Embodying The Real

This chapter is based on the exhibition, BODY presented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney from 12th September to 16th November 1997. The theme both grows out of Experiencing The Real and re-contextualises it. BODY deliberately presented works which posed the viewer questions about their own experience in front of the works. Each room was thematically designed and included juxtapositions of works that were intended to stimulate unusual and productive associations to enhance the viewer's experience of the individual works and the theme as a whole. It did not offer the comfort of a linear chronology although there was still a sense of historical development. Embodying The Real selectively examines some of these relationships in closer detail than was possible in the catalogue and with the benefit of hindsight. For a complete outline of the exhibition see the catalogue BODY.1

BODY represented a realist thread starting with Courbet and continuing through modern art to the present day. The process of selection brought other critical ideas into play such as: Realism versus Salon painting, empathy rather than voyeurism, gesture as a trace of the artist, art and life, and self-reflection.

Alexandre Cabarel
Birth of Venus 1863

Gustave Courbet *Portrait of Jo Heffernan, the beautiful Irish Girl* 1865

The most apparent distinction between Courbet's Realism and Orientalism, or other forms of nineteenth-century Salon painting, is the choice of subject matter. Realism depicts everyday life rather than fantasies of far-away places and legendary histories.

---

[1] *BODY*. 1997 Bookman Schwartz A division of Bookman Pty Ltd Melbourne.

The exhibition revealed that Courbet's preference for modern themes not only entailed an intellectual embrace of modern political thought, but also frequently involved a significant personal identification with the model and with the natural environment. More generally, the themes of the exhibition brought out a distinction between empathy and voyeurism, where empathy is engendered through this emotional identification. The empathy engendered by Courbet and other painters particularly Bonnard is shown to be supported by the brushwork which metaphorically and literally opens the figure for our engagement.

Empathy is usually precluded by certain cultural and artistic conventions that sanction voyeurism. Such conventions have provided an acceptable context for looking at bodies, even in the most prudish societies (at least within the West). One of the ways in which this has been done is through strategies which distance the viewer from the model. Orientalist and academic paintings, for example, which commonly appeared in the official French Salon exhibitions of the nineteenth-century, portray the nude as exotic, mythological or historically distant. Equally, the classical nude described by Sir Kenneth Clark is intellectually appreciated as an embodiment of classic ideals and proportion, rather than as a body amongst others.[2] This distance secures an indemnity for the voyeur from the threat of a gaze returned: the odalisque will not challenge the viewer's consuming eye. The voyeur may wish to possess the object of the gaze imaginatively, but not at the expense of forgoing the protection of anonymity. On the other hand, the intimacy of an empathic gaze may be confronting because it engages an erotic and bodily response, without the distancing filter of these conventions. It may also lead a viewer to identify with the body of the model, producing an imaginative merger of beholder and image.[3]

The selection process for the exhibition began with extensive viewing of major public collections. The initial framework was based on the principals outlined above, but there was also an intuitive component. Some works seemed to support the concept of an empathetic gaze perfectly while others did not. In several cases these readings of individual works went against the grain of orthodox art historical classifications of the artist's work. Gauguin for example was in many ways an inheritor of Orientalist adventures into the exotic world of cultural tourism. He was also the founder of "Synthetic" painting and therefore not an obvious inclusion in an exhibition based on realist principles. The particular example selected, however, will be seen to play an important role in the overall experience of the exhibition. These intuitions therefore needed to be supported by careful visual analysis. One of the factors which emerged

---

[2] Kenneth Clark, The Nude: a study of Ideal art (London: John Murray, 1956)

[3] See Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts' analysis of Michael Fried's concept of merger in "Courbet's Corporeal Realism: The Phenomenological Body and the Anti-Theatrical Tradition," in The catalogue *BODY*. 1997 Bookman Schwartz A division of Bookman Pty Ltd Melbourne.

from my subsequent reflection on the work was the relation of eye and hand in the realist paintings that I had selected.

The nineteenth-century collection on the ground floor of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris is arranged with the Realists along one side of the main aisle and Salon and Orientalist paintings opposite. If the viewer inspects each work in the Realist section and compares the brushwork with those on the opposite walls they will find a surprisingly consistent distinction. Artists like Ingres and Cabanel not only project their subjects into an exotic scenario, they also brush away any trace of their hand. It is as if they distance themselves from the voyeurism facilitated by their art. Experiencing the Realist works, in contrast, entails a full sensory engagement because in tracing the form, the viewer's eye follows the gesture of the artist. This is a process which brings the viewer very close to the artist and to the subject matter. In a way it is as if the viewer recreates the moment of production with each glance.

