

The Fruitmarket Gallery and Despina

Despina is an independent space committed to developing platforms for research, production and exchange in the fields of art and cultural activism. The organisation runs an international art residency programme alongside exhibitions, workshops, courses, performances, talks, film screenings, and other activities – a breadth of programme that offers a connection point with The Fruitmarket Gallery.

The relationship between Despina and The Fruitmarket Gallery grew out of an exchange of staff through British Council Brazil's *Exchange/Intercâmbio* programme in 2017. Iain Morrison, Enterprise Engagement Curator (The Fruitmarket Gallery) and Consuelo Bassanesi, Artistic Director (Despina) explored each other's organisations with particular interest in the representation of political and activist art in their programmes. The British Council has continued to support the working relationship between the two galleries with support for *Open Bodies*, giving The Fruitmarket Gallery a chance to learn in a hands on way from the operating

model of Despina at a time when it is expanding its own spaces and activities.

Open Bodies team

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Thanks

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Stephanie Black-Daniels
Henry McPherson
Vinícius Pinto Rosa
Miro Spinelli

open bodies

(re)presentation

Open Bodies, The Fruitmarket Gallery's Brazilian open-call residency programme, supports artists making performance work around gender and sexuality. During September 2018, two Scotland-based artists – Stephanie Black-Daniels and Henry McPherson – joined two Brazil-based artists – Vinícius Pinto Rosa and Miro Spinelli – for a month at our partner institution Despina, a progressive independent art space in Rio de Janeiro.

Throughout Thursday 21 February 2019, in and around The Fruitmarket Gallery, we are sharing experiences, images, installations and performance drawn from the participating artists' residencies. The *Open Bodies* residency dates fell in the month before 2018's elections in Brazil, and the stakes of that struggle, particularly for the communities of queers and women that the programme supports and engages, come through in profound and surprising ways in the work that the artists made.

Last September all four artists joined together in the closing days of their residencies to show work in Despina's exhibition space and it is the spirit of that presentation which is breathed for a day into the gallery at the Fruitmarket. McPherson and Black-Daniels have both taken the opportunity to update their interactive and performative installations with the benefit of several months' distance in which to process their experience in Brazil. It's been fascinating to see the ways in which their first versions of their *Open Bodies* work have hardened and firmed. I'm thinking, for example of the sequin-covered punch-pads in Black-Daniel's Brazil performance *Strike Score/Partitura do Golpe* that have become unflinching metal objects in the updated installation and performance *Block Block/Bloco Bloqueado*. In McPherson's work *Colagens/Collages* the bathroom space that the artist inhabited in Despina has transformed into a hard

tile floor with which the piece restages itself in the expanse of the Fruitmarket.

The Brazil-based artists, Vinícius Pinto Rosa and Miro Spinelli aren't physically present for this showing. We have worked with them to represent their participation in the residency in light-touch, but hopefully effective ways. Translating as *untitled*, but with a queering of expected gender that Portuguese makes possible, Pinto Rosa's *Sem títula* poster is recreated here: large, bold and pasted up as it was in Despina, a sister of the subversive images found glued and ripped on walls around Rio's contested streets.

I'm delighted that Spinelli has encouraged us to recreate a banner which he brought into the space at Despina. Its words '*Transição é sempre*' can translate in a literal way as 'Transition is always' and the syllable 'trans' feels resonant, appearing in the title of many of Spinelli's works. Hanging over their shared workspace the banner became a kind of talisman, it seemed to me, for the work that was undertaken by the four artists during their residency. Its phrase is Spinelli's own – the sign was commissioned as a present for Spinelli by a friend who had read the artist's Masters thesis in which the words appear. Spinelli tells me it is easy in Brazil to find this kind of sign-painting service, and he was keen for us to recreate the process here. Mirroring the making

of the original, the words for the two banners presented at the Fruitmarket have been painted by the Edinburgh-based artist Kate Livingstone, with fonts and layout chosen by her. The second banner was suggested by Spinelli and its words are the title of the new series of work that he began on the *Open Bodies* residency and which is documented in images installed in a corner of the Fruitmarket, as the original work was in Despina.

Spinelli's banners nod to the culture of protest around Despina which was noted in an interview journalist Nadine McBay conducted with Black-Daniels in *The National* newspaper:

The febrile, anxious atmosphere around the gallery inspired workshops and performance actions the Scots held with Rio-based artists. 'In the gallery people would be creating banners for rallies,' says Black-Daniels, 'It was very much a place that people would talk about what was happening.'

We've used the sense of the spatial relationships the artists set up with their working space, in our placing of their work: four distinct areas within sight (and sense) of each other. McPherson noted in feedback after the residency that there were:

'...changes that the working

environment might have made to my practice. Firstly, I think that working in a gallery space with other individuals was a wonderful experience for me. In my training, and my practice up until now, I've usually been confined to rehearsal spaces, recording/dance studios, or site-specific settings, so having three other artists in the gallery space at the same time, all working individually, was a first for me.'

