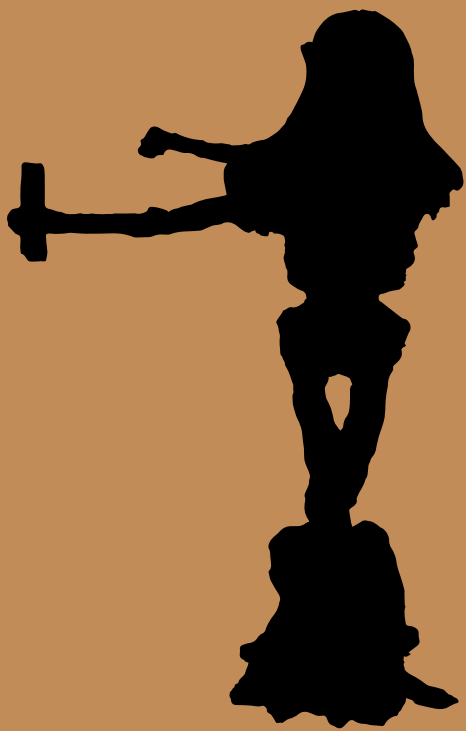


ÖTZA,
Ontologically
SPEAKING

*****Levi van Gelder***** 16.09. – 01.10.23



1

WOULD_DIE_4_ÖTZA22'S CONFESSION
An Introduction by Jordi Viader Guerrero

"I was set up!" **I screamed at the blocky 80s cordless phone.**

"It's you again, Would_Die_4_Ötza22! Hollywood's busiest sex offender!" **Replied detective McLean on the other side of the line.**

"Hey, cut the crap and just listen to me. I have something important to tell you! I know who killed Ötza!" **I was out of breath while saying this. The image of Ötza's dead body, a ridiculously large hole drilled from her chest to her back, the contour of that disfigured man in a lab coat wielding a heavy duty construction tool to carve that deadly hole in her... they were all still fresh from a couple of nights ago. I told the police everything I saw. The detective in charge, McLean, was suspicious. Why was I looking out my window and spying on Ötza in the first place? Why did he discover Ötza's silk underwear in my pocket? I had to do everything in my power to clean up my name and my identity.**

I was still shaken from the discussion I just had with Holy Body. She was not a simple porn actress... Her body... It was just like Ötza's. Every bony cranny of it; an exact double. She had just slammed the door of the apartment on the hills I've been borrowing for the past few days. I shouldn't have let her leave. I forced her to confess... Maybe I was a bit of a brute, but she had to know she was being used to cover up a murder. Ötza's murder. She's probably walking down Mulholland Drive at this very moment, believing I'm some sort of violent psycho. A peeping pervert.

"Is this a confession?" **Detective McLean's deep and confident voice exhumed virility. He could make fun of me as much as he wanted, but I needed him to know the truth as unbelievable as it might've seemed. I am not who he thinks I am and I had to set things straight once and for all!**

"NO! LISTEN!" **Shit, why can't I contain my screeches? I stopped for a second, took a deep breath and managed to calm down. "Just pay attention. All right? A few days ago I was looking for an apartment..." I might live in this porn producer-coded apartment on the Hollywood Hills right now, but, once again, I am not who I appear to be. My living conditions as a producer of second-grade internet content (no, not porn, but transcribing and creating commentary upon commentary of Ötza's Twitch streams) are precarious, to say the least. A roof is a luxury that comes second to broadband and the latest MacBook. Like the brightly lit tropical fish tank, the round rotating bed, and the dark velvety carpet covering this entire apartment, they're all façades hiding an insidious instability. "...and I noticed this GUY!" I went on. "Another content creator. He was looking for somebody who needed a place to stay." Everybody comes and goes in this city. We're all just part of a transient unstable population of screen dwellers, I thought to myself while delivering the facts to the detective. "And I thought it was a coincidence that we kept running into each other all the time. Anyway, now I realize he was throwing out a net. He was signing me up for a part that he was casting. And I fit the bill perfectly, boy! Love sick, sucker out of his ass! Always in front of the screen, deprived of any real contact. And you know what the part was?"**

