse around queer individuals and their sexual practices. The current vilification and illegalisation of transgender people as signs of moral corruption, crime, and indoctrination exemplifies it perfectly.

From the late sixteenth century, another shift in the apprehension of monsters started taking place. Coinciding with the establishment of modern scientific disciplines, early colonialism, and the emergence of bourgeois taste beyond the church, monsters become

less of fear-inspiring creatures, and rather objects of intellectual study and amusement. Monsters and all kinds of oddities under the European gaze also began partaking in an economy of collecting and entertainment. The more scientific view of monsters as rarities of nature worth studying began coexisting in the eighteenth century with a strong current of Neo-Aristotelian thinking, which regarded monsters as errors of nature and violators of decorum, and thus inspiring new affects: monsters were not so much terrifying anymore, but rather objects of repugnance and aversion.¹⁵

Monsters would soon become labelled freaks, and start becoming part of touring circus troops for the amusement of the public. They continued to be ostracised and marginalised, but now they were effectively powerless and mere provokers of curiosity and laughter. Simultaneously, nineteenth century ordinances in the United States and Europe barred individuals deemed unattractive or disturbing from certain public spaces. The poor, deformed, diseased, or unsightly were to be removed from public space for the comfort of the white middle and upper class.¹⁶

As Susan Stryker remarks, bodies, and particularly queer bodies, are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping their physicality that transforms the flesh into a useful artefact.¹⁷ Such artefact always serves a political goal to maintain imperialist and fascist ideologies. Yet what if monstrosity as a shared condition among the oppressed trespassed the enclosure of normativity and came to replace its very foundations?

*Can we trans/form, regenerate,
dismember, and re=member anew
fleshy bodies in their materiality?*

*And if these fleshy hopes feel
cruel to us sometimes, especially perhaps
when reality seems impossibly hard and fixed
and our own naturalcultural bodies and
desires feel immobilised, if there are times
when we have to face the knife, to tear
ourselves open, draw blood, might a
regenerative politics with all its monstrously
queer possibilities still serve to recharge
our imaginations and our electric
body=spirits, helping us transition from
momentary political and spiritual rigor
mortis to living raging animacy?*

Karen Barad¹⁸

The notion of humanity upon which the modern world has been founded keeps on shattering, like a mask that keeps on cracking, revealing a monstrous face. Yet this monster is its very creator. Just like doctor Victor Frankenstein trembles at the sight of his own creation in Mary Shelly's novel, it is not the monster itself that terrifies him. Rather, his monstrous creation works as a mirror, revealing that it is the very act of creating it that is horrific. This realisation makes Victor Frankenstein pursue his creature's death in his own hands, though in vain. Frankenstein's monster lives on, a queer body, an assemblage of parts electrified to life, roaming the Earth, outliving its creator. After witnessing Frankenstein's dead body on a ship sailing the Arctic, the monster plans to take its life by burning in a self-made funeral pyre, and then jumps into the icy waters, plunging into the darkness, leaving its ultimate fate unknown. Despite conventional readings of the novel's ending pointing to the monster's suicide plan as an act of remorse and acceptance of his criminal existence, what if the monster would not simply take its own life out of shame, but to shed the monstrosity forced upon it, liberating itself from the yoke of its master and mutating into a new form through the fire, like the mythological phoenix?

A monstrous political ecology promises a regenerative politics in the sense that it can both reveal and undo the racist, ableist, supremacist, classist, queerphobic, and speciesist foundations on which the "human" as we know it has been constructed. Far from universal, the concept of "human" has long enabled the overrepresentation of the European cisgender heterosexual man as if it were that of human itself. As Sylvia Wynter points out, such overrepresentation at the expense of the marginalisation of other kinds of humanity hinders any struggle to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, the environment, global warming, severe climate breakdown, and the sharply unequal distribution of earthly resources.¹⁹

Embracing monstrosity as a desirable condition and a way-out to Capitalism invites us to explore other ways of understanding and representing ourselves, new forms of becoming and kinship, alliance, and change.²⁰ There is potential in re-signifying monstrosity, in embracing it rather than rebuking it, in recognising that the horror lies in the perpetuation of monstrous stigma by those who deem themselves normal. It is this normativity that drives the current epoch of mass extinction, as it is intimately connected to the cultural dominance of fixed, heterosexual ways of reproduction, desire, and relating over symbiotic and promiscuous queer assemblages—which, as Lynn Margulis demonstrated, form the conditions that have driven the evolution and diversity of species on the planet, including the human.

