

ArtSeen

Itziar Barrio: *THE PERILS OF OBEDIENCE (PREMIERE)*

By [Jillian McManemin](#)



Itziar Barrio, *Untitled (JEFF 7)*, 2022.
Participant Inc, New York. Photo: Daniel Kukla.

Upon entering Itziar Barrio's exhibition *THE PERILS OF OBEDIENCE (PREMIERE)* we're greeted by *Brazaletes* (2022), a photograph of the goddess Minerva's tattooed arms adorned with gold cuffs, an assortment of sexy metal, latex, and concrete sculptures, and a dramatic paint job.

Standing opposite the print is *Untitled (JEFF 7)* (2022), a hybrid of mangled IKEA chairs anchored to a thick concrete base, shrouded with black latex that appears to melt onto the structure. The piece is framed by a wall painted in light-sucking, matte-violet that runs the entire length of the gallery. The

ON VIEW

PARTICIPANT INC

March 6 – April 17, 2022

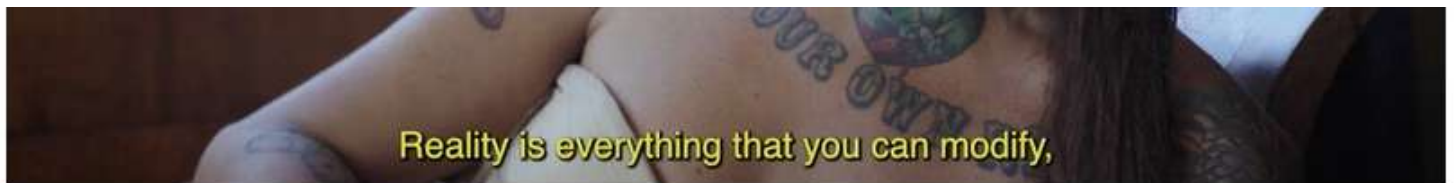
New York

facing wall is bisected: white and then black with a small monitor displaying the ticking run time of the 98-minute three-channel video, *You Weren't Familiar but You Weren't Afraid* (2022), that the artist developed over twelve years.

The project began in 2010 in the artist's hometown, Bilbao. Barrio assigned archetypes to actors and had them perform various movement scores. IKEA chairs—which the artist employs frequently to represent dominant relational narratives, mass production and labor—played a central character.

You Weren't Familiar but You Weren't Afraid occupies half of the main gallery space. The wide-screen projection is displayed slightly below eye level, guiding the viewer to sit in an IKEA chair or even on the floor for an optimal view. This coaxing, via the creation of circumstances, is how bodies are dealt with in the video itself. Barrio's characters move through their (capitalistic) predicaments as the artist simultaneously reveals the labor of artmaking.





Itziar Barrio, *You Weren't Familiar but You Weren't Afraid*, 2022. 3-channel HD, 98 minutes. Video still.

Over time, the video project expanded and subsequent iterations grew stickier and were created in different cities. The first installment in NYC features reenacted scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where plain-clothed actors watched by a live audience are directed in real time, then interviewed about their performances. Stella, a former Southern belle who's in a sexually charged and abusive relationship with her husband, leaves the *Streetcar* narrative and is transported to Bogotá, landing in a remixed *La Estrategia del Caracol*. Stella is enmeshed in the film while departing from it (she's polyamorous now). Finally, Stella arrives on a heavenly plane in Rome after a rough time as the lover of Accattone, where jewel-encrusted goddesses Venus and Minerva languidly discuss sex work.

Sex work arrives as a theme, which doesn't mean that we are subject to reiterated jargon. It merely exists and this casual emergence feels instructive, if not radical. The goddesses sing a song called "Labor Union Sluts," queer Marxism infused with a sense of humor.

Barrio's genre-fucking is generative and liberating. Narrative, reenactment, fracturing, remix, and improvisation are approached sans a tyrannical hierarchy of form. We tumble alongside Stella through time, space, and storyline, frequently pivoting out of the narrative to view it from another angle. I'm particularly drawn to the moments where the actors are interviewed. First as the characters they inhabit and then as themselves,

constantly analyzing what they're doing and who they are as the hum of spliced manifestos and musical interludes buzz.



Itziar Barrio, *THE PERILS OF OBEDIENCE (PREMIERE)*, 2022. Installation view at Participant Inc, New York. Photo: Daniel Kukla.

A small kiss of bronze, *Plegada* (2022), floats on the purple wall. The bronze cast appears again in *Minerva plegada en cañería IV* (2022): a big slip of black latex hanging from a hook that travels to a concrete slab on the floor (cast from an IKEA container), where the bronze is placed delicately. The artist created the bronzes from a fold in the hem of *Statue of Minerva* (2nd

space and history. The larger works also reference classical sculpture—with IKEA chairs as body and concrete as pedestal and latex, evoking billowy fabric carved into marble.

The archives of the project, carefully curated by Elizaveta Alexandrovna Shneyderman, are displayed in the back room with an accompanying [website in-progress](#). A Spanish translation of Virginie Despentes’s *King Kong Theory* rests on top of a printed copy of the *A Cyborg Manifesto* as a small iPad plays a slow motion animation (by the artist) of Sharon Stone’s infamous crotch scene in *Basic Instinct*. The presence of ephemera supports the objective of the art itself—revealing the labor of the project while offering a lens to view subcultural and theoretical ties.

Within the cerebral bath of theory and pop culture, *You Weren’t Familiar but You Weren’t Afraid* emotes the exciting, strenuous feeling of grasping for revolutionary solutions. It examines relational dynamics to understand the systems that bind us. It immerses us deeply in our world to offer possibilities and alternatives. As I looked closely at *The repetition of things they do make meaning* (2022), trying to discern if latex was laid on or embedded into concrete, the beat from Rihanna’s “Work” floated over, emphasizing the interwoven methods of Barrio’s constructed filmic and sculptural environments that are at once confrontational, queer, and fiercely cool.

Contributor

Jillian McManemin

Jillian McManemin is an artist, writer and the Founder of the Toppled Monuments Archive. She’s working on her first book, *Sculpture Kills*.