

## Born to make you happy

Débora Delmar, Lucy Evetts, Zoë Marden, Gray Wielebinski

Preview: Friday 4 November, 19:00 – 21:00

Exhibition: 5 November – 4 December 2022

Curated by Helen Neven // Enquiries: [info@theresidencegallery.com](mailto:info@theresidencegallery.com)

**What do we think of when we think of Britney Spears? A meteoric rise from ingenue mouseketeer to global pop superstar, superseded by a public fall from grace at the eviscerating heights of the tabloid epoch, have made Spears a figure paradigmatic of the highs and lows of contemporary fame. In the decade that followed, the termination of her thirteen-year conservatorship in 2021 and the subsequent re-evaluation of her treatment in the public eye have contributed to radical shifts in the public's understandings of mental health and the nature of fame over the last three decades. *Born to make you happy* is an exhibition of new works by Débora Delmar, Lucy Evetts, Zoë Marden and Gray Wielebinski which take Spears as their subject to explore the entwined issues of agency, construction of persona and self-coding, freedom and submission which complexify the celebrity body.**

**Débora Delmar** uses appropriated images and objects to investigate the contextual value and symbolism of goods and architecture. While researching physical barriers as metaphors for restriction, Delmar considered Britney Spears' conservatorship in relation to specifically domestic items that simultaneously protect and mark boundaries within the home such as fences, locks, safes, child gates, and pet cages. Pet cages in particular isolate animals from their owners inside shared space. In the legal system, conservatorship is the appointment of a guardian to manage the financial affairs and daily life of another adult, a power relationship that bears similarities to that of owner and pet. Delmar's new work features a miniature ceramic house contained within a dog cage, and a framed inkjet print that reads 'I will not work again', in reference to Spears' refusal to perform following her release. Spear's case exposes not just physical and legal barriers, but also the contractual and societal restrictions that her celebrity status imposes. In the context of this exhibition, Delmar's work speaks not only metaphorically to the captivity of fame, but also creates a physical enclosure within the gallery space.

In a series of new paintings, **Lucy Evetts** draws parallels between her periods of extended home confinement following her teenage diagnosis with ME and the global coronavirus-induced lockdowns, during which Britney Spears frequently posted on Instagram whilst simultaneously facing the restrictions of a conservatorship and a pandemic. Through dancing videos staged in her living room, inspiration images and book recommendations, Spears' followers were welcomed into the star's physical and mental private space, offering an intimacy that at times felt voyeuristic. Evett's paintings collage the metaphorical language and imagery that make up Spears' Instagram page and song lyrics, exploring ideas of self-coding and identity in relationship to the female voice, whilst looking at the home and the digital profile as both barriers and gateways between the private and public self.

In 2007, Spears shaved off her hair in an act of defiance to the intense media scrutiny surrounding her. While researching the European Witch Trials of the 16th and 17th centuries, **Zoë Marden** drew a comparison between Spears' radical act and the head shaving practices of the Witch Councils as both radically influencing the trajectory of contemporary feminism in their symbolic rebuttal of constructed gendered expectations. In

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*She Squirts* (2022), Marden displays a set of hair clippers – notable also for their phallic shape and vibration - alongside a fountain installation of aquariums featuring ceramic sculptures that call to mind sea squirts, oysters, orifices and genitalia, referencing the romantic water nymph and shell motifs littered across Britney's Instagram. By linking her research into aquatic posthumanism and emancipatory head shaving practices, this work by Marden seeks to interrogate the symbolic signifiers of constructed femininity and the means with which these can be challenged and undone.

Britney Spears' 2009 'Circus tour' was the first event the singer performed under conservatorship. In Act 1, Spears undergoes a transition from circus ringmaster to slave, entering a cage suspended above a ring of fire to perform "I'm a Slave 4 U." Given the legal captivity she was enduring privately, it's striking that the performance explicitly foregrounded the way in which the star's life and career were haunted by exploitation and servitude. **Gray Wielebinski** attended the show at the American Airlines Center in Dallas that year.

*Prerogative* (2022) is a custom ringmaster's whip, an object symbolic of forced labour, discipline, and sadomasochism. The yellow and white leather references the infamous yellow python that Spears donned on her shoulders at the 2001 VMAs. Resting on a steel arrow armature, the whip's placement recreates the Christ-like pose in which Britney held the snake. Arrows play a historic role in the iconography of Christian martyrdom, particularly in images of Saint Sebastian and Saint Cristina, the depiction of whose exalted - if not outright sexualised – suffering bears undeniable correlations to our contemporary culture's ambivalent relationship to celebrity figures. By pointing at the viewer, Wielebinski's arrows convey a sense of danger while also implicating us, suggesting the complicity that we, as spectators, have in Spears' own historical treatment.