Synonymously to monstrosity, Saidiya Hartman speaks of waywardness as a means of resilient living of the racialised, pathologised, criminalised, and dispossessed.²¹ Waywardness is a means of inhabiting the world that challenges the status quo. It is a claim to opacity and self-representation, a propulsion to strike and refuse, to love what is considered unlovable. It is born from the lived experience of enclosure, segregation, discrimination, and it insurgently lays the ground for new possibilities and vocabularies towards queer agency and freedom. In her words, it is "a beautiful experiment in how-to-live".²² Waywardly, the monster exists, moves, acts, resists, fights, assembles, desires, loves. Defyingly, the monster speaks in the desiring tongues of queer existence.



1 Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz

Wig Piece VII (Right Body Wrong Time), 2025

Wig Piece III (Right Body, Wrong Time), 2025

Wig Piece (String Figure No. 1), 2020

In Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz' *Wig Pieces*, hair has become disembodied and abstracted into something else: are these paintings, sculptures, or maybe curtains? In their *Wig Pieces*, Boudry/Lorenz play with what happens when our systems of reference falter. The works resist easy recognition and categorisation. Struggling to define them, we are confronted with the arbitrary nature of the categorising lines that shape the way we see the world; lines that in reality are much more tangled and messier.

The *Wig Pieces* invoke monstrosity not only through their refusal of legibility, but also in their materiality. Throughout history, hair has been a measure of monstrosity. Having "too much" hair, hair that is "too dark", hair in the "wrong places", or of the "wrong texture": they have all been used as markers of otherness.²³ In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, scientists were even preoccupied with hair as a possible marker of having a "lesser race". "Abnormal" or "excessive" hair growth was also theorised to be connected to mental illness or a sign of wildness in

"hypersexual" women. In these works, hair is divorced from the bodies they made monstrous and suspended in space as reinterpreted wigs.

Wigs are devices that change and transform bodies. They alter how bodies are read and understood or help them defy being understood at all.²⁴ Wigs can be seen as potential part of the assemblage of undoing that is drag. Renate Lorenz describes drag as the conscious reconstruction of one's own body through methods that produce distance to the norms that involuntarily constituted the self in the first place.²⁵ Drag is thus not just a conscious reversal and rejection of performing normative gender; it can take back agency from normalising power systems. Standing at the borders of gender, drag blurs, mocks, and expands the boundaries of gender, undoing them in the process. In doing so, drag can thus be understood as a monstrous political strategy that reveals the weak foundations on which gender expression is forcibly impoverished under Capitalism.

2 Hudinilson Jr.

Sans titre (14 pièces HJ2475), undated, 1980s.

Sans titre (20 pièces HJ2500), 1981

Sans titre (9 pièces HJ2502), 1980

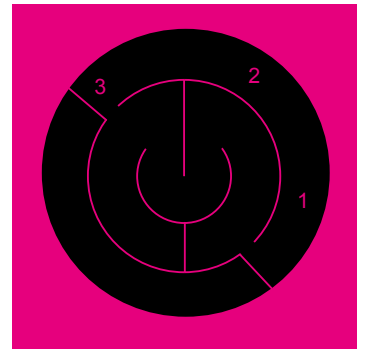
Sans titre (HJ0220), 1980

Sans titre (HJ1944), undated, 1980s.

As the monster was stitched together from disparate parts by Mary Shelley's doctor Frankenstein, Hudinilson Jr. recreates his own queer body by reconfiguring copied fragments of it. Sometimes he sutures these fragments into a readable body, other times the body is refracted into textures: close-ups so intimate that they lose legibility as a body. Through the practice of photocopy and scanning, Hudinilson Jr. played with opacity and exposure, carefully threading the line between the power and the risk of visibility by revealing all yet resisting identification.

The Xerox machine is a medium of mass production, known as a popular mode of print for many underground publications internationally: it evaded the censorship of a possible publisher and was widely available and affordable to use.²⁶ The choice of the Xerox figures as an accessible instrument of the circulation of dissent, yet also presents a possibility of intimacy.²⁷ Hudinilson Jr. started to experiment with the images he could create with the machine. In an intimate dance he pushed its limits through enlargement, cutting, and widening, pushing his own body up to the glass and distorting it often beyond recognition. This method was one of a careful observation of the self, and dealt with the politics of visibility in a social climate that is bound up in making difference invisible.

