

WHAT'S ON — Art

A Fire In My Belly – Violence Transcended

A timely exploration of loss and violence through film, centered around a rageous AIDS-inspired 1980s piece by David Wojnarowicz.

During the height of the 1980s AIDS pandemic, David Wojnarowicz produced a film that raged against the destructive forces of industrialised society through a collection of violent, dreamlike scenes of everyday urban life. Although the film was never finished, its impact resonated long after the artist's own death from the disease in 1992. And as recently as 2010, the film was removed from a landmark exhibition of gay art at Washington's Smithsonian for its now famous scene of insects squirming around the corpse of a crucified Jesus.

"He was enraged by the neglected lives and the death he was experiencing through the AIDS epidemic," says Lisa Long, the co-curator of the exhibition. Wojnarowicz never saw the epidemic as a tragic accident of biology but as an act of mendacious neglect by the American government. A central scene from the second part of the film shows the artist sewing his own lips together with red thread – silence can be the worst violence of all, like the American politicians whose refusal to confront AIDS hastened the deaths of so many young men.

Recently acquired by the Julia Stoschek Collection, Wojnarowicz's film provides the name to the upcoming exhibition *A Fire In My Belly*, which seeks to examine how violence and loss are witnessed and transformed through artistic practice. Having taken Wojnarowicz's film as a starting point, Long and co-curator Julia Stoschek searched for works that "resonated with the many paths it traces", forging an exhibition about violence, "not just structural and physical but the everyday, invisible violence." Every work in the exhibition (which features films by Laure Prouvost, Ana Mendieta, and, rather intriguingly, Barbara Hammer) has its own



David Wojnarowicz, *A Fire In My Belly*. Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and POW Gallery, New York.

"particular context, time, content and background as we looked to find work that is somehow embodied, trying to bring something more instinctual and aspirational."

The exhibition is coming at a time of great societal change, with governments struggling to contain another pandemic that is exposing further racial and class inequality. Suddenly, we find ourselves in a moment in time when communities who have been harmed and discriminated against for hundreds of years are no "longer being swallowed or silenced. Included in the exhibition will be the much celebrated *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death* by Arthur Jafa, a film without concept or script, that traces African-American identity through a dense montage of deeply moving and occasionally violent contemporary imagery.

Featuring over 40 hours of film, JSC will offer paying visitors the chance to return within six months as it is not possible to see everything in one day. — **DBW**

A Fire In My Belly, opens Feb 6 Julia Stoschek Collection, Mitte



Courtesy Sexauer Galerie

Review

Ornella Fieres

Through Feb 27 ★★★★★☆

A few years ago, Ornella Fieres bought a random box of letters and postcards at an inheritance sale belonging to a woman from the DDR. She began processing these artefacts through AI technology, slowly digitising the life of a woman, whose eccentric and outgoing personality now haunts this splendidly odd exhibition at Sexauer Galerie. Although her identity and appearance are kept hidden, in letters written by her and from others, phrases (often misinterpreted) from the handwritten text are delivered in austere female voices out of vintage TV sets. In another piece, hapless image description software has a go at describing photographs from the 60s and 70s. It points at a charming and unnerving meditation on advanced technology, filtered through the reanimated life of an East Berliner. Split into three main sections, the standout being the flowers scanned from the backs of DDR postcards and processed through deep-fake facial programs, which contort and abstract, resulting in peculiarly beautiful DDR-styled hybrids.

📍 Sexauer Galerie, Wedding.