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sex objects

Feminist humour, moving sculpture, re-signifying 'the nude'

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the postgraduate degree of

Master of Fine Arts

at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

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2018

ABSTRACT

My sculpture and performance-based practice deploys humour and movement to engage with knotted questions around sexuality and objectification.

Both contemporary and historical representations of the female nude in the traditionally male-dominated western canon all too frequently offer her body up, like a delicious pale dessert. The leaning, bending, swooning flesh is eroticised and yet also pacified. The vulva smoothed away. In contrast, heroic male nudes are more often eroticised in a way which emphasises their agency, power and control.

My thesis project contests the privileged position of the white male artist and viewer, examining sexuality, gender stereotypes, and power.

I use humour as a critical tactic to draw the viewer in, the honey to the sting, whilst also exploring the seductive potential of materials.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS/Preface

What relevance does 'the nude' in the western sculpture canon have in relation to contemporary attitudes towards gender and sexuality?

Must 'the nude' be figurative to be a nude?

What happens when I invert the stereotypical artist (male)/muse (female) relationship?

What happens when I combine movement with object making?

How does the presence of my, female, body affect the reading of the work?

Do I have to be serious to be critical? Is it ok to laugh?

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to Richard Reddaway and Julieanna Preston for your advice, support, and generosity. And to all the other Massey tutors for your critique and input.

Thank you to my family without whom this wouldn't have been possible, truly.

Mum, for all the hours (and hours) of editing.

Dad, for all the lifts.

Albrecht, for your patience.

Isla and Casper for making me laugh.

Bob, for being there, and looking after the kids.

Caroline, for the conversations.

Bill, for the motors.

All my wonderful classmates for your kindness, conversations and beers.

Josh, for the filming.

Essi, for general awesomeness.

Fraser, for the music.

Michael, Saran, Brent, Nik and Shieva for the dancing.

Also Jhana, Tim, Linda, Tama....

I know there are more, thank you as well.

Arohanui x

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To His Lost Lover

Now they are no longer
any trouble to each other

he can turn things over, get down to that list
of things that never happened, all of the lost

unfinishable business.
For instance... for instance,

how he never clipped and kept her hair, or drew a hairbrush
through that style of hers, and never knew how not to blush

at the fall of her name in close company...

How he never raised his fingertips
to stop the segments of her lips

from breaking the news,
or tasted the fruit

or picked for himself the pear of her heart,
or lifted her hand to where his own heart

was a small, dark, terrified bird
in her grip. Where it hurt.

Or said the right thing,
or put it in writing.

And never fled the black mile back to his house
before midnight, or coaxed another button of her blouse,

then another,
or knew her

favourite colour,
her taste, her flavour,

and never ran a bath or held a towel for her,
or soft-soaped her, or whipped her hair

into an ice-cream cornet or a beehive
of lather, or acted out of turn, or misbehaved

when he might have...

And never almost cried,
and never once described

an attack of the heart,
or under a silk shirt

nursed in his hand her breast,
her left, like a tear of flesh

wept by the heart,
where it hurts,

or brushed with his thumb the nut of her nipple,
or drank intoxicating liquors from her navel...

How he never figured out a fireproof plan,
or unravelled her hand, as if her hand

were a solid ball
of silver foil

and discovered a lifeline hiding inside it,
and measured the trace of his own alongside it.

But said some things and never meant them –
sweet nothings anybody could have mentioned.

And left unsaid some things he should have spoken,
about the heart, where it hurt exactly, and how often.

Simon Armitage¹

¹ Simon Armitage, "To His Lost Lover", *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1993), p.70-73. Retrieve full poem from: http://simonarmitage.typepad.com/homepage/2005/11/not_the_furnitu.html

What I most love about poet Simon Armitage's *To His Lost Lover* is the regret for all the sensual pleasures he/the narrator has missed out on in not truly 'seeing' his lover, not taking the time and care to really notice (and engage with her) in all her specificity.

In thinking about sexuality and looking at representations of women – as female nudes, muses, pornographic fantasy – I have a similar sense of something missing, a feeling that so many are cast from the same mould. Pale, yielding, generic, endlessly replaceable by more of the same. The 'eroticism' so narrowly defined, so little reflection on mutual and reciprocal pleasure. Why should this be? This genericising treatment of women reveals the over-representation of female bodies from a male perspective, the privileging of male sexual pleasure societally, and the privileging of male artists historically.

The result of all these facets is a lack of insight into female eroticism and desire, which have traditionally been repressed in patriarchal society. Journalist, Daniel Bergner comments in *'What do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire'* on the ubiquity of the view, shared by evolutionary psychologists including David Buss, that there is a difference in the intensity of desire of males as opposed to females and that this is a manifestation of "parental investment theory"; briefly, that males have limitless sperm and don't have to invest much worth in reproduction, whereas females have limited eggs, and the burden of pregnancy and childbirth. The result is female 'selectiveness' in contrast to males easy promiscuity.^{2 3} Bergner contests this characterisation asking: "Does the fact that women are expected to be the more demure gender...prove anything about our erotic hardwiring? Might the shared value place on female modesty speak less to absolutes of biology than to the world's span of male-dominated cultures and historic suspicion and fear of female sexuality?"⁴

What are we, all of us, missing out on when voices go unheard, when we leave things unsaid, when we do not listen? Linda Nochlin's essay *'Why have there been no great women artists?'*⁵ strikes a chord with me when she talks about the bias towards validation of particular types of art, high art, male art. When looking at 'great works' by artists like Michelangelo, Duchamp, Serra, I notice all the things left unsaid, the ways in which their work does not reflect my experience. Though lauded in the western sculpture canon to speak authoritatively, my questions are: for whom? to whom? So much attention has been paid to cool marble, to great slabs of metal

pushing the body to traverse it. So much (male) talking and so little listening. Representations of women, stilted, stilled, and shushed are many, yet representations of female desire and pleasure are few.

Why then, as a contemporary female artist, have I used a historical (one could argue outdated) and male-dominated reference point, or touch-stone, for my work? What relevance does examining 'the nude' have for me?

On a personal level, Renaissance sculpture informs the background of my thinking because it was Michelangelo's work that first ignited my interest. I remember, as a child, marvelling at the *Pietà*: the way the Virgin Mary supports the drooping body of Christ, his bicep and pectoral muscle represented as soft, giving way to the pressure of her fingers, and yet confusingly also perceptible as hard as marble.⁶ Also relevant is my dance background, learning Classical Ballet for nearly fifteen years. As a child I danced as an extra in several Royal NZ Ballet productions. I distinctly remember the adult male dancers casually wandering around the shared lounge area between rehearsal sessions clad only in their elasticated jockstraps, their bodies like moving classical-style nude sculptures.

What do the figurative classical-style sculptural nude, and Minimalist sculpture possibly have in common? And what possible relevance does either of these male dominated areas have to a contemporary feminist conversation around sexuality and equality?

It's important here to point out that when I use the term feminism (or feminist) I mean it in a pluralistic, rather than a singular sense. As Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Eleanor Princethal and Sue Scott point out in *'The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium'*, for contemporary women artists (including myself) "notions of identity – sexual, cultural, personal – [are]...fluid. And while feminism continues to be a drive that transcends individuality (it is meaningless otherwise), it is itself increasingly plural..."⁷ I intend for my voice to join a conversation that embraces a plurality of feminist perspectives and voices.

2 This theory sounds as though women have traditionally made this choice: rather than having it imposed upon them by males concerned with ensuring lineage and guaranteeing the offspring are their own. In other words women and children have been reduced to property.

3 Daniel Bergner, *What Do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2013) p.37-39.

4 Bergner, *What Do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire*. p.39.

5 Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists", in *Women Artists, The Linda Nochlin Reader* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015) p.42-68

6 Interestingly, when questioned by his biographer on why he had made the Virgin Mary so young looking, too young comparatively to be the mother of Christ, Michelangelo replied: "Do you not know that chaste women stay fresh much more than those who are not chaste? How much more in the case of the Virgin, who had never experienced the least lascivious desire that might change her body?" John Pope-Hennessy, *An Introduction to Italian Sculpture: Italian High Renaissance and Baroque sculpture*. (London: Phaidon, 1970) p. 304.

7 Eleanor Heartney, et al., *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.9.

I've lately found my longstanding hero-worship of predominantly white male artists problematic. Why have I not been more focused on the achievements of female artists? And, important to me, why are there so many more representations of female bodies by male artists, than there are of male bodies by female artists?

What is it about works like *David, L Beams* and *One Tonne Prop* that interest me and yet also tempt me to place them, in the gallery inside my head, in a section called 'Dick Art'? Is it contradictory that at the same time as I want to see more female artists' work, I'd also like to see a show focused on men's bodies (but not solely from the perspective of male artists)? I want to see masculinity portrayed in a way that doesn't favour the macho, and domineering.

And why do all the swooning, passive female nudes bother me? The heart of it comes down to what was initially a subconscious connection or shared tone that I felt existed between the sexualised representation of female nudes in the Western sculptural canon, and in mainstream (heterosexual) pornography. What I mean by a shared tone is that they have in common what A.W Eaton describes in *Art and Pornography*, as "...the eroticisation of gender hierarchy..."⁸ That is: "both men's and women's – experience of sexual desire and standards of sexual attractiveness have been systematically shaped in a way that renders women's subordination and men's dominance sexy."⁹

This systemic representation of the male as dominant agent, and the female as sexualised and subordinate is insidious. Objectified images of women portrayed as sexually available and subordinate to men are ubiquitous in mainstream Western media, pornography, and music videos.

Journalists Tom Reichert and Courtenay Carpenter note the increase in sexual content in the media, and that the sexualized portrayal of women in advertisements went up significantly between 1983 and 2003.¹⁰ Rape culture is currently an important topic of conversation; global movements such #MeToo, and #TimesUp, reflect the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault worldwide.

8 A.W. Eaton, "What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?" in *Art and Pornography*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p.281.

9 Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.15-16.

10 Tom Reichert and Courtenay Carpenter, *An update on sex in magazine advertising: 1983 to 2003*. (Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 2004). Retrieve from: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/107769900408100407>

When faced with statistics revealing structural and social inequality (exemplified by the gender pay gap for example) and its more extreme effects (sexual assault and rape), it is confronting to consider the extent to which men are privileged over women politically, economically, sexually – and in the gallery.^{11 12 13} Against this backdrop it is difficult for me to look at, for example, Richard Serra's work and be blindly impressed without a subtext of macho male domination inflecting my appreciation. I don't want my path impeded by Serra's *Tilted Arc*, and I don't want my body to feel under threat by *Sculpture No.3*. To be frank, women's bodies are under threat in real life so I don't want a massive wall of steel looming over me.

11 "Women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men. In 2013, the male employment-to-population ratio stood at 72.2 per cent, while the ratio for females was 47.1 per cent. Globally, women are paid less than men. Women in most countries earn on average only 60 to 75 per cent of men's wages. Women bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work. Women devote 1 to 3 hours more a day to housework than men; 2 to 10 times the amount of time a day to care (for children, elderly, and the sick), and 1 to 4 hours less a day to market activities. In the European Union for example, 25 per cent of women report care and other family and personal responsibilities as the reason for not being in the labour force, versus only three per cent of men. This directly and negatively impacts women's participation in the labour force. Gender inequalities in time use are still large and persistent in all countries. When paid and unpaid work are combined, women in developing countries work more than men, with less time for education, leisure, political participation and self-care. Despite some improvements over the last 50 years, in virtually every country, men spend more time on leisure each day while women spend more time doing unpaid housework." Source: United Nations, Women. Retrieve from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

12 "It is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. Around 120 million girls worldwide (slightly more than 1 in 10) have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. By far the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against girls are current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends. Adult women account for 51 per cent of all human trafficking victims detected globally. Women and girls together account for 71 per cent, with girls representing nearly three out of every four child trafficking victims. Nearly three out of every four trafficked women and girls are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation." Source: United Nations, Women. Retrieve from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

13 "Work by women artists makes up only 3–5% of major permanent collections in the U.S. and Europe, and 34% in Australian state museums."

