

# TREBUCHET

Increasing the range of art

The Body

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## CONTENTIOUS NUDES

Edward Lucie-Smith on the revolutionary impulse

## JOHN STEZAKER AT THE APPROACH

Conceptualist and romantic photo-collagist provides insight into depiction

## SUFFERING AND TRANSFORMATION

The body as a symbol for psychic change

Mothmeister | Stelarc | Louis Cole (Knower) | Bert Gilbert | Adam Dix | Katharine Dowson | Martha Parsey  
Ron Athey | Mike Laird | Andrew Litten | Damien Meade | Gail Olding | Sarah Sitkin | Nestor Pestana

Photograph by Ben Connell, courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery.



André Hemer,  
*The Cobra  
Effect #8*,  
2018

# CONTENTS

# 12

**ELECTRICITY AND TRANSHUMAN MUSIC**  
James Sclavunos and Michaela Davies explore agency and transgression



# 38

**JOHN STEZAKER AT THE APPROACH**

Conceptualist and romantic photo-collagist

# 66

**CONTENTIOUS NUDES**

Edward Lucie-Smith on the revolutionary impulse

# 94

**SUFFERING AND TRANSFORMATION**

The body as a symbol for psychic change

# 118

**LOREENA MCKENNITT: FOLK ACTIVIST**

The Canadian Celtic diaspora and the New World online

# 138

**A RICH BODY OF DATA**  
The flows and forms of MutualArt



---

# 150

## MODERN PATRONAGE

The inside edge of the Montblanc Cultural Foundation

## REGULARS

- 04 Contact & Credits
- 06 Editorial
- 08 Online digest
- 162 Subscriptions

## ARTISTS ON THE BODY

---

24

Mythological entropy

Mothmeister: Revelations behind the mask.

32

Progressive augmentation

Stelarc: Engineering the interface

54

Keeping in the shape of rhythm

Louis Cole: From Knower to Solo

56

Alchemical transformations in soul and psyche

Bert Gilbert: Rites of passage, skins of change

76

Hypnotic memories of the future

Adam Dix: Science fiction and new dimensions in art.

80

Lungs of coral, hearts of stone

Katharine Dowson: Internal beauty reflected in nature

86

Elegant geometry, structure and violence

Martha Parsey: Symbolic feminism and the revolt

110

Scars and revelations

Ron Athey: Personal explorations and public displays.

114

The depth of the vessel

Mike Laird: The inner limits of the human body

126

Pain, wit and gesture

Andrew Litten: Timeless models of expression

130

Mud and the body by-product

Damien Meade: Making the artificial appear sentient

132

The poetry and potency of presence

Gail Olding: Emotional access

146

Sculpture and abstract sensation

Sarah Sitkin: Bodies in decline, bodies at rest

156

Existing beyond the body

Nestor Pestana: Speculative design and the new human

---

# Trebuchet challenges entrenched views by bringing new creative ideas to the frontline of culture.

*Something in me knows where I'm going, and – well,  
painting is a state of being. ... Painting is self-discovery.  
Every good artist paints what he is.*

- Jackson Pollock

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# THE BODY MASKS

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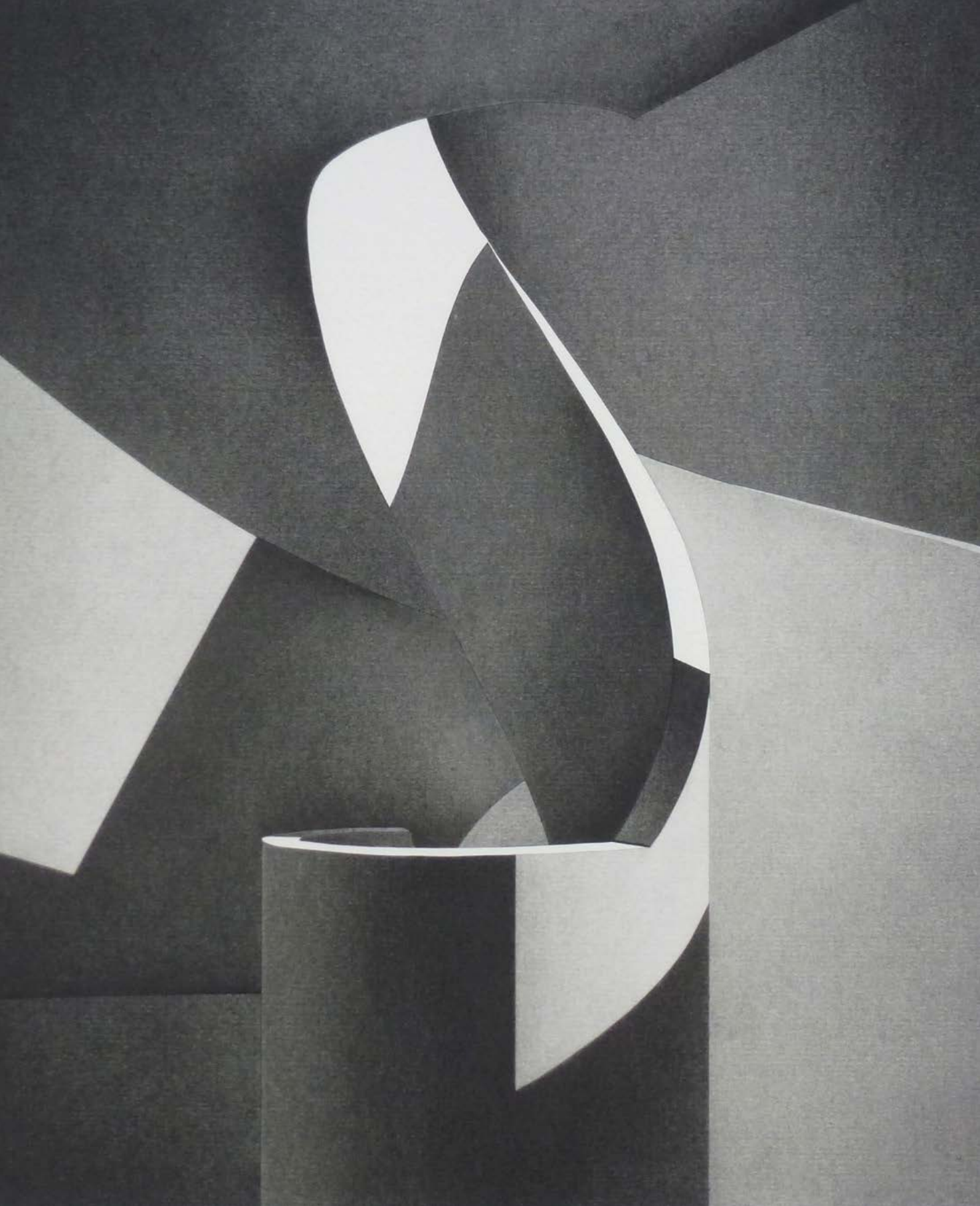
*There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;*  
-TS Eliot, *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*. (1915)

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In this issue of *Trebuchet* we look at how a variety of artists have approached remaking the body: as a canvas, a template, and as a site of investigation and statement. The representation of humans within societies has been central to the discussion of who and what we are, asking where does the individual end and the social body start? Where do transgressions against the body move from an agent's agency to a site of conspicuous controversy?

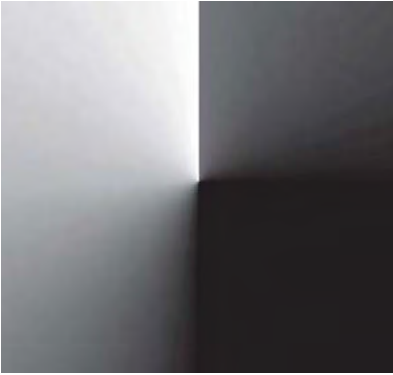
Society is a compact in which each individual forgoes actions and behaviours (sometimes this is easy, sometimes hard) in order to exist comfortably within local and contemporary values. The representation of the body has been variously knotted with social values, from Hitler's 'degenerative' assignation to Marshall McLuhan's analysis of Cubism, where the medium of painting replaces the content. In both cases we are asked to read the body as a place of action, philosophy and normative association where what we are seeing is intellectually demonstrative rather than just photorealistically figurative. We are asked to look beyond the body's physical attributes and into its being, as it appears to others and to ourselves.

The hand, the eye, the neck and the mouth are all symbols imbued with intent. From Ron Athey's visceral explorations of the body to Martha Parsey's layered figures to Loreena McKennitt's search for Celtic identity to the investigations of Stelarc, James Sclavunos and Michaela Davies into transhumanism, the spectrum of work presented here provides cardinal directions from which we can evaluate the continuing fascination we have with our bodies.



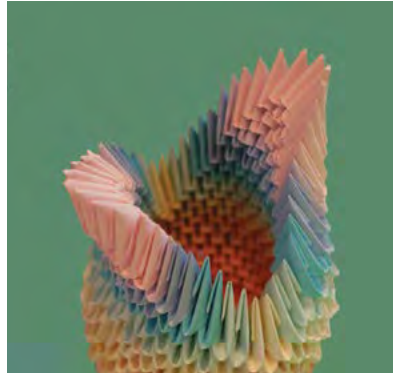


# AS SEEN ON ONLINE



## **SOUND** **NO SPACE FOR THE UNEXPECTED - XOR GATE**

The latest creative manifestation of Donald, one half of Detroit electro legends Drexciya and the main figure behind the projects Dopplereffekt, Arpanet, Der Zyklus and more.



## **SOUND** **MELTED ON MY CORTEX**

"It is more progressive, more uplifting, more melancholic, more dynamic, there is a greater emphasis on light and shade, it is heavier, it is more delicate, it has more beauty, it has more darkness"



## **ART** **ED KIENHOLZ' EARLY WORK**

Ed Kienholz is an assemblage artist, an installation artist, and a conceptual artist; which is to say that his work lies somewhere within that matrix. Showing at Blain|Southern, London, 2018.



## **SOCIETY** **THE PASSION OF WU YONGNING**

The final tragic dance of Chinese rooftop artist Wu Yongning.



**ART**  
**POSTCARDS FROM THE LOST GENERATION: PICASSO 1915-1925**

Review of 'Pablo Picasso: between cubism and classicism 1915-1925' ed. Berggruen and Von Liechtenstein.



**ART**  
**WHY BEING AN ARTIST IS NOT A JOB**

Andy Warhol famously called his studio "The Factory" and employed assistants. Surely this was a job?



**ART**  
**ANTI-ART REFLECTING A KNOWING SOCIETY**

'Anti Art' is a reflection of the often ironic, self knowing stance of the artistic player who undermines conventions.



**SOCIETY**  
**EQUIVALENCE & THE LOSS OF THE ENGAGED HUMAN**

Postmodernity as a condition of being for those of us who inhabit the developed world in the later 20th and early 21st century can be difficult to fully grasp.

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**SOCIETY**  
**ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE: IAN MCKELLEN PLAYS HIS PART**

Frank self-analysis offers some fascinating insight into Ian McKellen's career trajectory; an essential watch for both fans and those interested in an experienced actor's perspective.

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**Those who do not want  
to imitate anything,  
produce nothing**

- Salvador Dalí



# Vanessa Prager

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James Sclavunos & Michaela Davies explore agency and transgression

# Electricity and transhuman music

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Previous page: Photograph of Jim Sciavunos by Daniel Éram. Left: Attention is a scarce resource photo by Liam Loke, 2013. Courtesy of M.Davies

### **Electrical Muscle Stimulation (EMS)**

Electrical muscle stimulation (EMS) is the elicitation of muscle contraction using electrical impulses.

The impulses are delivered through electrodes on the skin near to the muscles being stimulated.

The impulses mimic the action potential that comes from the central nervous system, causing the muscles to contract.

The body is an electrical emitter, receiver and network station. Interconnected points vibrate with pulse messages; somewhere amongst the thought, signals and the noise of action there is some obscure deity called us.

Music changes us; the electrical impulses coursing through our brains are changed when we make sense of auditory inputs. Sonic experimentation has long pushed the boundaries of what we consider recognisable as music. We've changed the setting, format, range, production, even the value of music as a cultural artefact, however, what has remained largely sacrosanct is the role of agency in the creation of music.

Starting from a shared appreciation of the creative possibilities of Michaela Davies' art-music explorations, Bad Seed James Sclavunos and the Australian avant-garde cellist explored how control might be exerted over musicians via EMS (electrical muscular stimulation). The resulting experimental productions marked the beginning of an exploration by the two artists into the role of the body in performance and whether physical agency and humanity are as closely tied together as most would expect.

Speaking to *Trebuchet*, Sclavunos and Davies (via a less painful electronic medium) described the history of the project and where this visceral investigation might lead.



James Scavunos: Michaela and I first met at a Grinderman gig when the band played at a festival in Sydney. She approached me after the show and proposed a project that sounded pretty intriguing, that would have entailed me triggering MIDI impulses generated by my playing on a drum kit and these impulses would be turned into electrical stimuli that would control various muscles in her body. Now this sounded like good fun, but also didn't sound very... it sounded a bit S&M to me. Not that I have anything against that. I'm happy to go there if I'm paid the appropriate fee and I get to wear chains and a black leather bodysuit, but clearly this was a different kind of proposal.

The more I learned about what she was on about, the more interested I was in the creative potential and philosophical implications. But it wasn't until I had seen some actual footage of some of her pieces (in particular her 'dance' piece *Subsoma*) that I became very excited about the possibility of collaborating. Being a cellist, Michaela had already done numerous music-based pieces incorporating the EMS technology. I was specifically interested in collaborating on a musical piece that would integrate involuntary musical performance into a traditional score. The technology she was using was in fact pretty crude at that point, but there was enough potential there to encourage us to get together to see if we could come up with a diverse palette of sounds that could be produced exclusively by this technique.

In the very hot and humid summer of 2012, Michaela and I met up in Brooklyn, NY, and hunkered down with our laptops and her EMS set-up in my basement and we set about experimenting on each other to see what muscles controlled what sort of movements, and how those movements might interact with stringed instruments, and what strengths and durations and combinations of electrical stimuli produced the most interesting and reliable sounds. Michaela fortunately has a modicum of anatomical knowledge; I had absolutely none. Regardless of that, we learnt very quickly—and painfully—that it was all a bit hit-and-miss: different voltages prompted different reactions in different people; of course, not all bodies are the same! Further, we found that if the position of a

pad had shifted by even less than a millimetre each time it was applied, it might produce a different degree of reaction, because a different part of the muscle was being activated. We could easily customise the size of the pads to suit whichever muscle we were endeavouring to target, but it was still very hard to pinpoint the exact spots that consistently produced the ideal involuntary movement we wanted. Further complicating matters, if we were mildly sweaty (which we often were, it being summer and all) the pads became less efficient, as our skin was less conductive with a layer of perspiration.

In any case, we spent about a month diligently and methodically charting out an inventory of possibilities and permutations involving different kinds of controlled movements. We experimented with controlling finger movement as well, but the technique did not lend itself to fretboard work, as we couldn't devise a way to control finger pressure. It did look pretty cool, though, in a creepy kind of way.

So at some point I proposed to Michaela that we work together on a piece for a string quartet, a format that Michaela had already experimented with, and supplement that with a pair of trained classical musicians who would work off a traditional score. The traditional players would play side by side with the programmed musicians who would be responding synchronously to a MIDI score. The programmed players could be either completely untrained, without ever having touched a violin before in their lives, or be proper classically trained musicians, but either way, at least in theory, their response to the EMS should produce interesting results. With this set-up in mind, I wrote a three-movement score to accompany and interweave with the more unpredictable performance aspects that the EMS would engender.

The idea was experimental in every sense, because regardless of rehearsals we couldn't entirely predict how well it was going to go on the night. As I've said the technology was a bit crude and you couldn't count on a 100 per cent consistent result every time. That was part of the reason why we wanted to framework the MIDI-programmed components within a written score, but the

## **“WHAT STRENGTHS AND DURATIONS AND COMBINATIONS OF ELECTRICAL STIMULUS PRODUCED THE MOST INTERESTING AND RELIABLE SOUNDS”**

piece also quite intentionally has elements built into it over which I could not or did not exert absolute control.

We also wanted to explore both the contrasts and the similarities of the trained and untrained players. Classical musicians are impelled by their disciplined musical education to strive to play perfectly no matter what the obstacles, and in this case no matter how much the pads were forcing them do otherwise. The untrained string players, on the other hand, were just going with it, as it were. The results in either case were equally interesting, from a behavioural point of view as well as the sonic outcome.

Of course, there was no way to build in pitch variations in the MIDI programming because we couldn't control finger movement and pressure to any practical result, so we left that up to the whims and taste of the players. The musicians who were following the written score were reading traditional notation that designated precisely defined pitched and rhythmic parts. The MIDI-controlled players would be controlled rhythmically with their bow strokes, but the pitches were determined either by tuning of their instrument and where the bow happened to land across the frets, or in some cases we directed or left it up to them what pitches to choose. There were some performances variables we left open-ended like that.

So, obviously there was always going to unavoidably be a lot of chance and inconsistent elements in any given performance of the piece, but that was fine by us. Some degree of improvisation on the part of the players was expected and even required by us. None of the players, neither those following the traditional score nor those being triggered by electrical pulses, were strictly puppets nor were either fully using free will. At the end of the day, I guess a score is a score, to be followed, whether by 'choice' or forcibly compelled.

### **Is there a larger message about free will and determinism here?**

JS: Yes, there is, and Michaela has been exploring those themes throughout her own work. However, I think anyone can easily glean some of the fundamental ideas we were exploring in this piece. It was Michaela who came up with the title of the piece, by the way—*FM-2030*—as a tribute to the transhumanist/futurist philosopher of that name. Michaela introduced me to his writings. I think you can see the influence of his ideas on thinkers like Dr Michio Kaku and Ray Kurzweil. In any case, it's not so much that I've wholeheartedly embraced his philosophy, but we were definitely inspired by the spirit of his philosophy, and his passionate but unsentimental embrace of the possibilities of improving the human being by artificial means.

Michaela Davies: *FM-2030*, so named for the transhumanist philosopher Fereidoun M. Esfandiary, explores sonic possibilities and human limits at the interface of technology, live performance and composition. The work harnesses the bodily convulsions produced by electrical impulses to control performers in a string quartet, who are literally shocked into playing their instruments. The performers in the quartet are connected to a custom-built electric muscle stimulation (EMS) device, which sends electrical impulses to their muscles, generating specific involuntary movements.

The involuntary elements of the work are controlled via a composed MIDI sequence. An additional cello and violin accompany the 'robotic' quartet, playing parts written as a notated score. The work creates an absurd dialogue between the EMS-controlled players and the 'voluntary' musicians through the use of repetition, call and response and other techniques from the classical lexicon.

The use of EMS in this context extends the potential of the human body, enabling the performers to execute tasks beyond conscious capabilities. The performers' bodies

become a technological resource controlled by the musical score, to execute complex rhythmic structures, precision phasing and other techniques they would otherwise be unable to perform of their own volition. The interface also enables the performers to play in rhythmic unison without any external cues or obvious tempo.

By placing non-musicians in a formalised performance setting with trained musicians, and controlling their limbs so that they execute complex rhythms and techniques which would otherwise be impossible, the work speaks to the 'democratisation' of music with the advent of user-friendly tech, and the subversion of cultural traditions previously reserved for the elite or trained initiates.

Inserting these robotic elements into an enduring emblem of Western classical tradition, this eighteenth-century-meets-cyborg string ensemble provides a stark example of the man/machine interfacing that is central to most contemporary music creation, production and performance, and points to a growing reliance upon machines to perform repetitive or difficult tasks previously relegated to humans.

In a broader context, *FM-2030* is a creative enquiry into the nature of agency within systems where cognition is distributed across people, objects and environment through technologies of connection. The work aims to inspire reflection upon assumptions about agency and free will both in and beyond the context of musical performance.

### **So there really isn't a lot of sentimentality there, then?**

JS: There is a sort of romantic undercurrent there, this idea of idealising human beings, that there is unlimited godlike evolutionary potential. Maybe the real endgame is to get rid of humans because they are inherently flawed. Some say, 'Well, we are perfect as we are!' However, evidence tends to lean to the contrary, as far as I can see.

There are theories that the next step in evolution is non-human. I'm not really convinced that that is going to be a vastly superior scenario, not that I'll presumably be around to find out. It seems to me that if something has even the tiniest atom of human intelligence in it it's ultimately going to be its Achilles' heel. But maybe that's a good thing.

### **Has the technology moved on since then?**

It's a good question. At the time we were working on the piece I discussed with Michaela at length the limitations of



## FM-2030

FM-2030, born Fereidoun M. Esfandiary (1930–2000) was one of the first professors of futurology, and foreshadowed the contemporary meaning of the term transhumanism when he began to identify people who adopt technologies as 'transitional' to post-humanity as 'transhuman'. Transhumanism (abbreviated as H+ or h+) is an international intellectual movement that aims to transform and enhance the human condition. The most common transhumanist thesis is that human beings may eventually be able to transform themselves into different beings with abilities so greatly expanded from the current condition as to merit the label of post-human beings.

**“SUBVERSION OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS PREVIOUSLY RESERVED FOR THE ELITE OR TRAINED INITIATES.”**

## James Sclavunos

James 'Jim' Sclavunos is widely known as a percussionist with iconic ensembles including Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, Sonic Youth, Lydia Lunch, The Cramps, and Grinderman, as well as near countless sessions. Additionally he has acted as a producer/remixer for a wide range of artists, written for several publications and has expounded his encyclopaedic musical knowledge in a variety of formats.



Art  
Trans-human music

the technology, as well as what I saw as the particular pros and cons of it. At the time one of the things I liked about it the most was the fact that it was so brutal. That was a big part of the appeal for me, that when people are hooked to the EMS pads and being triggered by the MIDI score, they are actually often in pain and in fact they do usually look like they are in pain. At the very least, they look pretty uncomfortable, which in turn helps convey the presence of this 'invisible conductor', in both the electrical and orchestral sense.

Michaela and I have observed that some audience members have difficulty grasping what the performers are going through, that there was electricity coursing through the performers' bodies and they are actually undergoing very mild electric shocks throughout the performance. The only real tangible evidence would be from expressions on the faces of the players and their convulsive and unnatural movements. I assure you, if the voltage is sufficiently high it's pretty painful; I speak from direct experience, because as I mentioned before, Michaela and I experimented on each other to determine what voltages were needed where on the body and we had to examine the limits thereof. That was what we spent that summer exploring, how far we could push it and how much voltage was actually needed to lift that arm up in a quick decisive movement, etc. It can be very stimulating but also a very exhausting thing to undergo, too, and not a lot of people are willing to submit to it. We were very grateful for all the players that were willing. Some people got immediately scared off from even the mildest exposure to these electrical sensations.

As pointed out earlier, it's based on the TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) technology and if you've ever had any TENS treatments you know it starts off with a bit of tingling and moves up the scale. It's quite unnerving the stronger it gets and then depending on the amount of voltage, the amplitude

and the duration, it will make you respond in different ways. We were able to control all that to a degree and pre-program it all in REAPER. Michaela worked with an engineer to design a MIDI interface for a device similar to a TENS machine but adapted it so that there was a broader range of voltage available. She had it juiced up.

### **Did you lose many people during auditions?**

Not as many as you would think, and I'm sure some volunteers even enjoyed it to an extent. It was hard to tell sometimes who was really getting a proper shock and who was faking it. We didn't usually turn it up too much because we didn't want anyone to get hurt or be too uncomfortable, but the voltage would need to be of at least certain minimum strength in order to provoke the targeted movements.

At the end of the day, our goal was to end up with a viable performance of a piece of music; that was our objective and if someone was willing to participate and cooperate wholly or partially, it was only going to help us achieve our goal. Ideally we wanted people to have no control over their bodies at all, but that was only achievable to a limited extent. Neither the technology nor the variables in body response nor the trustworthiness of the volunteers were entirely reliable; there was no way to measure scientifically that yes, this is absolutely 100 per cent voltage entirely causing this movement. However, beyond any doubt, the voltage was definitely forcing the players' hands as it were, and indisputably causing some kind of response.

### **Surely this is in line with the philosophic aims of the piece itself?**

I see a lot of grey areas here from a theoretical and philosophical point of view. Aside from all that though, I intended that my score should stand on its own merits as a piece of music, and whether it is a good score or a bad score is ultimately a subject for critical evaluation.



## **Michaela Davies**

Michaela Davies is a cross-disciplinary artist working with sound, performance, installation and video. Michaela's creative practice is informed by an interest in the role of psychological and physical agency in creative processes and performance, and how obstruction can change the trajectory of individual development and creative outcomes both in and beyond the context of musical performance.

Michaela holds a doctorate in psychology from the University of Sydney, and is an Australian Music Centre represented artist. She has been awarded a fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts, and received the Prix Ars Electronica 2015 Honorary Mention for Digital Musics & Sound Art. She has presented work at galleries and festivals internationally including the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, London V&A, the Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Experimental Intermedia New York, ISEA, Mona Foma Festival Hobart, and Sonica festival UK, where she was 2013 artist in residence. In addition to exploring sound in installation and performance, Michaela plays electric bass in numerous projects.

## “EXPERIMENTING WITH THE ROLE OF MUSICIANS AND HOW THEY PERFORMED THE MUSIC, EXPERIMENTING WITH THE POSSIBILITIES OF MANIPULATING THEIR BODIES”

I hope those who heard it in its two public performances [at the Sydney Opera House in 2012 and Sonica Festival in Edinburgh in 2013] enjoyed it, at least as much as they might have enjoyed the spectacle.

I approached the score as an experimental music piece, experimental on multiple levels. We were literally experimenting with the idea of making music a certain way, experimenting with the role of musicians and how they performed the music, experimenting with the possibilities of manipulating their bodies. But in the end, aside from all that, I suppose FM-2030 must be experienced and judged just the same as any other piece of music.

### **It’s certainly electro-acoustic.**

Yes, in a very different sense [laughs]. A lot of composers and musicians have experimented with using impulses generated by the body and turning those into acoustical phenomena by various means. Whether they are measuring biorhythms or blood flow or thermal information from the body to activate oscillators, a lot of work has been done along those lines. I can’t think of any other circumstances where external forces are being used to control humans.

Cybernetics offers a lot of interesting and disturbing possibilities. Even the modest level of human body control we employed might have been offensive to some audience members, not because we’re maltreating our musicians, but because it challenges preconceptions of what the creative impulse should consist of and how one should go about expressing it. I mean some people—mostly drummers—were pretty bugged out about drum machines when they first came into use. When you start proposing turning human beings into puppets, I think it really crosses a line for some folks.

**For a lot of musicians, they work to build the level of control they have over their body’s ability to make music through their instruments...**

Well this is about control, too. It’s also about ultimate control. The ideal is for a composer to be able to exert the absolute control over the performance of their work.

### **So it’s literally a power trip.**

Yes, literally, in every sense of the word power. Personally, I don’t have a sinister agenda but I recognise the darker possibilities. This may turn out to be our reality, our future, like it or not, and an artist can say, “I’m presenting this and you should be aware of this.” Pop music around the world is already full of hit songs sung by humans that are mixed to sound like robots; robots or cyborgs making music may well be the next step.

And in any case, is it really such a grotesque thing to be able to extend the capacity of the human body? Body enhancement in both practice and theory is deeply ingrained in our culture: superficial, biochemical or surgical. It’s already going on and has been in our collective imagination for a long time, at least as long as the *Six Million Dollar Man* or *Captain America*. Why not in the world of music, too?

It’s very interesting, and it’s definitely going to be a game-changer, although so much of it is still theoretical at the moment that I don’t see how anyone can leap to any conclusions about it. It’s a type of futurism, and the future is always fraught with both peril and promise. We’ve known since Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* that unhindered embrace of progress invites a host of moral ambivalences.

Top: Michaela Davies & Jim Scavunus by Kyle Sanna (2013), courtesy of M.Davis. Bottom: Michaela Davies Sonica Festival (2013) by Boris Bagattini, courtesy of Michaela Davis





# Mythological entropy

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Mothmeister are a creative duo from Belgium whose work in costumery and masks has won them fans from around the world. Performative dreams and deep play with the unconscious form part of the modus operandi of the group.

Strange locations, unconventional or forgotten exhibition spaces are all backdrops for their expositional works. Born out of a desire to lampoon the seeming perfection of individuals' presentation of themselves on social media, the work has taken on a life of its own, reaching a wider audience of people who similarly wish to play with the portrayal of the social self. By no means a new concept, however, with high production values and a sense of humour Mothmeister have gained something of a cult following, ironically developing a creative community against the grain of the colonised spaces of the online world.

Reminiscent of the Chapman brothers, the intentions behind the work are sound and the process profound. Our consumption of it may be easy but the large messages resonate. Given Mothmeister's premise of social constructs, Trebuchet asked them how they see the body:

Mothmeister: We've always considered our body like a canvas to express ourselves: a toy one can fool around with, and alter non-stop. Hence our eternally shifting Mothmeister creatures. But obviously

there's a wider range of alter egos out there which we think makes our body even more fascinating.

We try and keep things (from our personal lives and Mothmeister) separate; we are two separate people but Mothmeister is the brand, if you will, which is the two of us and we really are like Siamese twins. One of us models while the other one is the photographer, though we make the clothes together. It's more or less an organic process which begins again with each project. It could be a mask, it could be taxidermy; we just let our thoughts float and it all happens very associatively. It grows... We don't think too much about it, but it's more about a feeling or emotions that suddenly create an image, and we never sketch out things. Things emerge.

Our real face is only one possible way to look at the world. We like to explore the other you. Your body gives you the space and tools to do so. It's like a play garden. We like this idea of hitch-hiking our body to another place. Our challenge is to reinvent the body. And, given the masks we wear, to make sure there's enough oxygen for our brains to operate, because the one who wears the masks often suffers from severe asthma and claustrophobia, which doesn't really help.