Hudinilson Jr. was an influential artist in São Paulo's art scene since the late 70s, a time where non-normative (self)expression was repressed into an existence that could only be underground. Between 1964 and 1985, Brazil was ruled by a military dictatorship in which censorship and surveillance was part of daily life. Not only sharing unwanted political views was dangerous, but showing any deviation of normative identity could risk punishment.²⁸ During this time, Hudinilson Jr. crafted a practice based on defiant visibility. These exercises of looking at and showing his own body are thus not only intensely intimate, they are inherently political.²⁹ He was reclaiming the power over his body and its visibility by not only deciding how and when it was seen, but also its very composition.



3 Sasha Litvintseva & Beny Wagner

A Demonstration, 2020

Duration: 24 minutes and 57 seconds

A Demonstration departs from Sasha Litvintseva and Beny Wagner's encounter with *Monstrorum Historia*, a taxonomy of monsters produced by naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi in the sixteenth century.³⁰ This work is a seeming paradox: where taxonomies represent the effort to cut up the world into categories and units to be studied, monsters represent that which spills from the cracks between the lines of normativity that taxonomies draw up. *The Monstrorum Historia* stood at the precipice of a new knowledge regime in which the scientific study of the monster became an affront to reason.³¹ Aldrovandi's monster taxonomy is an artefact born out of a scientific paradigm in which monsters existed as part of the world to study. Within the pre-modern distinction between wonders and monsters, monsters were looked at with anxiety and horror, since their existence was thought to foretell catastrophe.³² Litvintseva and Wagner explore how Aldrovandi's cosmology might still lurk in the deep subconscious of European science, in which monsters are no longer the object of taxonomies but their product.³³

In *A Demonstration* Sasha Litvintseva and Beny Wagner investigate the historical connection between monstrosity and taxonomy in a way that defies the normally assumed position of historical distance. Instead, they aimed to "capture a persistent phantom-like presence of monstrosity that haunts every attempt to define and standardise."³⁴ The images switch from a hurried, almost hunted flickering, to an eerily arrested stillness, on to stealing glances from spaces that feel as though they are frozen in time. Describing the act of filming and montage, Litvintseva and Wagner draw a parallel between the creation of monsters: "If we consider filming as analogous to the naturalist's work of collecting specimens, the resulting edit is the monster itself."³⁵

4 Xie Lei

Indulge II, 2024
Investigation, 2024
Nachtgesänge II, 2024

Xie Lei's paintings evoke both a vivid eeriness and intimacy that lures the viewer to feel an uncanny mix of arousal, anguish, and serenity. His paintings appear to be located in a subconscious natural dreamscape, where their characters engage in sexual acts that simultaneously strike as lewd and gruesome. Lustfully grimacing, the figures blend into one another and further leak into their environment.

The ghostly figures seem to haunt the canvas with a morbid eroticism that invites the viewer to vanish into its affective landscape. They might be interpreted as forming an ecology of cruising, which could be described as 'formation of space, time, and flesh where the porosity of self to other, of the familiar to the strange, can produce constellations of affect, desire, erotic kinship, and pleasure capable of carrying us away from the miasma of the present.'³⁶ They portray a deviant and monstrous sex not meant for heterosexual reproduction but based on pleasure, conducted alone or with others, inside or outside. Melting into their surroundings, we might think of how cruising is a queer ecological practice that collapses the distinction between public and private and creates 'counterpublic spaces of desire'.³⁷

Xie Lei conjures a queer sexual ecology by means of bodily ambiguity, transgression, affective excess, and the dissolution of fixed identities. In his paintings' luscious exuberance, the monster thrives in its vanishing, transformation, and ecstasy.

