

nara roesler

berna reale



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## berna reale

b. 1965, belém do pará, brazil

lives and works in belém do pará, brazil

Berna Reale is one of the most important artists in the contemporary Brazilian art scene and is acclaimed as one of the main exponents of performance art in the country. Reale began her artistic career in the early 1990s. Her first major work, *Cerne* (at the 25<sup>th</sup> Art Salon of Pará, 2006), a photographic intervention at the Meat Market located at the Ver-o-Peso market complex, led the artist to work as a forensic expert at the *Centro de Perícias Renato Chaves* from 2010 onwards.

Since then, Reale has been exploring her own body as a central aesthetic element of her performances, photographs, and videos. Her work, marked by a critical engagement with the material and symbolic aspects of violence as well as the silencing processes present in the most diverse instances of society, investigates the importance of images in maintaining imaginaries and brutal actions. The force of Berna Reale's work lies in the contrast between the desire for closeness and the feeling of disgust, eliciting the irony that results from the combination of society's fascination and aversion to violence.

Photography plays a fundamental role in Reale's practice. It is not only the means of registering and perpetuating the artist's actions but also the very unfolding of her creative process.

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[click to see full cv](#)

### selected solo exhibitions

*Agora: Right Now*, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2022)

*Festa*, Viaduto das Artes, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (2019)

*Deformation*, Wiesbaden, Germany (2017)

*Berna Reale – Über uns/About Us*, Kunsthaus, Wiesbaden, Germany (2017)

*Berna Reale: Singing in the Rain*, Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (UMoCA), Salt Lake City, United States (2016)

*Vazio de nós*, Rio Art Museum (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2013)

### selected group exhibitions

*Brasilidade Pós-Modernismo*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB-SP), São Paulo, Brazil (2022)

*Brasile. Il coltello nella carne*, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea Milano (PAC-Milano), Milan, Italy (2018)

3<sup>rd</sup> Beijing Photo Biennial, China (2018)

*Video Art in Latin America*, II Pacific Standard Time: LA / LA (II PST: LA/LA), LAXART, Hollywood, United States (2017)

56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Italy (2015)

*Artistas comprometidos? Talvez*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG), Lisbon, Portugal (2014)

### selected collections

Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, Brazil

Kunsthaus Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, Germany

São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP), São Paulo, Brazil

Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio),

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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<b>4</b>	agora: right now, 2022
<b>9</b>	ginástica da pele, 2019
<b>11</b>	bi, 2018
<b>15</b>	gula, 2018
<b>23</b>	vão, 2017
<b>25</b>	o tema da festa, 2015
<b>26</b>	promessa, 2015
<b>27</b>	cantando na chuva, 2014
<b>29</b>	rosa púrpura, 2014
<b>31</b>	soledade, 2013
<b>33</b>	americano, 2013
<b>34</b>	limite zero, 2012
<b>36</b>	os jardins pensus da américa, 2012
<b>38</b>	palomo, 2012
<b>40</b>	performance and photography
<b>45</b>	quando todos calam, 2009

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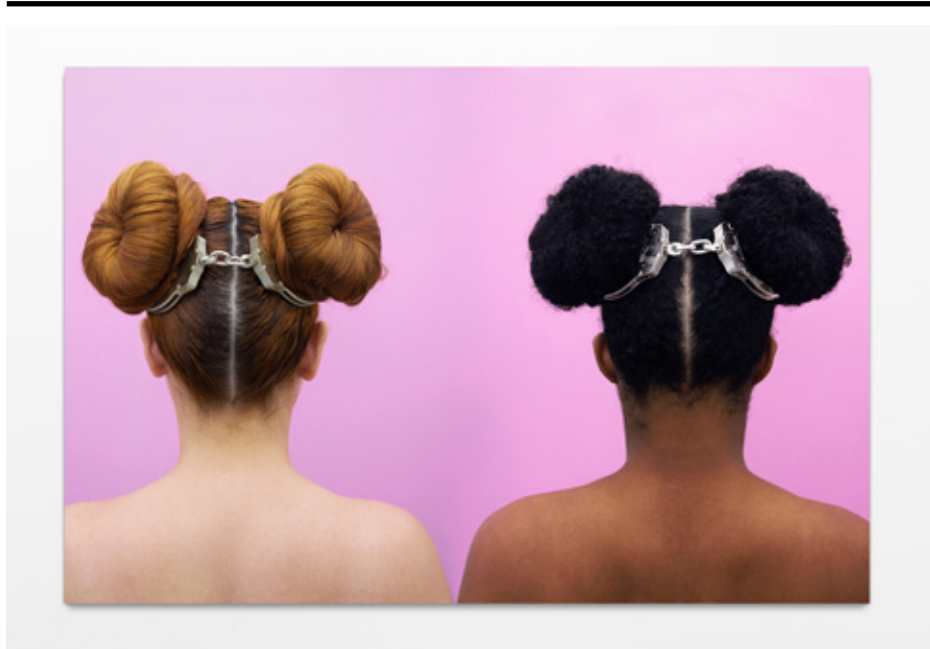
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## agora: right now 2022

