



ZABLUDOWICZ
COLLECTION

Invites

DARYA
DIAMOND

24 FEBRUARY–
3 APRIL 2022

Julia Greenway: Why don't we start by having you describe your 2020 film *Judgement Proof*? Particularly the American motel as an emblem for sex work.

Darya Diamond: Yes, I think it's important to bring up the motel. I'm not really subverting the narrative around sex work by using the footage of motels. It's such a romanticised motif in cinema and popular culture, so with the film I set out to illuminate the labour that upholds that fantasy space. The motel is a heterotopia. The prostitute is a heterotopia. There's a parallel between the motel and the prostitute as a vessel in the audio and the visual components throughout *Judgement Proof*.

JG: How did this work inform your Invites presentation?

DD: Print is a big theme in the installation. I'm working with some really large prints on cotton that I made during my residency this past year in Belgium. The prints include stills from the *Judgement Proof* film, as well as repeated, layered imagery from my time as a sex worker. My practice has always involved a lot of reproduction – both visually in my print-work as well as sculpturally through mould-making and casting. The reproduction of forms and images acts as material in recontextualising and exhibiting an ethics of care, which for me is a political act. I wanted this repetition to generate a sensorial visibility of, in this case, 'the girlfriend experience': a provision of care that includes but is not limited to a romantic, sexual and emotional embodiment of the 'ideal' girlfriend. A broad term, but a common sector of prostitution implying intimacy as well as sex.

There is green carpet throughout the installation, which is a new material for me – hopefully that integrates another layer into my work. I'm constantly looking to straddle a line between the home and the motel when I contextualise sex work. I often saw clients in my flat, sometimes at hotels, sometimes at motels, but the norm was at my home. The carpet, for me, connects a domestic utilitarian familiarity. I've also included castings of fixtures from old hotels, as well as offerings to La Santa Muerte or La Virgen de los Olvidados, the Mexican deity of death. She is the patron saint of border-crossers, both physical and spiritual. She provides solace for the marginalised and the disposed: sex workers, prisoners, trans folks, the true border-crossers.

JG: The installation also includes a new audio work that plays throughout the space on multiple channels. Can you describe how this work came together?

DD: These are audio recordings of clients I've seen in the last seven years, mostly in London and the UK. I basically take a one-hour session of 'the girlfriend experience' and edit it down into smaller, bite-size portions. I set out to portray the raw transactional intimacy of sex work and what that actually looks like, in a non-fetishy, non-exotic, kinky way. They're super-raw. Raw in the way that they're edited, but also raw in the sense that they're quite emotionally loaded.

JG: Who is Maria? Tell me about her.

DD: Maria is one of my work names. I am Maria, the woman in the recordings.

JG: The audio recordings capture unique exchanges. It's these very simple transitional moments between Maria and her clients. To me, this brings a really humanising aspect that feels essential in understanding the complexities of sex work. I wonder if that was what you intended: to destigmatise sexual labour by documenting an unexpected personal interaction?

DD: Yes, that's always been really important for me. The girlfriend experience can be a quite a pedestrian interaction – very much the opposite of depictions of sex work in popular culture. It's highly glamourised, fetishised and exotified as something that's just about kinks or a raunchy fuck. Even if you're providing a kink-oriented service – with or without intimacy or penetrative sex – you're providing emotional labour, and that's undeniable. As a prostitute, you're making space. That is an essential part of the job: making space for your clients.

JG: With all that being said, your work doesn't feel erotic to me. You've captured this very human interaction that unpacks the idiosyncrasies of what sexual labour actually entails.

DD: It's really important to me to challenge and redefine the mythology that surrounds sex work. There is a horrendous lack of visibility for sex workers and I feel strongly about portraying an authentic representation of its affective labour. Of course, I changed everyone's voice in the final recordings, including my own. I have taken out any incriminating personal information to make sure that the client's privacy is respected. I have also edited hundreds of hours down to minutes, and naturally have taken on a level of authorship. There is no demonisation or malicious intent; it's much more documentarian.

