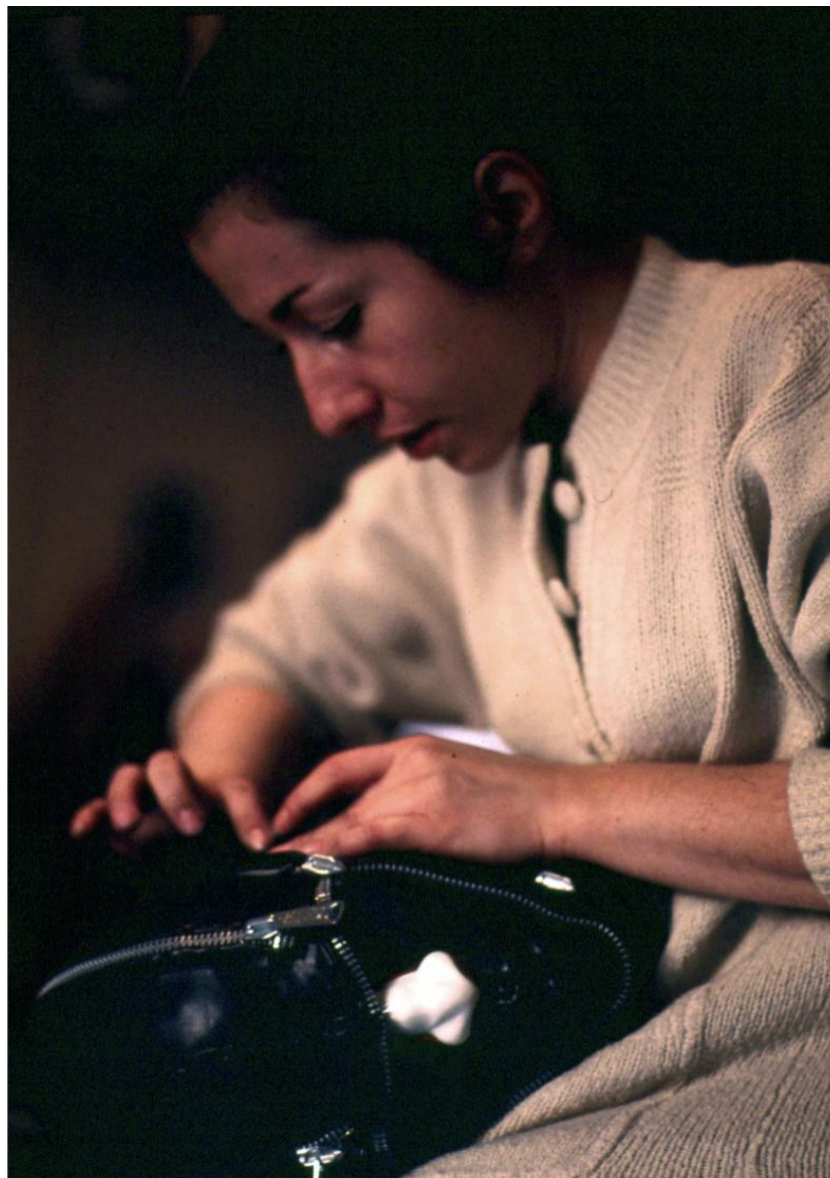


Confronting the Abject:
Three Female Artists and the Flesh



Fine Art (Sculpture) MA

09/09/2022

MA Report in History and Theory of Art ('Dissertation')

Supervisors: Joy Sleeman and David Burrows

Candidate Code: VSRC1

Word count: 10817

Abstract:

In my MA dissertation I will build on Julia Kristeva's philosophical ideas of the abject to consider the work of Nancy Grossman, Berlinde de Bruyckere and Pipilotti Rist. The bodily and the abject are intertwined, offering routes to explore one another. I will set out the complex legacy of feminist theory in problematising the body as a site in constructing social and political discourses, and how its flesh and matter may itself be constituted by external forces. The binary division between man and woman and the discrete nature of male and female bodies will be questioned, utilising Judith Butler's theories. A focus on skin as a liminal space, and the perceived liminality of female experience, will be brought to the fore via an analysis of diverse artworks, which share a pre-occupation with surface, tactility, and borders. I will focus on the importance of corporeality and gender over issues of class and race in relation to abjection, due to the limitations of this assignment.

Table of contents:

| | |
|--|----|
| Title Page..... | 1 |
| Abstract..... | 2 |
| Table of contents..... | 3 |
| List of illustrations..... | 4 |
| Introduction: Abjection and the body..... | 6 |
| Chapter I: Gender, the female body and the abject..... | 11 |
| Chapter II: Nancy Grossman: bound figure..... | 16 |
| Chapter III: Transformation and transience in Berlinde de Bruyckere's sculpture..... | 21 |
| Chapter IV: Pipilotti Rist's raucous delights..... | 25 |
| Chapter V: Conclusion..... | 30 |
| Illustrations..... | 31 |
| Bibliography..... | 60 |

List of illustrations:

The title page features Nancy Grossman working in her Eldridge Street studio, c. 1970, photographed by Guido Mangold.

1. Nancy Grossman, *Sketch for Road to Life*, 1975.
2. Nancy Grossman, exhibition view of *Nancy Grossman: Heads*, MoMA, New York, 2011.
3. Nancy Grossman, *No Name*, 1968.
4. Nancy Grossman, *Male Figure Sculpture*, 1971.
5. Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Sebastian*, 1614.
6. Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*, 1965.
7. Nancy Grossman, *Ali Stoker*, 1966 – 1967.
8. Berlinde de Bruyckere, exhibition view of *Berlinde de Bruyckere. Three Sculptures*, Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, 2012.
9. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Liggende I*, 2012.
10. Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, 1520 – 1522.
11. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Actaeon*, 2012.
12. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Liggende II*, 2012.
13. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Piëta*, 2007 – 2008.
14. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Schmerzensmann IV (Man of Sorrows IV)*, 2006.
15. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Aanééen-genaaid*, 2000.
16. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *The Wound*, 2012.
17. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Romeu ('my deer')*, 2012.
18. Pipilotti Rist, still from *Ever is Over All*, 1997.
19. Pipilotti Rist, still of artist's face from *Mutaflor*, 1996.
20. Pipilotti Rist, installation view of *Mutaflor* at the New Museum, New York, 2016.

21. Pipilotti Rist, still of open mouth from *Mutaflor*, 1996.
22. Pipilotti Rist, still of anus from *Mutaflor*, 1996.
23. Pipilotti Rist, installation view of *Solution for Man, Solution for Woman* at Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio, 2011.
24. Pipilotti Rist, installation view of *Solution for Man, Solution for Woman* at Cinema Manzoni, Milan, 2011.
25. Pipilotti Rist, alternate installation view of *Solution for Man, Solution for Woman* at Cinema Manzoni, Milan, 2011.
26. Pipilotti Rist, still of breast and crustacean from *Pickelporno*, 1992.
27. Pipilotti Rist, still of model world between legs from *Pickelporno*, 1992.
28. Pipilotti Rist, installation view of *Sip my Ocean* at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2017.
29. Pipilotti Rist, still of the artist's submerged body from *Sip my Ocean*, 1996.

Introduction: Abjection and the body

Abjection is defined both in terms of its connection to flesh – the matter of the body – and a revolt against it. Concepts of the abject and the formless – the loss of the clear boundaries between things, a suspension of order, states of fusion and flux – thus intertwine irrevocably in critical theory. The philosopher and literary theorist Julia Kristeva embarked on her landmark treatise *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* to build on the fragmentary writings of the French Surrealist philosopher Georges Bataille, rooted in descriptions of fantastical excess and desire, alongside Mary Douglas's anthropological study of social concepts of purity and the taboo.¹ Kristeva unravels the capacity of base and material elements, often found in the realm of everyday, to give rise to overwhelming sensations, bringing us into closer contact with reality and our relationship to the world. Initially published as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection*, her work was translated from French in 1982 and ultimately saw ideas of the abject penetrate mainstream cultural consciousness, influencing artists and writers to this day.² Abjection is a powerful instrument in the work of Nancy Grossman, Berlinde de Bruyckere and Pipilotti Rist, allowing them to enter contentious debates regarding the complex constructions of identity, conceptions of the body, allocations of alterity and difference. I will consider how the category of gender might shape confrontations with abjection, influencing female artists.

Although Kristeva repeatedly characterises the abject as 'formless, pre-symbolic and unrepresentable', there is a contention that she nevertheless categorises certain things as abject.³ In a panel discussion for *October* magazine in 1994 the critic Rosalind Krauss stated: '[...] Kristeva's project is all about recuperating certain objects as abject – waste products, filth, bodily fluids, etc. These objects are given incantatory power in her text.'⁴ An investigation into abjection within art therefore requires a disentangling of many of the critical dilemmas which surround its amorphous and complex manifestations, shaped by specific circumstances. The artworks I will discuss reference the language of bodily experience and affect – one of the most conspicuous signs of the abject. These include the 'incantatory' objects to which Krauss refers,

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: Approaching Abjection*, trans. by Leon S Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

² Imogen Tyler, 'Against Abjection: violent disgust and the maternal' in *Feminist Theory*, 10, (2009), 1-17, (p. 3).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rosalind Krauss quoted in 'The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the "Informe" and the Abject' in *October*, 67, (1994), 3-21, (p. 3).

which can '[...] unsettle singular bodily integrity: death, decay, fluids, orifices, sex, defecation, vomiting, illness, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth.'

Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection is famous for demonstrating a dissolution of the distinctions between subjects and objects, and the concurrent threat to the integrity of the individual through a visceral brush with the other. Kristeva counters many of the tenets of post-war psychoanalysis by highlighting how the abject escapes the rubric provided by a language of signification, utilized by Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud to explain the early formation of the ego. The 'abject' instead harks back to a primordial experience of encounter: the splitting away of the child from the mother. Kristeva demonstrates how this original instance of abjection intertwines notions of birth and death, ushering in clarity and confusion, writing: 'The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment where revelation bursts forth.'⁵ In his essay *Abjection Overruled* critic Martin Jay clarifies how the abject approaches the borders of the self, implying a moment of surrender or powerlessness: '[...] abjection points back to a time before individuation, just as it signifies the time after where the body becomes a mere corpse.'⁶ The term abjection is thus replete with controversy, considering its far-reaching implications and interdisciplinary uses, featuring strongly in debates surrounding the development of subjectivity. Kristeva's points as to its universally overwhelming character: 'When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braids of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*.'⁷ 'Abject' evidently describes phenomena whereby identity is both bolstered or broken down through a realization of that which operates in opposition to it, even if this is bodily, sensorial, fleshy and familiar. It is therefore important to recognise how abjection is deeply enmeshed in the ever-shifting construction of alterity alongside the manufacture of fixed and normative categories of identity.

Kristeva takes an example from personal experience to display how the abject ignites an inescapable chain of affects. She recounts gut-wrenching nausea: '[...when my] lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper [...] – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, [...] all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire.'⁸ These sensations prompt Kristeva's impulse to spit up her coffee, to cough up the insides the

⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.9.

⁶ Martin Jay, 'Abjection Overruled' in *Salmagundi*, 103, (1994), 235 – 251, (p. 238).

⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.1.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 2 – 3.

body into the outside world, ejecting both the foreign and the familiar. Abjection thereby indicates a liminal moment where the subject is under attack. In the sphere of mundane daily life, through something as seemingly innocuous as the film of milk, Kristeva highlights how there ‘[looms] one of those violent, dark revolts of being [...]’.⁹ The process she describes is chaotic and involuntary, rendering the subject at the mercy of their instincts as opposed to their conscious desires. Kristeva thus indicates how an individual’s illusion of control over their experiences, whether cerebral or corporeal, is liable to break. It captivates their entire essence. This capacity of abjection to prompt subcutaneous, automatic responses unveils how it returns the beholder to an existential state fundamentally linked to the primordial and the bodily. Jay clarifies this function of the abject ‘[to shatter] the wall of repression and its judgments. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego broke away – it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death.’¹⁰

In relation to this, Georges Bataille illuminates his transgressive theory of *l’informe*, which translates as formless, how material aspects of existence can undermine widely held beliefs in the self-sufficiency of the human subject. The *informe* carries the potential to perforate and disrupt the fabric of everyday life. As Krauss argues, Bataille reacts against social conventions regarding a need to reign in the uncontrollability of the body, instead celebrating the base and a world of desire. He ascertains the existence of a chasm between social ideals and the reality of lived experience, writing: ‘Man willingly imagines himself to be like the god Neptune, stilling his own waves, with majesty; nevertheless the billowing waves of viscera, in more or less incessant inflation and upheaval, brusquely put an end to his dignity’.¹¹ A confrontation with the intrinsic forces of matter operating inside the body complicate the enduring anthropocentric ideas regarding the psychological sway over the self, the championing of the mind over the body. The abject likewise gives way to powerful and ambivalent emotions such as horror and fascination through material encounters, potentially found through art, inviting the temporary loss of control and the lures of excess.