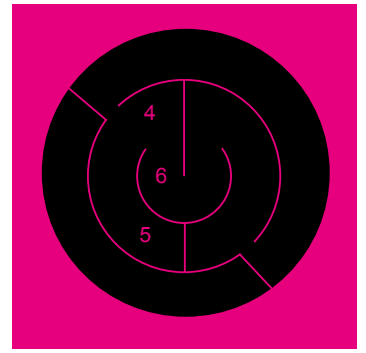
5 Luiz Roque

Clube Amarelo, 2024
 Duration: 7 minutes and 12 seconds

In *Clube Amarelo* (*Yellow Club* in Portuguese), Luiz Roque creates a world seemingly timeless yet inherently futuristic. Roque often uses the visual language of science fiction to create and imagine new, queer worlds.³⁸ *Clube Amarelo* is a speculative place that is alternative to our reality and is wildly alluring. A colourful post-modernist building draws us into the club space, where we reach a concrete room with glowing neon lights and tanning beds.³⁹ In the club reigns an otherworldly atmosphere where time, body, and identity become unstable, and where pleasure, terror, and transformation coalesce.

Clube Amarelo grasps us through the heightened nature of a queer sexual encounter. The meeting is ripe with the tension between abjection and arousal: when the protagonist is strangled, do they gasp for air or moan in pleasure? Is it a human meeting with a more-than-human other, or have both creatures long left humanity behind? This uncertainty and refusal of explanation allows for the film to affect the viewer after watching, leaving room for fantasy and desire.

Roque's film taps into the irrepressible desire for the unfamiliar, the arousal for what is different, and therefore potentially dangerous. Yet in the thrill of danger we may give in, we could follow our gut and rush to the trespassing of norms. As Connor Spencer writes about the work, "Will we like what we become, relish what happens to us, when we seek pleasure or embark upon the transformations of our bodies? Could our attraction to the other really be a sublimated fantasy of the reformatting of our own identity?"⁴⁰ Just like the film, the question remains unresolved. Through this very queer indeterminacy Roque allows us to keep on fantasising.



6 Clémence Lollia Hilaire

La part des anges (2), 2025

La part des anges unfolds through three modified water coolers. The coolers, symbol of infinite time spent in hospital waiting rooms, evoke the long afterlife of medical anti-Blackness: from the refusal to acknowledge Black women's pain during slavery to the contemporary effects of misogynoir, where symptoms are minimised, urgency is denied, and harm is rendered routine.⁴¹ This ongoing history unfolds in *oceanic time*, what Christina Sharpe describes as "a time that does not pass, a time in which the past and present verge."⁴² They hold this history in suspension: the quiet hum of institutional neglect alongside the possibility of ritual repair.

Each cooler is adorned with baby-hair, linking Black feminine aesthetics to intergenerational technologies of survival, which are intimate, coded, and recursive. They each correspond to Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey, three enslaved girls who were forced to endure horrendous experimental surgeries by American gynaecologist J. Marion Sims in the nineteenth century. Even though Sims experimented with many Black women, they are the only known patients, and they are now commonly referred to as the Mothers of Gynaecology. Their stories are the core of the installation: a reminder that the medical knowledge we inherit was built through the pain, violation, and coerced endurance of Black women and Black people with wombs.

Atop each cooler sits a jug filled with an offering of *bilongo* (plant medicine) preserved in firewater (in this case, white rum).⁴³ This mixture traces the BuKongo cosmological line between *luvemba* (water, sunset, endings, passage into the immaterial) and *kala* (fire, sunrise, beginnings, return to the material), marking each cooler as a site where bodily, spiritual, and historical transitions are negotiated. When the visitors take a sip, they become proxies, participating in a healing practice that challenges the structures built on the flesh of Black women, who were denied the category of "woman" even as their reproductive capacities were mined.

The work also reclaims a protective function of the 'zombie.' Far from the caricature circulated by colonial imagination, the *zonbi* (Haitian spelling) is reassociated with its West-African origins, the Middle Passage and the trauma of slavery.⁴⁴ It is transformed into a (discur-sive) figure with the potential to be reappropriated to affect resistance and healing.⁴⁵ The zonbi is conjured in the *duppy's* share, also called *angel's share*: the percentage of rum that evaporates after distillation.⁴⁶ The duppy is a figure not dissimilar from the zonbi. The drink stands as a restorative and protecting action, following the resistance of African and Indigenous communities who have historically transformed the symbols weaponised against them, turning their imposed tropes into shields for survival, memory, and resistance.