"I'm listening..." **The detective's cocky voice emerged again from the blocky, cream-colored cordless phone. Damn, why are my hands shaking?!**

“The part of the witness! He offered me his apartment for a few weeks and told me that there was this neighbor that did this little number on herself every night. He knew that I would LOOK. He knew that I would KEEP ON LOOKING. She looked just like Ötza. And I believed she was her. Teleported from my screen to my new neighbor’s window. Even if that sort of performance was not on brand for her. Anyhow, my second thoughts stopped there. For a few nights, I would have Ötza for myself and I was not going to let that chance go to waste. Our connection would not be mediated, I mean, separated by the clunky Twitch interface, our MacBook screens, and a web of under-sea cables anymore. No, now it would only be a logoless looking glass that’d bring us up close while also standing in between us. And that’s how I fell into HIS trap! It wasn’t Ötza, it was Holy doing the routine. That’s why I never saw her almost toothless face!” **I was ecstatic. The pieces of my fragmented life were coming together as I articulated my POINT OF VIEW to detective McLean.**

“Would_Die_4_Ötza22, you sound like one of those conspiracy nuts—plots all around you!” **Detective McLean’s voice was getting tired as I continued with my story. I was losing him.**

“Please, just listen to me for a second...” **I paused. As I was about to utter the next statement everything became crystal clear in my head. All the nodes in this web of looks were connecting to each other. It finally made sense! I was the victim of an act of showing. I was the perpetrator of an act of seeing. I was shown something because I wanted to see. HE wanted me to see. I wanted to see so bad what should’ve remained hidden, rotting below ground. But who was I seeing? Ötza? Holy? A dead body? A living body? A permanently online niche micro-celebrity? A porn star? Ötza is dead, she was killed but managed to remain alive on my screen and now, finally, outside of it.**

(Cut to black)

Driving down Mulholland Drive my head was spiraling down, drunk with the truth. When things are shown to you they are never what they appear to be. Whenever you’re the audience, the spectator, or the obsessive commentator of an online niche microcelebrity, you are never witnessing things as they are. Whenever something is being shown to you, you’re simultaneously made into a spectator. There’s always an unseen plot, disfiguring you—emasculating you into a passive viewer, when what you need to do... What you need to do is TO ACT! Act, just like Ötza! But how do I expect detective McLean to believe me, to see me for who I am and not as just another creep when I’m also setting him up as another spectator? Even worse, a second hand witness. A consumer of reaction content!

