

THE RUBBERY

STACI BU SHEA IN CONVERSATION WITH TONI HERVÀS

This issue is part of the exhibition by Toni Hervàs,
The Rubbery, September 16 2017 in 1646.

This artist
Toni Hervàs

This correspondent
Staci Bu Shea

Concept and design
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DEC 4: Staci Bu Shea (SBS) - Toni Hervàs (TH)

Dear Toni!

What an exciting adventure to go on with you. The last and only encounter we had was in Barcelona; I met you, Consol, and Anna – all for the first time – at a bar where we had drinks and got to know each other. We stayed out until late, dancing to 90s pop music and I had such a wonderful time with you three.

I remember us talking about gay dating apps and that you did research in Weeki Wachee, the Florida Springs State park that's home to the little-known 'mermaid show.' I don't think I've met anyone outside of the U.S. that knows about the mermaids of Weeki Wachee! I felt an instant affinity when I got to talk about this about you.

Alas, this was such a brief insight into your work, and now thinking about mermaid tails, generations of mermaids doing spins, passing around the air hose, and drinking coca cola out of a glass bottle – all while under water – my imagination is running a bit wild and I'm looking forward to learning more!

All I know is that this current project involves roller derby. Can you tell me about how this started, and what you plan to do at 1646?

DEC 6: TH - SBS

YASSS!! Such a fab night it was that one!! I always think that dancing is the best way to know somebody, there's something in the way of thinking the space and with the people you are sharing it with, different-moving on the same beat that allows you to know if you feel an affinity with that person, you don't even need to talk, that connection is just there. And that night on the dance floor magic happened, but obviously we had talked before and it was a way to celebrate [the fact that] we met!

It was this summer, the three of us were going dancing often, we met after your *Army of Love* training at MACBA. Now, months later, I went to Casco, where you work for, it was the *Army of Love* of Dora Garcia and Ingo Niermann exhibition project, it was the *Alternate Endings*, *Radical Beginnings* screening at Casco for the *Day With(out) Art* of World AIDS Day. We met there and was like traveling thought time.

A lover I had at that time we first met, sent this link to me:

<https://youtu.be/R8DrXK8WS4k>

I was trying to explain to him why I needed to dance so much, that I was feeling so physical at that moment, needed to explore that reachable and fleshy feeling even if I knew I was kind of wasting

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myself. That song was *O Corpo e l Que Paga* from Antonio Variações' song (one of the first Portuguese celebrities openly affected by AIDS who died). I listen to that song so often, thinking it perfectly reflects the feeling I had during that period when I was starting to think of this exhibition.

I remember telling you that Consol and I were taking *vogue* classes, and must be at that time too when just started training roller derby (or I was almost going to), still I am a *fresh meat* as it's said about the beginners. There's something great about the names players of the roller derby choose for themselves and how they make them perform once they are on the circuit, over challenging ourselves and making a fantasy image of yourself come true. It's a bit like flirting, or seducing the audience. I kind of remember talking about this kind of things while laughing, eating greasy *bocadillos* [sandwiches] and having drinks, and also the olives that Consol was obsessed with :).

I started with that sport because I always felt very attracted to minor sports related to the queer culture. Since I was a gymnast when I was a child, I was quite used to train almost three days per week. At that time I was not partying at all, I was too much in the gym but not as a place for building your body, it was a kind of safe space for a gang of kids who were otherwise going around till late on the streets while their parents were working. I remember how it was considered very bad, then, when somebody started to train on a machine that didn't 'belong' to their gender. There is something very powerful about people who perform such minor sports like men in rhythmic gymnastics, male synchro-swimming or the roller derby.

Coming from my obsession with Weeki Wachee, I made a performance with a mixed synchro swimming team. Mermaids are so queer, but, you know? When I went to Florida to meet them, I realized it was a complete heterosexual environment. The main triton [of Weeki Wachee, the mermaid-themed park] was obsessed with Aquaman, and when not working for the park, he would perform like Aquaman in his free time (he lives there) in glossy Lycra costumes to make that character come true. Remarking that macho superhero aspect to his triton role in order to make it less gay. In the village (also called Weeki Wachee) it was like a high school structure where the best mermaids are dating the best tritons, they are such local celebrities! Obviously they looked at me as if they were very shocked of my enthusiasm and queerness (I went there with a huge amount of flowers and a t-shirt of a porcelain cat and mini shorts).