As a whole, the work does not attempt to restore womanhood to a fixed or normative ideal; instead, it aims towards a gesture that Spillers describes as "a different social subject": one who emerges from the rupture with new possibilities for embodiment, kinship, and protection.⁴⁷

7 Sharan Bala

'discipline becomes a method of being and being a method to forget,' 2025 ⁴⁸

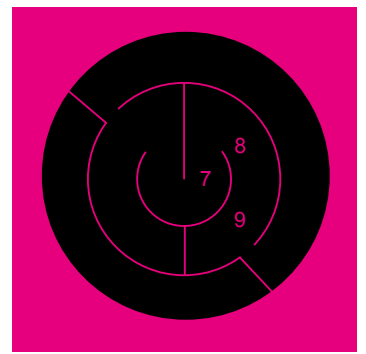
Sharan Bala is active both as an artist and as an activist for intersex visibility.⁴⁹ In *'discipline becomes a method of being and being a method to forget,'* Bala aims to research the intricate entanglements between identity, medicalisation, and socio-aesthetic determinations of sex.

In this installation we encounter reproductions of vaginal dilators, medical instruments used after vaginoplasty surgery, presented in a display reminiscent of corporate medical fairs in order to expose the continuities between medical, capitalist and colonial forms. The installation reveals how objects of supposed care and progress often serve as instruments of power, aiming to normalise and discipline bodies through oppression and erasure. In reference to the specific function of the dilators, Sharan Bala also questions the pressure to conform to feminine gender norms and prevalent ideal of what a "female" body should look like and how it should function in order to fit within the epistemology of normative sex.

Sharan Bala exposes with this work the intense violence subjected onto intersex bodies by modern science. Whereas intersex bodies used to fall under the monstrous as a godly omen, but with relative agency in the pre-modern paradigm, "monstrous" intersex bodies became heavily policed under modernity.⁵⁰ Intersex people came to threaten the neat boundaries of the sexual binary created in modern science and thus became heavily pathologised. The containing of this threat often results in "corrective" surgery in children to fit the "true sex" whilst they are not able to consent to the procedure nor are they able to pick their preferred gender expression.⁵¹ Advocating for the destigmatisation and demedicalisation of intersex experience is not only a plea to end unnecessary medical violence, but it is also a powerful rebuttal to the binary sex and gender regime.



Cabinet of curiosities of Ole Worm, 1655. Source: Wellcome Collection.



8 Dae Uk Kim

BLOOMING, 2022—ongoing

In the ongoing *BLOOMING* series, Dae Uk Kim is inspired by ‘fasciation’, an unusual process of mutation in flowers that can be caused by hormonal, genetic, bacterial, fungal, viral or environmental conditions. Despite their abnormal growth and bizarre appearance, fasciated flowers are artificially cultivated and collected given their aesthetic value and rarity. Kim’s fasciated flowers are clad in skin and adorned with piercings and hair, resembling human flesh and evoking genitalia. Kim’s work celebrates the beautiful mutations that occur in nature whilst advocating for an appreciation of bodily diversity. Through his fasciated, anthropomorphic flowers, Kim further wonders why rarity and difference in nature is sought after and prized whilst diversity and uniqueness are often cast out within humanity.

Julia Kristeva explains how abjection, the repulsion in the face of the monstrous, is not a biological given, but caused by a disruption of our understanding of identity, boundaries, and categories: it is the “in-between, the ambiguous, the composite,” which at the same time as disgust also inspires a yearning for it.⁵² Through their uncanny look, the *BLOOMING* series inspire both aversion and eroticism, embodying Kristeva’s notion of the abject.

The display of the flowers in bell jars connotes the aesthetics of museographic presentation. Exhibiting nature can be seen as a denaturalising action, an act that extracts a piece of nature out of its ecology. The pre-modern European cabinets of curiosities exhibited only the exceptions of nature, otherwise called monsters and mutations. However, after the creation of modern museums, nature came to be represented by single specimens that would stand for its entire species. Mutants and monsters were no longer represented as a sublime natural creativity but became abject anomalies proving the norm.⁵³ Captured in these bell jars, the flowers resist this imposition: instead, they stand proud in their unique monstrosity.

