

curated by 2026, “LOVE”

George MacBeth



David Medalla, *Untitled*, 1959. Zinc printing plate based on drawing mounted to wood, 17.7 × 13.9 × 2 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and EXILE, Vienna. Photo by Simon Veres.

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In Ariana Reines’s accompanying essay for this year’s curated by—Vienna’s annual matchmaking junket in which twenty-four commercial galleries partner up with a coterie of international curators to encircle a single theme—she remarks of James Schuyler’s “Hymn to Life” (1974) that while his poem “isn’t obviously *about* love, [it] is palpably *made OF* love.” This distinction, describing the enhanced sensorium of the lover who veers from kittenish to admiring to suspicious or possessive, informed the approach taken throughout this seventeenth edition, which took LOVE (block caps theirs) as its theme. This was the case even when the exhibitions were determinately anti-romantic in form, far from being “obviously *about* love.” Indeed in certain group shows it was hard to prevent the intrusive question: “what’s love got to do with it?”

One example would be the seeming austerity of the Art & Language conceptualist Ian Wilson's "There is a discussion," presented at Galerie Martin Janda and curated by Jan Mot. Proceeding according to the dematerialized vernacular of high conceptualism, in this series running from 1972 until his death in 2020, Wilson went about notarizing his conversations, both private and public, into signed certificates that read only "There was a discussion," alongside the participants, date, and location where it occurred. Despite the dispassionate reduction of Wilson's "Discussions," when viewed in its entirety this metadata record of a life of open exchange with others stood as an oddly affectionate tribute to the indeterminate economy of friendship.

This same spirit of artistic interchange was also evident in one of the more complex and intriguing shows at curated by, "What can I do now with this great useless machine of my love? It has no wholesome work to do." at FELIX GAUDLITZ, curated by the artist Jason Dodge. Here there was also an energetic discussion underway, with Altman-style crosstalk scrambling the lines of communication between artists both living and dead—a conversation which also continued beyond the gallery walls through works such as Lydia Ourahmane's claim to have fabricated and spread a rumor. The physical gallery was dominated by Rosemary Mayer's *Connections* balloons (1973/2026), carrying on their surface names of figures the artists in the show admired, alongside a dedication that included an important date from the admired one's life, a flower then in bloom, and a planet. A recreation of Mel Bochner's *Measurement Room* (1969) meanwhile girded the room's periphery, Iman Issa's shifting lenticular prints hung on the back wall (in conversation with Degas's ballerinas), and a reel-to-reel tape spooling in a long relay around a Bunsen burner played a single chord dirge. Through all these myriad entanglements, Dodge's preoccupation with the peculiarities of translation shone through—approaching exhibition-making as way of parsing the anxieties of influence and intergenerational attachment.

Other exhibitions found more direct ways to tessellate the curatorial theme. In her installation at Galerie Kandlhofer, Puppies Puppies (aka Jade Guanaco Kuriki-Olivo) married amour propre to amor communitas. The first through a witty rejoinder to Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags* (1967), in an installation where she supplemented Pistoletto's garden center Venus for a statue of her own body, and the second through her conversion of a gallery room into an open-access clothes exchange for LGBTQ people. At Shore Gallery, Amalia Ulman curated pieces from Zoë Lund, Bruno Zhu, and Libby Rothfeld into a charming show "BABYBUBU NEVER DIE" exploring the intensities of attachment and grief we feel for our pets ("If love could have saved you, you would have lived forever" as the pet gravestone on the exhibition's flyer read).

In a revelatory show, titled "Matelot, Matelot" after a pining Noël Coward ballad, EXILE Gallery brought together an exquisite, and hitherto unexhibited, series of print blocks depicting pensive young men from David Medalla's (1942–2020) teenage years in the late 1950s. Mounted on wooden stands protruding at hip height in a modestly sacralizing display, these tender studies of coquettish young models

(combined with the fact they were never in his life “activated” to produce any prints) imputed a desire that still dared not speak its name. Another historical display was Milan Ther’s exhibition of the Swedish artist and set designer Lenke Rothman’s (1929–2003) mixed-media assemblages at Croy Nielsen. Encased in acrylic boxes, these poised collections of disparate objets trouvés ranged from tensely bunched pleats of plastic and satin to a work compositing the word LIEN (Swedish for “the scythe”) against a shredded leopard-print blouse and a stitched-in sensationalist newspaper advert for “Marilyn’s bedsheet!” The seeming cuteness of Rothman’s assemblages and drawings gave way on closer inspection to an agonized desire to connect and organize the fragmentary objects of modern life. These found objects’ pathos resonated for me with an alternately hilarious and heart-wrenching selection of exhibits elsewhere lent to Galerie Elisabeth & Klaus Thoman from Zagreb’s Museum of Broken Relationships (in a show titled “After Love”). My favorites were the charred remains of furniture a spurned lover had incinerated after a breakup, and a selection of pristine pencils a fastidious suitor had gifted someone at the outset of their courtship (only to demand their return after the romance ended).

Considering the violent wave of nationalist sentiment presently sweeping Europe, there was a notable aversion in this edition to the vexed question of amor patriae (love for the nation): a tacit sequestering of love’s domain from the political to the personal. An exception was Valentin Noujaïm’s impressive, sepulchral installation “Silent Choir” at GIANNI Manhattan. Here one descended into the darkened gallery to encounter a noughties television monitor playing a loop of graveyard angels and seven spotlit trumpets placed around the walls, conjuring the trumpets that augured the apocalypse to Saint John during his prophetic retreat in a cave. Yet Noujaïm’s trumpets were all muted by lightly engraved wooden blocks—their capacity to herald the end of days frustrated, deferred, or indeed silenced by a world that didn’t wish to hear any more of it.

Subject: Art Market, Love, Intimacy

George MacBeth is a writer and editor based in Berlin.

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