A key difference within Bataille’s theories of formlessness and Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* is arguably found in the social utility of abjection to map out individual and collective identity, formulating an understanding of both a physical and social body. The sociologist Imogen Tyler reinforces this argument: ‘Abjection is not just a psychic process but a social experience.’¹²

⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.1.

¹⁰ Jay, ‘Abjection Overruled’, p. 238.

¹¹ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. by Allan Stoekel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 22.

¹² Tyler, ‘Against Abjection’, p. 10.

Douglas's work *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* from 1966 indeed set a precedent for how visions of the transgressive and the taboo, specific to each cultural context, in fact serve to establish purifying rituals and regulations.¹³ The contemporary art critic Julian Gueterriez-Albilla emphasises how Douglas relates her theories of contamination to each particular anthropological context: '[...] in most of the societies she examines, dirt becomes a form of disorder which works against society's ideal constructions of notions of order.'¹⁴ Kristeva explores many of these ideas in her chapter *Filth and Defilement*.¹⁵ For instance, she argues that abjection surfaces in relation to three main categories: anxieties surrounding bodily incorporation, bodily waste and signs of sexual difference. All these topics manifest in the work of Grossman, de Bruyckere and Rist. There is a key link between abjection and the potential defilement of the pure; threats to the coherence of the self and social systems engender the very acts and behaviours which re-instate order, such as exclusion. It is interesting to consider how abjection is derived from the Latin verb *abjicere*, meaning to cast out. This implies the word's relevance to processes of ostracization and the demarcation of identity: those who are made outcasts and those who cast out, the *abjected* and *abjectors*. The language of margins and liminality abounds throughout *Powers of Horror*, further highlighting the fluctuating constructions of identity and the conscientious regulation of its borders.

The ways in which abjection features within art are complex and diverse given the theory's strong grounding in sensory phenomena and lived experience. The transformative impact of Kristeva's work on the field of art was nevertheless rendered explicit in 'Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art: selections from the permanent collection', held at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in 1993. This exhibition documented the refocusing of the body as a vessel of signification with the arts. Indeed, the curators proclaimed proudly in their catalogue: '[...] the concept of abjection, encompassing investigations of discursive excess and degraded elements as they relate to the body and society, has emerged as a central impulse in 1990s art.'¹⁶ The show sought to usher in the grotesque, the taboo, the bodily, the scatological, and the erotic, into the white-walled gallery space. All the artists I discuss grapple with these themes, prompting visceral responses within the viewer's body. However, the agenda to create

¹³ Mary Douglas, *Collected Works: Volume II: Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁴ Julián Daniel Gutiérrez – Albilla, 'Abjection and the politics of feminist and queer subjectivities in contemporary art' in *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 13, (2008), 65 – 84, (p. 73).

¹⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 56 – 89.

¹⁶ Jay, 'Abjection Overruled', p.237.

a clearly defined, regimented discourse on the abject is innately contradictory. The curators failed to grasp the term's underlying specificities, its myriad manifestations, due to its contingency on individual encounter. Kristeva conceives abjection as innately surprising and unpredictable – a process which evades precise definitions: 'We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity'.¹⁷ In this sense, one can question the degree to which abjection can accurately figure in the process of viewing art, reliant on procedures of reification and objectification, and how this implicates an analysis the sculptures and video work of Grossman, de Bruyckere and Rist.

The first section of the Whitney exhibition was titled *The Maternal Body*, presenting work by Mary Kelly, Cindy Sherman, Willhem de Kooning and Marcel Duchamp, attempting to evoke how 'the feminine is often seen as the abject and the oppressed in patriarchal culture, and how women artists may appropriate the image of abjection to reclaim their identity in the space of art and society'.¹⁸ In my next Chapter, I will consider how this view is reductive, as a sexually specific female body cannot itself be abject, but is rather perceived so based by extrinsic forces. As the use of abjection as an all-encompassing label failed to grasp its polysemous nature, one must also question its use as an adjective to describe objects. Afterall, a key criticism of the Whitney exhibition was that it advocated the reality of so-called 'abject materials, such as dirt, hair, excrement, dead animals, menstrual blood and rotting food [...and how these] confront taboo issues of gender and sexuality.'¹⁹ One must reiterate Kristeva's own emphasis: 'The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I.'²⁰ As Kristeva explores how delirious language might encompass the power of the abject through her analysis of modern literature, one might ask how its power is embodied through art. Jay indeed points to the many different modes of abjection regardless of the 'untenable oxymoron' of abject art.²¹ I argue the work of Grossman, de Bruyckere and Rist brings greater awareness in the viewer of the porosity of the boundary between the base, material aspects of the body, highlighting that which can disrupt their notions of subjectivity.

¹⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Yuxin Wen, 'Reclaiming the Feminine Identity through the Abject: A Comparative Study of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly, and Cindy Sherman' in *Penn History Review*, 27, (2021), 10 – 40, (p.10).

¹⁹ Jack Ben Levi, Leslie C. Jones, Simon Taylor, and Craig Houser, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, (New York: Whitney Museum of Modern Art, 1993), p. 7.

²⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.1.

²¹ Jay, 'Abjection Overruled', p. 243.

Chapter I: Gender, the female body and the abject

The importance of the body is undisputed as a potential site for political activism within feminist discourse. It is unsurprising that abjection, which is indelibly linked to questions surrounding the boundaries of the body, was influential for feminist theorists and art critics in the 1980s and 1990s. Their writings revealed how women have historically been associated with the fleshy, the fluid, the material, citing liminal experiences such as pregnancy and menstruation. However, this examination of the specificity of female corporeality and its processes was initially denigrated by many key feminists. They believed the focus on the female body could potentially run counter to women's attempts for political and social equality, emphasising their nature as passive objects as opposed to their role as active subjects. One might argue this view is essentialist, suggesting key biological sexual differences map out absolute gender categories without addressing the potential disjuncture between these. One might scrutinise the archetype of a woman entrapped and confined to the domestic sphere – a vision of fragility and dependence – described famously by Betty Friedan in her work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), drawing attention to the marginalized position of women within society, relegated to the roles of housewife and mother. Second-wave feminists such as Friedan championed the need for women to enact change through education, work and cultivating their political views.²² However, the impact of patriarchal and philosophical ideas in shaping perceptions of the female body is boundless, ultimately undermining individuals' subjectivity by grounding women's physicality in the material basis of abjection. Feminists such as Toril Moi and Iris Marion Young have further emphasised a need to re-centre 'lived bodily experience' within theory, as biases conceiving the female body as other or dirty undermine freedom.²³

Describing the rise of irreverence and feminism within art, critic Lucy Lippard proclaimed: 'Often accepted unconsciously, these values support the opening up and out of eyes, mouths, minds [...] and sometimes the smashing of windows.'²⁴ It is important, however, to query an assumption that the 'transgressive potentiality' of 'encounters with the abject' can be used as a tactic by feminists and feminist artists to liberate women.²⁵ I argue *being abject* manifests differently in various social locations. Indeed, the argument that female experience must be

²² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, ed.s by Lionel Shriver, (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

²³ Tyler, 'Against Abjection', p.1.

²⁴ Lucy Lippard quoted in *Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest*, ed.s by Massimiliano Gioni and Margot Norton (New York: Phaidon Press Ltd and New Museum, 2012), pp. 25 – 26.

²⁵ Tyler, p.1.

perceived in relation to the abject and its associations with impure, improper, and dirty suggests this is justified based on a reality of sexual difference. One can consider an intersectional view of identity, highlighting how this is formulated by specific circumstances and factors such as gender, class, race, and sexuality. Kristeva's statement that 'filth is not a quality in itself, but applies only to what relates to a boundary' underlines how abject identity is ultimately liable to change based on societal constructions, thus defining that which transgresses from the ideal and across categories.²⁶ The anthropologist Winfred Menninghaus, moreover, appraises abjection as 'the newest mutation in the theory of disgust' and its connotations with the seemingly deviant and debased, marginalised members of society.²⁷

One of the most evocative descriptions of the experience of abjection is transparent in French West Indian philosopher Franz Fanon's work *Black Skin White Mask*, which assesses the legacies of colonialism and its tactics of subjugation, repression, and exclusion. Fanon indicates the innate contradictions and psychological discomfort this produces. He describes his internal crisis of conforming to the role of the idealised, civilised subject and that of the social alien on account of his race, writing: 'Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others [...] For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.'²⁸ His illustration of the constant devaluing of his subjecthood to the status of an object, represented throughout the text by his repeated labelling as 'boy' and 'nigger', highlights how social strategies of marginalisation thwart the maturation of individual identity. In this way, race only predetermines experiences of abjection insofar as social forces decide underlying notions of the hierarchy of categories of race, and that which can threaten it.

The political philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler moreover explains how abjection is integral to the construction and prevailing power of normative ideas of gender. As Fanon brings forward the notion that whiteness is defined through its opposition to blackness, she contends that the legibility of heterosexuality is ultimately predicated on the abjection of homosexuality. Hal Foster moreover lays bare how the social context of 1990s shaped many of the rising theories on 'the abject' and 'abject art'. He paints the picture of the proliferation of disenfranchised identities, the 'AIDs crisis, [...] systematic poverty and crime, the destroyed welfare state.'²⁹ Referencing the ideology of homophobia and fears of contamination during

²⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 69.

²⁷ Winfred Menninghaus, *Disgust: history and theory of a strong sensation*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Joel Golb, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p.365.

²⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann, (London: Pluto Books, 1988), p. 82.

²⁹ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant Garde at the End of the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p.116.

the AIDs crisis, Butler outlines in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) that ‘the threat of the collapse of the masculine into the abjected feminine threatens to dissolve the heterosexual desire. It carries the fear of occupying a site of homosexual abjection.’³⁰ As heteronormative ideas of sexuality are constituted in relation to the coding of the other with its fantasies and anxieties, Butler considers how this thwarts queer opportunities to construct coherent selfhood. For example, she writes: ‘Those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanised and the abject against which the human itself is constituted.’³¹ This introduces the idea that there are a plethora of abject bodies and those who experience its ‘dehumanising effects.’

One can further consider Butler’s theory on performativity, the idea that to be a ‘woman’ is a continual process of becoming and conforming to behaviours and values relative to culturally and historically specific sets of relations. The quote ‘one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender’ brings forward the idea that the invention of the category of woman, failing to address the many particularities in identity, is firmly reliant on a heterosexual matrix. In *The Laugh of the Medusa* the feminist Hélène Cixous commands her reader to take hold of their womanhood: ‘Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Your body must be heard.’³² This exclamation lauds feminine experiences as essential in constructing a new language for women, caught in their struggle against patriarchal forces. Such statements also importantly imply that ‘woman’ is a universal subject and that celebrating the specific nature of the female body will serve as an instrument for emancipation. Indeed, the political historian April Carter writes that equal rights for women is not a prerequisite for social justice, but rather that the ‘overall structuring of society and its hierarchy shapes the way people think.’³³ It is therefore unsurprising that liberal feminists saw the need to alter the whole of society and its culture, including the male-dominated sway of literature and art, to shift engrained biases against women.

For example, Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn scrutinise the role of abjection within art: ‘The journey of the female artist into the abject world of the reproductive body, human and animal, is essentially different from the male artist whose fertility does not align him with a

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p.203.

³¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.142.

³² Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ in *Signs*, 1, (1976), 875 – 893, (p. 875).

³³ April Carter, *The Politics of Women’s Rights*, (London: Longman, 1988), p. 79.

loss of form or formlessness.³⁴ This statement offers up a broad account of ‘woman’ and an essentialist account of gender, suggesting that intrinsic, biological differences contribute to the binary distinctions between genders, which become apparent in the contrasting works made by female and male artists. In addition, the cultural historian Constance Classen notably figures the female artist in relation to a gendered history of touch: ‘feminine tactility would continue to hold a powerful sway over the Western imagination as a source of both comfort and chaos, pleasure and danger’.³⁵ One might argue therefore that the works by Grossman, de Bruyckere and Rist are testament to their feminine identity, revealed through the sensitivity, tactility and focus on material and social boundaries in their work.

However, a social constructivist view of gender necessitates a consideration of how the characteristics of the body, which can delimit specific biological sexual differences, in fact exist in a state of indeterminacy – constant flux. The body is arguably liable to be constructed and manipulated by extrinsic factors. Butler incisively recommends that ‘feminists ought to be interested, not in taking matter as an irreducible, but in conducting a critical genealogy of its formulation.’³⁶ The argument that ‘a process of materialization [in fact] stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter’ clearly explicates that the material construction of a female body is itself a result of societal processes.³⁷ Elizabeth Grosz in her work *Volatile Bodies* fulfils Butler’s proposal, examining how an investigation of ideas of corporeality allows for a more acute analysis of the reality of sexual difference within feminism. Building on language used by Merleau-Ponty, she writes: ‘The flesh is composed of the leaves of the body interspersed with the leaves of the world.’³⁸ She thus considers the body in terms of its hybridity: its relationship to other things, whether these are objects, societal or cultural influences, as well as in terms of its own essential, physical make-up.

