

## Unknown Bodies

*In conversation with Marianna Simnett.*

### Berlin-based multi-disciplinary artist Marianna Simnett in conversation with Antoine Schafroth.

**Can you tell us about your life? What drove you to become an artist?**

I was born with the Art Bug. It started small – drawings and gifts for family and friends – now my life is art and my art is my life. It includes all my favourite things: desires, dreams, conversations, debates, parties, a disregard for rules, generosity, community, talent, love. Art is a disease and a cure. As Maria Lassnig said: “Living with art stops one wilting!”

**What is your relation to pain and danger? How do you position yourself as an artist with these core thematics?**

I love the kick of a thrill but I don't lust after pain. Many of my pieces are an attempt to work through trauma or injustice, agitations, restlessness, perhaps feelings of wrongness, but I think they flip as much into ecstasy and revelry as pain, and are as much about healing as touching a wound.

**I guess your work has been censored a lot. How do you deal with it?**

There's often been a reaction of unease. Walking out, fainting, or straight up rejection. But mostly I feel lucky enough to say my work is welcomed. People love to be confronted with their fears. I dig out the repressed, touch the goo in the stomach. There have been a couple of instances of censorship. It sucks but art is treading a very fragile ground right now of having to behave too nicely. I never got into art to be polite, quite the opposite. We need spaces to express difficult subjects.

**Your work “The Severed Tail” is on display at the Venice Biennale; it explores relationships between humans and non-humans in a fetish world. Is it a work that you specifically produced for the Biennale? How do you consider the specific public of a significant event like that? Could you expand on the narrative of this work?**

I made “The Severed Tail” in response to the themes of the Biennale “The Milk of Dreams” and as an homage to Leonora Carrington. It is a tale about a tail, following the story of a young piglet who has her tail chopped off and enters a deranged world of her own making, fuelled by her own sinister fears and

fantasies. A submissive pup is her guide through this fever dream as she meets mutant goth mice, a regal squirrel judging a tail contest, a domineering seahorse king and his attendant, a sly killifish. Like Carrington's own eerie fiction and paintings, it's a story full of unexpected detours and rife with psychological charge.

**I am really curious about your project Boyz Beasts. Can you explain it?**

This is a really cute project which started as a joke when I was watching Leo DiCaprio climb inside a horse for warmth in “The Revenant”, 2015. After that I started drawing/trapping my male friends in beasts. It now exists as a separate Instagram account: @boyzinbeasts. Boys send me a pic, I upload my digital drawing for free then the original is purchasable via my shop for €100, which can be seen at [mariannasimnett.com/shop](https://mariannasimnett.com/shop)

**What is happening next for you?**

In addition to being included in the Venice Biennale, my installation Prayers for Roadkill, 2022, is currently on view at Castello di Rivoli and was also shown at Art Basel Unlimited. I'll be having my first gallery solo show at Société, Berlin, this September, as part of Berlin Art Week.



Marianna Simnett, *The Severed Tail*, 2022, Three-channel video installation (video still). Courtesy the artist, Société, Berlin, and La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: Roberto Marossi.





Marianna Simnett, *The Severed Tail*, 2022, Three-channel video installation (video still).  
 Courtesy the artist and Soci  t  , Berlin.



Marianna Simnett, *Prayers for Roadkill*, 2022, 16mm film transferred to video with sound and sculptures (video still). Courtesy the artist, Soci  t  , Berlin, and Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea.



Photo: Spyros Rennt.





Genesis Fawn as "Vacanti Mouse", Parma Ham as "Doogie Mouse", and Spook as "Japanese Waltzing Mouse" in *The Severed Tail*, 2022. Photo by Krystian Lipiec.