I've been asking myself what values my work interrogates or contributes to. How does my work engage both men and women in conversations on the binary manner in which masculinity and femininity are portrayed, and the power dynamic they encode?

Judy Chicago, "We women artists refuse to be written out of history". (*Guardian: October 2014*)
Retrieve from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/09/judy-chicago-women-artists-history>

"Only 30% of artists represented by commercial galleries are women. In Australia, it's about 40%; in Germany, less than 20%." "51% of visual artists today are women; on average, they earn 81¢ for every dollar made by male artists." National Museum of Women in the Arts. *Get The Facts*. Retrieve from: <https://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts>

The Arrow and the Swan.

Looking at Baroque and Renaissance nudes I am reminded of my classical ballet training. Is it the toned muscularity of *David* (fig 1) that reminds me of a male dancer's physique? Or the contrapposto twist of Daphne (see *Apollo and Daphne*, fig2) which is reminiscent of Odette, surprised by the sudden appearance of Prince Siegfried, in Act 2 Swan Lake? Well, in a way, yes. But the most marked way in which I experience them is through embodied mirroring, which creates a recognition of their posture as an embodied feeling, and most importantly one that encodes gender.

What is embodied mirroring?

The correct posture, positioning, and the amount of control, tension or fluidity, torsion, or softness in each section of the body as the dancer moves, are learnt primarily by mimicking the body of the dance teacher. The student learns to perfectly match not only the movement and direction their teacher moves in but also the 'feeling' in an embodied sense. This embodied 'feeling' of another person's movement is attributable to the action of mirror neurones. Mirror neurones are "activated during the performance of actions and also during observation of actions performed by another."¹⁴ The important point is that the same neurones are firing as the ones that would be firing if it was your own body performing the observed action. Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason refer, in *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, to neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese's description of "embodied simulation as 'the functional mechanism underpinning *Einfühlung*' [empathy]... [and his observation that it] "can lead to a sharing of affective states. The observer's 'embodied simulation' produces a 'body state shared by observer and observed'." ¹⁵



Fig. 1:
Michelangelo
David
1501-1504

¹⁴ Dee Reynolds, and Matthew Reason, *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* (Intellect, Bristol, 2012) p.19.

¹⁵ Reynolds, *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, p.19.



Fig2 Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Apollo and Daphne
 1622-1625

When I look at *David* and *Apollo and Daphne* (as well as other sculptures) I experience the work in a similar way, as a momentarily stilled posture. Looking at, and inhabiting the posture of these nudes through this mental and kinesthetic process of embodied mirroring, I notice differences between the way male and females are represented. These differences are similar to the gendered differences in the movement of male and female dancers in (traditional) classical ballet. Certain postures and movements are characterised as masculine, and others feminine. The male dancer grasps, lifts, tilts the female dancer, emphasising both his physical strength and straight-backed control, whilst simultaneously demonstrating her delicacy, grace, and arching posable form. He maneuvers her body, displaying it in different positions, to the audience. Hints of sensuality in classical ballet are overlaid with technical mastery and control. There are differences to the style of movement and postures of male and female dancers. The males are never back-arched, melting into the arms of a female dancer, or moving in a manner like a startled bird. We do not see the female grasp the male by the waist and bend him backwards. The contrast in posture and movement between male and female classical ballet dancers encodes gendered roles of dominance and submission. The male, the arrow, and the female, the swan.

Swan Lake, Act II, a lakeside clearing in a forest by the ruins of a chapel. A moonlit night. Prince Siegfried has become separated from his friends. He arrives at the lakeside clearing, just as a flock of swans land. He aims his crossbow, draws back the arrow, when suddenly before his eyes a swan transforms into a beautiful maiden; Odette.¹⁶

Rudolf Nureyev & Margot Fonteyn – Pas De Deux, Act II, Swan Lake
<https://youtu.be/Z1cb9jjPRk>

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swan_Lake#Act_1



Fig.3
Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Rape of Proserpina
1621-1622

'The Nude'¹⁷

Gendered power is implicit in the nude, and the representation of the male and female body embodies 'ideal' masculinity and femininity.

Though there are a few exceptions, the male nude is more likely to be represented with taut musculature, sprung, ready for conquering action. The female is less likely to be represented in a way that conveys forcefulness or physical strength. She is characteristically depicted supine, gracefully restrained, or twisting back arched in fear or religious ecstasy (which carries subconscious associations with sex).

Male nudes such as Michelangelo's *David*, aestheticize the athletic and idealised male physical form whilst speaking of heroism and strength. Male figures are represented as mythological heroes: slaying giants, conquering philistines, deep in thought, wrestling serpents. The sensuous nude male body is venerated and simultaneously associated with moral and intellectual greatness. (There are a handful of male nudes sensually represented in more stereotypically feminine postures, for example Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*, however they are the exception.)

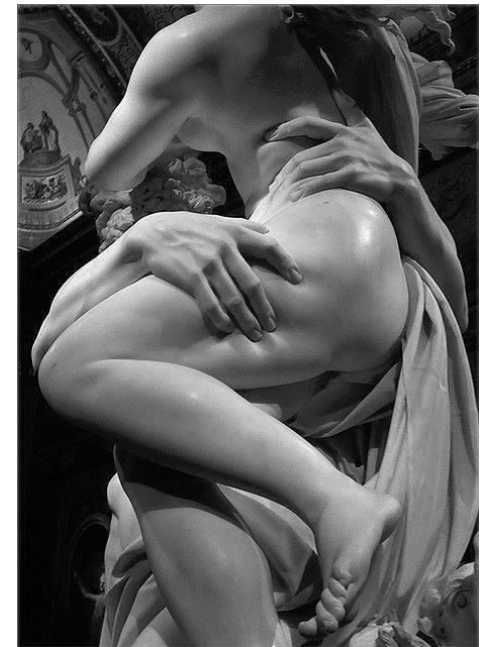


Fig.4
Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Rape of Proserpina (detail)
1621-1622

¹⁷ Here I refer to Classical (Graeco-Roman), Renaissance and Baroque nudes in the western sculpture canon. Though 'Classical' refers to art of the Graeco-Roman period from around 500BC to around 320BC, the term 'classical-style' is commonly used to refer to later work (Renaissance, Neo-Classical) which is stylistically influenced by the principles of Graeco-Roman art. R.M. Cook, *Greek Art*. (London: Penguin, 1986) p. 142.

Female nudes are aestheticized in a markedly different way. The sensuous nude female body often simultaneously blends a performance of modesty with display, one hand seeming to cover and yet at the same time draw attention to the vagina, hinting at sexual availability. She is coded to idealise and project certain qualities, and they are qualities that reflect how women “should” be and behave. The interplay between submission and domination, titillation and chastity, plays out in works such as Bernini’s work the *Rape of Proserpina* (see fig 3 and fig 4). Writhing to escape Pluto’s grasp, she is sexualised in a way that highlights her vulnerability. Notice the defined tense muscularity of Pluto’s torso pressed up against Proserpina’s flesh, his fingers embedded in her thigh and waist almost as though she were not unyielding marble but malleable dough.

Praxiteles’ *Knidian Aphrodite*, est 330BC (see fig.3) was the first sculpture in Western art to depict the female body without drapery, completely nude.¹⁸ Reputed to be so beautiful that men were overcome with desire for ‘her’, Praxiteles’ *Aphrodite* was not only the first female nude but, significantly, as Nanette Saloman points out, set up the lasting tradition of the female nude as sexualised and objectified.¹⁹

Praxiteles represented *Aphrodite* self-consciously trying to conceal her pubis from the gaze of the viewer, to preserve her modesty. Nanette Salomon argues that this posture “establishes the artistic codes of female nudity as fetishized... The most telling gesture...of the right hand before the pubis. The gesture constructs a sexual narrative of *seeing and being seen, of the gaze...*”²⁰ It stimulates desire by fashioning a sexual reading onto the nude female body and into the sight of the spectator who is unquestioningly assumed to be male.

18 Up until around 350BC the male was the primary subject for the nude. Men exercised nude in public gymnasiums, and were in control politically and socially. In contrast women were always clothed in public, and exercised little political and social power. They were considered the property of their fathers firstly, and later, their husbands.

19 Salomon comments on the popularity of the work, noting that the ‘pudica’ or ‘modest’ pose invented by Praxiteles, was widely copied, becoming the ‘classic’ pose of the female nude. Nanette Salomon, “The Venus Pudica, uncovering art history’s hidden agendas and pernicious pedigrees”, in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 1996) p.70.

20 Salomon, “The Venus Pudica, uncovering art history’s hidden agendas and pernicious pedigrees”, p.73-76.



Fig.5
Praxiteles
Aphrodite of Knidos (roman copy, original destroyed)
330BC (est)

HUNGRY EYES

Praxiteles' *Aphrodite* establishes the act of viewing the female nude as a sexually charged power relationship. "He has transformed the viewer into a voyeur, a veritable Peeping Tom. We yearn to see that which is withheld. The viewer's shameful desire to see matches the sculpture 'modest' desire to not be seen."²¹

This framing of the female nude by Praxiteles established the enduring tradition of the female nude as sexualised and at the same time vulnerable. The genitalia of male nudes are represented naturalistically. In contrast, female genitalia are smoothed away, hidden chastely, connected with modesty and fear of violation.²² The male can be un-self-consciously nude, sensually portrayed even, without being overtly sexualised. The classical nude represents female sexuality as being at the behest of the male. Combining mixed moral messages, she is judged on her sexuality whilst simultaneously being used to titillate the sexual imagination.

These attitudes persist. Sexuality remains linked with morality. The western nude is and has largely remained, a concentration of sexuality and gendered power created overwhelmingly by and for the male gaze.

John Berger wrote in 1972, in *Ways of Seeing*, about the fundamental difference in the ways the female and male are represented. He argued that "...the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies... A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. His presence may be fabricated, in the sense that he pretends to be capable of what he is not. But the pretence is always towards a power which he exercises on others...By contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her."²³

When the woman's 'presence' has been created/posed/represented by a man it expresses what *he* is saying may be done to her (or what he wants to do). When Berger says that her presence "expresses her own attitude to herself" it is important to note explicitly that this attitude is complicated by that fact.

When male artists represent women's sexuality they control how it is expressed – they decide what she desires, consents or submits to. Displaying the body of the female nude in a supine or submissive pose appeals to the fantasy of the male viewer (as conqueror). His sexual pleasure is privileged. Berger notes that the female's "nakedness is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner's [of the work] feelings or demands."²⁴ He goes on to comment on the difference between western nudes and those of non-western traditions (such as Indian, or African) where women are depicted actively absorbed in both the giving and receiving of pleasure. Berger notes the difference in Western Art, where the posture of the woman and display of erogenous zones is oriented towards the (male) viewer even when a lover is present within the work.

"Women are depicted in a quite different way from men – not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him."²⁵

Whereas the female spectator of the female nude registers the idealised projection, registers the suggested behaviour, sees themselves being seen, the male spectator of the female nude is allowed to remain invisible, in the sense of not needing to see themselves through the eyes of another.

Eric Carmen, Hungry Eyes
<https://youtu.be/2ssCL292DQA>

21 Salomon, "The Venus Pudica, uncovering art history's hidden agendas and pernicious pedigrees", p.76.

22 It is both darkly comic and depressing that sculptures, not just Praxiteles but Renaissance and later, depict the idealised image of woman – Aphrodite the goddess of love and sex – with a smoothed away Barbie-doll like mound for genitalia (and no clitoris).

23 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin Books: London, first published 1972) p.45.

24 Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p.52.

25 Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p.64.