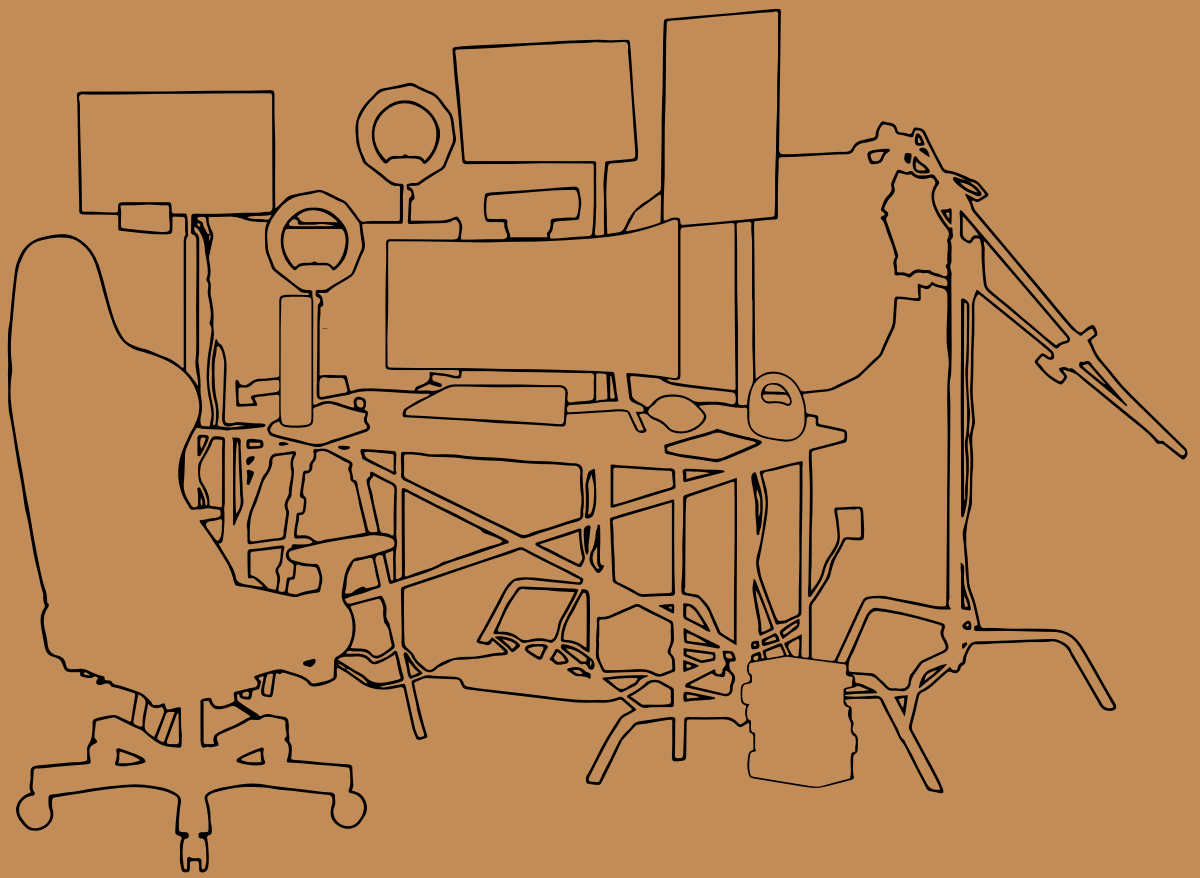
There’s an accident ahead. Shit, the road is blocked. Right in front of me, I’m surprised by a familiar profile shyly delineating through the back windshield of an old SUV. Holy? Ötza? Could that be you? Right next to her, on the driver’s seat, the disfigured scientist. And, in between them, his arm, slowly rising, holding a crowbar about to knock her out.

“Ötza!!! No!!!!!!” I roar. I jump out of my borrowed convertible Corvette and run towards the SUV. This time she’s not going to die. This time, at least once, I’m going to act up and save her!

(The end?)

“Content, that is a single unit of cultural output in the language of the Internet, is never produced in and of itself, but always speaks to a specific social context, which leaves its particular imprint on all content produced therein. This dialectic forms the basis of our investigation: proceeding from Marx, the interplay of society and its products is part of a whole in which production is both determined by and, in turn, recreates society in ever-changing ways. Individuals, too, can recreate themselves via production. A person can produce art to become an artist, and an artist that reflects upon their own art can become a better artist. In other words, production is not necessarily a one-way process by which subjectivity is deprived; the object grants the subject its subjectivity and vice versa. Production in general, including cultural production specifically, bears this liberatory potential.”

— ‘On circlejerk’, Chicago School of Countercultural Inquiry (2021), thephilosophersmeme.com



CHAPTER 7: THE PREHISTORIC HUT

Ötza was always cold when she had to do the shift in the prehistoric hut. She reluctantly zipped up her hoodie a little bit higher. She preferred to have it open, because she was wearing her favorite t-shirt underneath. But it was just too damn cold.

The families that visited the open air museum for natural history in Santa Ana where she landed a gig as a tourist guide / live action roleplay actor never quite knew what to do with her. The kids were scared of her. Their parents often greeted her with an awkward restraint, or pushed their screaming kids towards her so they could take a picture of her with their iPads. One time an elderly woman had been so unsettled by Ötza's appearance that she started hitting her with her walking cane.

