

The background is a vibrant pink color. A large, white, curved shape, resembling a stylized letter 'C' or a speech bubble tail, is positioned on the right side of the page, partially overlapping the pink area.

# **Puck Verkade**

**Dürst Britt  
& Mayhew**

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**Sunday Art Fair  
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## **BREEDER**

**a conversation between  
Puck Verkade and  
Tamar Clarke-Brown**

**Tamar Clarke-Brown: Starting at the beginning, the title BREEDER brings up notions around dystopia, references like Animal Farm, and feminist politics.**

**Puck Verkade: Well, I was looking into different forms of reproduction – not only biological, but also digital, visual and social reproduction; how these systems work together and become intertwined in order to perpetuate certain power structures. I was thinking about a feedback loop – something that feeds on itself.**

**But the title is manifold. It's critical but also humorous, a take on what it means to reproduce patterns, pathways and values. We're all breeders to some degree. In relation to digital reproduction, whenever we share memes, we're also 'breeding,' reproducing certain truths, and often oppressive systems and power relations. I was going back and forth between these three different types of reproduction, how they're interlinked and dependent on one another.**

**TCB: You want to interrupt that loop?**

**PV: As a visual artist, I'm part of a system that frames and reframes, and reproduces. But I'm also an active agent producing new images, appropriating old ones, or re-appropriating and reproducing other people's images to create new narratives. I started thinking OK, so how do you disrupt this pattern of reproduction?**

**This dilemma is most apparent in the last video where I'm working with actors. I scripted them, the three actors, as possible future donor-conceived children who might contact me as their biological mother in eighteen years. That whole video, episode 3, goes back and forth between generations, time, space, narratives and power. It's about what we get to reveal, what we hide, and why? Who gets to decide that? I asked one of my actors to eat some fried chicken and she's like 'OK! Let's do that. Great!,' then I look at her and I look at the camera, and I'm like... 'Ah shit!' This is not what I meant to do, to reproduce an image of a stereotype. So we started to have a conversation about this frame, because I felt like I needed to check-in with myself, check my accountability in what I actually want to reproduce.**

**TCB: Do you hope that the series will trigger a similar response in the audience?**

**PV: I would be pleased if the video could ask questions about how we deal with these situations. At the beginning of each video, well, they're looped, there's always a screening, or some kind of an interrogation – physically, socially or medically. When you're being registered as an identity, as with the egg-donating process for instance, there are certain parts of you that matter – apparently your sexual orientation and marital status for example. I think it's a good example of how society deals with identity and the shaping or registering of identity. This is why including the egg donor process was really important to me. I felt like it was a very odd process and actually a perfect example of how society corners us as content, as resources, and not as individuals. In many ways such processes help perpetuate classist, gendered, racial patterns and divides.**

**TCB: Obviously I noticed that all the actresses were people of colour (POC). Was that a conscious choice?**

**PV: I leave it up to them how they identify culturally but yes, I was specifically looking for people who had a complex heritage themselves so that in the video we could talk about how that shapes one's identity.**

**TCB: I'm wondering where you are in these videos. In some moments you break the fourth wall and I know you're in it, because I know you, but you don't identify yourself, your face is blurred or anonymized.**

**PV: It's questioning how individuals are rendered to objects. The lineup of women in episode 1 with the pixelated faces, for instance, is very 'United Colours of Benetton' – they represent a whole variety of 'diversity', and of course pixelation itself a stereotypical representational tool used to mask, hide or erase that I wanted to interrogate as well. I almost wanted to overdo this type of representation in order to question it. It's objectification in a way, and again there is a question about power. I look at my videos from a narrative point of view, so it's more about who gets to write the narrative and who doesn't. Who's erased and who's heard? Who voices who?**

**TCB: How do you deal with privilege in your filmmaking?**

**PV: Well, these episodes are like my fictionalised gestation. I find it really important, especially in the current political climate to address race relations and how I'm implicated in certain power systems as a white filmmaker. I have to be aware of certain hierarchies, and to interrogate**

myself and my motivations. This is not some sort of white anxiety as though I'm trying to excuse myself. I'm trying to expose and understand how I am also implicated in forms of white privilege.