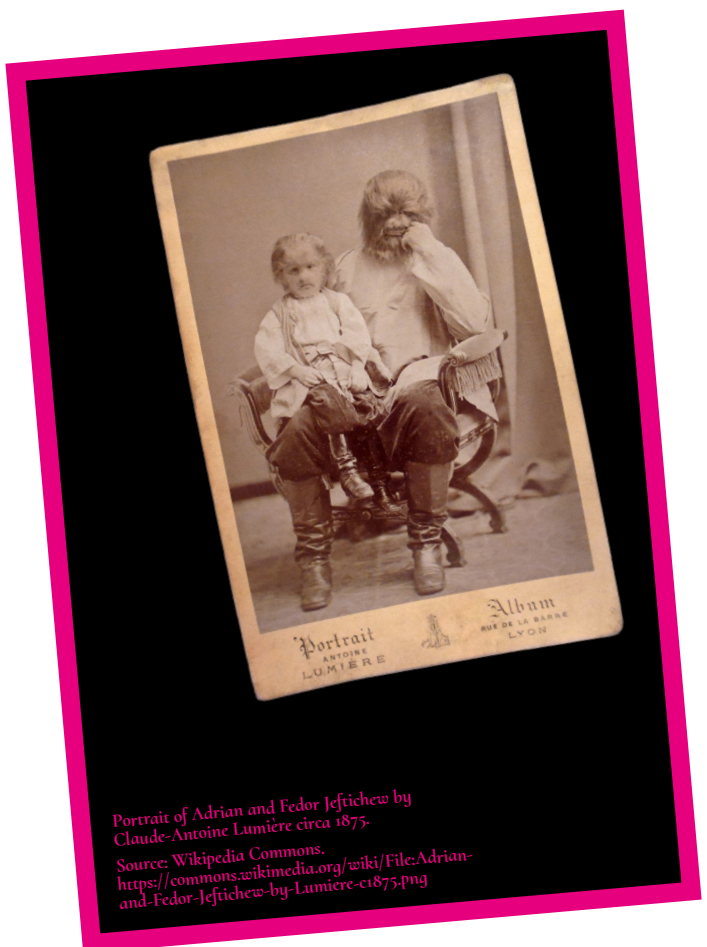
9 G. Gamel

Portrait d'Adrian Jeftichew, dit l'homme-chien, circa 1880

Stripped of his clothes and placed on a stool in front of a white curtain, Adrian Jeftichew was captured by photographer G. Gamel. Promoted as *l'Homme Chien* (The Dog-Man), Adrian Jeftichew was paraded around together with his son Fedor in one of the many freak shows popular in the nineteenth century.

L'Homme Chien was thought to be the result of the sin of procreation with animals, his son being evidence of Adrian's repeating of this sin. Jeftichew was said to believe that he and his son were damned and that prayer and donations were the only way to save their souls.⁵⁴ Whereas this view is characteristic for the pre-modern anxiety elicited by monsters, at the same time hirsutes like Adrian and Fedor provoked a broader anxiety linked to the shifting of paradigm regarding the origins of humans.⁵⁵ Was humanity a fixed, noble species preordained by God, or did we actually evolve from other animals lesser than us? This questioning of the man/beast dichotomy sparked by the hirsutes had the potential to cause ontological chaos.⁵⁶

To counter the threat of the ontological chaos upon meeting "monsters" like Jeftichew, freak shows had to carefully balance between appeal and repulsion so as not to disturb the sense of self in the audience. By taking on a scientific vocabulary, freak shows took on an educational character and created a distance between the freaks and the spectators by presenting the former as isolated objects of scientific interest. Freak shows gladly embraced Darwinism to present the people on show as "missing links" between species or as biological anomalies. This scientific perspective granted the freak show and its visitors an air of respectability for what was plain voyeuristic exploitation.⁵⁷



Presenting this photograph in the exhibition may raise the question whether Adrian Jeftichew is not being put back on passive display. However, hiding its existence might never allow for a reinstitution of Jeftichew's personhood and agency. By contextualising his story as part of a violent system of pathologisation and isolation, Jeftichew's photograph no longer becomes a fetishised object for voyeuristic pleasure, but a confrontational testimony that redirects our gaze inwards, making us question whether monstrosity is but a projection of ourselves.

1 Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?* (Fitzcarraldo, 2021), 19.

2 Pathologisation is the act of unfairly or wrongly considering something or someone as a problem, especially a medical problem.

3 “Kertbeny Coins the Terms ‘Homosexual’ and ‘Heterosexual’”, EBSCO, last accessed 6 October 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/kertbeny-coins-terms-homosexual-and-heterosexual>.

4 Paul B. Preciado, *Dysphoria Mundi* (Anagrama, 2022), 23–24.

5 DSM stands for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, a standard classification system for mental health conditions used by mental health professionals in the United States with worldwide influence.