Because most of our work consists of portraits, we mainly use what's generally considered the most expressive part of the body: the head. But paradoxically we hide our real face behind a fake facade, giving it

more expression on another level.

This juxtaposition is something that's always present in our work: the living body wears lifeless (death) masks and the accompanying dead taxidermy animals are dressed up, appearing more alive. It's a reference to the Victorian post-mortem photo shoots, where the living family often looked more like blurry ghosts (because of their movement during the long exposure times) than the deceased, who was often dressed and made-up as if he was still alive.

There are a lot of clowns in our work and in that respect it's quite archetypal, but we've tweaked it to make it our own; again these things happen quite organically. We go with the flow or emotions, whatever brings out the emotion. We do like travelling and isolated landscapes, especially landscapes where nobody likes to go on holiday. That evokes things for us in our imaginations.

## **In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

Mothmeister has been out there for four years now. Squeezing yourself into hundreds of suffocating masks and costumes is one thing. But over the last couple of months we've tried to change the natural shape of our body as well. By wearing antique muscle suits, uncomfortable Victorian corsets, adding humps, old and rusty prosthetic arms and stuff, we reincarnate into another body; we're playing with some kind of body



*Clown Horse. 2018.*



Profile  
Mothmeister





Left: *Untitled*. 2015  
Right: *Untitled*. 2007  
Below: *Untitled*. 2013



modification, most of the time in a painless way. From now on we want to push that a little further.

### **What potential do you see in bodies?**

Actually, pretty much everything can change your character and your body, how it looks and how it behaves. This means wherever we go we try to incorporate things that are not meant to be worn on the body. Whether it's an outdated lampshade, coconut-tree bark from a garden centre that turns out to be a great corset... There's so much potential stuff out there that we can use.

### **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

We don't run marathons. But mostly as we travel to the locations of our shoots we do so (changing voice back to non-formal, as these people clearly are!) on foot. Sometimes it takes hours of walking through challenging terrain to get to the eerie, isolated setting we had in mind. We drag along with us all the costumes, animals and such. We love to endure the effects that the weather can have on the body: pouring rain, violent storms, extreme heat or cold. It all awakens the awareness of the body. Most of the time we arrive exhausted. Putting on a mask and squeezing yourself into a costume at that moment is not number one on your wish list but it's part of the game. Apart from that we love to dress up, even when we don't shoot. It's part of our DNA.

### **What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

Somehow, to keep in shape, to keep it functional, to slow down the natural decay, to battle disease. Since for us the body is a toy, we would love to play with it for a long time. But as toys become rusty, sometimes they tend to be rather useless.

We are urban explorers as well. So we are used to squeezing ourselves through tiny holes, jumping over high 'forbidden entry' fences, clambering over military walls, running from security and such... This is our alternative and challenging way of 'keeping in shape'.

### **Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

The figure is very important to us because we do portraits but not in the traditional way. In fact we started with this series some years ago when we discovered Instagram. We liked Instagram though we were never fans of social media; we liked the simplicity and the power of a small picture in a square frame. But all we saw there were these meaningless repetitive selfies: happy faces—almost like implicit masks—people ostentatiously having fun with friends, showing off their new fashionable clothes, hipster party pics or tanned and half-toasted bodies in sunny holiday locations.

We found these portraits very fake and decided to show the opposite: shots of ugly, grotesque and lonely creatures wearing old and long-forgotten clothes, accompanied by

scruffy, dead, stuffed animals in bleak nondescript locations.

We saw that people on social media were hypocrites in a way, because they were all wearing these implicit masks and we were going to do the same, but the way we're doing it is to do the opposite or at least admit that we are wearing masks. There is always this contradiction in our work.

When we go to a shoot, no matter what the weather—we've done shoots in -20°C in Iceland, in snow storms, but also in 40°C—for the model there is always a body experience, not least because he's allergic to most of the masks. So for him it's not just something playful but also a process of suffering. We joke about it but it's real. So we try to keep the shooting time quite short. But that is part of the total experience, which makes the final result. Also, when we shoot in nature we never use artificial lighting, always natural light. Most of the time in the morning.

### **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

There are tons of inspiring artists that we admire because of their use of the body in a fascinating way: the metamorphosis self-portraits of Cindy Sherman; the intriguing imperfect bodies of Joel-Peter Witkin; Anna Uddenberg; the suffering of Franko B; the wax, deformed bodies of Berlinde De Bruyckere; the obsessive, morphing performances of Olivier de Sagazan; the huge body sculptures of Ron Mueck; the violence to the body in Paul McCarthy's video works; and

the live plastic surgery performances of the controversial French artist ORLAN.

**Where do you find inspiration?**

Since childhood, we've both been fascinated by myths, legends and fairy tales where animals possess human characteristics.

We're intrigued by masks used in ancient rituals, religious cult celebrations, pest control and carnivals. The transformation into our alter ego Mothmeister naturally grew through the years, simultaneously with our exploding collection of taxidermy, costumes and masks.

Masks are also something contradictory; on one hand you might hide certain aspects of yourself behind a mask, but at the same time you might express a whole lot of something else about yourself by wearing it. It's something important for us. When we wear the mask we become the character. We're not really directing the action, we sort of take on the character and then certain moods take over, and a lot of them are sad figures. Whereas in real life we're quite fun and outgoing. Sometimes the masks allow us to reveal things.

**Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

Change. Without a doubt. Not just in terms of age, which happens naturally and is an unstoppable force. Permanence is not in our dictionary as it is boring. It means standing still or stagnation. Lots of the stuff we collect is antique and dates back a

long time. In the meantime they get mouldy, rusty, scruffy...They slowly decay and fall apart. That's what we like about them, the never-ending changes. It adds soul. Character. Whereas permanence mostly doesn't. It's like a pause button, whereas we want to play.

**If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

Take out the brain. And live by heart and guts.

**With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

Even though we wear fake faces, we both have an aversion to the fake world. So we are not into this virtual reality thing. We stick to the physical stuff. The real thing.

But we think body extension and hacking is very interesting. Because that's about real transformation. And it's quite the opposite of the Barbie-doll robots mass media wants us to look like. Body extension creates another you and flirts with the nearly impossible. A lot of fascinating myths and legends are based on humans with a twist. So bring it on.





# Progressive augmentation

*Extended Arm,*  
Scott Livesey Galleries,  
Melbourne. 2011

During the 1980s, the iconic Stelarc started staging his famous suspension performances around the world, the artist suspended by hooks through his body. Visually arresting though the performances were, what strikes us now is how remarkably fresh the intention behind the work remains.

*Although the suspensions deal with the physical difficulty of the body strung up they have neither religious intent (transcending the body), the yearning for shamanistic empowering nor as yogic displays of control. They are realised with neither the intention of initiation rites nor the S&M exploration of pain and pleasure. What can be admitted though is that a painful experience does collapse the convenient distinction between the mind and body...*

*The suspensions were a body sculpture installed in a space of other objects. The stretched skin is a kind of gravitational landscape. The penalty you pay for being suspended in a 1G gravitational field. Suspended and in stress the anonymous body realises its obsolescence...*

*The nude and silent body at least in its static suspensions is an image of suspended animation. An anaesthetised and pacified body that*

*is obsolete but not yet extinct. That has desires but does not express them. That feels pain but remains silent and stoic. A body that neither thinks nor expresses emotions.*  
- artist's statement, 2018

Those performances received widespread coverage and Stelarc continued to explore the obsolescence and limits of the human body by incorporating robotics; extra arms, ears and other sensors have all been part of this protean artist's repertoire. Recognised by several institutions, Stelarc has received honorary professorships in Art and Robotics, as well as fellowship and research grants to continue his exploration into human hybrid interfaces. Given the broad possibilities for body extension, *Trebuchet* asked how Stelarc views the human body.

Stelarc: The biological body is an evolutionary architecture that operates and becomes aware in the world. Its survival parameters are very slim. Its longevity is relatively brief. It is soft and damages easily. It is vulnerable to microorganisms that are invisible but often fatal to it. Historically, it is an unstable construct, not only socially and

culturally, but now its musculature is modified by machine augmentation and its cognitive capabilities amplified by computational systems. The more that this body performs, the more it realises it has no mind of its own—not any mind at all in the traditional metaphysical sense. The body has always been a zombie body that performs involuntarily and it has already become a cyborg body, performing in increasingly automated and remotely distributed ways.

### **In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

As a performance artist you have to take the physical consequences of your ideas. There is no interest in sci-fi speculation nor in futurist prediction. What is important is to engineer an interface, experience it in performance and thereby have something meaningful to say afterwards. Your ideas can only be authenticated by your actions. The body has always been seen as an object, not an object of desire but rather an object that should be redesigned: a body with a *Third Hand* (1980), an *Extended Arm* (2000) and an *Extra Ear* (2011). As technology becomes microminiaturised it can become a component of the body, attached and even implanted. It is about the body in excess, the prosthesis not a sign of lack but a symptom of excess. The *Third Hand* was not only a visual attachment to the body but also gave it added capabilities. The *Extended Arm* had

an 11-degree-of-freedom manipulator that extended my right arm to primate proportions. The *Extra Ear: Ear on Arm* is a soft prosthesis surgically constructed and cell-grown which will be electronically augmented and Internet-enabled for people to listen in from remote locations. It's about exploring alternative anatomical architectures.

### **What potential do you see in bodies?**

The body is profoundly obsolete in form and function. Do we accept the biological status quo or do we accept that the body, although wonderfully complex, fatigues often and malfunctions intermittently? To assert the obsolescence of the body is to accept the necessity for its redesign. In the *ReWired / ReMixed* (2016) performance, for five days, six hours a day I could see only with the eyes of someone in London and hear only with the ears of someone in New York, whilst anyone, anywhere, could access my exoskeleton and choreograph involuntary movements with my right arm. The artist's senses were outsourced, its agency was split.

### **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

This person is this body. You are conscious of your body only when you feel sick or when you slip over or when you do yoga. This is not a person that conveniently splits mind and body; this is a physiological, phenomenological, interacting body in the world. What is important is not what is located in this body or what

is in other bodies but what happens between bodies, between you and me, in the medium of language with which we communicate, in the social situations in which we operate, and in the culture within which we are conditioned.

### **What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

In an increasingly video, virtual and vicarious world, the body asserts its materiality. In the *Propel: Body on Robot Arm* (2015) performance, the body was attached to the end of an industrial robot arm and its trajectory, velocity and position/orientation was choreographed. But the body is now increasingly haunted by its virtual other. Online, the body as its phantom flickers on and off, glitches as digital noise in biological evolution. The challenge is to transform from the psychosocial to cyber systems, to become an extended operational system of fractal flesh of bodies and bits of bodies spatially separated but electronically augmented, interacting with varying complexity at different scales.

### **Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

I began performing when I discovered I was a bad painter in art school! Using this body was a convenient site for experimentation and performance. Having no music training, I amplified my body signals and sounds. Having no dance training, I was interested in generating involuntary movements, at first with a muscle-stimulation



*Ear On Arm Suspension*  
 Scott Livesey Galleries,  
 Melbourne 2012

Photograph by Polixeni Papapetrou. Courtesy of artist.

system, 15-50 volts contracting and choreographing involuntary movements of my limbs, which could also be done remotely via a touch-screen interface in such performances as *Fractal Flesh* (1995), *Ping Body* (1996) and *Parasite* (1997). In the *StickMan* (2017) performance, the artist is connected to a full-body exoskeleton and algorithmically actuated.

**Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

The insect-like locomotion and the alien otherness of the butoh dancer.

**Describe your technique?**

Performing with a posture of indifference. Being indifferent, not in any negative sense; being indifferent as opposed to having expectations. Allowing the performance to unfold in its own time and with its own rhythm. Having expectations collapses possibilities.

**Where do you find inspiration?**

The mathematician and philosopher Alfred Whitehead asserted that our imaginations have been only as good as our instruments. How could we have imagined the quantum

and the nanoscale or been able to construct our cosmological models without our sensors, instruments and computational systems? New technologies generate unexpected information, images and experiences, propelling our curiosity and creativity.

**Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

We are in an age of circulating flesh. The blood flowing in my body today may be flowing in your body tomorrow, if you are O+. We can extract an organ from one body and insert it into another. Organs become



*Evolution: Writing One Word  
Simultaneously With Three  
Hands. Maki Gallery, Tokyo 1982*

commodified. We can take the hand from a dead body and reanimate it on an amputee. A skin cell from an impotent male can be recoded into a sperm cell—and, more interestingly, a skin cell from a female body can become a sperm cell. The body is a contemporary chimera of meat, metal and code. The body always remains contingent and contestable. Nano-sensors and nanobots might

initially be incorporated inside the body for medical reasons, detecting the first signs of pathological clusters of cancer cells or other pathological changes in temperature or chemistry, or blockages of the circulatory system. But this would also enable the possible redesign of the body, atoms-up, inside out. The changes would be invisible, never felt, and so incremental they would only be visible

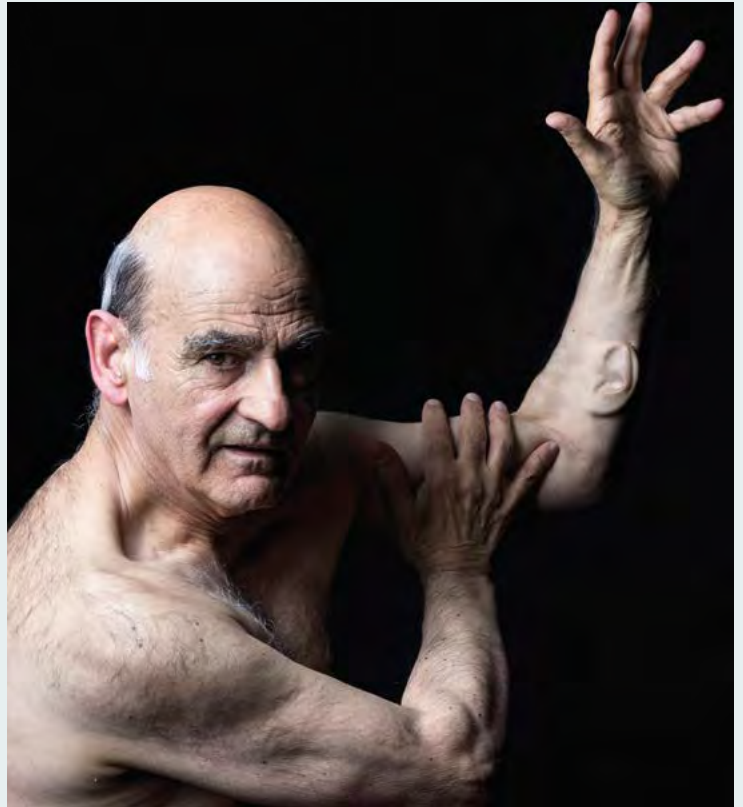
when the transformation becomes apparent at skin level. Its form and functions may alter over time, with new technologies and most likely with off-the-planet environmental niches. In fact, all technology in the future may be invisible because it is inside the human body.

**If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

The body is a wonderfully complex organ structure. It needs to be redesigned in a more modular way to facilitate replacing malfunctioning parts. Pull-out and plug-in organs and replaceable body parts. Or perhaps to engineer a synthetic skin. If that synthetic skin was permeable to oxygen and was able to have sophisticated photosynthetic capabilities, you could literally hollow out the human body. No lungs to breathe, no gastrointestinal tract to digest food, no circulatory system to convey oxygen and nutrients throughout the body. A hollow body is a seductive possibility, as you could incorporate more technology inside the body.

**With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

It always has!



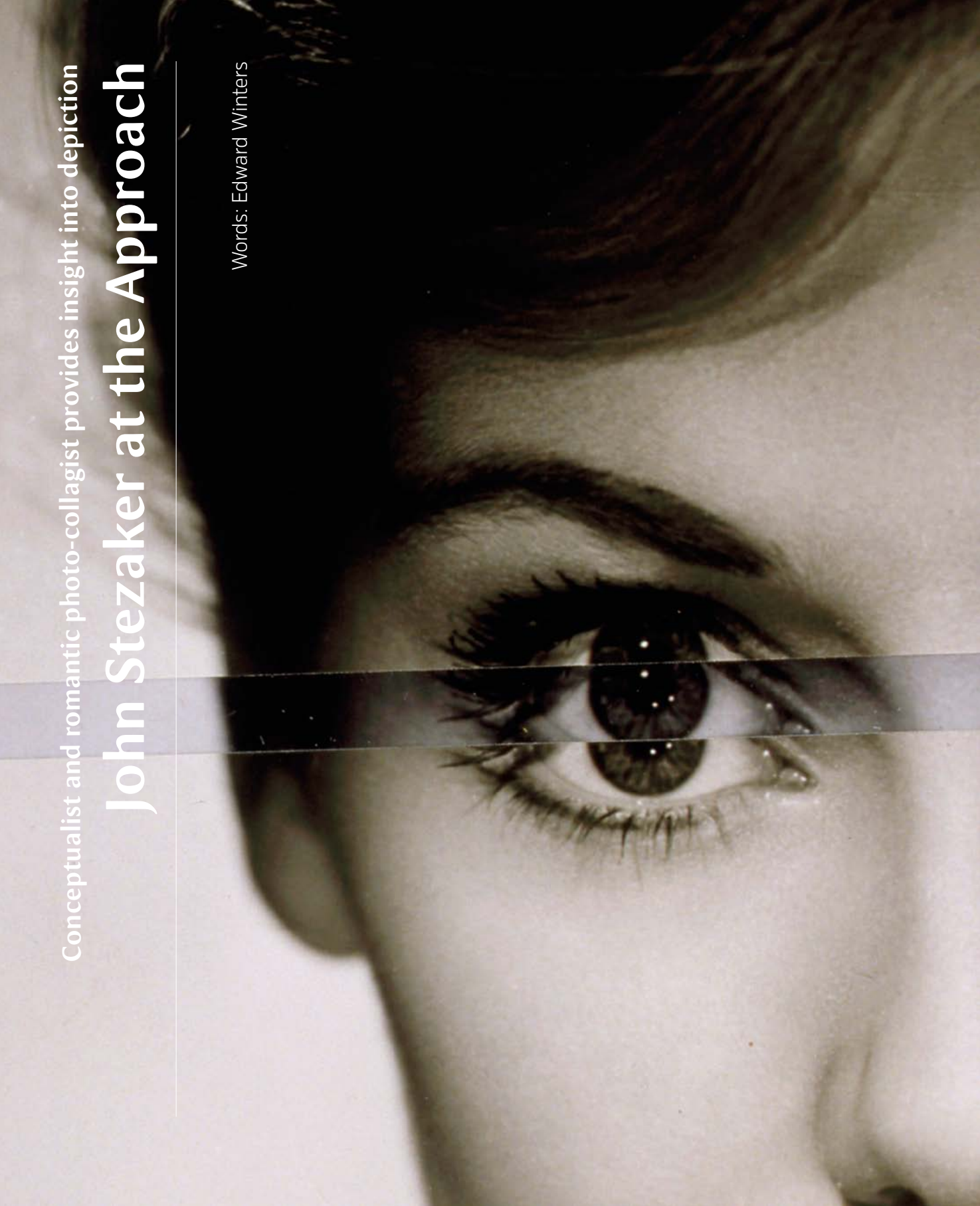
*Ear On Arm*  
Venice International  
Performance Art Week. 2017

Conceptualist and romantic photo-collagist provides insight into depiction

# John Stezaker at the Approach

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Words: Edward Winters







*“There is something very odd, even unnerving about cutting through a photograph,” [John Stezaker] says. “It sometimes feels like I am cutting through flesh.” (O’Hagan, 2018)*

What is a picture? Pictures, on the face of it, seem quite natural, in need of no explanation. After all, children begin to recognise and even make pictures with little difficulty. (Perspective comes later.) And so one of the problems facing a philosophy of depiction is explaining the materiality of pictures against the presence of the image evoked. It’s not just that pictures have surfaces. It’s that those surfaces are part of what we see when we see what is depicted in them. And why should that matter? Here goes. Pictures are various. There are photographs, line drawings, diagrams, paintings, tonal drawings, hieroglyphs and pictograms. There are moving pictures (in both colour and black and white), cartoons, reliefs, bank notes, coins and live-screen coverage of football matches. There are various projective systems of rendering space: perspective, orthogonal, isometric, axonometric, and so on. What they all have in common is that a two-dimensional

surface gives access to a three-dimensional world, either imagined or real. Some pictures (those that give access to the real world) are used as evidence and can be called upon for various reasons: in courtrooms or at the racetrack, for instance. Others, imaginary pictures, remain puzzling because they picture worlds that do not exist. We seem to see, in imaginary pictures, things that have no material counterpart in the real world. If, however, we could start to think about what it is for a two-dimensional piece of white paper, with dark lines arranged across its surface, to give us the experience of looking at a face, we will have come closer to an explanation of pictures that could range over all pictorial representations, real or imagined.

*[I]t is useful to introduce the idea of a picture-object.*

*For instance*

*:-)*

*would be a ‘picture-face.’ In some respects I stand towards it as I do towards a human face. I can study its expression, can react to it as to the expression of the human face. A child can talk to picture-men or picture-animals,*

# ” THEY PICTURE WORLDS THAT DO NOT EXIST

*can treat them as it treats dolls.*  
(Wittgenstein 1953, 194e)

For children, picture-men are embedded in the pictures at which they look or which they make. Embedded and embodied. For a child treats a doll as a living creature, responding to the doll as they would a human being, and pretending the doll responds to them. Roman Catholics believe in the imminence of saints: the presence of the saint in the statue to whom they pray for intercession. Saints, for such believers, are embodied in plastic, marble, plaster or picture.

## II

In fact, depiction presents two problems. The first and most basic is a logical problem. What is a picture and how do pictures represent? The second is an aesthetic problem. What is it for a pictorial representation to be a *beautiful* work of art? This second problem is, manifestly, dependent upon a solution to the prior, logical, problem. It is, so to speak, infected by a philosopher's conception of the logical status of pictures. Treading as lightly round the logic of pictures as I possibly can, I would like to offer a few remarks. In the first place, Wittgenstein's work on aspect-seeing is fundamental to the way in which we might best describe the *phenomenology* of seeing pictures. It best describes what it is like (subjectively) to see a flat expanse of marked surface and to undergo the experience of seeing a three-dimensional world in that surface. Imagination is required to see a suitably marked surface and to *further* see the face of a friend, or a great sea battle, or an arrangement of fruit with a bottle of wine, or a saint going about his or her miracle-making. In his book *Consciousness and the World*, Brian O'Shaughnessy writes,

*[Depiction] consists in seeing expanses of colour in such a way that, while remaining expanses of colour for one, they simultaneously in a special imaginative sense bring a*

*landscape into view.*  
(O'Shaughnessy, 2000)

It is the 'remaining expanses of colour for one' that shapes a conception of looking at *aesthetic* pictures and finding them beautiful. O'Shaughnessy is dealing with the logical problem in his book, but that conception of what pictures are and how they represent has implications for aesthetics. It rules out illusionism from the start. For undergoing an illusion is to have the flat expanses of colour removed from the experience, so that the experience would have to be characterised as a face-to-face 'seeing' of the landscape brought into view.

Richard Wollheim explains to us why it is that we see pictures as beautiful. He claims we have an experience with two folds, each of which is present

in the single complex experience. The first fold is the configurational (how the surface of the picture is configured and seen *as a surface*); the second fold is the recognitional (what the spectator can see in the picture—*what it's a picture of*). So that, when we attend to the surface of the painting, we see it as manipulated to render such-and-such a representational effect, and, seeing this effect in the manipulated surface we have an experience that requires attention distributed respectively between the configurational fold and the recognitional fold. What sets pictorial art apart from other pictorial practices, is that we are to attend to both folds. When the consumer of pictorial pornography looks at photographs of his object of desire, he masks out of experience the configurational fold, for the flatness and the composition are of no interest to him. To the extent that he is made aware of them—to the extent that he cannot mask out features of the configurational fold—is just the extent to which these formal properties of the picture intrude upon his project.

## III

I am not sure if I have written about the idea of collage as cutting into flesh. I certainly made that analogy in the titles of my earliest collages. Incisions, was the title I gave a particular (right angle) cut in the late seventies. At the same time narrower, cone of vision, triangular cuts I titled Excisions and were often related to the theme of blindness. In the film portrait collages (the Marriage and associated series) I had been aware that I had cut vertically through the eye during one phase. During another it was the teeth touching horizontal cuts. In both cases the cut seemed to be making a relationship between the white of the eye or of the teeth and the white of the border or ground. However, there are other surgical or violent associations with both areas of whiteness in the body. The teeth of course represent the cutting up for consumption which pre-figures collage as well being the only part of the skeleton revealed in life. So the cut seam seems to relate to death and post-mortem dissection, or so it seemed at the time I was employing that device. Both the shiny moist and white surfaces of teeth and eyeball seem to relate to the surface of a black-and-white photograph. Initially, I remember cutting such stills left me with a slightly phobic discomfort. I liked to get the cut over quickly. Oddly it took me decades to relate this slightly uncomfortable sensation to my first experience of the eye-slitting moment in Chien Andalou at the ArtLab at which time I was quite unprepared for the shock of this image. When I belatedly made this realisation I decided to exorcise this phobia by directly making a horizontal cut through the eye on a portrait, titling the result Blind. By chance one of these which I considered a failure happened to have a secret no copy and by placing the incised image over the copy in such a way as to double the eyes, I felt I had found a way of making reparation for

the surgical violence of the cut. These I titled Love and by chance there is a group of these on show at the Approach at the moment. I have talked a lot more about beheading in a number of interviews and lectures. I was fascinated by the analogy between the camera and the guillotine made by Aries. It seemed to me that the removal of the head was a kind of removal of the image's heading or main legible reference, liberating the body of the image for apprehension.

Anyway, I can think of countless examples in my collages and in those of others (especially Ernst). Are you familiar with the believed connection between Duchamp's Etand Donnés and the forensic photograph of the surgically cut-up body in the Blue Dahlia murder case? As you can probably tell this is a connection that much interests me." (Stezaker, 2018)

A couple lies on a bed. Sweet nothings: the faint whiff of existentialism; and of bad faith revealed to the absent spectator (...) who gazes unnoticed as the lovers return each other's gaze (...) Now place something between them. Put something in-between to disrupt the reception of the image; to get something different. You interrupt the cliché: 'Love is something of an agreement between two longings. Is it real? Does it last? Love is an illusion.'

And then, her face gets nearer to his. Or is it just a face? The picture-face is not the face of the woman at whom he gazes. It is a graphically drawn face that shows up as a representation and not as a living smiling face. Both he and she become fictions in the picture. Paradoxically, the drawn face, inserted into a photographic scene, calls attention to the mode of representation that was

HER BREASTS ARE FICTIONAL.  
THE DUVET IS DRAWN TIGHT UNDER  
THEM TO ACCENTUATE HER YOUTH

”

## ” SHE IS ARTICULATED AS SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM THE IMAGE SCENE

to disappear in the use of the picture. And so, we begin to look for fictions in the composition.

Her breasts are fictional. The duvet is drawn tight under them to accentuate her youth and beauty, as if she were wearing a bra, to lift and separate, as one old advertisement promoted its product; to project, to offer up. What woman draws the duvet about and under their breasts, after sex? (Before sex, the clothes and the furniture are used as props to accentuate desire. Disarray and abandonment; discovery not enclosure. At the college Christmas party one of my students was dancing with one of my colleagues, a fastidious man, keener on administration than with either teaching or research. I asked her if she found him attractive since it seemed so unlikely. She replied, “No. He’s the kind of man who would fold his trousers before he got into bed.” More or less my view of him.) The closer the drawn image gets them together, the more fictitious becomes the lived relationship. She is drawn, and, therefore, more of an image than a real woman; she is more pornographic than the photograph she replaces, precisely because she is articulated as something different from the image scene, as seen. She is more pornographic because the real woman (photographed) has now become a mere image: an imaginary phantom that, no doubt, finds itself projected onto the woman beside him in bed. Now go back to the sweet nothings: “I love you.” Thus, art pronounces upon life; shapes our view of it, so to speak.

### IV

Recently American philosopher John Kulvicki gave a lecture at Institut d’études avancées de Paris entitled: Pictures and Language (Kulvicki 2018). In that lecture he started to make analogies between pictures and language, and, also, to draw up disanalogies. One thing he noticed is that even if you cut a photograph up, the bits themselves remain representational. Bits of pictures remain pictorial.

(Think of a jigsaw puzzle.) Whereas language does not exhibit this feature. *Love* is the title of an exhibition of work by John Stezaker comprising works from the seventies through until 2017. Stezaker works in photo-collage, a medium he is keen to distinguish from photomontage. Here he speaks to Yuval Etgar.

*I consider montage as a mainstream intercutting of images that sets out to create a seamless continuum of some kind; intercutting images in a way that reduces them to narrative legibility (...) By contrast, collage for me is about opening up the space between images, liberating them from their instrumental use (...) It is a way of trying to reveal something of the abyss or the hidden void within this continuum of image culture or the montage of everyday life.*

*I see collage as a way of encountering the image as empty (...) But now, (...) [t]he sense and the space of the image as opacity rather than transparent legibility seems more than ever endangered. (Etgar, 2017)*

Kulvicki’s disanalogy might be of use here. That the images, cut up, remain images permits a photo-collage that does not reassemble as a new narrative image in the way that synthetic cubism does. Rather, the pieces of photo-collage remain image parts dislodged from their contribution to the image flow (the ‘montage of everyday life’), and in their new combination the photo-collage respects the fragmentary nature of their appearance in a way that disrupts narrative. In the series *Masks*, colour postcard landscapes are inserted into black-and-white portraits. Yet the contours, the implied continuity of line and image, work against this, so that we spectators scan and rescan the image to find pattern. In so doing we are alert to the contour working against the intrusion of the colour landscape postcard against the disrupted image of the two heads. (See below.) The contour suggests an interior world (even as it is depicted as an exterior world).



