

Bus Projects;
Apr. 14–May. 14, 2022

Anselma Forlano
‘Ruminations on the
body (Bussy) of Christ’

Bus Projects operates on the unceded sovereign land of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

For Anselma Forlano
From Nik
When I felt my body break

I have been reflecting on religion and Christianity lately with a felt aversion to the institution from a deeply embodied place, yet I hold an ambiguous relationship to spirituality and ritual in my own work that I see you borrow from too.

Here I am making an avowal. I've had a fetish for the dramaturgy of the [Greek Orthodox] church and their comforting rituals from a very young boy. However, growing up in an atheist household, where no one believed in the disciplines of the church made it hard for me to find ways of going yet I would get excited about the drama and theatricalities it provided.

Since my parents did not religiously go to mass for anything other than an occasional social life; I would go with my next-door neighbour theο George a Gregorian chanter at Agios Eleutherios on Albion street Brunswick. A red brick building with fake cement Corinthian columns painted white, with a light blue steeple. A charismatic architectural form that referenced Mediterranean buildings making a spatial connection drawn together with art-povera materials and a steady affirming hand. Arriving at Agios Eleutherios with theο George was a twist of time and space.

At mass I would stand alone in the front row on the men's side of the church, he, would be in the wings singing with the all-male Gregorian choir. In the front row, I would observe the priest and the altar boys and rehearse the choreography they would perform - in my head. As the baritone voices chanted in a foreign tongue filling the rooms air with a sense of anticipation. I would watch the altar boys and the priest's choreography as they moved in unison from the front to the back of the church in their jewelled robes holding their embellished phalluses. I dearly wanted to be part of this theatrical ceremony. I wanted a way in to this illusion to participate in this clandestine affair. I needed theo George to endorse me - into the backroom - to be part of their proceedings.

Not realising the entire choreography between the front of the altar and the back room my first and only attempt was challenging. As the most important part to the initiation to being an altar boy was to dress the priest. Garment by jewelled garment I had to help the priest get into his robe to cloak him. This experience happened in a slow ritualised space - pause - time stretches. His oversized body dominating mine, heightend acts of fear and excitement as he leaned forward to poke his head - turning and twisting through. As he prides his way, I ran my hands along the plastic encrusted beads of golden thread and embroidered patterning. Time forever stretching with fabric stiffening. Fingers tracing the bulges along his trunk, pressing, rubbing my skin against his jewels. I kept my hands pressed firmly on the fibrous embroiled threads touching every part of him. I feel my body flush down there, hands on fire.

Eyes steaming and my ears reverberated with the rumbling voices of the baritones, Latin, ancient words hypnotising space, I became vertiginous, confused losing all senses of why or what I was doing - in that back room. I could not gather sense or sequence to the ritualised choreography.

I dressed myself in the jewelled gown and could feel the weight of the garment pressing me in, containing me, gravity forcing me down to the ground. Holding my phallus in tremor, I watched the senior altar boy open his wing door, I copy them and step out onto the stage, candelabra lit, avoiding the gaze of the mass [looking back at me the iconography, pressed in aluminium] I stare deeply into the candlelit fire with shame,

clutching hard, biting down - I felt it pouring in me around me through me - I felt immobilised - tears welling - humiliation for being an embodied being - in that back room.

I quit altar boy service that same day in the body of a 9-year-old - when I felt my body break.

Bus Projects acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.

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