

Dominic Eichler on David Zink Yi

A different drum

In the video of his performance *La Cumbia* (1999) David Zink Yi's reclining and manly, but by no means monstrous, naked body is a shrill shade of Chromakey, Incredible Hulk-like, green. Maybe the Berlin-based artist was feeling like a real alien the day he thought about doing this.

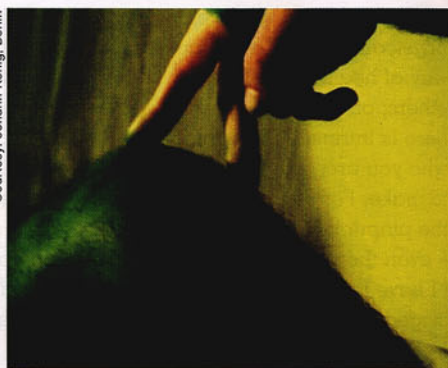


• La Cumbia 1999 Video stills

Only two of his fingers on one hand are left unpainted, like a poignant if coincidental inversion of Douglas Gordon's one black finger tattoo *Three Inches (Black)* (1997). All the action in the video involves Zink Yi giving his digits a life of their own. They become diminutive prancing legs that dance from the artist's green feet to his green face and back down again, occasionally stopping along the way to drum out a rhythm. The soundtrack for this finger dance is a catchy ditty in the popular Colombian music style that lends the work its title and which developed from a multicultural melding of Afro-Caribbean rhythm and sound with the folk music of Colombian farmers.

While green skin tends to be reserved in the Western collective cultural imagination for pop fantasy beings (Muppets, extra-terrestrials, villains and superheroes), here the music hints that the artist's real intention was to evoke a Colombian landscape. In some ways it is as if the artist is treating his own body as a foreign territory, a fertile and undulating land that his finger doll explores on an expedition or reconnaissance trip. Although the body-as-a-landscape idea can evoke a dodgy kind of erotic photography that imagines buttocks as sand dunes or a cleavage as adjacent hills, here it's used matter-of-factly. Meanwhile all sorts of brightly coloured bodies from the history of Performance art come to mind.

Courtesy: Johann König, Berlin



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Bruce Nauman's film *Art Make-up No. 3 Green* (1967–8), for instance, or troubling classics such as Yves Klein's blue print nudes, Hermann Nitsch's blood-splattered volunteers or Joseph Beuys' very own honey and gold-leaf po-face (*How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, 1965), to name just a few male, ritualistic, minstrel-like or mystically tinged acts – although there are probably enough other examples to cover the entire colour spectrum.

In video, Chromakey colours connote and delineate a space or thing earmarked for removal or deletion. Its favoured because people come in many different shades but not green, a fact that allows videoed performers to be easily superimposed on entirely different backgrounds. Zink Yi doesn't use this kind of special effect, but his video work does nevertheless involve the conceptual superimpositions of diverse backgrounds. The artist, who emigrated to Germany as a teenager, has what he has described as a 'layered notion of identity' shaped by his family's Peruvian, Chinese and German cultural heritage. This needs mentioning because in a number of works he draws directly on this experience and places it in the thematic foreground. These layers (although perhaps we need a word that conjures up a less orderly, less graspable arrangement) include big topics such as nationality and race. In his split-screen video *Dedicated to*