This idea of the work of art as a trace of the artist's bodily presence provided an important link to certain twentieth-century practices, culminating in performance art in the 1960s. In many ways a precursor to performance art, Jackson Pollock's dripped paintings can readily be interpreted as a trace of a physical action, an observation confirmed by Namuth's famous film of Pollock in the studio. Abstract Expressionism has been criticised in *Experiencing The Real* as looking inward to express something of the artist's emotions in general rather than responding to the external world. In the context of Minimalism and Yves Klein he represented an obsolete tradition. And yet Pollock played an important part in opening the frame of art to an extended field. His drips may have been gestural and therefore self expressive but their repetitions forced space out of the canvas suggesting possible continuity with the world beyond the frame. The dripping technique also deliberately drew on the Duchampian model of allowing accident to maintain an open boundary between the conscious process of production and the random space of nature. As a trace of a temporal activity he also anticipated performance art to a limited degree.

In *BODY* Yves Klein was represented by an *Anthropometry* and by a photograph of his famous leap in 1961. These works, described in detail in the chapter on Klein in this book, were presented as an introduction to Performance Art. The Vienna Aktionismus group moved from painting to performance, enacting rituals in which the body of the model and sometimes that of the artist no longer functioned as figures but as the field on which the paint was splattered. Such an emphasis on the artist's presence could easily lead to solipsism and self indulgence. On the other hand it can be a means to engage the viewer more completely in the work. The body art of Gina Pane, Mike Parr or Marina Abramovic from the 1970s is so confronting precisely because the viewer—and not just the artist—is included within the work. These actions can be described as factual in as much as they derived their form from the limits of their body or from the limits to the tolerance of the audience. Chapter 8 is

based on an interview with Mike Parr in which we discuss the contrast between theatrical aspects of the Wiener Aktionismus and the realism of factual Body Art.

By replacing the objectifying and distancing conventions of academic painting with an emphasis on sensory and emotional engagement, the works selected for *BODY* lessen the gap between art and life. Art which makes this boundary visible presents visual language as a kind of screen or veil which reveals yet separates and obscures the represented. Some artists have included literal manifestations of this boundary in their work. A striking example of this is Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnés: 1° La chute d'eau; 2° Le gaz d'éclairage* (1981).[4] In this installation, originally completed by Duchamp in 1968, the viewer is compelled to stoop and peer through a peephole to see the bizarre tableau created within. In doing so they not only acknowledge their complicity in voyeurism but also become an integral part of the content as subsequent viewers find them stooped at the doorway. Lucio Fontana provides another vivid example when he literally slices through the surface of representation creating a physical passage between the viewer's space in front of the canvas and the presumed space of projection behind it.

BODY also included some recent artists who have inherited Duchamp's readymades and make use of the metaphorical potential of objects and materials. The metonymic substitution of objects and materials for the body is one such strategy. Doris Salcedo, whose work is described in detail below, presents the shoes of those who have disappeared in the political violence in Colombia as attributes of the missing, in such a way that their presence is invoked more forcibly than any portrait could hope to do. This use of materials brings about direct bodily responses which access memories layered within the viewer's body.

The many intertwining themes of this exhibition revealed unexpected relations between the work of certain contemporary artists and their nineteenth-century precursors. In particular, many works selected emphasised an intimacy born of shared bodily sensations. The display of objects throughout the gallery spaces followed this thematic closely, beginning with an acknowledgment of the essentially voyeuristic business of peeking into private places.

The exhibition themes

At the entrance to the exhibition John De Andrea's sculpture, *Allegory: after Courbet* (1988), was installed as an extension of the title wall. It is a sculptural tableau of an artist with his model based on the great allegorical painting by Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio, Real Allegory Determining a Phase of Seven Years in My Artistic*

[4] In the exhibition this work was represented by a perfect replica made by the French artist Baquié. See detailed description of this work in chapter 3 of this book.

Life (1855). This work by Courbet plays a significant role in the development of this chapter. In De Andrea's version, as in the original, the model is shown watching the artist and not the other way round. In Courbet's painting, which is discussed in *Sexual allegories of landscape* below, the artist depicts himself sitting so close to the canvas, upon which he is painting a landscape with waterfall, that he appears to be merging with the painting.

The artist in *Allegory After Courbet* is staring into a plaster mould of his own face. The mould acts as a sculptural equivalent to Courbet's compression of the figure against the pictorial surface in the self-portraits and *The Studio*; it also introduces the concept of a trace or imprint of the body. The artist is both gazing in the mirror and contemplating his own absence. For Marcel Duchamp and other artists in the exhibition, such as Yves Klein and Julie Rrap the mould becomes a marker of presence and absence and an indication of physical contact. The negative/positive manifestation also acts as a metaphor for the investigation of the inside/outside of the body that appeared in the last room.

The De Andrea introduces some useful topics for the text of the exhibition, however, the material qualities of the work are a little out of step with the main arguments of this book. De Andrea has painted the sculpture to look like a black and white photograph. He is a sculptural equivalent of a Photo Realist painter whose source material is the photograph rather than the real world. While the indexical qualities of a direct body cast may be thought of as equivalent to the indexical nature of black and white photography[5] this is not necessarily relevant to De Andrea's concerns. In visual terms the result is distinctly uncanny. The life-like quality of the body casts is contradicted by the deathly quality of their colour. In a poetic way this also anticipates a subliminal theme of the exhibition that hovers between consciousness and not-consciousness.

