

CARA BENEDETTO

PRELUDE

BY ROSE BOUTHILLIER

Cara Benedetto explores desire, vulnerability, and the giving and taking away of power. Working across performance, images, and writing, she adopts familiar languages and structures from such things as romance novels, fundraisers, or advertisements. She then shifts, mutates, and destabilizes these forms to create room for a heady mix of confusion and intimacy, inviting viewers/readers to let down their guard and feel through their own mutable entities.

For her participation in *How to Remain Human*, Benedetto produced *Prelude Her patron*, a private event at the Museum modeled on a traditional cocktail reception including music, food, and performances by her students and frequent collaborators. As Benedetto describes, “the event functioned as a *How to Remain Human* preview party for museum patrons with a soft S/m theme. I say soft because I won’t disservice the BDSM community with my hack portrayal or tourism into their world. But rather I refer to the recent offence and fascination in S/m culture produced by the film *Fifty Shades of Grey*. In so doing I seek to draw a parallel to exploits in current academia, specific to the institution of MFA, where all art students are treated as masochists and contracts are unclear.”

What follows is an account of the events of June 11, 2015. They are muddled and loose. All italicized words have been drawn from the performers’ scripts, written by Benedetto unless otherwise noted. As the artist reflects, “the event is not an event. it invites. it

swarms. it does little. there is nonsense that lubricates our speech acts. the performers are paid. we have discussions about their practice. they act undirected. they hold scripts. they read and feel by choice.”

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6:45 PM

I don the skintight, mesh top, black-and-white striped collared bodycon dress that I purchased for this occasion. I bought this dress with Cara in Pittsburgh sometime in April, from her favorite vintage dealer, Linda. We spent hours in the store digging through stuffed racks, drinking gin out of Styrofoam cups, and shooting the shit as people dropped in and out. Suddenly, this little number popped out, and before I know it I have it on, and it fits, and I have to buy it. When we left, I felt light-headed. In the weeks to come, every now and again I would take it out, spray it with unscented Febreze, and run my fingers over its golden lamé label: Cachê.

6:48 PM

I make my way to the Museum in the early evening light, feeling somewhat exposed.

6:55 PM

I buzz in at the security entrance.

Hi there. May I have your name?

Thank you. I see you. You are The List tonight.

You have been expected. Don’t worry it is safe. As long as you are considerate, kind, sensitive and

mine. Now, tell me what do you see?

My safeword is "blue."

My phone vibrates. "Thank you. I want to fuck you too."

7:00 PM

I'm greeted by two blonde guides with piercing blue eyes.

*Now we'll go through these labias.
The doorway to her critical hole.
Right this way.*

Some event horizons tried to keep us secure, but we won't let them.

It's not important to stick anyways. Watch your step, her hair fell here. Her head is sensitive.

Winding our way through the loading dock and furniture storage, we arrive at the entrance to the Museum's Gund Commons:

Here is her dark room. Where we can feel her organs seep. There is much to feel. Please do so here.

So far about a dozen people have arrived, and they mill about in the softly lit room. A projection on loop shows several scenes of a man gyrating, stretching, grinding, and dancing on a bed, floor, and against a black backdrop. The music is atmospheric, gently pounding. We are down the hall. We are in the club. Dusky rays of sunshine peek around the silver mesh curtains, revealing that we are on our own time. Have you met the artist? She's the one wearing the pearl necktie.

7:14 PM

I work my way over to the food table, catered by General Sisters. Their concept for the evening is inspired by Nyotaimori, a Japanese tradition where sushi is served directly from a reclining nude body. I nibble on a variety of open-faced sandwiches: egg salad with fried caper, cilantro, and ricotta; balsamic strawberries with arugula, cashew cream, and mint; sage salt cream cheese with radishes and cucumber.

Soft folds of smoked salmon and thin slices of lemon are tenderly laid across exposed wrists; dark folds of cured meat are piled up on the abdomen. Little piles of green pods are dispersed across the table, quick-pickled rat tail radishes that burst with a hot salty tang. Guests select their items carefully before picking them up. Eyes linger. Some people are wearing suits. I pick up a napkin to wipe my mouth, then read it: "Am i Yours?"

7:26 PM

I order the first of too many vodka martinis. There's a bowl of chapsticks at the bar and I open one, inhaling a woody spiced scent, the flavor of BPC (Bored Phallic Class).

8:00 PM

The room swells in anticipation of the evening's first performance, a speech by Cara.

Here it is. I am not your teacher today. There are clear boundaries in this another way. Not like the success that doesn't grant. Not like a shade of A. Today I won't share my I. I'll use us.

U.S.

There's a hush in the room as the music quiets and her soothing, amplified voice fills the space. It's deep, watery, hypnotic. The words speak of resignation (accepting, departing) and they're sad, angry, wanting, commanding. The day before, Benedetto gave notice that she is leaving her position as Visiting Assistant Professor of Art at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

it is not enough that we are not slaves;

and if social conditions further the existence of automatons, academics, the result will not be love

US

of life

but a
U.S. love of death.

*So how do I resign lightly?
How may I understand the correct
panel, function, fucking for a
drum that isn't beaten?*

She reads from her last Sub Journal:

*I'm finally leaving and my head
feels clear, the bound is clear,
constructed as part of the system,
theirs...*

*Can we disseminate the self. Ex-
pand the self. Explode the self
without crouching being held get-
ting small. The decision. Two ex-
tremes. It is not Your fault.*

She delivers and it gets personal.
Cara. An airport terminal in Frank-
furt. A black duffle bag stuffed
with corsets and silk blouses. Pucci
sunglasses tucked into her collar,
exhausted, considerate eyes wan-
dering, coffee in hand, red nails
(slightly chipped) gripping a Bic
and slowly writing in a crisp leath-
er-bound journal.

*So then what is the value of a
single body in the art world?*

One woman. Status of one. The in-
tern. The assistant. The associate.
The adjunct. The underpaid, and over
regulated. Temporary opportunities
for all manners of opportunism. Your
services rendered for others in a
not-for-profit experience economy.
We all started as the bottom.

*What kind of position is static,
it attracts something
like
the
This
feeling
of
touch.*

So touch us.

Silence fills the room and it's like
we've all been let go, from some em-
brace. The music fades back in and
people resume mingling.

8:20 PM

There's a man in a leather col-
lar, cuffs, and codpiece sitting on
the floor. On order, he types and
retypes lines of critical theory,
blackboard punishment with hard 50
WPMs. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

8:30 PM

The band, L' Amour Bleu, begins
their first set. Thrashy sex-noise
washes over everything as one member
kisses and caresses another's feet,
splayed out through the holes of a
wooden screen. There is some kind of
powder involved and I imagine that
it tastes bad but that they don't
care. Some people look confused,
others ecstatic.

9:02 PM

The crowd starts to form a circle
around two women speaking theatri-
cally.

*E: My Toy, you are now my Toy, you
will respond only to Toy and noth-
ing else. Who are you?*

R: Toy.

*E: You are my Toy. Say I am Your
Toy.*

R: I am your Toy Sir.

A bed. Legs spread. A pearl. Lips.
Slap. Blind and begging. Something
shifts and

*R: Should we go dear, it's getting
early today, the sun is rising on
you.*

*E: yes I think so but first we
need to wait for mommy you*

Repeat. The lines aren't well known,
the delivery is somewhat stilted,
awkward, and anxious. There is some-
thing sticky about this self-con-
sciousness. An unscripted humilia-
tion. Weights shift uneasily.

Scene.

9:13 PM

Death comes and sits across from
me. I really can't see anything of
Death's face and Death is so dark
dark dark it seems to make the room
darker. Death directs its non-
face at me and points while slowly

sliding one skeletal finger across its neck, moaning.

I tug my dress down and the Caché tag itches my back.

9:15 PM

Melissa Ragona begins furiously slapping a meter stick on the tabletops and floor. The deafening whacks continue until the stick snaps in half, muting them somewhat, though the gesture continues. She has written her own speech, adapted from a script by Benedetto.