*The exhibition features a library of books based recommended by Britney Spears on her personal Instagram. An accompanying exhibition catalogue is available featuring additional research materials from the artists and essays by Asa Seresin and Grace Medford.*

*On Saturday 26 November, the artists will be in conversation with the curator and Zoë Marden will present a new live performance. More information on [www.theresidencegallery.com](http://www.theresidencegallery.com).*

## LIST OF WORKS

Débora Delmar, *Residence 398*, 2022  
Red ceramic oil burner cut out house wax melt warmer Christmas decoration, 4 panel dog pen pet puppy playpen metal exercise play fence for indoor/ outdoor, LED tealight candle  
61 x 61 x 61cm

Débora Delmar, *I will not work again*, 2022  
Inkjet print, aluminium frame  
21 x 29.7 cm

Lucy Evetts, *I just wanna go somewhere where nobody knows my name*, 2022  
Oil on canvas  
213 x 152 cm

Lucy Evetts, *Piece of Me*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
108 x 82 cm

Lucy Evetts, *Work bitch*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
108 x 82 cm

Zoë Marden, *She Squirts*, 2022  
Glass aquariums, water pump and tube, water, glazed ceramic, hair clippers, steel, chain.  
Fountain: 100 x 40 x 100 cm  
Clippers on chain: L210 cm

Gray Wielebinski, *Prerogative*, 2022  
Custom leather plaited whip, steel armature  
Whip: L152.4 cm, 3x metal plates: H10 x W10 cm (each), arrows: L5cm (each)

# THE RESIDENCE GALLERY

## ARTIST BIOS

**Débora Delmar** (b.1986, Mexico City, Mexico) investigates the effects of globalisation on everyday life focusing on issues of class, gender, cultural hegemony and gentrification. This is borne from the omnipresent influence of the United States in Mexico, and in the wider world. Within her practice she examines the contextual value of goods, analysing their systems of production, distribution and consumption. In her installations Delmar frequently references the sanitised aesthetic utilised in non-spaces, a neologism coined by sociologist Marc Augé to describe places such as banks, airports as well as corporate and government buildings, which are commonly under surveillance. She's particularly interested in the psychological and behavioural influence of this kind of architecture and frequently incorporates immaterial components within her exhibitions such as video, text, sound, scent, and situations.

Selected exhibitions: Body Blend Trade Culture, Muse Universitario del Chopo, MX, 2014, Upward Mobility, Modern Art Oxford, UK, 2015; 9th Berlin Biennial, DE. 2016; Biennial of the Americas, US, 2016; and more recently Femsa Biennial, Michoacán, MX, 2020-2021. She has received numerous grants such as the Jumex Museum Scholarship, MX, 2016-2018; Red Mansion Art Prize, UK/CN, 2018; and the Wolfson College Cambridge RA Graduate Prize, UK, 2019. She has recently been appointed as one of the Stanley Picker Fellows in Art & Design. Current and upcoming exhibitions include Liberty, Galleria Piu, Bologna, IT, 2022, TBC, Disland Paris, AU, TBC, Llano, Mexico City, MX, 2023.

**Lucy Evetts** (b.1989, Gloucestershire, UK) lives and works in London, graduating from the Royal Academy Schools in 2018. She makes paintings and installations using text and imagery, exploring material processes and their display strategies within the realm of painting. She threads together differing sources of text, documentation and personal narrative. Her recent work focuses on relationships between animals and humans in the public realm, examining the philosophical, cultural, and biological aspects of these encounters.

Recent exhibitions: Paint(consum)ing, The Function Suite, London, 2022; Split Open, The Split Gallery, London, 2022; Best in Show, Eve Leibe Gallery, London, 2021; Nourishment II, V.O. Curations, London, 2021; Quarantine Arts, Online Exhibition, 2020; Picture Palace, Transition Gallery, London 2020; Pets, The Other Art MA, Toma, Southend-On-Sea 2019; When Species Meet, Transition Gallery, London, 2019; Disir, TM Lighting, London, 2019.

**Zoë Marden** (b. 1985, Hong Kong) is an artist, filmmaker, and writer from Hong Kong, currently based in London. She graduated from the Royal College of Art's Moving Image MA, Marden works with performance, video, text, sound, sculpture and installation to create alternate worlds and speculative futures. Her research- focused works are concerned with Posthuman feminisms and where they overlap with the postcolonial. Her intimate performances play with the voice, activating soundscapes of desire and vulnerability. Recent projects have investigated the mythologies of witches and mermaids and their resonance within contemporary culture. She is part of the CAMPerVAN collective, a nomadic queer performance platform that has been active since 2016.

Recent exhibitions: Marine Lovers...their fishy beginnings, V.O. Curations, 2022; Queer to the Bank, Galleria Fonti, Naples, 2021; AORA:IV, Urbanism, 2021; DOMINO, PAF festival, 2020, Futureless, Somos Berlin, 2020; Remember the Liquid Ground, Gasworks, London, 2020; Stay Live at Home, Perform Istanbul, 2020; Grounded, Coastal Currents Arts Festival, 2020; Gaze to the UNKNOWN, Mimosa House, London, 2019; between Aeaea and the rocks of Scylla, The Horse Hospital, London, 2019; AMY/YMA, Serpentine Gallery, London, 2019; Unbothered + Moisturised, Eaton Workshop, Hong Kong, 2019; Equinox Light Cure, Exposed Arts, London, 2019.

**Gray Wielebinski** (b. 1991, Dallas (TX), USA) lives and works in London. In Wielebinski's expansive practice, incorporating video, performance, collage, installation, sculpture, and more, he explores the intersections of mythology, identity, gender, nationhood, and memory. Reconfiguring and transforming iconography and visual codes, his work seeks to navigate and question society's frameworks and belief systems. Wielebinski deftly confronts realities in order to imagine and propose alternatives.

Recent exhibitions: Love, Bold Tendencies, London, 2022; Testament, Goldsmiths CCA, London, 2022; Oil and Water, Hales Gallery, London, 2021; By Any Means, V.O. Curations, London, 2021; Two Snakes, 12.26 Gallery, Dallas, Texas, 2020; Repurposed Textiles, Krefelder Kunstverein, Krefeld, DE, 2020; Frieze London with Hales Gallery, London, 2020. Wielebinski's work is in the collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA, USA and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Library & Archives, CA, USA.