1. Private spaces, voyeurism or intimacy

Many of the works in this first section conformed to our expectation of an exhibition focusing on the nude. Luminous paintings by Pierre Bonnard, Suzanne Valadon, Edward Hopper and Balthazar Balthus accord with our desire for an aesthetic vision of the human body. A sculpture and a drawing by Edgar Degas of a young girl caught in an intimate pose at bath time is typical of the seductive yet invasive possibility of the genre. Two contemporary photographers, Bill Henson and Helmut Newton intervened in this largely nineteenth-century room raising critical questions about privacy and propriety.

---

[5] I have described the indexical function of the photograph in a catalogue essay on Christian Boltanski in the catalogue *Through a Glass Darkly* Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 1995.

This group of works appeared at the beginning, partly to meet popular expectations but also because they raised the issue of voyeurism and its relationship to empathy. In an exhibition that presented experiences of the naked human body it was important that the viewer be immediately alerted to their own response in each situation. These responses would necessarily be individual and subjective but any strategy that focuses the viewer's attention on the process of looking is consistent with the realist project as it is outlined here. Each image shows a figure engaged in personal activities, for example in the bathroom or the bedroom: private spaces in which we prepare our bodies for eventual exposure in the outside world. The artists take us into this private domain, thus parting the veil of discretion that allows for a reasonable distinction between private and public space. In most cases the artist seems to be an unseen watcher and the viewer is, by association, a 'fellow-voyeur'.

This aspect of the experience is dramatised by Helmut Newton's photograph *Self-portrait with June and models* (1981), a study of gazes returned and deflected. The viewer's eye is most likely to be captured by the gaze of the artist's wife, who is actually looking at the artist as he lines up the shot. We stand in place of the artist although unlike him, we are not reflected in the mirror. This work clearly harks back to Velasquez's great composition *Las Meninas* where viewers find themselves standing on the spot where the king and queen—the probable models for the picture—must have stood. The royal couple only appear as a shadowy presence in the mirror on the rear wall of the artist's studio.[6]

For the purposes of this book the most significant feature was the contrast between Bonnard and Balthus that revealed an extraordinary correlation between the degree of empathy experienced by the viewer and the openness of the artist's brushwork. Bonnard creates an intimate domestic environment where the naturalness of the figures allows the viewer to feel at home. Balthus on the other hand creates theatrical scenarios that emphasise the separation of viewer and the model replacing an intimate relationship with that of a client or patron. This distinction between the figure discovered in self absorbed activity and the declamatory posture of the classical pose can be readily related to the positions of theatrical and anti theatrical painting outlined by Fried.

Each of Bonnard's paintings depicts his wife Marthe de Méligny in the privacy of their home. Bonnard always seems to be disclosing a private world. The earlier paintings in this room, *Siesta, the artist's studio* (1900) and *L'homme et la femme* (1900), are intimate domestic scenes with a strong intimation of post-coital reflection. In *The Bath* (1925) and *Nu de dos à la toilette* (1934) Bonnard returns to the theme of the toilette. Marthe de Méligny, his partner for over 50 years, seems to have been a

---

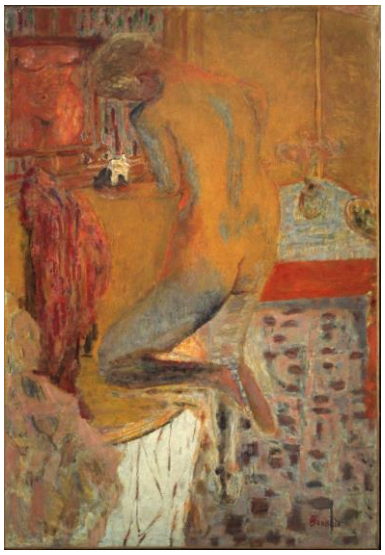
[6] Michel Foucault, Las Meninas, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (London: Tavistock, 1970) 3-16.

compulsive bather and the artist took every opportunity to paint her during her long periods of immersion. The shimmering colours of the tiled bathroom provide a luxurious bourgeois background to the figure, yet there is something sinister about this obsession with bathing which is conveyed by the lifeless pallor of Marthe's flesh and morbid stillness of her body in *The Bath*.