After that specific incident, she started wearing funky t-shirts during her shifts to kind of subvert the attention, to make people feel more at ease, to give them a conversation starter or just a focal point other than her abject appearance. It became a bit of a project, hunting down iconic semantic designs at Santee Alley, which is where she found a t-shirt saying "Italians do it better!" She also started visiting provincial flea markets on the weekends and had multiple accounts on Vinted, which is where she found her—by then—favorite t-shirt, saying: "I'm sorry ladies, I'm taken... Taken a shit!"

After a month or so, Ötza got bored (and too critical) with the prefab slogans and decided to start making them herself. The first t-shirt she designed was an off-white crop-top that said "Always historicize!", quoting Fredric Jameson, as sharp institutional critique on the open air museum and herself—as a 5300 year old mummy—working there with all the ontological repercussions implied, which totally flew over the heads of the normcore visitors.

So she tried "The Body (without organs)", accompanied by a horny, drooling emoticon, which also didn't get much reception—apart from a lengthy monologue of a guy with bad breath who said he had only one kidney. She tried "South-Tyrolia Piss Water", "Uncanny Valley Girl", "Don't look at my protrusible paleolithic cyborg shaft", "I steal at Albert Heijn to go...it's my hunty-adderall instinct", "Critique of Pure Reason: Roman Reloaded: The Re-Up" and one just saying "Drug Dealer", which definitely got some reactions.

She was wearing her "Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte & Semantics" t-shirt when the director of the museum came to visit her in her hut during work hours. After showing some fake interest in her work day, he got to the point.

"We got word that you have been wearing some inappropriate t-shirts during working hours, Ötza. Although we very much appreciate your creative input—since we of course also hired you because of your creative skills and artistic point of view—I am afraid that people are misconstruing the phrases on your t-shirts as being affiliated with the brand of the museum. So I think we have to be a bit more mindful with them. But, since we like the idea of customized t-shirts, I asked our communications team to devise some t-shirt ideas that fit the brand and values of the museum. So... we designed this shirt specially for you."

He pulled out a t-shirt from his briefcase. Ötza could already see the cheap polyester and the ugly corporate blue with her empty eye-sockets. On the t-shirt a little bearded man with a little loincloth was pictured holding a bow and arrow, with underneath the text "Ötza Never Gives Up!" in a sort of tribal-esque font. The director smiled at her eagerly.

"I... I like it," was the only thing she could utter.

“I’m happy to hear, Ötza. We’re still working on some other ideas.” He kept on smiling at her, almost intrusive now, expecting more affirmation. But she just looked back at him with a vacant disoriented glare. Silent. “But... I guess... If you have any suggestions yourself?”

She took a breath. “Crusty cumrag.”

She said it resolutely and with a toothless smile. Not because she didn’t have any teeth but because she thought that a smile without teeth would seem more confident.

“Come again?”

“Crusty cumrag,” she repeated. “Like a rag that you use after jerking off, but it has been in your nightstand for a while so it gets all crusty and hard. Like a sock. But I think crusty cumrag moves better in the mouth than crusty cumsock. I think it’s the repetition of ‘r’s. Obviously you don’t say it, it’s written on the t-shirt. But I think a good t-shirt phrase makes people say the phrase in their head out loud. Or totally out loud, that has happened too sometimes. So in that sense I think phonetics are also quite important. But if you think crusty cumsock is better we can also consider that?”

He didn’t like crusty cumrag or crusty cumsock. But it did create a good starting point for negotiation, which is why the museum produced her encrypted Harry Styles foreskin t-shirt on their budget. It said: “I REALLY 1T 2 PEACEFULLY RE3T IN HARRY’S 4SKIN”. A bit complex with the numbers, but otherwise management never would have approved it.

* * *

CHAPTER 82: THE SEX (AND THE CITY)

Ötza shifted and resurfaced. She had acquired a new skill after watching a YouTube video about Spinoza, and she re-entified. (Which is different from identifying, which she doesn’t do because she doesn’t exist, she insists...as a disontologized entity.)