Marcel Duchamp, in his work *Étant Donnés* (Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*), sets out to make the act of looking explicit and self-conscious.²⁶ Julian Jason Haladyn discusses, in *Marcel Duchamp Étant Donnés*, Duchamp's staging of the gaze as a major component of the work.²⁷

Haladyn describes how Duchamp directs our gaze to a partial view of the body, which we peep at (perhaps apprehensively) through the eyeholes cut in a wooden door. The viewer is presented with an illusionistic, three dimensional, diorama-like representation of an outdoor landscape – real twigs, an image of a waterfall (with illuminated motorised section to create the illusion of rippling movement). The female nude lies on the ground, holding a gas lamp aloft, legs spread to reveal a stunted cleft. Her body 'framed', presented as a fetishistic fragment. Haladyn observes that the way Duchamp sets up the viewing conditions for the work (with an empty waiting-room-like space), even before the viewer reaches the peepholes in



fig.6

Marcel Duchamp

Étant Donnés

(Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*)
1946-1966



fig.7

Marcel Duchamp

Étant Donnés (Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*),
detail of the door with peepholes.
1946-1966

the wooden door, is a significant part of the work. "The space within the room which contains the wooden door functions as a waiting room in which the viewers await their turns at the peepholes...Duchamp forces individual viewers to single themselves out by occupying the solitary viewing position at *Given's* door."²⁸

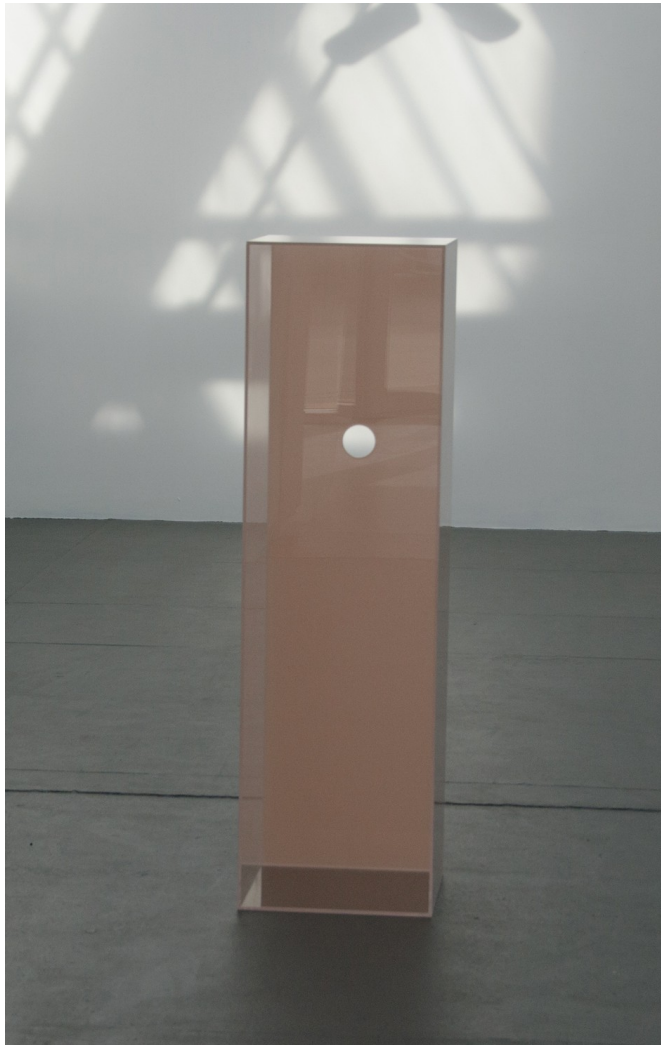
By hiding the voyeuristically displayed female nude within the work, and making the act of looking through the peepholes solitary, Duchamp puts the viewer on display. He makes the act of looking overt (and overtly voyeuristic), and thus turns the viewers gaze back onto themselves. Haladyn notes; "One of the key points of this unique form of visual presentation is that the viewers are made conscious of the act of viewing in relation to the artwork they view, and in this way become part of the work..²⁹ Importantly, the act of voyeuristically being seen viewing something private (note the sexual associations with peepholes/peepshows and the erotic content hidden behind the door), in the public setting of a gallery, charges the experience and leaves the viewer themselves feeling exposed to the gaze of others, aware of themselves both looking and being looked at even as their gaze presides over the sprawled female nude.

²⁶ Julian Jason Haladyn, *Marcel Duchamp Étant Donnés*, (London: Afterall Central St Martins, 2010) p.51.

²⁷ Haladyn, *Marcel Duchamp Étant Donnés*, p.51.

²⁸ Haladyn, *Marcel Duchamp Étant Donnés*, p.51.

²⁹ Haladyn, *Marcel Duchamp Étant Donnés*, p.52-53.



DISPLAY

Not having seen Duchamp's *Étant Donnés* in the flesh so to speak, I can only imagine that this experience plays out differently for men and women. Given that the body of the female reflects the female viewer herself to some degree (either in the sense of being like, or unlike the white female body in the work), there must be an added level of self-conscious evaluation. The male viewer is 'caught looking' but not confronted with an objectified version of himself. I intended my work *Display* to subvert this.

"The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."

Marcel Duchamp

My work, *Display*, humorously yet pointedly comments on what a male artist's or viewer's contribution may be. The suggestion that the male viewer completes the work by literally inserting himself into it and putting his cock on display, subverts the conventions of the nude. *Display* sexualizes and objectifies the male, he submits himself to our gaze.

Display plays with the idea of who or what is visible in the gallery. From certain angles the transparency of the object causes it to almost disappear. The play of light penetrating the work is seductive phenomenologically, and yet humorously undermined by the sexual innuendo.

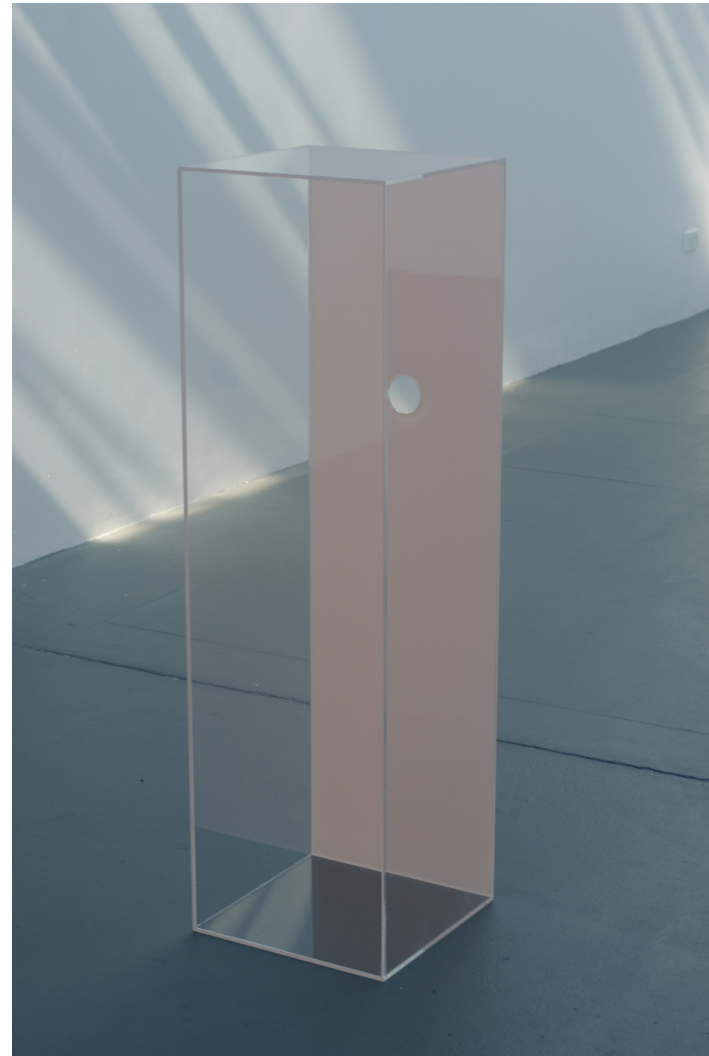
Fig.8 Caitlin Devoy
Display
2017

Display intentionally resembles a plinth, usually the most submissive object in a gallery. The plinth's role is to elevate the art object, whilst itself being ignored. We the viewers, are meant to pretend we don't see it. *Display* conflates the invisibility of the plinth in the gallery with the relative lack of representation of female artists in comparison to male.

Fundamentally though, I see *Display* as an abstracted female nude. Making a female nude into a display case for a cock was, in part, a reaction to the way (mainstream heterosexual) pornography frequently treats women as a collection of holes. When genuine female pleasure is not the primary concern, the focus is on displaying the insertion of the dick.

Renaissance male nudes and Minimalist art objects (such as Richard Serra's *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)*, and Robert Morris's *L-Beams*) are linked in that they valorize a stereotypically 'masculine' materiality and monumental scale. By taking the hard-edged, pared-down, geometric form of a minimalist abstract sculpture, and poking a (glory) hole in it, my intention (with *Display*) was to subvert a genre that has been heavily male dominated. The serious minimalist art object becomes associated with an act of sexual gratification. I intended this as a comment on the privileging of male artistic genius (suggesting a connection between phallocentric privilege, the admiring gaze, and masturbation).

Fig.9 Caitlin Devoy
Display
2017



DICK ART? Body Contact

I read Robert Morris *Untitled (L beams)* as body-like, phallic, macho. I see them as instances of the same body arranged in different poses. In focusing on pared-back monochromatic form, Morris aimed to offer “maximum resistance to perceptual separation”, in order to make the viewer more aware of themselves “existing in the same space as the work.”^{30 31} The absence of emotion and repetition of abstract geometric forms encourages the viewer to focus on the phenomenological and kinesthetic aspects of the objects. That is to say, their perception of the objects in space and the relationship of their body to the work and space is primary (in contrast to a static visual experience).

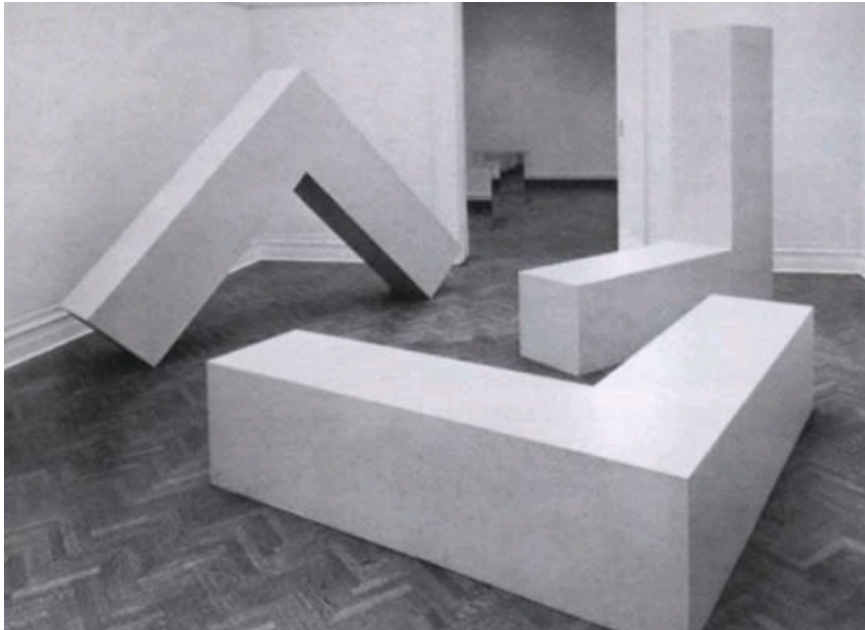


fig.10
Robert Morris
L-Beams

30 Minimalist sculptors rejected surface decoration. Is this a co-incidence given that stereotypically, the decorative carries associations with craft and femininity?

31 Robert Morris in *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) p. 238.

Though in physical proximity to the objects, the viewer is held at a distance. The impenetrability of the abstract form, its tense physicality/stiffness, blocks an emotional reading. This feels to me like an attempt to create a level of objective distance. One of the critiques I would level at Minimalism is the way it valorises objectivity and analytical distance, and connects them with stereotypically hard and industrial ‘masculine’ materials.

The renaissance hierarchy of the senses, equates vision with understanding (and men). Touch is correlated with the body, the material, the feminine, and the emotional, and thus lower in the hierarchy. The Cartesian binary of mind over matter leads to a gendered characterisation of the mind as analytical and rational, in contrast to the sensual emotional body.