Bonnard *The Bath* (1925)

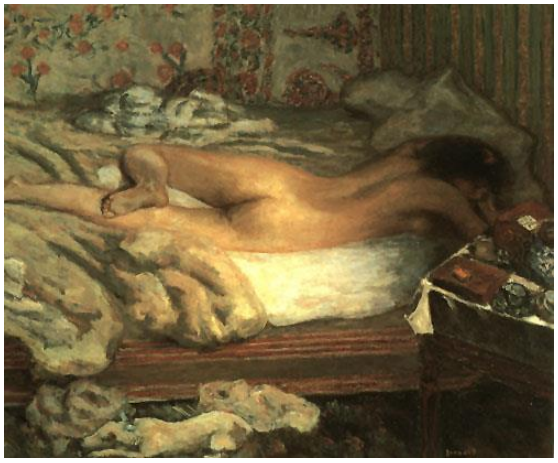
Bonnard himself appears in *L'homme et la femme* (1900). The artist represents himself gathering up his clothes behind a screen which divides the composition in two. On her side the woman turns her attention to the kittens on the bed. In spite of biographical information which reveals that all was not entirely comfortable in their relationship,[7] there is no doubting that there is a binding contract between these two people which extends emotional assent to us as viewers by association with the artist/beholder.

[7] Marthe seems to have been very insecure, she misled Bonnard about her identity inventing her aristocratic surname, (She was born Maria Boursin). She was not only obsessive about bathing, often spending many hours in the bath, but she also avoided the company of Bonnard's old friends and colleagues as if she was afraid of being unmasked. This led to their relative isolation, part intimate idyll, part prison. See N. Watkins, *Bonnard* (London: Phaidon, 1994)



Bonnard *Nu de Dos à la Toilette*,(1934)

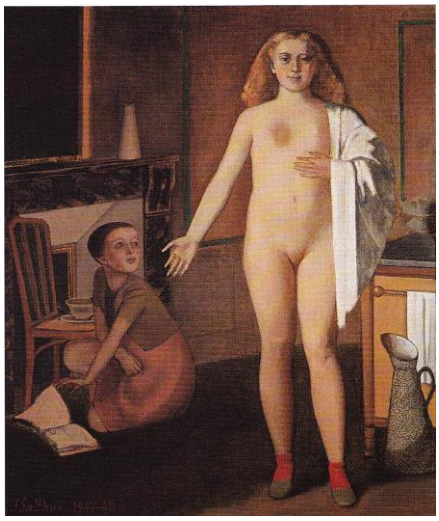
The brushwork in Bonnard's paintings is correspondingly open. Loose dry strokes always remain transparent to our eye. For example *Nu de Dos à la Toilette*,(1934) where the openness of the painted surface makes the flesh glow with an inner light. Not only is the surface open but the boundary of the figure is also very softly defined. The back of the figure virtually merges with the brightly lit wall behind her. Our visual comprehension of the figure is only possible when it is seen as a whole with the rest of the composition. If you were to isolate any portion of the figure it would become unreadable. By opening the figure to the passage of light and dissolving its boundaries Bonnard replicates the work of Analytic Cubism.[8] Like Picasso, Bonnard makes the figure merge with the painted field. The figure is quite literally opened up for our gaze.



Bonnard *Siesta, the artist's studio* (1900)

[8] See my notes on the figure and field in Chapter 1.

In *L'homme et La femme* as in *Siesta-The Artist's studio* (1900) Bonnard makes much of the tumbled bedclothes which provide a luxurious opportunity for the painter's brush and heighten the level of sensuality in the image. Courbet was a master of this use of fabric. In *The Sleepers* (1866), for instance, he allows the hand of the brunette sleeper to dangle at the edge of the bed where the silky white slip parts to reveal a fleshy pink fold in the bed covers. Fabric easily translates into flesh in the hands of the artist and in the imagination of the viewer. This kind of painterly metaphor is greatly facilitated by the loose brush work used by the artists.



Balthus *The room* 1947-48

Balthus makes us feel very differently about our role as voyeur. His stagy compositions are designed to titillate but the models always seem to be carefully posed in the studio. To reinforce this unnaturalness the nudes are often accompanied by a clothed admirer or witness.[9] In *The Room* (1947-48) The paint which describes the skin of the main nude figure has been worked dry over dry and rubbed back repeatedly producing an orange peel effect somewhat like a close up of the pores of the skin. The edges of the form are sharply defined at every point on its silhouette. It is virtually isolated from the field by strong illumination against a dark field in the manner of an early Renaissance Madonna. Balthus' model is also made to adopt a pose from imperial Roman sculpture. It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic contrast with the private ambience and loose technique of Bonnard. The closure of the brush work invites us to enjoy the sensual surface of the skin that it laboriously simulates but it refuses any possibility of visual merger. The closure of the boundary of the form also prevents the figure being considered as a part of the continuum of nature.

[9] See *Nude with Cat* (1949) and *The Room* (1947-48) In the exhibition *BODY*.

