

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Protesting Sex Slavery: The Textile Doll as Activism

If anything, art is ... about morals, about our belief in humanity.

Without that, there simply is no art."

Ai Wei Wei (The Tate 2017)

Master of Fine Arts

Massey University, Wellington

Rosie White

2017

Table of Contents

Abstract

1. Introduction

2. Modern Slavery

3. Sexual Offending and Art

4. The Doll in Contemporary Art

5. Art as Activism

6. Materiality and the Maker

7. Conclusion

Bibliography

ABSTRACT

Natural disasters, climate change, war and poverty have increased the vulnerability of migrants to modern slavery. Human traffickers prey upon post-disaster migrant populations who are vulnerable to promises of jobs and security. And among the most vulnerable are children, who are often given no choices. The incredibly sad yet lucrative side of sex trafficking is that a child or a young person's body can be sold repeatedly for high profit with low overheads – often leading to a lifetime of severe trauma.

This project involves the textile practice of cloth dolls. Dolls have rich cultural significance. They are used in children's play, religious ceremonies, and are often dressed in national costumes. They are used in counselling to help victims deal with traumatic experiences. And as artist Eric Fischl (Fischl 2015) points out, they are a widespread genre in contemporary art, used by artists such as Hans Belmar, Cindy Sherman, Louise Bourgeois, and Morten Bartlett. And textiles themselves have been used as a form of protest from suffragette banners to the dolls of the Chilean Arpilleras.

The cloth dolls that have been made as part of this project highlight and protest issues of sex trafficking. The dolls are darned and patched, just as the women and children, who are rescued by organisations that fight against modern slavery, need mending and restoration. They have a name tag on their ankles with a URL directing people to an agency that fights modern slavery and its consequences. They have been left in public places and displayed in a gallery setting.