In her most recent solo exhibition at Nara Roesler, Berna Reale presented a selection of new works using photography, video, installation, and, for the first time, painting. The photographs evoked the aesthetics of fashion magazines or advertising panels, with models wearing uncanny accessories such as handcuffs, in *Cabeças raspadas* (2022), electronic ankle bracelets, in *Ligadas* (2022) and *Acorda Alice* (2022). Through this, Reale does not aim to celebrate or embellish violence, concerned by the risks of making it trivial, but rather seeks to highlight the ways in which violence is often turned into a fetish or spectacle in western culture.

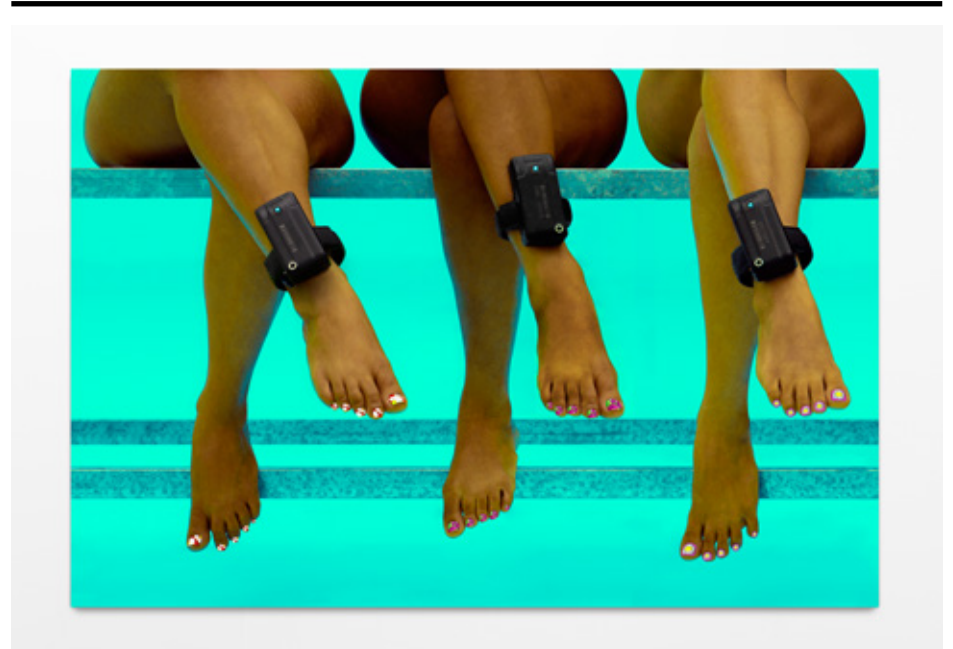
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exhibition view  
AGORA: *Right Now*, 2022  
Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil



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*Cabeças raspadas*, 2022  
print on cotton paper,  
plexiglass face mounted  
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in



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*Ligadas*, 2022  
print on cotton paper,  
plexiglass face mounted  
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in

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→  
exhibition view  
*AGORA: Right Now*, 2022  
Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil



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The body of paintings are created using oil painting on metal plates, and depict bodies that have suffered aggression. By creating these pop-like images with vibrant colors, the artist, who has been practicing painting since 2015, highlights the ambiguity of our relationship with violence and such imagery, emphasizing their power to simultaneously trigger fascination and horror, desire and denial, engagement and hopelessness.

According to curator, Claudia Calirman, 'By drawing our focus towards various forms of social injustice, Berna has a clear aim. As disconcerting as they are, her images are no more brutal than the violence that surrounds us in the Now.'



