

**Trisha Baga**  
*the eye, the eye and the ear*



## Trisha Baga *the eye, the eye and the ear*

20 February 2020 - 10 January 2021

Curated by Lucia Aspesi and Fiammetta Griccioli

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## Trisha Baga

Emerging internationally midway through the late 2000s, immediately after graduating at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, Trisha Baga (Venice, Florida, 1985) is considered one of the most interesting artists today working with time-based media. Since the beginning of her career, her use of performance and video as a means to explore the themes of the body and its transformation led her to relate to the physical and tridimensional aspects of projection within the exhibition space.



*There's No "I" in Trisha*,  
2005-2007 (video still)  
Single-channel video,  
48"17", color, sound

Baga does this replacing her body's presence with ordinary objects—whether found or made—that dialogue with the projected images thus becoming part of the installations. This approach recalls the pioneering multimedia experiences of women artists like Joan Jonas (b. 1936) and Shigeko Kubota (1937–2015), who investigated the relations between the body and the moving image. Unlike these 1970s experimentations with the diffusion of video in art—and in which the dialogue between the performer, the video-camera and the spectator was central—Baga's work, as a reflection of the generation to which she belongs, focuses on exploring the dynamics between the computer screen and the projection space.

Trisha Baga orchestrates visual and sound motifs—which interweave fragments of pop culture, personal portraits and humorous situations with contemporary

forms of communication—choosing 3D technology as preferred medium. The latter—used in diverse fields from computer technology to videogames and cinema—is employed by the artist in its low-tech version to create images by combining and overlaying 2D and 3D shots. In the works she realized in the last decade—such as *Madonna y El Niño* (2010) and *Orlando* (2015), which portray, among other themes, climatic cataclysms—the projection often embraces staged objects to create an interplay of volumes and shadows that stratify the physical space. As protagonists of these filmic landscapes, the props arranged in front of the screen merge with the narratives that alternate syncopated episodes with more structured moments, to create continuing shifts between the real and the virtual.

“Mollusca & The Pelvic Floor,” 2018  
Exhibition view, 2018  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Greene Naftali,  
New York

Whereas Trisha Baga’s work mimics the distracted and associative logic of navigation on the internet, it also



merges the spatial nature of the screen with that of the surrounding environment in a fluid overlapping of visual and sound layers that bring to life an infinite chain of swirling fragmented sequences. Conversations extrapolated from Hollywood films, refrains from pop music songs, and extracts from Sci-Fi writings are interwoven to create a narration in which spoken words and written text dialogue with objects and ceramic works made by the artist and included in her installations.

In addition to combining ephemeral and malleable forms of expression like video and performance, the artist uses the media of painting and ceramic. In particular, she creates 1:1 scale sculptural works of ordinary objects—such as cameras, musical instruments, telephones—placed on plinths, which appear almost fossilized. Ironically, elements of everyday life and traces of the present become objects to be displayed in museums. More abstract compositions derived from collages of images and assorted elements—including phosphorescent paints and seeds—are recurrent in her works on canvas and seem to turn the video pixels into matter.

The artist’s research explores the transformation between media and its tropes by referring to the cyclical obsolescence of technology through key figures or icons in the history of civilization. Among these, the representation of the horse is emblematic as a subject dating back to prehistoric cave paintings, 19th-century photographic studies of movement by Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), and most recently in a scientific experiment (conducted at the Harvard Medical School since 2016) in which a short video of a galloping horse was inserted in the DNA of a bacterium opening

the possibility of using living cells to store information. Considered in this regard, as Baga has commented, the body may be thought of «as a sort of living memory card» where organic and electronic entities are merged. In her practice, the interconnectedness of biological and technological mutations is confronted by linguistic explorations of archaic images and myths, such as Plymouth Rock (the place where the first settlement was founded in North America by English colonists in 1620), a symbol of the dawn of the history of the United States. Furthermore gender identity and the relationship between the individual, society and culture are recurrent subjects in Baga's oeuvre, which investigates the imagery of post-colonial societies through the lens of a particular interest in her country of ancestry, the Philippines, and its history of occupation.