So I wonder, Staci, how was it to grow up in an environment like that [in Florida].

The poster of the exhibition is going to be from a picture of this performance so, somehow, Florida vibes are all around :)

The project I'm installing at 1646 comes from a research I've done while I was in a residency at the 18th Street Art Center in Santa Monica (LA). I use to work with several layers of information and mixing themes that look non-related and become a Frankensteinian creature that contains all of them. This exhibition is about the roller

derby phenomenon, the Prager archive that is located at The ONE archive (one of the largest queer archives worldwide; where documentation is kept about the seminal years of the gay leather culture in California related to the *MotorCycle Club* and the *Fist Fuckers from America* and their faction called *The Argonauts*) and the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts. All phenomena that have been referred to as 'Pussies on wheels'.

For now I will just introduce the roller derby: I started to try to investigate the roller derby phenomenon in LA, but I couldn't manage to understand even half of it, it is something that you should understand as a sport from the inside, otherwise it is more of a spectacle. So, once I went back to Barcelona, I noticed that because of the increasing interest in this sport, it has in recent years opened to male athletes, but still working under a structure as determined by the original WFTDA (Women's Flat Track Derby Association). That's why I wanted to join the sport myself. I was surprised at how, in some way, the team is like a full body, and needs to be protected, to be impenetrable and not destroyed.

Now a funny anecdote: you know, to my surprise, they weren't queer at all, but gay-friendly. Most of them came from hockey on wheels or from rugby. I realized that because – to be initiated – they wanted to teach me how to whistle during a match, and the captain told me I was not doing it right and that I should do that like if I were 'eating a pussy'. Even if that kind of behavior [in male sports] was exactly the one I was trying to avoid, I understood it was somehow very respectful in the situation of the training session and follows the horizontal structure as built by women, so I decided it to continue.

I just realized that's too long, and not getting to the point yet, but to me it is cool to proceed and know each other step by step, like that day at dancing the Moog club. hugs and besos,

And as is said on Weeki Wachee: once a mermaid, always a mermaid

DEC 8: SBS - TH
Hello merqueer!

I'm so excited by your message and everything that you pointed to; I'm following the threads you're weaving, and finding so much joy in learning about you, simmering in the glow of feeling 'damn, I love being gay.'

I will continue to follow you, listening to *O Corpo é que Paga*, responding to the different points you brought up. Through google translate, this song title is *The Body Pays* in English. I like how this song marks a time for you. It makes me think about anti-touching laws in post-war LA, that it was illegal for gay people to touch each other, even in bars and clubs. I think about how this history lives in us, I think about it when I have a lot of space around me while I'm dancing and when I make eye contact with someone through the wall-sized mirror in a gay club. How does my body pay to desire and be desired, and in what ways? Oh, our debt. More on this from the

brilliant Grace Dunham and Reina Gossett in their *Touch One Another* conversation (<http://www.reinagossett.com/touch-one-another/>).

I love this interest you have in sports and queer culture. I'm drawn to this as well. Some of my favorite porns are of gay *cis* men role playing in sport scenarios, especially football. The erotics of these situations, already so drenched in physicality, what the body can do, continues to inspire me. Like the mermaid culture that you spoke of, sports are incredibly and deeply gender segregated – it's amazing the compulsory and resulting heterosexuality and reinstating of power relations that such gendered sports involve. As they're hardly co-ed, sports are really gay! But there isn't the yielding to it as you might imagine, like male roller derby involving a culture of machismo that turns to misogyny. Did you tell the captain that eating pussy is a lot like eating ass?