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*No quintal*, 2022  
oil paint on steel  
122 x 100 cm | 48 x 39.4 in



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## ginástica da pele 2019

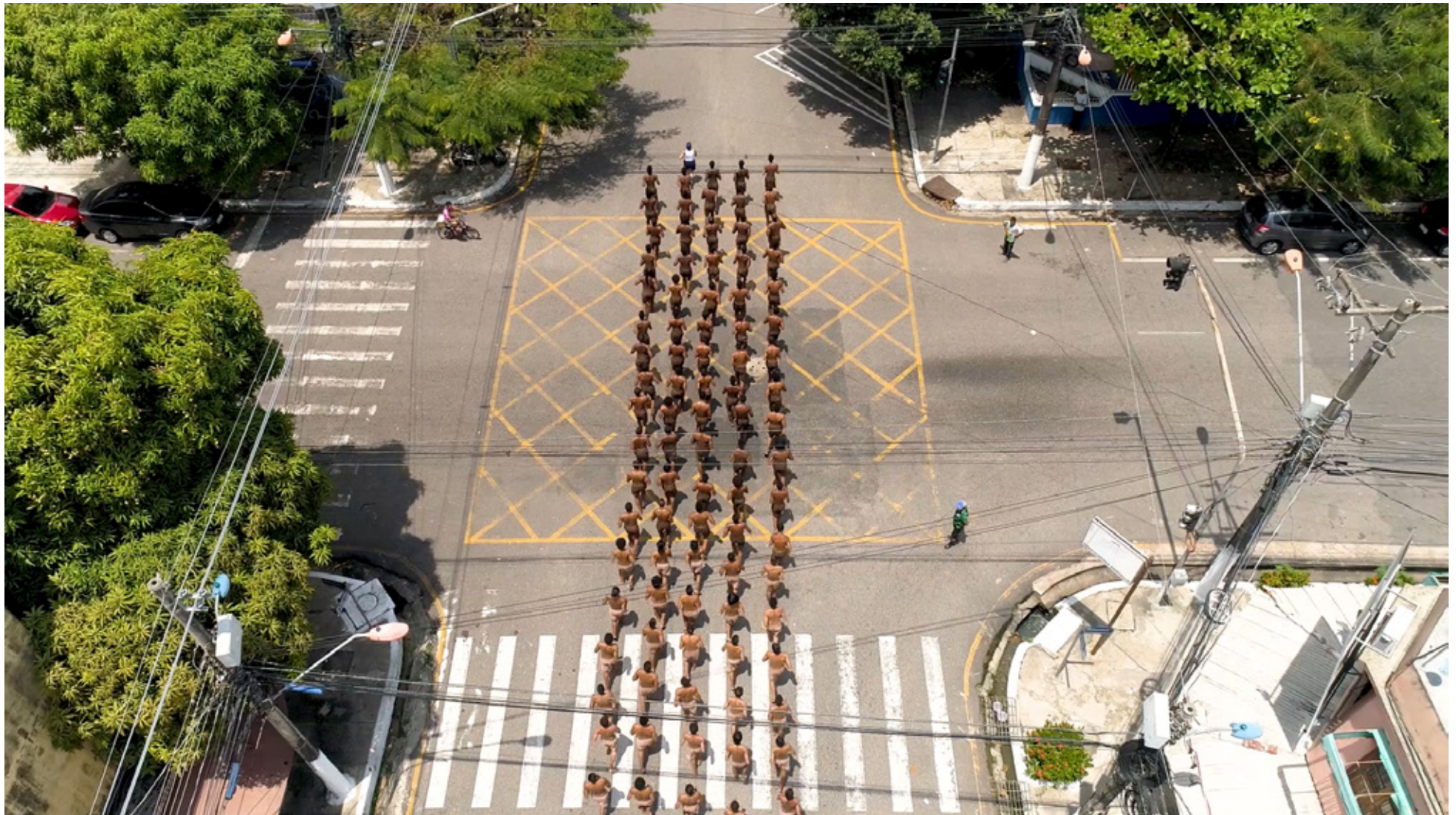
*Ginástica da pele* is, for Berna Reale, one of the most elaborate and meaningful works of her career to date. It took two years and the collaboration of more than two hundred people for the preparation and development of this performance, which happened in June 2019. The performance, registered in a video and a photo series, took place on the streets of Belém. One hundred young men arranged in five rows, twenty in each, according to their skin tone: in the first row were those with the darkest skin tone and in the last, those with the lightest. During the performance, they did a series of exercises led by the artist who, with a whistle, gave the rhythm and guided the transition between movements. The exercises refer both to the physical training of the armed forces and the police on the streets, and to the gestures of the suspects when arrested. The irony present in the contrast of these two contexts leads us to reflect on social issues related to prejudice and the crisis in the Brazilian prison system.

[click here to watch the video](#)

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*Ginástica da pele* # 05, 2019  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
150 x 100 cm | 59 x 39.3 in





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Ginástica da Pele, 2019  
video  
4'18"



Berna Reale addresses the violence affecting women and the LGBTQ+ community through the character Bi, who is the protagonist of a series of performative works registered on video and photographs. Additionally, the performance unfolded into a photographic work of rich contrasting images such as *I kneel and you pray*, *Your molds don't fit me*, *It's heavy*, *Everybody looks at the cats*. Reale departed from the fact that all human bodies have female and male hormones, which makes them, in essence, bisexual. The very character that the artist plays, which is enacted through a costume that erases the artist's traits, is an amorphous being, whose erogenous zones become only bulky bulges. The artist also created the lyrics for the soundtrack, a 'funk carioca', that follows her movements. The young musicians Emi Lion and Will Kief composed the soundtrack. The enactment of different personas, or characters, is a characteristic of Reale's performances.

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*Everybody looks at the cats # 02*, 2019  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in

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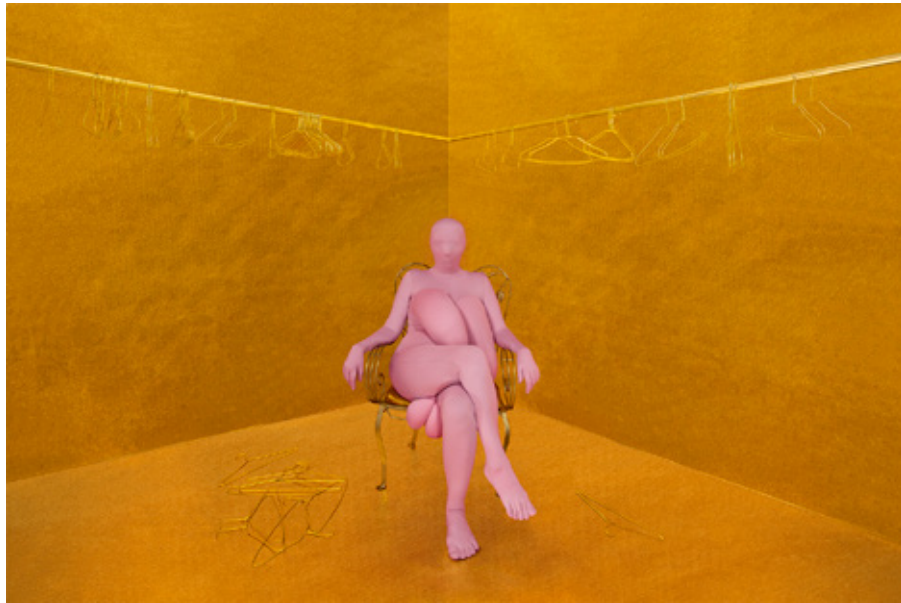
According to art critic and curator Claudia Calirman 'Bi is a grotesque figure, recalling Hans Bellmer's surrealist "hermaphrodite" dolls from his mid-1930s Poupée series, in which the human body is dismembered, fragmented, and eroticized. Bi is also reminiscent of Cindy Sherman's play on the construction of identity, especially her *Sex Pictures* from the early 1990s, in which the artist uses prosthetic body parts to create ambiguous, hybrid figures. In the persona of Bi, Reale enacts a freak, a clown, a jester figure—purposefully easy prey to be despised and discarded. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "Clowns and fools, which often figure in [François] Rabelais' novel, are characteristic of the medieval culture of humor. They were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season... They stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar mid-zone as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors."<sup>1</sup>



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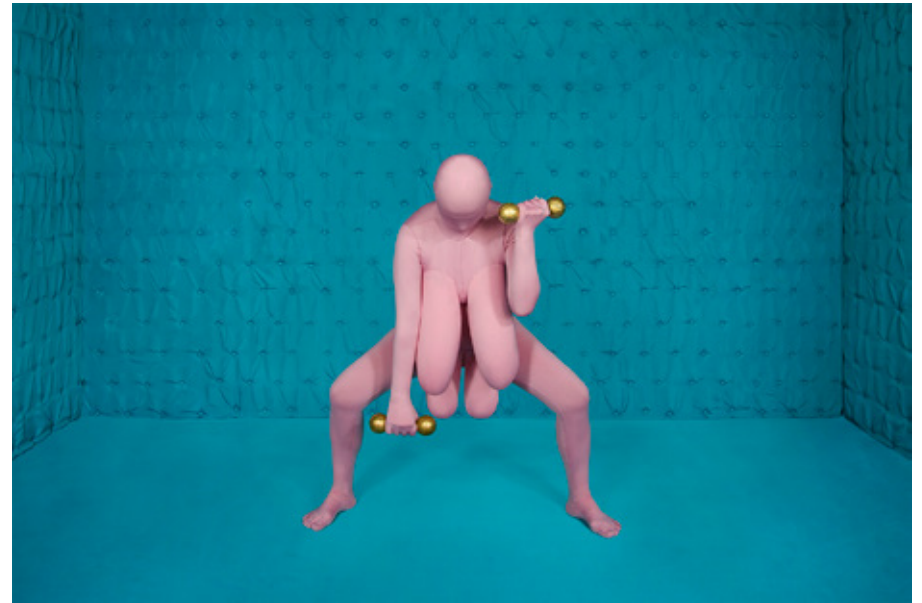
exhibition view  
*berna reale: while you laugh*, 2019  
galeria nara roesler, new york, ny, USA  
photo © Adam Reich

