



**Staatliche Museen zu Berlin**  
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

# Fat to Ashes

*Pauline Curnier Jardin*

Berlin, 31 March 2021

**Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin**  
**Pauline Curnier Jardin. Fat to Ashes**  
from reopening – 19. September 2021

**TEXT BY JACQUI DAVIES**

**Pauline Curnier Jardin. Fat to Ashes**

The Arena has come to embody ideas of European civilization and achievement, a place of worship, democracy, community, athletic attainment, procession, entertainment and celebration. It has also acted as a site of brutal contest, authoritarianism, punishment, butchery and slaughter in a multitude of forms from ancient gladiators and slaves fighting to the death and public executions to contemporary bullfighting, from fascist rallies for the promotion of war, to public dissection of corpses in anatomical theatres.

For her solo exhibition, Pauline Curnier Jardin constructs her own arena, within the cavernous exhibition hall of the Hamburger Bahnhof. This arena, part cake, part stage or film set, becomes the site for spectacle and the presentation of a new immersive installation — depicting acts of ritual, devotion, adoration, procession, butchery and slaughter — “Fat to Ashes”.

In the film “Fat to Ashes”, we follow the procession of St. Agatha; a dazzling, heady, devotional procession and worship of the Patron Saint of the Sicilian city of Catania, which takes place every year from 3rd to the 5th of February. According to legend, the Roman prefect Quintianus had Agatha tortured and her breasts amputated because she refused his advances, hence her position as Patron Saint of rape victims, breast cancer patients, wet nurses, and bell founders and a protector to victims of fire. As we lose ourselves in the crowds and escalating atmosphere of the procession, we cut from Agatha’s festival to Cologne Carnival, this, a week of excess that runs from so-called “Fat Thursday” or “Giovedì grasso” and known as “Weiberfastnacht” or “Fettdonnerstag” in German, until Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning of Lent and a period of reflection according to the Christian calendar. And the film cuts back again to Agatha; and cuts to the ritual slaughter of a pig in an Italian mountain village, an event that is replicated in villages across Europe, a fattened up pig is killed outside, on a dark, cold morning (between 26th December and 15th January) demonstrating vividly how agriculture becomes culture as living flesh becomes meat. And then we are back again to Agatha, and again, cut, cut, cut, constantly returning to the celebration and reproduction of Agatha’s butchered body and the re-enactments of this symbolic narrative.

Butchers and bodies, candles and cakes, alcoholic and spiritual levity, trance-like ritual and re-performance that reveal deep layers of European identity and community: Agricultural traditions, Catholic rites with Pagan fervour, ancient and modern, beautiful and violent.

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Outside Curnier Jardin's makeshift arena, we step into familiar terrain. The Hamburger Bahnhof's steel colonnade, running the length of the vast hall, becomes a street, the long grey speakers attached to the columns resemble lampposts. From these speakers, cinematic production again evokes the narrative, place, atmosphere, in the form of a soundscape — the sound is the street, the sound is the night, and the lone walker. In this street we discover the related sculptures, the "Feel Good" works, arrangements of modest yet symbolic materials — candles, twine, drawings, wax and foam, assembled with the same informality and DIY-confidence as the arena itself, employing the iconography of home-made banners, advertising, memorials, shrines and flyers; and the aesthetics and language of informal employment, missing persons, and victims of accidents, street attacks, and sex for sale. The works appear to promise comfort, satisfaction or a memento — drawn from Europe's "oldest profession" and marginalised communities, ever-present on the side-lines and in the shadows of celebration and spectacle, behind closed doors, on dark streets and in the gutters.

The exhibition is a body of work in celebration of St. Agatha, this in a year where her devotees in Catania could not congregate to shout, sing and pray their dedication or vividly remember her scars, or beg for protection from violence (protection from Etna's destructive eruptions). It should be mentioned that Etna, in the absence of this vivid act of devotion, erupted 13 times in the 3 weeks from the festival's dates, with strong volcanic tremors, 13 powerful paroxysms and an ash plume 10km high. Volcanic activity that also causes the collapsing of the mountain's sides, revealing the strata of previous eruptions, the scars of 500,000 years of violence, like the scars to Agatha's mutilated breasts and body.

"Fat to Ashes" is also a vigil, not to a single person or concept, but rather, like the giant candles of the Catanian festival in her honour, a massive candle made up of many candles, Agatha, virgin, martyr, saint, and the male violence that connects her to women, targets and victims throughout history and still today, both agricultural and urban, Christian and Pagan, ancient and modern...

After over a year of isolation and fear, „Fat to Ashes“ catapults us back into a Europe of celebration, feasts, crowds, bodies, laughter, shouts, songs and prayers — and the searing beauty and brutality of religion, culture and life itself — both historical and contemporary.

Jacqui Davies, Berlin, March 31, 2021

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