Moreover, Grosz’ reading proposes how conditions of both visibility and invisibility can adjust perceptions of abjection. She points out how attributes of the female body have historically been conceived in terms of an absence or lack and, more complexly, a source of mystery: ‘a leaking uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow.’³⁹ Misogyny was often

³⁴ Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn, ‘Animals Art and Abjection’ in *Abject Visions: Powers of Horror in Art and Visual Culture*, ed.s by Rina Arya and Nicholas Chare, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 35.

³⁵ Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*, (Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 20.

³⁶ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.121-2.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 120.

³⁸ Elisabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), p.103.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.203.

justified via references to what was perceived as the unruly, unreliable and frail aspects of women's bodies, such as breasts and genitals, the loci of potential flows, aligning women closely with sexuality and reproduction. Her book lays out how these factors cause an identification of women with the abject body, revealing fundamental fears of the transgression of boundaries and states of flux. She writes: 'Bodily fluids attest to the permeability of the body.'⁴⁰ Items such as menstrual blood and liminal processes such as pregnancy are thus socially coded to align women with abjection, demarcating potentially transgressive experiences which the social body must regulate.

I argue these three female artists respond to abjection in multiple ways; they explore social and physical margins, representing materials which might otherwise be cast off or are subject to disintegration, whilst also pushing the limitations of identity, demarcating a space for the other and unfamiliar. Gutiérrez-Albilla argues profound importance is placed on the abject to advance many of the key objectives of feminist and queer theory, such as the dismantling of 'the dominant patriarchal and heterosexual ideology.'⁴¹ Their works are thus useful to understanding the destabilization of possible identities and occupy a fraught area of feminist and political debate. I argued that as notions of sexual difference are affected by cultural influences, such as those that align the female body with abjection, these artists inevitably question how such circumstances have come into being, probing into the nature of their own position in the world and the matter of their bodies. Grossman, de Bruyckere and Rist all play on ideas of the skin, questioning the extent to which corporeality is a vessel of identity. The legacy of cultural ideas of femininity, transparent in these artists' shared interest in sexuality and the figure, provide subject matter and material with which to confront ideas of the abject.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.193.

⁴¹ Gutiérrez-Albilla, 'Abjection and the politics of feminist and queer subjectivities', p.66.

Chapter II: Nancy Grossman: bound figure

Nancy Grossman's work, shaped by the background of protests against the Vietnam war and the cultural liberation of the Sixties and New York art scene, is often considered in relation to the erotic and the obscene, a celebration of taboo and disturbing representations of the body amidst acts of aggression. For instance, in the early 70s she began a series of drawings of a machine gun tethered to a human head: a metaphor for the dehumanising power of violence in thick graphic lines and black shadow [see *Fig. 1*]. The critic Holland Cotter noted that this female artist's brave investigation of transgressive social topics within art 'blew conventional images of femininity to smithereens.'⁴² Grossman's art indeed occupies an important place in queer and feminist debates around gender, sexuality, and the fabrication of both social and individual identity. Building on her diagrammatic studies of the devices of bondage, Grossman gained notoriety for her leather-clad wooden busts of heads in the 1980s. Fourteen of these were displayed in a solo exhibition at MoMa in 2011 [see *Fig. 2*]. These sculptures instantly unsettle and perturb the viewer. Intimidating, black-armoured faces are lined up in a row, fitted with the appendages of horns, chains and collars, their thick necks implying monstrous strength. Through Grossman's use of masking, the viewer can imagine the emotional states which shape the specific physiognomy of the face beneath the leather wrapping. They can project their own ideas of personhood onto these life-size objects, which can range from angry brutality to frail weakness. These questions of possible identity are brought out through Grossman's repeated use of the motif of the human figure in a state of bondage, simultaneously trapped and protected, subject to the internal battling of various forces, the throes of pain and pleasure.

Grossman's work is frequently aligned by critics with contemporaneous activism in the homosexual community, trends of fetish wear and the underground S&M scene. Besides these links to themes of dominance and control, I argue Grossman creates powerful psychological encounters through her use of materials and depiction of the human figure. A sense of confrontation is perhaps one of the most notable characteristics of abjection Kristeva describes. An analysis of theories of abjection thus offers a route to understand the subversive qualities of this female artist's work. The series of head sculptures carry universal relevance, depicting inner torment and anguish. I argue the works capture the innate sense of vulnerability Kristeva describes within the initial moments of abjection, whereby the subject is dumbfounded, and

⁴² Holland Cotter quoted in Nancy Grossman's *Nancy Grossman: Tough Life Diary* (New York: Skidmore College 2012).

their senses are momentarily stifled via an encounter with the other. In *No Name*, for example, the lips are replaced with two rows of tightly whip-stitched metal grommets, creating a powerful image of enforced silence before the viewer [see *Fig. 3*].⁴³ One can infer that leather bondage hides identity but also prevents the articulation of it. States of blindness and voicelessness are thus evoked – attributes often associated with abjection within society. The title *No Name* thus implies voluntary anonymity as well a state of non-identity or incoherent identity: a crisis of individual subjectivity.

The wooden heads, each carved by hand in their own idiosyncratic formation, almost completely covered in thick black leather, including mouths, eyes and other sense organs, arguably signifies the artist's privileging of touch above the visual aspects of identity [see *Fig 2*]. For instance, Grossman notably stated in an interview for *NY Arts Magazine* in 2000: 'I like to say there's [...] less to say and more to feel [...] Sculpture strikes me as being deaf and dumb. It's a necessity more than anything else, a way to escape from the rules with which you were brought up.'⁴⁴ The fact that these heads are severed, lacking bodies or limbs, implies their helplessness. Some might argue that Grossman's focuses on social inequality, encouraging the viewer to think about those who are powerless to acts of aggression. One can perhaps cite examples of the assaults on the homosexual community and the casualties of war and crime. To consider a quote from *Powers of Horror*: 'Abjection [...] is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: [...] a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it [...] a friend who stabs you.'⁴⁵ Although Grossman's sculptures can be read more broadly as a social commentary, they have profound implications in terms of philosophical ideas of subjectivity. There is an evident comparison between Grossman's representation of the human subject through the cipher of a disembodied, bound head, and the ways Kristeva reveals how abjection confronts everyone with forces beyond their control, even if these are primal – operating on a level beneath the surface of the skin.

The contorted pose of the figure is the perhaps most salient aspect of Grossman's *Male Figure Sculpture* [see *Fig. 4*]. The stark black monochrome increases our awareness of the separation of the body from its surroundings. The artist alludes to the inner musculature and curvature of a corporeal form, its contours and shape, whilst clothing the entire body in a leather. One can refer to Grosz' explanation that '[...] the various sensations located at the

⁴³ Matthew Nichols, 'Nancy Grossman: Heads' in *Art in America* (2011).

⁴⁴ Grossman quoted in Stefano Pasquini's 'The Loud Whispers of Nancy Grossman' in *NY Arts Magazine* (2000) 43 – 45 (p.45).

⁴⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

surface of the body are the most primitive, essential and constitutive of all sources of sensory stimulation.⁴⁶ The main visual details inside the figure's monotonous black surface are silver zips which act as markings, repeated lines that suggest energy as well as violence. Like bloodied wounds they protrude from the leather sheathe, glistening in the light. The pose Grossman has carved out for her wooden base is reminiscent of the martyrdom of a saint, recalling homo-erotically-charged representations of Saint Sebastian, notorious of Baroque painting. One can imagine the body writhing amidst vacillations of agony and ecstasy: hands above the head and torso exposed, flesh rippling, tied to a tree or pillar, shot through with Roman arrows [see *Fig. 5*]. Although clear identifications of the figure elude the viewer in this sculpture, Grossman evidently references the abundant and imagery of human torture and the martyrdom of saints. The use of animal skin as a material for her sculpture indeed implies the act of skinning itself, wrought by violence.

There is ambiguity as to whether this body is alert either to sensations of pain or pleasure. Bondage, one might argue, can simultaneously dull and increase sensitivity to external stimuli. Sealing off the skin from both air and direct touch, the wearer arguably becomes more aware of their own corporeal boundaries and the contact that exists, now compromised, between their own body and the outer world. Through this act of wrapping, the body's status is arguably reduced to that of an object, due to the strong emphasis on its physical boundaries. However, one might argue that use of leather or latex clothing to objectify and fetishize the body in a sexual context conversely gives the wearer a heightened psychological consciousness: they ascertain their presence as an individual subject, either to be pleased or inflicted with pain via knowledge of the brute fact that their body is an object which can be used. Grossman's work is often examined, perhaps too simplistically, in terms of its relation to BDSM. The use of leather wrapping relates to more complex ideas, including: the historic dress of a medieval executioner, mummification and binding of the corpse, anatomical illustrations of dissection, the prevalence of images of the Flaying of Marsyas.

Kristeva's theories on the abject are essential to understanding the significance of this work. The physical proximity of leather to the human skin creates a point of disjuncture, perhaps similar to the film of milk on coffee grazing Kristeva's lips, at once familiar yet foreign.⁴⁷ This work proposes the juxtaposition of animal skin with human flesh. Kristeva highlights compellingly the feelings of suffocation and repugnance the abject produces,

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 35.

⁴⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3.

described repeatedly as a sense of opposition to something. The abject, nebulous and hard to grasp, thus reveals how leather bondage might serve as a sensory and psychological device to induce feelings of unease. In Grossman's sculpture, the viewer can guess as to the sensation of their human skin wrapped tightly in dead animal skin, pulled tight over the body in a thick and warm clasp: an embrace and a choke. Grossman use of leather can in fact be traced back the artist's earlier exposure to scenes of violence and brutality against animals. She was influenced by her childhood upbringing on a ranch in Oneoato, New York, introducing her to the use of leather bridles and harnesses for horses, deepening the idea that skin is a fundamental form of bondage, highlighting how animals are also entrapped through the appropriation of their material substance. One can consider Kristeva's statement: 'The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal.'⁴⁸

Grossman's parents also worked in the garment industry, providing her with sewing and pattern-making skills. Indicating the importance of her early work with fabric, sewing is at the fulcrum of *For David Smith*, constituting a sculpted relief of animal skins which protrudes from a flat surface [see Fig. 6]. A patchworking technique joins diverse elements together, such as leather, fabric and rubber, creating a figural composition mounted on a white, painted plywood ground. The tactile use of leather as a material arguably bridges man and animal, alongside elements of the natural and artificial. In his book, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender*, David Getsy outlines how Grossman's abstract assemblages of the mid-1960s shaped her later more figurative work. He argues they demonstrate an intense fascination with substance of the body itself, and thus debates around gender and identity, offering essential insights into the artist's process of making and connection to questions of materiality. Getsy states emphatically: 'For her, the body was nothing but raw material. After all, her sculptures are made from old skins'.⁴⁹ A recognition of humanity's link to the animal is indeed a powerful source of abjection for Grossman. She introduces how identity is shaped by a constant relationship to the other, signified frequently via the proposed relationship of human flesh and animal skin.

An analysis of *Ali Stoker* deepens an understanding of how Grossman's contact with materials brings forward alternative ideas of embodiment [see Fig. 7]. The work is dynamic and visceral, carrying associations of war zones and scenes of disaster: the churning up of the earth, oil spilling out, liquid black, the pulsating energy of broken-down machines. Grossman's

⁴⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.12

⁴⁹ David J. Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 148.

use of zips, laces and buckles indicate points of potential collapse as well as visible signs of fabrication and assembly, symbolising the ongoing process of doing and undoing within her process of making. The viewer gains an awareness of the fact that the individual elements of the work are bound, tied, strapped, as much capable of being set free as they are of being bound and trussed. In certain areas, Grossman lets the leather surface of her wall-based sculpture buckle and pucker, creating empty chasms, pockets and pools, and suggesting the potential ooze from openings in the skin. Kristeva explicates how things which are cast off signify abjection, as they ultimately denote the presence of a border. She writes: ‘These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty [...] There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border [...]’⁵⁰

Ali Stoker thus has a range of associations – enclaves on a rockface, the pitted texture of a meteor, open mouths and sexual organs – spaces where clear boundaries dissolve. Rubber tubes form iterative diagonal lines, emerging outwards like snakes from the heaving mass of leather parts only to be submerged again, diving back below the surface, sealed by rough stitches. This ambiguity between the figure and ground creates a state of flux: a shifting sense of depth concentrated inside the rectangular frame. Getsy emphasises how this work in fact references the multiplicity of human genitalia. The use of abstraction and figuration arguably confuse questions of sexual identity, as signs of the binary distinctions between sexed bodies seemingly dissolve in this work, characterised by its proliferating folds of leather and tubing. Grossman’s sculpture thus brings forward the possibility for shifting identity embedded within the reality of the skin. It is possible to consider how her work operates in light of transgender theories emerging in the 60s, such as those identified by Susan Stryker, foregrounding the potential hybridity and fluidity of gender.