Roller derby is largely ruled by *cis* women, right? I don't know so much, but I imagine it can get quite TERF-like (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist). Oy ... What's the general take on "competitive advantage" in the league? With more men participating in roller derby, as well as trans and gender- non-conforming people, how do roller derby leagues take up queer politics?

The way you're conceiving of this "frankenstein," as you say... I love these associations! Wheels, leather, fisting, "pussies on wheels." What attracts me most is this "full body" of the roller derby team that you speak of, and the way it tries to protect itself from penetration and destruction from the opponent. The one that breaks through ... is this the fisting moment? Sounds like in roller derby, no one wants to get fucked, they just want to do the fucking. Odd, right, when there are so many bottoms and not enough tops. <3

So this penetrative frankenstein on wheels, how is it coming together, what does it look like, how is the process? You're bringing me back to the colors and textures again, like with the mermaids. I'm imagining the materiality of all this. Tell me about some of the wheels and holes, and what they feel like!

DEC 11: TH - SBS

Here writing you from 1646 after a weekend of hard-working on testing the physicality of all this in the space. Reading the fantastic *Touch One Another* I take one of Grace's sentences to go on:

'In our culture, we're made to feel like our emotions are our fault and ours alone to bear the weight of. What if, instead, we see our most painful emotions as sites of recognition, as evidence of how oppression is all around us and moving through us. I think that embarrassment is a moment of painful understanding. We feel – sometimes unbearably – the force of histories telling us how to be. I think there is work in learning to see that pain not as evidence of who we are, but of what we're fighting against.'

The roller derby team from Den Haag is called *The parliament of pain* (such a beautiful name), so related to that

empowerment from the heart. I also thought that the roller derby was mostly a *cis* women fandom, I guess it is somehow, but the most important is how this sport is taken as a queer space for fighting against all this non equality, so present in other sports. Indeed, men starting to get into a sport defined by women and following the rules of the WFTDA (Women Flat Track Derby Association), will start performing the sport in a queer environment, has the risk of bringing changes to the derby, but potentially to the male idea of contact sports too (and that can be very interesting).

Now the sport federations are trying to cut this link with its feminist origins (and the WTFDA) and create a new sport that is basically the same as the roller derby, but only changing a few norms (and that's an actual fight going on right now, neither women nor men want that to happen). A few weeks ago I went to Amsterdam to shoot a European male tournament of roller derby, part of that video will be in the exhibition. During the only female match that took place you could see a big difference with the male one, one of my teammates who was in the Spanish team told me how much beautiful it was to see the way women are playing it, because that didn't always end up in a bunch of people using only their physical skills. I think we both have so many passions for the sports related to gender issues, also share same porn fetishes ;) ha ha great point of view of relating the reception as a sexual practice, I guess, is a weird mix of not wanting to be penetrated and to host the fucker in a kind of cast but physical flirt and seduction without letting him go further. To stay stuck forever in this mass of flesh. A bit like the song of the mermaids and the attraction base of the strategies for theme amusement parks.

So great they [Grace and Rena] started talking about The ONE archive. The first thing I saw there was a sling they had exposed, instead of a description of the item, was a page of the *TAIL* magazine, where somebody introduce the object with a self-experience, talking about the way the materials felt on his body, fantasies and fears came out of a psychedelic trip that brings him wild till sit there and understanding not only his use, but the way you felt once you are sitting there. Subcultures like FF and Roller have in common the fist as an icon for the resistance. Both are based on the pride of the pain bringing the body to unexpected feats.

That came from the Robert Prager archive, a Californian writer who was part of the FFA and the MCC we were talking about. Seven boxes where you can find anything from photocopies, drawings and paintings by Chuck Arnett to manuscripts for the unpublished *Fist Fucking Manifesto*. Arnett was a professional dancer who was working as a bartender at The Catacombs, the first *leather bar* in San Francisco. In an interview I found there, Chuck was talking about the anti-touching law, and how funny it was when he was practicing Fist Fucking in the basement at The Catacombs, thinking about what the legislators' take would be on putting a hand not *on* somebody but *inside* somebody.