She found herself stranded in the Desert of the Real. This desert was a national park, and the only thing present in the sandy dunes of this flattened landscape was Brad Pitt, upside down, and a GQ magazine camera crew. She couldn’t find herself. Where normally prominently placed on Brad Pitt’s forearm—visible on paparazzi pictures and sometimes even on the silver screen—here, her likeness was hidden from view with every picture. She tracked down every pixel of every picture, and in every single one seemed to be...just out of frame. She didn’t exist.

In this flattened sphere of the Real, she got the idea for a new chapter. A scene—a sex scene actually—with herself, as the tattoo on Brad’s forearm, and Brad Pitt. Since then, she didn’t quite find the way to write it.

It could start with a conversation, which could get a little heated, a little steamy, and they would start making out. He would take his clothes off and he would still look as good as in 1991. He would touch her, and with that he would touch himself. They would start making love, but they wouldn’t go all the way yet. They would take a little smoking break, to talk a bit more, maybe open a nice red from his cellar. But after two sips, they would continue the lovemaking. It would be long...passionate...

And it’s interesting, because for her...it would be such a moment of imploded transcendence, but for him, I guess, radical immanence? His lust would be immanentized to the point

of self-obliteration, where the subject loses its symbolic consistency, and falls apart. But the question is; who is the subject? Is it Brad, because he is kind of both the characters because she exists as and on his skin? But she would write from her perspective, of course. So what then? Is her existence on his body merely parasitical? Or did the desire, the lust between them, emerge through her existing as an external, detached libido? More as — what Lacan calls — the *hommelette*, which is a french portmanteau for man and omelet, as the organ that gives body to libido, but that is also autonomous, surviving without the body whose organ it should have been. Immortal life. Indestructible life. Could be a nice chapter, right?

Maybe he would feel a little dirty afterwards, and would have to take a shower immediately after. Not because of the ego, not because he basically touched himself. But because the immortality of this external organ — of her — is not the sublime immortality of spirit, but the obscene immortality of the undead, of the living dead, that just... doesn't die. Like mentioned before, she doesn't exist. She insists. She reconstitutes herself and continues with a blind, indestructible insistence, with an urge to just repeat painful past experiences. Over and over again.

So what she's trying to say is... of course he doesn't want to show her on a magazine cover.

* * *

CHAPTER 129: THE ÖTZY LEE DANCE COMPANY

Ötzy Lee Miller walked into the biggest classroom of her dance studio, the Ötzy Lee Dance Company. Actually — to be precise — she stormed into the biggest classroom of her dance studio. She was in the worst of moods. The girls scored second at the Miss Prissy Kissy Epistemologissy Dance Competition in Columbus, Ohio. Second! What an abhorrent crime. They had been working on their new dance routine for this specific competition for the last weeks, an ambitious piece titled: “Frank & Stein: The Gothic Flatline.” A dance routine about the conflicted counterfactual friendship between the wax figure of Anne Frank in Madame Tussauds and Gertrude Stein, who together are discussing the Gothic Flatline, as described by Mark Fisher; the plane where it is no longer possible to differentiate the animate from the inanimate and where to have agency is not necessarily to be alive.

She looked each girl in the eyes, making sure every single one of them understood that she was displeased. No, not displeased, outraged. She didn't say a word. Ötzy Lee had given them more than enough energy over the last couple of weeks. Working tirelessly, day and night, assembling the intricate story of Frank and Stein in a jazzy hip hop lyrical performance. She had given them everything and the ungrateful leeches didn't even bother to fully stretch their feet during the grand jetés.

The kids were trembling. They knew she was not happy and she was happy that they knew she was not happy. The moms were standing on the side. They were also not happy, but mostly they were not happy with the kids not being happy for knowing Ötzy Lee was not happy. She couldn't bear to look at their faces, always complaining, always thinking they know better. They wouldn't know a *chassé* if it hit them right in the face.

She gave them one quick glance, scoffed, and turned towards the pyramid.

“On the bottom of the pyramid, we have...” She swiftly tore the white A4 paper that was covering the first headshot of one of the girls — of which there were six — taped to the dance studio mirror in the shape of a pyramid. “Kendall.”

Before Ötzy Lee could even finish the name, Jill protested loudly, her shrill voice inciting a sudden storm of rage in Ötzy Lee, but miraculously—however it was no miracle that did it, it was the skillful patience of Ötzy Lee—she found the power within to ignore Jill’s ungraceful squealing while speaking to Kendall, whose eyes were tearing up.

“You had an essential, crucial part in the piece. And you were HORRIBLE. You did NOT embody Gertrude Stein, you did NOT finish your turns, you did NOT give ANY energy and your face was completely LIFELESS. You were the only animate character in the piece, and how can we demonstrate the fickle balance of differentiating between the living and nonliving when the only live character seems to be BEREFT of life.”

“Next...” She ripped away the second paper, with even more temper than before. “Nia.” Dr. Holly rolled with her eyes. “You were supposed to be a frighteningly inert cyborg that narrated the dissolution of history in times of technological triumph... but I didn’t believe you.”

“Accompanying them on the bottom of the pyramid.” She tore another paper from the mirror, a third face of aggravating righteousness appearing behind. “Mackenzie.” She crumbled up the paper in her hands and threw it across the room, aiming for the trash but just missing it, which made her even more frustrated. “That is where you belong. In the trash. You were supposed to be an uncanny valley girl, a dancing art animatronic that was a continuous leitmotif for dead labor and mechanical reproduction. But you gave me Chuck E. Cheese stripper.”

Mackenzie was choking on her tears, knowing damn well that there’s absolutely no place for tears at the Ötzy Lee Dance Company. If anyone, Ötzy Lee should be the one crying, for this character was based on her personal experience working as a Jordan Wolfson animatronic at the Stedelijk Museum back when she was still a professional dancer. Mackenzie knew how important this role was to Ötzy Lee, and yet, she gave 0% of the attitude and *je ne sais quoi* that a depiction of Female Figure (2014) should have.

“Third on the pyramid.” Another loud ripping sound. “Chloe. You were supposed to be a dead piece of meat on the stage... and you were a dead piece of meat on the stage, in every single way. A true dancer knows that, even as a dead piece of meat—a disembodied entity that overpowers the docile body into inertia—you have to bring it to life on the stage. A disappointing performance.”

“Second on the pyramid: Maddie.” She heard gasps throughout the room. Maddie had stayed undefeated at the top of the pyramid for four months. The girls looked at each other, Melissa stumbled over her words, Maddie froze completely and Ötzy Lee watched it all play out. “You had the main role, which was a difficult one. But if anyone would be able to portray the barbaric subjugation of the wax figure of Anne Frank in Madame Tussauds Amsterdam, it would be you. You can do WAY better than that, disappointing week for you.”

“Then, on the top of the pyramid...” Expectation filled up the room, doubled even by the room-sized mirror, the silence too heavy for the dance floor to withstand. Ötzy Lee couldn’t help but smile when she tore away the last sheet of paper with a screeching rip, showing the picture underneath to be completely blank. Gasps. “No one,” she said.

She returned the offended gaze of the last girl standing, her unnervingly tight ponytail almost yanking her blond hair out of her scalp, seemingly stretching her facial expression into one of perpetual contempt and ungrateful ostentation. She was supposed to be Mary Shelley, a omnipotent puppet master that served as the enigmatic Big Other of the piece, superintending the relationship between the wax figure of Anne Frank and Gertrude Stein towards the point of the apocalyptic flatline in the end of the piece, a world without any differential fields

or distinct objects, devoid of the possibility of any other alternate actualities than a singular necropolitical capitalist homogeneity.

But she committed two heinous, unforgivable sins... she lip synced during the routine. And she dropped her baton.

* * *

CHAPTER 17: THE BOGDANOFF TWINS

The Bogdanoff twins were famous for multiple things. They were famous for their shows on French television about science fact and science fiction. They were famous for their prominent and bulbous cheekbones and chins, while both denied ever having undergone plastic surgery. But mostly they were famous for scamming (some of the) scientific academic world in 2001 and 2002 by writing nonsensical physics papers that were still published in reputable scientific journals. Although—also here—never admitting their papers were anything but an important scientific contribution, even going as far as suing multiple scientific magazines for defamation. All time hits like “Topological field theory of the initial singularity of spacetime” and “The KMS state of spacetime at the Planck scale” are since debunked as “a hoax perpetrated on the physics community”.

A group of four was sitting at Jamie’s Italian. The four include Ötza, of course, and her twin sister, who doesn’t exist but was counterfactually conceived just for this segment—after that she will cease to exist—her name is Ötzette, she’s a type designer. And Igor and Grichka Bogdanoff. And they were on a double date. While Igor and Grichka were talking to each other about their positions at Megatrend University, Ötza and Ötzette were whispering behind their menus, discussing who they think is the cutest and—even more importantly—who will go home with whom.

Abruptly, Igor and Grichka interrupted their conversation, saying—in unison—that they predicted crypto in the 80s. Then they started uttering scientific jargon, a meaningless combination of buzzwords that was already difficult to understand due to the inflexibility of their swollen lips. Ötza tried to listen, and wondered how they managed to gaslight all those scientists (not all of them Italian) to take them seriously?

But then she thought to herself: Why should they not have been taken seriously? Surely, their statements were nonsensical to traditional scientific standards. But did that mean it actually had no meaningful content whatsoever? She couldn’t help but wonder; if science is an interpretive system just like any other sort of knowledge, then why wouldn’t there be space for counterfactual speculation? Were Igor and Grichka also just victims of science’s regime of truth, just like herself?

“I would love to read your thesis,” she said to either Igor or Grishka. She felt proud of her newfound realization, and happy to support the twins with their academic scamming practice.

But they looked at her weird, and said: “I’m pretty sure you can’t read.”

Her and Ötzette got up immediately, both grabbed their drinks and threw it in the faces of Igor and Grishka respectively. (Not respectfully, respectively.) Apparently they were too caught up in science’s regime of truth after all, and totally not self-aware. Not sexy. Ötzette stopped existing when they walked out of Jamie’s Italian without paying.

ÖTZA, ONTOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

Confessions of a Cryodesiccated Fanfiction Entrepreneur From the Neolithic

Cryodesiccated mummy and freelance fanfiction entrepreneur Ötza invites you to her (posthu)man cave at Mutter, where she shares her fanfiction at her first solo show *Ötza, Ontologically Speaking: Confessions of a Cryodesiccated Fanfiction Entrepreneur From the Neolithic*.

Collaboratively developed by Levi van Gelder and Leila El Alaoui, this uncanny 5300 year old drag character propels herself into different universes and fandoms—from *The L Word* (2004) to *The Hunger Games* (2012)—in an attempt to rewrite her own story that has been (unfairly) extrapolated from scientific reconstructions. Fact and fiction blur, or even disintegrate, as Ötza playfully switches between her multiple cultural identities, lamenting her position in the world as cryodesiccated corpse, primeval Man, scientific subject, tourist spectacle, fanfiction writer, queer individual or struggling artist in contemporary Amsterdam.

Costume and styling Ötza

Leila El Alaoui

SFX prosthetics Ötza

Suzanne Breur

Airbrush costume

Ruperto Herrador

Set design in collaboration with

Ruperto Herrador

Soundscape

Gediminas Žygyus

DOP “Ötza at Rijksmuseum”

Kyulim Kim

Paper-maché head in collaboration with

Paul Zwaan and Babs Bleeker

Exhibition text

Jordi Viader Guerrero

Special thanks to

Heleen Mineur, Elif Özbay, Francisca Khamis Giacoman, Mariana Jurado Rico, Andoni Zamora, Charlotte Rohde, Alec Mateo, Luca Bryssinck and many more

Mutter is a platform for contemporary art based in Amsterdam. Initiated by Nuno Bejinho, Katy Hundertmark and Rodrigo Red Sandoval.