

## **'Geldwäsche: Research for the Bermuda Triangle'**

*Reflection Essay by Madeleine Archer, Intern at SomoS Art House Berlin and audience member for Geldwäsche performance.*

Standing before steel bowls of water and small piles (or intentional pyramid 'displays') of 'Geldwäsche' soaps, Lara Salmon and Regina Mamou's performance of 'Geldwäsche: Research for the Bermuda Triangle' saw the artists repeatedly placing currency-infused soap in their mouths, demonstrating a literal 'money-wash' that was not without an inevitable, uncomfortable sense of self-punishment.

While Richard Nixon's infamous 1971 'Nixon Shock' speech played out behind them, the artists' unnerving acceptance of the distaste of the soap demonstrated endurance of more than just the act itself; this was the artists bearing the cost of a national identity and history tied to production, consumption, infusion, and ideological and political corruption. 'Geldwäsche' embodied a one-night performance and installation of absurdly working with the essence and residue of the US dollar, a self-flagellation and washing out of mouths through which accents will always hold account "being American."

A visual artist working primarily with performance, Lara Salmon's experience in the space of physical endurance and body work is seen as well as felt, expressed through a quiet yet unwavering resolve and fixed determination to endure. Body-based, in collaboration she is 'Vertex 2, B' ('known dependent variable'), one side of a figurative Bermuda Triangle with artistic partner Regina Mamou. Strongly research-based, Mamou's 'Vertex 1, R' ('known dependent variable') is a ying to Salmon's yang; a foundation of comprehensive historical and social research prowess. Upon this, the duo in performance enact subtle yet unexpectedly effective actions, drawing from each other both through shared experience and difference.

Still bearing the emotional weight of the intense cultural saturation of their recent artist residency in Marrakech, Morocco, Salmon and Mamou's preparation for 'Geldwäsche' proved a catharsis in motion; working through frayed nerves, released exhaustion, and the acknowledgement of deeply challenging experiences, 'Geldwäsche' was formulated through reflections and literal refractions. SomoS Art House Berlin provided a place of pacification, a space to support and enable the artists' previous experiments with scent distillation and symbolic infusion. There is

surely something to be said of the way the creation of the Geldwasche soaps inevitably took on symbiotic resonance with SomoS and the city of Berlin itself. The artists responded to their place through creation, reflection on the foreign, and a blunt confrontation of the self in the midst of Global economic relations, confluences, and tensions.

How much the cost of an American identity? When the currency of nationality is carried on the tongue, through the voice, how much responsibility for the sins of one's national identity remains a choice? In this case, to wash the sins from one's mouth becomes a political act, the artists' choice being that of their very own brand of home-made soap infused with the scent of corrupted currency. Geldwasche played out like a beat of a butterfly wing, reverberating long after the performance had concluded. Always assured to leave an impression; like the trace of scented soap on skin or the trail left by dirty money through corrupted hands, by launching their self-made line of soap infused with the essence of tangible US note currency, Lara Salmon and Regina Mamou demonstrated the sheer impact of micro moves in addressing macro socio political conditions. Where this approach as a collaborative arts practice will lead next will surely continue to utilise the conceptual depth already established.