Morris questioned this in later work, going on to experiment with felt, and focusing more on the active engagement of the viewers body in work such as *Bodyspacemotionthings*.



fig.11
Robert Morris
Still from Tate video of *Bodyspacemotionthings*



Bodyspacemotionthings, was a 1971 show of Morris's from a period when he was involved with the Judson Dance Theatre. It comprised a collection of objects which the 'viewer' could physically interact with, and was restaged at the Tate in London, 2009. Interestingly, in both instances the show was forced to close early due to injuries to members of the public.

"Climb, balance, crawl and roll on the interactive installation *Bodyspacemotionthings* by artist Robert Morris, as this series of huge props including beams, weights, platforms, rollers, tunnels and ramps built from materials such as plywood, stone, steel plate, and rope transforms the Turbine Hall"³² The materials favoured are hard and industrial. Certainly, the viewer becomes an active participant rather than disembodied viewer, but from a dancers perspective the objects are more like movable props or stage sets than a dance partner. Morris has developed the embodied aspect of the viewer's interaction with the objects by making them climbable or movable, but there isn't the tactility, and reciprocal communication (through breath and embodied mirroring) that happens in dance. The movable objects are shifted by the weight or position of the participants body 'pushing' it, in contrast to blues dance, for example where movement unfolds as suggestion and response (initiated by either partner).

fig.12

Robert Morris

Bodyspacemotionthings

1971

Richard Serra's industrial steel works (such as *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* (1969), and *Sculpture no.3*) focus on the viewer experiencing them not as a purely visual phenomena but as a bodily experience unfolding in space and time. Rather than visually grasping the work in its entirety from a distance they require a more active engagement from the viewer moving around the work. Serra's concentration on heavy-weight materials, dangerous processes like iron welding (with its associations with the male-dominated construction industry), in addition to monumental scale has attracted criticism from feminist art historians and artists for its overbearing and macho aesthetic.

32 Tate Modern, *What's On* retrieve from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/robert-morris-bodyspacemotionthings>

Critic, Ana Chave³³, charged that the Minimalists' "rhetoric of radicality – their use of "strong" and "aggressive" materials, in fact disguised an exaltation of male expressions of power – the strong, the forceful, the authoritative, the commanding."³⁴

Common to both Renaissance sculpture and Minimalism is a focus on formal purity, and material singularity, in contrast to the clutter and unpredictability of real life. This striving towards understanding through reduction (to an ideal or abstraction) validates a tendency towards a singular 'truth' rather than a plurality of perspectives.

Minimalist sculpture is heavily influenced by phenomenology. Phenomenological perception is based on the objective observation of subjective phenomena, such as light, and temperature. However neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio and Guy Claxton, as well as the writer Siri Hustvedt, argue that perception is more complicated than understood by phenomenologists (such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty). Claxton states: "A little thought reveals that perception cannot be a straightforward 'video' of reality, but is already highly interpreted, and arrives saturated with our own experience and desire..."³⁵ We are highly suggestible, and information from one sense subconsciously influences information from another.³⁶

What if we are making value judgments on subjective phenomena without noting the influence of social conditioning and internal states as well as what exists in the world exterior to our bodies? Gallace and Spence note, for example, that our perception of value or reliability is influenced by the physical weight of the object we are handling.³⁷

33 Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power" in *Arts Magazine*, vol 64, no.5 (January 1990), p.43-63.

34 Lisa Phillips, and Paul Schimmel, *Charles Ray*. (The Museum of Contemporary Art: Los Angeles, 1998), p.99.

35 Guy Claxton, *The Wayward Mind. An Intimate History of the Unconscious* (London: Abacus, 2005) p. 227-228.

36 Chef, Heston Blumenthal talks about the multisensory experience of eating, which involves more than just taste and smell. In fact, sound can influence diners perception of flavour. In an experiment at his restaurant 'The Fat Duck', diners were played either an audio track of the sound of bacon sizzling, or of farmyard noises, whilst they tasted a bacon and egg flavoured ice cream. They were asked to rate which flavour was more intense, the bacon or the egg. Diners who had been listening to the sizzling soundtrack reported tasting higher levels of 'bacony' flavour. Charles Spence, et al. "Sound Bites", in *Art and the Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011) p.224-225.

37 Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence, "The neglected power of touch: what the cognitive neurosciences can tell us about the importance of touch in artistic communication" in *Sculpture and Touch* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014) p. 107-124.

When presented with information on a sheet of paper attached to a clipboard, participants will rate the argument attached to the heavier clipboard more highly or more likely to be correct. The subconscious perception of the weight of the clipboard literally gives weight to the argument.

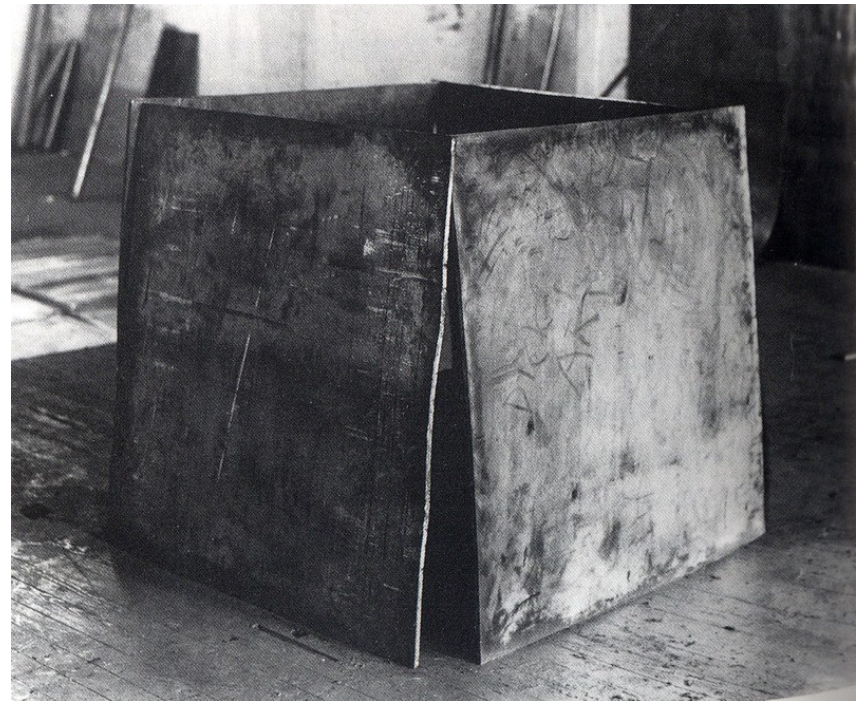


Fig.13
Richard Serra
One Ton Prop (House of Cards)
1969



HAVE A SEAT

My work *Have A Seat* plays with the viewer's perception shifting. From a distance, the pale pink seat has a sense of solidity, albeit with a hint of light penetrating the material and drawing the viewer in for closer inspection. As the viewer approaches the seat, its authenticity (as a 'real' seat) becomes questionable. What initially looked solid, rigid, static is revealed to be a body-like and humorously unstable substance. Should the viewer have a seat, as the title of the work suggests, the acquiescent substance may give way to their body. And is it in fact an inanimate object or a body? If it is a body, is it really ok to have a seat?

I intended the work to reveal the fallibility of the viewer's perception, the making of assumptions, or ability to be subconsciously influenced by the space in which the work is encountered.

Fig 14

Caitlin Devoy

Have a Seat (detail)

2017

Wood, acrylic, gelatine



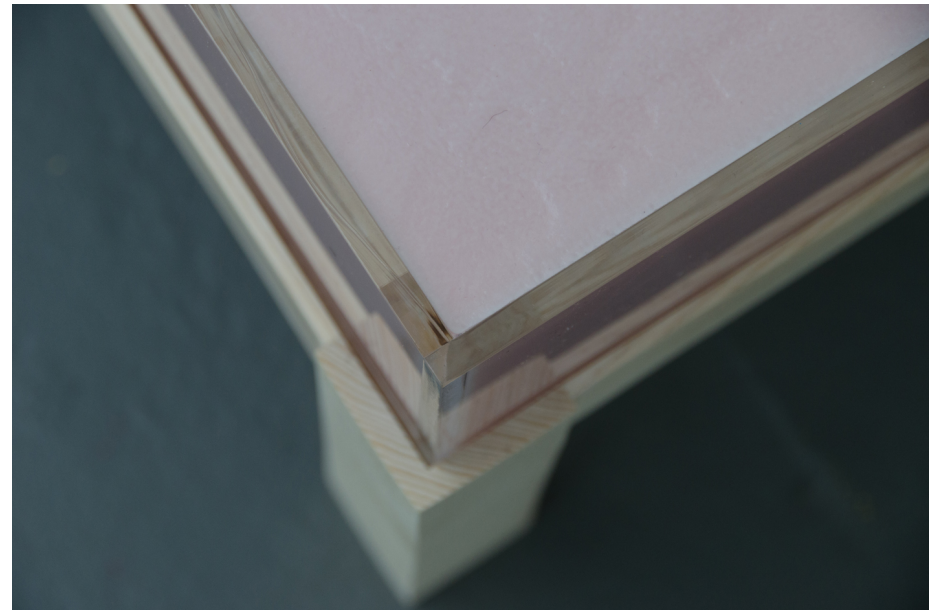
The potentially slapstick moment of sinking right into the gelatine seat was also intended to focus the viewer's attention on a tactile engagement with the material. The delicate, sensual vulnerability of the gelatine combines with a cool clamminess. The material can be alternately perceived as delicate, stilled, sensual, repellant, squashy, or penetrable.

“Sculpture is what you bump into when you back up to see a painting.” Barnett Newman³⁸

Fig. 15 & 16
Caitlin Devoy
Have a Seat (detail)
2017
Wood, acrylic, gelatine

The insertion of the soft, body-like gelatine into an object which references minimalist sculpture aims a barb at the macho materiality of the sculptures such as ‘*L-Beams*’ and ‘*One Ton Prop*’. Turning the minimalist art object into a bench, a non-art item you’d find in a large gallery for the viewer to rest their weary body on as they look at a painting (perhaps Newman’s *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*, latin for *Man, Heroic and Sublime*), undercuts the seriousness with which these objects are customarily approached.

“By its nature humour is anarchistic...and implies when it does not state, criticism of existing institutions, beliefs and functionaries.”³⁹



38 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/159168-sculpture-is-what-you-bump-into-when-you-back-up>

39 Malcolm Muggeridge, “American needs a PUNCH” *Esquire* (1958) p.59-61.

Display and *Have a Seat* were both intended to draw attention to the elevation of some objects over others in the gallery (and by extension, the prioritising of some voices over others). I wanted to draw attention to the binary categorisation of art-object vs non-art object. Traditional gallery conventions reflect a hierarchy of vision over touch. You can touch the non-art but don't contaminate or degrade the art with body contact.

Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence note that since medieval times "... touch has been indivisibly linked to sin, vice, sexuality, perversion and even impurity as opposed to the holiness and purity of vision."⁴⁰

Touch is an important component of my practice, both in the making and the experience of the work. This is not purely in terms of sensual pleasure, but also in terms of my stance on embodied perception which "locates the body as the source of knowing."⁴¹ Touch is not purely sensual or erotic, but also cognitive (contradicting the binary construction of mind over matter/body). Touch provides us with objective information about texture, weight, proximity, and temperature. Touch also comprises 'sensing', feeling, and understanding, and is therefore both an analytical and an emotional sense. Importantly, "Touch is reciprocal, a two way exchange. Every time I touch, I am also touched."⁴²

This idea of reciprocal touch informs my work. Even when the act of touching is only imagined by the viewer I intentionally make work which is materially tempting to investigate through touch, breaking the convention of the gallery. *Have a Seat* proved irresistible.

Fig 17
Caitlin Devoy
Have a Seat (detail)
 2017
 Wood, acrylic, gelatine

⁴⁰ Vision is associated with cognition, or understanding.

