

# HANNAH BLACK

THE ARTIST ADORED BY THE INDUSTRY, SOUNDTRACKING HER WORK WITH BRITNEY SPEARS. AKA, YOUR NEW OBSESSION.



I FORGOT MY COPY of Hannah Black's book, *Dark Pool Party*, on a plane to Mexico City. Losing stuff would upset me if I couldn't picture it found. Maybe the gangly steward discovered it in my seat front pocket. Intrigued by its ascii art moon cover, he took the book home, where he read it in an epsom salted bathtub, underlining lines like: *I'm a real girl! The wall inside is stone, it doesn't have a body or a part time job.*

Or maybe Hannah's book made it to another country. It could be back in Los Angeles, where Hannah wrote, "Perhaps getting to know a person is like getting to know a city." Or *Dark Pool Party* could've crossed two borders to Toronto, where Hannah just was. She was reading there by invitation, now she's in New York taking meetings, participating in a group show, and celebrating her birthday (November 12th). Berlin-based (Manchester-born), Hannah calls trips like these her, "traveling salesman gigs." She's a frequent flyer.

The problem is — it wasn't my copy to lose. I'd borrowed *Dark Pool Party* from a friend. Hannah Black is read like that: hand to hand to word of mouth. Her being and her — writing, video, sculpture, and performance art — work, bound as they are (they are largely autobiographical), are respected and beloved within a peer network. Writers are often liars, or at least aspirational, writing as we wish we were. Black's art, rather, seems integral to her. It aims for integrity: holism and honesty, which may be why so many people love it and her.



question." She was explaining why she regretted agreeing to another interview. "I think basically the thing is," she rejoined, "I just shouldn't read them."

"Another problem —" Black listed several, "that I have with interviews is the same problem I have with OkCupid or whatever — you're supposed to say like, *this is what I think you should find lovable about me.*"

She explained how she hadn't mastered *real performance*: "You make a screen and you give people consent to project onto it — that's *really performing.*" This also made interviews hard: "I usually hide from performance in feeling. What is it about this way that I'm so invested in feeling that I lose the decisional beauty of performance? Maybe I don't experience my visibility as a series of decisions about how I want to be seen, I experience it as a kind of accident... An accident of feeling."

Most profiles of Black include a description of her speech. "Curbing, meeting a catch with a catch, presenting alternatives to the thought's own alternative, with poetic freedom, with liquid agility," artist Rosa Aiello wrote when I asked her for an impression of Black. "The way she speaks makes my mind move fast too and in thrilling patterns."



bathed in the light of your laptop dead or sleeping

"She is undoubtedly one of my favourite writers/artists/thinkers," Martine Syms, an LA-based artist, and co-publisher of *Dark Pool Party*, told me. Syms first came across Black's work in *The New Inquiry*, an intellectual publication Black write and edits for.

"The writing bore into my brain," Syms says, "It was seductive, hilarious, insanely smart, and I wanted to read more more more. I also wanted to share it with everyone I knew. Then I found out she made videos too and I was obsessed."

In one of Hannah Black's videos, two standing fans wrapped in white sheets face each other in oscillate mode. Taller and broader, the fan to the left has further to turn, making its motion out-of-step with its near-twin. They move, almost colliding or embracing, near-missing or rarely, momentarily directly facing one another. "Everytime" by Britney Spears plays. *I guess I need you baby.* The video, which Black titled "All My Love All My Love" (2015), reminded me of my interview with the artist, also: every relationship I've ever practiced. It's the almost there-ness of intimacy, embodiment seemingly separating us.



here is where you will be translated back into yourself and back

"Reading transcripts," Black said at the outset of our chat, "you understand the level of misunderstanding which probably happens in every conversation, like, *noooo that's not what I meant, or, I totally misunderstood that*



I started reaching out to people familiar with Black's body of work after speaking with the artist — her self-image was so different than my experience of her public self, which is like, following any mention of her name, someone always goes, "Oh, I love Hannah Black!"

"You know when you have the vaguest awareness of someone, but they keep floating into your orbit?" Aria Dean, a curator of net art at Rhizome, told me. "Like you read something you love and it turns out to be by them, you see something that floors you — they made it. It took me a long time to discover that all of the brilliant Hannah Blacks were in fact the same person."

"Whenever I encounter Hannah's thinking," artist Yanina Lee wrote. "I am comforted that she is doing the difficult work she does within the confines of the art world. I feel as if her art practice activates a shared vulnerability that transforms into strength."

"It's funny," Black said, as if replying to Lee, "because in some ways it's weird to have this position as someone who publicly speaks about things because what actually maybe gives me the capacity to speak publicly about things is my complete incompetence. I think come to realisations that people just have, quite late, because I found childhood quite difficult, and like, etc. etc."

Then we talked about lipstick. Having both grown up with *Seventeen* and the like, Hannah and I commiserated over a shared fantasy of being asked about our makeup routines by a glossy magazine. "I had some really profound lipstick realizations in the last few years," Hannah. "Like orange, a really bright orange, looks great on me. And brown — brown lipstick!"



you must keep hold of what it means to have hands eyes teeth

"I bet it brings out your freckles," I replied. "Exactly! It totally brings out my freckles."



Clothing BRAND

Hannah Black is a UK-born, Berlin-based artist. She has an MFA in Art Writing from Goldsmiths College at the University of London and completed the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York in 2014. Her work has been exhibited by Arcadia Missa, the New Museum, Various Small Fires, Lisa Cooley, Chateau Shatto, and Vilma Gold, and been published by the New Inquiry, Artforum, Texte zur Kunst, Frieze, and Harper's. She has an upcoming solo show at Bodega gallery in New York in January 2017; a show at Mumok museum in Vienna in March 2017; and a performance at MoMA PS1 in New York in April 2017. Her second book, working-titled "My Apocalypses," is forthcoming from Verso press.

Opposite page: Hannah Black, *My Bodies*, (2014). Digital video.