

story as a point of departure and poses a problem faced by the most vulnerable human beings, if not all of humankind: How does one survive in the wilderness—and find love—before falling prey to a hunter?

—Alexandre Melo

Translated from Portuguese by Clifford E. Landers.

## TALLINN, ESTONIA

### Anu Põder

KUMU ART MUSEUM

Estonian sculptor Anu Põder (1947–2013) has been internationally unrecognized for too long. The curator of “Anu Põder: Be Fragile! Be Brave!,” Rebeka Põldsam, attempted to put her on the map and into the broader canon of art history by presenting her outstanding oeuvre next to those of precursors and contemporaries, including Katrin Koskaru, Ursula Mayer, Ana Mendieta, Alina Szapocznikow, and Iza Tarasewicz. Like Szapocznikow, Põder draws upon an artistic strategy of merging representations of fragmented body parts with amorphous masses of various materials: Torsos emerge and sink back into dark clouds of synthetic wool in works such as Põder’s *Composition with Plastic and Synthetic Wool*, 1986, and Szapocznikow’s similar *Tumours*

*Personified*, 1971, in which casts of the artist’s face seem to be fighting shapeless tumors’ attempts to suck them in. Anxiety about the body is pertinent in both artists’ practice. In Põder’s earlier works, installed in the show on an elevated stage (thus repeating the presentation of Szapocznikow’s *Tumours Personified*), smooth, flesh-toned plastic or leather body parts are almost aggressively stitched together with soft dark textiles, as if the artist had been trying to control the formless, the dissolving (both in body and memory), and the temporary—or the fear of temporality itself.

The impermanence of the corporeal also appeared through disappearance, when only traces of former bodies remained. Like

Mendieta, Põder often employs physical imprints on materials that in one way or another refer to the body—for instance, pieces of clothing in works such as *Space for My Body*, 1995; *Ancient Light*, 1995; and *Pattern as Sign. Furcoats*, 1996. These three pieces were installed together in one room of the museum. The four wall-mounted objects that constitute *Tested Profit. Rubber Bags*, 1999, are especially close to Mendieta’s works, both visually and conceptually. In them, rubber surfaces are disrupted by stitched and cutout human-shaped silhouettes. The objects lie flat—as if the bodies they reference were taken away, or evaporated, or perhaps resurrected—and look like empty cadaver pouches.

The artist’s rigorous sense of how materials can evoke bodies becomes even more evident in *Clodbopper, Stride of a Man of the 20th Century*, 1999, which comprises realistic casts of men’s work boots made of soap and fat. Placed on a small square stage covered with soil, the footwear looked heavy and tired. Yet at the same time, the materials could dissolve at any moment in certain conditions. Serial presentation

is important in all the aforementioned works (*Tested Profit. Rubber Bags, Tongues*, 1998, and *Tested Profit. Rubber Dolls*, 1999, were shown together in her solo exhibition “Tested Profit” at the Tallinn City Gallery in 1999) as if to underscore the interchangeable nature of the bodies separated from the remains presented in the shows.

Anxiety in Põder’s works is often suggested not only by their material temporality, but also by their references to pressures exerted by established social structures and authorities. The uneasy, complicated position of a female artist forced to divide time between artistic creation and her family’s needs is evident in *Composition with a Torso and a Child’s Hands*, 1986, where casts of small, almost greedy-looking hands seek the breast of a flesh-toned female torso. A struggle against conventional power structures permeates the work *Lectern*, 2007—an actual lectern burnt from the inside that greeted the visitors entering the exhibition. The show’s title, “Be Fragile! Be Brave!,” pointedly expresses the complex character of Põder’s practice, as well as her unique ability to translate the mental and physical experiences of daily life through material accuracy and vivid forms.

—Neringa Černiauskaitė

## DUBAI

### Yazan Khalili

LAWRIE SHABIBI

Yazan Khalili’s show “On the Other Side of the Law” analyzed life in Ramallah from the standpoint of legality, focusing on the often-absurd contortions to which Palestinians must submit their daily routines in order to accommodate international laws. Khalili connects questions of lawfulness to a discourse on the circulation of images, adapting a strand of recent critique to illustrate the larger political failings of a system ill-equipped for the realities of its subjects’ lives.