Gallace, "The neglected power of touch: what the cognitive neurosciences can tell us about the importance of touch in artistic communication", p. 107.

⁴¹ Daniella Terrile, "Embodied Perception" on *Wiki P2PFoundation* 2012. Retrieve from: http://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Embodied_Perception

⁴² Rosalyn Driscoll, "Aesthetic Touch", in *Art and the Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p.108.



I've long been interested in Dead Air boxes – a safety device used in scientific laboratories. They are designed to allow the body access to an internal chamber whilst preventing direct physical contact with dangerous live contaminants (the gloves allowing and yet impeding contact). They provide a strangely liminal space. Neither entirely interior or exterior, never skin to skin.



fig.18

Caitlin Devoy

Vitrine (I tremble at your touch)

2017

Wood, latex

VITRINE

My works *Vitrine* and *Hand in Glove* both play off this idea of a liminal membrane blocking or confusing a visual and tactile encounter.

Vitrine (I tremble at your touch) fuses the abstract form of a vitrine, with a body-like membranous latex. The opacity of the latex material (and its literal associations with fetish-wear, the body and sex, including surgical gloves and condoms) subverts the usual function of a vitrine. Traditionally, a vitrine protects and displays art object/artefacts, preventing people from touching them.⁴³ It is an object (or receptacle), for looking though, not directly at. In this case, *Vitrine* prevents the viewer from looking inside. The encounter with surface frustrates the eye's expectation of transparency, yet ignites other senses. The latex is both sensual and confusing. It is soft, smooth, delicate, gives way to touch, and yet the smell and coolness are not 'of the body.' The ambiguity of the material tempts the viewer to touch it, to investigate it. Taut from a distance, the material trembles or shudders when the movement of the viewer disturbs the air around the object. The movement of the latex is ambiguous – it could be read as body-like (breathing, trembling), erotic, creepy or humorous. I intended the object to be responsive to the breath, yet the body of the object is still and obstructive. The reaction of the latex membrane to the movement of the viewer is in some ways like the feeling and responding to the breathing of a dance partner in a close embrace. This is particularly so in Blues dance, which is improvisational, close body contact enables each partner to feel the diaphragm rise and fall, enabling an embodied communication which can convey an intention to initiate movement, and at the same time hesitation, relaxation, tension, or anxiety.

In terms of the female nude, *Vitrine* avoids fetishizing segments of the female body, but at the same time it is body-like, vulnerable and alien. I felt the passivity of the object reflected disassociation, making me uneasy. I wanted to place more responsibility on the 'viewer'. To see if it were possible to allow the viewer to inhabit the body language of the object more explicitly.

⁴³ The latex is also UV sensitive, and will degrade over time, subverting the usual function of a vitrine as a robust protector of the objects with in it. *Vitrine* will decay.

INSERTING THE VIEWER INTO THE WORK

HAND IN GLOVE

Hand in Glove returns to the notion explored in *Display* of literally inserting the body into an object.

The two *Hand in Glove* plinth works present the viewer with the choice to activate them, to insert and move their hand inside the object. In choosing to do so, the viewer/participant comes into tactile contact with the sculpture, feeling the silky texture of the wooden plinth and the coolness of the glove. The position of the glove is predetermined, adding a level of suggestion to the participant. It is up to the participant to consider how their interaction, or hand gesture may be received by others in the gallery. This raises the question of what you're prepared to do in front of others, and how viewing conditions affect our behaviour.



Fig.19 (left)
Caitlin Devoy
Hand in Glove, 2 (detail)
 2018
 Wood, electrosoft rubber glove

What does the penetrative aspect involved in activating the work trigger? Some viewers found the puppet-like action amusing initially, whilst others remarked on the latent creepiness to the objects, and feeling there was a level of power play operating.

Fig.20 (below)

Caitlin Devoy

Hand in Glove, 1 (left) and *Hand in Glove 2*

(right)

2018

Wood, electrosoft rubber glove



The *Hand in Glove*/plinth works use a readymade component – a glove – the projection of which, into the object, was partly inspired by the protected environment of the dead air chamber. (The particular type of glove used is an electricians safety glove which insulates against up to 17,000 volts. Both the dead air chamber and the electricians glove are meant to protect the body and create a safe space by avoiding contact with hostile bacteria or an electrical current.) The usual passivity of a plinth is an important factor in the work, as is the placement of the gloves – approximately at crotch height in relation to the body of the viewer. In combination with the sexual innuendo suggested by the act of penetrating the art object and the particular gesture suggested by the positioning of the glove, they conflate idea of body contact or insertion with safety or danger in an uneasy manner.

To me, essentially, these works reflect on consent. I thought people would question whether they should penetrate the object. The cool clamminess of the glove in combination with the dehumanised plinth object was intended to create a feeling of unease. *Hand in Glove 1* (with the glove sticking out the front) was referred to by one person as ‘a groping machine’, and I found it uncomfortable to see people activate the works. On the one hand it felt like *Hand in Glove 2* was victim-like and on the other hand my personal feelings towards the gestures being enacted were stronger than I expected. I noticed other viewers, as well as myself, tense up when *Hand in Glove 1* was activated, particularly when someone was standing near it when this happened. Several viewers kept their distance. It revealed to me how unpleasant it felt to make work that *enacts* or *repeats* that power imbalance in a manner which could be mistaken for endorsing it.

Fig.21

Caitlin Devoy

Hand in Glove 1

2018

Wood, electrosoft rubber glove



“WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT?”

“Making your own jokes is equivalent to taking control over your life – and usually that means taking control away from someone else.”⁴⁴

After the discomfort I felt in relation to people interacting with *Hand in Glove*, I reassessed the idea of creating work which reflected on unease and vulnerability but could be read as positioning the female as assailable. My response was to attempt to re-signify the stereotypically dominant male role. The humour in my work from this point develops more explicitly as a tactic to challenge gendered stereotypes of domination and submission.

DENNIS

Dennis is a direct attempt to use humour in a way that encapsulates the complexity of its potential (as noted by Jennifer Higgie in *The Artist's Joke*): “...to activate repressed impulses, embody alienation or displacement, disrupt convention, and to explore power relations in terms of gender, sexuality, class, taste, or racial and cultural identities.” This work places the shoe on the other foot in terms of objectification.⁴⁵

Dennis is a very strange guy. Some of the inspiration for him came from watching the British comedy show *Greenwing*, set in a hospital. One of the characters, Dr Alan Statham, is a ludicrously uptight, pompous, and sexually obsessed loon who desperately wants to be admired. The pedestal he imagines himself on is constantly being eroded by other characters. His stuttering bodily tension, and lack of control hilariously and painfully reveal his inadequacies. In one sketch he tries to sneak a peak at a male corpse on a gurney in order to compare penis size.⁴⁶ It is refreshing to see male sexual frustration, hysteria and vulnerability, rather than an alpha male.

⁴⁴ Regina Barreca, *Last Laughs, Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988) p.274.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Higgie, *The Artist's Joke*, (London: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2007) p.12.

⁴⁶ *Greenwing*, Dr Alan Statham, YouTube. Retrieve from: https://youtu.be/x_-6fnB4FMk



Fig 22. Caitlin Devoy, *Dennis (Moon Hopper)*, 2018, Rubber moonhopper, silicone penis

Dennis does not exude authoritative grandeur. Far from the heroic nude, he is soft and acquiescent instead of muscular. *Dennis* is overtly sexualized in a humorous way, which isn't flattering. The suggestion that he is to be ridden is implicit, based on the fact that he is part moonhopper. The inflatable aspect of the moonhopper adds to the joke, referencing inflatable sex dolls.

The white of the moonhopper is intended to refer to the white male nude and to marble, but it is a toy and a mass produced object – malleable and generic, alluding to the standardising sexualisation of white female bodies pornographically.⁴⁷

The humour of *Dennis* is complicated. On the one hand he is very comical, but at the same time it the humour is not entirely light-hearted. Given that the male nude commonly encodes power and control, and presents the male as conquering, are we laughing at *Dennis*'s failure to measure up? Or are we laughing uneasily because the dominating power dynamic has been uncomfortably revealed? Does our laughter express our refusal to take him seriously? The work also asks who is in on the joke. The combination of sexualization minus the alpha-male stance is revealing.

⁴⁷ The majority of mainstream pornographic material repeatedly features a narrowly defined set of physical attributes and behaviours.

DICKING AROUND

Physical interaction with sculptural objects in my practice had up until this point been largely implicit, for the viewer to imagine, but in the video work *Dicking Around* not only is the humour explicit, but suddenly the interaction/performative suggestion becomes explicit.

This work combines the sexual and the inept. *Dennis* is a weirdly sexualised but unsexy object. *Dicking Around* conflates the tropes of the music video, the male nude, and the sex toy, and subverts them, turning the formerly heroic male nude into a ludicrous and submissive inflatable plaything. Barbara Kruger “describes the comedic as ‘motored by its intimacy with objectification’...”⁴⁸

Dicking Around objectifies the male for a change, thereby revealing power dynamics around women’s bodies. When women’s bodies are objectified and appraised they are reduced to parts. Men are not usually reduced to a cock to be stared at. Cutting from *Dennis*’s whole ‘body’ to close-ups of his genitalia parodies the way sexualised portions of women’s are highlighted in music videos. Below the surface silliness of the object and its potential to cause embarrassment, it investigates vulnerability and power. Is it emasculating or could it be mocking the Freudian concept of ‘penis envy’? *Dicking Around* suggests macho posturing is a ridiculous performance.

I performed *Dicking Around* as a dance-like choreography to music, specifically Hall and Oates, *I Can’t Go For That* - *No Can Do*.⁴⁹ The combination of the particular song with the blatantly sexualised object created a tension. The sweet way the lyrics, in particular the chorus, are sung and the dreamy feminine arm movements in combination with the sexualised bouncing, were intended to create an uncomfortable ambiguity.⁵⁰ I wanted the audience to be uncertain about how much conscious intent there is to be suggestive. The performance destabilises the song lyrics, their tone or intent becoming questionable. The tension between what is implicit and what is explicit in a song – love or sex for example – and the way the same song ‘reads’ differently depending on the gender of the singer forms a parallel with my practice: allowing a power dynamic that was formerly veiled to be challenged.

48 Higgie, *The Artist’s Joke*, p.15

49 Daryl Hall & John Oates, *I Can’t Go For That (No Can Do)* from the Album *Private Eyes*: 1981. Retrieve from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccenFp_3kq8

50 Mimicking arm movements from the Dying Swan solo in the ballet *Swan Lake*.

*“I, I’ll do anything
That you want me to do
And I’ll do almost anything
That you want me to, ooh*



But I can't go for that, no (no) no can do...”

fig.23

Caitlin Devoy

Dicking Around, still from video.

2018

Rubber moonhopper, silicone penis.

This work attempts to capture what Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave attribute to the comedian, Mae West: “[she] did what was impossible for a woman to do up until then – ridicule sex, while at the same time being sexual herself.”⁵¹

51 Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Women in Comedy* (New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1986) p.182.

The bouncing motion of my body on top of *Dennis*, riding him in an alpha position, parodies sexual acts. Enacting a sexualised movement complicates the reading of the work. I intended to reveal a sexualised power dynamic and gendered double standards around sex. Mae West was characterised as the bawd, the opposite of the sexually passive 'good girl'. Although the work makes *Dennis* look silly, the sexualised movement of my (female) body bouncing adds a charge. In spite of the fact that I am fully clothed (while *Dennis* is the one with his bits out jangling around), by being 'sexual', I leave myself open to insinuation, revealing the pervasiveness of slut-shaming and rape culture.

The presence of my body in the work demonstrates how the personal becomes political; the real (rather than hypothetical) effects of ideology or action come into view.⁵²

52 Amelia Jones, in *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon, 2000) p.20-21

WHIP IT OUT

Despite the fact, as Heartney et al. note, that forty years have passed since Linda Benglis was excoriated for her Art Forum advertisement (see fig.19), the issue of judging and controlling the “proper expression” of women’s sexuality remains.⁵³

What is the “proper” expression? It sometimes seems mind-bendingly difficult to express anything at all about female sexuality, without running into accusations of pandering to the male gaze, atavistic pretension, or sluttiness. There is a real weight of judgement overlaid on women’s bodies and sexuality (whether straight, gay, queer or trans).