Balthus *Nude with cat* 1949

Balthus, like Bonnard and Courbet makes use of the sensual connotations of fabric and other tactile materials to amplify our awareness of touch. Fabric hangs alongside skin, the hand brushes the breast or reaches out to touch a cat. These are moments in which Balthus suggests arousal through the image of tactile material or fur. Unlike Bonnard his closed paint surfaces ensure that these effects are read and not felt. We may be aroused by the image but the metaphorical slippage between paint and flesh or fabric is not activated. Balthus describes a sensation to the viewer but Bonnard and Courbet make the viewer assist in the realisation of the form just as they must in a Cubist composition. The viewer achieves a degree of merger in Bonnard's paintings by engaging with the medium, recreating the form through a visual transformation of the raw material into bodily sensation.

An unexpected and surprising extension of these observations was provoked by a tiny and atypical painting by Edward Hopper. Hopper is best known for his observations of everyday life in the public domain. The little study *Nude crawling into a bed* (1903) is an exception. The intimate subject matter, the dark tonality and the broad brush work are more typical of a study by Remrandt. As in the self-portraits by Courbet, Hopper has brought the figure very close to the picture plane.[10] In this case however the figure faces the same way as the viewer and moves into the picture and not towards the viewer. This proximity to the viewer, and the insistent quality of the painted surface makes for a strong kinaesthetic bond between the figure and the viewer. This identification is enhanced by open brush work in the same way as it is in the painting of Bonnard.

[10] See Michael Fried's opening chapter on the self portraits in *Courbet's Realism* and my arguments in *The Sexual Allegories of Landscape* in this chapter.

The room is divided by the play of light and shade, creating a screen of illumination parallel to the picture plane (and metaphorically reproducing it). The figure of a woman moves through this screen. Her buttocks and legs are brightly illuminated as is the near edge of the bed but all beyond is dark and mysterious. The woman passes into the dark recesses of the bed and the space beyond. This implied movement from the illuminated surface into the veiled interior evokes a movement from consciousness into reverie or sleep. Because of the strong visual association between the viewer and the figure there is an implied sense of embodiment or merger on the part of the viewer.

The dark space beyond the bed absorbs the figure as she moves into reverie suggesting the possibility of a space beyond the surface into which we might also be drawn. This painting incorporates the symbolism of passage into reverie through the image of the bed and darkness while also engendering a kinaesthetic response through the quality of paint and the intense compression of the composition. The possibility of this kind of embodiment also suggests a passage between the represented world of the pictorial space and the real space of the viewer. This sense of passage took on additional complexity in the next room.

2. Sexual allegories of Landscape

The next group of works linked nineteenth and twentieth-century images of the landscape as an allegory of the female body to reclamations of the land as a productive site by later feminist artists. The idea of the artist/beholder's imaginative passage through the surface of the representation is ethically complicated by the representation of the female figure as a point of entry.

Gustave Courbet *La Source* 1862

The first painting you saw on entering the room was *La Source* (1862). This is a less commanding work than the version at Musée d'Orsay, the figure is prettier and the composition seems flatter. With Courbet this apparent flattening is often associated with some metaphorical intention. In this case there is a significant compression of

the figure. She stands with her back to us her belly and breasts pressed against the waterfall. The luxurious paint which Courbet always applied for water, lubricates the implied merger of figure with landscape. Courbet mixed varnish and other thinners into his oils to make the paint more transparent and also more liquid. Applied with a palette knife this produced a fluid, buttery texture. The drier brush marks that make up the figure enhance this lubricity by contrast. The hair of the woman merges with the foliage growing on the cliff her face is turned away and is represented only by a vague and unformed slither of flesh tone that sits uncomfortably under the dark rather stiff hair.[11] The face is almost dissolving into the void beyond. Her right arm passes through the water and seems to disappear through the pictorial space into the darkness. Like the Hopper in the first room this is an image of merger and passage. It is not just that Courbet is absorbing the woman into the water and the land itself. It is equally an image that draws the viewer into an imaginative penetration, not of the woman herself as Nochlin suggests,[12] but of the veil of representation that separates art from life.

Gustave Courbet was particularly committed to the association between female creativity and the earth. His best known paintings of the nude are intimately associated with nature: *The Painter's Studio, Real Allegory Determining a Phase of Seven Years in My Artistic Life* (1855) and the two versions of *La Source* (the version from The Metropolitan Museum was represented in this exhibition) are key examples which Michael Fried has analysed most provocatively. One feature of his interpretation is the intense identification Courbet is supposed to have demonstrated with his female models. Another is the artist's identification of women with nature and the use of landscape features as metaphors for aspects of the feminine. The waterfall, the source, and the cave are obvious enough associations which can be reduced to banal sexual innuendo. Linda Nochlin supports this view, regarding Courbet's merger with the female body as yet another instance of a male artist presenting 'woman' as available for imaginative penetration. Arguably, however, there is an intense investment in this female presence in nature throughout the art of Courbet which seems deeply personal and empathic. These opposing interpretations are most dramatically exposed in Courbet's specifically erotic compositions.

---

[11] There is an uncanny resemblance between this head and the fragmented face of Etant Donnés described below.