6 The title of the publication was inspired by Gayatri Spivak’s seminal postcolonial essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), in which Spivak critiques the under- and misrepresentation of marginalised, colonised voices in Western academia.

7 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 1980), 2.

8 Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows. Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Duke University Press, 1995), 5.

9 In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), Julia Kristeva offers an in-depth study on the experience of abjection as the catalyser of horror and a constituent to the formation of identities.

10 Judith Butler, *The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2004), 90.

11 Homi K. Bhabha discusses ‘metonyms of presence’ in his collection of essays *The Location of Culture* (The Routledge Classics, [1994] 2004).

12 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2017), 17.

13 Victor Hugo, *The Man Who Laughs* (1896), quoted by artist Lorenza Böttner in her thesis ‘Handicapped?’ (1982).

14 For a comprehensive study of wonders and monsters in Europe from the High Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, please refer to Lorraine Daston & Katharine Park’s *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (Zone Books, 2001). Daston and Park’s book has been very insightful to trace the summarised historical account presented here.

15 Daston & Park, 202.

16 Moshtari Hilal, *Ugliness* (New Vessel Press, 2025), 189.

17 Susan Stryker, ‘My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix. Performing Transgender Rage’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (3), 1994, 240.

18 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), 411.

19 Sylvia Wynter. *On being human as a praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Duke University Press, 2015), 260.

20 Barad, 410. It is worth noting that Barad reaches this conclusion after exploring nature’s queerness and its political potential by means of quantum physics.

21 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments. Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Woman and Queer Radicals* (Serpent’s Tail, 2021). In her book, Hartman explores waywardness in the context of black social life in the first half of the twentieth century.

22 Hartman, 227-228.

23 Moshtari Hilal, *Ugliness* (New Vessel Press, 2025), 115.

24 Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, and Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu,
'THE UNLIKELY PUBLIC ASSEMBLY OF STAGES, HAIR, CHAINS, AND MICROPHONES'
A Conversation between Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu, Pauline Boudry, and Renate Lorenz,'
page 24, in *Stages*. Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz (Spector Books, 2022).

25 Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art - A Freak Theory*,
(Transcript Bielefeld 2012), 21.

26 Xerox is the brand name of a company well known
well known for its photocopying machines,
think here of those big office printers.

27 For more on Xerox machines
and queer underground publishing:
Shannon Michael Cane,
'Xerox, Paper, Scissors,' *Aperture*,
no. 218 (2015), 46-51.

28 'Exercícios de me Ver,' KOW Berlin, g.d.,
<https://kow-berlin.com/exhibitions/hudinilson-jr>.

29 Idem.

30 Taxonomy is the science of classifying and categorising.
A taxonomy of monsters then is a system of the classification and categorisation of monsters.

31 Sasha Litvintseva en Beny Wagner, 'Monster as Medium:
Experiments in Perception in Early Modern Science and Film,'
E-Flux Journal, no. 116 (2021), 1-2.

32 More about this divide can be found in the essay accompanying this exhibition.

33 Litvintseva and Wagner, 2.

34 Ibidem, 3. (Translation: Yanna Kok)

35 Ibidem 8. (Translation: Yanna Kok)

36 João Florêncio en Liz Rosenfeld, *Crossings: Creative
Ecologies of Cruising* (Rutgers University Press, 2025), 24. (Vertaling: Yanna Kok);
Cruising is "a queer subcultural practice of wandering around public places in search of
casual sexual encounters. Cruising can nonetheless be said to have existed ever since people who weren't
captured by hegemonic sex-gender systems found themselves seeking sexual encounters outside of sanctioned
regimes—and spaces—of pleasure, intercourse, or kinship."
(Florêncio en Rosenfeld)

37 Ibidem, 33.

38 Krist Gruijthuijsen and Léon Kruijswijk,
foreword in *Luiz Roque, Estufa*, edited by Léon Kruijswijk
(KW & Berlin der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln, 2024).

39 The building in the film is Casa Neptuna
by influential South-American architect and artist Edgardo Giménez.

40 Connor Spencer, press release for Luiz Roque's exhibition *Holes*
at Mendes Wood DM, New York, March 14 to April 19 2025.

41 Janice Sabin, 'How We Fail Black Patients in Pain,' AAMC,
5 Juni, 2023, <https://www.aamc.org/news/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain>. Misogynoir is a term referring to
the combined force of anti-black racism and misogyny directed towards Black women. The term was coined by Black
feminist writer Moya Bailey in 2008 to address misogyny directed toward Black transgender and cisgender women in American
visual and popular culture.