From the late 50’s many women artists claimed ownership of the representation of their bodies, rejecting the role of artist muse or passive nude.⁵⁴ Heartney notes the standoff between opposing camps of feminists: those who maintained that the appropriate way to express female experience and concerns was through identification with nature (its associations with creating and sustaining life) and by opposing “masculine aggression”; and those who disagreed with this “essentialist” position.⁵⁵

Heartney (et al.) describe how the pro-sex/porn feminist writers of the 1980’s (for example Camille Paglia and Paula Webster) “suggested that the oppressive potential for sexualised images of women could be countered by images that celebrated female pleasure and desire”.⁵⁶ They refer to Paula Webster’s argument: “If we can switch our focus from men’s pleasure to our own, then we have the potential of creating a discourse that will challenge the values of ‘good girls’ (non-sexual women) and explore the bridge that connects and divides expression and repression.”⁵⁷

Many of the female artists whose work I connect with would fit Heartney (et al’s) concept of the ‘Bad Girl’ in that they “exploit “politically incorrect” and sexually explicit material to challenge the patriarchal image regime.”... and explore “the body’s role in forging our identity” and use their work as a means of “taking control...of the way their sexuality is pictured.”⁵⁸

53 Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.15.

54 Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.15-16.

55 Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.16.

56 Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.19.

57 Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.19.

58 Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.8



Fig.24 (above)

Linda Benglis*Art Forum Advertisement*

This ‘taking control’ of their own representation has taken many forms.

Linda Benglis commented that some of the impetus behind her Art Forum advertisement came from her observation that “there seemed to be no pinups unless they were essentially the object of the male gaze, so...I thought to myself, “What if I was my own subject and my own object, looking back at the men and the viewer in general?”⁵⁹ Benglis’s work contends with sexualised representations of women which privilege male desire and fantasy, and fail to represent female sexuality from a female perspective.⁶⁰ And she does this whilst herself being sexual. There is nothing puritanical about her Art Forum advertisement – it takes visual cues more from pornography than high art or earth-goddess imagery. By representing herself oiled-up, hand on hip, dildo as proxy dick, Benglis’s work attempts to re-signify female sexuality with power and dominance whilst simultaneously taking aim, through humour, at phallogocentric constructions of power as dick-centered. However, many feminists at the time were quick to accuse her, vociferously, of objectification.

59 Linda Benglis in Heartney, *The Reckoning, Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.17.

60 As well as the privileging of male artists in galleries. She is also mocking the idea that women artists are ‘women artists’ rather than just artists, accorded equal status to men.

In contrast, Carolee Schneemann’s work *Interior Scroll*, often described as ‘vulvic’, conflates the central core (womb and vagina) of the female body with a distinctly female creative-core. Schneemann intended to draw attention through this work to the way that the exterior of women’s bodies are fetishized as art objects, by male artists, whilst societally the interior of a women’s body, the vagina, is considered shameful or even dirty.⁶¹ Schneemann intended to counter the view that only ‘masculine’ techniques and modes are valid, and to reveal the sacred, lifegiving nature of the vagina as a source of creative power.

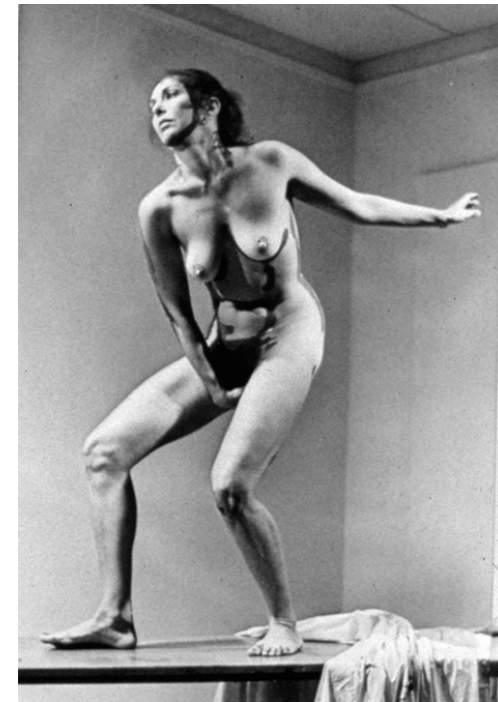


Fig.25 (right)

Carolee Schneemann*Interior Scroll*

61 At the same time, the reading of the scroll performance was a retort to a “structuralist filmmaker” who refused to watch her films...chid[ing] Schneemann for her traditionally feminine [ethereal, emotional, diaristic, layered] — techniques” instead of the masculine “system of the grid / the numerical rational.” Quinn Moreland, “Forty Years of Carolee Schneemann’s “Interior Scroll” (*Hyperallergic*, 2015) Retrieve from: <https://hyperallergic.com/232342/forty-years-of-carolee-schneemanns-interior-scroll/>

Am I allowed to say how irritating I find the word ‘vulvic’ though? This is not to cast aspersions on Schneemann’s criticality, and the validity of her exploration of the female body as active rather passive. The reductivity of using the ‘vulvic’ power to represent women is a bit off-putting however. Is it that I think dicks are more serious? Clearly not. I think it’s more the lack of humour that I find difficult. I’m equally as uninterested in a man talking seriously about how he makes art from his ‘testi-core’.⁶²

I use humour as a tactic to subvert an essentialist position. Humour allows dissent and criticality to include the absurd, and is antithetical to pretension. It enables me to ask questions without claiming singular authority.

“Since the 1970’s, feminist art historians have been pointing out that Western art’s traditional focus on the female nude underscores the male dominated culture’s assumptions about female passivity, sexual availability, and subordination.”⁶³

Feminist artists have employed a multiplicity of tactics to contest male authority, objectifying, fetishized, male-oriented, representations of women, and the bias towards showing work by male artists.⁶⁴ These tactics have included, for example, challenging the art historical bias towards male artists (Judy Chicago, *Dinner Table*), using drag-like performance to examine gendered power (Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)*), revising images of women by switching the gender of the model (Linda Nochlin, *Buy My Bananas*), or taking on a stereotypically masculine posture or stance (Linda Benglis, Art Forum advertisement, or Sarah Lucas *Fight Fire with Fire*, or *Self Portrait with Fried Eggs*).

One area of investigation repeatedly reflected on is the **body**, the gendered body. Is this because women who do not believe in any innate or essential inferiority to men, see the connection of power and privilege with the body you happen to be born into as illogical? Do you have to have a dick to be taken seriously?

Another theme common to many feminist artists is **humour**, employed as a tactic to address gender inequality.

62 I’m alluding here to Vito Acconci’s *Seedbed*, 1972., one of my least favourite works of all time.

63 Heartney, *The Reckoning. Women Artists of the New Millennium*, p.15-16.

64 What constitutes a ‘feminist artist’? Only those who self-identify as feminist artists? I don’t like essentialist categories, so the most important identifying features for me would be someone whose work examines or reflects on gendered power relations. There are obviously many ways to do this ranging from the more overtly activist to the poetic.

So why have I addressed the male body rather than the female? As Amelia Jones notes, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre: “For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen.”⁶⁵ Male representations of sexual fantasy have not only been privileged, but also intellectualised in the gallery. How often do we get to see and hear about women’s pleasure, or how they feel about men’s bodies?⁶⁶

Many feminist artists have worked to take charge of how they are pictured by representing their own bodies and sexuality from a position of agency. After *Dicking Around* I wanted to experiment with a different approach, to put more of the emphasis on placing the male in the position of being viewed, done to, observed. I want men to look at themselves.

65 Jean Paul Sartre, quoted in *Seeing Differently* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012) p.67.

66 Peggy Orenstein refers to the term ‘intimate justice’ in her TED talk ‘*What young women believe about their own sexual pleasure*’. She credits Sara McClelland, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, with coining what she refers to as her “favorite phrase ever in talking about all of this: ‘Intimate justice’. That’s the idea that sex has political, as well as personal implications...And it raises similar issues about inequality, about economic disparity, violence, physical and mental health. Intimate justice asks us to consider who is entitled to engage in an experience. Who is entitled to enjoy it? Who is the primary beneficiary? And how does each partner define “good enough”?” Peggy Orenstein, *What young women believe about their own sexual pleasure*, (TEDTalks, 2016) Video: https://www.ted.com/talks/peggy_orenstein_what_young_women_believe_about_their_own_sexual_pleasure

DANCE FOR ME

Not The Furniture Game

His hair was a crow fished out of a blocked chimney
 and his eyes were boiled eggs with the tops hammered in
 and his blink was a cat flap
 and his teeth were bluestones or the Easter Island statues
 and his bite was a perfect horseshoe.
 His nostrils were both barrels of a shotgun, loaded.
 And his mouth was an oil exploration project gone bankrupt...

And his headaches were Arson in Her Majesty's Dockyards
 and his arguments were outboard motors strangled with fishing line
 and his neck was a bandstand
 and his Adam's apple was a ball cock
 and his arms were milk running off from a broken bottle.
 His elbows were boomerangs or pinking shears.
 And his wrists were ankles
 and his handshakes were puff adders in the bran tub
 and his fingers were astronauts found dead in their spacesuits
 and the palms of his hands were action paintings
 and both thumbs were blue touchpaper.
 And his shadow was an opencast mine...

and his heart was a first world war grenade discovered by children
 and his nipples were timers for incendiary devices
 and his shoulder blades were two butchers at the meat cleaving competition
 and his belly button was the Falkland Islands
 and his private parts were the Bermuda triangle...

The balls of his feet were where meteorites had landed
 and his toes were a nest of mice under the lawn mower.
 And his footprints were Vietnam
 and his promises were hot air balloons floating off over the trees
 and his one-liners were footballs through other peoples' windows
 and his grin was the Great Wall of China as seen from the moon
 and the last time they talked, it was apartheid.

She was a chair, tipped over backwards
 with his donkey jacket on her shoulders.

They told him,
 and his face was a hole
 where the ice had not been thick enough to hold her.

Simon Armitage⁶⁷

67 Simon Armitage, "Not The Furniture Game", *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1993), p. 47. Retrieve full poem from: http://simonarmitage.typepad.com/homepage/2005/11/not_the_furnitu.html

CREAM, CREAM (SOFT), EXTINGUISHER

If my works *Cream*, *Cream (soft)*, and *Extinguisher* were an addendum to the poem, perhaps, rather than the invisibility of the “Bermuda Triangle” they would say: And his cock was a swaying tentacle, a prehensile failure, dessert, a blush-toned question mark, raw pastry, half earthworm, the first bite of an eclair.

Armitage’s use of metaphor in *Not The Furniture Game* demonstrates its potential for humour (in this case black humour, not to mention threat).⁶⁸ Metaphor allows for the oblique, particular and peculiar. It has a layered and enlivening effect, in contrast to the flattening one-dimensionality of the stereotype.

These objects *Cream*, *Cream (soft)*, and *Extinguisher* all liken the phallus to a generic, everyday object. *Cream* and *Cream (soft)* are based on the canisters of spray whipped cream you see lined up on shelves in the chiller section of the supermarket. *Extinguisher* is cast from the type of fire extinguishers you see in kitchens, garages, workshops, anywhere there is a danger of something catching alight.