*Commence a Dress!
We begin with our theme for the evening, to be unclean. Unclean with joy.*

She's wearing a leather bomber jacket that Linda helped her pick out, too. Not sure where she got the gimp mask.

Academic, Macadamia!--thriving as it does within the dark, rotting interior of the law, this tiny, heartless, scathing little, teeny, tiny empty center. This law list, this listlessness, of debt--monetary, soul-bound and chained to the inner walls of our folding flesh structures, our soft machines melting in the hallways of petty penny pushing bureaucracies and bursars, and burden-trundlers.

Her stage presence is frenetic, explosive. The speech soap-boxy and sing-songy and taunting.

Indeed, descent is much more difficult to achieve than what these institutions call "success" with implications of licking the poles that administrators ride as they circus their way to the top. Giddyap! Giddyap! cry all the Mr. Guppys toeing their way into the climbing-wall, jerking themselves off on the ivy curtains and the lush shag rugs. But, I order you to jerk off too--commit small crimes and treacheries in order to avoid the self-denials that build these halls.

What does it take to get on top?

I implore you, prod you into places, muddier and less sure. To borrow from Helene Cixous: "Use your own body as a form of transport."

I stand here with an unidentified inferno inside of me--and it is this disoriented heat that I leave you with.

Thank you.

Applause. Cheers. Woops. Whistles. Ice cubes rattle around in plastic glasses.

9:25 PM

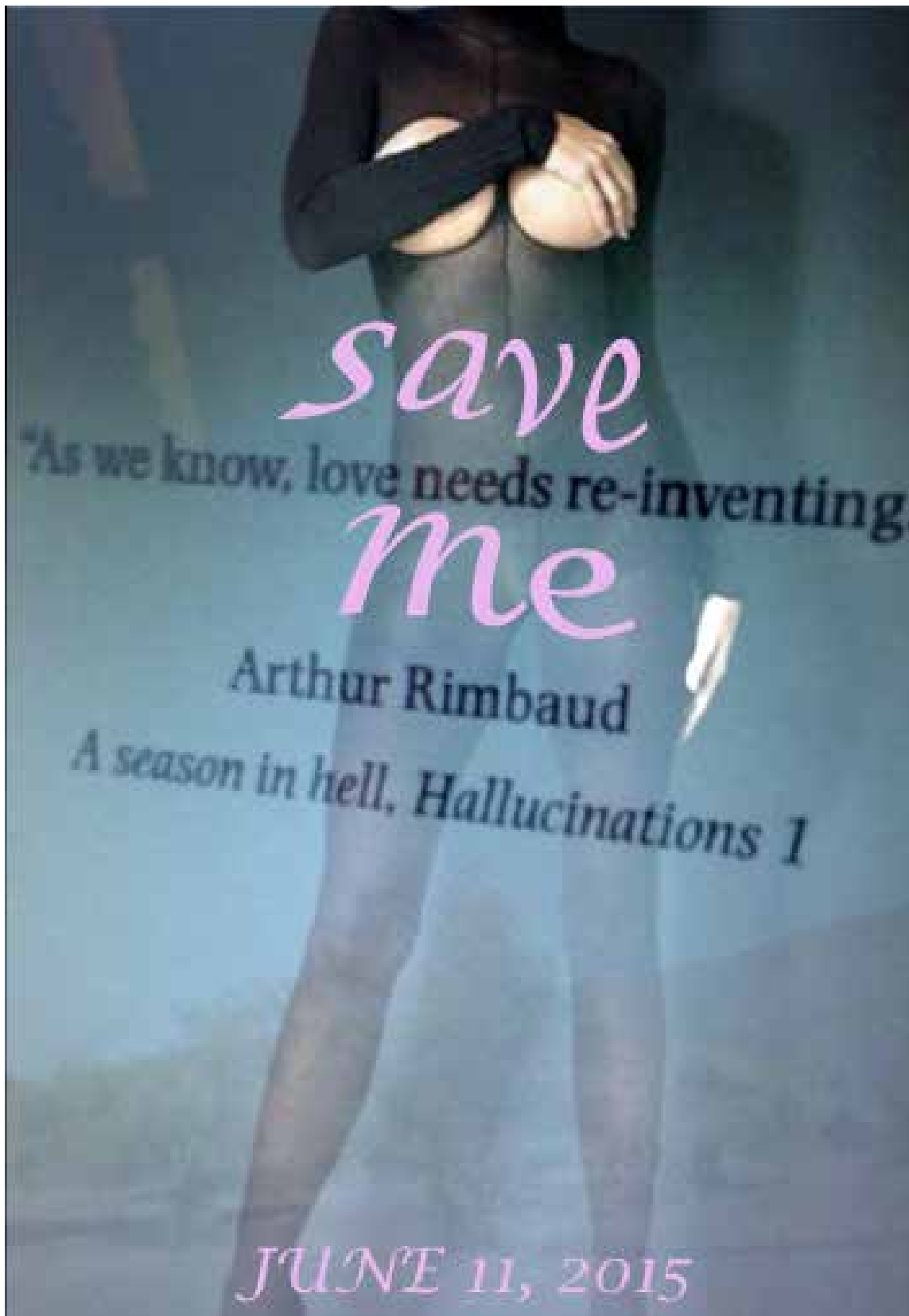
L' Amour Bleu's second set begins. Those who remain are getting really, really into it. Thrashing. Tonguing. Abandon. The Submissive typer is on the dance floor, bound and in the hands of his Key Keeper, who circles around him, playfully sashaying with chains in hand.