*Untitled*, Collage. 1976

## A ROMANTIC ARTIST, EVEN IF HE IS COMMITTED TO THE ANALYSIS OF IMAGES

By contrast, montage is about assembling combinations of images to form one continuous image and narrative. If we look at some of the montages of Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing* (1956), we see a single uninterrupted space within which the cut-out pieces are assembled into a single picture. No such singular space exists in Stezaker, and this is what makes his work ambiguous. We look at a picture and see things which aren't cut out, but which appear to us as a continuity between the constituent imagery. (As when I seem to see the eyes of the woman whose face is obliterated by the postcard.)

Moreover, Stezaker is alive to, and indeed part of, the intellectual milieu that embraced semiotics in the seventies. But Stezaker is seen as a Romantic artist, even if he is committed to the analysis of images under the influence of the 'new photography' of the seventies. (Despite his professed Romantic leanings, he was, until 2006, Senior Tutor in Critical and Historical Studies at the Royal College of Art.)

Part of his romanticism is his focus on 'the everyday' as that might be an otherwise overlooked area in our conception of the suitable object of aesthetic experience, and for the making of artworks that values such experience. He has been likened to and compared with Joseph Cornell. Indeed, he gave a lecture at the Royal Academy of Arts in London to augment Joseph Cornell's *Wanderlust* exhibition there in 2015.

As part of the conceptual photography movement, Stezaker's work discloses a natural curiosity toward the image and its phenomenology. Nothing bears the stamp of such rationality in Cornell's work. It is Romantic in that it shuns any analytical framework, bathing itself instead in the delicate beauty of nostalgia, distanced love, curiosity and wonder. Freud, Marx, Saussure and other founders of

the modern social sciences might have plenty to say about these subjects but for Cornell, the poetry of the work is magical and any attempt to rationalise the work would be, for him, analogous to explaining a conjuring trick to a child. The work would lay mutilated, dead, under any such surgical procedure.

Despite his career teaching critical and historical studies, or perhaps in virtue of it, Stezaker is alive to the image as a site of Romantic permission, or even Romantic obligation. Like Cornell, his imagination dreams up images that put the spectator into a strange, trance-like transitory space, disconnected from the humdrum world of commerce. Such images engage the inner life of the spectator as he or she feels the emotional delicacy of the work's world.

Art, on such a view, has the power to move us, transporting us away from the alien world we perceive around us, replacing its commerce with a world that permits our desires and shapes our imaginative engagement with those desires. Works are often erotic, without being sexually urgent; aesthetic and therefore lacking anything like the vulgar instrumental value of pornography.

Stezaker's photo-collages look like images that simultaneously view the outer world whilst revealing an imagined inner life. The use of contour running continuously between the different image combinations provides coherence for the overall image which imposes itself over the fragments. Michael Bracewell captures beautifully the character of Stezaker's work:

*Stezaker's act of 'taking out of circulation' placed an infinite trove of found imagery at his disposal (...) from which he then released new possibilities: an intensely poetic strangeness, seemingly at once 'within' the psychic world of the image, yet rendering it entirely alien to its original purpose of production. (Bracewell, 2012a)*

Of "Pair IV" 2007, Bracewell writes,

*In his Masks series, for example, the sophisticated figures depicted within the 'host' image—often a film still or a studio publicity portrait—are partially blocked by the superimposing element of the collage. These in turn depict chasms, tunnel entrances, cataracts, waterfalls, caves, grottoes and cliffs: vistas and studies of wild or romantic landscapes. In "Pair III" and "Pair IV" (both 2007), for example, a screen couple are drawn into the traditional 'clinch', yet the postcards superimposed on the identical images turn their facing profiles into the opposing banks of rivers running through gorges towards unseen outlets. As profile becomes crag and cliff, two equally opposing forms of romanticism appear to come into play: the high society love drama (as implied by the passionate gentleman's black tie and evening jacket, and the young woman's extravagant coiffure) and the transcendent calm and grandeur of the natural wilderness or the moonlit night. (Bracewell, 2012b)*

The photo-collages are startling. Because of their construction as images—secured by the uninterrupted contours as they wind through different images—two different spaces seem at once convergent. It is as if we are seeing an inner world within an outer world that frames it. And so, it is like having a perception of the world out there whilst simultaneously pictorially imagining a world seen only by the inner eye.

The poetry of these images calls to mind the surrealist poetry of Federico García Lorca, here translated into song by Leonard Cohen:

*And I'll dance with you in Vienna  
I'll be wearing a river's disguise  
The hyacinth wild on my shoulder,  
My mouth on the dew of your thighs  
And I'll bury my soul in a scrapbook,  
With the photographs there, and the moss  
And I'll yield to the flood of your beauty  
My cheap violin and my cross" (Cohen, 2011)*

The river's disguise, the soul buried in a scrapbook, the photographs there, the moss, the flood of beauty, all contribute to a complex image, and it collides with these images that Stezaker is making, so that there is a visual equivalence with the poetic image. I imagine Stezaker's studio with boxes and files of old photographs from movie promotions, black-and-white agency shots of film stars now dead. In the thirties Cornell wandered New York City's streets foraging in used bookstores and junk shops and so began his collection of books, photographs, astral maps, old prints, theatrical memorabilia, and reels of old movies. Stezaker, too, wandered London, the second-hand bookstores of Charing Cross Road, collecting images including early film stills, portraits of film stars, postcards and other nostalgic photographic and film memorabilia to



use in his collages. With both artists there is a sense of the magpie or the mudlark, seeing something precious in the trash cans of a city or washed up in the silt of its river's ebb; saving something with the potential to unlock romantic feelings in what would otherwise go unseen, overlooked; the bric-a-brac of the deceased, the contents of a sideboard drawer thrown upon a flea market stall by the house-clearance dealer. In an interview in *Frieze* magazine Michael Bracewell asks about the nature of Stezaker's collecting:

*MB: Do you feel when you're searching out the materials for your work, from charity shops or secondhand bookshops, that you are assuming a form of psychic responsibility?*

*JS: Yes, I do. I'm taking things very seriously that aren't usually taken seriously. And there is often an uncanny dimension to collecting images. You go out looking for one thing, and you find the image that you really should have been looking for and you realise that your ego's been in the way...*

*MB: Your work is in the tradition of the flâneur, for whom there are going to be occurrences in the urban landscape that enable a moment of transcendence.*

*JS: Absolutely. You can go for months and years and not have those moments, and you've lost it. But it keeps you wandering, looking; 'allowing yourself to encounter'—there should be a word for that. It doesn't matter whether I've had the images around on my bookcase for 20 years when I start a series; it's finding an image in a bookshop that starts a new series of thoughts." (Bracewell, 2012b)*

*It's as if the overlooked encapsulates a wealth of possibility that will awaken only those with sufficient sensitivity developed through making work and wanting more. There is a feeling of excitement in Stezaker's 'you find the image you should have been looking for'.*

If Cornell's work has a nostalgic air, then so too does Stezaker's. Searching in the secondhand bookshops and in charity shops, in flea markets and in seaside bric-a-brac emporia, what is encountered is the forgotten detritus of lives now passed. There is also something of nostalgia in Stezaker's conception of art theory. From the same interview Stezaker talks of his education at the Slade School:

*JS: I went to the Slade for six years, undergraduate and postgraduate in painting, although I gave it up in the first year. I entered college in 1967, so my first academic year involved the sit-in that took place in 1968. The reason I gave up painting was partly political. I was interested in student politics at the time and was exposed to the Situationist International ideas from France. And that's where collage came from too. I couldn't read French very well, so much of the work of the Situationists was a predominantly visual experience for me. Seeing these recaptioned images gave me ideas, that this may be*



*another way of thinking about being an artist. But it was a strangely schizophrenic course. On the one hand I was doing life drawing with Euan Uglow, on the other I was entertaining ideas from Guy Debord. (Bracewell, M. 2012b)*

Stezaker is content to proclaim himself a Romantic, going back through surrealism and finding himself influenced by William Blake. How is it possible in a tumultuous world of flowing images to arrest the image and make it an altar of contemplative thought? How is it possible, now, for an image to arrest us? If this sounds religious in tone and in sensibility, it is questioning what we have lost in our modernity and this, too, puts Stezaker in the good company of Cornell. In his prose poem, Charles Simic captures something of Cornell's sensitivity that applies equally to Stezaker:

#### *TOTEMISM*

*Inside everyone there are secret rooms. They're cluttered and the lights are out. There's a bed in which someone is lying with his face to the wall. In his head there are more rooms. In one, the venetian blinds shake in the approaching summer storm. Every once in a while an object on the table becomes visible: a broken compass, a pebble the colour of midnight, an enlargement of a school photograph with a face in the back circled, a watch spring—each one of these items is a totem of the self.*

*Every art is about the longing of One for the Other. Orphans that we are, we make our sibling kin out of anything we can find. The labour of art is the slow and painful metamorphosis of the One into the Other. (Simic, 2018)*

In "The Work of Art as Object", Richard Wollheim provides an account of the nature of the art of modern painting as both intentional and physical. Painting requires our attention to the surfaces of its works. We need to see them as worked surfaces in a tradition of representation. Wollheim is liberal in his conception of representation, admitting the paintings of both Mark Rothko and Morris Louis as representations. The requirement is that the surface of a painting should support the experience as of the surface and simultaneously support the experience as of something

seen as projecting forward from, or receding behind, the picture plane. The space seen in the picture need not include figuration. The essay is a corrective to the Greenbergian conception of painting. In that essay he also mentions the temporal nature of the activity, calling upon us to recognise that at different historical moments, different features of the appreciative kind can be called upon or emphasised. He runs through a number of features brought to the fore by modern painting:

*Within the concept of art under which most of the finest, certainly most of the boldest, works of our age have been made, the connotation of physicality moves to the fore. The evidence for such a theory at work is manifold, the inspiration of the theory can be seen in a wide variety of phenomena which it thereby unifies: the increasing emphasis upon texture and surface qualities; the abandonment of linear perspective, at any rate as providing an overall grid within which the picture can be organised... the indifference to figuration; the exploitation of the edge, of the shaped or moulded support... and the physical juxtaposition of disparate or borrowed elements, sometimes stuck on, sometimes freestanding, to the central body of the work, as in collage or assemblages. (Wollheim, 1973)*

It is with such endorsement that it is possible to locate the work of both Cornell and Stezaker within the realm of modern painting, even if that location is peripheral. (The word 'peripheral' should not be construed as pejorative.) In appreciating both artists, the spectator is called upon to regard their work within the framework of modern painting. Stezaker considers his position with regard to Wollheim and the conceptualist context within which photo-collage is made:

*It occurred to me that I should contextualise my disagreement with Wollheim at the time. I considered myself on the dematerialisation side of the conceptual/minimalist sensibility and Richard was firmly on the other side. My interest in the found image was an extension of this as well as a way out from what I saw as the cul-de-sac of the concept in art. Only later did an attachment to materiality seem to be part of my fascination for images. Blanchot puts it well when he talks about obsolete images:*



*'Now that its value, its meaning is suspended, now that the world abandons it to idleness and lays it aside, the truth in it ebbs, and materiality, the elemental, reclaims it. This impoverishment, or enrichment, consecrates it as image.' The image requires the touch, the revelation of the material substrate. In the show on at the Approach of the photo-roman collages I represented that discovery. I discovered it in damage, found or deliberate and in certain violence to the image. This of course brought me very close to the double fold idea that you cite. I doubt however Richard ever noticed or acknowledged my return to the fold. (Stezaker, 2018b)*

## V

Michael Bracewell's interview with Stezaker returns to the riotous times of the late sixties and early seventies, a time when universities were occupied by students and art schools moved away from a strict curriculum. Essentially, art education became the expression of individuals and their uniqueness. This was at odds with the idea of a set of skills being taught, and those tensions were felt between the old guard and the avant-garde.

*MB:What was so damaging about 1968?*

*JS:We were dismantling the structure, but had nothing to replace it with. We had William Gregory for visual perception, for instance—and all these things vanished*

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after 1968. There had been an amazing line-up of intellectuals involved in the Slade teaching at that time, and afterwards there was this emptiness, and it never really recovered. But the one valuable thing I got out of it was coming to terms with some of the ideas of the Situationists—Guy Debord, in particular. “La Société du Spectacle” was terribly important. I struggled with it in French at the time, and then it was published in English in 1969. But his interest in collage made me aware of the subversive potential of surrealism—situationism comes out of that tradition, as much as any tradition of political resistance. (Bracewell, 2012b)

In the architecture schools and in geography and English departments there is a new enthusiasm for psychogeography as that was outlined in Guy Debord’s writings for the *Situationist International* (SI). In those writings Debord defined the *dérive* and *détournement*. Whilst there is something of the dandy about the *flâneur*, the man who likes to look out upon others and who likes to be looked upon by them in turn, the *dérive* is a more ambitious way of navigating the city. The situations sought in the *dérive* are somewhere between art and the everyday world. *Détournement* is a method of making art:

*Détournement, the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble, has been a constant present tendency of the contemporary avant-garde both before and since the establishment of the SI. The two fundamental laws of détournement are the loss of importance of each détourned autonomous element—which may go so far as to lose its original sense completely—and at the same time the organisation of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect.* (Bracewell, 2012b)

## REMARKABLE ENCOUNTERS THAT ARE AT ONCE EVERYDAY AND AESTHETIC

The loss of importance of each element is a ‘forgetting’ of the original context within the everyday; it picks up the fragment as an overlooked image and reframes it in some new and contemplative space. It appears in the work of both Cornell and Stezaker. It is clear how this can appropriate fragments from the image stream. The *dérive* is the workaday habit of the artist in search of material and in search of the remarkable encounters that are at once everyday and aesthetic. The effort is to recognise that the city everyday offers encounters that exempt themselves from the humdrum world of commerce and give an aesthetic perspective upon the city and its inhabitants.

Other artists of the twentieth century have concerned themselves with everyday aesthetics. Arte Povera used found objects, as did constructivists and Dadaists. In each case the work was meant to step down from the pedestal of high culture and bring itself into the world of the masses. But in so doing it pursued the aesthetic of everyday experience, thus democratising art by making it both available to, and expressive of, the experience of a people released from the bad faith imposed upon it by corporate prerogative.

Stezaker’s art is both redemptive and defiant in this respect. It underscores the nature of imagery and imaginative contribution of the spectator in looking at his work; and it defies the transparency of the image stream through which we are sold junk and the manipulative imagery that conspires to shape our desires. The beauty of Stezaker’s work lies in its ability to resist the onslaught of the image stream, whilst simultaneously providing us with images that demand thoughtful contemplation in a space removed from the world of mere consumption.

John Stezaker, ‘Love’, was at The Approach, London, Thu 15 Feb 2018 to Sun 25 Mar 2018

# Keeping in the shape of rhythm

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Sometimes the Internet works. For the content creator evangelists it's touted as a way to bypass middlemen and distribute your content directly to an audience of people who never knew they were your wildest fans. For many artists it doesn't pan out, however, once in a while the digital rainbow ends in a pot of gold.

Capturing the global attention via a set of visually fun and musically adventurous videos, Knower (Louis Cole and Genevieve Artadi) achieved a strong following, several million views, thousands of subscribers and a widening trail of online mentions. It's certain they would have been successful regardless of the online following, however stepping into record company jargon, they've an impressive reach. But, for drummer/composer Louis Cole, Knower is just one musical avenue and under his name he's released two albums of strong musical acumen referencing Brian Wilson, The Flaming Lips and The National, as well as a deeper knowledge of electronic music. Cole's solo releases are tantalising for music fans, containing energetic and unusual compositional treatments which are produced with a freshness and lightness of touch that beg a repeat.

Taking time out from a very busy touring and recording schedule Louis Cole discusses the physicality of his creative life with *Trebuchet*.

Louis Cole: For me, the body is mostly a tool to create music and art the best way I can in this dimension. Whatever

dimension that is.

This meat vehicle that my soul controls needs to be in good working order at all times, so that I can create really good tracks and videos and so that I can play really sick drum fills and synth basslines. I also use my body for other really important stuff in life. But creation is probably the most important one to me.

## **How do you define the body?**

Maybe I don't really know, but I have pushed my own body to be able to do things with more precision and clarity and focus and speed and agility, for the sake of my music. And my brain, I really have pushed it to come up with ideas I really believe in and to filter out the bad ones. And just to always be creating. I don't know what the brain really does. Maybe it translates soul into body function?

## **What potential do you see in bodies?**

I think a lot of people could react well to better quality music, not the corny boring music they are fed. If the world was fed better music overall, then better music would be more popular and present. And people would feel it, and be into it.

## **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

I try to take care of my body all the time, just so I can constantly create and execute good ideas and play really nice drum beats. Definitely if I have a show where I have to play a lot of drums though, I have to be extra aware of tension in my arms.

## **What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

I'm not sure. But definitely accepting your natural strengths and weaknesses to try to use them to your advantage. That's a challenge. Or maybe trying to age really well for longevity.

## **Why and when did you choose the drums as a medium for your work?**

Yeah, a drum set has a lot of cool moving parts, so I thought that looked cool. And I used to hit my head against my pillow in rhythm to fall asleep when I was a kid. So maybe I really was obsessed with beats and rhythms.

## **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

Vince Carter's dunks, Eldar Djangirov's fingers, and pretty much everyone I see playing drums on my Instagram feed now.

## **Describe your technique?**

Well, to give a really simple answer, I'm just trying to create the best possible stuff I can, that feels unique to me, and I'm trying to create as much of it as possible. I really need a high functioning body to be able to do that. My body is real thin and long and I think I'm kind of prone to injury playing drums, unless I play a very certain way, but it's also good for certain things.

## **Where do you find inspiration?**

Other musicians. Or filmmakers, athletes, painters, and badass creative



types. Anyone who's just nailing what they love doing. Also from life experiences, and I sometimes get ideas and inspiration when I drive my car around with no sounds playing.

**Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

Change. Definitely. Always adapting and improving and learning, or maybe forgetting things, getting worse, or ageing.

**If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

Nobody should be dealt a disease like ALS or Parkinson's. Things like that really mess with the body's function. I hope we can cure and prevent anything like those diseases soon.

**With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

It definitely will at some point. When everyone's a cyborg and can play any rhythm or note combination perfectly, things will be way different. At the end of the day though, cyborg or not, nothing beats creativity or a cool idea.

*Time* is released on CD/Digital on August 10th 2018 via Brainfeeder



# Alchemical transformations in soul and psyche

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Personal and societal transformation is channelled directly through the body of the artist in the ritualistic works of Bert Gilbert.

Gilbert's interdisciplinary works include performance, costume, photography, fetishistic objects and 2D works. Not afraid to broach sexuality and obsession, she has gained a reputation for pushing the audience to confront underlying desires and taboo.

*Bert is London's mistress of bucking trends and blushing cheeks.*

- Clare Considine, *Le Cool*

There are allusions to Jungian analytical psychology perhaps most obviously in the works *Shadows of my Former Self* and *Animus*, and to alchemy and symbolism throughout the artist's practice.

*Her process is one of re-discovering a universal 'Sacred Heritage', the foundation of primordial cosmologies (Mircea Eliade: Rites and Symbols of Initiation) witnessed within myth, nature rituals, folkloric storytelling and music.* - Bert Gilbert website

The attitude, frankness and originality of the artist makes her a

highly potent force and this is sadly a quality which is often lacking in an increasingly po-faced art world.

Her performances can be seen as essential interventions, calling for malleability in a congealing culture.

## **How do you define the body?**

I see the body as visceral and multilayered: emotional, spiritual, physical, sexual, sacred and profane. A portal/juncture to the past the present and the future.

A house of memories, a record of time, punctuated and scarred by the experiences, the interruptions, the rites of passage we experience through pleasure and pain. The human body as the microcosm of the Earth and the Earth as the macrocosm of the human body.

My practice explores the internal externalised and vice versa; the relationship between the body and the mind, dislocating and reconstituting parts of the body and using these fragments as a vehicle to form a visual language. My particular fetish is the skin, and I explore this in multiple ways within my practice: *The Fourskins of the Apocalypse* (2016) are alchemical second-skinsuits for "ritual sacrifice and

religious raves". The Necro-suit is based on Aztec priests that used to flay their sacrificial victims and wear the skin until it flaked off.

The Maenad-Medusa, a hybrid of Dionysus's female followers (often referred to as "the raving ones") who, high on a mixture of wine and weed, used to run on a full moon into the forest and rip the skin of anyone that they came into contact with, man or beast.

The challenges are to make work that, although rooted in a personal expression, acts as a meeting point for others to experience a physical representation of the intangible concept of spirit/collective consciousness. The rediscovering of what Mircea Eliade calls a universal 'sacred heritage', the foundation of primordial cosmologies witnessed within myth, nature rituals, folkloric storytelling and music.

## **In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

My work is physically enduring, time-consuming and ritualised, transferring the energy of the making into the final pieces. Previously, I have kept this behind the scenes; more

Bert Gilbert, Maenad  
Medusa Skinsuit



Photographer Wig Worland 2018. Image courtesy of artist. © 2018



Bert Gilbert, Left: *The Peyote Skinsuit*. Right: *The Necro Skinsuit*. Photographer Wig Worland © 2018.



recently I have started to document this process.

I am now making much larger works (totems/entry poles) in new materials, experimenting with using my body as a performative tool within the work. This is an uncomfortable transition but is yielding interesting results.

By using myself as a channel for communication, removing the self-consciousness of my constructed persona and exploring the liberation within, this makes the body a vehicle for expression of archetypal representations of the collective unconscious.

**What potential do you see in bodies?**

I'm not sure I see any more potential than other artists; all I can do is continue to explore the themes and narratives that inspire me and communicate them in the lexicon of symbols that I am constructing. These representations are unique for me: there is transcendence in the repetition of themes and the body gives unlimited potential for this. It is the vessel that carries life and spirit. The existential search for meaning that is trapped inside the visceral and multiple layers that make up a human body. The alchemist's views on this are the basis of this interest; the connection to the Earth/cosmos "as above so below".

The beauty in the potential for change, for mutation, for transition into beings undetermined by gender or sexual persuasion.

**Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

As someone who identifies as a



Photographer Wig Worland © 2018. Image Courtesy of artist.

female, I am conscious of my body in the usual ways that our culture has undermined the power of females via achieving a form of unattainable perfection and dismissal/shaming that results in displaying “un-feminine” traits.

As an artist I am exploring the dark feminine and the blurring of gender until it is out of focus—for me, there is a magic that happens in this peripheral vision. I am conscious also of being both male and female at the same time and how that relates to my construction of self and the wider cultural ideas of sexuality and gender construction.

The ruptures between the interior and the exterior, the epidermic meeting points of emotional and physical spiritual interventions. The filters between what is seen and unseen. The genderless *Liberation Suits* (2017) made in collaboration with Izzet Ers were an exploration into this. They were based in wordplay, the subtext of what is said and what is actually meant. Through the resulting union of our partnership (the Jungian concept of *syzygy*) we created seven bodies in the form of boiler suits using alchemical symbols and colours.

Using myself as a vessel, I am investigating the kinetic aesthetic that my actions can create, and the subsequent handling and shaping of the material which leaves the essence of my actions subliminally embedded in the work.

**What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

To bring back humour, hope and connection in this “age of loneliness”

(George Monbiot). To create emotionally based shared experience that transcends us from a world constructed entirely on capitalist principles of consumerism and a dysmorphic perception of ‘body beautiful’, grounding us back to the earth.

**Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

Perhaps not a conscious choice, but a natural one, being that I live in a body and it’s the house that I view and process the world in.

Since an early age I was fascinated with surgery and wounds and skeletons, the beauty of the grotesque. I also had multiple illnesses and injuries so on a personal level the body literally became a site for both physical and mental pain.

I was taught to stitch at an early age and I think that making stuffed limbs and embroidering body parts became a natural transition from using these tools to express myself, stitching myself back together and for an understanding of self.

There is literal and metaphorical use of the body in my practice: the material sensuality of the objects produced, the constant repetition specifically of fingers, eyes and multilayered skins, the mark-making and the use of materials such as hair, bone, fur and my own blood (*Baptism by fire remains*, 2013). They signify as rites of passage of death and rebirth.

**Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

I loved Francis Bacon since an art teacher introduced me to him at 11. The violence and energy he captures

within his paintings, multiple versions of Dorian Gray’s rotting portraits exposed from the attic.

Austrian-Viennese actionist Hermann Nitsch staged intense ritual productions under the title *Das Orgien Mysterien Theater* in which urine, faeces, and blood were slathered over bodies of the performers. He was one of the formative artists that I became obsessed with, all the blood a grotesque orgy of bodies and animal carcasses.

The French artist Orlan gave a series of lectures when I was at St Martin’s that had a marked effect on me, her series of projects to have her face and body surgically altered to resemble Botticelli’s *Venus* in a bid to draw attention to the double standards and pressure surrounding perceptions of female beauty.

Tim Hawkinson’s collaged body parts from 2007 and his multiple hands from 2004.

Cindy Sherman’s constant reinvention of self and use of her own body.

Marina Abramović in the way she opens and holds a space for people to explore healing through her own physical endurance.

Arnulf Rainer’s intense physical expressions of emotion, the use of his feet and fingers, photographing himself in states of extreme emotion and testing the effects of hallucinogenic drugs on his practice.

Franko B’s bloodletting performances [on his] own body made his experience more relatable to his audience, because they could imagine the pain being inflicted as if it was their own.

Louise Bourgeois... really no words needed.

Rebecca Horn's fantastic extensions of the body.

Other feminist artists such as Hannah Wilke, who presents her own nude body as an object for visual interest, allowing her to claim her body and her sexuality as her own.

Antony Micallef's portraits are particularly awesome.

James Merry's headpieces for Björk are breathtaking.

### **Describe your technique?**

There are multiple techniques that I use in the creation of work. It is heavily based in psychoanalytical energetic responses from in-depth research and repeated themes; wordplay which then culminates in a series of multimedia expressions: installation wardrobe, artefact, assemblage, moving image.

More recently I have been collaborating on a series of projects with Izzet Ers, which has helped with losing the ego and ownership of work. The work produced becomes neither mine nor his and the space for play and production that happens between is a vessel of communication. It became a shorthand that is easier somehow than my normal practice which is still in longhand (as it can take me years to finish a series or piece of work). Giving ego and ownership over in a partnership speeds up this process both on production but on a decision-making process. When you solely generate work, it takes much more time.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

Although clichéd, everywhere can

function as a source of inspiration but specifically for the past 10 years I've studied psychoactive plants/ethnobotany (of which a lot of my work has been inspired by, without actually imbibing them), the mystery schools, shamanism, chaos magic, psychoanalytical texts, philosophy, anthropology, alchemical and medical texts. Museums and shows.

The diseased body, the heroic body, the queer body, the abject body, the body as machine.

### **Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

For me it's change; you can shed a skin and begin again. *My Fourskins of the Apocalypse* are archetypal second-skinsuits for rites of passage that are intended to transmogrify you from one state to another. Impermanence and change is all we have.

### **If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

The addition of an actual third eye, or eyes in the back of your head, the ability to regenerate limbs like salamanders and grow more arms and hands—many hands make light work/Goddess Durga personified—and a literal third leg would be great as well!

### **With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

Yes of course, as my work will always be some reflection of the time it is made in; even if my practice isn't directly based in these ideas, it will still be influenced by them. Whilst





thinking on this, I remembered the work of Arthur Elsenaar and Eric Kluitenberg (1994). They stated:

*The technologisation of the human body implies a conceptual abstraction that destroys the integrity of the physical experience. Destroying the duality between the physical and the spiritual, it also undermines the traditional opposition of culture and nature. Our cultural customs, our habits, our behaviour all become mechanisms to be altered at will in order to make the world-machine run smoothly. It raises an anxious uncertainty about the question: what does it mean to be human?*

Furthering this inquiry, if virtual worlds can appear as real as reality and if this reality is also a construct, then perhaps it will lead to the exploration of the absent body—or, as Stelarc stated, “the obsolete body” that man has created technological and informational environments which the body alone cannot hope to handle. The body and machine are merged, a hybrid.

There is also an interesting discussion happening around wellbeing at the juncture between our own bodies, the bodies of others,

healthcare spaces and medical technologies. The artist Ilona Sagar in *Correspondence O* (2017) “explores the link between language, surface, technologies and the body” through “mediated encounters in social, political and experiential space. Illusion and material.”

I am currently looking to work in augmented or virtual reality, to develop my *Portable Portals* (2017) into a series of installations that operate in both planes; a psychoactive multi-sensory experience triggered by objects in the installations.

On a lighter note, I would love to explore the technology that can grow organs in vats; I have always been obsessed with medical oddities in jars and produced a whole series of objects and illustrations inspired by this (*I Put It in Cider*, 2005-7). The Hunterian Museum has always been a favourite place to visit when I need cheering up. I was also a medical illustrator for a year or so at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, which was a great experience to fuel my medical obsession, although I did have to draw the five stages of sexual excitement in male and female repeatedly for this time... which was eye-opening.



Edward Lucie-Smith on the revolutionary impulse

# Contentious nudes

Words: Edward Lucie-Smith







As the annual London Photo Fair, just closing as I start to write this, has just reminded me, representations of the body, more specifically the naked or nude human body, have become contentious once again. As perhaps one can sense from the fact that I have just chosen two subtly different adjectives with which to describe it.

There are a number of different reasons for this: some technical, some social, some polemical—all interlocked.

In the history of Western art, from Greek and Roman antiquity onwards, representation of the body, the unclothed body in particular, has very often been a central preoccupation. If this faded away in what we now call the Middle Ages, it revived strongly with the Renaissance. In this it contrasted forcibly with, say, the long history of Chinese art, certainly from the Tang Dynasty onwards. In Chinese ink-painting, it is the representation of landscape that occupies the central, most prestigious position. In Islamic cultures, figurative representations of all kinds have often had an outlawed or semi-outlawed status. This has applied particularly to representations of the nude.

Where paintings and sculptures—images made by hand—were concerned, the relationship between these and

their audience was often more complicated than we, living in the twenty-first century, are now ready to realise.