[12] Linda Nochlin in her catalogue essay for the exhibition *Courbet Reconsidered* at the Brooklyn Museum New York, 1988. She makes a critical response to Michael Fried's analysis of Courbet's feminism in which she makes this comment.

Gustave Courbet *L'origine du monde* 1866

L'Origine du Monde painted by Courbet in 1866 was commissioned by Kalil Bey, a wealthy businessman and Turkish diplomat. It was undoubtedly intended as erotic if not pornographic, but Courbet's title would seem to be more than a nineteenth-century euphemism. The image depicts a woman lying with her legs spread. It is framed to focus on the pubic area, with the lower legs and the torso above the breast falling beyond the edge of the composition. Courbet transfers this anatomical meaning of 'origin in a woman's body' to the earth as the 'source of all life' and, in doing so, he sexualises the landscape itself. Courbet's landscape paintings often depict the rocky gorges of the river Loue which flowed through his home town of Ornans. *The Source of the Loue* in this exhibition—which has often been discussed in relation to *L'Origine du Monde*—shows the river gushing out of a cave towards the viewer.

Fried argues persuasively that the subject of Courbet's compositions often incorporates an allegory of the creative activity of the artist. Some of these arguments draw a long bow but there are some strikingly clear examples. In *The Artist's Studio* The model stands close behind the artist who, as I have mentioned, is pressed hard against the canvas as if to pass through it. Her head is adjacent to the painting which depicts a landscape with waterfall. The line of her hair and neck exactly echoes the outline of a tree in the painting. She holds a white drape which flows from her hands towards the edge of the composition seeming to follow and complete the stream's passage from the painted landscape to the painted studio floor and on to the real space in front of the canvas. Courbet invariably paints water flowing towards the bottom of the frame and by implication into the viewer's space. In this series of transformations the model has become an extension of the landscape and in particular of the fertile river. In addition to this merger there is an equally strong formal association between her body and the figure of the artist himself. She stands very close, once again creating a compression in the space of the painting, her hand holding the drape exactly echoes the artist's palette hand and the outline of her buttock replicates the line of his shoulder[13].

---

[13] Michael Fried Courbet's Realism, Real Allegories, Allegories of Realism pp160-162 and171. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1990.

In the Paris version of *La Source* the figure of the woman is seated in the pose of the artist in *The Artist's Studio* the reflection of her body follows the form of the drape in the studio model's hands. Her left hand echoes the palette hand but this time it is plunged into the waterfall (the source of creativity) and she holds a branch in her right hand as if it was a brush in the hand of the artist. Fried argues that in this painting Courbet has merged the image of the model and his own body. When this is considered in the light of Courbet's self portraits, that also seem to depict the act of painting according to Fried's analysis, there seems to be sufficient consistency in the argument to be convincing.

Another example of Courbet conflating creative painting and femininity is *The Grain Sifters*. In this composition the artist's sister Zöe is seen from the back. She is sifting wheat from chaff. She is portrayed as a strong young woman who holds the sieve high while kneeling on the ground with her thighs spread. She is sifting the grain onto a large white canvas spread on the ground. The grains that have fallen on the sheet are painted with thick blobs of sticky reddish paint. Because of the pose and the composition the red stain looks as if it might equally have sprung from Zoe's body. The fertility of the harvest therefore being associated immediately with female reproductive cycles. If we are to believe Fried however this is also an allegory of painting. The blobs of red paint scattered on the white canvas being a premonition of Pollock's Action painting. Fried points out the shadow of a lattice cast on the wall as if it were a reminder of the stretcher frame of the canvas. There are two other figures in the composition, a lethargic woman sorting chaff by hand and a young boy peering into the dark recesses of a tarare or sifting machine. The black space Fried argues is the visual occlusion that must be the consequence of absorption[14].

Gustave Courbet *The source of the Loue* 1864

The black hole of absorption appears again in Courbet's paintings of the source of the Loue. These paintings evoke other associations between water welling up from the ground and human procreation. It was commonplace to associate the spring or

[14] Ibid pp 151- 155.

source as female in nineteenth-century painting.[15] In the case of Courbet, however, this metaphor seems more concretely tied to the productivity of the land and the life bringing properties of the source of the Loue. His profound identification with the land seems to arise from his historical and political circumstances and his daily experience of the countryside. Courbet came from a rural community that had benefited under the Republic's re-distribution of land between 1848 and 1851. For these middle-class landowners the land was a major political issue. For the first time in modern history those who worked the land also owned it, and participated in government. Later in his life Courbet served as a minister in the short-lived Commune of 1871 and was subsequently thrown into prison for his political activities. Much of his work is allegorical, not so much as an aesthetic device but because of the very real fear of political censorship felt by his class. *The Painter's Studio* for example was intended as a satirical criticism of Napoleon III. It was submitted to the Salon in 1855 at the time of the Great Exhibition in Paris, which had been initiated by Napoleon.[16] Although Courbet's criticism was encoded as allegory it was still not acceptable to the officials. He responded to rejection by creating his own pavilion near the official exhibition. While the allegorical nature of his criticism gave him some protection from the law his position with regard to the authorities was permanently compromised. His ability to respond was in part due to his family connections and to the financial assistance of his wealthy patron Alfred Bruyas.

