

# ARTFORUM

## Julia Heyward

CCA WATTIS INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS  
California College of the Arts, 360 Kansas Street  
May 5–June 13

“Who needs bondage? Isolation will do.” Julia Heyward (also known as Duka Delight) is a master at talking dirty. Her words are seductive, to be sure, but more so unctuous and often defiled. In performances and videos made between 1971 and 1984—the purview of her first monographic survey, curated by Jamie Stevens—she lends an incantatory cadence to skeins of metonymy, rhyme, and alliteration. Buoyed by her southern drawl, language revels in its own slipperiness, a fish the artist is quick to gut.

Heyward's penchant for volte-face is also visual. After all, she pioneered the genre we now call music videos, primers in transforming teenage lust into quotidian—and therefore nefarious—forms of capitalist desire. The exhibition's titular video, *Conscious Knocks Unconscious*, 1979, features a surreally spinning Venus de Milo. Contra the literally “unarmed” sculpture, the artist boasts that she has an army replete with privates (smacking her breasts and crotch to percussive effect). *Shake Daddy Shake*, a hypnotic 1976 performance, tells the story of yet another doomed limb. After a lifetime of shaking hands with his congregation, her pastor dad has developed an involuntary—you could even say unshakeable—tremor. Heyward's vocal acrobatics commandingly rail against the patriarchy while doused in familial sweetness, her dulcet tones edged with an enraged timbre girls reserve only for their fathers.

A leather costume of battery-operated LED lights (used in her 1984 performance *No Local Stops*) hangs from the gallery ceiling. Devoid of a wearer, the empty carapace is both threatening and erotic. Who needs bondage when you've got chains of signification? Heyward's oneiric monologues—though seemingly stream of consciousness—insist that association is in fact never free.



Julia Heyward, *This Is My Blue Period*, 1977, video, color, sound, 31 minutes 28 seconds. Installation view.

— Catherine Damman

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