In her videos, the reenactment of natural phenomena, such as hurricanes or photosynthesis, contextualizes personal dramas through scientific descriptions of such elemental metaphors as water, light, and fire. By giving emotional voice to natural events, Baga updates an oral tradition rooted in the earliest forms of storytelling and myth-making.

## The Exhibition

The exhibition features five video installations that bring together more than ten years of Trisha Baga's production, starting from her first work *There's No "I" in Trisha* (2005–2007)—conceived as a television sitcom in which the artist plays all the characters based on gender stereotypes—to her most recent *1620* (2020) realized for “the eye, the eye and the ear.” The show comprises also a wide selection of ceramic works created by the artist since 2015, which are featured as archeological artefacts of civilization.

*Mollusca & The Pelvic Floor*, 2018  
Two channel projection:  
2D and 3D video, 37' 18",  
color, sound; ceramics  
and various materials  
Installation view, 2018  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Greene Naftali, New York



As a sort of *mise en abyme* which tells a story within a story through texts and image sequences, the exhibition is an overview of the media that Baga has referred to, from VHS to DVD and 3D. The show also underlines the artist's performative practice that, since

her first works, has included herself as an essential part of her installations.

The exhibition layout is suggestive of natural history museums and takes an unconventional classificatory approach that relates the idea of fossils to technological devices, creating temporal short-circuits. The title “the eye, the eye and the ear” places emphasis on the sensory activity in the show, where visual effects replicate sounds in such a way that the narrative might be perceived as a living organism.

For the exhibition, the texts of all the videos are fully translated into Italian and the artist has incorporated them as part of the projections. The videos *Mollusca and the Pelvic Floor* (2018) and *1620* (2020) are currently presented in 2D. The artworks were originally projected in 3D and viewable with stereoscopic 3D glasses that cannot be distributed to the public to respect the current health and safety measures.

## 1 ORLANDO, 2015–2020

As a sort of fictive title for the exhibition placed at the entrance of the show, the text of *ORLANDO* reappears in reverse on the exit wall of the Shed. Two intentionally misspelled wall texts feature a disclaimer of possible printing imperfections of the book *Half Mile Down* (1934), written by early 20th-century naturalist and scientist William Beebe (1877–1962), which documents pioneering oceanographic researches on the life of waters. The excerpt—taken from the foreword of the book—is reworked by Baga, who intervenes by altering two keywords, changing each instance of “book” to “man,” and “it” to “her,” thus generating a paradoxical swap of identities between living entities and objects. The artist’s subtle action functions as a declaration that introduces the exhibition and is also one of the central issues in her practice: a careful reflection on the relation between the human body and the material and cultural artifacts.

Conceived in 2015 for her solo exhibition “Orlando” at Greene Naftali gallery in New York, the work takes its title from Virginia Woolf’s (1882–1941) novel published in 1928 and the city in Florida. The 2015 exhibition took place in an imagined future after a great flood consumed the artist’s native Florida, with Orlando being one of the last cities to seek refuge in. Baga resumes the excerpt from *Half Mile Down* for the show “the eye, the eye and the ear,” underlining from the very beginning the importance of the idea of collectivity and the necessity to reflect on the representation of the human figure, as well as its preservation and transformation. Thus, the work approaches the subject of lan-

guage frequently explored in Baga's videos, where the text functions as evidence of the evolution of culture through the use of communication.

## 2 Hypothetical Artifacts, 2015–2020

Situated right after the entrance of the exhibition, «the geological corridor of evolution» of the manmade artifacts of civilization—as defined by the artist—is a collection of more than twenty ceramic pieces realized from 2015 to the present day. These elaborate objects appear as if fossilized and placed on plinths—like future archaeological finds—, hinting at the common aesthetics found in natural history museums. Retaining their vividness, the glazed ceramics are wryly repurposed as museums exhibits and displayed according to an unusual classification system: a pyramidal plinth hosts portraits of Sphinx-like poodles with flaming heads. On a segmented plinth, a group of seemingly abstract sculptures representing coded objects are positioned alongside others that mimic electronic devices—as a typewriter or a microscope—incorporating organic elements and e-waste.

