

Yuni Hong was born in Japan in 1981 to Korean parents and grew up in the Shinjuku Korean neighbourhood in Tokyo. She and her family were part of what are called the *zainichi* Korean, a term widely used to describe Korean residents in Japan. Deeply affected by this ever-present difference throughout her childhood and teenage years, she developed a particular way of looking at the notions of identity and territory. After her arrival in France in 2005, the artist found herself once again facing issues of integration due to her nationality: the French State asked her to leave the country when she was pregnant. In 2014, that administrative and legal odyssey gave rise to her performance *How I became a French woman*.

Today, Yuni Hong has officially obtained French citizenship, but she is still haunted by her past history. In the last few years her work has also developed around this conflicting relation linked with her nationality and this triple identity. After producing several performances in which she draws deeply on this notion, the artist is today focusing on examining the concept of gender, as is illustrated by her piece *my name is junky/everything's fine*, created at the Pierre et Marie Curie municipal swimming-pool in Mulhouse, a performance where she summons up the memory of a

deceased transgender friend.

As she walks down the long corridor in the Roman baths that leads to the small pool, the artist is reminded of the story of her transsexual friend whom she knew in Japan. "To start with", she explains, "I thought I'd put on this performance in his memory". This space, made up of several showers, saunas and rest areas, is usually accessible turn by turn to men and women at different times. This transitory place, where it is quite acceptable to walk about completely naked, unconsciously prepares spectators before they reach the large balcony overlooking the small pool.

The ambient noise of the swimming pool reverberates like a backwash against the building's magnificent white vaults. Down there a female swimmer in a black costume stands out right away in the midst of the bustle: she is sitting serenely on the pool's edge, holding in her arms a large inflatable dolphin which she ends up letting loose among the swimmers, before in her turn jumping into the water. In the cacophony and hubbub of the pool, the figure of Yuni Hong stands out for her placid and determined character. Into her blue swimming costume she slips a blue phallic object and does a series of stretching exercises between the swimmers. Once the warm-up is over, she leaves the water and tosses the prop into the pool.

The score of *my name is junky/everything's fine* intermingles and dialogically connects movements inspired by swimming and bathing with objects imagined and designed by the artist. Sculpted in blue polystyrene foam, they crudely represent archetypal attributes traditionally associated with masculinity or femininity: penises, breasts, etc. The sides of the pool are punctuated by these brightly coloured abstract totems which the artist manipulates and puts on, each in its turn, before throwing them into the water.

Sporting an oversized bosom, she sensually rubs and fondles the brass rail which runs along the pool steps (every day the staff has to upkeep the period wrought ironwork and facilities), before swimming across to the far side of the pool, where she once again changes prostheses. She tosses her two false blue breasts



into the water and loops around her neck an accessory similar to American football shoulder pads. In a few seconds, her puny morphology is imbued with a certain vigour. She takes up her position on a small blue mat in front of the audience of indifferent swimmers, just like in front of a rock concert crowd. Music then rings out through the ambient hubbub: "Hey! Oh! Let's go! Hey! Oh! Let's go!". Holding a microphone, Yuni Hong sings *Blitzkrieg Bop* by the American punk group The Ramones, in playback. As a sports anthem widely used before matches to encourage both players and supporters, this song refers in particular to the blitzkrieg strategy. "It's to give strength to the dolphin", the artist explains. The dolphin which we then realize is the avatar of the friend she wants to pay tribute to.

Incarnating turn by turn male and female figures with the help of these artificial attributes, her attitude is interfered with every time. Yuni Hong finally completes her series of metamorphoses by wearing the round belly of a pregnant woman on her waist. With a firm hand she drives a small stiff rod into her abdomen: an erectile member then rises up in the place of her supposed vagina. With a hand on each side of this new undulating sculpture that is meant to offer hope for a life to come, the artist floats peacefully on her back, like a hermaphroditic Ophelia, alongside the other swimmers and the dolphin which she ends up retrieving, leaving behind the floating prostheses thrown into the water during the performance amid the pool's users. The small pool's life then resumes its usual round, children carry on tirelessly splashing about and half-naked shapes silently swim across the space doing the breaststroke, unbothered by the choppy surface.

In the particular setting of the swimming pool, the challenges of Yuni Hong's work take on a different strength. This public place is governed by implicit rules and activities. The semi-nudity in it de-personalizes each user in favour of a social mix, yet this space cultivates ambivalent relations to the notion of the body. The changing rooms ensure that the sexes are separated prior to the exposure of bodies: skins are then unveiled, shapes are suggested, and furtive glances inevitably examine and compare. The swimming pool is a space of observation and arbitrary presentations: exhibition mixes with curiosity. As a place of leisure, wellbeing and sporting activity, the pool is also a competitive space. Bodies confront each other and appraise one another based on conventional criteria, and people look for differences.

"I wanted to wander about among genders and identities", the artist reveals. Like her previous performance, *Camara*, created in 2015, during which she tacked, this time around, through different languages and different kinds of expression, *my name is junky/everything's fine* is developed around the idea of boundaries. Yuni Hong recounts how she delved into the writings of the Spanish theoretician and philosopher Beatriz Preciado when she was preparing this piece. In particular in *Testo Junkie: Sex, drugs and biopolitics*, this author describes the pleasure of switching different languages in the same way as genders: "The unique pleasure [...] of wandering from one language to another like being in transit between masculinity, femininity and transsexuality. The pleasure of multiplicity".¹ If, by the same token as movement and behaviour, language can be a place where a power play is exercised, it is also a tool which permits the questioning of the domination and subversion of certain codes.

By some anecdotal coincidence, the artist's Japanese first name at the time was



Junkie. Yuni Hong plays with these many different identities which make it possible to unfold various swathes of her personal history. In her work as a whole, we can sense the stigmata of that past which steers her praxis and defines her research subjects. Here, by appropriating the story of her transgender friend, the artist once more calls upon the notion of fluidity and permeability. By weaving links between the different plasticities which alter bodies, practices and uses, she carries on deconstructing this idea of formatted, assigned and framed identity. The artist nurtures her work with this happy “multiplicity!” which informs it.



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Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics*, Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2008, p.120.

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Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, City University of New York, Feminist Press, 2013, translated from the French by Bruce Benderson, p. 133.