

Frieze

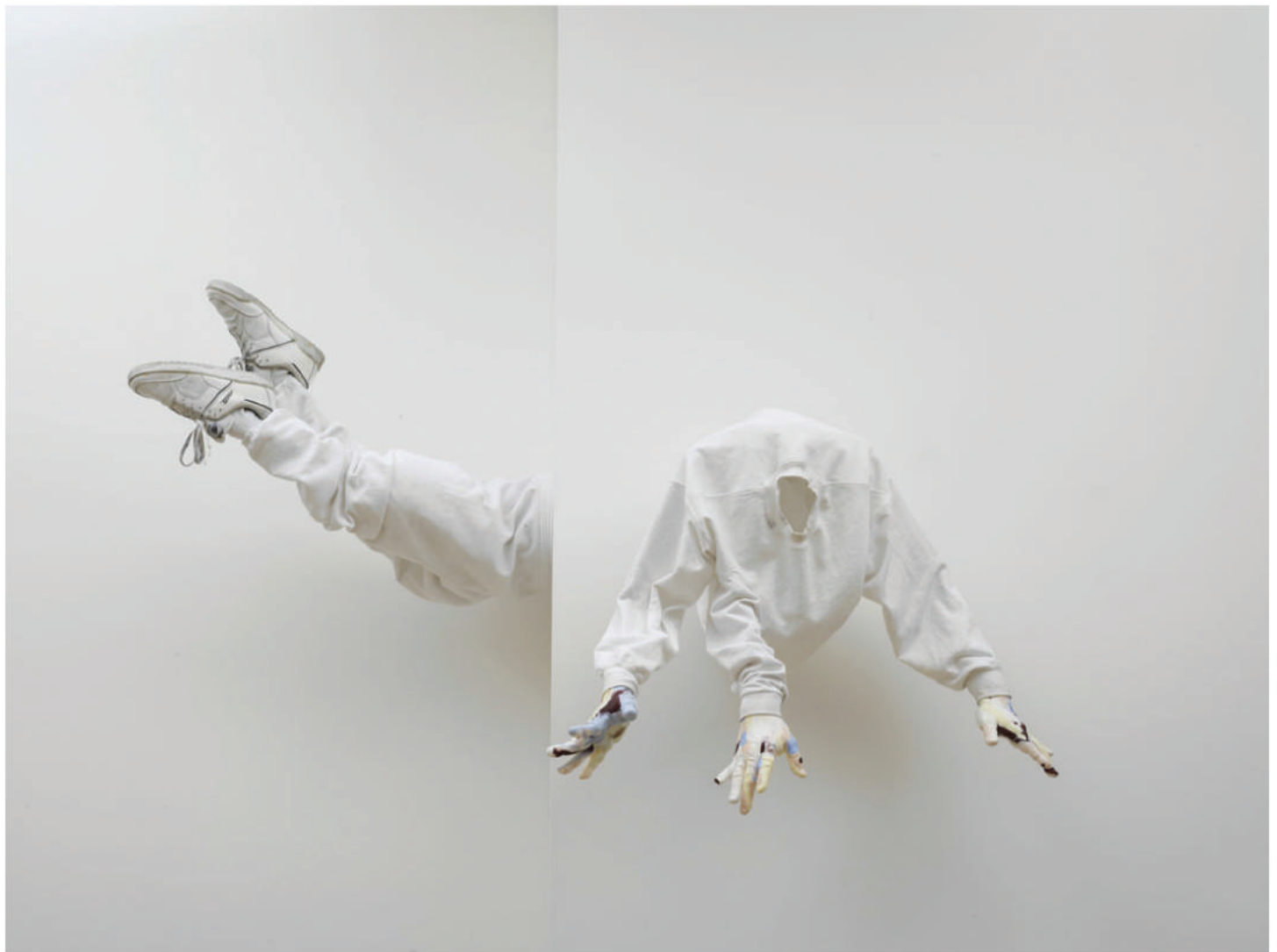
Reviews /

Tori Wrånes

BY ROBERT BARRY

14 MAR 2016

Carl Freedman Gallery, London, UK



Tori Wrånes, *Mom, don't you miss the real me*, 2015, silicon, gel, pigment, wood, cotton tracksuit, trainers, socks. Legs: 62 x 88 x 55 cm, Body: 100 x 70 x 67 cm.

