



Dora Budor Interview

The stereotypical view of Hollywood is a scintillating dystopia, where the produce is 100% organic and the people are 100% plastic.

Even though she visited Los Angeles for the first time just this month (for a screening she curated at Fahrenheit), Dora Budor's works are a perfect reflection on that Hollywood real/fake hybridity. She is interested in virtually every aspect of Hollywood: its materials, ideological aspects, and how we react to them. Her carnal sculptures and installations are anthropomorphic renderings of film props and prosthetics, resembling something like physical CGI or special effects transformed into a tactile reality, her work seems to have fallen out of a blockbuster movie.

Talking on the phone with Dora about Hollywood—an industry, a phenomenon, and a place that inspires her practice—got me excited about things I have previously been reviled by: *Elysian*, blood splatters, and decaying zombie flesh.

Char Jansen: I'm in Chinatown in Los Angeles, and you're in Chinatown in New York City. It makes me think of that John Carpenter movie, *Big Trouble in Little China*.

Dora Budor: There is something about John Carpenter movies that really drive me nuts. I think it's the way he imposes '80s driving music onto every single scene, and then whenever anyone starts talking he just lowers the volume. It's like there's a radio playing next to your head all the time...

CJ: Lol. I guess I was thinking about that peculiar exchange of culture that happens between Hollywood and Eastern film production companies.

DB: One of my favorite movies last year was *Snowpiercer*. It's a Korean-Hollywood production of a feature film by Joon-ho Bong, who made it after finding this French graphic novel called *Le Transperceneige* about the only survivors of frozen apocalypse on a train that endlessly circles the globe. It's incredible because it has all the Hollywood tropes, but it's acted out in a super hysterical way, with very exaggerated emotion—people are laughing and screaming it's like Kabuki theatre—it's almost too much for the screen. But when this very specific Asian treatment (influenced by history and theatre) protrudes through the glossy Hollywood surface it becomes really interesting.

CJ: Funny you use the word “protrudes,” because in your work you often seem to perform dissections, exposing all the layers that might lie beneath a surface or skin.

DB: Recently I've been making new sculptures reusing screen-used architectural miniatures from *The Fifth Element*, *Batman Returns* and *Johnny Mnemonic*. The miniatures are captivating, and strange. They are all made to look aged, and document the passing of real time. The oldest one is 20 years old, so it shows actual wear and tear. You can see that the layers of what is supposed to be rooftop tiles are made out of pieces of sandpaper that have come unglued. All of them have been physically weathered in different ways with this dystopian filter added onto them: they

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Char Jansen

often represent our future environment as very derelict, because of too much pollution, global warming, or some other catastrophe.

Today, with CGI, the first sculpting layer is always a pristine surface, and then layers of weathering and dust are added on top. There's an interesting reference between reality and fiction with this type of aging because in order to believe and connect with the narrative, the cinematic environments have to have a history as well as a present. They need to look as though they have been lived in, or touched by a human/alien hand. But in real life, when something that has aged too much, we have an urge to replace it, or we want to repaint it, iron out the wrinkles. Or treat it with botox.

CJ: You seem interested in drawing analogies between the human and the nonhuman. Your current work up at Various Small Fires, as part of the exhibition *The Slick and The Sticky*, reveals the hidden electrical infrastructures in the gallery building, turning the walls inside-out to expose this network of veins carrying energy.

DB: I'm interested in bringing objects to life, or to the point they start to resemble life—sort of like when you see zombies reanimated and you think “oh they're alive, but there is something really off about them.” Many interesting characters in films are created from parts of different bodies. I like partialized objects like that, different types of hybrids of us and our image.

For my installation at Swiss Institute in New York I'm texturing the walls and floor with the black goo that resembles the kind you'd find in a sci-fi film, this type of black matter that can contain life—like in

Prometheus, it contains an alien DNA structure that can reanimate, or like in *X-Files* it's “the black cancer” that invades another body. I read recently that in Chinchorro, mummies that have been preserved for 7,000 years are starting to decompose into black slime. Because of global warming, the bacteria buried in their mummified skin has come back to life. Once understood as dead, biological and ecological forces have suddenly revived these ancient bodies in a Frankensteinian way—a symbolic indication of the current moment.

CJ: How do you manage to get so deep behind the scenes of Hollywood?

DB: I'm a bit of a film nerd when it comes to production and “making-of” footage. I find breaking down Hollywood visuals one of the most beautiful things in the world.

But it's almost more interesting to look at what the fans are obsessed with, what scene produces an emotional effect or which character is particularly problematic for them. The audience tells you how it works: what excites us, what emotions trigger us. Or, why do we want violence? What

Dora Budor (b. 1984 in Croatia) and lives and works in New York. Recent exhibitions include solo presentations ‘*Spring*’ at Swiss Institute, New York and *The Architect's Plan, His Contagion and Sensitive Corridors* at New Galerie, Paris; group shows *The Slick and The Sticky* at Various Small Fires LA, *Believe You Me* with 247365 New York, *Flat Neighbors* at Rachel Uffner, New York; and institutional group exhibitions such as *Inhuman* at Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany and *DIDING – An Interior That Remains an Exterior?* at Halle für Kunst & Medien (KM-) in Graz, Austria (2015). Recently she participated in panel discussions at Judd Foundation, Art Basel Miami Salon, and Whitney Museum of American Art, and the writings on her work have appeared in *Art in America*, *Flash Art*, *Artforum*, *Modern Painters*, *Frieze* and *Mousse* magazine. She is also a winner of the Rema Hort Emerging Art Award (2014) and is co-director of the project space Grand Century in New York.

Dora Budor

form do we enjoy most? Films with super high box office ratings often contain a theatrical kind of violence. American movies in the '70s and '80s used to be about guns and knives, it was more realistic, but now there's incredible versatility to it. The different types of blood splatter you can get in CGI are like a science all of their own.

CJ: So has looking at the audience reactions to these mainstream movies affected how you make art, and for whom?

DB: I don't make art for the gallery, or at least don't perceive that to be the ultimate purpose of it. I'm making sculpture now, but that's not to say I might not make a mainstream movie one day. What I find exhilarating about mainstream film is that it becomes part of collective consciousness. Certain events, fictional or real, feel as though we've been through them, and we re-experience them by triggering the subconscious. That's how I approach making art.

CJ: You'd rather go to a movie than to a gallery.

DB: I don't want it to sound like I'm dissing art, but I rarely find inspiration *looking* at art. Being involved in this thing that is so different makes my brain way more open. I guess I tend to move more towards creating environments, an overall experience that is static, but can give a feeling like a movie does. I am always thinking about how I can make a movie without using moving image, to create a film without film.

CJ: Many people criticize Hollywood and the effect of "Hollywoodification" on culture.

DB: I think Hollywood is absolutely amazing. It's so democratic and so undemocratic at the same time. It's a playground for exploring all the ideas in the world, almost without limits. Of course it has this completely rotten infrastructure and it is a money-making machine, but what is being created in spite of this is incredible.

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Dora Budor, *The Architect's Plan, His Contagion, and Sensitive Corridors* at New Galerie, Paris (2015), installation view. Image courtesy of the artist and New Galerie.

2

Our Children Will Have Yellow Eyes (2015), Screen-used miniature living container from *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), steel armature, epoxy clay, infected silicone prosthetics, acrylic polymer with pigment suspension, sfx and weathering paint, assorted metal hardware. Image courtesy the artist and New Galerie, Paris in collaboration with NOIR-MONTARTPRODUCTION.