

Ben Burgis and Ksenia Pedan

text by Erik Martinson

Like walking into the morning after. A space that maybe isn't for you to see if you weren't there the night before and crashed out on the sofa. Must have been a real blast. A dog with a face of faces barely acknowledges your presence. There's an eerie calm as you take in this tiny apocalypse. Bottles found each other and congealed; a table is skewed and barely standing; the chairs look like they crawl the walls when no one is looking. What seems like detritus has mutated into a landscape before you. It feels lived in, like you took a wrong turn into a door marked private, not the intended gallery. You are where you need to be.

To say the practice of Ben Burgis and Ksenia Pedan is immersive is an understatement. Sculpted components create installations as domestic spaces, public spaces, hybrid forms of both. Their work often functions as stage set for performative activations. Frequent collaborators Keira Fox and Adam Christensen co-develop scenarios with the pair. As with the spacial context Burgis and Pedan make, the performances hinge on the edge of comfort. Like arguments in public that unfold as if no one else is present, Fox and Christensen unravel social codes. Through cues from a variety of sources, they may inhabit the entangling narrative arcs of couples, siblings, even a gallerist and assistant, all with associated power relations and ensuing tensions. They weave among you, and you among them. The space they inhabit is yours too, after all. Sometimes you can even hear their thoughts bicker. When the performance ends is a difficult delineation.

The objects are characters in this too. They perform alongside Fox and Christensen. They aren't just props, they prop up narrative. As Burgis and Pedan continue their work and collaboration with Fox and Christensen over time, where do the excess personas end up? Surely aspects of some are sutured together into something new for the next performative iteration. Perhaps other personas reconstitute as objects for the next space, their energies warped into the metal backs and frames of dysfunctional chairs, or into the lacquered shirt fused with its hanger, or even the tire prints and dirt dissipated over everything. These personas are still there, moving along with their humanoid counterparts.

This brings to mind the post-apocalyptic film *The Bed Sitting Room*.¹ In a rubble-strewn London, some years after World War III, an ensemble of absurd characters carry on in their absurd situation. The National Health Service is the name of a single nurse with all sorts of remedies, and the BBC news comes through a hollowed out television set that frames a well dressed anchor (his top half anyway) wondering about giving live updates. Among the rubble one family eventually finds a new domicile in a bed sitting room dissected and isolated from the rest of its house. As events go, the mother finds herself transformed into a wardrobe; the father into a parrot (eventually eaten); and a wrecking ball breaks through the wall of the bed sitting room, forcing it to reluctantly speak. Not the voice of some god, but rather a mutated lord. Seems like everything has a potential voice. It's announced that a cure for the mutations is found: full body transplants. Though, you would imagine that some don't go for it, content with what they've become.

¹ Lester, Richard, director. *The Bed Sitting Room*, Oscar Lewenstein Productions, 1969. Based on the play, *The Bedsitting Room*, by Spike Milligan and John Antrobus, 1962.