Different layers of metaphor operate in this re-signification from everyday to phallic objects. On one level there is the reality of the ejaculatory action of these everyday objects. On another level the material qualities of silicone with its body-like tactility allowed me to transpose a combination of softness and movement onto stiff, immobile everyday objects. By undermining their usual rigidity and sexualizing them I intended to make them humorously unstable, perhaps lending them a comic pathos.



fig.26

Caitlin Devoy

Cream

2018

Silicone

⁶⁸ Metaphor: a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. Merriam Webster
Dictionary Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor>

Michelangelo and Bernini transformed the rigidity of marble and, through their virtuosity, gave it the appearance of supple flesh or undulating muscle (see *David*, fig1 or *Apollo and Daphne*, fig2). We can imagine the feeling of the sensual silkiness of the marble were we able to run our fingers over it even as the heft of the marble seduces us intellectually, the grandeur of its physical weight subconsciously creating associations of authority, seriousness, wealth, and power. Though the genitalia of these Classical male nudes are portrayed in a flaccid rather than erect state, materially they are not flaccid – the rigidity and stillness of the marble compensates, for in our minds the works are perpetually hard.

I wanted to reference the sensuality of these nudes whilst undercutting their domineering masculinity: co-opting the squishy precariousness of silicone to contend with the material and authoritative weightiness of the marble, and the generic everyday object to subvert the singular and monumental.



Silicone (though usually of a firmer grade) is commonly associated with prosthetics (for amputated limbs), and sex toys. The softer, more elastic grade of silicone I've used allows the objects to give way to touch, to bend over backwards, to swoon. Though it has reasonable tensile strength it can give off an appearance of vulnerability. It is not overbearing, or overpowering. No longer rigid (associated with the authoritative and powerful), this soft phallic object is able to express multiple states. *Cream* and *Extinguisher* allude to all the states, from tumescence and ejaculation through to detumescence, enabling the phallic object to become mutable or unstable. These objects are sexualised, yet not in the stereotypical style of pornography, which customarily focuses on the representation of the (dominating) erect phallus. The translucence of the silicone allows subsurface scattering, a property shared with human skin. The film industry has in recent years invested considerable energy in mimicking the effect of subsurface scattering when creating CGI characters, such as Gollum or the Navi characters in *Avatar*, in order to avoid the uncanny valley effect and make characters more believable, thus increasing viewer empathy for the characters.⁶⁹

I chose to use silicone for the qualities of flexibility and subsurface scattering in order to give banal everyday objects an emotionality, to subjectify them in a way.

fig.27
Caitlin Devoy
Cream (soft)
 2018
 Silicone

69 Source: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/science-of-light-diffusion-brings-gollum-to-life>

Blush-tone

“Blush-tone”? “Flesh-tone”? Whose tone?

I’ve been using the blush-pink tone because it is so ubiquitously associated with stereotypes of “femininity” (sweet, pretty, not aggressive or demanding), or the infantilization of women (at least in western culture).^{70 71 72} Pink is also often used colloquially to refer to female genitalia.⁷³

Eaton, discussing the female nude in relation to objectification, notes that one of the key characteristics is the generic physiognomic qualities they share. She notes: “Regardless of time period, nudes are regularly **pale** and without any trace of body hair, with full round breasts and erect nipples.”⁷⁴ When I see myself reflected through a male gaze it is as the white female body. But I want to draw attention back onto the trope of the white male artistic genius who for so long has been the creator, but not the object of the gaze.

I’m addressing the ‘white male’, through the white western nude, and the tendency to see white maleness as ‘normal’ (women and other marginalised groups are conceptualised in terms of deviation from this ‘norm’). Artists such as Kara Walker powerfully address race in relation to the nude. The whiteness of Renaissance nudes reflects the racist linking of whiteness with purity, intellect, rationality and the mind, in contrast to the irrational, sexualised baseness of blackness. There are substantial, problematic, racist differences in the depiction of white and ‘non-white’ bodies in western art. However a more extensive examination of race in relation to sexuality is outside the scope of this project.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Pink signifies romance, love, and friendship. It denotes feminine qualities and passiveness. <https://zevendesign.com/color-association/>

⁷¹ Pink is a powerful colour; psychologically. It represents the feminine principle, and survival of the species; it is nurturing and physically soothing. Too much pink is physically draining and can be somewhat emasculating. <http://www.colour-affects.co.uk/psychological-properties-of-colours>

⁷² However the colour pink also has associations with groups involved in advocating or fighting for equals rights for women and LGBTQI people.

⁷³ Janelle Monae celebrates and resignifies ‘Pynk’ in this song, expressing her desire for her female partner, and the sensuality of women’s bodies which she represents as powerful rather than submissive.

Janelle Monae – *Pynk*, from the album *Dirty Computer*, 2018. Retrieve from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaYvIVR_BEc

⁷⁴ Eaton, *Art and Pornography*, p.298.

⁷⁵ Further reflection on racism in relation to sexuality is needed. It don’t think its appropriate for me to be the mouthpiece, given that I’m white, but it is important to acknowledge, signpost, and educate myself further rather than ignore it.



fig.28
Caitlin Devoy
Extinguisher
2018
Silicone

EROTO-METRONOMES

Cream, *Cream (soft)*, and *Extinguisher* reference earlier works I made using gelatine, playing on the suggestive material qualities of the gelatine – its genital-like, trembling constitution. The idea to make the silicone objects literally move originated in an object I made for a performance in collaboration with Claire Harris. *Bin Jelly* was an edible sculpture cast in gelatine. The precarious swaying motion as I de-moulded it was an unexpected and captivating moment for me. Suddenly, the object seemed to dance.



Fig. 29
Bin Jelly
2018
Gelatine



The *Eroto-Metronomes* examine what happens when I increase the weight of scrutiny on the objects, rather than *my* body performing. I didn't want to restrict myself to representations of my body as a basis to talk about sexuality, particularly because the way that I express my attitudes to the body and sexuality is through dance. Dance movement (including sexualised movement) can be used as form of protest, a means of rejecting of authority, and a refusal of shame. Many contemporary choreographers, from Parris Goebbels to Wayne McGregor, employ sensual or sexualised movement in order to express the self-determination of bodies and sexual identities other than the heterosexual white male.⁷⁶ When I dance for myself I feel powerful, but in the context of making work I'm concerned about being objectified. I wanted to remove my body visually from the equation and make the phallic objects dance for me.

One of the things I'm exploring in my work is how to counter the type of toxic, domineering masculinity which men are encouraged to buy into. Instead of a stereotypically aggressively thrusting alpha-male performance, these masculine objects give way and sway. Moving in response to the motorised plinth-like objects they rest on, the elasticity of the silicone allows the objects to mimic the movement of the human body. I intended the experience of the objects not to be purely visual but to be felt through embodied mirroring, rather like a dance experience. The music and the objects' movement suggest the viewer might join in, heightening the innuendo-laden humour.

The form of the plinths allude to minimalist sculpture but their customary 'seriousness' is undercut by the sexualised repetitive robotic movement of the plinth. By swapping the certainty and control associated with weighty rigid materials with flexible silicone and wavering movement I intended to re-signify the phallic. Is it the vulnerability of the silicone objects that I am trying to eroticise? Is this linking of vulnerability, with both the sexual and the humorous aimed at rebalancing the power dynamic, by making the masculine less authoritative, allowing a loosening of restraint, undermining the association of the masculine with control? Or, more threateningly, do they suggest a vulnerability associated with castration or performance anxiety? Or do they move in a way that suggests female pleasure?

Fig.30 **Caitlin Devoy**, *ErotoMetronome (Cream Dance)*, 2018, Silicone

⁷⁶ Dance movement (including sexualised movement) can be used as form of protest, a means of rejecting of authority, and a refusal of shame. Many contemporary choreographers, from Parris Goebbels to Wayne McGregor, employ sensual or sexualised movement in order to express the self-determination of bodies and sexual identities other than the heterosexual white male. Wayne McGregor, *Chroma - The Hardest Button to Button*, performed by The Royal Ballet, 2013. Retrieve from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SMmL6kIx-w>
Parris Goebbels choreography for The Royal Family, HipHop International Dance Championships, 2015. Retrieve from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJy6sR0-MVQ>

Although on a surface level the works could be seen a bit of fun, there's a deeper level on which they reflect my ambivalence. The robotic repetitive movement of the plinths could be read as a reproach to the types of heteronormative phallogentric sexual performances common to pornography. I, like many women, have very mixed emotions towards dicks.^{77 78}

Fig.31 **Caitlin Devoy**, *ErotoMetronome (Extinguisher Dance)*, 2018, Silicone

77 In Aotearoa New Zealand, up to one in three girls will be subject to an unwanted sexual experience by the age of 16 years. The majority of those incidences would be considered serious, with over 70% involving genital contact.

- In Aotearoa New Zealand, up to one in five women will experience sexual assault as an adult.
- For Maori girls and women the likelihood of sexual violence is nearly twice as high as the general population. Pacific and migrant women are also at statistically greater risk of sexual violence.
- There are varying rates for sexual violence offences against males but large scale international prevalence studies have tended to find a figure of one in seven boys.
- Reporting of sexual violence in New Zealand is very low, with an estimated 9% of incidents ever reported to police.
- Sexual violence has a very low conviction rate in Aotearoa New Zealand, with only 13% of cases recorded by the Police resulting in conviction.
- Media reporting on issues of sexual violence is often under-informed and defends public myths and misconceptions about the dynamics of sexual violence. This misinformation affects society's shared understanding of and attitudes to sexual violence, promoting false narratives and rape-supportive attitudes in society.

Source: *Rape Prevention Education New Zealand Whakatu Maori*, Statistics. Retrieve from:
<http://rpe.co.nz/information/statistics/>

78 "It is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. Around 120 million girls worldwide (slightly more than 1 in 10) have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. By far the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against girls are current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends. Adult women account for 51 per cent of all human trafficking victims detected globally. Women and girls together account for 71 per cent, with girls representing nearly three out of every four child trafficking victims. Nearly three out of every four trafficked women and girls are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation." Source: United Nations, Women. Retrieve from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>



Is it weird to make ‘feminist’ art which places so much focus on male genitalia? Shouldn’t I be making art about women?

After frequent comments about my “dick obsession” I began to wonder. But as it turns out I’m in good company. Jennifer Morgan notes that many feminist artists, including Renate Bertlmann, Linda Benglis, Shelley Lowell, and Louise Bourgeois, “...rendered prominent the male member to reverse its phallic power and expose its crude potential to dominate.”⁷⁹

Sarah Lucas does not self-identify as a feminist artist, yet there is a commonality with my work in aspects such as humour, the use of everyday objects, and the representation of the body from a female perspective.



fig.32

Sarah Lucas

Got a Salmon on (Prawn)

⁷⁹ Jennifer Morgan, *Renate Bertlmann*, (London: Prestel, 2016) p.56.

In photographic works such as *Got a Salmon on (Prawn)* Lucas represents the nude male body with an everyday object standing in for his genitalia. As he cracks the lager can open the beer splurges out. The stereotypically macho stance and possibly inept act combine humorously. She represents masculinity as performative act, thus undercutting the viewers ability to take him seriously. Portraying the male model with a can of lager in front of his genitalia also conflates the phallus with everyday ordinariness.

fig.33

Sarah Lucas

Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab



Works such as *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab* reference the body (in this case female), using everyday objects. The table acts as a body proxy and the food items arranged on it are laden with sexist innuendo. Lucas takes the objects and assembles them into a kind of tableau, a bit like a still life and yet unlike a traditional still life. Although we can ponder the ephemeral nature of the food objects and how that relates to death and ourselves, the ‘serious’ contemplation is undercut by our recognition of the food items resemblance to female breasts and genitalia.

There is a contrast in Lucas's representation of the male and female that pops up in other works (such as *Chicken Knickers*). Lucas plays on everyday sexist attitudes: the male is generally represented as posturing but 'ordinary' (and therefore fallible), whilst the female is frequently portrayed in an abject manner (see *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab*). There are of course exceptions in photographic self-portraits (like *Fighting Fire with Fire*, and *Self Portrait with Fried Eggs*) in which her androgynous appearance and 'masculine' stance subvert stereotypically 'feminine' representations seen in advertising imagery.



fig.34

Sarah Lucas
Chicken Knickers

Lucas often references the crassness of colloquial sexist banter in her practice. As Matthew Collings points out in *Sarah Lucas*, she has stated in interviews "the reason she uses 'sexist

attitudes' is because 'they're there'."⁸⁰ In other words they're not abstract, but as everyday as the objects she uses.



fig.35

Sarah Lucas
Self Portrait with Fried Eggs

⁸⁰ Matthew Collings, *Sarah Lucas* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002) p.33.