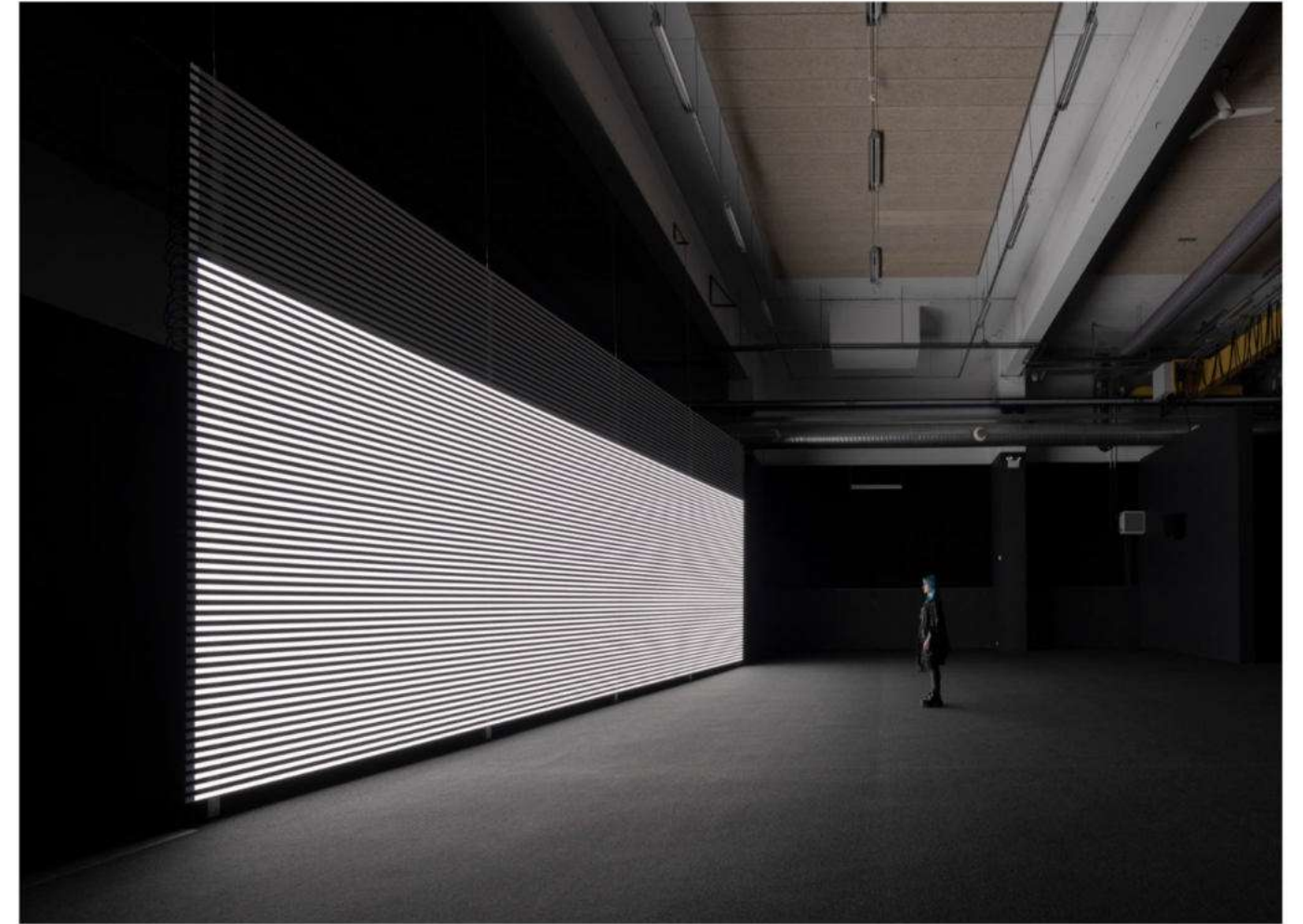


Femi Oyewole as "Killifish" in *The Severed Tail*, 2022. Photo by Krystian Lipiec.





Kiani Del Valle as "Piglet" in *The Severed Tail*, 2022. Photo by Krystian Lipiec.



Marianna Simnett, *Faint with Light*, 2016, LEDs, audio, aluminum, acrylic, installation view, Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin. Photo: Anders Sune Berg.



Marianna Simnett, *The Severed Tail*, 2022, Three-channel video installation (video still). Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin.