

Give Rise to Colin Self

Tip the Ivy

Performance: 25. 2., 26. 2. 2022, 7 p.m.

Press talk: 24. 2. 2022, 11 a.m.

HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark

Burgring 2, 8010 Graz (AT)

With Dia Dear, Bully Fae Collins, Colin Self, Mica Sigourney, Vera de Vienne, Geo Wyeth

Co-commission: Performance Space, New York

Partner: Akademie der Künste, Berlin; OX, New York

Curator:

Cathrin Mayer

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HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark is pleased to present, together with the Performance Space, New York, the experimental opera *Tip the Ivy* (2022) by the American non-binary composer and artist Colin Self (b. 1987 in Aloha, USA). Situated between performance, participation, research, and activism, Self always reacts to the local and social conditions of the places where his works are created. *Tip the Ivy* is thus not only a performative piece of theater, but also a research project that addresses the coding of information through a queer perspective.

At the heart of the project is an exploration of Polari, a slang language that was used by homosexuals in the United Kingdom mainly in the period between the 1930s and 1970s, who developed it as a coded form of communication in reaction to the threat of the criminalization of their sexuality. Originally this language drew on Romanic elements from Italian, and was then further influenced by Yiddish expressions and street language over the decades. Self's research on Polari consists on the one hand of learning this almost forgotten language, and on the other in investigating the role and significance of coded information in the context of a queer history and making it productive for contemporary phenomena. Even if queerness is now less and less a reason for exclusion and marginalization in a Western context, it is still necessary to continually fight for the acceptance of non-heteronormative lives all around the world.

With Polari as a starting point, Self researched various narratives that look at the criminalization of queerness. The model for one of the roles in *Tip the Ivy* was Querelle, a character from the novel of the same name by Jean Genet – a sailor embroiled in homoerotic relationships who is struggling for power, desire, and money.

An important figure for this research and performance project is Werner Obermeyer, alias Vera de Vienne (b. in Graz). Self met Obermeyer during a residency in Graz and came to know the fascinating story of this travesty artist and gender illusionist. In young years Obermeyer debuted as a

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ballet student at the Graz Opera, and then gained stage experience in various establishments at Hamburg's Reeperbahn. From the 1960s he traveled throughout Europe with his partner under the name of *Mademoiselle X & Partner*. Depending on the context, they offered "classical" reviews or performances that today would be seen as drag shows. Self's interest in the life and work of Obermeyer focuses on the different perceptions of the figure of Vera de Vienne in official and subcultural spaces, and also in the different codes that were used at the time to mediate queerness.

For *Tip the Ivy* Self selects the narrative framework of a prison where the inmates attempt to achieve freedom somewhere between reality and a world of dreams. One of the characters is less a real person and rather an avatar who communicates via the screen of a smartphone. This role was partly inspired by a number of real profiles of Tik Tok users, who share otherwise censored information in non-democratic countries by means of various sequences of movement, an example being make-up tutorials.

Tip the Ivy is a project that on the one hand emphasizes the positive power of queer communities on the basis of collaboration and shared work, and on the other hand enacts the bitter political realities of surveillance and censorship in the here and now in the form of an experimental opera. Self achieves this via a reinterpretation of the classical genre in which he sees voices and song as a collective force. For this he developed a new technique for group singing that he calls XOIR. The focus is not on reciting musical scores but on somatic awareness and the shared organization of bodies and voices.

In 2021 Colin Self was artist-in-residence at HALLE FÜR KUNST. *Tip the Ivy* was initiated by HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark and co-commissioned by Performance Space, New York. The performance will be presented in May 2022 at Performance Space.

Colin Self (*1987 Aloha, lives in Berlin) is a lecturer at NYU's Clive Davis Institute in Berlin and has presented his work at the Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam; HAU Berlin; Neues Museum, Berlin; The Kitchen, New York; and Issue Project Room, New York; among many international festivals and venues. He is a Rhizome Commission Grant recipient and a Queer Art Mentorship Fellow. He is a co-founder of NYC queer performance collective Chez Deep and Radical Diva Grant. Self received his MFA in music and sound from Bard College, New York. Since 2015 Self works closely with Holly Herndon and has performed with her touring ensemble. He leads XOIR, an international non-utilitarian vocal workshop focused on alternative modalities of group singing, and releases solo music on the record label RVNG Int.

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