<sup>1</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trad. Hélène Iswolsky. First published in 1965. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8



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*Your molds don't fit me*, 2019  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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*It's heavy*, 2019  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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Despite the violence embedded in Reale's performances, videos, and photographs, her work at times seems entertaining parodies. While at first glance, Bi's costume can be perceived as a banal carnivalesque fantasy, it stands for everything that is often ridiculed, destroyed, and annulled for being different.'

[Click here to see the performance video \*A massa é bi.\*](#)

[Click here to see the video \*Se toque.\*](#)

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*Bi Massa*, 2018  
digital video, color, sound  
edition of 5 + 2 PA  
01'39"

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**gula** 2018

solo exhibition

galeria nara roesler, são paulo, sp, brazil

Berna Reale's first solo exhibition at Galeria Nara Roesler, curated by Agnaldo Farias, is a turning point in her artistic production. The artist deepens her investigation of violence in a series of seven photographic works: *Comida batizada*; *Comida caseira*; *Sede de onça*; *Comida de rua*; the *Sobremesa series*, *Fome de leão e Fome de lobo*; and *Terra sem jejum* installation. The titles, as is common in Reale's work, foment associations among symbols and are essential to creating meanings and fostering the ironic tone that permeates the works' social criticisms. One of the innovative aspects of these works is the absence of the figure of the artist, who uses other people as the medium for the photographed actions. According to the curator, 'Berna gets it right' as her works 'have something to do with the incessant inter-devouring between social strata, the mutual cannibalism spattered with blood, which includes the arrogance of those responsible for maintaining order and who, from the height of their low rank, do not hesitate to shoot when within the favelas, hitting the innocent.'



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*Sede de onça*, 2018  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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*Comida Batizada*, 2018  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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*Comida Caseira*, 2018  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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*Comida de Rua #1*, 2018  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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*Sobremesa*, 2018  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
126 x 189 cm | 49.6 x 74.4 in



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*Fome de leão*, 2018  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
150 x 100 cm | 59 x 39.3 in



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*Fome de lobo*, 2018  
print on cotton paper,  
plexi glass face mounted  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in

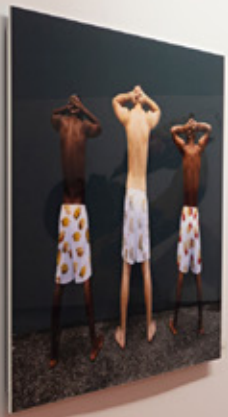


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*Terra sem Jejum*, 2018  
wood coffins  
5 pieces of 27 x 100 x 38 cm | 10.6 x  
39.3 x 14.9 (each)

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exhibition view  
*gula*, 2018  
galeria nara roesler, são paulo, brazil  
photo © Everton Ballardin





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**vã** 2018

solo exhibition

centro cultural banco do brasil (CCBB-sp),  
são paulo, brazil

In this solo show, curated by Agnaldo Farias, Berna Reale presented a set of works in video and photography that focus on the female body experience in our society through images that evoke the absurd. *Vã* is an installation with large-format photography, in which the artist takes on the persona of a boxer, who faces us. Instead of the typical boxing gear, she wears a medieval chastity belt and pink plush boxing gloves. In *A frio*, the artist concentrates on the useless task of wiping ice cubes in a large room where ice is produced, wearing only a transparent plastic overall and pink accessories. In *Em pelo*, the artist enacts a bullfighter that dances in the middle of a tannery, creating a dreamlike atmosphere within the latter's everyday working activities.