Courbet was an active naturalist and a member of the *Societé d'emulation du Doubs*, a society formed to promote scientific studies to improve the land in his native region. He was also called upon by geologists to render rock formations for scientific publications. In other words, he was actively involved in the daily management of the environment and not just an objective observer. His painterly treatment of rocks and water is as obsessively rendered as his handling of skin and hair. He evolved techniques for handling paint that approached the concept of equivalence, which was later articulated by English painters such as Francis Bacon and Frank Auerbach. When painting rock, for instance, he preferred to use a palette knife to simulate the hardness and angularity of the crystalline nature of stone.

In *l'Origine du Monde* the intimate detail of flesh and pubic hair is meticulously recreated so that the viewer's experience is almost as tactile as it is visual. A consistent feature in Courbet's compositions is a framing that brings the viewer very close to the subject. This adds to the sensation of merger and encourages the viewer's imaginative projection into the picture. While contrived for figure painting such as

---

[15] This is in part due to the story of Aphrodite rising from the waves, myths of water nymphs and the water bearer. Ingres' *The Source* (1856) is a more conventional symbolic representation of this idea.

[16] Helen Toussaint in her essay for the exhibition *Gustave Courbet(1819-1877)* (Paris: Grand Palais; London Royal Academy 1977-1978)

his early self-portraits, and most particularly *l'Origine du Monde,* this effect is equally evident in Courbet's landscapes and his later studies of animals. The combination of this compositional strategy with the sensual paint quality produces a striking material presence for the viewer.

Michael Fried argues that Courbet attempts a quasi-corporeal merger with the subjects of his painting[17]. By implication the viewer follows the artist as beholder, experiencing something of this sense of passage through the pictorial surface. In paintings such as *The Source of the Loue* the flow of water out of the composition towards the viewer and the deep, inviting recesses of the cave initiate an imaginative movement in and out of the composition, binding the viewer in a sexual allegory. Passage through the screen of a pictorial surface may be thought of as a passage from the world of representations and language to the material world. This passage is made more explicit in some contemporary art such as Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void*, Lucio Fontana slashing the 'veil' of representation in his *Concetto Spaziale* paintings, and the work of performance artists of the 1960s and '70s who are discussed elsewhere in this book.

Marcel Duchamp *the door* and *inside Etant Donnes* 1968

andscape as sexual allegory was taken up in the exhibition by the proximity of Courbet and Baquié, who faithfully replicated Marcel Duchamp's last great work, *Etant Donnés*.[18] In this work the viewer must look through a small hole in a wooden

---

[17] Michael Fried pp 154. In his discussion of *The Sifters* …Its tempting to construe the relationship between the tarare interior and the patch of sunlight – mediated compositionally and thematically by the upraised sieve - as expressing the obvious but important truth that the quasi-corporeal absorption of the painter – beholder into the painting not only didn't put an end to representation……but rather gave rise to a specific representational effect.

[18] See chapter 3 in this book.

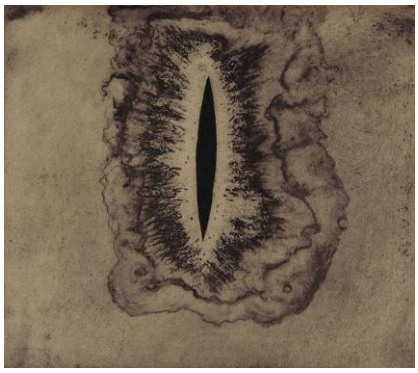
door to see the secret image. By stooping to peer the viewer becomes a conspirator with the artist and perpetrates an act of visual penetration. The view that meets the eye through the keyhole is an extraordinary tableau. Through a ragged hole in a brick wall there is a landscape that includes a waterfall animated by a crude lighting device. In the foreground a naked woman is seen lying on a bed of twigs. The framing of the figure is similar to that of *L'Origine du Monde*. She is holding up a glowing gas lamp, which draws our gaze towards the waterfall in the distance. I will return to this work when describing the room where surreal fragments of modern art were displayed.[19]

Flanking the doors with their infamous peepholes was a body of small works by Duchamp to one side and Anish Kapoor on the other. Duchamp's nine etchings entitled *The Lovers* selectively quote from erotic paintings including *Woman in white stockings* by Courbet, and Ingres' *Turkish Bath*. The small collage *A la manière de Delvaux* (1942) shows a cameo or detail from a painting by the Surrealist artist Delvaux of a woman's breast reflected in an oval mirror. Duchamp has framed the oval within a further circle cut from a sheet of tin foil. The net result is a keyhole vision of a woman in the privacy of her bedroom. The keyhole effect relates to *Etant Donnés* while the invasion of privacy reverted to the theme of the first room.