As we can see, when looking at the productions of the past, nude representations addressed their intended audience in a number of subtly different ways. Sometimes, in a Christian context, their purpose was religious. Images of Adam and Eve, shamed by their own nakedness, about to be cast out of Paradise. Christ, vestigially clothed and muscular, suffering on the Cross. Increasingly, however, these moralistic and punitive associations were absent. Turning to imagined antiquity, artists illustrated situations and stories where superb nude figures, both male and female, existed in their own right. We look back now at the heritage provided for us by great masters of the nude such as Titian, Veronese, even Velázquez, with his superb Rokeby Venus, now in the National Gallery here in London.

As one examines these productions in historical sequence one does, however, increasingly begin to notice, not only that they are always in dialogue with an imagined audience, but the nature of this audience changes with the passage of time. In the societies of the Renaissance and the Baroque, being allowed to gaze at forthrightly nude figures always contained an element of privilege. This is

adroitly stressed in the nudes of the French Fontainebleau School of the sixteenth century. Looking at these, we know we are looking at images not intended for the entirety of the French society of the time, but for a sophisticated, courtly few.

This situation persisted well into the nineteenth century, though the audience eventually became broader, while at the same time, paintings, smaller examples in particular, became more and more commodified. That is, painted nudes were no longer produced on commission for grandee patrons, but were made ad hoc, in the hope of finding a buyer, regardless of that buyer's educational status or position in the existing class system.

One of the main agents of change, where representation of the nude was concerned, was the invention of printing. A print was not simply multiple but also cheap, because it could be easily multiplied. It was in addition something that could be studied in privacy, but also secretly, if the possessor so wished. The result was a great upsurge of erotic printmaking, images that not only represented nude figures, but which represented sexual activity or strongly implied its possibility. Erotic prints were addressed entirely to the male gaze. This was true of



John William Waterhouse,  
*Study of Nymphs for 'Hylas  
and Two Nymphs'* circa 1896

Left: Image courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford © 2018. Right: Image courtesy of photographer Rama © Rama. Cc-by-sa-2.0-fr, 2018

Eugène Durieu,  
*Nude Study*, 1854





## “WE NOW FIND OURSELVES LIVING IN AN ERA OF DRASTIC REVISION AND CHANGE.”

Edgar Degas, *After the Bath, Woman Drying Her Back*, 1896

almost all non-religious art featuring nude figures made during a period from the beginning of the fifteenth until the end of the nineteenth century but it was, for obvious reasons, particularly true of prints.

A major change, but not a change in the nature of the audience, came with the invention of photography in the first half of the nineteenth century. Photographers soon discovered that this new medium offered an ideally convenient and effective way of creating images of the nude. It was used by celebrated artists of the period, among them Delacroix and Degas, as a convenient source of reference, and it soon achieved an independent life of its own, in dialogue with but separate from traditional ways of image-making.

As the century progressed it became more and more firmly established as the democratic medium of choice for creating erotic images, with a wider outreach than any rival. What remained unchanged was the fact that, perhaps more specifically than ever, photography channelled the male gaze. Women photographers did make images of the nude but accepted established formulations when they did so.

One particular aspect of photography endowed it with special erotic force. This was the fact that a photograph

seemed to guarantee that what was shown was not something imagined. It was necessary for it to have existed in the ‘real world’ for the photographic image to have been made recording it. This perception still exists in the back of most spectators’ minds, even when they are aware of how flexible and mutable photographic images have become in the age of the computer.

We now find ourselves living in an era of drastic revision and change, both in general, where images of the nude are concerned, and in relation to photographic nudes in general.

This change often involves a degree of self-contradiction. For example, there have been recent attempts to censor images that were considered perfectly innocuous in the past. This can extend to images created in the supposedly repressive Victorian past and long on view, without arousing protest or comment in major public institutions.

One recent controversy that springs to mind is a recent fuss in Britain about a painting by the Victorian artist John William Waterhouse in the collection of the Manchester Museum. It shows what is at first glance an innocuous mythological scene, and it has been continuously on view in the museum since it was acquired in 1896.





The subject of the work is Hylas and the Nymphs. Hylas was the innocent teenage lover of the Greek demigod Hercules. The story, as reported in the Guardian newspaper, goes as follows:

“Hylas goes inland for water. Finding a spring, he plunges his pitcher into the water—but nymphs, desiring the young man, grab hold of his arm, dragging him under. The women are the predators, not Hylas. At the same time, the painting clearly invites the viewer to enjoy the nymphs’ naked breasts, while betraying more than a little anxiety about female sexuality.”

For a politically correct contemporary audience there might be several problems here - not only a possibly lascivious pleasure in juvenile nudity, but in the fact of female aggression. And not only Hylas, but the nymphs who seize him, appear to be underage.”

At the request of Sonia Boyce, a well-known British black female artist who had a retrospective at this institution (March-July 2018), the Waterhouse painting was taken down, and replaced by a mass of slogans.

A fuss ensued, and the work was soon replaced in its usual spot. But the very fact that there was a big fuss seems significant.

There is, however, a contrast here with other things that are taking place in the art world, for example the rise to prominence of LGBT artists and art events, many of which place a strong stress on nudity, though in this case the erotic images are more usually male rather than female. A good place to catch a glimpse of this activity is to go to the Los Angeles based website of the Tom of Finland Foundation ([tomoffinlandfoundation.org](http://tomoffinlandfoundation.org)), which devotes itself to preserving the legacy of the Finnish-born artist and illustrator Touko Valio Laaksonen (1920-1991), and to promoting male gay imagery in general. One admirer has remarked of Tom’s work, “these are not conversation pieces, they are masturbation pieces”. Another admirer, female, claims that “Tom of Finland helped pave the way to gay liberation”.

## “THE RISE TO PROMINENCE OF LGBT ARTISTS AND ART EVENTS, MANY OF WHICH PLACE A STRONG STRESS ON NUDITY”

However, reverting to the event with which I began—the London Photo Fair of May 2018—the lack of nude imagery, from what I remember regarding previous London Photo Fairs, was rather noticeable. Even more observable was the fact that some of the most striking of the nude images that did make it into the fair were the work of woman photographers. Particularly noteworthy was a full-scale paraphrase by Charlotte Colbert of a famous painting by Lucian Freud, *Benefit Supervisor Sleeping*. In this, Freud’s massive nude has been deliberately fragmented, so that you see the body in pieces, on a series of different panels, each separately framed. It’s a case in the most literal sense of ‘now you see it, now you don’t’.

Making the rounds of this very large fair, I became more and more aware not only of the absence of nudes, usually a staple in an event of this sort, but of the urge towards abstraction in contemporary photography, which, given photography’s origins, as briefly outlined above, seems like a massive contradiction in terms. Contemporaneously in London there is an exhibition at Tate Modern called *Shape of Light: 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art* (until 14 October 2018). This has been mauled in reviews by some of my fellow critics, but I feel that many of the criticisms are unjust.

True, it doesn’t quite solve the conundrum of whether or not you can label something a photograph if the process of making the image has completely abandoned the idea of using a lens. Is sloshing about with some chemicals and a roll of photosensitive paper really enough to justify the description?

What the show does bring into focus, in some cases quite literally, is the desire to use photographic means to create images that appear to be completely independent of any aspect of the surrounding world that can be independently observed, and perhaps compared, with what the artist presents you with.

This will towards independence from anything observed, this will to create images ab initio, has long existed in what we still call, for want of any better description, avant-garde art. You find this impulse in Malevich, and you find it much later in the work of Donald Judd and other American minimalists.

Today, the conflict is sharpening once again. There is a kind of art that wants to remake the rules of social responsibility, even at the price of discarding much of the art that has been revered in the past. The #MeToo movement is just one aspect of this. This kind of art, for obvious reasons, clings to figuration. And there is, on the contrary, a kind of art that wants to opt out completely, and exist in its own sphere, on its own terms. Neither of these impulses can be regarded as traditional in any usual sense. It’s two revolutionary, or would-be revolutionary, impulses going head-to-head.

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# Hypnotic memories of the future

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*Cathedral, 2015*

The ominous and ambiguous relevance of technology and science are put under scrutiny in the work of painter Adam Dix.

Dix is a visual artist working in a mode trail-blazed mainly by writers like H.G. Wells, Philip K. Dick and Kurt Vonnegut, where science fiction is used effectively to highlight prescient issues affecting our time.

The visual language of communications technology, consumer trends and obsessions—more than a nod to Apple mania is evoked by religious and secular gatherings—are conflated with the iconography of 1950s and '60s science fiction, giving the work a strangely nostalgic feel.

In a world where digital media, augmented reality and artificial intelligence are all on the cusp of a leap forward, it's unlikely that he will run out of pressing subject matter.

Dix studied a BA (Hons) in Graphics and Illustration in 1990 at Middlesex Polytechnic and in 2009 an MA in Fine Art at Wimbledon College of Art.

He lives and works in London and recently undertook a residency at the Griffin Gallery, where he reflected on process and painterly quality in his practice.

*My aim whilst a resident at Griffin was to further the already inherent layering process within the work and extend its economic language by creating works that had an optical depth and visual 'pull and push' between figurative and abstract forms within the painting, through shallow layering of paint. - Adam Dix, 2017*

Dix's practice is deceptively benign on first glance; the subtle paint washes, nostalgic imagery and muted, well-handled colour make seductive viewing. But there is a lingering sense of being caught among forces too great to control. Vaguely utopian, hypnotic memories of the future.

## **How do you define the body?**

The figure within my work is used as a visual and narrative contrast to the objects of technology depicted: the organic and the synthesised.

It is as if the people have an over familiar sense of commitment to these sterile forms, a necessary relationship of connection.

Costume and characters are important to my work, emphasising the ritualistic and ceremonial qualities. There is an ambiguous hierarchy and sense of history, a play of past and present, with 'dress'

pointing to a time when technology was seen in futuristic terms rather than personal commodity. I see the figures as organic nodes relaying information via the machine, self-perpetuating and succumbing to their innate need to connect.

The shamanic character role within the narrative is a key character found in traditional forms of folkloric custom and spiritualism that would be there to mediate between the audience and the spirit world.

Here in my work I have made the shaman a composite of receptor and conduit. Adorned with a crown of satellitedish-type spheres, he is engaged with other characters. Sometimes with evangelical presence he lays hands upon the subjects to complete the circuit of communication.

The shaman in my work represents an individual that aligns himself with the devices of connectivity. Deciphering and acting as a conduit, his true identity is a masked screen; he is a custodian of communication who is there to symbolise the link between the individual and an all-encapsulating system of communication.





Procession, 2010

**In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

My figures' appearance and their performance within the paintings are exaggerated by appropriating the ritualistic and ceremonial traits and imagery often found in the genres of science fiction, national pageantry, folklore and religion. Referring to these constructed belief systems I see as fostering a group reaction, where comparisons between past and present systems of connectivity can be initiated.

Science fiction as a genre discusses the social psyche in relation to the wonders of technology. This is exemplified in my opinion through the literature, pulp fiction and film from mid-twentieth century onwards, and it is here that I refer to visually and metaphorically with regard to the reference imagery.

**What potential do you see in bodies?**

By appropriating sci-fi as a contemporary folklore—not unlike other areas that have ceremonial narratives that heavily rely on choreographed worship—the subjects' responses within my paintings are

exaggerated in their relationship to these contemporary icons of infotainment, conveying a sense of compliance.

As I mentioned before, my characters are human nodes completing the circuit so the synthesised current can continue. This is emphasised by compositionally placing the figures in a circle to show a sense of a continual flow; also, placing the figures within the paintings so they turn away from the audience implies that the viewers themselves are privy to something familiar that could be beneficial, encouraging them to take part.

**Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

Yes, in a way. I am conscious, like most people; I have a phone that I peck away at more than necessary, distracted by emails, social media platforms and other forms of infotainment, via a black screen that reflects my face and the real world around me.

**What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

In my paintings there is a

quasi-religious appropriation with regard to the depicted landscape of figure and technology. I see the characters aligning themselves to these devices in a cult-like state of reverence, aware that these objects may have qualities that extend their immediate communication beyond themselves. The fiction being a sci-fi spirituality, where the user of this technology appropriates the device as an amulet or icon.

In other words using the vehicle of science fiction and faith to discuss our relationship to contemporary communication as an extension to the human body, the spirit and the soul.

**Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

I have always worked with the figure. The figure is key compositionally within my work. I use it as a metaphorical platform, depicting narratively the figure's reaction and role through stance and dress, as a contrast to his or her surrounding environment within the painting. Through the mixing of genres there is an unsettling familiarity.

With physically opposing symbolic time frames, the figure can be used

to emphasise this, highlighting similarities between different eras and genres. I use this to direct and challenge the viewer's attention within the narrative of my paintings.

**Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

My interests in figurative painting tend to align with those artists who describe the figure in an economic way such as Honoré Daumier, Luc Tuymans, Jockum Nordström, Mamma Andersson, Marcel Dzama and Neo Rauch, to name a few. I am more interested in the figure as a receptacle to carry a narrative, rather than being representational.

**Describe your technique?**

My painting technique evolved from my keen interest in old print ephemera and the process of lithography. I wanted to originally reference a period in history where there had been a spike in the advance of communications, which would subsequently refer to the devices we use today. By looking at printed material of the 1950s onwards, such as National Geographic, pulp fiction, etc. I decided that the

qualities of this form of media could be incorporated sublimely as a directional tool within the painting. My concern was not to pastiche the printed image, but refer to its character translating the qualities that were inherent, such as ink saturation, mis-registration of colour blocks, strong contrast between light and dark and soft photographic imagery.

The paintings are subsequently made by methodically layering thin layers of oil colour glazes, repeating the process from the lightest tone to the darkest tone.

It is a watercolour process but done in oil and the majority of my paintings are painted on the flat rather than upright. Some works can have up to 30 glazes.

**Where do you find inspiration?**

Inspiration for my works can come from many places. My preference is to find references in flea markets, thrift stores and bookshops rather than the Internet, ranging from contemporary science and technology journals, science fiction novels and films, printed ephemera, old postcards and photos, folklore

and religious ephemera, as well as visiting independent local museum archives and county festivals.

**Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

It's a vessel or conduit, with changing function.

**If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

Fallibility is part of being human, so for that reason I see no reason to change.

**With developments like Virtual Reality (VR) changing the way we view our bodies, do you think this will affect your work?**

Virtual reality is an area that I am already starting to address within my work. I am concerned by the extension of the concept of an artificial world where the individual's senses are totally enveloped, interacting within that space while physically placed in the real world, as if straddling both, and how this may interrupt or desensitise.



# Lungs of coral, hearts of stone

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Glass, a metaphor for a membrane; impermeable, yet penetrable by the eye. Katharine Dowson's work aims to show us the hidden beauty within our bodies. Informed by scientific discovery into dyslexia, HIV and cancer, her detailed sculptures and installations allow the viewer to enter the body. Confronting aspects of ourselves as permeable biological, questioning the overlaid psychological frames through which we picture ourselves. Her work has been bought by Charles Saatchi and features prominently in the collections of the Arts Council, the Wellcome Trust and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Dowson has spent more than 20 years investigating the intersections between science, psychology and art. Speaking to *Trebuchet*, we asked whether all scientific advances are necessarily positive.

## How do you define the body?

It's a hidden side of life. I'm fascinated by the internal workings of the body, and I see my body as a landscape within that. I'm always talking about the hidden side of life that is there but remains invisible unless a third

party or catalyst comes into play, like science. As often as not, I link the body to other natural forms and organisms because we're all interlinked. So the viscera often look like rocks. There are wonderful photographs of coral reefs and they look like internal photographs of the body, for instance inside the lungs. It's a matter of perception.

If you tell people it's a coral reef when they're looking at lungs they'll react positively but if you say actually it's lungs, or internal organs, they go "Urgh!" For me the internal body is really stunning. Beautiful. For me that's what the body is.

The psychology of the body and the mind is also important. Most of us only start thinking about anatomy or our bodies—unless you're an athlete—when something goes wrong. In general, our body continues doing what it does. Women are more sensitive to their bodies because they change in a very marked way during puberty and also once a month. This is why we are frightened of hospitals, or dentists, because we are suddenly out of our comfort zones. We are very vulnerable beings, however much we'd like to think we aren't.

## What have people's reactions been to your work?

A lot of the time people think it's very beautiful or they don't like it. It's either one way or the other; people don't really ignore my work. I rather like doing the work where it's seductive on the outside but you're not quite sure what you're looking at. I used to like light boxes and they looked like lungs with tracheas and things like that, but actually the lungs are cast as seaweed. The 'trachea' were blown by a technical glass-blower and then dipped in wax. So it was based around anatomy but also make-believe.

I find beauty in the body because imperfections in nature I think are beautiful; there are always imperfections. In fact, what I love about Islam is that nobody is perfect except for God, so when they are creating these stunning kilim rugs and carpets they add imperfections as a tribute. For me it's the imperfections that are fascinating. It seems to me that when things have gone wrong with the body, the trouble then, is that it filters into the mind. It can be incredibly depressing which is where psychology starts kicking in. The body



Image courtesy of K. Dowson © 2018

*My Heart*,  
Grey Inclusion, 2013



Image courtesy of K. Dowson © 2018

is about psychology, the brain and the life of the brain, and how the brain thinks about how we are.

**Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

I am actually. I did a piece of work called *My Soul* (2005) regarding dyslexia. I wanted to look at the psychology of dyslexia. Specifically, I wanted to use myself as a guinea pig for psychologists to study dyslexia. They put me in an MRI scanner—this was in 2001/2—and blasted these words at me, measuring my responses. From that they could see where the word-processing parts of my brain were. From that study there was enough of my dyslexic brain morphed with other dyslexic brains to show a general anomaly and justify more funding into research.

For myself I had my MRI scans which I gave to someone at Newcastle University. At the time, medical imaging and CAD didn't communicate; they were two different system languages so we had to model it specifically. This was the basis of *My Soul*: my brain, left and right hemispheres, etched into lumps of glass. That was as close as I could get with the brain at the time.

In 2013, I had a residency at the National Glass Centre and I was

able through that to work with the Parkinson Research Centre UK [as another guinea pig] to update [the image of] my brain. This time I 3D-printed my brain, laser-etched it and also cast it. So again I have actual physical evidence of my brain specimen and I've also done the same thing with my heart.

People still carry forward the Victorian idea that the soul is in the heart, whereas we tend to think that it's in the brain. If there is such a thing. I have my heart and brain kept in a way that I can hold them. Life-sized. I've also made enlarged versions and in marble. One version is in pink Portuguese marble, 3.5 times life-size. It was quite new at the time but since then numerous people have done it.

I've been very inspired by medical museums since the 1990s, so I've been working with the body ever since. It's not always internal anatomy that I've found interesting. I did an installation called *Myriad* (1998) that was thousands of optical lenses which played with the idea of breaking up the external body, but in a different way. That was talking about how what you see and what I see are two different things. So the lenses were curtains three metres high to anything up to 12 metres long,

made from rejected spectacle lenses and magnifiers. To make them look random you have to have a fairly specific plan. You see the human form in various ways; you see them upside down, or magnified or not magnified. To emphasise the effect we had some contemporary dancers dancing behind them which the viewer sees stretching or contorting in particular ways.

**What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

I think there's a problem in medicine. We are abusing our bodies in many ways. The 'perfect body' is a real problem. It has a terrible effect on teenage girls who have issues around their bodies. Selfies and all these things are creating a self-obsessed generation.

Modern medicine is creating problems for the future, in the sense that I'm a mother, and while modern childbirth is fantastic, how we've overcome all these problems. I'm interested in what it's going to do to our genetics in terms of the Darwinian development of the female form. People are now able to have children who would not necessarily be able to in the past because they are able to have caesareans. Now that's fantastic but it's going

to be interesting to see how the female body changes; the hips are going to get narrower—not least because that’s apparently more desirable in a visual sense. So it’ll be interesting to see how these things develop in future generations. There is a difficulty in thinking about how the body dies; modern medicine will also create a situation where our bodies will continue going on longer and longer. I think about my darling mother who has dementia, who is beautifully looked after, but how can we let go or let people let go of their bodies? I’d say that’s probably going to be an issue in the future, if it isn’t already.

### **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

Leonardo da Vinci. He was fantastic. He was a scientist as well as an artist and inventor; his was just the most amazing brain. He would say the most incredible things. I had a quote up in my studio: “The only constant thing in nature is change.” I think that’s true.

I love Egon Schiele. I know that he’s controversial and similarly I haven’t been able to look at Eric Gill sculptures in the same way. It is contentious. If you look at Egon Schiele’s work you can tell that he’s probably not a particularly nice character. I think it’s a real problem thinking that artists have to be nice; you have to divorce yourself from that. Bacon was seriously questionable. Lucian Freud was an interesting character too. But I was really inspired by Otto Dix’s wartime

etchings; I was really inspired by his depictions of the body in a very visceral way. It’s at once poignant and distressing. There is a brilliant etching of this mother, which is very spiky, dry. It’s not the gouged plates that he did with the soldier in the dugout with the rotten flesh and the maggots. This one is very spiky and it has a mother within a town that has been bombed and she has these wide, staring eyes that are looking with absolute horror and she’s trying to breastfeed this dead baby. It’s really stark and says everything to me about war, which is again very powerful.

I also love Rodin and you get these female figures that look like a giant thumb and you get a sense of their weight. He had this fantastic technician in the studio that was able to take these small figurines that he created in the studio and he was able to enlarge them. So a lot of these sculptures that you see were actually made for the gates of paradise and then they were blown up from plaster. When he died these plasterworks were subsequently cast in bronze.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

From sciences, anatomy, nature, psychology; those are the really the things that I find something in. Looking at science plates and squaring the circle, or circling the square (between science and art). I love the book *Gaia* (James Lovelock, 1979) about how everything is interconnected and looking at the micro/macro world from tiny

organisms to whatever and then similarities between those and quasars in outer space.

### **If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

As Leonardo said, the only constant thing in nature is change. It’s a difficult one as I think it’s the psychology of it; it’d be good to make everyone more empathetic with one another. More kindness. It’d be good to breed kindness into it. So if via genetic modification you make people kinder. I mean, if you can do people with blue eyes and no dyslexia then why not do it with a characteristic? So you could cut the megalomaniac gene, the self-obsessed gene... I think it would be a fine thing to change genetics for the good.

### **With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

It will if I’m interested in it. Whenever I do a project with a scientist I find something fascinating. The thing is that I’m not a scientist, so their world is forever extraordinary. When I work with scientists they find the way I think quite different.

They really love that I get excited about their work and it suddenly makes them see things in ways that they haven’t seen things before. So that’s how the relationship can work so when they make a new discovery, whatever it is, I always find something to make it work.



# Elegant geometry, structure and violence

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*My paintings are often large diptychs, or a number of canvasses, made without preliminary sketches or any other devices, just using my eyes and a pencil, drawing straight onto the bare canvas. Working on bare canvas means that whatever I paint remains. This gives the process of painting an element of risk—a kind of performance in the making of it. Although areas of my paintings are rendered in great detail I allow unpainted areas to allow space and give the viewer room to form a discourse with the image.*  
- Artist statement, Martha Parsey

The large canvasses of Martha Parsey contain stylised worlds, where action, geometry and perspective create a colourful dissonance. The figures in her paintings, playing out stylised narratives, encourage an emotional and symbolic reading as they intersect a network of subliminal geometric elements.

Over the course of her career Parsey's figures have shown a range of poise and tone from violent to subtle, drawing a parallel between cardinal emotion and surreal geometry. A signature element in her work is the manner in which objects and figures emerge and disappear into unpainted areas of canvas; painted areas in Parsey's work signify static consciousness, whereas the blank spaces are areas where potent imagination is left to play with historicity. What is unsaid here?

What details are omitted and why?

With the artist living and working in Cologne and London, Parsey's paintings are part of a number of prestigious collections worldwide including the Ovitz Family Collection, the Zabłudowicz Collection and the Musée National d'art Moderne, Paris. In this issue of *Trebuchet*, Parsey describes the physical process of painting as well as the process through which she ascribes the body as figure and position in her work.

## **How do you define the body?**

The body is often not fully defined as a solid space in my work, sometimes only by markers: clothing, jewellery, buttons or the shape of the silhouette. In fact a lot of the time the body consists only of the bare canvas, which has a skin-tone texture to it.

## **In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

I think I've stretched the idea of what needs to be defined and what doesn't. Bare areas of canvas work as a reminder to the viewer that this is a painting, an artificial representation, and the texture of the bare canvas gives the painting itself a certain rawness and nakedness. The faces in my paintings are on the whole the most complexly painted areas, enhanced by the contrast of the body which is a vacuous and incomplete space.

## **What potential do you see in bodies?**

Leaving the bodies as empty vessels allows the viewer space to project themselves into the figures. My figures are, in a sense, figments of the viewer's imagination, and space around the figures allows the imagination more room to roam.

For example, in a recent painting *Giant Steps* (2017) the figure is very fragmented, where parts are made to stand for the whole. The body parts, the legs and torso, are signifiers, flags of femininity if you like, without the woman in her own entirety. She's an emblem of woman, made up of her fragments reflected in the mirrors that surround her, like the gambling dice on which she stakes her chances, her upper body defined only by the shape of a dotted bra. So she's really a completely incomplete figure, where more attention is paid to signifiers of the erotic (like the shoe) than to her as an actual substantial being.

## **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

Something people often forget about painting is how physical it is. Certainly in my case, working predominantly on a fairly large scale, often with a number of canvasses, like in the diptychs and triptychs, or indeed in the 12-metre painting, it's a very physical act. It takes a fair amount of physical and mental strength and sweat to make them,

and by working with your hands, your own body, to bring this thing to life, it is a very physical and intimate process.

The more you paint the more in tune you get to the physical act of painting. Your coordination improves, your eye, hand, and the way you move, almost like a dance: I remember clearly from the 12-metre painting of being almost like in a trance. When you're really in tune with it,

like a musician with their instrument, or a well-trained sports person, it becomes a sixth sense, and you can do almost anything with it and it works for you, like an improvisation.

**What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

I think the challenge today in terms of painting the human body is how photography has changed how we look at the figure. First painters

answered that with the various viewpoints of Cubism, then Bacon distorted and whittled the figure down, severely abbreviating it. The issue with the human form today is how to bring across the presence of a person without boring everyone with figurative representation now that the camera has broken that down and annulled it as a viable option or possibility.

**Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

My work has always been figurative. The body offers a lot of scope for gesture and posture that adds to the portrayal of the person, which I've treated differently in many different works. In *Sirens Sweetly Singing* (2015) I approached painting the body, the naked skin, in more detail, which is something I generally avoid because female nakedness is already an occupied coded territory where you easily drift into voyeurism. I was able to solve this by 'dressing' them in stockings, heavily applied make-up, fishnets in their hair as well as by giving them a slightly masculine air. The title comes from the Cream track "Tales of Brave Ulysses" from 1967, based upon the epic Greek poem. According to Homer there were two sirens, often depicted as naked figures, legs scaled, or winged as part-woman part-bird. They entice us with their fixed vacant stares, the mother-of-pearl quality of her torso,



Image courtesy of M.Parsey © 2018







*Giant Steps, 2017.*



Profile  
Martha Parsey



Sega, 1999.

the mermaid legs bound in nylon, one outstretched across the scale-like pattern of the floor, the word 'achtung' spelled out as a warning beside them.

In the painting *Don't Call me Babe* (2011) I wanted to paint the whole figure, complete and unfragmented. It was during the run-up to the London Olympics, as I was looking at a lot of sports photography. I wanted to have this female gymnast with the rope a little like a snake in an ancient myth, playing with the portrayal of the female form in a modern setting,

in boxing shoes and gripping the gym rope in her hands, as an empowering call to self-autonomy outside of the canon of male versions of the female form.

*Rip Her to Shreds* (2000) was an early painting of two women fighting in the street. I used pins through the canvas for the pubic hair that protruded from under their pulled-up skirts. The man they are most likely fighting over is portrayed simply as a stick man in the road markings of the street. It's a crude and violent

image, in my mind very physical in its abbreviated and energised form.

*Brace Yourself* (2001) was an early painting of a boy standing in a pool. I was interested in the idea of how to show his body submerged in water and to create a sense of his deep discomfort in the cold, as well as a still panic about a foreboding disaster as portrayed in the Egyptian-style, frieze-like pictograms above his head. The body was painted quite roughly and schematically, as was the water, with an artificial pouring of paint to create foreground and depth to the water with his small body emerging from the icy pool.

In *Sega* (1999) I wanted to look at the male figure in a group, of the male family. A man sits with his five children playing a Sega video game. All their torsos are bare, the father with tattoos, the children's gazes fixed to an off-screen screen; only one boy, looking closely into the eyes of a hamster in his hands, connects to another figure. Here the bodies and faces are painted in thick impasto oil, becoming almost sculptural.

### **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

Obviously Francis Bacon, or I wouldn't have made two films about him. What's so fascinating about Bacon is what he couldn't do and what he managed to achieve within the limits of what he could; he was a very limited painter and therefore a very resourceful and inventive one.

I do get a real kick out of the achievements of some sportsmen and women. I play tennis so have my big tennis idols, but it's never just athleticism and strength, it's always a combination of body and mind, and when the two are working together, often under intense pressure, how they seem to almost transcend the possible, go beyond physical and



mental boundaries. When you look at Usain Bolt for example, beyond all the playing to the cameras, he has his own unorthodox style and a physique that is not that of a hundred-metre sprinter, and an attitude, making it look so relaxed and easy, not just beating the world record, but by a huge margin, while even slowing down at the end, and almost reluctantly crossing the line.

### **Describe your technique?**

Firstly I draw the composition in pencil on unprimed canvas from figures I've assembled in some kind of an image in my head. Once the composition is resolved I paint the faces that in large part are the main focus of the painting with graphic areas to suggest the space.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

Paintings, photographs, films, things I see or imagine, being alive.