⁵⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.3.

Chapter III: Transformation and transience in Berlinde de Bruyckere's Sculpture

In an exhibition for Hauser and Wirth in 2012, Berlinde de Bruyckere took inspiration from the story of Diana and Actaeon, famously narrated by Ovid in his *Metamorphosis*. Her sculptures investigate the crossing of borders between the human and animal, man and woman, dead and the living, through the abstraction of the figure. Three entities are presented recumbent on wooden boxes, as if inviting the viewer into an autopsy room, mausoleum, or the solemn atmosphere of a wake [see *Fig. 8*]. Unlike Grossman's solid wooden busts, stitched with seemingly impenetrable shell-like black, de Bruyckere chooses materials that closely emulate the visual characteristics of flesh: the laminated materiality of the human body. Wax also allows de Bruyckere to blur the boundary between the lifeless and the sentient through its ephemerality, forming a link between the monumental and vulnerable. She can suggest the pulse of veins, the animate and vibrant force of blood, whilst also the pale skin of a corpse, cool to the touch like stone, through the complex layering of different colours of wax within the casting process.

For example, *Liggende I* represents a headless figure laid supine across a piece of fabric. The bones of ankles and kneecaps are recognisable as white protrusions [see *Fig. 9*]. Indeed, there is a suggestion that a real skeleton exists inside the substance of de Bruyckere's sculpture: a hint as to the substructure of the body – its various networks of bones, vessels and tissues. The outer surface of the wax also imitates certain properties associated with human skin due to its combination of translucency and obscurity: the inner workings of the body are hinted to but ultimately evade the viewer's grasp. It reacts with qualities of light to create a form of iridescence or sheen, perhaps reminiscent of the pallor of a corpse. One can consider how the physical vulnerability of wax – its potential to liquify under heat – deepens its connections to natural processes of decay, such as those that take place in the body after death. The melting ooze of wax can perhaps be likened to the eventual rotting away of the matter of the body, ultimately unveiling the skeleton below. Kristeva's argues that the corpse, derived from the Latin *cadere* meaning to fall, represents the ultimate outpouring of bodily fluids: 'Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver [... The] corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.'⁵¹

⁵¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.3.

I argue that the position of de Bruyckere's sculpture deepens its connection to the theme of morbidity, embedding her work in a historic artistic tradition. Specifically, one can draw a comparison with Holbein's Renaissance work *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* [see *Fig.10*]. This devotional painting was originally part of a predella for an altarpiece. Its depiction of the sacred body liable to the grotesque aspects of physical decomposition sort to stir piety in the worshipper through its representation of Christ's earthly suffering. De Bruyckere also depicts a limp, pale body, the naturalistic putrefaction of flesh and details akin to stigmata: the upper part of her waxen torso is bloodied, blushed red, seemingly wounded. Spear-like antlers emerge alongside the chest, substituting the position of human arms. In this installation, it is unclear as to whether the viewer glimpses a scene of becoming, embodied by the protagonist Actaon's transfiguration into a deer, or the ultimate disintegration and diaspora of his body-parts [see *Figs 9 and 11*]. Contrasting to Holbein's painting, which provides hope of spiritual redemption by linking a mortal form with transcendence, I argue this sculpture further disturbs the viewer's notion of the fixed boundaries of their corporeality. de Bruyckere creates a strong sense of discomfort by unveiling the chaotic force of matter within the physicality of her sculpture, capable of both transformation and destruction.

In *Volatile Bodies* Grosz recapitulates how the abject, although frequently symbolised by bodily wastes such as those personified by the corpse, is in fact not what is dirty and impure about the body, but rather: 'that which upsets and befuddles its order.'⁵² One can immediately consider how these female artists' exploration of the abject is innately subversive, revealing potential gaps between the realities of lived experience and systems of order, such as social hierarchies and the dichotomies of gender. For instance, de Bruyckere questions the supposed division between the human and animal, bringing forward the monstrous and base aspects of existence. Moreover, in his essay 'The Phobic Object' the critic Simon Taylor reinforces Grosz's reading of Kristeva's work, emphasising the rising materialism of art in the 1990s. He writes how it functions to confuse identity, writing: 'These traces of abjection represent both 'us' and 'not me'.'⁵³ The corpse is repeatedly described as the epitome of abjection – that which is cast off from the body – de Bruyckere plays on further possible forms of disintegration, the multiple threats to the borders of the self. *Liggende I* and *II* vacillate across various, hybrid states of identity, such as those between man and deer, birth and death, violence and tranquillity [see *Figs 9 and 12*]. Considering both their visual and material qualities of fragmentation, one

⁵² Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 192.

⁵³ Simon Taylor in Petra Lange-Berndt's *Materiality: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London & Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2015), p.127.

can reiterate Kristeva's notion that abjection – 'above all ambiguity' – is characterised by the threat of assimilating otherness, which these sculptures represent.

The metamorphosis of Actaeon is indeed a powerful subject to unravel ideas of abjection. In *Liggende II*, the human body is eviscerated; a waxen shape, a slender white form, appears to blossom outwards into either a spool of branches or bone-like masses, emerging like protuberant growths or fungus from the trunk of a tree [see Fig. 12]. Evidence of this transitory moment of humanity's shifting and merging with the natural world, create a sense of unease. De Bruyckere implies how the corporeality of the viewer might also be rendered victim to fantastical, material forces of change. By representing the body in a state of disintegration and flux, the artist highlights how the subjectivity of its occupant might also be broken down and threatened. This idea is fulfilled by the fact that the hunter Actaeon is torn to shreds by his own hounds at the end of Ovid's legend, highlighting how the tragic victim's identity, indicated by his ability to be recognised by others, has been displaced alongside his physical transformation. This deepens the idea that systems of hierarchy are also liable to same mystical forces of change in the poem. Therefore, if one considers Grosz' specification that the abject must not simply be defined in terms of bodily wastes and the repulsive aspects of the body itself, but rather its potential to disrupt and transgress social boundaries, de Bruyckere's allusion to the topsy-turvy experience of Actaeon enables her to engender a sense of unease in her viewer: who can question their own status and physical presence.

In both *Piëta* and *Man of Sorrows IV* de Bruyckere explicitly refers to Christian iconography and depictions of saints [see *Fig.s 13 and 14*]. These sculptures are recognisable in the ways in which they signify martyrdom. *Pieta* appears to refer directly to Christ's deposition from the cross and the Biblical scenes of entombment. The juxtaposition of the waxen body with white cushions arguably blurs the boundary between the body and its surroundings – it becomes enmeshed and cradled in folds, perhaps implying the tender wrapping, bandaging, and embalming that is about to take place. In *Man of Sorrows IV* de Bruyckere pushes the representation of Christ's body to the limit. A piece of wax is impaled by a length of iron. The only clear signs of suffering are transparent in the positioning of the body in a cramped pose, encircling the harsh substance of metal as if in an embrace. In this fetal position, the sculpture arguably carries wider relevance, lacking clear demarcations of gender and class. The wax represents flesh: pure matter. The viewer is unsure as to whether this is a work which should be revered or reviled, or if it points to a moment of genesis or death. The fact its back faces the viewer and its head is absent brings greater attention to the surface of the wax itself: its mottled complexion and the folds of skin. This ambiguity indicates abjection: the viewer cannot

identify this as a specific human body and is forced to consider it as unknown, a new-born or aged body. In her essay 'Seams in the Flesh of the World', Stephanie Damianitsch indeed brings attention to how de Bruyckere's figural representations all lack discernible heads or hands – conventional conveyors of subjectivity and gesture.⁵⁴ In this sense, the viewer is unable to associate themselves with the figure, who cannot return their gaze, betray their emotions or proclaim their identity.

In her series of drawings *Aanéén-genaaid* from 2000, de Bruyckere presents an amorphous figure [see *Fig. 15*]. On the paper, forms emerge into the foreground like stains through layered washes of watercolour and faint pencil lines. As in her sculptures, often glued together with epoxy resin, the overall shape appears to have been composed via an assemblage of parts. Blues, reds, and browns merge, mapping out denser and more transparent areas. This layering creates a varied surface, which appears puckered and wounded, almost like a bruise or a broken, scabbed piece of skin tissue. Furthermore, two drawings, *The Wound* and *Romeu (my deer)*, shed light on how abjection is key to the experience of corporeality [see *Fig. 16 and 17*]. De Bruyckere indeed describes a wound 'as a sign of being, a hole that makes you aware that the body has an outside'.⁵⁵ In the first work, vibrant red alludes to a cavity of blood amidst deep shadows, implying either the dark bark of a tree or pubic hair. This composition suggests the recession of a deep wells of blood or open flesh, implying a scene of violence or destruction, and perhaps carrying connotations with female sexual anatomy. *Romeu (my deer)* is a traditional sketch from a male life model which has been disrupted to display antlers dripping from the neck and the body reduced to a state of crippled, prostrate agony. This work brings forth ideas of corporeal fragility, also embodied through the abstracted study of a wound. de Bruyckere thereby highlights how abjection exposes both psychological and physical threats to the integrity of the body, revealing its innate permeability and indicating points where it is liable to both open up and collapse.

⁵⁴ Stephanie Damianitsch in Hans-Peter Wipplinger's *Berlinde de Bruyckere: Suture* (Vienna: Leopold Mueum, 2016), p. 50.

⁵⁵ Berlinde de Bruyckere quoted in *ibid*, p. 55.

Chapter IV: Pipilotti Rist's raucous delights

Pipilotti Rist's practice contains explicit signs of rebellion and activism. The artist's famous video work, *Ever is Over All* (1997), which depicts a turquoise clad woman fervently wielding a red flower at a car on a Zurich street, is described as a moment of ecstatic violence, '[...] jolting us out of a kind of postmodern visual stupor' [see *Fig. 18*].⁵⁶ Considering how Rist revels in the transgressive and spectacular, it is unsurprising that the abject features heavily in the discourse around her work. Kristeva explores this term in relation to social conventions regulating the impure and the pure, but also its links to awe and escape: 'The abject is edged with the sublime [...] For the sublime has no object either. When the starry sky, a vista of open seas or a stained glass window shedding purple beams fascinate me, there is a cluster of meaning, of colors, [...] light touches [...] that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, hear, or think.'⁵⁷ As Grossman and de Bruyckere demonstrate how our relationship to the body can be refigured, Rist questions ideas of the world and the body's place within it through storytelling, characters and imagery in her videos. Indeed, the curator Sherri Geldin writes 'Rist's figures are beyond seductive, almost trance-inducing in the parallel realities they conjure.'⁵⁸ This female artist thus illuminates how many of the rituals and taboos which are part of our social framework, signified by the experience of abjection, are liable to anarchic reimagining.

For example, Rist champions the topsy-turvy in her single channel video *Mutaflor* of 1996 [see *Fig. 19*]. Lasting forty-six seconds, the silent, coloured video expands on themes regarding the circulation between the inner and outer parts of the body. Projected onto the floor, Rist encourages the viewer to bend their neck downwards and gain awareness of their own material grounding to the earth [see *Fig. 20*]. The video offers blurry glimpses of the artist's naked body, punctuated by close-ups of its surface. The camera jumps between the totality of Rist's white fleshy form to her pink lips and shining teeth; it penetrates the cavernous interior of the mouth and emerges seemingly from the wrinkled and dimpled skin around her anus [see *Figs. 21 & 22*]. The low-tech editing fully immerses us in the substance of the body. A quick black-out of the screen between the footage of these two orifices – one open and the other closed – forms an interval. This moment of obscurity arguably implies the process of digestion, suggesting the viewer is consumed by the artist herself, temporarily becoming matter, escaping

⁵⁶ Julia Engberg in *Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest* (New York: Phaidon Press Ltd and New Museum, 2012) p.28.

⁵⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp.11-12.

⁵⁸ Sherri Geldin in Christopher Bedford's *Pipilotti Rist: The Tender Room* (Ohio: Wexner Centre for the Arts, 2011), p.1.

the confines of their subjectivity. Temporary invisibility creates ambiguity: one envisages churning innards, acidic juices, and the hidden processes which take place inside the body. Indeed, Rist elision between the conventional spaces where food is consumed and where it is expelled implies abjection: the expulsion of the internal into the external world. By playing the video on a loop, Rist deepens the inter-connectedness of the delicious and the beautiful and the repulsive and grotesque. A spiralling composition creates a sense of endlessness and flux, which overwhelms the viewer and engenders a confrontation with the abject: '[...] like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.'⁵⁹ Desire and disgust are thus defining aspects of *Mutaflor*, displaying the pushes and pulls inside the human body and its constant fusion with the environment.

