

Despite this richness of detail, Dash's works make a strong gestalt impact when viewed from a distance at which the underlying painterly logic reveals itself. For example, in one work from 2021, a light-blue panel is placed high up on the wall, and it is only when we move in closer that we perceive the skeins of string that are suspended from the panel, attached to what appears to be a paint-spattered broom handle on the floor, as if salvaged from regular use in the artist's studio. The immediate visual impact of the blue monochrome panel is nuanced by the material play of gravity and appropriated materials that we see only from up close.

This kind of formal play has charged undertones in our time. The subjection of the natural world to the present economy of images transposes materials into essentially aesthetic contexts. By presenting unprocessed matter such as earth and graphite alongside manufactured items of daily use, such as plastic bottles and pieces of Styrofoam, Dash calls attention to this situation without pretending to resolve it. The introspective and critical space of painting, which has often functioned to transform materials into images, provides the perfect ground for such effects.

—Alex Bacon

## COPENHAGEN

### Jeannette Ehlers

KUNSTHAL CHARLOTTENBORG

A few years ago, Jeannette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle erected *I Am Queen Mary*, 2018, a towering monument of a Black woman seated in a throne-like chair in front of the West Indian Warehouse in Copenhagen. The sculpture, which was a proposal for a permanent installation at the site, commemorated the

one hundredth anniversary of the sale and transfer of the Danish West Indies to the United States. The installation's impact on general awareness of the country's colonial history in today's Denmark, dominated as it is by the discourse of liberal nationalism, cannot be underestimated.

It is with the reverberations of this recent project in mind that I entered Ehlers's exhibition "Archives in the Tongue: A Litany of Freedoms," which comprised eleven works—installations, videos, and sculptures—alongside a series of performances and a film program. Curated by Awa Konaté and Lotte Løvholm, the exhibition elucidated how Ehlers's probing poetic work explores the boomerang effects and multilayered contradictions of colonial modernity. Rather than attempting to abolish the concepts, monuments, and institutions of art that have served colonialist interests, she used the material and imaginary space of art to draw attention to, heal, and reform a Danish historical present. This approach is most evident but also most challenging in the video installation *Moko Is Future*, 2022, which opened the exhibition. The

work is based on the carnivals first organized by enslaved people in the Caribbean in the eighteenth century, inspired by the colonists' masquerade balls. In the center of the large gallery space, a vertical projection showed Moko Jumbie (Healer Spirit), masked and dancing around on stilts through Copenhagen's streets and squares and among its historical buildings and statues. The character appears at once fragile, strong, and caring. But given that today's Denmark is a faltering welfare state with rock-hard immigration policies, and that the show itself was mounted in a palace built with the spoils of the country's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, the piece left me with little sense of exuberance.

"People who have stake in their society protect that society, but when they don't have it, they unconsciously want to destroy it." So ends the excerpt from a speech by Martin Luther King that makes up the soundtrack to the nineteen-second-long video work *There Is Nothing More Dangerous*, 2015. In *Coil: The Sensuous Ways of Knowing*, 2022, two different types of video footage played simultaneously. A monitor showed a close-up of hair being carefully braided, while a voice-over told a story about how enslaved women used their cornrows to encrypt information and hide rice and grains. Close by, YouTube clips of uprisings from streets around the world were displayed on iPhones attached to selfie sticks. If the art space can be a tool for violence and domination, what secret acts of care and resistance might it nevertheless conceal?

The neon wall work *Until the Lion*, 2021, which illuminated the room in its pink glow, reads UNTIL THE LION HAS THEIR HISTORIAN, THE HUNTER WILL ALWAYS BE A HERO—a sentence the artist saw written on the wall of a fort in Ghana that belonged to Denmark during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The meaning behind this deceptively simple found poem gradually opens up: Might the artist be the hunter, the lion, and the historian, all at once?

—Fredrik Svensk

## PRAGUE

### Biennale Matter of Art

VARIOUS VENUES

In "Disease as an Aesthetic Project," Alina Popa's final essay before her untimely death in 2019, the Romanian artist reflects on her experience of terminal illness. Where many would steel themselves against the pains of sickness, Popa leaned into her vulnerability and the contradictions of her condition. "I despair. I refuse to live in fear. I want the thing to disappear, to stop harassing me. I have no break from it. I have no break from me," she writes. The second edition of Biennale Matter of Art similarly centered on a desire to nourish vulnerability amid violence. Organized by transit.cz, a decentralized collective of arts organizations operating across Eastern Europe, the biennial also served as a capsule retrospective of Popa's oeuvre.

Popa's video works and documentation of her performances appeared in two of Matter of Art's three locations. A disused wing of a local hospital housed two performances—*The Grounds are Gone and I am Hanging from this Sentence* and *Point Pet*, both 2015—that are, as Popa said, "unperformable" and that examine the means by which systems of language and vision impede spontaneity. Additional works at Prague City Gallery, the biennial's main site, documented Popa's best-known performances, including *Heal the Line*, 2018, in which a mark equal to Popa's height was drawn on the gallery floor and visitors were invited to heal it with their touch. In the wake of both Popa's death and several successive global traumas, *Heal the Line* defended the therapeutic value of human contact.

Jeannette Ehlers,  
*Moko Is Future*, 2022,  
4K video, color,  
sound, 12 minutes.