The mural that Arnett painted on the wall of the room of the club where the juke-box was placed appeared in Time magazine, and is seen as one of the highest points of outing in the States. The picture shows that foggy eye

contact that you were talking about, it was seen as something so sexy and desirable. It's awesome to read them talk about the music that was playing there, such as *Ballad of the Sad Young Men* or *Shake a Tail Feather* (average lyrics that in the context of a gay bar at that point would sound as subliminal hymns to homosexuality). I was crazy-photocopying all of that, Michael (the archivist) was shocked at how important it was for me to have it physically if I could scan all of it.

I was reading in Kate Eichorn's book *Adjusted Margins* (she also published *The Archival Turn in Feminism*), is related to how the Xerox machine became so important in the queer culture, a space to share [that was] cheap and safe. It's very cool in the first chapter when she starts about the physical relation with the machine (from the postures the body must realize to the anger and affection that somebody could feel for that object), to get to the point when she talks about the inventor of the Xerox who started investing in paranormal research because of the idea that through the photocopy machine somebody could actually contact the spirits. It was funny because before, while I was doing some lecture about my work, I happened the scene when Woopy Golbergh is possessed in *Ghost* by a spirit who wants to communicate through the body of somebody else. So this exhibition is some how a way to create a body for these voices who already died.

First, I started understanding the materiality of this archive, photocopies and materials like Crisco, rubber or nail-polish that were spread on all the pages. Melting Crisco (that popular American vegetal butter that is used for the fist fucking practices) on reducing photocopies made the paper, transparent, leading to project them turned on self-made slides, other superimpose several layers of information at the same time. Crisco is not compatible with latex, what it brings to categories of materials that are opposite, so I decided to start drawing over plastics (is very hard to find how to fix the painting on plastics, acrylics jump, and nail-paintings are burning it) so I wanted to do some drawings that are going to be damaged or destroyed in the past of time and the many places where can be set. But also I love the material possibilities they possess, from the shining and reaction to light, the viscosity and the body it can take by itself) So you can start imaging lots of photocopies and plastics all melted on Crisco and treated as the body in the same way the roller derby make use of them and the gay leather scene.

That thing of works that are being broken and damaged through the lack of protection and the way they can be carried or set are things with what I've been working with on many projects. I feel some attraction to things that looks like are going to disappear. On 'El Misterio de Cavia', my last solo show, was a research about the trains and transvestite Spanish cabaret scene of the 70s, and was all made of cardboard taken from the streets. That project started with the idea of the local cabaret shows and how they were somehow related to fire and transformation (from Margarita burning herself each night at the Copacabana to Ocaña dying burned dressed like a sun made on paper. During the spectacle they shine (like fireworks

do) till gets switched off waiting like a Phoenix for the new rising. On 'touch one another' is also the fire related, like in Stone Wall and other historic moments. Paper burns fast and plastics can be easily pinned.

That's why I guess I switched from the photocopy machine to the Risograph one. The master is created by making holes all around the plastic paper to let the ink get in and reproduce the image. So, here we have the many holes I guess ;) seeing the printing process as a sexual gay practice the masters are versatile and the copies could be the bottoms. Also the ink never completely dries so is ejaculating color constantly.

Thinking on the track of roller derby related to the printing systems, both are based on 4 channels, the CMYK one, and the 4 tracks. Also the colors and DIY aesthetics are very important in that sport, the color tapes with which they draw the track are used to repair the protections.

The images were taken thanks of two Reefs the referees: CAPS LOCK & DANIO RERIO. They agreed to wear go-pro cams on their boys to get as close to the action as it was possible. Being on wheels and having the cameras attached to the body, the movements are not only psychedelic, also very physic with the absence of full body perception. So time to finish this second chapter and let the myths and the trips to the third one :)

Toni sending you lots of:



DEC 14: SBS - TH
Dearest Toni,

I've been meaning to write to you sooner, but these days have swallowed me whole. Since reading your message, though, I've been swirling around in the language you used to describe what you're working on: the colors, materials and their textures, the porous holes and what fills them. I'm thinking about how this is manifesting visually, and I have some idea but I know I will be pleasantly surprised to encounter your work on Friday.