The next section composed of figures includes a self-portrait of the artist and references to pop culture icons like Elvis Presley and drag queen celebrity RuPaul. They are part of a series titled *Calcified Encasements for Virtual Assistants*, which function as potential housing for Artificial Intelligence devices, such as Alexa. The materiality of these pieces seems to embody a hypothetical primordial rendering of the reality that surrounds us; in particular, the ceramics implanted with

residue of processing chips and wires question the excessive reliance and hopes we put on technology and stage its most fragile and failing aspects.

## 3 Mollusca & The Pelvic Floor, 2018



This multifaceted installation is an exploration of the «condition of enclosing different meanings» locating its emotional thrust around two main narratives: the evolutionary lineage of mollusks and the interspecies relationship between Baga and Mollusca, the homophonic pseudonym the artist has given to the household AI unit developed by Amazon. Comprised of two simultaneous projections—one 2D, the other 3D—the installation speculates on the “hypothetical ancestral mollusk,”—scientifically thought to be the first mollusk from which the others evolved. This installation displays a heterogeneous composition of physical and virtual materials playing with the viewer's sense of time and reality, blurring borders between real and filmed spaces. In contrast with the moving image, various objects are arranged and at times spotlit by the projection in front of the screen, such as an oscillating fan, an analog clock, rocks and the Echo Dot Alexa.

*Mollusca & The Pelvic Floor* recounts a power struggle between human and machine in the form of a multilingual dialogue, employing a language of repurposed bits of pop culture mixed with personal and found footage. These include clips of the film *Contact* (1997) by Robert Zemeckis (b. 1952), videos of the artist's family in the Philippines, and extracts from

Sci-Fi books including *Imago* by Octavia E. Butler (1947–2006) and Dan Brown's (b. 1964) *Origin*.

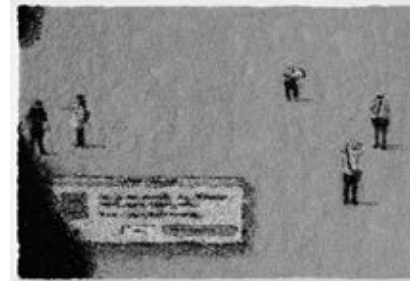
#### 4 Studio Photos 2012, 2012

Featured in a dark room, this single-channel silent video documents Baga's experimentation with photography and the materiality of light. *Studio Photos 2012* is projected on a canvas coated with glow-in-the-dark-paint, hence the light of the video results in creating traces of the passage of visitors into the space and on the surface of the image. The video shows the movement of light around the artist's studio and walls which, when encountering the glow-in-the-dark surfaces, leaves phosphorescent photographic trails. The work opens with footage of the artist's dog spotlighted by a torch while roaming around her haphazard studio, the inquisitive light—carried by Baga—casually revealing scattered objects present in the room. This intimate recording discloses the artist's studio practice, showing how everyday cultural detritus are a source of fascination for her and thus become an integral part of the work. *Studio Photos 2012* alternates on the screen moments of pitch black, light mapping and afterimages of light forms.

#### 5 Seed Paintings, 2017

Made of seeds and foam mounted onto wooden panels, this group of paintings is part of a larger series of works initiated by the artist in 2017. These pointillist reproductions obtained by using organic materials depict figures in desert-like landscapes blended with computer-generated elements, revealing Baga's oppositional interplay between the organic and the digital world. The starting point for the scenes portrayed in the seeds paintings are the pedestrians in her work *Virahanka Trail* (2017)—a multimedia installation including footage of tourists walking up and down sand dunes at a Japanese beach—, which alludes in its title to the ancient Indian mathematician Virahanka (700 AD ca.) who originally discovered the Fibonacci sequence (named after

*Sex*, 2017  
Seeds, foam, wood,  
61 × 88.9 × 5.1 cm  
Courtesy of the artist  
and SOCIÉTÉ, Berlin



the Italian mathematician of XIII century), a numerical sequence in which each element is generated by the sum of the two that precede it.