[Click here to see the video of the exhibition.](#)

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*Vã*, 2017  
photographic print  
edition of 5  
167 x 110 cm | 65.7 x 43.3 in





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*A Frio # 1*, 2017  
inkjet print on cotton paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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*A Frio # 5*, 2017  
inkjet print on cotton paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in

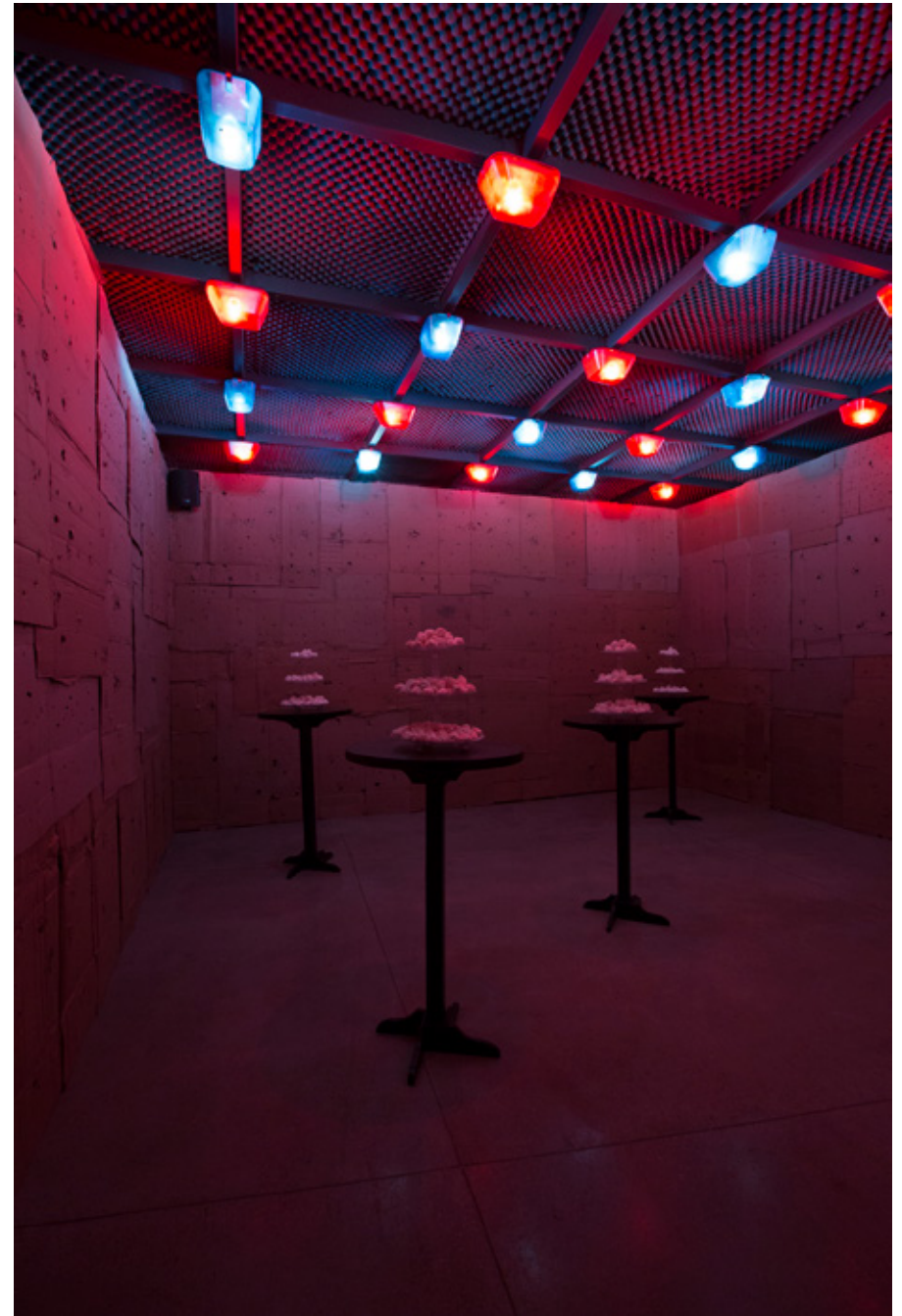
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## o tema da festa 2015

'The theme of the party harks back to the festivity of popular nightclubs and the aggressiveness of the streets of Brazilian cities. Lights spin around like in a nightclub, but these are siren lamps arranged in an orthogonal grid, accompanied by music composed of sounds recorded in police cars and phone calls reporting murders. Cardboard sheets cover the walls, like those usually used on the outskirts of large Brazilian cities to cover the victims of violent crimes, and these sheets are riddled with bullet holes from both weapons belonging to police officers and seized from criminals. Meringue is offered on tables and in candy jars around the room, and the public can eat at will.' That is how the curator, Paulo Miyada, describes Berna Reale's installation at the 34<sup>th</sup> Panorama of Brazilian Art, in 2015. In summary, the artist has violence, festivity, and irony coexisting in the same space.