The works *Solution for Man* and *Solution for Woman* also examine the role of the body in shaping identity, carving out social categories and impacting individual experiences. Installed in the toilets at the Wexner Centre for Arts in 2011, the viewer looks up at the two screens mounted to the ceiling [see *Fig 23*]. The videos, fluorescent with vibrant clouds, in fact document the gushing action of urination, edited using heavy saturation. Rist thus creates what appears to be an abstract dance of ink, paints or dyes blossoming outwards, ever shifting in shape and appearance. The use of synthetic colours indeed masks the substance of the original footage: urine. This liquid thus takes on an active and performative role, operating as an object of spectacle and visual delight. Moreover, the fact that the viewer must crane their necks to look up at the videos arguably suggests an experience of admiration and wonderment, similar to that engendered through the hierarchical positioning of icons in a Church or clouds floating above in a sky. The artist's mode of display is evidently subversive: Rist ushers the collective body of the exhibition audience into the intimate space of toilet stalls for them to publicly view the body's process of disposal, conventionally hidden and enacted by individuals in private [see *Figs 24 and 25*]. In this way, Rist grapples with social taboos, confronting the viewer directly with material which is cast off and rendered abject. The formless, visceral residues of the body are given a platform through her art.

The respective titles of these works also puts forward the presence of a binary opposition between genders. However, as the subject of each video work is the same – urination – Rist arguably pokes fun at the existence of these social categories. The social taboo which surrounds this waste substance is universal, unaffected by gender or sexual differences. However, as Butler outlines, the process of differentiation is undeniably a key feature of identification,

⁵⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 1.

which impacts strongly upon social and psychosexual behaviour, enacted materially.⁶⁰ Rist's placement of pink and blue bows on the works she has assigned as masculine and feminine thus investigates the validity of the conventions imposed by the notions of sexual differences between bodies [see *Fig. 23*]. She questions the divisive social categorisations of gender; the topic of her dual video work indeed suggests a shared identity that extends beyond that formulated by a division of biological sex and its impact on social behaviour. Through the humorous, gestural act of tying bows and her rainbow-coloured videos, Rist in fact playfully brings forward contentious ideas, regarding what is base and fundamental to the human body. Rist strives towards a new form of video art: '[...] to take this cold and technical media and make it warm, to reject the divide between the organic and the mechanical.'⁶¹

The controversial work *Pickel Porno (Pimple Porno)* from 1992 also foregrounds Rist's concerns with gender and the framework surrounding the representation of men and women [see *Fig. 26 and 27*]. As the video's title would suggest, Rist reacts specifically to the conditions of viewing the body through pornography, classically excluded from the realm of art and relegated to the domain of low cultural consumption. Indeed, fierce media debates surrounding the effects of pornography exploded in the 1990s due to the rise of VHS and private video channels, which created widely accessible footage of a submissive female body, objectified in various sexual acts via the documentary stance of the camera.⁶² Responding to the feminist protest against such debasing pornographic content, Rist set out to make a porn film that would appeal to both herself and other women – a sensory world exhibiting other signs of pleasure, traversing categories of gender. Juliana Engberg reinforces this, writing of '[...] Rist's search for a sensibility that can embrace a more universalist sensuality.'⁶³ The video indeed celebrates the corporeal: a model world nestled between legs switches to cosmic shots of earth from space; close-up textures of skin, breasts, nipples, and sexual organs interweave with slow motion pans of flower fields, fruits, and sea urchins. By juxtaposing the surfaces of the body with landscapes and various objects, Rist thus suggests how the fantastical and pleasurable are uncovered through a tactile, sensual engagement with nature.

The surveillance 'lipstick' Panasonic camera, with wide-angle lens and large depth of field, allowed Rist to hide the apparatus of technology in the process of filming.⁶⁴ She captured the actors up close, without projecting any shadows onto their skin, achieving detailed views of

⁶⁰ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.

⁶¹ Rist quoted in Bedford's *The Tender Room*, p. 7.

⁶² Rist quoted in *Pixel Forest*, p.64.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 65.

the intricate topography and morphology of their bodies: dimpled and puckered skin, pubic hair, sexual orifices. Many consider this work in terms of the mechanical and the fleshy in an erotic, harmonious encounter. Rist encapsulates this: “[...] you should not be able to tell if the camera is filming the body or if the body is touching and filming the camera as well.”⁶⁵ The choice of camera was indeed essential in formulating the sensorial qualities of this video, immersing the viewer in the intimate acts portrayed. Editing adds to this, as interferences and drop-outs, glitches, and heavily saturated colours splash across our field of vision. This lack of precision and clarity arguably emulates properties of an intimate encounter and leaves space for imagination. Rist thus implies the sublime, where the viewer’s perception of the fringes between things dissolves and is instead supplanted by fluid networks and sequences, further eroding the boundary between subject and object, technological and bodily. The artist replicates the vitality of abjection, grasping the viewer both psychologically and corporeally in a world of heightened experience.

Sip my Ocean (1996) also embodies themes of excess and boundlessness [see *Fig. 28 and 29*]. One can infer that this work strongly relates to themes of abjection considering how the language of fluidity, the in-between, and dissolution litters Kristeva’s text. Additionally, this video marked Rist’s first move beyond the confines of a monitor screen, investigating the capacities of projection and laying the groundwork for her environmental exhibition spaces. Light floods into the corner of a room, creating a doubling effect, where two projections seemingly reflect one another [see *Fig. 28*]. However, despite this visual symmetry, *Sip* evidently grapples with themes of fragmentation. A rendition of Chris Isaak’s song *This Wicked Game* serves as an audio which, initially soft and melodic, raises in pitch to become a disconcerting screech. This creates an atmosphere of hysteria, complicating the tranquil scenery of blue sky with Rist paddling in a bikini, representing classical ideals of a female form.⁶⁶ Rist’s submerged body parts transfigure, becoming blurry. This video complicates outward signs of beauty, ideas of dream-like paradise. A range of domestic objects sink to the surface of the seabed and are consumed by a sticky underworld.

Georges Bataille’s theories of the *informe* are useful to understanding this art-work’s play on the oscillation between weightlessness and gravity. The camera repeatedly plunges into the water, revealing objects and bodies pulled downwards, and then lifts up, liberated by the artist’s hands. The tie between underlying natural forces and abjection is expounded by Bataille in *The*

⁶⁵ Rist quoted in *Pixel Forest*, p. 66.

⁶⁶ Engberg in *ibid*, p.25.

Language of Flowers, where he writes: ‘While the visible parts are nobly elevated, the ignoble and sticky roots wallow in the ground, loving rottenness just as leaves love light.’⁶⁷ I argue different forms of viewing are implicated in abjection, involving scenes of discovery, spectacle, immersion – an investigation into the amorphous and enveloping. *Sip* is indeed defined by the iterative act of submergence; an underwater world of algae, rocks and strange objects, like the plant-roots described by Bataille, contrasts to the terrain of sun and sky. The video work responds to ideas of abjection through its imagery of both nature and artifice, creating a strong narrative regarding the relationship of the body and its environment, simultaneously harmonious and discordant. Like a view inside a kaleidoscope, where reflections clash and collide, this video embodies themes of disintegration and fabrication, similarly enticing and confounding the viewer [see *Fig. 28*].⁶⁸

Therefore, an understanding of abjection relates to Bataille’s notions of the *informe* and riotous, cast-off debris, unseen matter and the internal, bounding, uncontrollable forces of growth and decay. Rist’s exploration of the hidden and seemingly base elements of the body, the turgid and dark, creates a sense of chaos which relates to descriptions of encounters with the abject, involving both a heightened awareness of and an escape from the body. In *Sip*, a clear dialectic of figure and ground, the position of the body in relation to its surroundings, is thrown into crisis. Moreover, Rist’s repeated techniques of close-up, strongly focusing on the skin, bodily and organic surfaces, engages the viewer’s whole body alongside editing, colour, and multi-sensory immersion. These possibilities for dematerialization in the medium of video thus enables Rist to carve out alternative modes of viewing.

⁶⁷ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, p.13.

⁶⁸ Peggy Phelan in *Pipilotti Rist* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2001), p.66.

Chapter V: Conclusion

In conclusion, these female artists confront the body. They reveal its idiosyncrasies and complex terrain – its flesh, skin, skeleton – and ultimately underline its powerful position in the formation of identity. All three artists explore entrapment and liberation and how the body, as a material and product of historic social construction, is fundamentally linked to the carving out of subjectivities. Grossman emphasises the physicality of artistic process and how this imparts life into her work. I argue this is based on a connection to the vital, tactile aspects of materials and a devotion to the task of making. She fabricates physical things which are themselves a trace of the maker's own body and deposits of the numerous experiences of encounter and touch, pleasurable or painful. De Bruyckere references mythology and uses the ephemera of wax to explore matter: the internal, the grotesque, spaces where the body blossoms outwards, and where it shrinks and comes apart at the seams, ejecting itself. On the other hand, Rist tackles the cold, mechanical properties of video and revels in the scopic and its potential to transcend material limitations. She describes elements of fantasy and reality via the medium's vast scope for editing, image-making scenes of spectacle, disgust and delight. Her video installations absorb us, implicating the viewer both psychologically and physically. All three artists unveil universal ideas regarding the sensorial and volatile experience of the body: how it intertwines and threads itself with natural and artificial surroundings, fluctuating across borders. This preoccupation with liminality is influenced by their shared identity as female artists. Grossman, de Bruyckere and Rist utilise the historical associations of a female body with the field of abjection – its connotations with weakness, magic, the material, the flowing, the dirty – as a powerful vocabulary to impart visceral presence to their work. The viewer can perceive ambivalent experiences, the role the body might have in constructing these, and how corporeality is itself subject to the perennial processes of change and transformation.

Illustrations:

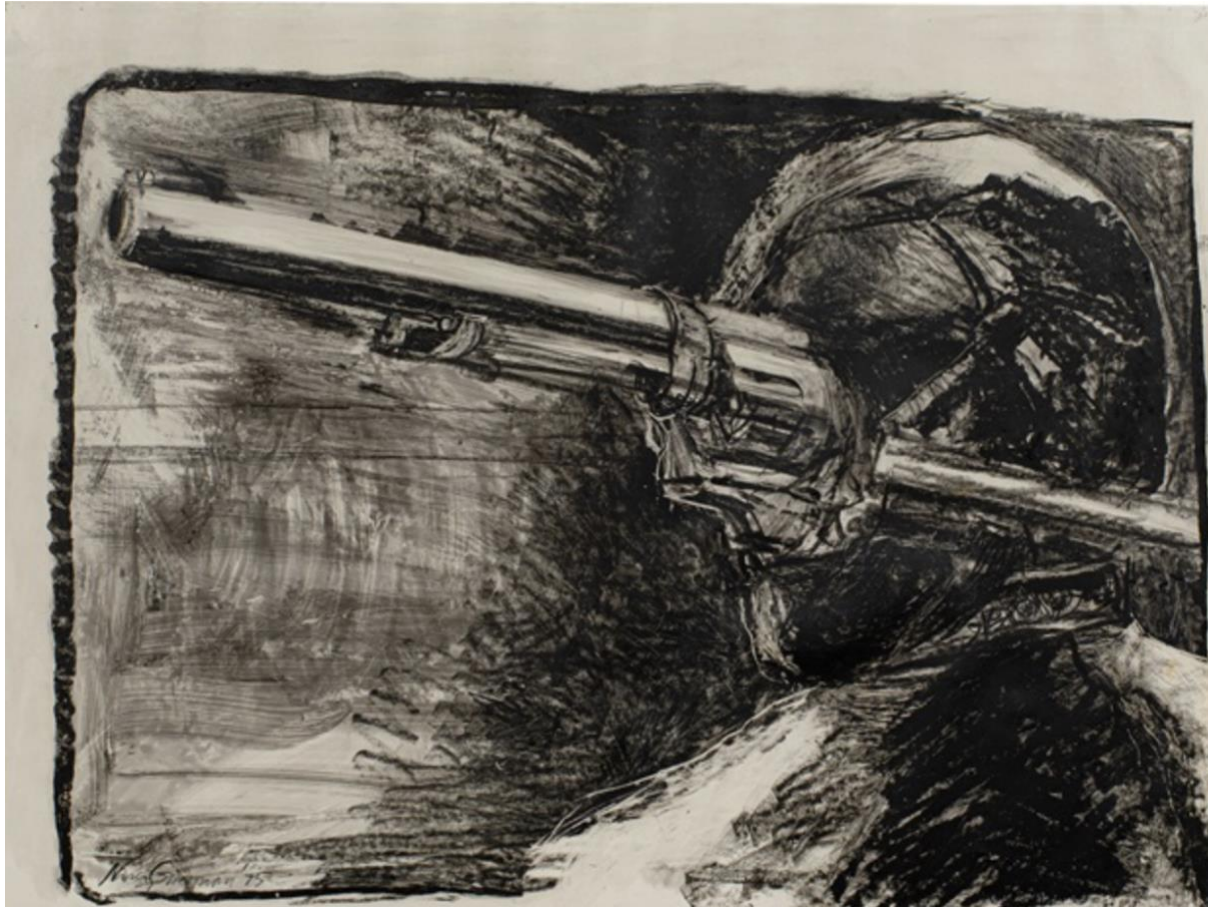


Figure 1: Nancy Grossman, *Sketch for Road to Life*, 1975,
Lithographic crayon on paper, (49.5 x 66 cm).
© Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York.