The three-channel video installation *Robbery in Area A*, 2013–16, for example, highlights flaws in the West Bank’s tripartite mode of governance. The Oslo II Accord divided the territory into three zones, variously administered by the Palestinian Authority, the Israelis, and the two powers together. This means, for instance, that burglars can rob a bank in Area C, scuttle through to Area B, and then make it to Area A faster than the authorities are able to coordinate among themselves (the Palestinian authorities of Area C need Israeli approval to operate beyond their prescribed zone). The work is based on an actual robbery that took place in 2008, which Khalili recounts via subtitles on an otherwise blank screen; the other two channels show his own (semilegal) surveillance of Palestinian banks and footage of fires burning in the West Bank.

The painted canvases of *Apartheid Monochromes*, 2017, refer to the use of specific colors to signify place of birth, ethnicity, and residence, in license plates and the identity cards Palestinians must carry. Khalili relates these shades to the variously colored monochromes that Yves Klein exhibited before his famous blues. But while Khalili’s gesture acknowledges the outsize importance

of color in the territory, Klein seemed a flippant reference point for this discussion of the regulation of bodies.

This problematic—the inherent weakness of aestheticization as a political strategy—was addressed head-on elsewhere, in some of the exhibition’s strongest works. In *I, The Artwork*, 2016, Khalili photographed a contract, written from the point of view of the artwork, with stipulations concerning its future. These ranged from capricious exhibition display demands (“I, THE ARTWORK must be exhibited no less than 3 meters from the nearest corner”) to rules over ownership (“I, THE ARTWORK shall not be owned, sold, or donated to an individual, an institution, or a state which is a settler-colonial state, or supported by a settler-colonial state”). The piece itself—a photograph of the contract tacked up on the wall over a sofa—builds the potential for abridgment of these terms into its own existence: It is an image of a contract, rather than a binding legal document, with no real say over who will own it in the future.

The photographic installation *Copy of a Copy of a Copy*, 2017, looks at the strange case of Suleiman Mansour’s *Jamal Al Mahamel* (Camel of Burdens), 1973, a painting of an old man carrying the city of Jerusalem on his back, which became a symbol of Palestinian resistance and is frequently reproduced as a poster in the Arab world. Muammar Gaddafi bought the original painting, which was then destroyed in a US air strike on his Libyan compound in 1986. Mansour also created others, and there have been intermittent claims regarding which is the oldest extant version, with increasing financial stakes. *Copy of a Copy of a Copy* shows a photograph of an exhibition in Palestine in which a collector hung an early poster of *Jamal Al Mahamel*—a now valuable item—and, in front of this image, a thousand copies of a photograph that Khalili took of a printing shop in Ramallah that had a small-scale poster on display. The thousand copies are themselves printed as posters, and are stacked and tied on a wooden pallet—not for the visitor to take, à la Felix Gonzalez-Torres, but together comprising an object that will now reenter the art market under Khalili’s name.

A growing body of writing has investigated image circulation in light of the increased facility of movement by digital images and images on the internet in particular. David Joselit, for example, has shown how the art market’s means of ascribing value to a work intersects obliquely with how the image itself accrues power through increased visibility. Khalili’s adaptation of this inquiry to a Palestinian context puts that divergence in political terms: He reveals the discrepancy between widely held claims, in this case of Palestinian nationhood, and the legal apparatus that constrains them.

—Melissa Gronlund

## BEIJING

### Yang Jiechang

INK STUDIO

The show “Earth Roots” proved the continued power of the monochromatic density and crusty strata of black ink as a metaphorical primordial stew that continues to nourish experimental art in China. Here, forty-six instantiations, of Yang Jiechang’s famed series, “One Hundred Layers of Ink,” 1989–99, were featured alongside a selection of the artist’s works from the previous decade. The exhibition’s narrative pivoted on the 1989 Centre Pompidou exhibition “*Magiciens de la terre*” (Magicians of the World), in which Yang participated as one of three artists from China. The curators noted that Yang, by that point, had already anticipated many artistic strategies that would come to characterize 1990s Chinese art: repeated action, intentional inarticulacy as a critical strategy, and monumen-



Anu Põder. *Composition with Plastic and Synthetic Wool*, 1986. Textile, plastic, epoxy. 14 1/8" x 14 1/8" x 14 1/8".

Yazan Khalili. *Robbery in Area A*, 2013–16. Video. 10' x 10' x 10'.