I share this interest in everyday objects acting as proxies for genitalia, however my focus differs in emphasis. I accentuate the body-like in terms of the tactile materiality of the objects (often simultaneously sensual and silly), and more recently their body-like movement. Rather than just objects for looking at the *ErotoMetronomes*, suggest tactile body contact or active participation from the viewer. The objects themselves are, perhaps uncomfortably, closer to body-like – more so than the everyday objects Lucas uses. Like Lucas I intended them to be humorous but my humour operates both on a visual level in terms of their genital-like shape and tactility, and an embodied level. I intended to reduce the distance between viewer and object by employing sexualised movement. The visual recognition of the *Erotonomes* sexualised movement is intended to trigger an embodied mirroring response. This embodied simulation (potentially) felt by the viewer aims to humorously heighten the sexual innuendo of the objects.

CONCLUSION

On the day I am writing this conclusion a confrontation between toxic masculinity and social justice are playing out in real time. In spite of multiple, credible allegations of sexual misconduct and assault, Brett Kavanaugh is poised to be confirmed as a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.⁸¹ And it is not solely men who support this patriarchal abuse of power.

At the same time, the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad for their efforts to fight sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.⁸² Their work, and refusal to be silent on these issues, is heroic.

Reflecting on gendered power historically reveals both the persistent and pervasive treatment of women as sexualised objects. I have attempted to revise ‘the nude’ and reveal the gendered power dynamic of male dominance and female passivity (which privileges a fetishizing male-oriented gaze) in order to make clear that it does matter when the socially and politically dominant voice controls the narrative.

When Serra, Judd and Morris investigate embodied experience as abstract phenomenon whilst employing monumental scale and weighty materiality, which are loaded with masculine authority, they fail to notice gendered differences in our experience as bodies in the world. Due to the ubiquity of objectifying representations (and live experiences) women do not get to walk around those sculptures merely thinking about ‘the body’ in relation to the object in the same way Serra (et al.) do. Women’s bodies are not neutral and autonomous from scrutiny.

Works such as *Have a Seat* and *Vitrine* made last year reflected my vulnerability. I intended the material defencelessness of the objects to engender empathy in the viewer, or conversely to reveal a lack of tenderness and care. However, I have come to question whether laying these bodies bare repeats the trope of passivity, the ubiquity of which makes it invisible to those in a position of privilege.

The power dynamic encoded in ‘the nude’ persists: in advertising, music videos, and pornography. My intention has been to reveal the heterosexist voice controlling the narrative around the “proper” expression of women’s sexuality. In representing the male body from a female perspective my intention is twofold: to reveal to the male viewer what objectification feels like, and to reflect on the connection between social power and sexuality.

In creating sexualised work I left myself exposed to the possibility of sexist assumptions being made around my sexuality and behaviour. Reactions to my work revealed uncomfortably sexist attitudes towards a woman ‘being sexual’, attitudes shared by both men and women. For women, the experience of being sexualised and yet also shamed for expressing sexuality is omnipresent. For the LGBTQI community, so too is the experience of being shamed for expressing sexuality that deviates from a heterosexist white male “norm”.

One of the reasons I employ humour in my work is in order to reveal these attitudes, and to attempt to rebut and refuse that shame. Shame is a powerful way to diminish and control people.

I discovered in producing this body of work that humour and criticality are not mutually exclusive. Humour and metaphor allow for a more complex examination of stereotypically binary positions – allowing multiple and conflicting emotions to be present simultaneously. Humour is a powerful means of revealing who is in control and expressing dissent.

81 *The Guardian*, October 2018, Retrieve from: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/05/brett-kavanaugh-us-senate-vote-supreme-court>

82 *The Guardian*, October 2018, Retrieve from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2018/oct/05/nobel-peace-prize-2018-live-updates>



fig.36

Caitlin Devoy*Pygmalion and Galatea* (after Girodet)
2018

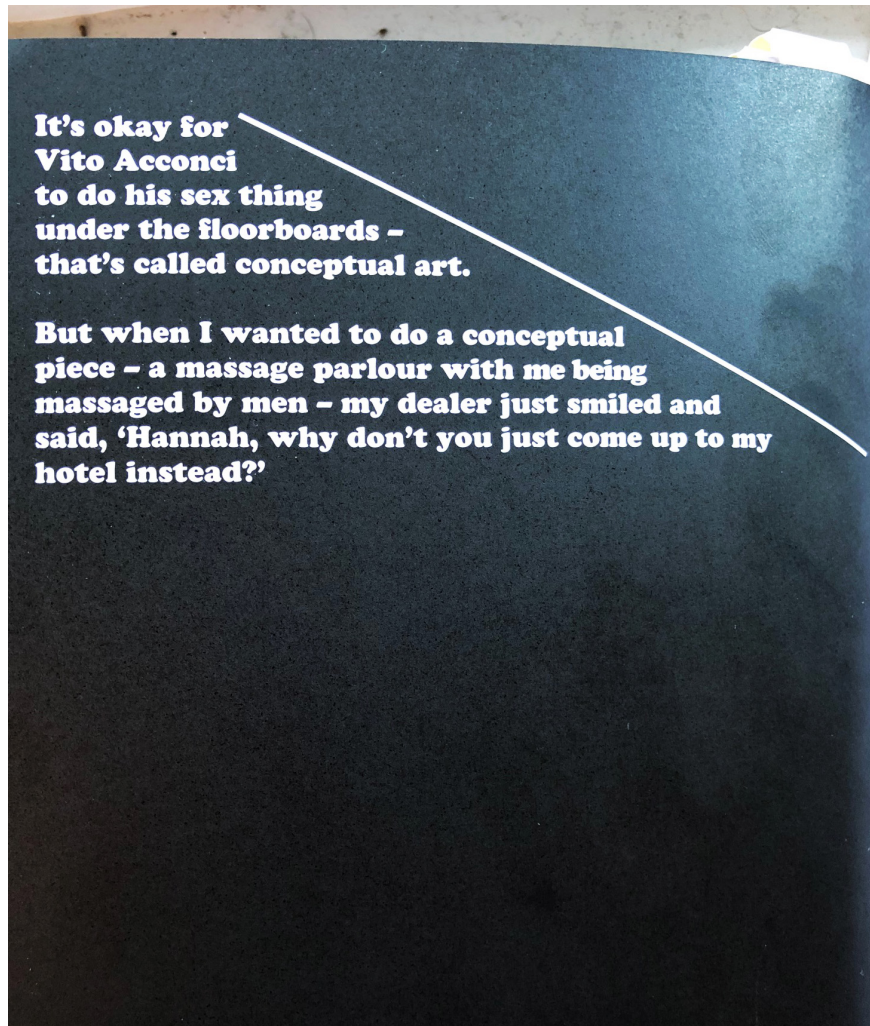


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List of Figures:

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David

1501-1504

Marble

Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

Retrieve from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo_%27s_David#/media/File:David_05.jpg

Fig. 2:

Gian Lorenzo Bernini

Apollo and Daphne

1622-1625

Marble

Galleria Borghese, Rome.

Retrieve from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apollo_and_Daphne_\(Bernini\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apollo_and_Daphne_(Bernini).jpg)

Fig. 3:

Gian Lorenzo Bernini

Rape of Proserpina

1622

Marble

Galleria Borghese, Rome.

Retrieve from:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Rape_of_Proserpina_\(Rome\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Rape_of_Proserpina_(Rome).jpg)

Fig. 4:

Gian Lorenzo Bernini

Rape of Proserpina (detail)

1622

Marble

Galleria Borghese, Rome.

Retrieve from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Rape_of_Proserpina_02.jpg

Fig. 5:

Praxiteles

Aphrodite of Knidos (roman copy, original destroyed)

330BC (est)

Marble

Museo Pio-Clemento, Vatican City.

Retrieve from:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cnidus_Aphrodite_Roman_copy_after_4th_century_BC_Greek_original_Palazzo_Altemps_Rome_\(8737574339\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cnidus_Aphrodite_Roman_copy_after_4th_century_BC_Greek_original_Palazzo_Altemps_Rome_(8737574339).jpg)

Fig. 6:

Marcel Duchamp

Étant Donnés (Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*) (interior view)

1946-1966

Mixed Media Installation

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Philadelphia.

Fig. 7:

Marcel Duchamp

Étant Donnés (Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*) (detail, door with peepholes)

1946-1966

Mixed Media Installation

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Philadelphia.

Fig. 8:

Caitlin Devoy

Display

2017

Acrylic and vinyl.

Fig. 9:

Caitlin Devoy

Display

2017

Acrylic and vinyl.

Fig 10:

Robert Morris

Untitled (L-Beams)

1946-1966

originally plywood, later versions made in fiberglass and stainless steel.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Fig. 11:

Robert Morris

Bodyspacemotionthings (video still)

originally 1971, restaged at Tate Modern, London in 2009.

Retrieve from:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/robert-morris-bodyspacemotionthings>

Fig. 12:

Robert Morris

Bodyspacemotionthings

1971

Fig. 13:

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One Ton Prop (House of Cards)

1969 (re-fabricated 1986)

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MoMA, New York.

Fig. 14:

Caitlin Devoy

Have A Seat (detail)

2017

Wood, acrylic, gelatine.

Fig. 15:
Caitlin Devoy
Have A Seat (detail)
2017
Wood, acrylic, gelatine.

Fig. 16:
Caitlin Devoy
Have A Seat (detail)
2017
Wood, acrylic, gelatine.

Fig. 17:
Caitlin Devoy
Have A Seat (detail)
2017
Wood, acrylic, gelatine.

Fig. 18:
Caitlin Devoy
Vitrine (I tremble at your touch)
2017
Wood, acrylic, latex.

Fig. 19:
Caitlin Devoy
Hand in Glove, 2 (detail)
2018
Wood, electrosoft rubber glove

Fig. 20:
Caitlin Devoy
Hand in Glove, 1 (left) and *Hand in Glove 2* (right)
2018
Wood, electrosoft rubber glove

Fig. 21:
Caitlin Devoy
Hand in Glove, 1
2018
Wood, electrosoft rubber glove

Fig. 22:
Caitlin Devoy
Dennis
2018
Rubber moonhopper, silicone penis.
Fig. 23:
Caitlin Devoy
Dicking Around, still from video.
2018
Rubber moonhopper, silicone penis.

Fig. 24:
Linda Benglis
Art Forum Advertisement
November 1974

Fig. 25:
Carolee Schneemann
Interior Scroll
(Image from performance)
1975
Retrieve from: <https://fineartmultiple.com/blog/carolee-schneemann-interior-scroll-masterpiece/>

Fig. 26:
Caitlin Devoy
Cream
2018
Silicone

Fig. 27:
Caitlin Devoy
Cream (soft)
2018
Silicone

Fig. 28:
Caitlin Devoy
Extinguisher
2018
Silicone

Fig. 29:
Caitlin Devoy
BinJelly (object made for a performance)
2018
Fig. 30:
Caitlin Devoy
Eroto-Metronome (Cream Dance)
2018
Acrylic, Motor, Silicone

Fig. 31:
Caitlin Devoy
Eroto-Metronome (Extinguisher Dance)
2018
Acrylic, Motor, Silicone

Fig.32:
Sarah Lucas
Got a Salmon on (Prawn)
1994
Cibachrome print

Fig. 33
Sarah Lucas
Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab
1992
Table, fried eggs, kebab, photograph
Tate Modern, London.

Fig. 34:
Sarah Lucas
Chicken Knickers
1997
R-type print
Tate Modern, London.

Fig. 35:
Sarah Lucas
Self Portrait with Fried Eggs
1996
C-print

Fig.36
Caitlin Devoy
Pygmalion and Galatea (after Girodet)
2018
Digital Image

Fig.31
Hannah Wilke
“A Very Female Thing”, in *Sexuality*, p.28

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