9:45 PM

The band wraps and dance music takes over, we are all releasing, dizzy and Cara grabs the mic to remind us that "this is not a fucking wedding." Some clothes are removed, some bouquets are given. Last drinks are downed and we stumble out onto the street, surprised at how early it is and how late it feels.

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Event production and zip ties...Kory Dakin
Guides.....Lanne Margrett
Elaine Ziol
Death.....Paul Heyer
General Sisters.....Dana Bishop Root
Ginger Brooks Takahashi
Submissive Typer.....Daniel Pillis
E.....Kevin Brophy
R.....Brittany De Nigris
Key Keeper.....Elena Harvey Collins



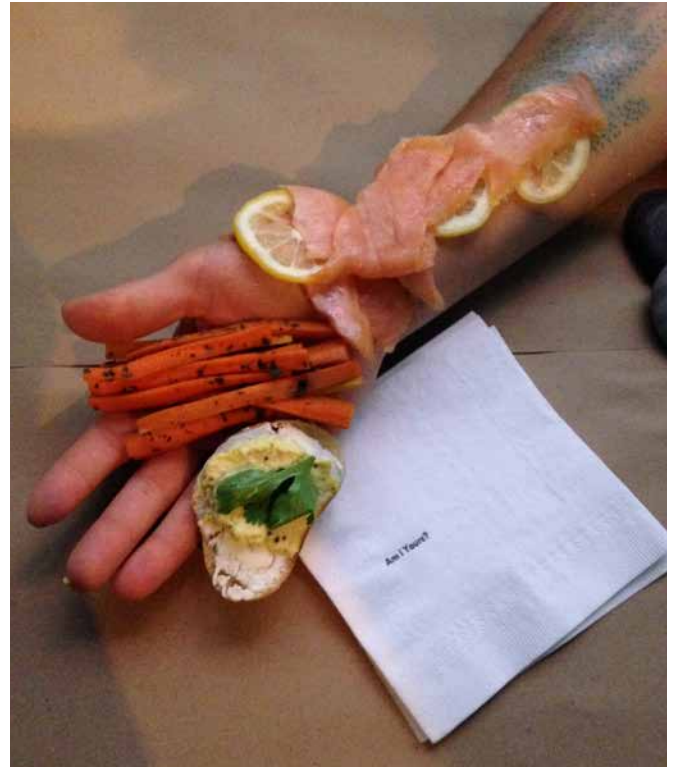
Cara Benedetto
Save the Date
Prelude Her patron, 2015



1.



2.



3.

1-3. Documentation of
Prelude Her patron