Courtesy: Carl Freedman Gallery, London

The artist growled as she made her way through the audience. It was a busy night at Carl Freedman Gallery and assistants ushered Tori Wrånes, hunched over in a white smock, through the tightly bunched crowd like zookeepers leading some wild animal. Her bright-orange face glowed in the low light, sporting fulsome whiskers and a bulbous fake nose.

At the far end of the gallery, in an area set aside for her performance, stood a sculpture (*Multistand*, 2016), shaped like an old-fashioned hat stand. Its surface is coated in a patina of epoxy, rough yet glistening, like hoarfrost. Each of the stand's hooks ends in the latticed steel globe of a vocal microphone protruding from the frosting.

Wrånes sang into these mics in an obscure vocalese, the melodies suggestive of folk music but hewing to no identifiable tradition, seeming to draw on multiple, entwined ethnographic sources. A native of Norway, Wrånes calls this her 'troll language', after the magical beings of Norse mythology, identifying it as a deliberate strategy to circumvent the hierarchies of linguistic structures. It is, by turns, soaring and guttural, utterly ridiculous and quite beautiful. The different mics did not merely amplify her voice but transformed it: this one pitching it down to a baritone; that one adding a high harmony, reverberation or another strange form of filtering or distortion. Passing through the system of unseen wires and circuitry, Wrånes's voice was multiplied, becoming a whole cast of characters in dialogue, none of them quite human.



Tori Wrånes, 'Drastic Pants', 2016, installation view, Carl Freedman Gallery, London

She sang surrounded by her own sculptures and wall-based works, the latter mostly abstract, multicoloured daubs in globular impasto, the former of two types: great sagging beanbags, similarly paint-splashed, hanging from the ceiling on mirror ball motors; and uncanny headless familiars, leaping from the walls in sports wear. Only later, returning to the gallery a few days after the performance, did it strike me that the three beanbags (*Beanbag 1, 2 and 3*, 2015-16), rotating slowly, formed a kind of lumpy solar system.

At the far end of the room, a black leather jumpsuit posed as though occupied by some phantom stands poised upon the wall, caught in a gesture suggestive of both of a mid-dance Michael Jackson and the spook from the *Ghostbusters* logo. Its title, *Sad Dwarf* (2016), recalls the folkloric names – 'red giant', 'white dwarf' – astronomers bestow upon imploding stars. (Just as the supernatural quality of Wrånes's voice is mediated by unseen hi-tech processing, no rational scientism is entirely free of its own magical thinking.)

The same frosted coating that covers Wrånes's hydra-headed mic-stand fills a small walnut frame near the gallery entrance. (The list of works is scrupulous in detailing the precise material used in each frame, as if to evoke the elemental powers of each different wood.) Embedded slightly off-centre in the bottom half of the flat, frosted surface is a little gold cross that spins perpetually, giving the symbol of Christianity one minute, becoming its Satanist inverse the next, but spending by far the major part of its time, like most old folk tales, between such Manichean opposites.

The opening night performance, Wrånes's first in the UK, did not last long – ten minutes or so – but it felt epic, like a compressed take on Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Ring Cycle, 1848). Wrånes assembles her mythology not from tone painting and epic poetry but from half-recognizable bits of pop culture, a painterly expressionism suggestive of gas nebulae and the ambiguous figure of the troll. The effect is spooky but playful. World-building has rarely been so much fun.

ROBERT BARRY

Robert Barry is a freelance writer and composer from Brighton, England. His book *The Music of the Future* is published by Repeater.