I was also thinking – and allowing you to titillate me – it's work like yours that excites art historians and material lovers that write about art. There is so much to think through with your work. The materials and activity, and the intended and unintended use of them and the meaning of that interaction, the effects. There's so much to hold onto, catching the stuff that falls through the cracks.

All of these connections that are made possible by sexual practice: I'm fascinated by how you engage both the problems and possibilities of reproduction otherwise. From the photocopying machine to the Risograph. The continuity that is possible, the continuous ejaculation of color!

As queers doing art work, we are constantly bringing forth new forms from what is broken and engaging those ghosts. The ghosts that have a direct link to unprotected sex. The making of a body that can inhabit these narratives, open and vulnerable and willing to persist. I wonder about the Frankenstein body I will see tomorrow night. I'm looking forward to being in that body and feeling it with all of mine.

Until then, Toni. Thanks for this exchange. I'm grateful to be able to talk with you and share this way.
With love,
Staci

DEC 15: TH - SBS

Thank you so much for your words and thoughts!

This is not the last letter I'll send to you, but yes the one that is going to be printed in the next few hours, can't wait to see & hug you!! Working still on the building up, meanwhile thinking about what it could like right now in your mind. So excited to see how this takes shape, textures and materials are taking form on your mind being only driven by my words.

Reminds me of the way I approach The One archive, and how I felt amazed by the texts that the TAIL magazine contains, or the personal letters from Prager to other members of the MotorCycle Club, when they transform their own sexual experiences while on LSD and/or poppers into erotic narratives and try to turn their own feelings and sensations into words trying to seduce the imagination of the audience through skills of storytelling to shape those images in their minds. Robert Prager was sharing and collecting

pictures of things that reminded him of the shapes and feelings of the inside of a human body, shapes that he couldn't see but feel and go through.

By the way! Can you imagine I never make this link with reproduction (in a sexual sense, in relation to photocopying!!) that's so true!!! So weird!!

Starting from this reproduction (or non) that we are talking about, I will end with a kind of bedtime story (before I go rest and get ready for the plenty-of-emotions-day that is coming tomorrow; to finish all this and have you here finally facing the frankenstein monster).

I guess you know about *Jason and the Argonauts*. [Jason was an ancient Greek mythological hero who was the leader of the Argonauts whose quest for the Golden Fleece featured in Greek literature].

When that ocean of men going on a boat adventure to steal the Golden Fleece arrived to the Colquide, Jason used his seducing skills and influence with the gods with the princess Medea. She was clever, pretty and into magic, but she fell prey to the ecstasy of a spell that the gods had spread on her drink. She fell blindly in love with the warrior and, knowing his mission, decided to give him a transparent unguent to rub himself with before going with the gang on a night adventure. This kind of condom had to be spread once he was naked to protect against anything it could happened to him.

It's not weird that part of the Motorcycle club decided to take the name *The Argonauts*. They went camping and planned motorcycle circuits shaped like drawings of intestines full of obstacles, like the obstacles the Argonauts have to face in the Greek myth. It was so excited when I realized that on one page in the archive, from one of these meetings they had, two circuits were drawn that fit the two spaces of 1646 exactly!

As a symbol, the MCC Argonauts drew an image of Broomilda, modifying a comic character and making it more organic-like looking. A kind of a witch who drives them and protect them. Just like in the roller derby male players follow the leading rules defined by a woman.

In the myth Medea betrays her own family and jumps onto the Argonaut's ship. That's when the race starts with Medea doing all sorts of magic and turning this strategic game into a psychedelic trip.

Thanks of the tragedy by Euripides [Medea], everybody knows how that love story ends. Medea is dropped and decides to hurt Jason in his most precious treasures: his offspring (after which he dies of a deep melancholy). Thanks to you I now know that the killing their sons, an image modeled after themselves, means – in terms of Risographic process – killing the 'original' ones.

Wish you a good trip my dear, see you so soon!! Now we'll bring our words to be reproduced and spread for Tonight :)