

SPEAKING THROUGH BODIES | Iván Acebo-Choy

Picture two naked guys screwing each other in the middle of a barely lit room. One of them, the top, is not only setting the rhythm of the act; he uses his body to cover, to direct, to master. The other guy, the bottom, uses his body to please himself; he receives, he is aware of himself as a receptacle, as the genesis of desire. Then, add to the picture a dozen guys watching the scene in silence. They can barely see each other, make out faces, say anything. All they care about is the spectacle of sex, the wonderful feeling of witnessing the perks of being queer. Now, think about the bulk of contemporary queer art. Remember the luscious bodies, the entrancing colors, the daring images, the political statements and the satiric tones. Everything from *Act Up* to Slava Mogutin. What do these things have in common?

THE SPECTACLE OF SEX

A few weeks ago, a friend and I went to an infamous bar in downtown Mexico City. It occupies an entire three-story house of white bare walls and pale lights. Every corner of the place is available for exploration. There are screens on the walls displaying vintage porn films, the techno music resonates in every nook, and there are specially designated areas for the display of sex. My friend and I grabbed a few drinks and headed to a seating area. To our surprise, the area was already occupied by a couple of naked guys having passionate sex on one of the leather sofas. The lack of illumination made it difficult to make out faces, to *discern* identities; all we could see was the couple going at it, completely unfazed by us or the other ten people who walked into the room. Nobody turned away. We all stood watching, weaving that heavy silence of fascination and pleasure that the couple used, indeed, to keep feeding their own fire. Such a scene made me think: homos, more than anybody else, rejoice in the act of watching others and themselves. Being queer is the act of being all body in the darkness, all scene and fascination with the materiality of our desires.

Unlike feminists (gay and straight), homos love exploring the body for the sake of it. While feminists are busy trying to reconfigure the gaze that has controlled and defined the female body since antiquity (through the deconstruction, reinvention and appropriation of symbols, either sexual or not), homos insist on objectifying their bodies as the projection of their identities. While art historians consolidate the white heterosexual male eye as the point of reference in the History of Art, homos base their differences on the materiality of sex and the idea of a universal

sexual experience as a way of being. Homos look to enjoy the (forbidden) pleasure of the male anatomy as though it still were a deadly act.

WHAT BODIES WANT TO SAY

As I browse through gay art magazines, online photography blogs, records of queer interventions and new histories of art, I see naked men, oversized penises, and men kissing or masturbating. I see men watching themselves, perusing other men, or posing to be watched. We homos have recurred to our bodies as a projection of our voices: that is all we have left.

Social control over queer bodies has been ruthless and effective; desire, that mysterious thing, remains the wild beast. Homos enjoy watching other homos because the body is the key to communicate with the (gay) world. Even the dark room was born to quench the necessity of queer expression; homos had to go underground and recognize themselves in the darkness: they were forced to play the game of love with the groping hand, the sweaty back, and the reluctant lips. They don't explore the body to understand themselves; they merely expose it, they admire it, they talk through it because there is no time for dialogue in the darkness. That is what Michelangelo, Mapplethorpe, Warhol, and Tom of Finland have done, and what Gilbert & George, Pierre et Gilles, Morimura, François Sagat and hundreds of other artists are doing. They look at the *Homo* not as an opportunity to dissect and see inside him. For queer artists, homos *are*, homos *love*, homos *fuck*. Homos act instead of being acted upon, and their bodies are the mere reflection of that situation: they resist manipulation to consolidate themselves in the apparent abjection of desire and pleasure. Homos are part of a reality show.

What the sex scene at the bar and queer art have in common, then, is spectacle. Like the bottom, queer art receives the gazes to impact our sexual self-consciousness. We don't care if the guy is red, green or brown or if there isn't enough light to see him: there is a gay man willing to engage our inner desires. Like the top, queer art directs our attention to several aspects of *queer-ness*: sexual loneliness, emotional loneliness, social loneliness. Both work to probe our identities, to construct our sensualities, to support our continuous struggle to achieve climax. Nakedness is our strategy and to succeed we need that which we cannot live without: the body of another man.