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RAM
上海外滩美术馆
ROCKBUND ART MUSEUM



Tosh Basco, *untitled (no sky)*, 2023, C-Print, 24.2 x 30.4 cm, Courtesy of the artist.

The Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai presents
Tosh Basco: No Sky

July 1 - October 15, 2023

The first-ever survey of the Filipino-American artist, acclaimed for her performance-based work

When I dance, I am free of it all, an open channel to say what can't be said in the photos or in words. It is a movement towards love and the dissolution of the self as a discrete being. It is an offering in the hope that this can soften the hard edge that propels us further away from one another.

--Tosh Basco

No Sky is the first-ever survey exhibition of Tosh Basco, highly regarded for her hypnotic performances, movement-based work, and improvisations, which unfold across film, theater, drawing, and painting. This exhibition presents hitherto unseen works that the Filipino-American artist made over the last decade, including works on paper, oil painting, and photography. All the work in the exhibition, in various ways, can be considered as *representation-by-touch* and thus ask the viewer to think about alternative sensory modes of representation, challenging the dominance of the eye and mind, imitation and idea.

The exhibition transforms the RAM's fourth-floor gallery into a blue stage, which alludes to Basco's studio and performance space. In this theater, three series of works on paper are presented on transparent structures, which are reminiscent of the iconic glass easels designed by the legendary Italian-Brazilian architect, Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992). Bo Bardi's glass easels offered a breakthrough in the 1950s, enabling artworks to exist freely within an open space, accessible from numerous perspectives, unburdened by any predefined narrative or hierarchy. Similarly, in *No Sky*, Basco's large-scale drawings levitate in the center stage.

An installation of photographic works on the museum's fifth floor responds to the exhibition's title: *No Sky*. It takes its name from a poem by the Lebanese-American poet and artist Etel Adnan (1925-2021), which addresses themes of dislocation and the impossibility of returning to a past or home. Under *No Sky*, the studio is the stage; performance is rehearsal; painting is touching; improvisation is a form of liberation.

Currently based in Zurich, Basco did not develop her work in a traditional art school context but initially emerged from her involvement in queer nightlife scenes in the 2000s. At this time, Basco, living in California, participated in a wide range of different movement traditions and researched alternative histories of performance. Basco became well-known as *boychild*, an ethereal drag persona that the artist performed hundreds of times over a few years. She developed this character by combining her research into different forms of improvisation that are used by performers who take on a kind of social intermediary role, such as shamans, medieval court jesters, clowns, and healers.

After her early success with *boychild*, Basco's practice continued to evolve as she explored experimental performance aesthetics and dance practices, such as Butoh, which center around extremely intricate movements. The difficulty of documenting delicate, entangled gestures using photography and video led Basco to experiment with drawing and painting as alternative forms of translation.

Eventually, the action of translation became the site for Basco's corporeal approach to drawing and painting. She works with materials such as clown white paint, gold pigment, and theatrical blood powder, which were initially used in her performances. Covering her body in these materials, Basco uses her body weight to imprint marks on different

surfaces, evoking motion and bodily intimacy. Conceptually, this approach to *painting-as-improvisation* allowed Basco to illustrate gestures and entangled movements that would be impossible to render through other media.



Tosh Basco, *Shatter and Embrace (for Hijikata)*, 2017, Pigment on paper, 106.7 x 71.1 cm (42 x 28 in), Courtesy of the artist and Company Gallery, New York

The artist comments: “*No Sky* brings together many pieces of my practice and is the culmination of many moments in my life: Where there is not language, there is performance. Where there is desire and longing, there are photos. Where there aren’t words, there are the drawings and paintings. There is no logic. It is a felt sense, a full throttle feel in the working through world.”

RAM Artistic Director X Zhu-Nowell comments: “Our third exhibition this year, this survey of Tosh Basco’s work will further the discourse that was initiated by WangShui and Evelyn Taocheng Wang on the politics of visibility, representation, and authenticity. Basco’s oeuvre presents an alternative approach to perception. She transforms the museum into an arena where deviation, distortion, imperfection and decay are exalted. Collectively, these queer Asian diaspora artists provide a range of new outlooks in China, where these voices have been ostracized.”



Tosh Basco, *NO SKY*, Serpentine Park Nights, London, 2021

EDITORS' NOTES

About the Artist

Tosh Basco was born in California and rose to prominence in the drag scene in San Francisco in the 2010s. Well-known for her movement-based performances under the name *boychild*, Basco's photography and drawing accompany the performance practice. Viewed as a whole, Basco's work attempts to enfold language, becoming, and representation together in spaces where they are presumed to exist as discrete entities. She is co-founder of the collaborative entity Moved by the Motion with Wu Tsang, and collaboration remains a vital aspect of her work. Basco's work has been presented at the Venice Biennale; the Sydney Biennial; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; MOCA, Los Angeles; and ICA London, among other institutions.

About Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai

Inaugurated in 2010, the Rockbund Art Museum (RAM) is a contemporary art museum located on the Bund in Shanghai. The museum is housed in a historic Art Deco building

from 1932 that was originally one of the first modern museums established in China. The landmark building was renovated by David Chipperfield.

In considering what it means to be an Asia-based contemporary art museum in the 21st century, RAM aims to explore the importance of “archipelago thinking”: connecting to artistic culture across Asia and beyond to gain richer perspectives on today’s challenges, practices, and networks within contemporary artistic practices. We wish to build constructive, creative relationships between multiple localities in Asia and different cultures globally, to create a hub for working with a broad range of artists, researchers, and scholars, and to dive into subtle and dense layers of new experiences with our audience.

With a strong reputation for an innovative curatorial approach, RAM experiments with different models of what an art project can be, from research to alternative learning programs, from exhibition-making to unexpected performative formats. By supporting bold contemporary art practices, we aim to recognize local histories while responding to global art challenges and social change.

RAM regards the role of exchange as an essential process for cultural growth, by building up a network of multi-regional, international, and cross-disciplinary partnerships. Through this process, we aim to cultivate diverse and deep-rooted connection to our audiences and communities, and also to different social and cultural organizations. With strong support from our board, patrons, and Advisory Committee, we strive to observe, learn, and pursue opportunities to develop original art projects that explore and engage with the multi-faceted elements of contemporary life.

www.rockbundartmuseum.org

International Press

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