

G A S W O R K S

Jamie Crewe

Female Executioner

26 January – 26 March 2017

Female Executioner is the first solo exhibition in London by Glasgow-based artist Jamie Crewe.

Comprising newly commissioned video, sculpture, print, and text-based works, the exhibition focuses on French writer Rachilde's *Monsieur Venus: A Materialist Novel*. Exploring what is at stake in historical reclamation, *Female Executioner* investigates what happens when a queer, transfeminine artist tries to touch, reflect on, or rehabilitate a historical work of fiction which seems to offer them ancestry.

First published in Belgium in 1884, *Monsieur Venus* describes a relationship between Raoule de Vénérande, a masculine aristocratic woman, and Jacques Silvert, a working class boy who becomes her mistress. Together, aided by Jacques's sister Marie and Raoule's friend the Baron de Raittolbe, the couple invert their genders, acting out a love fuelled by perverse innovation and tinged with sexual jealousy, conservatism and class power. In the end, the novel's overarching Victorian morality falls upon its characters, and everyone is punished for their transgressions.

For Jamie, the novel's frequent and nuanced cruelty complicates any wholly positive identification with the lead characters, who may at first seem like prototypes of modern-day transgender figuration. However, aspects of the novel still speak lucidly to contemporary trans experience, touching on issues that remain urgent, such as fraught relations with visibility and authenticity, pervasive experiences of trauma, and the threat of punishment and harm. Grappling with this painful ambivalence, *Female Executioner* stages, reworks and misreads the positive and negative, radical and moralising aspects of *Monsieur Venus* in relation to the artist's own personal history and experience of transness. In Jamie's own words, "seething under its own references" the exhibition "tries to touch the past, and is struck by the past in response."

The video *Adulteress* (2017) stages the moment that Jacques slips away from Raoule to walk the streets in a black velvet dress and attempt to seduce a 'real man'. Chronology, setting and performance are unhinged from Rachilde's original description, which appears at the bottom of the screen, as focus is given to Jacques's excited journey instead of Raoule's jealous rage. Rachilde's text juxtaposes with and contradicts the footage it accompanies, building to an ending in which tentative and optimistic images synchronise with the promise of a duel to the death. Through these and other strategies of wilful misinterpretation — as well as impartial editing, working together with close friends and displacing the novel's events to modern-day Glasgow — the radical potential and fundamental judgements of *Monsieur Venus* are made to trouble a new context.

Elsewhere in the exhibition a threatening invitation appears in flaming letters on a domestic wall in a screen print titled *Miserable wretch* (2017). The words of this note, which in *Monsieur Venus* is written by Marie Silvert and sent to her sister-in-law Raoule, are transposed from a Parisian drawing room to a bedroom in Gasworks's residencies house, where Jamie spent three months in the summer of 2016. The words become fluorescent and the room is drawn from memory.

Also on show, *Inert being* (2017) comprises twenty eight off-white soy wax tablets depicting a bouquet of flowers in counter-relief. These tablets will be rotated daily throughout the exhibition, displayed one at a time on an AV pole mount and viewable through a doorframe which has had its doors removed. Soy has anti-androgenic properties, which block testosterone production, and the twenty-eight tablets refer to the average length of a menstrual cycle; in *Monsieur Venus* a bouquet of 'immaculate white flowers' is sent daily to Jacques's apartment by Raoule, and he is scared to think why — perhaps because another mistress could put out red flowers when she is menstruating to let a visiting suitor know she is unavailable, and he cannot, and does not, and is constantly at Raoule's disposal.

The doors of the emptied doorframe can be found, displaced, fitting uncomfortably in the connecting aperture between the two gallery spaces. Pasted onto one of their glass panels is *Stone breaker* (2017), a text drawn on paper with a knife. The text describes Jamie's experience of gender while a resident at Gasworks in summer 2016, with a particular focus on the risks of announcing or articulating; when Jamie speaks explicitly about their gender, in a new context and to new people, they find insecurity, doubt and pain stirred up, which they thought was in the past. This text, in black ink, is interrupted by — and formed around — bold phrases in red, which may be agreeing with the narrative or shouting it into submission.

Beyond these doors the second gallery space is washed an earthy, vegetal blue with powdered woad, contrary to Rachilde specifying a hidden room painted the blue of a 'cloudless sky'. In this space there is a sculpture called *Wax figure* (2017); a loose latex sheet is draped across boxes and ephemera from around Gasworks, creating a rough approximation of a reclining body. On the surface of this latex skin a few incorruptible markers of authenticity and femininity are burnt with a soldering iron, while the body has been voided of all its meat. These burnt features draw equally from the body parts Raoule plucks from Jacques's corpse (dead from a duel with the Baron de Raittolbe) to make a waxwork likeness of him, and from the make-up and grooming routine Jamie maintained while a resident at Gasworks.

Female Executioner was made with reference to Melanie Hawthorne's English translation of *Monsieur Venus* (published 2004) and to the French edition of 1889. With thanks to Transmission Gallery in Glasgow, James Kelly, Freddy Dewe Mathews, Charlotte Percival, John Turrell, Tom Turrell, and Temsu Yanger for their advice and production and installation assistance.

Commissioned by Gasworks through the Freelands Artist Programme.
Gasworks' 2016-17 Exhibitions Programme is supported by Catherine Petitgas.