Figure 2: Nancy Grossman, *Nancy Grossman: Heads*, 2011,
Leather on carved wood, varying dimensions.
© Installation shot from the Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 3: Nancy Grossman, *No Name*, 1968,
Leather-covered wood with white painted epoxy, shoe-lace and metal, (28 x 18 x 25 cm).
© Gift of Lynda and Stewart Resnick to MoMa, New York.



Figure 4: Nancy Grossman, *Male Figure Sculpture*, 1971,
Leather and zippers on wood, (172 cm in height).
© American friends of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.



Figure 5: Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Sebastian*, 1614,
Oil on canvas, (200 cm x 120 cm).
© Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.



Figure 6: Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*, 1965,
Leather, metal, rubber, and paint assemblage on canvas mounted on plywood, (215.9 x 215.9
x 17.15 cm).
© Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York.



Figure 7: Nancy Grossman, *Ali Stoker*, 1966 - 1967,
Dyed leather, metal, and plastic mounted on wood, (95.3 x125.7 x 27.9 cm).
© Collection of Halley Harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld.



Figure 8: Berlinde de Bruyckere, exhibition view of *Berlinde de Bruyckere. Three Sculptures* at Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, 2012.
© Stefan Altenburger, Photography Zurich.



Figure 9: Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Liggende I*, 2012,
Wax, epoxy, iron armature, wood, cotton, wool (134 x 234.5 x 82 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.



Figure 10: Hans Holbein the younger, *The Body of Dead Christ in the Tomb*, 1520 - 1522,
Oil and tempera on limewood (30.5 x 200 cm).
© Kunstmuseum, Basel.



Figure 11: Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Actaeon*, 2012,
Wax, wood, fabric, epoxy, iron armature (142 x 233.5 x 80 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.



Figure 12: Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Liggende II*, 2012,
Wax, epoxy, iron armature, wood, cotton, (103 x 234 x 83 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.



Figure 13: Berline de Bruyckere, *Piëta*, 2007 – 2008,
Wax, epoxy, metal, cushions (80 x 110 x 180 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.



Figure 14: Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Schmerzensmann IV (Man of Sorrows IV)*, 2006,
Wax, iron, epoxy (415 x 102 x 98 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.



Figure 15: Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Aanéén-genaaid*, 2000,
Watercolour and pencil on paper, (51 x 39.5 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.

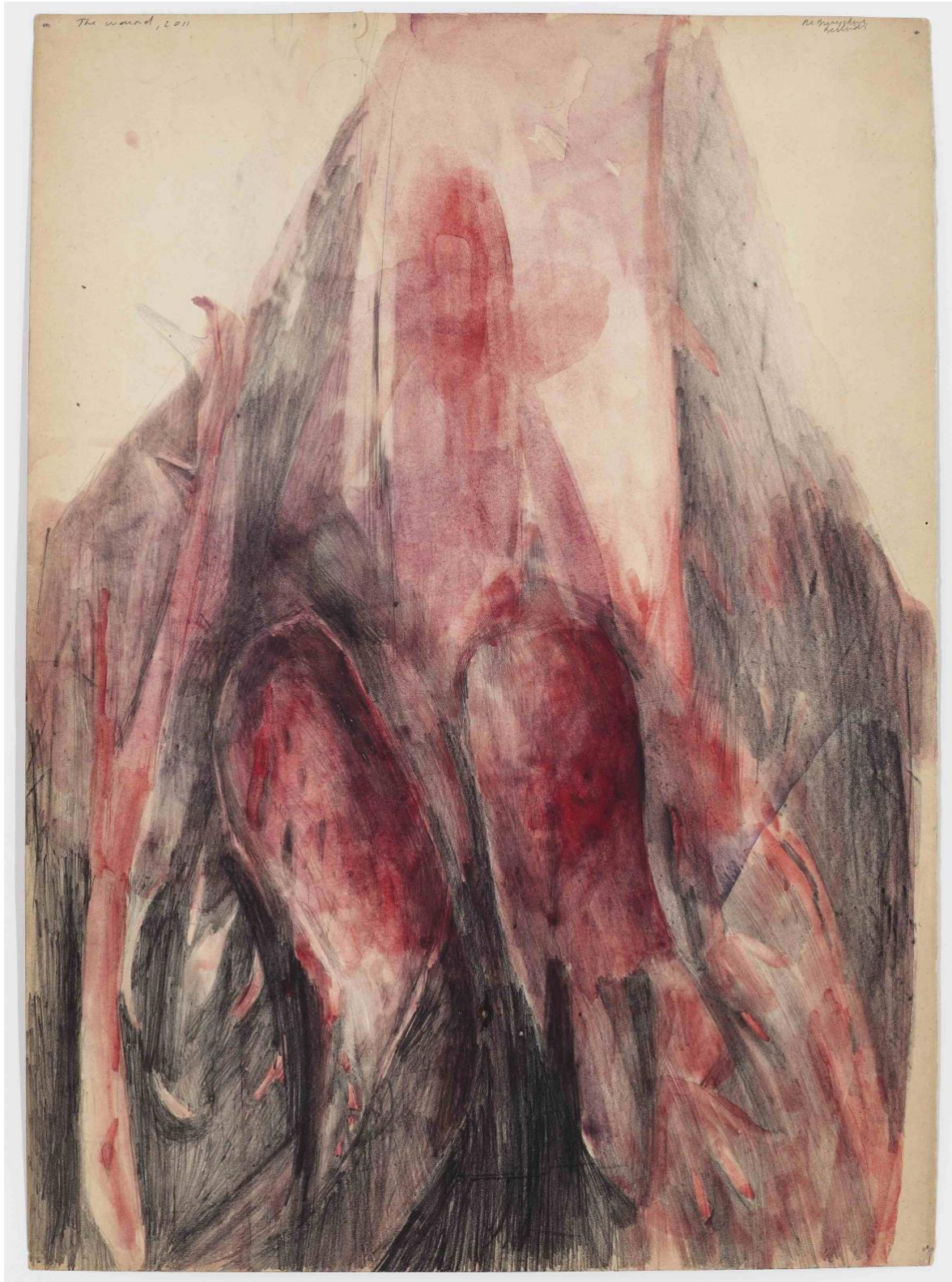


Figure 16: Berlinde de Bruyckere, *The Wound*, 2012,
Watercolour and pencil on paper, (44.5 x 32 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.

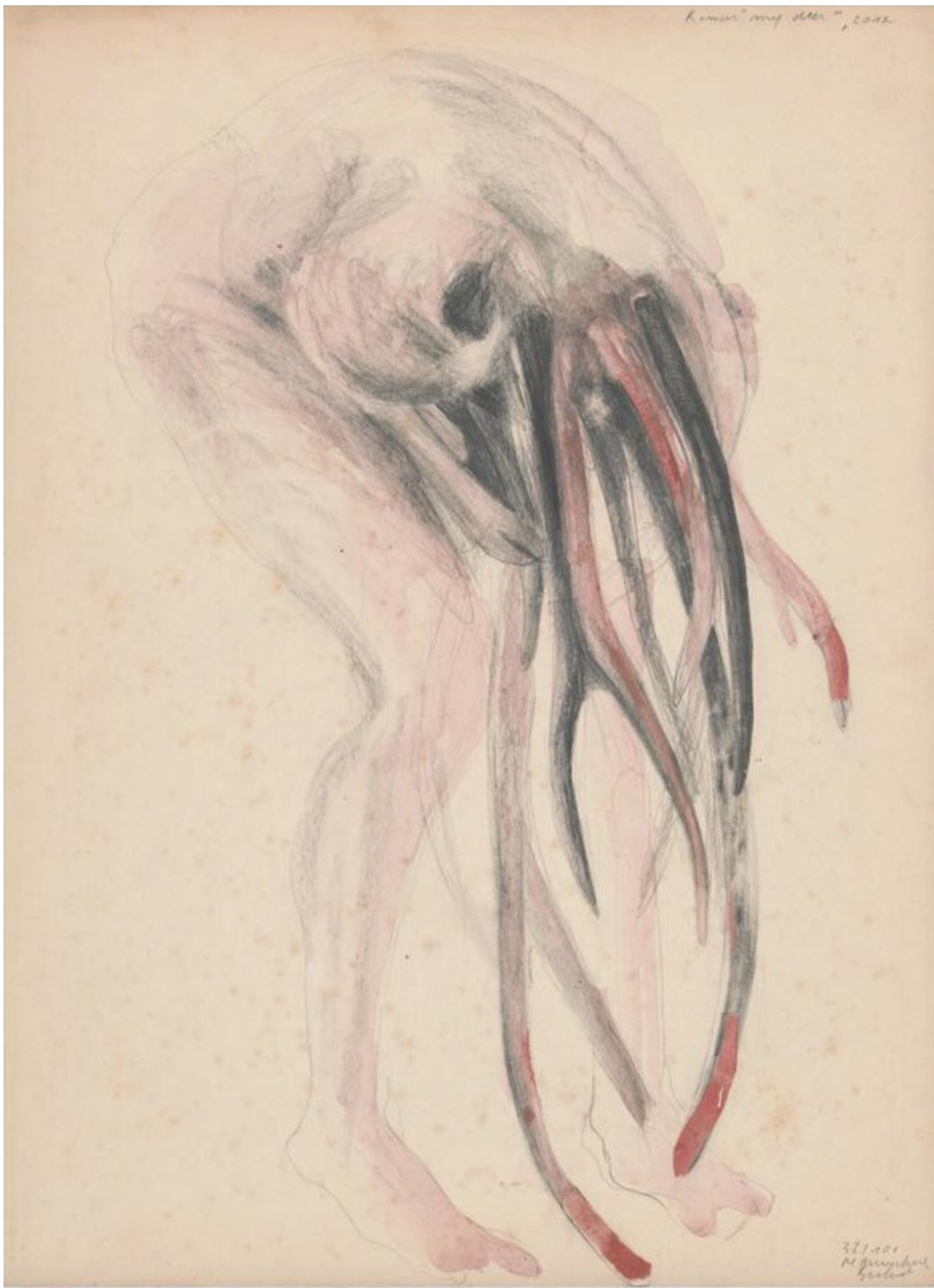


Figure 17: Berlinde de Bruyckere, *Romeu 'my deer'*, 2012,
Pencil and watercolour on paper, (38.1 x 27.9 cm).
© Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.



Figure 18: Pipilotti Rist, *Ever is Over All*, 1997,
Still from two-channel video installation, sound, colour and sound, 4.07 minutes (projection
dimensions variable).
© MoMA, New York, 2022.



Figure 19: Pipilotti Rist, *Mutaflor*, 1996,
Still from single channel video installation, silent, colour, 43 seconds, (projection dimensions
variable).

© Photographed by Thomas Micchelli, 2016.