42 Christina Sharpe quoted from manuel arturo abreu,
'Essay for Clémence,' 2024, 3. (Translation: Yanna Kok)

43 Ingredients: white rum, casse (*Senna alata*)
calabash pulp (*Lagenaria siceraria*), hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*),
salsepareille (*smilax aspera*) root.

44 Scholars see the origin of the Haitian zombie as a reaction to slavery,
with the zonbi's eternal (after)life of forced labor performed for their master
echoing the condition of enslaved people.

45 In the original Caribbean understanding of the zonbi,
feeding them salt would elicit them to revolt against their masters. They thus embodied
the smoldering potential for resistance, even in their state of living death.

In *The Zombie in Contemporary French Caribbean Fiction* by Lucy Swanson,
she talks about the discursive power of the zombie in contemporary French Caribbean fiction,
in using the figure of the zombie as a tool to address the continuing oppression of the Black community.

46 *Duppy* is a word widely used in the Caribbean as a synonym
for ghost or spook, believed to like rum and blamed for its evaporation in rum-based drinks.

47 Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe:
An American Grammar Book,' *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987), 80. (Translation: Yanna Kok)

48 The artist thanks Tim Mathijsen
for the help and support in realising this work.

49 Intersex individuals are born with sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, genitals,
and/or hormonal structure) that do not belong strictly to male or female categories, or that belong to both at the same time.
Doctors often advise parents to perform surgical and other medical interventions on intersex new-borns and children, to make their body
(seemingly) conform to male or female characteristics. In most cases, such interventions are not medically necessary and can have
extremely negative consequences on intersex children as they grow older. 'Intersex' stands for the spectrum of variations of sex
characteristics that naturally occur within the human species. It also stands for the acceptance of the physical fact that sex
is a spectrum and that people with variations of sex characteristics other than male or female do exist.

50 Foucault describes in the introduction to *Herculine Barbin* how in the Middle Ages, the sex would be chosen at
baptism by the father or godfather, and that, if needed, this choice could be amended by the person themselves at the time of marriage.
This was based on the acceptance of the existence of two sexes within one body. In the modern era the idea of
there existing one 'true sex' within a body became prevalent. A doctor's job became to find out
this true sex and operate accordingly.

51 Michel Foucault, 'Introduction,' in *Herculine Barbin* (Random House, 2010).

52 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 2024), 4.

53 Charles Wolfe en Olivier Surel, 'On the Aestheticization,
Institutionalization, and Dramatization of the Concept of Nature – Conversation
With Olivier Surel and Charles Wolfe,' in *Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions*, ed. Tristan Garcia
en Vincent Normand (Sternberg Press, 2019), 141.

54 Diana Snigurowicz, 'Sex, Simians, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-century France:
Or, How to Tell a "Man" From a Monkey,' *Canadian Journal of History* 34, no. 1 (1999), 67-68.

55 Hirstute as adjective generally means hairy.

The specific condition of Jeftichew and his son was most likely hypertrichosis, which is often
mistakenly called histurtism. Hirsutism is the occurrence of excessive hair on parts of the body where it
normally does not grow. It is mostly used in the case of 'biological' women
growing hair in places that normally appear in 'biologically' male hair growth patterns
(mayoclinic.org). It is thus quite a broad term, used slightly differently in differing contexts.
Here the term is used to address Jeftichew and other people with hypertrichosis in the
more general sense of the word rather than the clinical diagnosis.

56 Snigurowicz, 57.

57 Hilal, 12-19.

Colophon

BEYOND POLITICAL BOUNDARIES Chapter 3
CAN THE MONSTER SPEAK?
6 December 2025 — 22 February 2026

Sharan Bala
Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz
G. Gamel
Hudinilson Jr.
Dae Uk Kim
Xie Lei
Sasha Litvintseva & Beny Wagner
Clémence Lollia Hilaire
Luiz Roque

Curator — Sergi Pera Rusca
Text — Sergi Pera Rusca & Yanna Kok
Translation — Mirjam Linschooten & Yanna Kok
Campaign Image — Minhu Jun
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Curator — Sergi Pera Rusca
Project Manager Communication & Public Programme — Daan Veerman
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