Related Events:

Performance: *Potash Lesson* by Jamie Crewe Wednesday, February 15, 7pm

Jamie Crewe presents *Potash Lesson*, a performance which ponders trans visibility, feminine pathologisation, and creative legacies with the help of an old video, a mistranslated play, a scene of humiliation, and a chemical stimulant.

This event is free to attend. Please check our website for further information and booking details.

Talk: Jamie Crewe and Mason Leaver-Yap Wednesday, March 15, 7pm

Jamie Crewe discusses their practice with writer and curator Mason Leaver-Yap.

This event is free to attend. Please check our website for further information and booking details.

Screening: Cinenova | Now Showing Thursday, March 23, 7pm

As part of Cinenova's *Now Showing* series, Jamie Crewe presents a moving image work from Cinenova's collection alongside a work of their own.

£5/£3 concessions. Please check www.cinenova.org for further information and booking details.



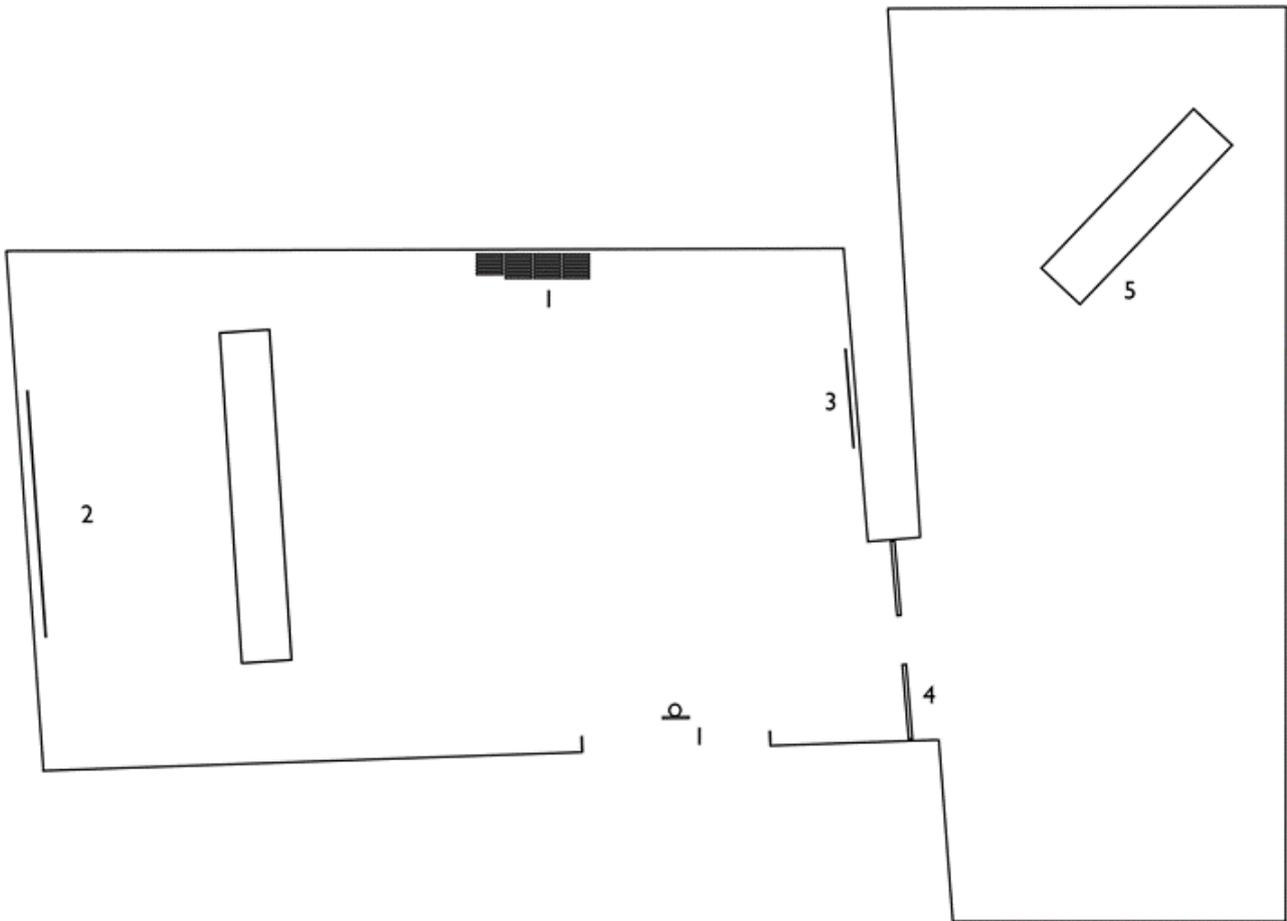
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List of Works

1. *Inert being*, 2017. 28 soy wax tablets, rotated daily, Unicol pole.
2. *Adulteress*, 2017. Video, excerpt of chapter 16 of *Monsieur Venus: a Materialist Novel* by Rachilde (1884), 22 mins duration.
3. *Miserable wretch*, 2017. Screen print.
4. *Stone breaker*, 2017. Knife-drawn ink on paper.
5. *Wax figure*, 2017. Burnt latex, gallery ephemera.