### **Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

I think of the body really as nothing more than a shell and outside of painting I don't attach that much significance to it. It often gets over-emphasised, overly coded or used to give people a false sense of identity. We're just the way we are, by nothing more than accident really.

### **What would you change about the human body?**

The beauty of drawing the human figure is that it's so difficult! No, I wouldn't want to change anything to make it easier. You wouldn't want to win Wimbledon without beating a really good opponent, would you? Even if the opponent ultimately is always yourself. Challenges make us better; I'm not into making it easier, I don't use any projectors or any aids like that, just looking and drawing.



Left: *Rip her to shreds*, 2000  
Above: *Sirens sweetly singing*, 2015

Most people, if they really want to draw or paint the human figure well, just need to learn to really look at it. I'd have no reason to carry on if it was easy. Each picture is a challenge I set myself to resolve some issue in the painting.

### **With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

Digital photography, photo apps and the reach of social media are definitely already affecting how we view others and what we choose to show or expose about ourselves. Whether that really changes painting, well, I doubt it. Painting has a very long tradition and is somewhat contained and restricted by the physical possibilities of the

medium. I'm also not a big subscriber to the lineal idea of contemporary technical development being the summit of human achievement – I was only just listening to a chamber piece by J. S. Bach and was struck by how radical and modern it sounded. So I think it really comes down to an individual's sense of inventiveness, regardless of what time or culture he or she lives in, than what technical developments are available to them. I sense we will all soon tire of photo manipulation and are already yearning for something more physical; the physicality of painting, the physicality of being, because ultimately, we all want to physically connect.

The body as a symbol for psychic change

# Suffering and transformation

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Words: Michael Eden







# “ARCHETYPES BEING SO POTENT CAN ONLY BE APPROACHED AND MADE SENSE OF INDIRECTLY THROUGH SYMBOLS”

We are all ready to win, projecting villains and obstacles onto the situations and people who appear to be in our way, but as always, the enemy is within.

Our bodies suffer in space and time: we share this with other people. Our bodily pain has a direct equivalence in our minds; mental suffering has physical manifestations; physical suffering alters and affects our minds. But if we externalise our struggle we can never be responsible for our actions, own our bodies or change our minds.

Physical and mental suffering: mutilation, searing pain and trauma can be given context and even made to work for our best interests; we have a long history of bloody myths and fairy tales and a modern history of updating these in the premier medium of time, film. No matter how great the external impact on the body, so long as we survive it's the mind that suffers and the mind that remains malleable to change and redemption, if we can face the true obstacles those we give force to with our own mental activity.

## **Jung and the Key to Self-Knowledge**

Using Jungian concepts, it is possible to discern how the myths and fairy tales of a culture have developed to mediate powerful emotions, drives and primordial images erupting from individuals. Jung names the psychic forces which are responsible for this 'Archetypes':

*Archetypes are typical forms of apprehension, indeed wherever we meet with uniformity and regular recurring ways of apprehension, they are referable as archetypes. (Jung, 1969)*

The Archetypes for Jung are present in the 'collective unconscious' defining that space, which is like the psychic equivalent of DNA. Present in the collective unconscious are the ancient hopes, aspirations, fears, desires, drives and notions of the sublime which come to define a culture/epoch through their repeated insistence via individual's psychic workings. In their essentialised form, the Archetypes being so potent can only be approached and made sense of indirectly through symbols, through a translation into meaning via creation myths, stories, art and so on and being the source of psychic energy, they are inexhaustible.

*Not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. Even the best attempts at explanation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language. (Indeed language itself is only an image.) The most we can do is to dream the myth onwards and give it a modern dress. And whatever explanation or interpretation does to it, we do to our own souls as well*

*with corresponding results for our own well being.  
The Archetype - let us never forget this - is a psychic  
organ present in us all. (Jung, 1969)*

Dr Jolande Jacobi gives the following explanation of this in her book *The Psychology of CG Jung* (1942) using the example of an 'axial system'. Jacobi explains:

*Thus, the archetype as a potential 'axial system' (the archetype per se) is pre-existent and immanent in the psyche. The 'mother liquid' - the experience of humanity - in which the precipitate must form represents the images which crystallise around the axial system and which take on increasing sharpness and richness of content in the womb of the unconscious. (Jolande, 1942)*

*In this way we might understand Jung's account of Archetype as a kind of river bed carved in the land: "An archetype is like an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries digging a deep channel for itself. (Jung, 1969)*

And man, as Heraclitus said, is a river.

We might understand the notion of Archetype further by giving it the status of an axiom in Jungian theory or a kind of absolute truth of the psyche: in this way we

## “THEY CYNICALLY MOCKED THE PAINTING WITH A SPOOF OF ITS TITLE”

Bert Gilbert,  
*Wrestling with my Inner  
Demons V*, 2016

can see how the artists of the romantic and symbolist movement have an affinity with Jung since their work was an attempt to approach such notions, emphasising feelings such as awe and horror, Turner's *Slave ship* (1840) is surely his attempt to approach horror, his original title *Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying - typhoon coming on* pointing directly to the terrible event in which a number of slaves were cast overboard so their owners could claim the insurance. Turner gives the event a biblical overtone, the raging sea full of piteous hands and the storm threatening to obliterate the whole desperate scene.

The ship was The Zong and the event was known as the 'Zong massacre' which took place on 29 November 1781. The law at the time stood as follows:

*The insurer takes upon him the risk of the loss, capture, and death of slaves, or any other unavoidable accident to them: but natural death is always understood to be excepted: by natural death is meant, not only when it happens by disease or sickness, but also when the captive destroys himself through despair, which often happens: but when slaves are killed, or thrown into the sea in order to quell an insurrection on their part, then the insurers must answer.* (www.umich.edu, 2015)

None of those responsible for throwing over slaves to claim insurance were charged with murder.

Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer above the sea of fog* (1818) is also a clear example of this affinity, the lone figure set against the epic landscape immediately draws a distinction between the power and wonder of nature compared to the fragility of a human individual, and yet the young man seems to be risen up on his rocky perch, poised to adventure into whatever lies below the mist, an image of the courageous human in a moment of profound apprehension of the sublime.

The romantic and symbolist artists gave primacy to intuition and feeling over what for them had become a too rigid rationalism during the enlightenment. Turner had evoked the wrath of the popular opinion-makers *Punch* magazine, who satirised his title for its dramatic emphasis. They cynically mocked the painting with a spoof of its title,

*The humorous magazine Punch, invented a catalogue entry which included 'A Typhoon bursting in a simoon over the Whirlpool of Maelstrom, Norway, with a Ship on fire, an Eclipse, and the Effect of a Lunar Rainbow' In a London pantomime of 1841 there was a scene in which a boy with a*





*tray of jam tarts falls through a window in which a Turner painting is being displayed; the shop owner dusts down the broken tarts, puts a frame around them, and sells them for a thousand pounds. (Ackroyd, 2006)*

This contributed to the painting's ill-reception and was a sign of Turner's falling out of favour.

*Jung also encourages scorn for his use of a more (although not entirely) poetic language in his writing. Commenting in The Guardian in 2004, Adam Philips rebukes Jung for "characteristically high flying and far flung titles". He goes on to say that Jung has an "ominous uniqueness", finally stating: "The question we are likely to ask Jung is, why is he so interested in himself? (Philips, 2004)*

Philips, like *Punch* before him, cast himself in the 'no nonsense' role. For Jung he conjures the image of self-satisfied eccentric, a self-appointed genius in love with their own pronouncements. But to say that Philips is divisive seems obvious as Jung can answer Philips' glib question himself:

*Imagine someone who is brave enough to withdraw these projections all and sundry, you get an individual conscious of a pretty thick shadow. Such a man has saddled himself with new problems and conflicts. He has become a serious problem to himself for he is now unable to say that, they do this or that, that they must be fought against. He lives in the 'house of self collection.' Such a man knows that what is wrong in the world is in himself, and if he only learns to deal with his own shadow, then he has done something real for the world. He has succeeded in removing an infinitesimal part at least of the unsolved gigantic problems of our day. (Jung 1970)*

Here Jung makes clear the necessity for a working through of one's own problems, this would be a uncompromising understanding of self, requiring a great deal of introspection. We might ask Philips, 'how can a person put their house in order without taking an interest, and eventually responsibility for their own psychic workings?' perhaps such a pronouncement is beyond Philips' no-nonsense approach?

**"TO REACH AS BROAD AN AUDIENCE AS POSSIBLE  
BY TAKING RELIGIOUS, MYTHIC OR FOLKLORIC  
NOTIONS, INTUITIVELY GRASPED BY PEOPLES"**

Michael Eden,  
*Linchpin*, 2017



**“IT IS A MOMENT OF DEATH AND REBIRTH WHICH  
BEGINS THE PROCESS OF INDIVIDUATION”**

Art  
Jungian transformation

Philips is not however Jung's most heavyweight critic: the sober rationalist AC Grayling has a similar problem with Jung, although for the most part his emphasis is at least on Jung's interests and style rather than the man himself:

*Jung's work, which on a blunt view is vitiated by its eclectic baggage of mysticism, superficial anthropology, credulity and superstition. Freud was at least an empiricist and rationalist... even if he is (scientifically speaking) off with the fairies. (Grayling, 2004)*

It's difficult to know since Grayling gives no specific examples of what he is referring to by 'baggage': he simply lists the subjects via which Jung tried to help both himself and those interested in his theory come to a greater understanding of analytical psychology, to reach as broad an audience as possible by taking religious, mythic or folkloric notions, intuitively grasped by peoples, to illuminate difficult concepts otherwise reserved for the elite few, and for Jung, to demonstrate the connection between individuals by showing how these themes found a voice over and over again across the world.

*With regard to 'credulity' we might remind Grayling of his own misstep over his exclusive and very expensive University for the Humanities. Speaking after falling out of favour with leftist students, he writes: "My whole record, everything I have written, is turned its head. Now I am a bastard capitalist. It is really upsetting. (Carthy, 2011)*

It's difficult to accept that Grayling would not have predicted the anger this move would inspire, after all a little Holmesian deduction can't be beyond his rational mind? Grayling may benefit from giving some attention to his shadow, or at least looking at ways to bring his teaching to a wider audience.

Whether Jung's theory is 'vitiating' by baggage must surely be a matter for individuals to judge. For my part, Jung's insistence on those themes which AC Grayling lists so disparagingly in his article are simply helpful in making his points clear; we can agree or disagree with Jung as suits us. It is also clear that there are motifs which occur so frequently in our myths, fairy tales, literature and cinema

that a coherent theory such as Jung's can help us to give them closer study, bringing greater understanding of their relevance and implications for individuals and societies.

*Archetypes were, and still are, living psychic forces that demand to be taken seriously, and they have a strange way of making sure of their effect. Always they were the bringers of protection and salvation, and their violation has as its consequences the 'perils of the soul' known to us from the psychology of primitives. Moreover, they are the infallible causes of the neurotic and even psychotic disorders, behaving exactly like neglected organs or organic functional systems. (Jung, 1969)*

One must be clear to understand the distinction between 'personal' and collective unconscious the following quote from Dr Jacobi is useful:

*In contrast to the personal unconscious, which is an accumulation of contents that have been repressed during the life of the individual and is continually being refilled with new materials, the collective unconscious consists entirely of elements characteristic of the human species. (Jacobi, 1942)*

This makes clear Jung's concept that we, the human species, share a fundamental base in the archetypes.

The challenge of the individual, then, is to confront both these archetypal forces which emanate from the collective unconscious as well as what is present as repressed in the personal unconscious. This process is difficult: its beginning initiates the journey of the individual subject towards a greater knowledge of themselves; we might understand this by employing the ancient Greek aphorism, 'know thyself' so often associated with Plato and Socrates. For Jungians 'know thyself' is expanded into the process of individuation where by the subject begins the painful task of coming to terms with their shortcomings, their repressed material, forbidden desires and so on, taking responsibility for these things to form a more whole, true self, a man or woman in the round, so to speak.

*Every advance in culture is, psychologically, an extension of consciousness, a coming to consciousness that can*



*take place only through discrimination. Therefore an advance always begins with individuation, that is to say with the individual, conscious of his isolation, cutting a new path through hitherto untrodden territory. To do this he must first return to the fundamental facts of his own being, irrespective of all authority and tradition, and allow himself to become conscious of his distinctiveness. If he succeeds in giving collective validity to his widened consciousness, he creates a tension of opposites that provides the stimulation which culture needs for its further progress. (Jung, 1969)*

Naturally this is a painful, difficult process, one which stretches the limits of the individual's will and necessarily threatens to shatter previous formations of self. It is therefore paradoxically a process which would be impossible to begin without pre-existing areas of reflection, kept open by the radical implications of fairy tales for example, or if one prefers in art or philosophy and so on, while simultaneously being the process in individuals from which such creativity originates. The odd moebius nature of this concept brings to mind Douglas Hofstadter's notion of a strange loop:

*Despite one's sense of departing ever further from one's origin, one winds up, to one's shock, exactly where one had started out. In short, a strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop. (Hofstadter, 2007)*

Hofstadter's visual example of this is MC Escher's Drawing hands. The 'self-creating' motif of this image is central to the notion of a 'strange loop'; it is meant to help us understand Hofstadter's idea of subjectivity:

*In the end, we are self-perceiving, self-inventing, locked-in mirages that are little miracles of self-reference. (Hofstadter, 2007)*

This modal seems to complement Jung's idea of the psyche as a self-regulating adaptive system, although for Jung the Ouroboros would surely serve as a better example of the paradox, not least since the image can be traced back into antiquity its variations occurring in many different societies:

*The dragon is probably the oldest pictorial symbol in alchemy of which we have documentary evidence. It appears as the Ouroboros, the tail-eater, in the Codex Marcianus, which dates from the tenth or eleventh century,*

*together with the legend 'the One, the All'. Time and again the alchemists reiterate that the opus proceeds from the one and leads back to the one, that it is a sort of circle like a dragon biting its own tail. (Jung, 1968)*

It is this perplexing notion of the emergence of consciousness and the creativity which ensues from greater levels of self-knowledge that Jung hopes to illuminate by referencing the Ouroboros, the;

*...dragon that devours, fertilises, begets, slays, and brings itself to life again. Being hermaphroditic, it is compounded of opposites and is at the same time their uniting symbol. (Jung, 1968)*

It is a moment of death and rebirth which begins the process of individuation. This is evoked beautifully throughout the variations of the Cinderella stories, where the despised feminine figure must endure until she can be reborn and take her rightful place in the social order. Cinderella herself was forced to sleep in the hearth

## “KEPT OPEN BY THE RADICAL IMPLICATIONS OF FAIRY TALES”

surrounded by smouldering embers, what better place for a phoenix to emerge?

One such story, a German fairy tale *Allerleirauh* (many kinds of fur) has a princess resolve to run away to avoid the incestuous advances of her grief-stricken father.

*She put on her mantle of all kinds of fur, and blackened her face and hands with soot. Then she commended herself to God, and went away, and walked the whole night until she reached a great forest. And as she was tired she got into a hollow tree, and fell asleep. (Jones, 2012)*

For the early peoples of northern Europe, the forest was a place of the unknown, of the ‘other’, and going into it represents that ‘going down’ which Nietzsche speaks of where people were encouraged to explore the dark recesses of their inner world and return to a shared reality, changed and stronger. The princess must become aware of the ‘other’ in herself in order to survive. The creature she becomes is not simply a mask, a surface disguise; rather it is her innermost self personified, a monster, resourceful and capable of enduring all the dirty work. Jung writes:

*A person who by reason of special capacities is entitled to individuate must accept the contempt of society until such a time as he has accomplished his equivalent. (Jung, 1969)*

The princess possesses potential, the symbols of her creativity and individuality shut up in a nutshell: a golden ring, a golden spinning wheel, a golden reel, and three dresses of the sun, the moon and stars. The impossibility of these objects being compacted into such a small space gives emphasis to the bursting forth of the individuated self, when the princess shakes off her furs, wipes her face clean and wears the dresses which catch the attention of her suitor. Of course, the image which is brought to mind when the princess becomes her ‘true self’ is a glorious one, but for my part it is *Allerleirauh*, a dark thing, a stain almost, with the voice of a woman, and a single perfect finger which resonates in my mind’s eye.

It is after all *Allerleirauh* who represents transformation itself, suffering and struggle, these themes which seem to evoke the most vivid images in the imagination. Many young women stand for this struggle in fairy tales; who can fail to be moved by the painful mutilation of the miller’s daughter from *The Handless Maiden* as she is continually pushed, tempted to act, first the selfish actions of her father, whose narcissism is such that he sees only one course of action: “Help me in my affliction and forgive the injury I am going to do to you.” (Jones, 2012)

A corrupt authority in the extreme who chops off his daughter’s hands to save his soul while simultaneously looking to be pitied, not even in her mind is she free to resent her father such is suffocating nature of his power over her: “Do what you will with me. I am your child.”

The girl’s stumps seem to actualise her acute passivity and the brutal narcissistic wound at play in the background due to her father, being too much to bare she leaves him, with all his treasures.

Upon meeting and marrying a king she is adorned befitting royalty and yet still she seems frozen, the silver hands he gives her to wear, ‘which could not sow or weave’, a mere decoration, a symbol perhaps of her new status, bringing her up to standard in a palace of beautiful things. There is a pivotal moment in the story which begins her journey to a greater balance of opposites, a feature of individuation. It is the passive feminine which has to die before she can individuate, and in proper dreamlike fashion with the character of a non-sequitur, the old queen slays a doe deer in place of her unfortunate daughter in law and keeps its tongue instead of hers as requested, to show as evidence of the terrible execution.

With the doe’s death a new story begins, and like *Allerleirauh* the miller’s daughter finds herself in the forest struggling to survive. In the Russian variation of the story she finds autonomy in the woods; after the silver hands have fallen away she plunges her stumps into a river to save her baby boy who has fallen in, amongst the mud

## “HIS OVERLY PROUD FATHER WHO WANTS A CHILD TO STIFLE THE GOSSIPS AND IS GRANTED A GROVEL HOG INSTEAD”

and water her hands reappear, the baby rescued. The little boy surely a composite of burgeoning masculine qualities like the ones his mother gains and so badly needed to balance her character.

If ever there was a creature who “must accept the contempt of society until... he has accomplished his equivalent”, as Jung says, it is the grovel hog from *Hans My Hedgehog*. Hans is the result of a cavalier wish on the part of his overly proud father who wants a child to stifle the gossips and is granted a grovel hog instead.

*His wife had a son, who was part hedgehog, the upper half hedgehog, the lower half human. She was aghast when she saw him, and said, ‘Look what you’ve done with your wishing.’ (Jones, 2012)*

We might see Hans as a personification of the couple’s unconscious and neglected problems represented by their childless marriage. The neglected son is left behind the stove, as if to be put to the back of one’s mind, while his parents fantasise how much easier it would be if he were dead. His form awkward and horrifying with sharp quills, a symbol of a curt and hardened character which has helped him survive his melancholy childhood.

The bagpipes his father give him allow Hans to channel his suffering when he goes into the forest: there his time is fruitful, his herd grows and he helps two wayward kings find their way home. Much like *The Handless Maide*, the turning point of the story is announced by a slaughter, in this instance of Hans’s pigs - all he has left materially from his parents. In a gesture of paying back he takes them to his father then leaves to claim what he is owed from his royal acquaintances.

He is rejected many times by the agents of society, his parents, the false princess who is made bloody by his quills and her father who sends his soldiers to attack him, his eventual ‘becoming’ is no less painful his true princess and their union, which surely represents the

incorporation of the feminine, has to burn his hedgehog skin and leave him charred and black. This transformation from grovel hog to man is both violent and painful we are left with Hans in a bed, ‘human from top to toe’. Now ready for healing, he is rubbed with balms and ointments and married again to his true princess. As Dr Jacobi says:

*The complementary or compensatory relation between opposite functions is a structural law of the psyche.” (Jacobi, 1942)*

If autonomy is a whole robust self, and these are the goals of the painful transformations which occur in individuation, why must this entail so much pain? He continues

*The first stage leads to the experience of the shadow, symbolising our ‘other side’, our ‘dark brother’ who is an invisible but inseparable part of our psychic totality. For the living form needs deep shadow if it is to appear plastic. Without shadow it remains a two-dimensional phantom. (Jacobi, 1942)*

The personal shadow represents all our repressed material, our forbidden desires and difficult truths embodied in a figure the same sex as ourselves; it comes into our dreams to haunt us and gives body to our prejudices when we project onto others. Its assimilation is painful as it requires us to abandon delusional self-perspective and act responsibly; we can in this mode no longer escape into victimhood, although the reward is a more creative, whole self.

The archetypal shadow is much more ominous, it is untameable, akin to a kind of ‘death drive’ with the character of Thanatos it can only be coped with, so to speak, since it is that which primordial man has feared and ever will it is the other as a changeable god, for Nietzsche, the void which looks back at us.

**Mutilation and the failure to act**

Bert Gilbert,  
*Shadow of My Former  
Self*, 2016



The failure to incorporate the shadow is a failing that prevents any further development, and so a most brutal physical act is the marker which comes to symbolise this shortcoming; the horror is a prompt. Our eyes and hands are powerful tools and are symbolic of our ability to be active in the world; they are connected to sexuality, independence and creativity.

Touch, intimacy, survival, skill, giving and receiving comfort, eroticism and violence.

We have seen how the idea of mutilation in myth and folklore is linked to a feeling of being stifled, trapped and frozen in an unhappy state, for example with the handless maiden her bloodied stumps suggest her mental pain, her inability to escape her selfish overpowering father. He treats her as a possession and the injury is present in her mind before it's made real with the cutting off of her actual hands.

In the ancient world too, self-mutilation had powerful cathartic qualities relating to self-knowledge perhaps most famously with Oedipus, as the blind seer tells him in *Oedipus Rex*: "So, you mock my blindness? Let me tell you this. You [Oedipus] with your precious eyes, you're blind to the corruption of your life."

Oedipus's mutilation is self-inflicted: he gouges out his own eyes because he failed to have insight into his destiny, and his eyeless face stands for his new informed perspective. The contemporary artist Bert Gilbert explores personal transformation in her evocative shadow images (*Shadows of my former self* and *Wrestling with my inner demons*). Many of her works utilise her own body in performances which see her donning her creations or struggling with them. Gilbert's titles are suggestive but do betray an interest in Jung (the shadow images and *Animus* most directly). While mutilation literally transforms an individual, it stands for the negative manifestation of the failure to act which creative reflection counters. As her website states:

*Gilbert's ritualised and obsessive methods are in turn energetic and meditative. What they make signifies a rite of passage, from one state to another, operating as alchemical relics of this transformation, in all their material sensuality. (artist statement, 2018)*

Exploring the 'dark feminine' ambiguous images such as *Furka*, which manage to conflate religious, Jungian and

folkloric references in Gilbert's practice, directly recall the struggle with the personal shadow, the artistic process of creative risk, reflection and action is surely an excellent alternative to living out hubris or self-mutilation and takes the cathartic release of watching tragedy further in the active mode of art making.

### **Shadow in Film**

A surprisingly poetic representation of shadow can be found in *The Hitcher* (1986) the debut film of director Mark Harmon, previously a landscape photographer. His long picturesque shots of the epic western landscape create that eerie land of the unconscious which in fairy tales is the forest.

The story follows Jim Halsey, a young man who picks up a hitcher on a road journey through the mid-west to help him stay awake. The distinction between them is clear: Halsey is young, naïve, full of clichéd pleasantries; an awkward youth on a journey to California, the land of his childhood dreams. John Ryder by comparison is an older man, rough and jaded, the choice of the European Rutger Hauer to play Ryder adding to his mythical alien persona in the cowboys and sheriffs landscape.

Immediately we are thrust into their struggle, as after an uncomfortable exchange Ryder torments the boy holding a knife on him. He asks Halsey to repeat: "I want to die." Halsey is tentative, Ryder acts; this is the theme of their ongoing encounters. All the time Halsey appeals for help; from his brother over the phone, from the paternalistic sheriffs who follow the trail of destruction and from Nash, a young woman who does lend him her strength. All the time Ryder prompts Halsey to act, electing never to hurt him despite many opportunities, he repeats,

# “THE PATERNALISTIC SHERIFFS WHO FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION”

“You work it out... I want you stop me.” Ryder even gives Halsey weapons to help him survive the clumsy police who are hunting him wrongly, and comes to his aid when it looks like he will be killed by law enforcers.

Ryder is a horrifying yet oddly compelling figure he is archetypal, primal. Like Loki of Norse myth he is mischievous; he mocks the boy and the police for having a domestic, weak morality, he pushes a coin into Halsey’s mouth and closes his eyes: “You are damned,” he seems to say. Give that to Charon. He leaves the boy to ponder the meaning of the gesture.

Sadly, Halsey grasps this too late and in the most controversial moment of the film he fails to act, and Nash, who is tethered between two lorries, is ripped apart before the impotent police and traumatised Halsey. Ryder is disappointed in Halsey, hanging his head while pushing down the accelerator.

For those of us who are willing to think symbolically, however, Nash’s death is not gratuitous: it serves to announce the turning point in Halsey’s individuation where the inferior function is incorporated, for Halsey, like the handless maiden, it is active masculine qualities which are needed to bring balance to the psyche. Nash is like the doe deer, her death is the beginning of Halsey’s self-reliance, his taking up of the shadow’s challenge. “I want you to stop me,” and that he does; he ignores the police and their appeals to ‘polis’, he seeks out Ryder in search of something more eternal, more primal, and in a suitably arduous struggle Halsey kills Ryder, then looks on him sympathetically as the camera pulls away.

The end of the beginning of individuation is the point at which one incorporates/acknowledges the shadow components of the personal unconscious. Individuals capable of this have prepared the ground for their life’s work, just as ‘self-knowledge’ is a readily understood idea, while its fulfilment is an especial feat of will. The struggle to break up the false self and come to terms with our ‘dark brother’ represents a process which is ongoing, and it’s this reason why figures such as Allerleirauh, the handless maiden, Hans and Halsey appeal to me in their absolute extremity. When they are monstrous, mutilated and desperate they seem to be more human.

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# Scars and revelations

*Ron Athey: The masochist who puts writers under his spell.*  
- *The Independent*, 2012

Performance artist Ron Athey has a fearsome reputation for confrontational body art. Since the 1980s his performances have referenced S&M, religious imagery, body modification, blood, alienation, mental illness, heightened states of awareness and transcendence. Not that the visceral nature of his performances haven't received their share of controversy.

A target in the NEA 'culture war', a movement by Conservative US politicians to bar artwork by visibly gay or feminist artists, Athey has remained unsilenced and continues to host exhibitions to a broad global audience. Evidence of his influence can be found in the retrospective publication *Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performances of Ron Athey* (2013), in which artists including Lydia Lunch, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Antony Hegarty (Anohni), Robert Wilson and Bruce LaBruce describe the importance of his work. Cultural engineer Genesis Breyer P-Orridge (Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV) describes his performances thus:

*In his bloody self-obliterations, Ron Athey reveals the profound enigma of the body as primary location of SELF. His flesh is a source of LIFE and a source of DEATH... Yet his performances are also implicit celebrations.*

## How do you define the body?

Aside from two modes of body art, I've studied structural bodywork (post-Rolfing/Wilhelm Reich techniques); I feel different circulatory systems (blood/lymph/xi), the malleable connective tissues which include collagen and cartilage. And, referencing *Anatomy Trains*, there's front, back, side, diagonal and spiral lines that make up the anatomical meridians.

Philosophically, there's depth, and on the surface or the screen, width. There's a hierarchy of intensity, head-heart chakra-genitalia. The receiving body (orifices), the penetrators (digits/fists/glans/tongue), and the sacred invisible: the neuro-psycho-psyche systems. It's a nervous golem.

*Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights: the accumulations of a lifetime gather there.*

*In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille.*

*I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story. - Jeanette Winterson, *Written On The Body*, 1993*

## In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?

From Fakir Musafar: "It's your body, play with it." It can take a ride. In 1980, when I was 18 years old and making my first performances with Rozz Williams in PE, we would fast,

take a lot of cheap speed, write together and record it on a cassette while running through underpasses and industrial space. Fuck, sweat, and live in piss-soaked clothes. This idea of using endurance tests to arrive at a readiness to perform. But perform what? I think the idea of pressing the body to arrive somewhere esoteric beyond the body while still inhabiting the body. I've never been post-human!

But I'm well aware of taboos, even if I don't feel them myself. Again, the face and the genitals have this strong reaction of empathy. I've tried to enter that shock/rejection and find a poetic way in through other senses.

## What potential do you see in bodies?

The beauty of fucked or perfection. The articulations that come after exhaustion. Grace. Exposure versus nudity. Embodiment. I think in my performance *Solar Anus* (1998), something transmitted; the action of pulling a two-metre double-strand pearl from a tattooed ass region was preparation for the penetration scene. It's a little understood fact that something described as pornographic can be non-sexual.

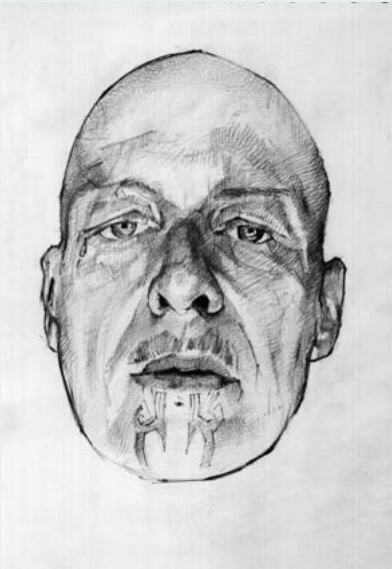
## Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?

It's definitely an enhanced, symbolic body in performance. Twice I have left my body! Once as the Sebastian at the Abode of Chaos in Lyon, and the most intense time on my fiftieth birthday performing the *Self-Obliteration* in NYC. Those times I became on the



Russell MacEwan, Ron  
Athey (*Crown*), 2016





Russell MacEwan, *Ron Athey*, 2018

outside and wasn't performing; I became an element.

