



## Judith Barry's "Imagination, Dead Imagine" references horror films and J.G. Ballard

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You enter a dark room illuminated only by a 10-foot-high rectangular cube comprised of four green-framed video monitors showing a face in close-up from all sides—facing forward, back of head, and both sides featuring the right and left ears (a 5th view could be seen from above, showing the top of the head), all above a mirrored surface where your reflected legs continue the bodyline. An androgynous, blue-eyed Caucasian with very regular features, bowed lips, and dark short hair has gelatinous liquid in a succession of yellow, red, brown, milky clear, and red-turning-to-greenish-yellow with small bits of debris, all simulating bodily fluids, poured onto it from above in a wash. A crinkly digital line clears the frame between each pour. At various points, crickets crawl and eat liquid off the face. Flaky white oats are sprinkled. Worms crawl and tumble down the face. There's a flour snowstorm. Then the footage goes in reverses and the debris

flows up. Throughout, we hear breathing sounds.

Expressions of joy, relief, stoicism, placidity are actually emoted from a composite head that digitally combines two models, one male and one female.

Currently on view at Mary Boone Gallery and curated by Piper Marshall, Judith Barry's *Imagination, Dead Imagine* dates from 1991 when it was originally commissioned for the *Savage Garden* exhibition curated by Dan Cameron at Madrid's CaixaForum. It was displayed along with other installation art by Mike Kelley, Ann Hamilton, Barbara Bloom, David Ireland, Christian Marclay, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Charles Ray, Meyer Vaisman, and Meg Webster.

*Imagination, Dead Imagine* is also the title of Samuel



Beckett's last and shortest (five pages) novel, in which he describes "an austere room in which a male and female character are seated, experiencing only invariable cycles of light and heat." Barry was also influenced by J.G. Ballard's story *The Impossible Room*, which includes the following description: "A perfect cube, its walls and ceiling were formed by what seemed to be a series of cinema screens. Projected onto them in close-up was the face of Nurse Nagamatzu, her mouth three feet across."

Trained as an architect, Barry wrestled with "how architecture might be conceived of differently as not primarily the

physical manifestation of the building per se, but instead as the translation into built form of our lived social relations. Foregrounding discourse and translation as the primary, not secondary, generators of the built world freed me...." Barry is also interested in the blind spots, what we cannot see outside the frame.

The repeated onslaughts of liquid shows the indomitability of the human spirit, with the head wiped clean over and over again. In the era it was created, this could refer to feminism, illustrating women being dumped on (Beatriz Colomina's "dirty and clean spaces"), the AIDS crisis, or the first Gulf War. Today, it can be read as a metaphor for living in the era of Trump. At the same time, it references horror films like *Carrie* and *Evil Dead*, as well as Freud's excess, repression, and bodily functions. At least the liquids Barry used in production were non-toxic—honey, beets, soup and more, soaked up between videotaping the scenes with sacks of kitty litter.

**Imagination, Dead Imagine**  
**Mary Boone Gallery**  
**541 West 24 Street**  
**New York, NY**  
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