The outdoors parts of this *(re)presentation* day happen in workshops echoing those that the Scotland-based artists led as part of their schedule in Rio, for members of Despina's audience and, in Black-Daniels' case, specifically for other women artists. Each workshop invites us to rethink the ways we find to orient ourselves as we negotiate our cityscapes.

It's notable that our two Scotland-based artists, McPherson and Black-Daniels, both studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, most known for its music and theatre programmes. The *Open Bodies* programme and *Open Out*, the week of varied artform programming in which it is shared, show the Fruitmarket's commitment to artists working through and from other artforms as they connect and extend into visual arts practice.

I hope you enjoy sampling this international relationship with Despina, supported by the British Council, which we have found a powerful stimulus at The Fruitmarket Gallery. We hope this partnership will continue as part of our broader engagement with a Brazilian art scene that always seems to be fully embodied and active within the challenging dynamics of our time, often one step ahead.

Iain Morrison
Enterprise Engagement Curator

These short texts about each of the artists were written by Guilherme Altmayer (GA) and Raphael Fonseca (RF), the curators that Despina invited to work with our four artists during their residency. They are translated here by Frederico Pellachin and Iain Morrison, with input from the artists.



Miro Spinelli develops his artistic research from his own body and from the traces left by it, to think about states such as abjection and precariousness. In the *Gordura Trans (Fat Trans)* series, composed of performance actions (seventeen performed to date), Spinelli presents his naked body in contact with various types of media such as soybean oil, grease, butter and palm oil. The particular material for each action is chosen with political consideration for the geographical and social context in which the action is presented. While smeared in oily, greasy, sticky substances, the artist moves in an unpredictable way, with care and difficulty, dissolving the boundary between his body and the space and simultaneously establishing a relationship with the public by making eye contact.

In the *Open Bodies* residency at Despina, Spinelli broadened his field of investigation from the *Gordura Trans* series to explore substances changing in chemical reaction, and made traces beyond, but still inseparable from, his body. Using as a base many litres of recycled cooking oil, caustic soda and water, he produced soap in large quantities. Common sense makes us think of soap as a symbol of cleanliness and hygiene. However, the artist uses soap to invade and spoil the gallery space, a stain spreading from one of the corners to soil the white cube.

In **Vinícius Pinto Rosa's** recent work, sculptural practice that connects to the human body is of central interest. Drawing from their family's expertise in crafting jewellery and fashion accessories, Pinto Rosa constructs adornments that both decorate the body and disrupt the normative dressing of it. For *Open Bodies*, Pinto Rosa created an ensemble of wearable works made from paper. They initially were fitted to the artist's body to be photographed, then suspended from the ceiling in a configuration that related to the parts of the body's anatomy that had held them. The effect is to summon a presence fluctuating between human and post-human, born in the experimental conflux of materials and the material of life itself. RF



Stephanie Black-Daniels has been investigating ways to extend the female body through fabricated, sculptural garments and wearable forms. Through actions made with these creations, the artist explores the limits of her own body's capability so as to think about the relationship between all of our bodies and the spaces they present in. Her work approaches a discussion of gender and sexuality in performance shot through with connotations of chastity, sensuality and savagery. For her first visit to Brazil through the Despina residency, the artist voiced her intention to note respectfully the territory she would be operating in. She arranged one-on-one workshops





The stain makes reference to the colour of skin, visually presenting many different shades. These are imagined skins that live as part of diverse bodies, which provoke a rethink of polarising description. They blur categories (as well as corners), and open up cracks onto many other places that there might be to situate oneself in the world. GA



Artist **Henry McPherson** trained as a musician and his expressions in visual art frequently take sound as their point of departure. In a developing practice, the young artist has followed interests in experimental ways of using classical instruments, in durational sound pieces, and in the cross-currents between the concert hall and white cube gallery. During *Open Bodies* he recorded sound from different Rio locations, each with its own particular queer cultural importance. Bars, cruising spots, shelter spaces and the streets of the city have made their way into his field recordings. Different routes have been assembled in sound, and during the presentation, the artist plays these tracks to individuals at their request in the upstairs bathroom, one of Despina's most intimate spaces. RF

called *Performing Women in the City* with four female-identified individuals she connected to through an open call. Working through conceptions of rituals and savagery, identity and surface, rhythms and sexuality, the seven-hour long encounters held the possibility of intense exchange: of experiences, of knowledge of the local terrain, and of each participant's performance practice. The artist and collaborators negotiated the dissimilarities and affinities of their bodies, their aesthetic and/or political distance, and through these transatlantic encounters that they enacted, expanded territory has been claimed. GA