Validating emotional and sexual labour has been implicit throughout my practice. Often invisible, this work is in demand for healthy, regular, boring humans who require diverse forms of support and care. The service that sex workers provide is an invaluable intimate routine, a form of psycho-sexual inventory, a ritualistic exchange.

JG: You frame the client exchange as being comparable to a religious confessional. What role does religion play for you throughout your work?

DD: I think the obvious link between sex work and religion in this situation is the emergence of a confessional space. And holding space for somebody. In one of the recordings for this exhibition, the client says something about the need and desire to create his own bubble. To me, that said so much. Often what clients are paying for is a safe space completely free of judgement and social pressure. Getting laid, having someone to confide in and someone to make you feel good and make you feel taken care of for an hour, is part of a fundamentally spiritual or psychological hygiene.

JG: What's most refreshing about the recordings is that it doesn't take much prompting from Maria for the clients to fully express their personal vulnerabilities.

DD: No, not at all. Maria is literally being a mirror – I'm just being a mirror to them. Just like the motel, she is defined by her content. She is a heterotopia. She is constantly redefined by her client, she is reflectively performing a projection of their desires.

JG: You've installed the recordings across multiple channels throughout the space, giving the audio a collective, atmospheric feel. You ask your viewer to listen intently to decipher the exchange, because the recordings are abstracted, as you say. It's nice to see you approach the entire site with a textured, spatial audio experience, whereas in your past work you have typically made pieces for individual listening.

DD: Yes, it's a social public. I've never done it like this before, so I'm really excited by the outcome. Mainly, viewers will all be experiencing the tracks together. As you said, I normally present these recordings in a somewhat private atmosphere by inviting the viewer to step into a small space or listen with headphones on. This installation is a collective experience of that intimacy. For the viewer to be immersed in this transaction with someone they maybe don't know, standing in the gallery, that's a fucking exciting moment for me as a maker: to elevate a shared experience of transactional intimacy.

JG: With those spatial considerations, I also wanted to ask you about the exhibition site and your interest in responding to the building's historical architecture. It seems that you set out to enhance the religious forms by wrapping your prints around the beam structures and deliberately working with the stained-glass windows. Why is a former Methodist chapel a unique space for you to be working within?

DD: The approach to this particular space is exciting because of the religious undertones. It's funny you said 'enhance', but I see it very much as a layering. To me, it's an opportunity to tell a story by incorporating this architectural source material. I really wanted to play with all that, to elevate the religious cues as I essentially fill the space with pornography. I think the space lends itself to that kind of examination as a way to redefine the juncture of sex work and spirituality: allowing the transactional service of sexual labour to be deemed spiritual, and also public, collective, social and healthy.

Artist's presentation: Screening of *Judgement Proof* film Saturday 2 April. Please check website for further details.

Upcoming Invites 2022 Victor Seaward 14 April – 29 May

Darya Diamond (b. 1991, Bay Area, California, USA) received an MFA from Goldsmiths, University of London in 2020. Recent solo exhibitions include *Judgement Proof*, Piloto Pardo, London (2020) and *My Mother the Doctor*, Leimin Gallery, Los Angeles (2017). Select group exhibitions include: *Meatspace*, The Koppel Project Hive, London (2021); *Rabbit Hole*, F Magazine, Houston (2021); *Redirecting*, Tree Art Museum, Beijing (2020); London Grads Now, Saatchi Gallery, London (2020); and *Rabbit Hole*, Niche Gallery, Los Angeles (2020). Diamond was selected for the 2021 Bloomberg New Contemporaries and participated in the Frans Masereel Residency programme in Belgium.

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to solo presentations by UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a UK commercial gallery.

Image: Darya Diamond, *Untitled*, 2022. Digital photograph. Courtesy the artist.

176 Prince of Wales Road
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Opening times
Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm
Other times by appointment
FREE ENTRY

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