In life my self-image is much moodier: I can be casual, low energy, or momentarily cocky!

### **What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

Besides the pedestrian and timeless, sickness and ageing, the contemporary body (with a spending budget) has access to enhancements that still fall short. Hormone therapy, anabolic steroids, surgeries, buttock implants, cyborg bits and pieces.

As an American, health insurance. I have such inconsistent medical care that I'm paranoid I'm going to die of malign neglect. I tested HIV+ in 1986, and this year I've been taken off of medication because no one wants to pay \$3,000 a month for it. This is boring but true; fantasise about other

enhancements if you will, but you have to stay alive.

### **Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

Dissociative disorder. I went through teen angst trying to feel my body, trying to fill the God hole with comparable experience. So even then, maybe more than, life art was the theme, every sexual or psychedelic journey...

In the time I was with Rozz Williams (1979-1983) everyone had a band and I didn't have the skill set or feel the calling for music. But performance art blew my mind, Johanna Went, COUM Transmissions... Suddenly I felt that articulation within an action, that it was more than pornographic, more than mortification of the flesh, way more than abjection; it made the entry point of content a formality. The real destination is the reason for profound art, something beyond agenda and identity.

### **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

Right now I'm working on something new with an incredible artist: Cassils. Starting with their strength/bodybuilding/stuntperson and fighting skills, but taking it beyond to the formal high art presentation, with an ice mould, under fire, pounding down their own weight in modelling clay. I'm particularly moved by bodies that defy standards: Leigh Bowery's chunky but funky full figure; the bionic pop star Viktoria Modesta and her conceptual prosthetic legs; World Famous \*BOB\*. It has to be more than a super-body and more than a freakish body; it's the embodiment, intention, project.

### **Describe your technique?**

My work always starts with a

question. What is the real definition of healing and what does it look like? How would this scenario play out if it's being decided by a trickster? I have a research-based practice; I want to make darkness visible, public private in a certain way. The deeper I go into esoteric practice, the harder it is to remove it from its own restrictions, miracles without dogma.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

Studying belief systems, problematic or not. Intuitive shamanism. Shabby shamanism. Literature and evil. Jean Genet. I was raised in unruly Pentecostal Revival meetings and I still focus this lens on making work: the collective witness of audience, reclaiming ritual, channelling ecstasy, pleading in the blood of Christ. Digging in deeper to exhibitionism, finding context for penetration. Light design as illumination. Psycho-neuro acoustics. Bataille. Americana. Funeral rites.

### **Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

Incorruptible flesh, the illusion of preservation versus death and decomposition. No one gets out alive. These times: transexual journeys, enhancements, illusions. It's all still decomposing/heading towards death.

### **If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

I've always resented the need for sleep. I didn't realise until I was in my forties that I had become useless if I miss a night's sleep, and that amphetamines are counter-productive once your adrenals say, "No more!" Can't I be a vampire?

**With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

It already has. We live in the times of extreme-normal and extreme-cruelty. It's not a great time to be tender! Experiential technologies like virtual reality are interesting, but I tried working with sensors as early as the 1990s, and needing four hard drives to run something a technician could 'mime'; well, it's not always what a performance needs. However, we can try, but we cannot ignore the context that we live in.

When I started working with blood, blood only meant 'HIV' in the public eye. The 1970s' conceptual art was not relative. It became relative again thanks to the work of Franko B and Kira O'Reilly. Now we are in this literal reading of everything through identity politics. That was the climate when I started showing my work at proper art centres in the early 1990s. I never claimed to speak for people with AIDS, but I made rituals to try to understand, in the archetype, where all this process of sickness and death sat. How it looked to a medievalist, channelled through classical and mythological references. But yes, we can also put on the goggles and trip on the personal 360.



Russell MacEwan, *Ron Athey*, 2018

MIKE LAIRD: THE INNER LIMITS OF THE HUMAN BODY

# The depth of the vessel

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Image courtesy of Mike Laird

Arctic mountains, endless deserts, deep forests, traversing remote passes under the crack of gunfire; all territories that we've commodified as a comfy night's good viewing. However, for adventurers who've been and seen those places, they take on a higher value as the reward at the exhausted middle of a journey full of physical peril and mental hardship. Often the return is the most dangerous part: more people die coming down from Everest than during the initial climb. The location of this danger is, more often than not, the body. That is where things go wrong, where things break down. Let's not forget that the final fading widescreen is the closing of our eyes. Explorer Mike Laird is a man who knows the pitfalls of this inner territory and has spent his life fighting his limits.

A trustee of the Scientific Exploration Society, Laird has been awarded fellowships to both the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Asiatic Society. He is also an honorary member of the Anglo-Bolivian Society. He has trekked to the North Pole, cycled solo and unsupported 4000 km across Australia, journeyed on foot through Pakistan to join Coalition forces in Afghanistan, and through much of all this held down a corporate job in risk management. Which prompts the

question: despite what appear to be extremely dangerous activities, to what extent does knowledge of your body really prepare you?

"The body to me is a vessel. It takes me places, it allows me to do things that I want to do. That said, it presents me with many challenges, such as age, physical ability and occasionally injury. Throw in a bit of 'out-of-the-box thinking' and a heap of determination and most challenges can be overcome. But not all!"

**In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

One of the areas where I like to push the body (and usually admire its response) is adaptability, particularly with regards to extremes of hot and cold. I've walked and skied in the Arctic in temperatures approaching -40°C yet I've also worked in southern Iraq in temperatures around 50°C. I don't think there are many other creatures able to adapt themselves to operate in such a wide range of temperatures, other than, perhaps, non-migratory species living in areas of the world like Yakutia.

**What potential do you see in bodies?**

I think that a body's potential is fuelled by desire coupled with willingness and it's a cline, a sliding

scale starting with desire and ending up with sheer bloody-mindedness and determination to make things happen. Self-belief is paramount to realising one's own potential. Not everybody has self-belief, let alone desire.

**Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

I am very conscious of my body and critical of it. Age is something we can't control, though we can lessen the effects of it on the body by maintaining an exercise regime and general activity. I currently live in Bali which is a global hotspot for yoga, and I am aware of the benefits of yoga, yet I have to confess I have shied away from attending classes because of my awareness of my own inflexibility and fear of feeling very inadequate. Self-awareness, self-acknowledgement and answering frank questions can be very cathartic! Perhaps doing this interview will give me the impetus I need to tackle this personal challenge.

**What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

Personally, I don't believe that the challenges faced by the human body have much changed over time. The levels of expected performance against challenges have though: humans (in some but not all societies) have grown taller, got stronger,



Diving in the white Sea,  
Russia,

run faster, and they live longer.

If I had to encapsulate all of that into one word, it would be 'endurance'.

Humans as a species have an incredible ability to evolve, adapt and endure. I also believe that this is driven by factors within the environments and societies in which we live. Some of the factors are physical, i.e. the need to do something better in order to survive, and others are mental or psychological, i.e. the desire to perform better, perhaps as an athlete.

#### **Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your endeavours?**

Around the age of 17. It was very much a conscious choice. I had been told that I might become mobility-impaired at a relatively early age and with that in mind I decided to do something about it. I was, in all honesty, quite a lazy teenager. Whilst my brother excelled at sports at school, I could barely even be described as mediocre. I was moderately able but had almost no interest in applying myself. Through

my last two years at school I took a great interest in weight training, and I feel this gave me a platform from which to maintain a moderate degree of fitness throughout my life. I've never been athletic and my forte would be physical strength rather than speed, agility or stamina. If I had to liken myself to any animal, it would be a hippo: slow to start, not super-fast even at top speed, good in the water and not much hair!

#### **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

One person who always left me awestruck was the Romanian Nadia Comăneci, the first gymnast to achieve the perfect score of 10 at the Olympics. She was at the Olympics in 1976 and 1980 and I can remember watching her on TV. Looking back on it, I think it must have been the precision with which she executed her moves, and realising the sacrifices made and determination that had got her there that made such an impression.

#### **Describe your technique?**

I have to confess that my work starts with little more than a chance happening or a comment from or discussion with a friend. I have two great friends in London, Gary and David, who usually ignite some notion inside me to go and do something or take on a new challenge. We often talk over ideas, try to establish whether they have ever been done and consider the feasibility of doing them. The next two ideas are already well advanced in their planning but I can't tell you what they are just yet!

#### **Where do you find inspiration?**

All around me. Watching people in the street, hearing about those who have overcome adversity, reading stories of personal accomplishment and, occasionally, learning about challenges which have not yet been accomplished. These, though, are rapidly diminishing in number as the world becomes ever more accessible to the average person.

Finishing a 4000km  
cycle, Australia.



### **Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

Change all the way. The human body is ever evolving. During my lifetime I have seen the world 1500-metre record reduce from 3:46 to 3:26 and the 200-metre swimming record reduce from 1:54 to 1:42. There is no doubt that humankind is getting faster. That said, fast alone does not necessarily take it account strength, agility and endurance. Neanderthal people were almost certainly stronger than us and perhaps so too were the great warring tribes, like the Spartans, the Vikings and the Celts. It would seem therefore that humans truly do physically adapt to the environment that surrounds them, and as it changes so they do too, even if that means they become physically weaker. It could be argued that in some societies there may in fact have been a trade-off between increasing intellect and reducing physical ability.

### **If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

Ideally, I wish we didn't age. At 48, I am conscious of the fact I am slower and less fit than I was in my twenties. I accept the fact that this is natural but so often I wish it was not. At this stage in my life I have the knowledge and toolset (as well as the finances) that allow me to do so much, yet I wish I could do even more. I have failed on an Arctic expedition and on a Channel swim and at the time they both really hurt me mentally and physically, but I have been able to learn from them and see them both now as very positive experiences and ones for which I am grateful.

### **With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

In a nutshell: no! Explorers and expeditionists need more than just a physical body to help them achieve. They need drive, determination and the will to keep pushing through

when things get very tough. A world-class sprinter takes years of training to possibly realise a goal in under 10 seconds. A world-class explorer takes years of training to achieve something that may take them one month, six months or longer, and every step can be filled with pain and peril. Many don't make it to the end and some don't make it at all –they perish!

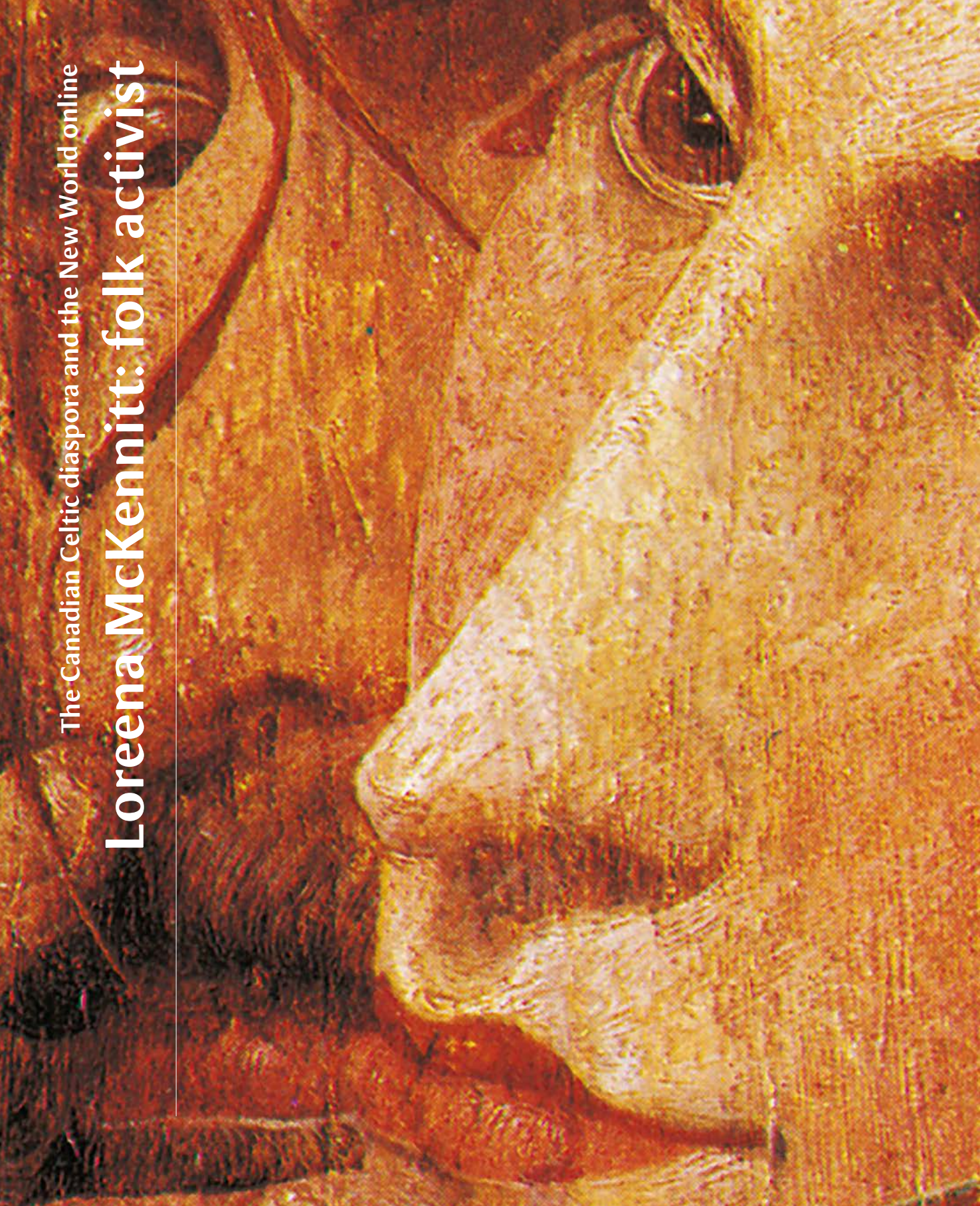
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Everest:

*'Among climbers who died after scaling higher than 8,000 meters (26,246 feet) above sea level, 56 percent succumbed on their descent from Everest's 8,850-meter (29,000-foot) summit, and another 17 percent died after turning back. Just 15 percent died on the way up or before leaving their final camp.'*  
[blogs.scientificamerican.com/news-blog/death-on-mount-everest-the-perils-o-2008-12-10/](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/news-blog/death-on-mount-everest-the-perils-o-2008-12-10/)

The Canadian Celtic diaspora and the New World online

# Loreena McKennitt: folk activist

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Is there a future for folk? Two decades into the digital revolution we're still noticing the knock-on effects that this transformation has wrought on the creative industries. From printers to suppliers to artists, the move from physical sales to streams has not resulted in a diffuse injection of money into an industry much broader than just the biggest labels and artists. The idea of underground music hasn't changed, but the possibility of it being a viable living for niche artists has.

Canadian musician Loreena McKennitt has carved a rare path in genre music. Releasing her own interpretation of Celtic music since 1985, she has maintained control of her music and publishing (Quinlan Road), which, coupled with multiplatinum sales, has given her a deep insight on the music business and its development in the digital age.

Talking to *Trebuchet* in a café overlooking London's Hyde Park, McKennitt discussed her career and how the twenty-first-century artist must come to terms with the connections between community, business and creativity in order to survive.

Loreena McKennitt: I wanted to be a veterinarian and to be involved in animal conservation; I never dreamed of this! I heard traditional folk, people like Simon and Garfunkel, and became smitten with it. I loved the feeling of Celtic music. I'm sure there's a neuroscience explanation for it; there's something about the modality. My interest just evolved and around 1985, after working in the theatre in Stratford, Ontario, I made my first recording with some money from my parents. I recorded it in about a week, and gave cassettes to my friends, and then went busking on the streets of Toronto. It's just morphed from that.

There were a few critical junctures: in 1991, I attended an exhibition in Venice (*The Celts - The First Europe*, Palazzo Grassi) that was the most extensive exhibition

on the Celts ever assembled, and I realised that there was this vast collection of tribes that had spanned out across Europe and into Asia Minor. I also knew that there were so many already performing traditional music, probably doing it better than I could, and also with more authenticity than I could. So I thought, maybe I'll head down the history-of-the Celts road and use it as a creative springboard, and now it's almost an act of musical travel writing. It also compensated for the formal education that I wouldn't have. That exhibition was pivotal, because I saw that there were Celts in Anatolia and Greece dating back to the time of the Silk Road.

Once I understood the geography of where the Celts went I started to understand the broader scope of Celtic culture and certainly Spanish history, with the Galicians, etc., then I went to Morocco and spent some time there, which culminated in the album *The Mask and Mirror* (1994). When I look back on it, I see that it was an act of self-education that I also used as inspirational fuel for my own creativity. I wasn't being strict with myself,

## ” WHERE YOUR SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON OTHERS PITCHING IN

I wasn't saying that everything had to have a direct Celtic connection, but even just getting into the vehicle of the Celts and visiting some other place helped me.”

### **Are you creating fictions?**

It's all permutations really, with some of my own experiences in there as well, but I didn't want to have a career where I drew on my own personal life as the fodder for my work. I do see that in retrospect it's a form of musical travel writing and I love travel writing. I love learning about history and cultures, I love writers like Bruce Chatwin, William Dalrymple and Patrick Leigh Fermor. (Following them in a sense) the recordings became little snapshots of times and places that I've been to. I'm lucky in that as my career has taken off I've had more resources to go off and explore different places.

### **You've reached a wider audience than just Celtic people...**

One of the fascinating things with music is how universal it is. There are a lot of people who don't understand English who have taken my music into their lives.

Regarding authenticity, I've done more traditional recordings in 2010 with *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, and the first recording has more traditional pieces. There is something so beautiful in doing that simple sort of repertoire, but I much prefer to be engaged in it just sitting in someone's living room rather than fretting about recording it. Recording is an interesting exercise; you have your canvas and the musicians and the palettes of colour and texture to work with. For almost every song I've recorded there's an image that corresponds to what I'm trying to achieve, sort of like how painters autograph their work; I do that with music. It's just really interesting to express certain imagery through music choices and I think a large part of that comes from have been involved in the

theatre and film. It's all about supporting that vision.

That said, I don't really think about particular images with my songs but rather I gravitate towards a particular palette. Even when I use a variety of instruments, including Middle Eastern instruments, I think about how I can blend them into the vision. These instruments have such distinctive voices and so with *Ages Past, Ages Hence* (recorded 1989, released on *Lost Souls*, 2018), it was very angular, I wanted something very cool. So I used a high harmonic that rang through. I don't know whether most listeners would pick up on that, but whenever I hear it, it's like bowing icicles.

There is a psychology that is constantly at work; I'm evoking certain feelings and a sense of place and time. It's such a hodgepodge, how things come together.

### **You've used your music career to support political and charitable works; how did that come about?**

I think it stems from growing up in the country, in the middle of the Canadian prairies, where your survival depends on others pitching in. It's a very rural thing, at least in Canada. As I grew older, I realised that what I was able to achieve for myself was off the back of many people before me who had sacrificed and given. It's a basic concept that you should give back as much as you can; it's part of a code of honour. I live on a farm now and I know the farmers in the neighbourhood and they'll come over and we help each other out.

Water safety is something I've been heavily involved in. These days I have a person who is primarily devoted to the water safety fund, and she's exceptional. She goes to different places around the world and conventions on drowning and is currently working with an international group trying to harmonise standards on life jackets and



PFDs (personal floatation devices) in Ottawa. There are many groups, but so few are able to go to all the different events internationally and she's able to do that and be a thread of continuity between everyone.

In 2000, I purchased a heritage school and turned it into a family centre. Originally, I didn't think I'd keep it for a long time. Mainly I bought it to save it from demolition and to allow the community to come up with another plan for the building. It turned out the community wanted a family centre, so we did the transformation towards making it suitable. So I'm still the proud owner of a family centre.

**These are surprisingly physical, real-world things for someone who makes quite ethereal music.**

Yeah, maybe, but I think I have a 'fix it' pathology or compulsion. My career is far more successful than I could have ever imagined, so I put back where I can. I've taken a keen interest in connection technology as it pertains to child development. It seems there's a growing body of research that is indicating that the premature use of connection technology is having a detrimental effect on children and young adolescents. I've been studying it quite intensely for the last five or six years but only now is research able to tell us the effects. A lot of the tech companies and the school boards are also looking into this, so I'm very interested to see how it takes shape.

I've also advocated copyright reform in Canada and have appeared before standing committees to get them to change the law. Canada, sadly, was one of the last countries to ratify its copyright legislation; until about six years ago we had pirates off the coast from Halifax to Victoria. Copyright is only as strong as its weakest link, and because I manage my own career, 90 per cent of my time is spent working on the business, so I understand quite intimately how it works and the damage that's done. My career will be okay because I'm a legacy musician now,

## ” THE INDUSTRY USED TO BE A VERY BROAD ECOSYSTEM OF PEOPLE

as I reached a peak in the late '80s. But for anyone starting out now, it would be impossible to achieve the same amount of success I have.

There is a whole generation that feels that it's okay to have music for free, and while the income from streaming is a little bit better than nothing, when artists get back around 27c per song on vinyl or CD, 24c for a download and then £1.50 for 1,000 plays (Youtube) or whatever, it's just not enough for people to survive on. It's a pretty big plummet from 27c to 0.0084c per song. There are many different points of view on this, but as an artist who lives and dies by the sales I can see what's happened to us. In Canada, it's gone from a \$22bn industry to a \$6bn industry, to the extent that it's decimated a whole industry; studios, studio engineers,

suppliers, assistants, the drivers, the caterers, the printers, the agents, the masters, the manufacturers, the retailers, they're gone. Here's one example: in Stratford, what happened in the music industry has played itself out in the traditional media, too. They were a bit asleep at the wheel and off the mark when they referred to the music industry as only the major labels, without appreciating that in actual fact the industry used to be a very broad ecosystem of people and players, and that when the digital tsunami came it affected them all. (Traditional media) didn't realise that it would affect them too, and it has. So Stratford, when I moved there in 1981, had a decent-sized local paper, the *Beacon Herald*, that was printed locally by the printers who manufactured my inserts and CD booklets, etc. Before I signed to Warner Music Canada in 1991, I obliged them to continue the contract with the local printers, and we went from selling 35,000 copies of *Parallel Dreams* (1989) to many more, which was a huge account for those printers. But they're gone now, because they were tethered to the newspaper and the newspaper got clobbered in the same way as the music industry through outlets like Facebook. This is the carnage that really happened over 20 years while technology came

in unregulated; people didn't know what its positive and negative aspects were, how to position themselves and what the new business model would be. I'd say that essentially the old business model was dismantled before anyone had any clear idea of what the new one would be, and they're still looking for a viable model.

I see a lack of viability for certain genres, specifically folk, classical and jazz, where we're being told that relentless touring is the way forward. That's fine when you're young, when you tend not to have other commitments, but once you have relationships and family, it suddenly get really tough. I don't think it's wrong that one should be able to commodify their own creations and get a proper income from it. It goes back to having a value system around your work and having a business model that supports that.

#### **Do you think that it relates to how 'community' is constructed?**

I love the anthropologists I've encountered on the way, especially Robin Dunbar, who studies primates and formulated "Dunbar's number". He was curious to know whether or not there was a physiological element that predetermined the size of primate social groups. He found that there was a correlation between brain and group size; for people, it's around 150. Which seems about right; it's that size where you can meet each other, need each other and care for each other, a village sort of size, where reciprocity is quite direct. Another anthropologist I enjoy is Ronald Wright, who I mention in the song *Lost Souls* (2018). He studied civilisations like someone would study the black box of an unfortunate aircraft. He believes that as a species we have a tendency to get ourselves into progress traps. He talks a lot about how we're really exploiting the environment as we always have, always thinking that there is a new world to go to, but there no longer is any new world to go to.

#### **Do you ever get a sense of guilt when you go on holiday and get away from the news and these larger problems?**

Shouldn't we be thinking about these issues all the time? It's a real moral dilemma, as we're born into a world in crisis and it's against one's moral instinct to run away from it. But at the same time the scale, depth and

intensity of the problems makes it difficult to know how to respond, I debate that with myself: for how long and how hard must I lean against the wheel before I need to take a break to look after myself and just enjoy simple things? It's something that you have to decide for yourself, recognising that that time away is important, possibly to a greater degree than we might imagine.

It's funny because this press tour is so different than it was 20 years ago. It used to be that we'd do a showcase and in-store performances, but that was part of an ecosystem that has gone, and so a lot of that activity has gone online. There isn't any evidence (convincing to me) how effective that is, plus these companies get an enormous amount of content for free, content that isn't free this end as it takes a lot of time and energy to create. So I wouldn't be surprised if this is my last lap, because it takes so much just to stay in the game. Also it's quite dangerous, because if you miscalculate, there might be repercussions. For instance, I financed all my recordings so I could be in a situation where I have paid off all the expenses and I'm left thinking, well, I hope somebody buys this recording. Whereas with the old model, regardless of how broken or corrupt it was, you knew the drill; you knew how to measure things and you knew what to invest less into. Now it's like the first day in the music business and I don't have the humour for it any more. The absolute uncertainty of it and the time we spend analysing: is this working? Is it worth it? How's it done? I mean, I'm okay, but for other artists it's not going to be feasible.

This is unique for me and my career. I used to have two offices, one here in London and one in Stratford, and we're really working around the clock to make this happen. And we can, and we do, but it's not the quality of life that I really want to have. So we'll see. It's too soon to see what the upshot will be. We're planning to tour South America in the fall and then here in Europe in March. We could tour all the time, probably, but we just don't want to. I want to have a normal, stable, integrated community experience. I mean, it's not my career at all costs.

*Cooke Reese water safety fund.*  
<http://www.cookreesfund.com/index.html>





Andrew Litten, *Breathing*, 2012. Image courtesy of Anima-Mundi Gallery

# Pain, wit and gesture

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The visual oxymoron of a whimsical and lyrical tendency combined with raw, almost brutal elements is the driving tension that gives Andrew Litten's work impact. He is an expressionist painter and, although he had some formal training (evening drawing classes), one can't help thinking that had he not later abandoned art school (reflecting on its claustrophobic and restrictive atmosphere), he may have been influenced by the far more commonplace irony and sensationalism that was typical of his generation of artists.

*Creativity is empowering and empathy is powerful. I want to create art that speaks of the love, anger, loss, personal growth and the private confusions we all experience in our lives. Perhaps subversive, tender, malevolent, compassionate—the need to see raw human existence drives it all forwards. - Andrew Litten 2018*

Expressing intelligence, wit and raw emotion is a tall order and difficult to balance on the picture plane, often failing or slipping into one or the other. Litten's practice manages to contain this energy: choice of colour, materials and a folksy, naturalistic approach to figuration helps to douse and add a little poetry to brutal mark-making and difficult subject matter.

Litten's forthright, engaging style and the frankness of paint handling make him a premier example of an unpretentious contemporary artist working with psychologically intriguing subject matter that often explores sex, death and violence, and the awkward need for companionship.

## **How do you define the body?**

My approach to representing the body is almost entirely guided by a sense of the subject that I am wanting to connect with. The figure can radically change position or shape as the work evolves. I have to go with it and support the changes compositionally and anatomically. The face is an essential element for me. We all intuitively read people's faces to understand their thinking and initially go for the eyes and mouth—particularly to read emotion.

Often, when I am creating the figure, a likeness to particular people I know will creep in and the subject might then begin to live in a slightly different way. Sometimes I use a photographic reference for further information, but it is all exploratory and there are no predetermined processes.

## **In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

My approach to the human body is to make representation read

emotionally. It is usually important that the descriptive information is present without slowing the reading or jolting the flow of engagement. I suppose this sounds simple, but it takes time to work through a lot of visual information.

Depth of emotion comes through consideration and reassessment of life experiences, and I think that this is important if you want to really represent something tangible in a convincing way.

## **What potential do you see in bodies?**

The human body is the most powerful timeless model of expression and I enjoy the process of trying to find my own way within a genre that has historical weight behind it. I can't really say beyond that, as my ideas and inspirations change all the time.

## **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

My painted figures are usually around life-size. I view them as actual identities that are being created, not just as images of something. So, for this to read convincingly, I am actually engaging mentally and physically. In this way I am aware of my own body in relation to the painting and there is a behavioural connection as I self-identify deeply with what I am creating.



**What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

Personally... staying alive.  
I don't know, otherwise.

**Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

I left art college early because I was tired of the ego-driven environment and constant talk about ambition. This was the time of Brit Art and Shock Art. Personally, I preferred awkward honesty.

In one way or another, I have endeavoured to represent this within my particular milieu.

**Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

I tend to gravitate towards female art as it is typically more honest about the body. Louise Bourgeois obviously, Tracey Emin, Jenny Saville. I love the power of Rodin's sculptures at the moment, as I am using clay.

**Describe your technique?**

Any predetermined technical approach bores me quickly and if I decide to do one thing I usually begin to see equal worth in doing the opposite. Each piece of work needs to be a discovery for me and this means allowing in self-doubt together with the moments of clarity.

My attitude is to engage in an unguarded way. To focus to the extent that I can think about nothing else and for long periods of time create an image that feels right—even if it looks wrong and unexpected, it has to feel right. It is all very precarious. The whole surface of the painting



feels alive and unstable at the same time: like a mass of raw nerves on the surface.

**Where do you find inspiration?**

I never get inspiration copying images or anything stylistic.

It is always actual observations, conversations with people, hearing or reading their stories. It's the personal stuff that means something.

**Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

There is possibly a hopeful world out there where we can change our body limits to a significant level alter gender, intelligence, stop ageing and cognitive decline, or potentially improve our bodies in extraordinary ways with prosthetics, etc.

The vast majority of people who face discrimination and

misunderstanding are stuck in their bodies and have to quietly cope with not fitting in.

**If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

Fewer fingers, please! For some reason thumbs are great to paint and sculpt. And three fingers look good, too, but four fingers is a struggle for me to represent. I don't know why, but often think it.

**With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

Definitely. All these things are exciting and odd so will affect my work.