Recalling the visuals of *Virahanka Trail*, the figures in the paintings are juxtaposed with sketches of

Photoshop dialogue boxes indicating their conversion from the spatial dimension into the pictorial one. These textured panels offer a materic version of the pixelated images of the videos—suggesting a re-composition of the images fragmented by technology—showing how the artist expands the possibilities of painting by envisioning it through the lens of the digital. Through this

series, Baga creates a parallelism between the act of painting and editing on the computer, revealing the multifaceted aspects of her methodology.

## 6 *Madonna y El Niño*, 2010



*Madonna y el Niño*,  
2010 (video still)  
Single-channel video,  
25' 14", color, sound;  
disco ball

This single-channel video projection is deeply rooted in the artist performative practice. The work recalls multiple imageries: from the popstar Madonna to the Christian iconography of the Virgin Mary, as well as the climate phenomenon El Niño linked to periodic warming across the central and east-central Equatorial Pacific Ocean. The work introduces Baga's fascination for natural phenomena and popular culture, comparing the linguistic evolution of Madonna's cultural output to the water cycle. Through the exploration of metaphors and mythologies, water becomes a recurrent reference in Baga's oeuvre due to its physically and symbolically

malleable properties. These aspects are captured in the video through syncopated edits comprised of non-diegetic sounds—like the noise of the rain being associated with the materiality of the pixelated images on the screen—intertwined with montaged and collaged found footage of Madonna's 2006 *Confessions* concert tour and readings of the popstar's journal entries—written during the filming of *Evita* (1996) by Alan Parker (b. 1944). In between these rapid and fluid sequences, Baga is once again taking on the role of the performer, audience and editor, seen on screen while singing along to Madonna's tunes, manipulating the projector and blending a variety of images—reminding us of the endless stream of swiping through media content—or roller skating in front of the lens, interrupting the streams of light and creating absences in the shape of her body.

*Madonna y El Niño* is projected onto the wall and over a disco ball positioned before the screen which generates changes in light forms in the space. This work established the visual aesthetic and loose narrative structure that the artist continues to explore today; through this piece Baga brings together cryptic and instantly recognizable source material, creating her own analysis on personal mythologies. The closing scenes of the video are extracts from the film *Tropical Malady* (2004) by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (b. 1970), accompanied by a female voice reading an excerpt from the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1931–2019)—the first African-American woman to win the Nobel prize—, the overlapping of these two references shows how Baga draws upon the legacies of film and literature as a way to explore collective history.



## 7 *There's No "I" in Trisha*, 2005–2007/2020

Displayed as a domestic space, *There's No "I" in Trisha* is the first video made by Baga, conceived as a sort of TV sitcom that questions the gender stereotypes of all the various characters performed by the artist herself. The immersive installation welcomes visitors with a living-room—reminiscent of a typical set from American television shows—while a nearby monitor is showing a teenage love drama, where Baga ventures in playing as the sole actor, director and set designer. As an ode to popular culture, the video opens with an extract from the book *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary W. Shelley (1797–1851) and the hit *Somebody To Love* by the Queen. It reveals contents typical of shows such as *Friends* or *Frasier*—complete with canned laughter, lightweight script, and stereotyped characters—re-examining how typecast gender roles, sexuality and social norms are portrayed in popular programming.

