

Vaginal Davis

VD as VB

Vaginal Davis is an Afro-American drag queen, who over the last twenty years has been performance artist, actress, curator, musician and writer. Since 2000, Davis re-enacts in art and hybrid spaces well-known performances by the contemporary art star Vanessa Beecroft, reworking (and subverting) the entire VB phenomenon at the same time.

VD as VB - Erdgeist, Earth Spirit #27-29 10827, performed in June 2007 at the Kapelica Gallery in Ljubljana, was inspired by *VB53*, produced in 2004 by the Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery of Florence. On that occasion Beecroft, in the middle of the Tepidarium in Florence, an elegant, airy 19th century structure in iron and glass, installed a heap of dark earth, upon which models, in the usual sculptural poses, and wearing high-heeled sandals and long wigs, offered themselves to the public eye. The image drew explicitly on the Renaissance iconography of Mary Magdalene, observed by Beecroft in a museum in Florence. The artist, as usual, did not take part in the performance. In *Erdgeist*, on the other hand, the artist is present, right in the middle of the stage, playing with VB as a target of the art gossip and with VB as a brand, and converting a representation of contemporary cult of beauty into a process of self-awareness and self-determination for the people involved.

The Madonna of Laibachdorf (2007), the image produced during Davis's stay in Ljubljana, is a response to Beecroft's *White Madonna with twins* (2006). While Beecroft's Madonna is the symbol of our troubled relationship with the southern hemisphere, Davis' Madonna is an emblem of our atavistic fear of diversity, be it racial or sexual. By breastfeeding the Sudanese twins, the wealthy white woman attempts a gesture of charity, but actually perpetrates an act of colonialism, while by cradling two chubby white babies, the black homosexual reveals the hypocrisy that lies under the thin veneer of tolerance, brandishing diversity like a threat. A genial threat, because the fear lies not in Davis, but in the eyes of the spectator.

Domenico Quaranta