Left: Andrew Litten with  
his work. 2018  
Below: *Sexual Inter-  
course*, 2012



Image courtesy of Anima-Mundi Gallery

# Mud and the body by-product

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*Damien Meade's paintings begin as mud, but live on as creatures of dirt. Minerals suspended in water are made compact—first by time, then the artist's hand—and transform into something that Meade cannot, or at least does not want to name. Paint shifts onto linen panels like dried-up Play-Doh curling at its edges, creating what looks like hair, pairs of lips or the surface of skin, perhaps. In an unusual twist of tradition, this clay will never see the inside of a furnace. Instead, it stays wet and, once he is through, will be crushed and churned into the shape of Meade's next model - Olivia Fletcher, for Peter von Kant Gallery*

Meade (b. 1969, Ireland) lives and works in London. He obtained his MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art. Meade creates paintings which are simultaneously melancholic and thought-provoking, exploring ideas of creation and destruction.

Meade references the modern digital world in his practice (manipulated images provide subject matter for works), combining this with a hands-on physical approach which sees him create sculptures that seem in process. This gives Meade's work a strange status, virtual intruding into the material, a similarity to our time that is deliberate and uncanny.

Recently showing at the *Peter von Kant Gallery* this serious, thoughtful and hands-on artist proves that painting is still a medium for deep thought and reflection.

## **How do you define the body?**

The body, or the figure, is an oblique reference for me; a by-product of what I do. For me as an artist, thinking about my work strictly in terms of the convention of the body makes it very difficult to escape that convention. It is everything and it is nothing, which is a form of stagnation, so you have to develop disrespect for the convention, which results in a kind of iconoclasm. For me, the challenge is to trick yourself into ignoring it so that you might find it again. It is something counter-intuitive.

## **In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

I'm not sure if I have, at least not consciously. Or if I have, it is a by-product of trying to push something else.

## **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

Art is a by-product of a subjective mediation of reality, so maybe it is all self-portraiture. Most artists I know are narcissists, but some are better at hiding it than others!

## **What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

The loss of effective antibiotics.

## **Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

Painting is my medium; the body is more of a nestled subject.

My original art school training was quite traditional—we were made to do lots of life drawing—so maybe it began there.

## **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

El Greco: how he totally re-imagined human form into something more human. And Rembrandt. Both artists made a kind of proto-AI, in that they made the artificial appear sentient.

## **Describe your technique?**

I make paintings of my sculptures, artifice within artifice.

## **Where do you find inspiration?**

Sometimes in failure. It makes me less precious.

## **Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

Heraclitus: "Nothing ever is, everything is becoming."

## **With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

I think it all points to crisis, which is always healthy for art.



# The poetry and potency of presence

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Incomplete, severed manifestations of trauma and lack are politicised and given context in Gail Olding's vision. Highly personal, she recalls experiences from her family life and reflecting her social and political concerns, and as with any successful and accomplished artist, she has found ways to make these authentically experienced subjects universal, layering life experience with criticism and adopting a poetic, multi-discipline approach. The works have a strong physical presence, often directly referencing the human body either in anthropomorphic forms or large phallic weapons.

Born in London, Olding studied for her BA (Hons) at The London College of Printing in Photography in the late 1980s and during the '90s went on to study at The University of Westminster and Central St. Martins to complete two MAs: one in Photography and one in Fine Art. Formative experiences included studying painting with the painter Hermann Nitsch in Austria, and working with the late photographer Fay Godwin.

Olding found public recognition when she won the Eastern Arts Award

in 1999, solidified in 2003 when she was nominated for Beck's Futures art prize.

## How do you define the body?

Defining the body is a difficult one. I am sure there is a good definition in a medical dictionary. On the one hand it's a living, functioning biological suit that I am wearing; it's the place where I am looking out from. It is the thing that embodies me. And on the other hand, it is a war zone, a political issue, it's a place of cultural control.

My grandfather had his foot amputated, then his leg to just above the knee. His hand was then amputated, then eventually his entire arm due to gangrene. He also had false teeth and wore glasses. I was terrified of him as a small child; he would unscrew his hand and screw on a large hook to undertake various tasks. At night my grandmother would take him apart and put him to bed; his false limbs were placed next to the bed, his teeth—in a glass of water—were placed on the bedside cabinet. In the morning she would put him back together again. His body was partly his and partly plastic in order to look whole/complete.

In the work called *Hold Me Close* there is a trolley on which there is a pair of cast plaster feet from the top of which a hook protrudes a claw/pincer. Here the body is missing; I realised that when I was life drawing I never drew the hands or the feet. Next to the plaster feet a glass knife speaks of fragility, and its lack of ability to perform its function properly. Next to which is a hairbrush threaded with long hair. The female child. In certain mythology, the cutting of the pubescent female's long hair signals her sexual maturity.

My grandfather's limbs were attached by a leather corset which was tied and strapped to his stumps; it was highly fetishistic. In the piece *Pulse* the pedals of the piano are present and on top sit the piano's keys, which are played by the hands. The body is missing. Next to this is a pile of ash—possibly the missing body returning to dust. Behind which is an animal trap. We are trapped in our own bodies.

## In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?

I feel that I have explored the body



*Mother Daughter Sister,  
May 2015.*

Top: *Formate*, 2009  
Bottom: *Hold me close*  
Exhibited at Espacio  
Gallery, 2014  
Right: *PULSE*, 2017



Images courtesy of G Olding © 2018





from the starting point of disability and its fetishised quality through into issues of body and flesh of the female under the scrutiny of the male gaze.

The film *Crash* by David Cronenberg was a particularly interesting exploration of sex and the disabled /prosthetic body.

### **What potential do you see in bodies?**

The body is your home; one can only gain pleasure from one's own body. Bodies are being integrated with science in such a way that one's body's performance can be enhanced by chemical intervention or mechanical or digital implants.

### **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

Yes, I am conscious of my own body. I have been taught to measure it against other female bodies and the male ideal. I am not sure I have a particularly strong relationship with my body I tend to live within.

### **What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

I probably see that the body is under scrutiny; as medical science evolves and develops so do ideas and desires, from body piercings, tattoos, all concepts of body adornment, as well as fashion. Leading to eating disorders, hatred of the body and destruction and manipulation of the body. Age is to be defied through procedures and surgery in order to keep the body looking young. Diet and exercise to keep the body in function.

But its greatest challenge is gender. We are starting to choose/ elect our own gender and have our

bodies altered to suit.

We have synthetic bodies in the sense of robotics which use artificial intelligence. Sex and the robot, sexual obedience and the desire for that in the other.

### **Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

I think the body chose me due to the experience of my grandfather. It's what we have been given to live in until it eventually returns to dust.

In the piece *The First The Last The Beginning and The End* there is a row of burial urns in pearlised white giving them a glow, and in the centre is a black urn on which a crow sits. It is said that the crow inhabits both worlds of the light and the dark; it is the keeper of the secret of creation and also plays a role in the occult. The budgerigars/parakeets are in certain mythologies the keepers of the secret of creation. The urns are the keepers of the remains of the body (the urns also have feet, necks and lips).

It's fascinating there is so much thought around the body, whether through religious ideologies, cultural, ritual, sexual, or hatred. We live in a society where because my body is biologically female I have had to be judged on my body, the outer surface of me. I didn't choose this body; I am embodied in this body.

I am pleased to see that there is a radical movement in progress, where women are demanding equal pay and equal right to the planet on which they live—it's about sharing. This is proving a hard thing for some men to understand, let alone relinquish. In the work *Mother Sister Daughter*

there are three branding irons each bearing a word: BITCH SLAG and HO. These are words used in our society to shame women for their sexual behaviour; they are a form of punishment. Here the woman is branded, the implication of the mark of the flesh, scolded for being female.

We have been taught to double-think. We know that these words are wrong and indeed unfair, however we use them still: they are promoted by the press, all forms of media and music.

We live in a marketing holocaust where women's image has been sold to the highest bidder.

In the work *Un-namable* this is a random form of flesh which displays signs of a female body; it lies on a metal trolley, it is fetishised by a pair of tights rolled halfway down. The female under the male gaze as flesh: no brain and no speech, no power, to be taken.

Lacan says that the interior and exterior are the same surface.

### **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

Louise Bourgeois would be the most influential. Her work is brutal but deeply moving at times; it is visceral and also tender. There is experience and life which come into action and are made manifest through the object. Francis Bacon has been a great inspiration through his depictions of the monster within through the distortion of the body employing the ugly. His work is unafraid and electric.

### **Describe your technique?**

I work in lots of materials; materials have a language and I try to match the

language with the meaning.

I make most of the components of my work whether it be casting, turning wood, or welding metal. I enjoy the process of making, I therefore rarely outsource. I work quite intuitively; I like to use my body, my hands, to feel the materials and find their strengths and weaknesses through a tactile exploration and experience of them.

This builds a knowledge and understanding of materials. I therefore rarely work from measurements or detailed drawings;

I am more likely to make lists. I like my body to play a central role.

I can tell if the proportions are right through scaling up against the body through the object relationship to the scale of the body.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

I like to read. I'm interested in how the Bible/Christianity has had a lasting effect on our society,

how it is embedded in our psyche.

This is changing due to cultural shifts, but fundamentally most religions are about the same thing. Reading, poetry, lectures, conversation and looking at the work of others.

### **Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

It has to be a place of change, even if it just the transformation from birth to death. It never remains the same.

Duane Michals' black-and-white photograph titled *Moment of Perfection* is an image of a man pulling his shirt off over his head, and underneath it reads: "He was unaware that at the exact moment he removed his undershirt, his body had grown to its perfection. With his next

breath, the moment had passed.

"We are in constant change.

The body fails and needs treating, the body has a different value in different ideologies, the body is controlled by the shifting ideologies controlled by our thinking.

Placebos or just the viewpoint from which we project.

Our belief in our bodies comes from the other. We are based in language; if enough people tell us our bodies are fat, thin, wrong or ugly, etc., we believe it.

Transgender, the body in total transformation from one gender to another.

Parts of the body can be grafted onto other parts of the body, transplants are gifts of organs to sustain the life of another...

The body is up for grabs! But ultimately the human body will die.

### **If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

Periods and the menopause.

Fucking massive design faults if you ask me.

### **With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**


Yes, I have already touched on these issues in some works entitled *Formate*. These works are a series of forms bodily but random. They are plaster which is cast in condoms: when the plaster fills the condom it starts to transform from a male penis shape into a more female breast-like shape. Transforming into its binary opposite. These are sanded into perfect smooth forms which hold a seductive fetish quality.

The flows and forms of MutualArt

# A rich body of data

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*The new job of art is to sit on the wall and get more expensive - Robert Hughes*

In 2017, Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* sold for a record \$450.3m, making it the most expensive painting ever sold and also a factual meme that people around the world can easily recall and repeat.

As Gavin Turk might point out (and Damien Hirst tacitly implies), people's fascination with the value of art is a reflection of their judgement of their own judgement. How closely their appraisal of a work's value matches industry consensus via an auction validates them on a personal level. Taste being a broad signifier of individual position, whether or not the worth of a work harmonises our personal convictions is only relevant in the context of our lives. Whether we see an old master or Banksy being worth what it sells for at auction becomes a statement on who we are.

## “PEOPLE’S FASCINATION WITH THE VALUE OF ART IS A REFLECTION OF THEIR JUDGEMENT OF THEIR OWN JUDGEMENT”

‘Earn your worth, negotiate your value’ is a shop-worn HR cliché, however it reflects a binary relationship at the heart of any exchange, especially of non-functional art. For an enthusiastic collector, a sense of value creates a functional need which informs how much they are willing to pay, at which point they’ll start to be interested in how much the piece is worth. The work could then become either a decadent fling or a canny investment, depending on the appraisals of the market.

Value in art is based around a set of nebulous socially derived intersections: novelty, influence and (elite) appeal. Worth in art is seemingly more transparent, existing as a form of marketplace-situatedness, defined by sales history, related works, market projections and inflation. The layman quickly understands that while the appreciation of value is open to everyone, the appreciation of worth is the province of a closed cadre of people whose financial decisions about their collections inform a work’s continuing worth and thus its lasting value.

The power held by esteemed collections is that over time fewer paragraphs tend to talk about works that aren’t influentially collected (either by respected collectors,

galleries or more famous artists), conspicuously resold or displaying some inspirational innovation. However, with a broadening base of artistic collection this might be about to change.

Zohar Elhanani is the CEO of MutualArt, an online art resource that claims over 500,000 members, who receive sales and exhibition information on 300,000 artists and 17,000 venues. The aim of the resource is to make widely available sales figures for artists and works in an easily digestible manner. Increasingly, a broader cohort of collectors are purchasing art; how this will affect the existing system in terms of both value and worth remains to be seen. Emblematic of MutualArt’s vision is Elhanani’s own observations on collecting as well as his background in blue-chip business.

Elhanani: I’ve been with MutualArt since mid 2017, so I’m relatively new. My background has been fairly broad in terms of global start-ups and I am a collector, so the relationship between collecting/investing and transparent information combined with technology was very interesting to me. The opportunity I saw was that you can take a market that is lacking in information,

Previous:  
Jemma Appleby,  
#1300817, 2017  
Left: Jemma Appleby,  
#5270817, 2017.



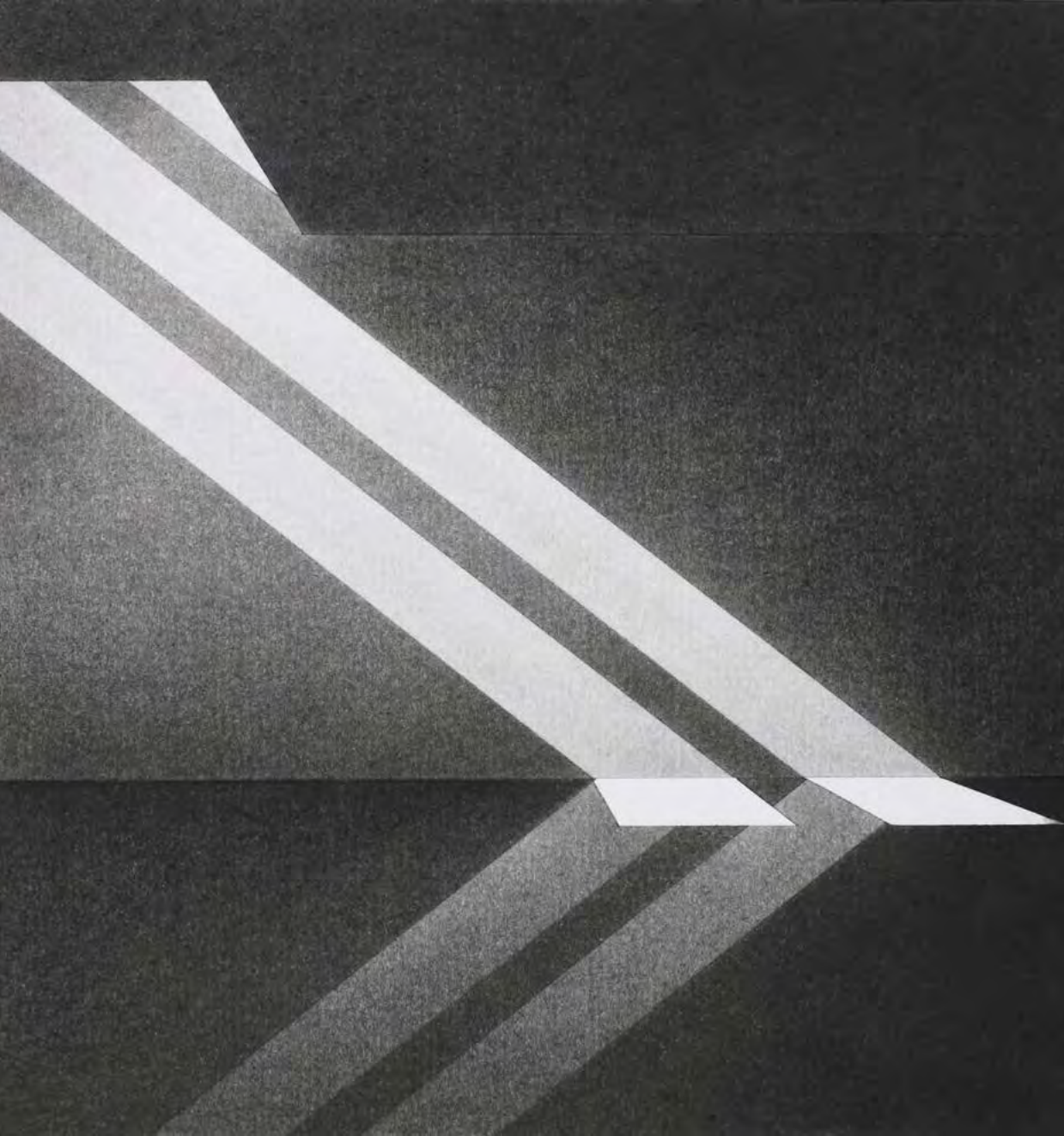
or is asymmetrical in terms of who has the information, and provide tools and technologies that mitigate the unevenness, allowing for better decision-making. Anyone who has amassed a large collection eventually has to look at it at least in part as an investment; there will come a time when you have to liquidate your collection. So it's a sensible approach to also look at the economics and the trends and everything that goes along with the actual purchase decision.

At MutualArt we cover the gamut of the users from enthusiast to professional; we have a real broad base of users. Of course, it rotates with time; the enthusiast becomes the collector, who then becomes an investor, so we maintain a broad relationship throughout their development. We handle the entirety of the dialogue with our users.

The initial goal was to gather the data and make sure that it's presented in a very personalised manner. Our primary role was (and still is) to gather information in an accurate and timely fashion. For example, if there's an upcoming exhibition that covers artists that you like, we would obviously need to publish the relevant

information in advance of the exhibition happening (the same applies to auctions and even articles), because you need to have a consolidated view of current data. This is what our moderation is focused on, taking in the data and making sure that it's correct—auction houses do make mistakes—and we have a way to present it in the most accurate aggregated fashion.

How it works is that once we have the data the next step is to deliver the analytics that are driven by that data based on the different user patterns we see. For a professional, it's drilling down into an artist, finding comparable works and seeing what they went for at another auction, and whether that is due to seasonality and overall trends and what external factors may have influenced previous prices. For a market, there is a whole raft of things to take into account: genre, individual auction sales analysis, post-sale analysis, and more. We look at the entirety of the data and we try to prioritise what's important and present it consistently.



Jemma Appleby,  
#1280817, 2017.

## “IS IT AN INVESTMENT? IS IT A COLLECTIBLE? IS IT A TRADE, OR IS IT A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING?”

At that stage we have a mechanism where the user defines for us which artists they'd like to follow and we push information to them, sending ongoing alerts based on what they want to hear about. It could be a number of things: upcoming exhibitions, auctions, specific artists or movements. We also have an app that gives a location-based service about where an exhibition is taking place. Plus you get all the information pertaining to the artists you follow in whatever city you're in. The mobile side of what we offer is something that we're developing quite strongly, given that art is something you generally see when out and about. The website is great, but people need that information at hand.

### **Is it possible to deliberately skew your analysis by submitting incorrect data?**

The data is directly sourced from the auction houses and exhibitions—we don't use third parties—so in theory, if they've made a mistake or they publish inflated information, we'll be processing that. As an example, there might be an auction that has higher estimates for an upcoming lot; in that case we'd look at the entirety of the data and it becomes clear when there are abnormal outcomes. That's our higher-level rationale: the more information we have the more we can analyse the likelihood of something being persistently inaccurate or relatively low, which you wouldn't pick up if you're relying on a single datapoint.

We're looking for standards and commonalities and from these we can gauge how the data from a particular source performs, what the deviations are, and how volatile individual results are. There are guarantees nowadays on certain lots sold by certain auction houses. If the lot

is guaranteed, you ensure that the data is isolated from the tech because you know it had a protection against it failing put in by a third party or the auction house itself, and that has to be looked at in a different light, i.e. as an estimate set versus what something sold for in a more open market. We look at all these factors in our analysis and we want to continue to offer these services, not to replace the human aspect of art. Advisors, galleries and dealers exist for a purpose, and we don't see this being an automated service any time in the foreseeable future. I don't think it can be. I'm not an art person per se—though I've become more familiar with it—but it's good to be providing tools that can back up the feeling I get when I walk into a gallery and that decision to purchase.

What that does, in our view, is extend the market long term by making more people aware of this aspect of art and thus more comfortable acquiring or investing in it. People feel more comfortable buying if they're aware of the trends and the liquidity of the art they purchase. So even if people are not familiar with the inner workings of the industry, they can still invest in it, which in the long term is good for the industry. In the short term there may be some resistance to increased transparency, but if it grows the market that's a good thing.

### **Do you think that this will mean the end of artists being quickly overvalued?**

I think art is different from many other assets. As opposed to, say, real estate, there is a perception that flipping art, buying works in order to sell them on versus enjoyment and long-term liquidity at the end of the process, is a bad thing. Our view is that the platform is objective; we don't cater to any one single user. We provide data as objectively as we can and again the data should reflect that a work



## “IN THE FUTURE WE’LL BE ABLE TO DO MUCH MORE WITH IMAGE PROCESSING, OR MACHINE VISION”

has been sold multiple times, as we can bring up every instance of it being sold (assuming that it hasn’t been sold privately) and then buyer or the party can ascertain whether the data has been in some way manipulated or is optimistic versus long-term appreciation. This is no different from the stock run-ups or real estate run-ups that do happen; if people had simple tools to analyse those, it would allow them to read the bigger picture. We do not take a position on whether reselling art at inflationary rates or holding it long term is a better approach. We want to provide the data to allow people to make that decision for themselves.

You’re looking at an industry that is hundreds of years old and so there is a natural tendency to maintain a certain way of doing business. We see many different personae on our site, some want to look just at the art and some want to look strictly at the pricing and economics of it, and some want to look at both. That tells us that there are different perspectives on what art is. Is it an investment? Is it a collectible? Is it a trade, or is it a little bit of everything? So if you get people looking at the art in different ways, you’re going to get different perspectives and some might be in conflict, which is why I stress neutrality. It is the only way to approach it, because you’ll be discounted by one perspective and loved by another. We’ve remained objective and developed our services according to requests from the analytical side and also from those who want pure information on the artistic side of things. We balance those requests as they come in to fit with our overall vision.

**Art has been tied to politics in a variety of ways and the movement of art has raised certain questions about exploitation and theft. Do you think that there could ever be a case where your objectivity is challenged by moral obligations?**

If a work that has been sold turned out to be fake or stolen, we would exclude or annotate that within the data set. Again, though we don’t make the assessment whether something is fake or stolen, we’d take note if it was removed from sale or there was an authoritative

public statement made about authenticity. I don’t see a conflict between our data-driven approach and the morality of a work; it’s a question of being on top of current data as it becomes available. In turn, if it skewed the current results, we’d have to annotate it, and the same would apply to unsold lots and we even cover low-value lots. Our methodology is very transparent and I’m happy to share it. We’re not really reinventing statistics or maths; the key to making presentations or tools is to have the data at your disposal, and you have to acknowledge the source, the frequency of collection, etc. Say you were doing an article on a particular work (more difficult with prints or editions), we could calculate the rate of return over time by going through how many times it was previously sold, benchmarked against the Dow Jones.

The artificial intelligence part of the site is still a work in progress and we are constantly moving to use more intelligence based on patterns and conventions that are recognised in art. In terms of artistic style, genre and movement, we can take data and associate it, so long as it’s been tagged well, and suggest associations and comparable artists or works. Within a particular movement or time span, if you know the artist and their peers, you can present the user with other suggestions that fit their specific tastes. In the future we’ll be able to do much more with image processing, or machine vision, actually looking at the image and from the image understanding what the user is seeing. Using the contextual and textual information (gallery notes, for instance) along with image recognition you can develop a deeper level of tagging and association. It would go some way to associating the emotional draw and visual draw along with the contextual draw. This is where technology will take us and it’s something that we’re looking at.

**To ask a sensationalist question, assuming that you have an AI-based model that is distributing data to show a general trend within a market, is it possible that you might spark an art market crash?**

I don't foresee this as a problem [laughs]. With financial systems that use automated trading and algorithmic trading platforms this could be the case, but with art it's not likely that it'll reach that level of liquidity. If that did happen, I think we'd swap our stock for art.

It's something that I've discussed with different financial advisers. In 2016, 51 per cent of wealth managers viewed art as a way to store value, and 45 per cent viewed art as a way of accounting for a client's overall asset value, however in 2011 it was 28 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. I think this upward change in the perception of art as investment has to be correlated with wealth creation but also the availability of information in a broader way. This is something that is indicative in data, but again, I don't think it'll be an algorithmic trait so I wouldn't worry about a crash.

**What do you see as the main challenge for MutualArt going forward?**

It's always the data, getting to the data, and getting to the customers with the data. In a sense it's no different to any other business that matches a product to a consumer, but I think in this case we need to educate the market and make the tools readily available. It's always a challenge to broaden the universe of users but we really believe that today's enthusiast will be tomorrow's investor and we need to support them throughout their exploration of the arts. That's why our vision is very broad and very objective, with a core of tools that can support different user personae. That's the challenge, and we're seeing progress in the number of users but also in the degree of engagement. We have users who are spending much more time on the site, asking us questions and giving us feedback, which indicates to me that there is keen interest in this sort of information.

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Looking into the future, we can see that the buying trends of disparate private collectors might overtake the importance of grand institutions. It's possible that art writing might find a larger audience of the willing and paying, itself supporting a more diffuse sphere of discussion. Would this new journalism express a vibrancy surrounding the variety of trends and practices of different institutions now visible through data?

Would this power a new sort of democratisation of long-term value based on a more diffuse locus of collection and appreciation?

How would this affect grand collections? It's hard to imagine that they would ever become unloved and forgotten, but would this new knowledge create a new sort of audience? The mechanism for all this hinges on a financial historicity denoting a currency of interest and thereby artistic merit. The reduction of art to finance is a horrifying concept; that a price tag might have more significance than the intention behind a work is abhorrent to anyone who ever had a moment of artistic revelation. Yet the financial sustainability of output has always been the dark partner of creativity. A new economics within art could be a sea change for a variety of artists whose work has never fitted easily within existing narratives and which, separated from the general drift of establishment, might find new value as it is interpreted by separate markets.

Of course, considering Robert Hughes again, we must bear in mind that all pronouncements on the future of art are invariably wrong—not that that should dissuade us from making them. Simple access to market has never guaranteed a product's success, despite being a constituent part of its success. However, the deeper education of a wider base of collectors to diverse global art communities cannot be ignored.

# Sculpture and abstract sensation

Los Angeles based sculptor Sarah Sitkin makes uncanny art. Anatomical sculptures created from silicone clay, plaster, resin and latex convey psychological themes on which the viewer is simultaneously attracted and disturbed. Containing liberal inferences to surrealist works which in turn reference classic European painting, there is a presence and verve in her work which is sharply original.

Primarily exhibiting on the West Coast of the USA, her reputation, bolstered by social media and select viewings in Europe, is extending to a wider audience. Challenging the tropes and methodology of her previous work, Sitkin is an evolving artist whose recent work displays an increasing engagement with audience perceptions of the body.

Her March (2018) exhibition of *Bodysuits* allowed participants to wear a variety (race, sex, age) of meticulously detailed body forms, re-contextualising the role of the viewer in sculpture in the process. This is a particularly charged site of creativity regarding contemporary polemics around the perception of the human form as it relates to art, containing as it does central ideas of being, heteronormality, appropriation and change.

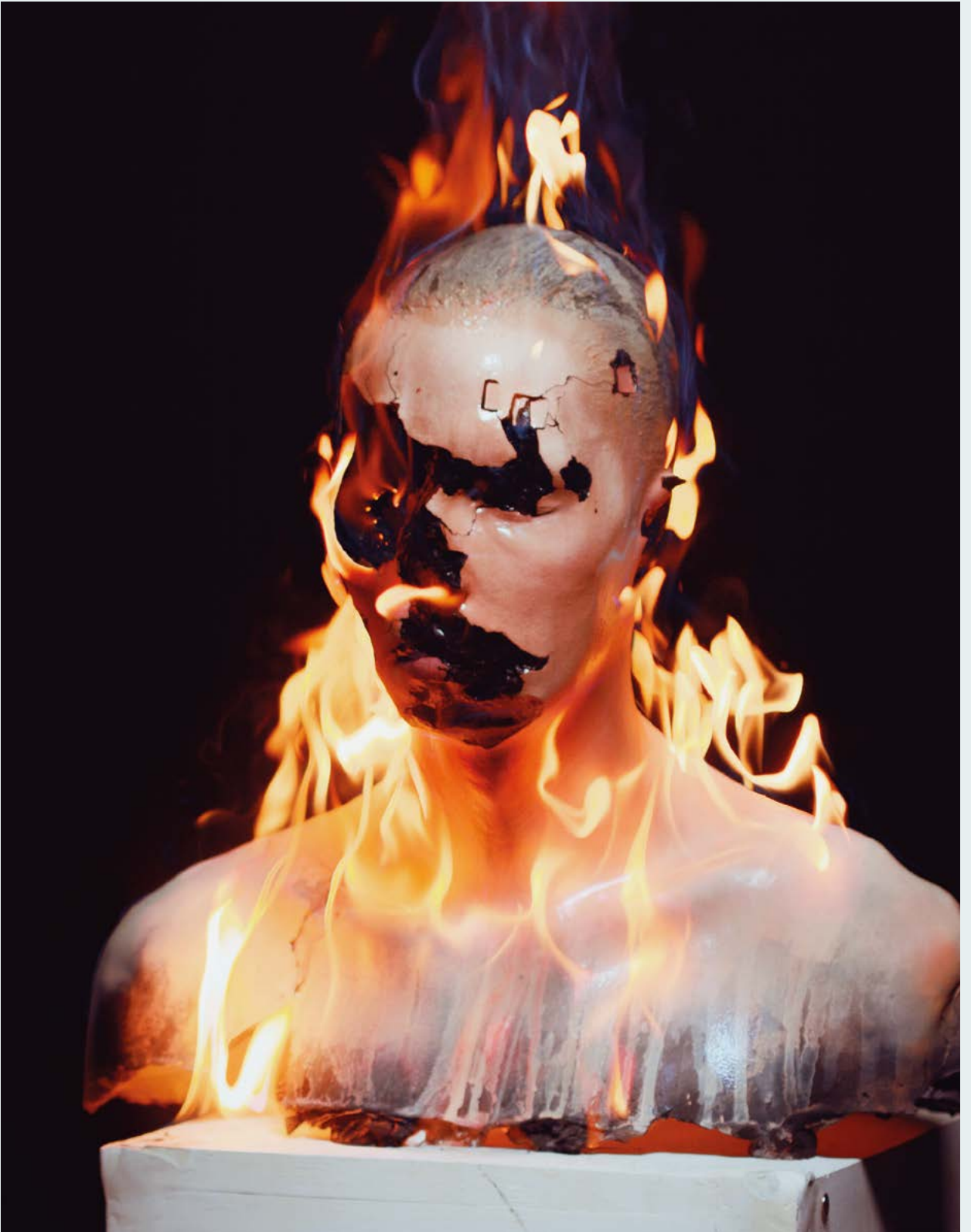
Discussing her relationship with the human form, Sitkin allowed *Trebuchet* into the techniques and perspectives she employs in her arresting art.