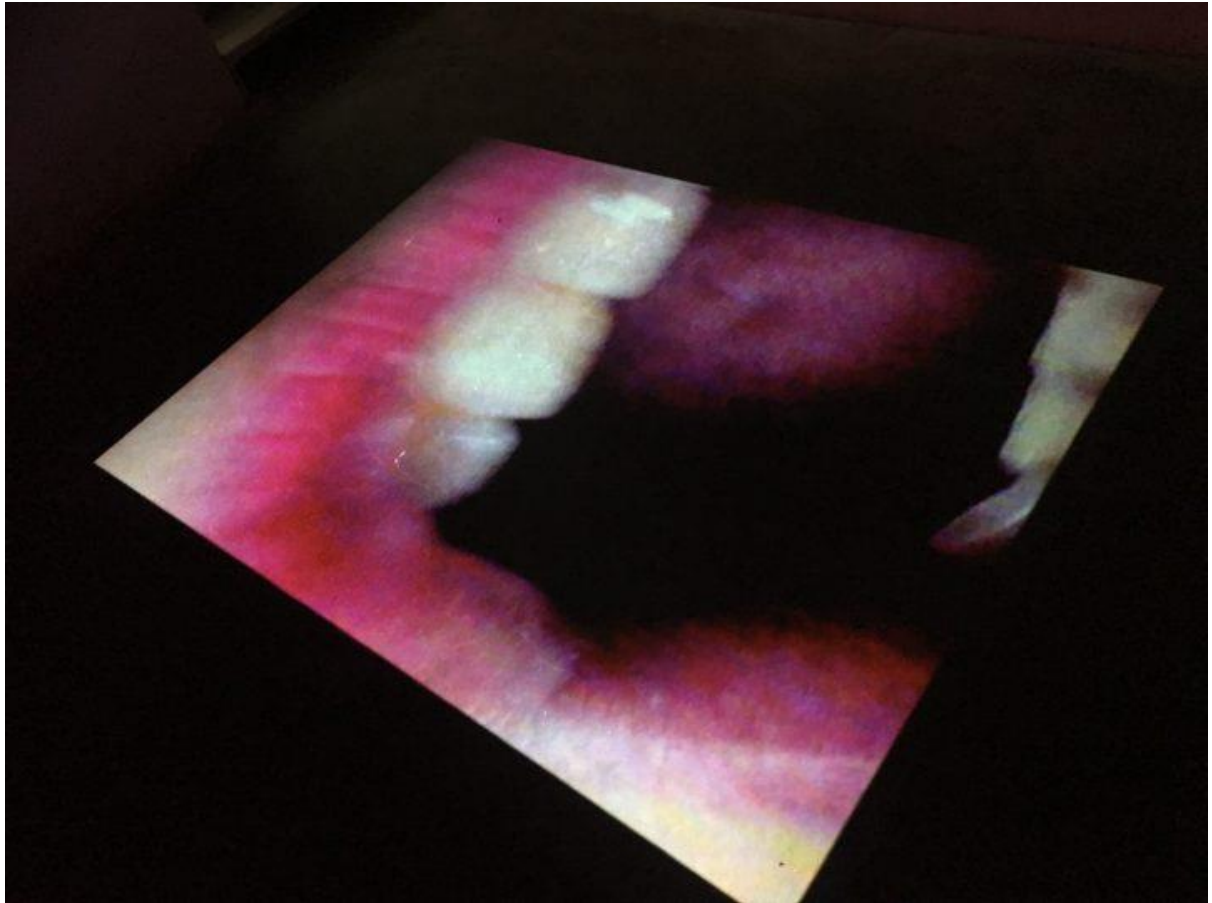


Figure 20: Pipilotti Rist, *Mutaflor*, 1996,
View of video installation in *Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest* at the New Museum, New York.
© Photographed by Thomas Micchelli, 2016.

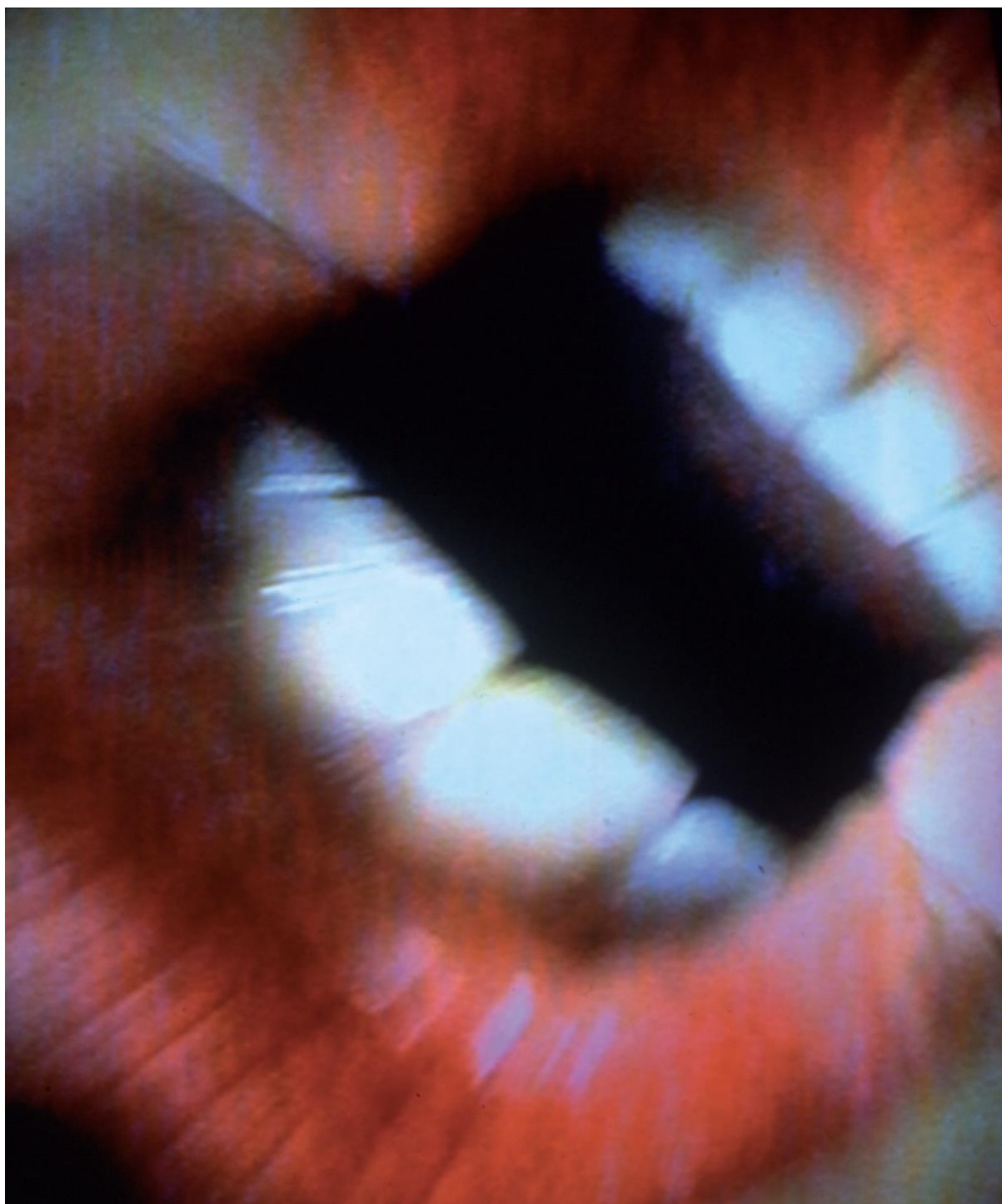


Figure 21: Pipilotti Rist, *Mutaflor*, 1996,
Still of open mouth and teeth.
© Pipilotti Rist.



Figure 22: Pipilotti Rist, *Mutaflor*, 1996,
Still of anus.
© Pipilotti Rist.

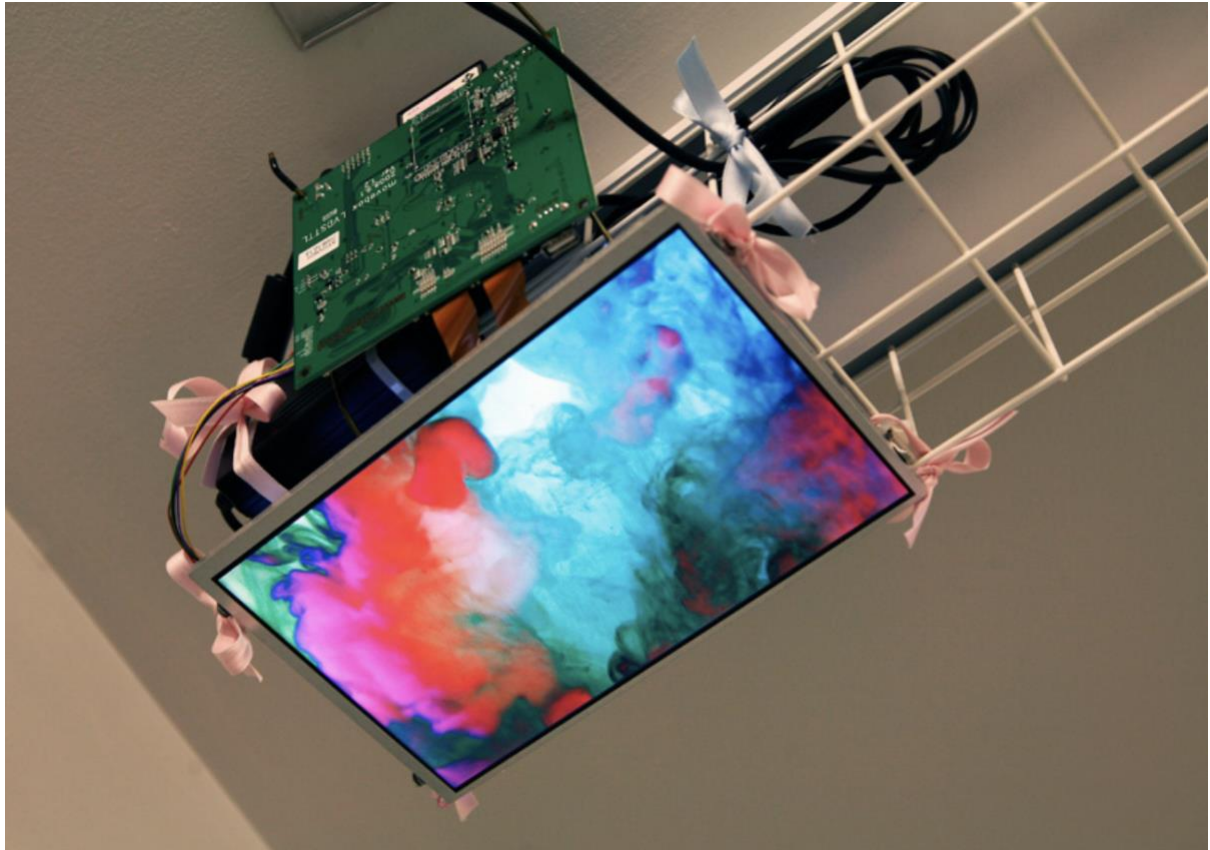


Figure 23: Pipilotti Rist, *Solution for Man, Solution for Woman*, 2011,
View of video installation in the restroom at Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio State
University.

© Photographed by Kevin Fitzsimmons, 2011.



Figure 24: Pipilotti Rist, *Solution for Man, Solution for Woman*, 2011,
Installation view of 2 LCD screens on loop, in the toilette of Cinema Manzoni, Milan.
© Photographed by Roberto Marossi, 2011.

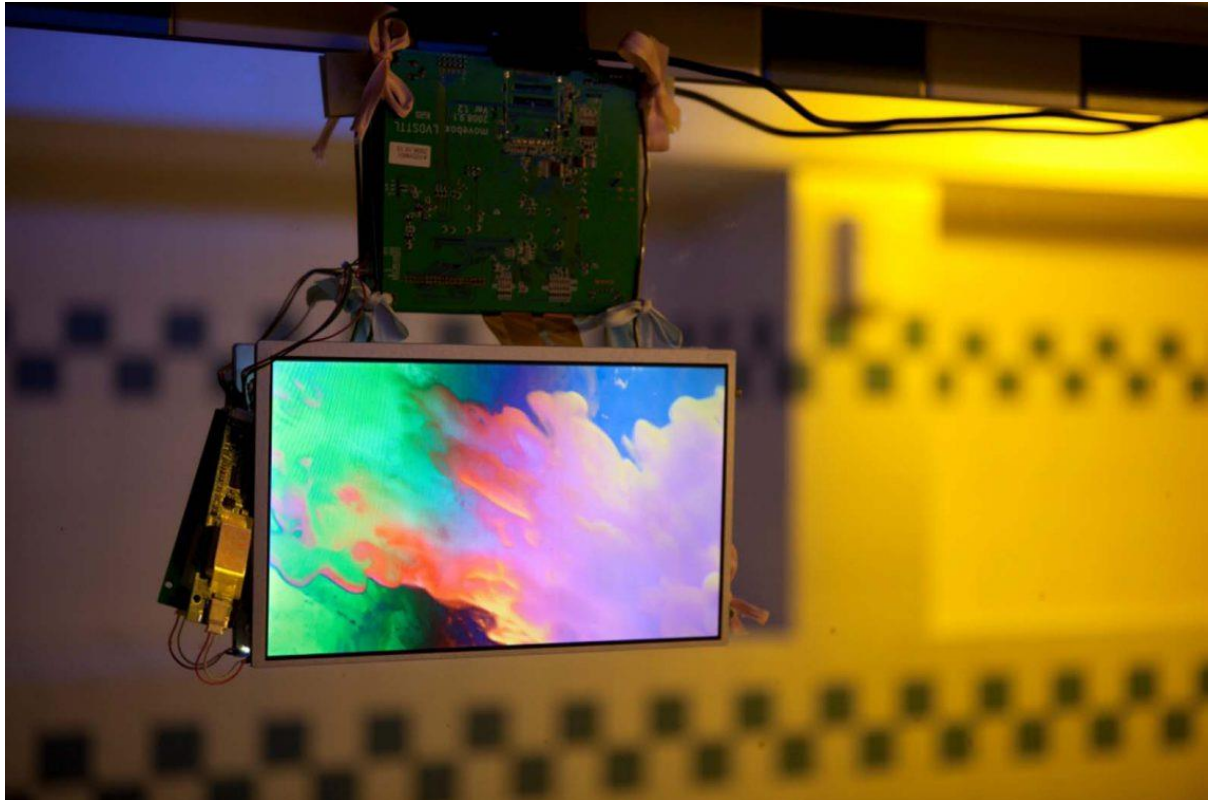


Figure 25: Pipilotti Rist, *Solution for Man, Solution for Woman*, 2011,
Close-up view of video installation at Cinema Manzoni, Milan.
© Photographed by Roberto Marossi, 2011.