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*O tema da festa*, 2015  
installation  
variable dimensions





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**promessa** 2015

The performance *Promessa* (2015), registered through videos and photographs, took place during Círio de Nazaré, one of the largest religious festivals in the north of Brazil, which brings together millions in the city of Belém do Pará. Amid the crowd of Christian pilgrims, the performer, in colorful garments similar to those of the Pontifical Swiss Guard—an honor guards' unit responsible for the Pope's security—, carries the rainbow flag, the symbol of the LGBT+ movement. The artist questions the normative imposition over affective relations by religious institutions that, often going beyond their functions, create moral values about human relationships that contradict their philosophical foundations based on the dissemination of love.

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**cantando na chuva** 2014

In *Singing in the Rain* (2014), a long red carpet stretches over an immense dump. On top of this dump, Berna Reale walks, and tap-dances to the iconic song *Singing in the Rain* as if she were the character of a classic Hollywood musical. In this performance, the artist problematizes the blindness of a large part of society toward poverty and those in a vulnerable situation. The mockery becomes evident through the antagonism of the festive dancing and inhospitable setting. In the words of the German critic Rudolf Schmitz, 'Berna Reale appears, almost unrecognizable behind the gas mask, like a ballerina on history's dump, tireless and very sensitive. The presence of a song, *Singing in the Rain*, is not only novel but also brings in humor, irony, sarcasm. Perhaps, only in this way can the spectators admit the things that form the scenario: the society of consumption and waste, which leaves nothing to the miserable people other than garbage.'



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*Singing in the Rain*, 2014  
video  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
4' 15"

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→  
*Singing in the Rain* # 2, 2014 (detail)  
mineral pigment on Premium Luster  
photographic paper  
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in



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**rosa púrpura** 2014



*Rosa purpura* (2014) presents a criticism of the constant objectification of the female body, treated as a commodity for the consumption of the male audience, including by the media. Followed by a military band, Reale and a group of 50 schoolgirls march through the streets of Belém. They are all dressed in emblematic uniforms of traditional schools—tight white blouses and pink pleated skirts—and carry prostheses in their mouths that refer to the oral cavity of inflatable dolls. As a means of publicizing the exhibition, at Galeria Millan, posters with portraits of these girls were later spread throughout São Paulo, in places such as cinemas, theaters, cultural centers, art schools, and others. During the show, the artist posted on her website testimonials from some of the performance participants describing their violence and sexual coercion experiences.



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*Rosa Púrpura # 2*, 2014  
mineral pigment on  
photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in



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*Rosa Púrpura # 6*, 2014  
mineral pigment on  
photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in



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*Rosa Púrpura # 10*, 2014  
mineral pigment on  
photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in

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**soledade** 2013

In this imagetic narrative told through videos and photos, we see the artist appearing in an elegant blue blazer and pearl necklace aboard a golden chariot pulled by four pigs. The journey happens in one of the most violent neighborhoods in Belém's outskirts, on a street where there is an open-air drug market, according to the police. The street lends its name to Reale's performance, which symbolically connects it to the feelings of loneliness and abandonment. The artist is not criticizing a specific person but the political class as a whole. The evident contrasts in the performance, the solemnity of the artist's attire and gestures in comparison with the miserable setting, and the symbolic value of the animals pulling the chariot highlight the discrepancies between the actions and discourses of those elected to represent the population, who, instead of working to remedy the people's needs, work to satisfy their interests.

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*Soledade*, 2013  
video  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
2'56"





Soledade # 01, 2013  
mineral pigment on  
photographic paper  
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in

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**americano** 2013

The video, shown at the 56<sup>th</sup> La Biennale di Venezia (2015), was shot before the 2014 World Cup, and the 2016 Olympics took place in Brazil. In this work, Reale divests the fantasy and glamorous image that the country usually portrays, especially during the preparation for these events, seeking to unveil the naked reality. The performance takes place in a penitentiary in Pará. The artist runs through its corridors carrying a replica of the Olympic torch, juxtaposing images of success and failure, of power and helplessness.



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*Americano*, 2013  
video  
ed exhibition copy  
3'42"

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**limite zero** 2012

In this performance, Berna Reale is carried through the streets of Belém as if she was a dead animal. Numerous men dressed in white, reminding us of butchers or nurses, come off a refrigerated truck in the middle of urban space. They carry a long metal bar, from which the artist hangs, tied by her feet and hands.



