

Close to you

By Julia Geerlings

The exhibition *The Water Party* by David Bernstein (1988, San Antonio, Texas) takes the artist's eponymous text published in Metropolis M as a starting point to imagine the presentation of a fictional political party that propagandizes the social, spiritual and philosophical value of water to our society. A Tale of a Tub is transformed back into its historical function of a communal public bath house and meeting place. This aspect is of great importance to Bernstein, whose work is about meeting with people and sharing ideas. His installations usually possess a performative character, whereby the audience is the viewer, listener and participant at the same time. On the ground floor he has installed a big wooden hot tub where visitors are invited to bathe and melt, soaking knowledge together, returning to the warmth of the womb. The tub not only refers to the Japanese ofuro (soaking tub) and Mikvah (Jewish ritual bath), but it also carries a deep connection with his mother and grandmother who share a love of baths.

Along with this embodied practice, artworks are presented which promote the fluid ideals of The Water Party such as: matriarchy, collaboration, divine holding, sharing pain as a form of resilience, and soul-flooding (instead of brainstorming). Many of the pieces presented come from collaborations or from friends as he sees the act of invitation as an extension of his individual practice. Some works are presented on top of other works and some join a collection taking on a new temporary title and role. This expresses his belief in the flexibility of objects and meaning. In this sense, water is taken as a metaphorical starting point, an intuitive process for finding relationships between things. At its core, The Water Party asks you to believe in the other, the unknown, and the things we don't completely understand. When leaving the exhibition, one might find themselves humming a kitschy (kitschy catchy) song from the seventies, (*They Long to Be*) *Close to You*, by the Carpenters. This is chosen as the party's anthem because being together intimately, compassionately, and spiritually is their main message

Captions:

1. Reminder / David Bernstein / 2014-19 / mahogany wood and neodymium magnet

This work is a reminder of a reminder. The form made me think of a mezuzah, a sacred Jewish object placed on the doorpost of your home to mark the transition from one space into another. It brings your attention to the threshold, the moment when you leave the weight of the outside world and enter into the protection and comfort of your inner sanctuary.

2. Wood for Cup and Cup for Wood / Ineke van der Burg and David Bernstein / 2016-19 / ceramic and various woods

This is a collaboration with my girlfriend's mother. She saw me put one of her cups on top of my wooden sculpture and said that she thought the materials looked good together. She suggested we collaborate so I proposed that I make a piece of wood for her cup and asked if she could make her cup for the wood. She decided to cut a hole in the bottom of the cup so you can see the wood from both sides and so that you know this is not a cup for liquid, but for wood.

3. Cheers to the Miss Standing Under the Table Doing Karate / David Bernstein / 2012-2018 / apple and oak wood

This table-bar comes from "Thinging" a text written in collaboration with Jurgis Paškevičius. The process of thinking through things involves a lot of language slips and playful extensions. At this bar a drink is served, created by Slim Denken and Hayne E. Day (Self Luminous Society). It's called 'Cha-Cha-Cha' and is a blend of three teas: smokey black, Japanese green, and milky oo-long.

4. Soul-Flooding / including the works: 'Something to hold on to' by Rosa Sijben and David Bernstein (2018-19), 'Object HLLLL as a background for laser scanning' by Marco Lampis (2019), and 'Obsessys' by David Bernstein (2017-19) / various objects

Instead of brainstorming, this platform presents *Soul-Flooding*: a space to think and discuss alternative forms of sex education. The Water Party is not a single topic party and believes it's important to consider sex-ed beyond the practical concerns (which are still very much in need of improvement!) of consent, LGBTQI+ presence, health & safety, etc. We want to open a discussion around pleasure, kinks, sex positivity, ethical non-monogamy, the role of objects, how to express care, and erotic intelligence. On the platform are artworks and objects which have their own history and meanings. Here they take on a fluid role with a new use, temporarily embodying the situation of soul-flooding.

5. Drain Deity / Benny Snouta (Self Luminous Society) / 2019 / plug, steel, and ink

Plug-The-Drain! Stop-The-Swamp! Benny Snouta has created this god of the drain based on a traditional Buddhist practice of iconographic painting. She has painted the eyes while her eyes were closed so that when she finally opened them, the plug had come to life.

6. Even if it's Not True it's Well Found / David Bernstein / 2018-19 / glass, sugru, cork, and water of life

The water of life in this bottle was given to me by Paoletta Holst who is visiting Indonesia to research H. F. Tiellemans, a Dutch Colonialist who created an early water bottling factory called *Hygeia* on the island of Java.

7. Hamamas Boy / David Bernstein / 2019 / Pine wood hot tub

My mother, grandmother, and I all share a love for soaking in the bath. It goes beyond simply cleaning; it's a transcendent relaxation. After conversations with both of them about bathing, Judaism, and motherhood, I selected phrases and sentences to carve into the sides of the tub. This work is dedicated to Marion Bernstein and Charlotte Hattenbach.

8. Waterfalls #3: Just like you / Liu Chao-tze / 2017 / motion waterfall lightbox, vinyl text

Chao-tze says she chose this text from the song '(They Long to Be) Close to You' because it often plays at the Chinese restaurant where she originally made this work for. By isolating the line "Just Like me, they long to be", an ontological question appears. Is 'They' referring to the waterfall and it's *beingness*? Or is the waterfall the 'you' we all want to be close to?

9. Close to You / 900 Stig featuring Indridi / 2018 / recorded cover of the song '(They Long To Be) Close to You' by The Carpenters

At a party 900 Stig and Indridi became overwhelmed with the situation, so they found a quiet room and decided to record this song.

10. Pain-things / José (Self Luminous Society) / 2019 / acrylic and gouache on various woods, neodymium magnet

From L to R:

Dear José · Supporting a Dying Tree · Sad News · José's Uncontrollable Shadow · If not you, who? If not now, when? If not where, why? · Brand New Stain · Luxury Water · Big Ambitions, Small Space · The pain of the Unknown · Gloomy weather · Doe Normaal · Team Building · "This Might Sound Racist, But..." · Everyday Pain · Am I a Parasite? · Justus-van-Effen-Complex Complex

Formerly an obscure conceptual artist, José has recently decided to leave conceptualism and become an ordinary painter of ordinary pain-things. She is the newest member of Self Luminous Society, the alter-ego-artist-cooperative of linguistic-metaphysic-mystical-lunatics. The Water Party wants to promote sharing pain as a way to build resilience.

11. Wood is Good & Object WMmmUp as a dancing table / David Bernstein & Marco Lampis / 2018 & 2019 / unknown wood & plaster

These works placed together become an abstract altar. The work by Marco is made with a traditional technique he learned in Italy from a master craftsman. It is normally used for decorating churches and requires a laborious, obsessive, monk-like process. The late poet Mary Oliver says, "Attention is the beginning of devotion."

* The Sand Party / Rosa Sijben / 2019 / sculpture performance (during the opening)

Responding to The Water Party, Sijben has created a poetic political opponent, The Sand Party. The sand and the water enter an erotic symbiosis in her etude, a combination of movements and words.