

# The approach

## this is art

Contemporary Art Magazine

---

The Approach, 1st Floor, 47 Approach Road, Bethnal Green, London E2 9LY

### Shapeshifters

---

#### Shapeshifters

The Approach

12 January - 10 February 2019

Review by Jillian Knipe

**In the delicate space of The Approach Gallery, group show 'Shapeshifters' initially seems a suitably lightweight fit with pastel images and objects tiptoeing across the room. In direct opposition, heaviness slowly wades in through the details, as pinks shift from candy fluorescent to wet plasticky sludge and blood clot red. Sascha Braunig, Sandra Mujinga and Maria Pinińska-Bereś take on something of the dark, suspicious nature of popular mythology's three fates. Most works point to women and the female form, yet actual bodies are absent. The effect lures us into considering gender as a composite of assertions, components, behaviours and illusive hybrids.**

A driverless broomstick spears the room and seems to have spiked detritus on its journey. Is 'Sabbath' (1987) by Pinińska-Bereś the tool of domestic goddess or transport for the wicked witch? Has the broom-rider disappeared to enjoy a day of rest or transformed into the broomstick itself? The artist's sketches give clues to her extensive questioning of gender identity between lounging labias scientifically studied with all the care of Michelangelo's sketches, a birdcage dress suggesting Velazquez's 'Infanta Margerita' (1659) wheeled out for public entertainment and the ill-fated tower of Pisa meets Tatlin's unrealised invention; both phallic disappointments.

This Is Tomorrow  
Sandra Mujinga  
Jillian Knipe  
29 January 2019

# The approach

Bringing the debate into the living room, Mujinga's 'Disruptive Patterns' (2018) presents a composition of three looped videos. All seem to tell a different version of the same story or the same story at different times. A semi-translucent, liquid dancer is foregrounded by heavily edged, fluid forms moving across the screen and interrupting the view. Mujinga heightens this baffling scenario with her empty garments. Using an extensive range of materials from glossy PVC to dull denim, Mujinga's sculptures appear as discards, hangups and window dressing. All non-specific, they give way to perceptual possibilities such as victim, performer, animal, gender fluidity and possibly a snake shedding its skin for renewal.

Braunig edges closer to the body by portraying ambiguity with the simplicity of the flat figure. Both 'Spliied' (2018) and 'Shower Scene' (2018) depict female figures which might be cut out space, shadows, silhouettes or even cousins of the 1970s 'Charlie's Angels' symbol. The former conjures up a trompe l'oeil of flickering paper and its three-dimensional trickery. The latter is a lively gouache of a curtain with a double witch cut out as the deceptive entertainer. Presumably it's her male counterpart who gropes his way through the fabric folds of the beckoning enchantress. His orange limbs are bright with alarm, their gridded pattern recalling temporary netting around a dangerous crevasse in the road.

It's tempting to read the title 'Shapeshifters' as is, alongside its inversion "Shifty Shapes". Shapeshifters change physical form from one to another, while shifty shapes are more evasive, even a little devious. These three artists seem to use categorisation clichés as a springboard to a vastly more empowered and illusive sense of gender. The result is as much a challenge to the concept of defining something as specific and exact, as it is to the one-dimensional witches and bitches so often depicted in modern literature.

---

**Published on 29 January 2019**