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*Limite zero*, 2012  
video  
edition of 5  
3'45"

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→  
*Limite zero*, 2012  
video  
edition of 5  
3'45"





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## os jardins pensus da América 2012

The work *Os jardins pensus da América* refers to both the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and the Queen of Hearts garden in Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll's masterpiece. The performance incorporates numerous elements that give rise to a series of meanings concealed within the apparently innocent action of watering flowers: the military print of the delicate dress, the black color of the flowers that refers to mourning. We are thus led to reflect on American military actions around the world, and how their widespread violence has become normalized.

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*Os Jardins Pensus da América # 2*,  
2012  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
150 x 100 cm | 59 x 39.3 in

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→  
*Os Jardins Pensus da América # 3*  
(detail), 2012  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
150 x 100 cm | 59 x 39.3 in



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**palomo** 2012

*Palomo* seeks to invert the idea of peace and security that permeates some institutions, especially the police. The artist allegorically embodies the figure of the second rider of the Four Knights of the Apocalypse described in the Bible, the one who symbolizes war. In the performance, which took place in downtown Belém do Pará at dawn, Reale crosses an empty street, imposingly mounted on a scarlet red dyed horse, wearing a black military uniform and a muzzle, an accessory normally used to contain dangerous animals. The work's title is, simultaneously, an appropriation of the name of the horse that the artist rides, and a play with the meaning of the word 'Palomo', which in Spanish is 'pigeon', an animal that in Western cultures represents peace.

*Palomo* was part of Reale's main solo shows such as *Vazio de Nós*, at Rio Art Museum (MAR), Rio de Janeiro (2013), and *ECCOCI!*, an independent project parallel to the 56<sup>th</sup> La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (2015), in which the artist was one of the representatives of the Brazilian Pavilion.

[Click here to see an excerpt of the performance.](#)



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*Palomo # 05*, 2013  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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*Palomo # 04*, 2012  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
100 x 150 cm | 39.3 x 59 in



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## performance and photography

Berna Reale's performative work has an intimate relationship with photography, not only because it is often the medium that crystallizes the actions, enabling their permanence and circulation, but also for allowing the creation of images that tell stories. Thus, the artist seems to synthesize her performances in the photos with the creation of a character through the combination of clothes, props, and makeup, as well as the way she positions herself in the scenario. *Retratos*, from 2011, is perhaps one of the definitive examples of this practice, whereby the artist creates allegories in Brazilian society, bringing together various symbols in the same scene, referring to the ambivalences and disparities that form the national culture.

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*Série Retratos: A Mulher*, 2011  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
150 x 100 cm | 59 x 39.3 in



*Série Retratos: A Morte*, 2011  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
160 x 100 cm | 62.9 x 39.3 in



*Série Retratos: O Mito*, 2011  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
150 x 100 cm | 59 x 39.3 in



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*Série Retratos: A Religião*, 2011  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
150 x 100 cm | 59 x 39.3 in

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In other cases, like in *Número repetido*, from 2012, Reale seeks to investigate our society's transformation of the human being into an object, a number, a disposable tool that only has value when linked to the industrial production process. The artist wears a uniform whose design refers to a typical Chinese dress and a mask that hides her face, leading us to reflect on the individual's objectification in the capital world.

*Sim senhor*, from 2010, brings into play the power and sexual violence of the Catholic Church priests over nuns. Berna Reale appears dressed as a nun, yet the habit, made with transparent fabric, operates in opposition to its traditional function of covering the body, for, instead, it reveals the body.



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*Repeated number # 1*, 2012  
mineral pigment on Premium  
Luster photographic paper  
edition of 5 + 2 AP  
50 x 70 cm | 19.6 x 27.5 in



*Sim Senhor (diptych)*, 2010  
photographic print on cotton paper  
edition of 5 + 2 PA  
68 x 48 cm | 26.7 x 18.8 in



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## quando todos calam

*Quando todos calam* is one of Berna Reale's most iconic works, and is responsible for bringing her national recognition in the art scene. The piece embodies the essential elements of her practice: the poignancy of the image that reflects our society's violence. The artist lies naked on a table placed in Belém do Pará's central market, the famous Ver-o-Peso market, and places fresh meat on her stomach. The animal remains attract vultures that fly over the performer and feed on the entrails that rest on her.

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*Quando todos calam # 2*, 2009  
photographic print on cotton paper  
edition of 5 + 2 PA  
66 x 100 cm |

nara roesler

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