This is why the fried chicken scene was really important to me. I asked my actor if she was OK with opening up the conversation, and she was like, 'Yeah! It's better than pretending like it didn't happen.' I could always do that – edit the whole episode out. But no... Let's open that up and show how complicated this really is.

**TCB: What do you do with that privilege?**

**PV: This is a central question in the body of work. I try to interrogate my own working process through the use of narrative and scrutinizing the lens based power relations inherent to using a camera. If you're taking on stereotypes and stigma as a subject, or even as a narrative structure, then where is the line between reproducing that or destabilizing it? If we're talking about race relations and neutrality, can I as a white person even destabilize it? Maybe in some cases it's not in my position to do that.**

**TCB: How do these questions relate to the installation itself?**

**PV: Well it's a modular installation, it has the potential to be built and rebuilt. I felt that was a very straightforward way of dealing with this idea of making and remaking, and the fact that it has possibilities to be a different structure each time. In every place it will have a different body, or skeleton; a different framework. The installation is an attempt to make something materially that could provide context to view the video work and provide a bodily connection with the visual and theoretical content of the videos. On a personal note it's actually also the first time I'm actually making stuff with my hands. I feel that could become a more prominent thing in my practice.**

**Aesthetically the structure could be affiliated with a playground, a climbing frame. But it's also a fencing material being used in public space to navigate the public in a slightly authoritative manner telling you where to go and where not to go. With the bias hides, the metal sculptures with stretched latex – which you could interpret as 'bias hides', or hides as in 'stretched skin' – I guess that came about because of the medical examination, and this idea of becoming an egg donor and subjecting my body to different forms of examination and screening. I thought it would be interesting to make sculptures that resemble medical screens and also relate to disclosure of information. In the process of making I realised that a lot of my work deals with how we interpret and treat surfaces. It's just the beginning of a new way of thinking about my content. This is why the**

**latex is different skin colours, which are the most cliché, stereotypical colours. I'm trying to call to attention biases and show how implicit biases are structured in everything we do.**

**TCB: And you do use cliché noticeably in your work – why do you find cliché, perhaps more exaggeration – and there's humour here too – a powerful investigative methodology?**

**PV: I feel like in our very sensitive political environment, humour now is seen as irony, or as neutralising very sensitive matters. It can provide access to a core human condition, but this is where it gets tricky! I'm completely aware that a lot of people are not big fans of using humour when it comes to very serious matters, like political issues, and in a way I understand that, in terms of being politically correct (PC). But I also think it doesn't work if you shove something down someone's throat, so in my opinion humour can provide access. In making something absurd, ridiculous or humorous, I'm not trying to make fun of it, but exaggeration and humour can provide a way in. Not in terms of relief – because nothing gets 'solved' but in terms of putting something on the surface – pointing it out. Then you can go below it and try to untangle the different layers.**

**TCB: Is this series to be continued?**

**PV: At the moment I feel like this could grow into a larger episodic body of work, wherein the questions left in each video provide content for a new one. The third video opened up a new chapter, maybe regarding social responsibility and representational accountability. I want to try and break down how image-making can be damaging, how there is inherent violence in capture, and try to find an alternate way of operating.**

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Tamar Clarke-Brown (b. 1990) is a London based freelance curator, critic and creator. She holds an MFA in Curating from Goldsmiths, University of London (2016). Her interdisciplinary practice is focused on experimental futurisms, digital culture, representation and the black diaspora. Tamar is developing new, open and playful projects for the digital age, with the potential for greater connectivity, access and critical investigation through the creative use of technology. She has worked with institutions including Serpentine Galleries, Autograph ABP and Bard Berlin and she regularly contributes to platforms including AQNB and Screen Shot Magazine. Recent curatorial projects include embassyHACK at the Government Art Collection (2016) and #BlackmendreamLDN at Buster Mantis (2016), which extended through a digital zine. In 2017 Tamar co-founded the collective Betababes, with Francesca Altamura, which focuses on experimental digital publishing project, and also CBT, a faux-digital startup whose work will feature at Tate Britain and Protein Studios in Autumn 2017.