*There's No "I" in Trisha*,  
2005–2007 (video still)  
Single-channel video,  
48" x 17", color, sound



The one-woman comic series runs for four seasons, filmed by the artist over the course of two years. The video weaves a familiar plot characterized by snippets of everyday life, through which Baga actively examines her own role as an artist, envisioning it as an integral part of her work. As alluded in the title, the work investigates the notion of the self and questions its inaccessibility, emphasizing in particular the rearrangement of experiencing "I" as a study of the multiple figures interpreted by the artist.

## 8 *1620*, 2020

This video installation is a new production realized by the artist especially for the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca. *1620* takes its cue from the legendary site known as Plymouth Rock, which symbolically marks the origins of the United States of America. The video opens with a text referring to a fictional organization called DNA USA, an experimental gene therapy program initiated as a response to the current "illness" in the United States of America.

Conceived as a 3D documentation of an imaginary theatrical performance with the actors impersonating the pilgrims, the video gives a specific role to technology. With the development of each act the narrative frame breaks up further, mimicking how media technology has changed the way we tell and read stories over time, fracturing and re-compositing temporal sensibilities and perception.

*1620*, 2020  
(location shot)  
Two channel  
projection: 2D and 3D  
video, 30' approx.,  
color, sound  
Co-production of Pirelli  
HangarBicocca, Milan  
with the additional  
participation of  
Giò Marconi, Milan  
and SOCIÉTÉ, Berlin  
Photo: Oto Gillen



According to the artist, «1620 is an impressionistic science fiction, which reframes Plymouth Rock as a source of narrative stem cells in the hands of genetic scientists studying deep-seated flaws in The American Drama.» By tracking the history of the Rock and its repeated fracturing over several centuries, Baga employs the point of view of the cinematic composite as the source of cultural identification.

## 9 *No Source Found, 2019*

Conceived in connection to the work *1620*, this fragmented ceramic piece is placed horizontally onto a pedestal and invites the viewer to observe it from above. Roughly reproducing the scene of the Mayflower Compact—the first agreement for self-government to be established by the Pilgrim Fathers on their arrival to America—the work ironically reminds the viewer of the tangible monument of freedom “Plymouth Rock” and emphasizes its fragility and susceptibility to manipulation. The crumbled ceramic floor becomes a wry metaphor of the eponymous site and much like the historically questionable Rock—frequently scattered while being transported to different sites over the centuries—, it represents a broken landmark that has been altered repeatedly, questioning how historical facts have been passed on, fractured and re-composed over time.

As explained by the artist, «The title simultaneously refers to the error message on projectors when lacking a media input, and the limitations of archeological records and historical understanding of Filipino culture pre-Spanish and American colonization.»



*No Source Found, 2019* (making of)  
Ceramics, variable dimensions  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Giò Marconi, Milan  
Photo: Samuel Lang Budin

## Selected Exhibitions

Trisha Baga (Venice, Florida 1985) lives and works in New York City. She graduated at the Cooper Union School of Art, New York (2007) and at the Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (2010). Her works have been exhibited in numerous solo shows at international institutions, including: Gallery TPW, Toronto (2018); CCVA, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard College, Cambridge, (2017); 356 Mission Road, Los Angeles (2015); Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2014); Peep-Hole, Milan (2013); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Kunstverein München, Germany, Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA), Dundee, (2012). She has participated in major group shows, in institutions such as Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2019); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2018); Aïshti Foundation, Beirut (2017); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Biennial of Moving Images, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Manifesta 11, Zurich (2016); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2015); Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon, Lyon (2013); Center for Performance Research, New York (2010).

Trisha Baga founded, together with Pam Lins in 2007, the (CC) Ceramics Club in New York.

**This publication accompanies the exhibition “the eye, the eye and the ear”  
by Trisha Baga**

### Lenders

Greene Naftali, New York; Gió Marconi, Milan; Collection Giovanni Pasqualini; Collection Jeffrey Knowledge; SOCIÉTÉ, Berlin; the artist and all those who prefer to remain anonymous

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Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2013, Vicente Todoli has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: Shed, Navate, and Cubo.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the inauguration of Pirelli HangarBicocca.



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