## How do you define the body?

I think about this all the time: the divide between my body and myself. I feel the self exists in my brain, and that I'm still myself even if my body changes. I view the body as purposeful in scientific terms—for example, its symbiotic relationship with the many forms of bacteria it houses—but in terms of the survival of the self, I view the body as unnecessary, a very limited vessel that we are confined to during our lives. What isn't a challenge about having a body? In my work, the body requires very careful consideration and management, particularly when lifecasting models. Creating and maintaining a supportive emotional environment for models is probably the most challenging aspect, since making a mould takes some time from start to finish, and you have to consider their physical needs and safety throughout a process that employs very dangerous materials... I mean, if you are not precise and careful during the moulding process, you could literally kill someone.

The body is also in constant flux, which is almost impossible not to record when making a lifecast; dicks get soft, nipples get hard, posture changes under the weight of materials during cure time, even breathing... This is tough. You have to deal with the fact that the duration of the mould appointment from beginning to end will almost always dictate a result different from the form you started with.





**In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application of the body?**

I don't think I've done anything particularly new or revolutionary with pushing the conception or application of the body; my work starts with me having questions about my own corporeality, why I am this way, and I explore these questions through my practice.

**What potential do you see in bodies?**

I see the lack of potential actually, our lived-in bodies as a limiting place, a vessel we are contained in that we annoyingly cannot escape during our lives.

**Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

I'd say I approach other people's bodies quite differently from my own: a lot of very, very deliberate caution and care, as necessitated by the materials I work with. While there is some catharsis in the creation of other bodies as my work, it isn't a cure for my experience of the live body as a frustratingly limiting container.

**What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

Memory. Technology these days is allowing us to not suffer the labour of remembering. Our memory is a muscle that is shrinking.

**Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

When I was a kid, actually. My parents own a hobby shop in

North Hollywood, and they used to bring home materials that I would experiment with when I was young, like alginate and clay.

**Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

I really do admire Joel-Peter Witkins. I remember when I first saw his work when I was in high school, and I was just floored by it, that people could really make art like that and in a sense, get away with it. It expanded my understanding of what art can be.

**Describe your technique?**

Probably my most important technique is managing models' comfort during the moulding process while also trying to ensure the intended mould comes out successfully. The rest is just a lot of chemistry.

**Where do you find inspiration?**

My work is not really created according to any outside influences. It's mostly a product of my own inner toil.

**Describe your technique?**

I'd say the only permanent aspect of the body is that it is a site of constant change.

**If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

I would change so much! Ideally I would just remove the body entirely; it is such a massive collective of inconveniences. But I'd start with

the lungs; removing the necessity of breathing for my models would make my work a lot easier. It'd also be great if I could make moulds of people with their eyes open, so eyeballs could go next.

**With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

That would definitely affect my practice. As media culture grows and we are able to envision and experience our bodies beyond their born limits, what my work with the body can be is greatly expanded, which is very exciting.



The inside edge of the Montblanc Cultural Foundation

## Modern patronage

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Kartharine Dowson,  
*Meditation*, 2016

The idea of a foundation conjures a variety of responses from the artist, from being a lifeline when drowning in debt and insignificance, to the conservative enemy that captures and corrals art's small buying audience into the fertile furrows where practice coalesces into canon, and from there into career.

A foundation has principles and aims, which are rarely those of the individual artists, meeting often at the midnight crossroads of finance and bureaucracy. The Green Manalishi of patronage has a mixed reputation, however; it has also allowed legions of artists to find the critical fellowship and support required to fully develop their work.



The Montblanc Cultural Foundation, led by curators Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, is an organisation based on subjectivity. It takes a level of confidence to invest power and influence in two people. The success of this, of course, depends on who they choose, and historically the Montblanc Foundation has chosen well. They have commissioned new works from artists including: John Armleder; Monica Bonvicini; José León Cerrillo; Thomas Demand; Hans-Peter Feldmann; Sylvie Fleury; Liam Gillick; Gary Hume; Fang Lijun; Thomas Ruff; Tom Sachs; Chiharu Shiota; Cerith Wyn Evans; and Heimo Zobernig.

In 2016 Bardaouil and Fellrath were appointed as chairmen and, pulling from their joint experience of international exhibitions, publications and lecturing, they are shaping the Foundation's strategic direction. Both have an impressive CV behind them, as academics as well as curators.

Some of their previous exhibitions include: *Staging Film: The Relation of Image and Space in Video Art* at the Busan Museum of Art (2016); *When Process Becomes Form: Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction* at the Villa Empain in Brussels (2016); *I Spy with My Little Eye: A New Generation of Beirut Artists* at the Mosaic Rooms in London and Casa Árabe in Madrid and Cordoba (2015); *Mona Hatoum: Turbulence* at Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha (2014); and *Songs of Loss and Songs of Love* at the Gwangju Museum of Art (2014).

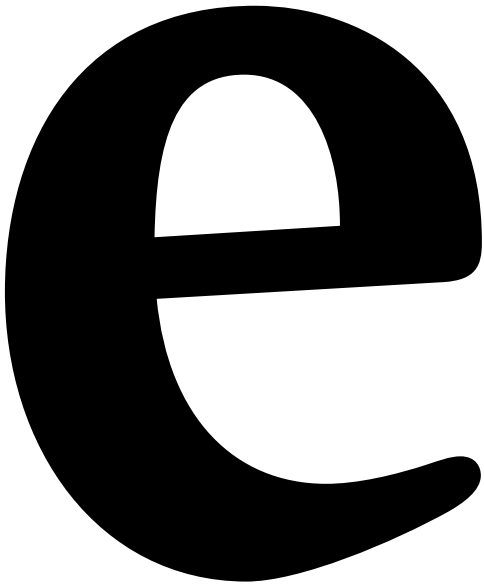
Bardaouil and Fellrath have also held teaching positions at several universities, including the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University; the London School of Economics; the Singapore Institute of Management; and the American University of Beirut. Their academic monograph *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group* (I.B.Tauris, 2016) recently won the prestigious 2017 Modernist Studies Association book prize.

Looking at their curatorial projects as a whole, one notes they are marked by many hyphenated terms,

'inter-temporal', 'trans-cultural' and 'cross-disciplinary', which are themselves a cross-hatched area between the field of modernist studies and global contemporary artistic practices. This begs the questions: isn't a cultural foundation a fundamentally modernist idea, and what relevance does it have today?

Montblanc: Guided by the belief that the arts inspire new ideas and thinking, the Montblanc Cultural Foundation has aimed to facilitate artistic exploration by unlocking opportunities for artists to produce and showcase work for over 27 years, and by recognising patrons of the art through highlighting and supporting the respective organisations and projects that they care for.

The Foundation's core initiatives include the globally recognised Montblanc Arts Patronage Award, which to date has awarded close to €5m in prize money to over 250 art patrons and their organisations around the world. Since 2002, the Montblanc Art Collection has supported over 170 artists by commissioning them to create new works. The collection includes many artists who went on to become internationally renowned figures."



### **How do you keep your perspectives fresh?**

Our decision to work independently is what allows us to keep our eyes and ears open to all sorts of cultural currents and artistic practices that are happening within and beyond familiar networks and institutions.

This independence gives us the freedom to travel extensively and meet artists and cultural producers from different backgrounds and extremely diverse types of institution, not only in the visual arts but also in other disciplines, such as literature, cinema, theatre, fashion and design. This provides us with insight into different cultural models and forms of artistic practice, allowing us to constantly expand our horizons and approach to the work that we do, including the Foundation.

### **What are the main challenges of your work?**

Fighting jet lag! With 17 Arts Patronage Awards in 17 countries, we do our best to engage and be present at most of these events. For the Montblanc Artist Commission Program, we are constantly looking at various artists, talking to curators at different institutions, and exploring potential recipients for the future. This entails constant travelling and searching, which we love, as it allows us to

have a panoramic view of what is happening in the arts in different parts of the world and enables us to make interesting connections and build bridges.

### **One imagines that you've a unique perspective on art and trends. What do you see currently ascending and what do you see descending?**

There is not one general answer to this question, but perhaps we can give you a few observations. There is certainly a desire to connect between institutions from different places across the globe. Larger museums and institutions are increasingly looking at smaller and more fluid organisations to learn from their model. Also, more global awareness is guiding the exhibition and collection strategies of many museums, where artworks and artists from different parts of the world, which have been less represented in the past, are being acknowledged and celebrated.

### **What are the constituent parts of the Montblanc Foundation as an art body? Why does the Foundation's title use 'cultural' rather than, say, 'art'? Is this a distinction that allows more latitude?**

Art is one aspect of culture. With contemporary art, in particular, the traditional definition of what art is, and what it can achieve in terms of social relevance,

## **“META NARRATIVES CAN OFTEN BE REDUCTIONIST AND MAKE MEANINGLESS CLAIMS ABOUT THE DIFFERENT SUBJECTS YOU ARE TACKLING”**

is constantly expanding and the boundaries are always shifting. Culture is a more inclusive term that includes all forms of artistic expression. Since we believe that art is a reflection of all aspects of life, culture seems to be the more fitting word to describe what the Foundation stands for.

### **Would you say that you take a meta view of curation, viewing curation as a creative act within itself?**

In our publications we actually try to move away from meta narrative, whether it is about curation or anything else. There are of course overarching themes that underpin many of the projects that we work on, such as our interest in art's normal considerations, the interdisciplinary connections between different art forms, multiple modernities, and so on. Meta narratives can often be reductionist and make meaningless claims about the different subjects you are tackling. Furthermore, we see many curatorial projects operating within preconceived notions. Instead of truly investigating a subject, some projects set out knowing what they want to say and look for artworks that fit. Instead, our work is marked by rigorous and open-ended research. We always strive to allow the artwork and the artist to have their own voice and speak for themselves.

### **We are used to seeing curators as arbiters of taste. To what extent is this position challenged by the Internet?**

The Internet is like a flea market; you can browse

through endless piles of things, but only the trained eye can recognise what is truly valuable. The benefit of the Internet is that it has made things accessible, at least in terms of visual proximity. To a certain extent it has also diluted the authority of the expert, as anyone can post anything and market it as authentic, true, or valuable. The democratisation of seeing is essential to any society for a free flow of ideas and exchange of opinions. Within this context, we do not think of our job as curators as telling people what is better or more beautiful. Instead, we like to confront people with different things, presenting them in intelligent contexts that encourage people to engage in a conversation and arrive to their own conclusions. We most certainly have our own opinions and would share them if asked, but this is not what curation is about. Curation is about talking with people and not talking down to them, and almost always, there is a new perspective that you discover from that conversation.

### **The dynamic between curator, patron and buyer remains opaque; how do you approach this relationship?**

We think that these roles are becoming less categorical and more fluid. You are also forgetting the most important part of this equation: the artist. In our work as curators, we always base our selections on our conviction in the validity and formal quality of the artwork and its relevance to the place and time in which it exists. We are aware that our selections have an impact on other aspects, making the artwork desirable to collectors, therefore influencing its market value. What we find truly inspiring is the dialogue we have with artists when working together

on an exhibition, and then, the final encounter with the audience, which provides a new reading and context to both the artworks on display and the curatorial ideas behind the exhibition itself. In that regard, the audience has a very important role to play; they provide the artist and the curator with that final reality check: is the work/exhibition truly connecting to the public, and if so, is it doing that in ways that were expected or different? This is a very exciting aspect of what we do.

**Where does your artistic interest lie, personally and within the Foundation? And if there is any tension between those two strands, is it a tension that you enjoy e.g., when 'off the clock', I'm going to delve into some nasty street art?**

Our aim is for all our choices to be relevant, whether in the recognition of patrons or the selection of recipients for the artist commissions. We believe that the Foundation should reflect the global complexity of contemporary art, and that our fingers should be on the pulse. In that sense, our independent curatorial work and our work with the Foundation operate along the same lines, and have the same objectives. It is about seeing how any of the various artistic styles that exist out there are being reinvented and envisioned to be a testimony of the times in which we live and a pointer to where we might be heading to.

**What does the future hold for you two prolific authors, academics and curators?**

We are looking forward to announcing the winners of the Arts Patronage Award for 2018, and to seeing the works of the three artists (Emmanuelle Lainé, Mercedes Dorame and Ruby Onyinyeche Amanze) who were commissioned by the Foundation to come to life within their respective exhibitions before they join the collection headquarters in Hamburg at the end of the year. Besides our work with the

Foundation, we are working on a number of new publications. We are joining the curatorial team at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, and we are preparing two thematic contemporary art exhibitions that will travel internationally from 2019 onwards, as well as solo exhibitions for two distinguished artists.



# Existing beyond the body

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Criticising the homogenisation of the human being, and exploring the potential for an endlessly shifting body augmented by emerging technologies, the work of Nestor Pestana taps into the zeitgeist of our turbulent age.

Pestana is a speculative designer and multimedia artist currently based in London. His work explores the links between science, design and technology to promote creative and critical thinking, as well as sharing and exchanging knowledge. Speaking of a recent project, he says:

*Biotechnologies might open up a new perception of our bodies as a malleable material, and perhaps even new forms of interactions with our environments. - Nestor Pestana, 2018*

Pestana himself defies categorisation by blending scientific, philosophic and design-based approaches in his works, sometimes reminiscent of a behaviourist experiment (B. F. Skinner comes to mind). Projects such as “The Interviewee” see a young woman interrogated by a seemingly benign but ultimately stultifying system. More recently he is expanding his exploration of the body.

*My latest projects might seem a little different from “The Interviewee”. My new projects, After Information: “The Infumis”, they share a lot in common. “The Interviewee” is a protest piece, a critique to a society that sort of wants to standardise*

*the body. “The Infumis” is a sort of response in a way; it provides a more holistic understanding of the human body and assumes its biological nature. The human body is not an isolated entity that can be precisely measured, as presented in “The Interviewee”, but a complex ecosystem that expands to the environment through layers of biodiversity: bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms that work together in symbiotic relationships and that play an important role in defining who we are. - Nestor Pestana, 2018*

Projects are expressed through a variety of media including film, animation, illustration and immersive and interactive installations and performances. He has completed an MA in Design Interactions at the Royal College of Art. His recent exhibited highlights include *Night School on Anarres* at Somerset House, with work also shown at Seoul’s 2015 bio-art exhibition Sustainability: Abundance of Life and Swiss Pavilion’s *School of Tomorrow* at the Venice Architecture Biennale.

## How do you define the body?

All sociocultural, political and technological aspects of a given time and place play a key role in the definition of the body, or at least in the way we perceive it. It is in this sense that I think post-humanism provides a robust definition: it embraces the idea of a body defined not only by its biology, but most importantly by its

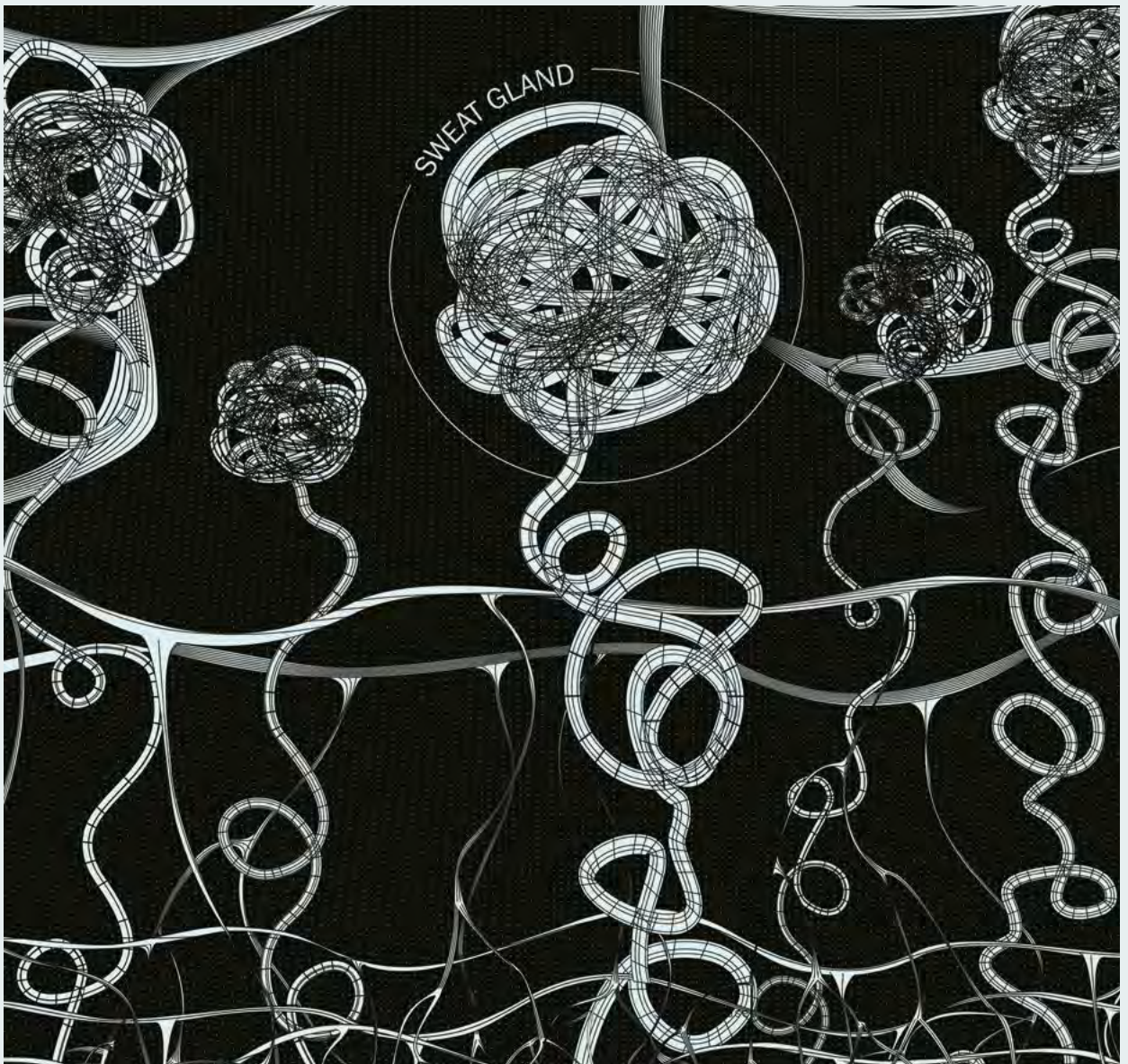
contemporary technologies.

Our bodies are therefore in a constant state of definition. For example, in the current informational era, governed by informational technologies, data is what primarily defines our bodies; we have the urge to understand them through it. Take the human genome project: a pure translation of our materiality into a series of codes that ultimately hold the promise that one day we will take evolution fully into our own hands.

Still, advances in biotechnology are providing us with another, more holistic understanding of the body: an ecosystem made of millions of organisms in symbiotic relationships, dependent on each other for survival. This also raises fundamental questions about our own nature: where does the human body begin and where does it end? And even trying to put a boundary in such a way is a pure illusion, as everything is interconnected through biological systems existing in different states of density.

## In what way do you feel you’ve pushed your conception and application of the body?

Through fictional narratives and speculations. This has allowed me to be more or less free from some of the issues presented by ethicists in the real world, and from the limitations that emerging technologies currently have. Although these are very important aspects to take into account when designing fictions (if only to make them more plausible),



this freedom has allowed me to set ground to imagine what would it be like if we developed a technology in a certain way, and see how it would change the way we perceive and interact with our bodies and surrounding environments. Although some of my projects may seem a little far-fetched, their technical development would be impossible with the current state of our technologies. However, my aim is not to present them as solutions for our futures, but to share a vision and start discussions. I think there is a huge potential to be explored by designers in the micro and quantum worlds of our own bodies.

### **What potential do you see in bodies?**

Some microorganisms, such as bacteria, are naturally able to metabolise the most unwanted materials into useful components for humans. For example, *Marinobacter hydrocarbonoclasticus* is a type of bacterium able to synthesise hydrocarbons—a pollutant—into nutrients like lipids. Advances in biotechnology are allowing us to manipulate such microorganisms in substantial ways, opening opportunities to be inventive with regards to their metabolic and symbiotic processes. Perhaps in the future we might be able to modify certain elements of our own bodies in order to establish alternative symbionts with different types of bacteria, which could potentially allow us to exist and interact with our environments in a different manner than we currently do.

### **Are you conscious of your own body in the same way as in your work?**

In my work I imagine fictional characters that modify their bodies using technologies. They have their own reasons to do that: a response to

the environment in which they exist or simply a materialisation of their own ways of thinking. They perceive their bodies as a material that can be modified in significant ways, and although their bodies are very similar in appearance to ours, they have a slightly different biology that allows them to exist in a different way than we do. I am not able to be conscious of my body in the way that my characters are, because our biologies are different. But I have empathy for the characters.

### **What do you see as the greatest challenge to the body?**

Science, technology, philosophy, feminism and other disciplines are providing us with a range of perspectives on what it means to have a human body. Many of these perspectives are still complex and challenging topics for our society.

While the scientific conceptualisation of the human body as a biological object among others, which our rational capabilities have differentiated us from, is widely accepted by society, it lacks of the social and personal contexts in which the body came into being; how does the mind of an individual relate to its embodiment? Is the body female, male or non-binary? I think that these and other similar questions have been brought by different disciplines partly because of the necessity to understand the body in relation to technological advances. On one hand, biotechnology presents the body as a material that can be modified to suit our needs and desires. On the other hand, informational technologies are raising even more fundamental questions, by making us think that we can transcend ourselves into disembodied virtual beings, so humans can actually exist beyond the body, gender and perhaps even in other bodies.

### **Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?**

I was always interested in topics that were more or less related to what it means to be embodied and disembodied. I am perhaps more aware of this now than I was ever before. So I don't think there was a conscious choosing process, but just a natural interest that grew over time as I dove into post-humanism literature, philosophy and conversations with scientists with whom I work. Using the body as a medium for my work has allowed me to directly explore such topics, imagining other ways of existing through technology, questioning the very meaning of our own materiality, and challenging assumptions and conceptions about the body and its relation to sociocultural, political and ecological topics.

### **Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire?**

From biohackers like Lepht Anonym to academics like Donna Haraway. Although my work is speculative, I find it interesting how the biohacker community have taken technologies into their own hands and started experimenting with their own bodies, DIY-style. It is not only their courage, determinism and perseverance in pursuing such endeavours, even if they go against established legal systems, but also how they are pioneering a new understanding of the human body in the field of body modification and enhancement. I also admire Lepht Anonym's views and criticisms on who ultimately has access to technologies—normally an elite of wealthy people. She is to some extent proving that the contrary is also possible.

I only recently discovered Donna Haraway's work through a good friend of mine. Although written





back in 1984, her *Cyborg Manifesto* is one of the most interesting pieces I have read recently. She portrays the cyborg body as a rejection of traditional boundaries that separates humans from other living creatures and machines. For her, everything is linked in an open, fluid and distinct semiotic flow. It is only in this holistic understanding of the body that my work can be understood.

### **Describe your technique?**

My projects are research-based and conceptually developed through conversations with experts and scientists. Collaborations are crucial in my practice.

The ideas are materialised through a variety of mediums, such as films, animations, illustrations, immersive and interactive installations and performances. Props are sometimes produced to further explore a certain aesthetic of a project.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

Research and collaborations. In trying to answer some questions I sometimes have, in talking with scientists and in understanding how other beings exist, such as bacteria. I think these are the most bizarre creatures on this planet; they thrive in the most extreme conditions and are able to feed from the most unwanted components. I think they are very inspiring creatures.

### **Do you see the body as a place of permanence or change?**

Change. The body is in constant adaptation to an ever-changing environment, and this is only one of

the many factors contributing to the body as a place of change.

We have been modifying our bodies for many years—take, for example, the Kayan people and their ancient tradition of stretching their necks. Or the artificial cranial deformations performed by some cultures in Peru. From health to cosmetics or even for ideological reasons, we still change our bodies in today's world, and we will in the future. Technologies are allowing us to deeply understand our bodies on various levels, and therefore have more meaningful iterations with it than ever before; we will perhaps look very different in the future and not necessarily because of natural evolution, but because of our own decisions.

### **If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed what would it be?**

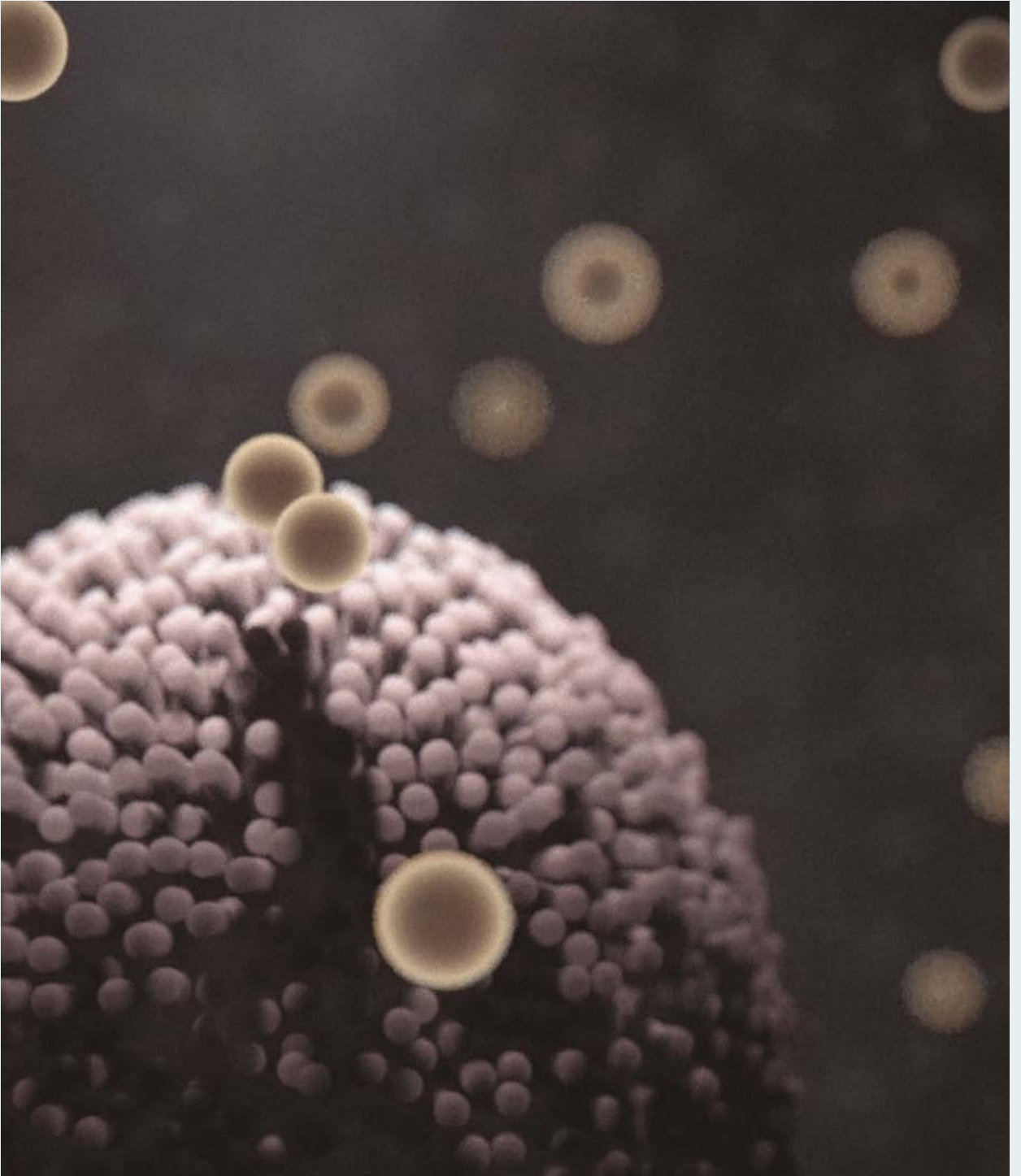
I always wondered why some organisms are able to regenerate major body parts while others, like us humans, are not. It seems the most reasonable feature for any organism to have, so why hasn't evolution provided us with that? Salamanders for example are able to regenerate almost everything in their bodies, so if we evolved from a common ancestor, is it possible that regeneration is built into the human genetic code? And if so, how can we take advantage of it?

### **With developments like VR changing the way we view our bodies, will this affect your work?**

My work is highly informed by

technological developments and imaginings of new ways of existing through them. I therefore find it extremely important to keep up to date with technologies, and how these are constantly informing the way we perceive our bodies. But rather than using these perceptions as design prepositions, I am more interested in imagining what other perceptions of our bodies we could potentially have in the future and how we could design for them.

*AIS The Infumis - film still, 2015*



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