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Gender Trouble

BY CHLOE STEAD

Alexandra Bachzetsis's new performance, *Private: Wear a mask when you talk to me*

When I took my seat in the theatre at Kaserne Basel, Alexandra Bachzetsis was carefully applying heavy stripes of pink blusher to her cheekbones. Sporting black tracksuit bottoms, her hair in a high ponytail à la pop star Ariana Grande, Bachzetsis continued to pout and primp for some time after the audience had settled down.



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I wouldn't normally feel the need to mention an artist's chosen coiffure, but in this case it's relevant: changes of hairstyle and the repeated layering and removal of clothing act as important intervals in Bachzetsis' 53-minute long performance, *Private: Wear a mask when you talk to me* (2016).

For her opening number, the artist and trained choreographer danced seductively to an instrumental version of Percy Sledge's 'When a Man Loves a Woman' (1966) in a floor-length latex dress. More dancing followed, with references ranging from Trisha Brown to Michael Jackson, but it was the downtime between these performative episodes that elevated *Private...* from parody to pointed critique, when Bachzetsis held a range of gender-bending poses – some yogic, some pornographic. The most memorable was when the artist donned an all-weather tracksuit and lay on her side. With one leg bent and one arm dangling over her groin, she performed a perfect rendition of the classic male model pose. But this was more than the artist dressing in



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drag. Through her subtle nuances of facial expression and body language, Bachzetsis seemed to side with Judith Butler in her 1990 text *Gender Trouble*. 'Gender', Butler writes, 'is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame'.

Private: Wear a mask when you talk to me was performed as part of 'Trans-corporeal Metabolisms - the 12th

Performance Project' at LISTE Art Fair, Basel, curated by Eva Birkenstock

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