Figure 26: Pipilotti Rist, *Pickelporno*, 1992,
Still of breast and crustacean from video, with colour and sound, 12 minutes 7 seconds.
© Pipilotti Rist.



Figure 27: Pipilotti Rist, *Pickelporno*, 1992,
Still of model world between legs.
© Pipilotti Rist.

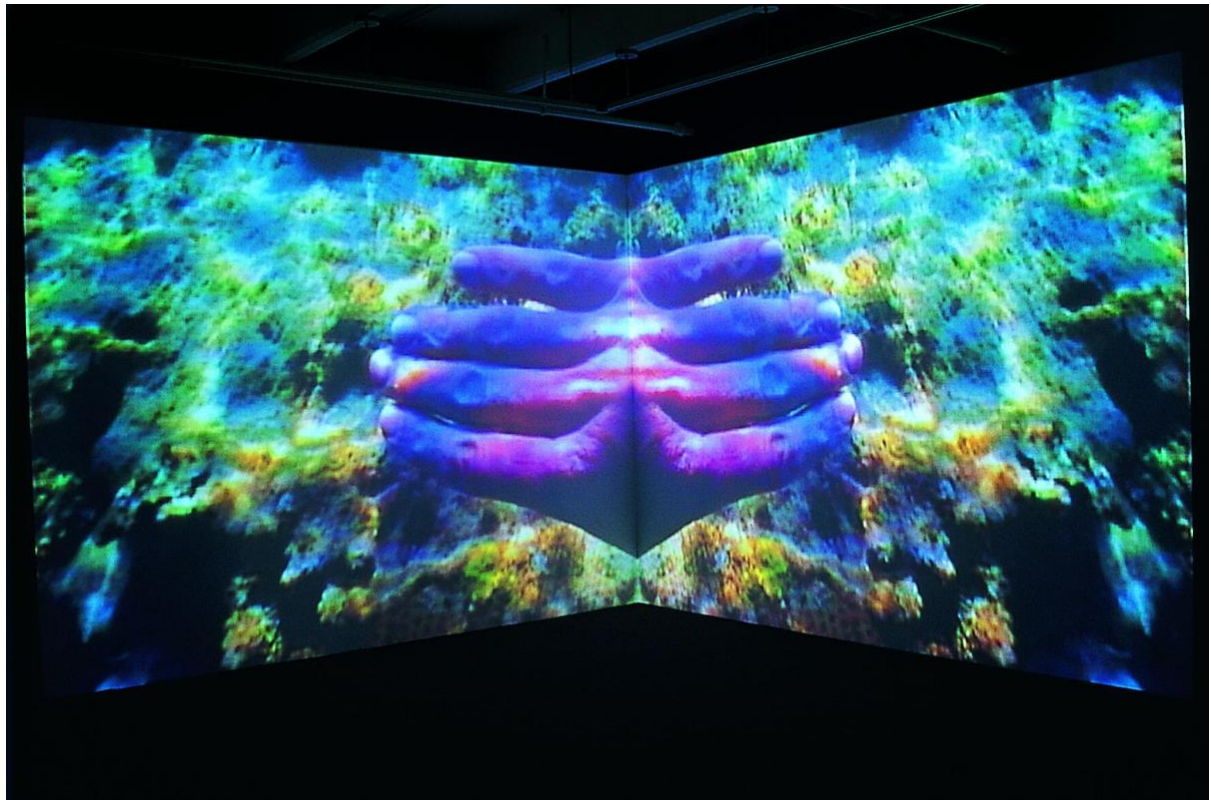


Figure 28: Pipilotti Rist, *Sip my Ocean*, 1996,
Installation view of single- channel video with colour and sound, shown using two projectors,
8 minutes, (dimensions variable).
© Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

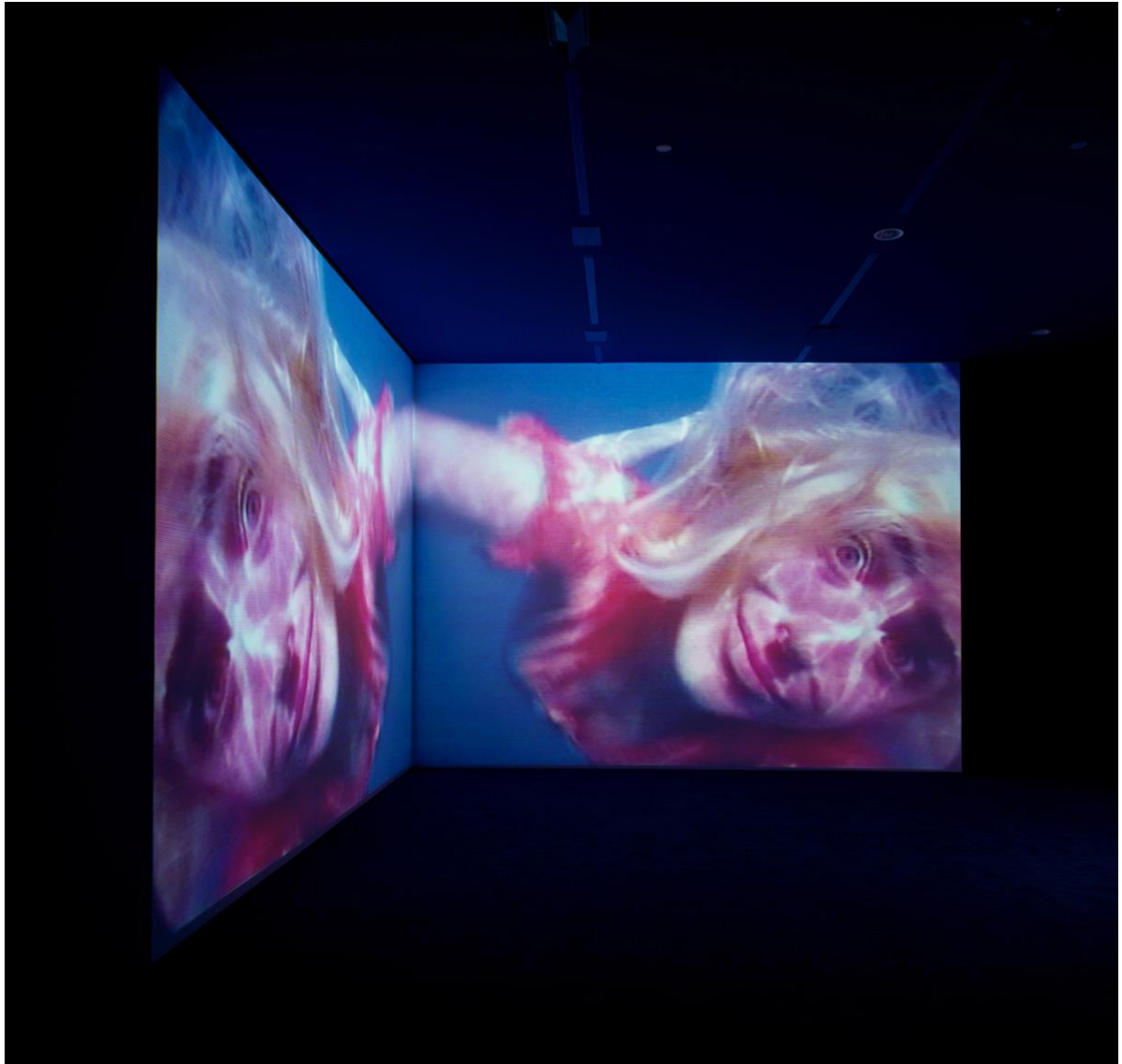


Figure 29: Pipilotti Rist, *Sip my Ocean*, 1996,
Alternate view of video projection, detailing Rist's submerged body.
© Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Bibliography:

Arya, Rina and Nicholas Chare. *Abject Visions: Powers of Horror in Art and Visual Culture*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

Bacal, Edward. 'The Concrete and the Abstract: On Doris Salcedo, Teresa Margolles and Santiago Sierra's Tenuous Bodies' in *Parallax*, vol. 21, no. 3, (2015), pp. 259 – 270.

Bataille, Georges. *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1987).

(-) *Story of the eye (by Lord Auch)* trans. by Joachim Neugroschal with essays by Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes (London: Penguin Books, 1967).

(-) *The Tears of Eros*, trans. by Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989).

(-) *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed.s and trans. by Allan Stoekel et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

Bedford, Christopher. *Pipilotti Rist: The Tender Room* (Ohio: Wexner Centre for the Arts, 2011).

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

Brand, Carina. 'A Materialist Reading of Abject Art: Performance, Social Reproduction and Capitalism' in *Open Library of Humanities*, vol. 7, (2021), pp. 1 – 22.

Bul, Lee. 'Beauty and Trauma' in *Art Journal*, vol. 23, no.3, (2000), pp.104 – 107.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

(-) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. xvii-xix, 4-8, 187, 191-2.

- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Books, 1997).
- Burke, Carolyn, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford. ed.s. *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- Carter, April. *The Politics of Women's Rights*, (London: Longman, 1988).
- Chasseguet-Smirgel, Janine et al. *Female sexuality: New Psychoanalytic Views* (London: Karnac Books, 1970)
- Cixous, Helene, et al. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in *Signs*, vol. 1, (1976), pp. 875 – 893.
- (-) and Catherine Clement. *The Newly Born Women*, trans. by Betsy Wing (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996).
- Classen, Constance. *The deepest sense: a cultural history of touch* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012).
- Conboy, Katie, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury. ed.s. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997).
- Douglas, Mary. *Collected Works: Volume II: Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Mask*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann, (London: Pluto Books, 1988).
- Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant Garde at the End of the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
- (-) Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, and Helen Molesworth. 'The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the "Informe" and the Abject' in *October*, vol. 67, (1994), pp. 3 – 21.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*, ed.s by Lionel Shriver, (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

Gioni, Massimiliano and Margot Norton. *Pipilotti Rist: Pixel Forest* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2017).

Grossman, Nancy. *Nancy Grossman: Tough Life Diary* (New York: Skidmore College 2012).

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Gutiérrez – Albilla, Julián Daniel. 'Abjection and the politics of feminist and queer subjectivities in contemporary art' in *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 13, no. 1, (2008), pp. 65 – 84.

Irigaray, Luce. *This sex which is not one*, trans. by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Jackson, Stevi and Sue Scott. ed.s. *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

Jay, Martin. 'Abjection Overruled' in *Salmagundi*, no. 103, (1994), pp. 235 – 251.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* trans. by Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

Lange-Berndt, Petra. ed. *Materiality: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London & Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2015).

Levi, Jack, Leslie C. Jones, Simon Taylor, and Craig Houser. *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, (New York: Whitney Museum of Modern Art, 1993).

Menninghaus, Winfred. *Disgust: history and theory of a strong sensation*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Joel Golb, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003)

Meskimmon, Marsha and Dorothy C. Rowe. *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

Moi, Toril. ed. *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1986).

(-) *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Nichols, Matthew. 'Nancy Grossman: Heads' in *Art in America* (October 2011).

Pasquini, Stefano. 'The Loud Whispers of Nancy Grossman' in *NY Arts Magazine* (2000), pp. 43 – 45.

Phelan, Peggy, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Elisabeth Bronfen. ed.s. *Pipilotti Rist* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2001).

Rosenthal, Stephanie. ed. *Pipilotti Rist: Eyeball Massage* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2011).

Samman, Nadim Julien. 'Juliana Cerqueira Leite: 'Portmanteau'' in *Third Text*, vol. 27. no. 2, (2013), pp. 278 – 281.

Stryker, Susan and Stephen White. ed.s. *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).

Tyler, Imogen. 'Against Abjection: violent disgust and the maternal' in *Feminist Theory*, vol. 10, (2009), pp. 1-17.

Weiermair, Peter. ed. *Erotic Art: From the 17th to the 20th Century* (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1995).

Willson, Jacki. *Being Gorgeous: Feminism, Sexuality and the Pleasures of the Visual* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2015).

Wipplinger, Hans-Peter. ed. *Berlinde de Bruyckere: Suture* (Vienna: Leopold Museum, 2016).

Wen, Yuxin. 'Reclaiming the Feminine Identity through the Abject: A Comparative Study of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly, and Cindy Sherman' in *Penn History Review*, vol. 27, (2021), pp. 10 – 40.

Young, Iris Marion. *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

