



Photograph: Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery / Judith Barry, *imagination, dead imagine*, 1991

Judith Barry, “imagination, dead imagine”

BY MICHAEL WILSON

FRIDAY JUNE 9 2017

Judith Barry’s video installation, *imagination, dead imagine*, opens with the sound of labored breathing, followed by a gurgling cascade of liquid pouring down upon the head of a person of indeterminate gender seen from five sides on a giant cube of screens. The subject endures the onslaught with eyes closed but also with an impassive expression, as if this were all in a day’s work. We never see who’s doing the pouring, but it’s repeated again and again with a different substance each time: Water, flour and, perhaps most disturbingly, maggots.

There’s a fluid dissolve between each round, and at one point the sequence runs backward, so the face goes from wet to dry. Barry, who has taken the title from a Samuel Beckett story that’s at once visceral and austere in its depiction of two bodies confined inside a vault, offers her victim no respite from the torture.

Echoing a host of works by other artists—Hermann Nitsch, Bruce Nauman, Marina Abramović— *imagination, dead imagine* keeps onlookers at a remove, allowing us a multiplicity of views with no idea of specific context. Is the cube a prison? A stage? A studio? The artist isn’t saying.