Kapoor's five drawings were all highly material works depicting sexualised voids which are inevitably linked to the image of *l'Origine du monde* by Courbet and its connection with the grotto. This gallery wall with its actual peepholes and its many represented apertures paradoxically concealed more than it revealed for behind it there lay a cabinet of erotic curiosities. Further into the exhibition the viewer encountered the verso of Baquié's reconstruction of *Etant Donnés*. This room of sexualised fragments and Surrealist fantasies of the body lay unseen behind the gallery wall in Room 2, just as the fetishisation of the female body lay behind the body as landscape.

The waterfall and the grotto were combined in the works of Courbet and Duchamp, but there were many other manifestations of the hole. While an orthodox psychoanalytic reading would ascribe negative connotations to the hole, it can in fact become the exact opposite of a lack.

[19] Also see chapter 3 in this book.



Anish Kapoor *Blackness from her womb* 2001
acquatint from the original drawing in the exhibition

Anish Kapoor's drawings of sexualised voids brought the vagina and infinity together in a powerful allegory of becoming at the threshold of being and not being. Kapoor has been influenced by Klein's attempt to manifest the void. His installation *Void Field*, (1990) in the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales, creates a void within an ancient stone. The work consists of four rough hewn blocks of Cumbrian sandstone each being a cube averaging about 1500 x 1500 x 1500 mm. On entering the room the viewer immediately sees a black spot of about ten centimetres diameter on the top of each stone. The black is so dense that it quickly becomes clear that this is a hole not a patch of pigment, and yet there seems to be no side to the hole only a phenomenological absence of matter — a void. This has been achieved by hollowing the stone leaving only a thin shell. On the top face the shell tapers down to nothing at the edges of the hole. The interior has also been pigmented with Prussian blue that enhances the visual effect of the infinite depth of the void.

Even knowing the material facts of the work does not diminish our visual and kinaesthetic response. The hole seems to be the mouth of infinity of nothing. The ancient stone itself could hardly be more material. Even hollow they each weigh over two tonnes they are such dense rock. This is indeed a manifestation of being and nothingness. It appears as the infinite held within the material and the finite. Noting Kapoor's Indian background, McEvilley has identified the hole with the Hindu Goddess Kali whose womb gives life and subsequently devours it in a cycle of renewal.[20] In terms of the realist function of the piece, the economy of means with which this metaphysical idea is manifested is absolutely concrete. The literal stone the actual void present a real object, which embodies complex ideas as experience with no need for reference to McEvilley's mythological explanation.

When the viewer stood up and turned away from the keyhole of Baquié's *Etant Donnés* they were immediately confronted by the frontal view of Auguste Rodin's

---

[20] Thomas McEvilley, *The Darkness Inside a Stone*, Anish Kapoor exh. cat. (Venice: XLIV Venice Biennale, 1990).

sculpture *La Figure Volante* (1890-91). This figure also represents the fragmented figure of a woman with her genitals exposed due to the stretch of her limbs. This and a similar work *Iris* that appears in the surreal room could very easily have been the models for the first study Duchamp made for *Etant Donnés* in 1948. Rodin's *Iris* was a water nymph and acted as a messenger of the Gods. Metaphorically she could also therefore make the passage between the material and the immaterial.

Beyond Rodin's flying figure there appeared another watery image of a hole in the ground. This ragged hole in a riverbank was an excavated silhouette of the body of the artist Ana Mendieta. This was one of a series of photographs documenting Mendieta's performance *Silueta Series from Iowa*, consisting of video and photo-documentation of a series of actions performed by Mendieta in the Iowa landscape.

Ana Mendieta *Silueta Series from Iowa* 1967

In these performances she left traces of her body in the soil and vegetation. In the video we barely detect the human form as it slowly moves under the weeds in a swamp or the sand of a riverbank. The photos revealed her presence more emphatically, while paradoxically consisting of her absence. They were made by drawing her own silhouette in the ground or leaving an impression of her figure in the mud. Sometimes the trace of her presence is retained in selectively weeded fungus or flowers or by the effect of fire. In an earlier series of performances made in Mexico her presence is marked by rituals of Catholicism. Mendieta ended her life on a New York pavement after falling to her death from her apartment window. This hindsight lends these imprints of her form a particular resonance. The photographs are evidence of transient presences although they reveal interventions in the landscape that in spite of being light of touch are strangely enduring in our mind's eye.

The imposition of her form on the earth is not an exercise in sovereignty over the landscape. On the contrary, it is a light touch that leaves no permanent impress. Her body is not thereby merged with nature. Mendietta draws herself upon the landscape, suggesting a different kind of affinity with the environment, a continuity that does not outlaw individuation. Figure and ground intermingle[21].

---

[21] Susan Best *Just Looking* in the catalogue BODY.

These actions also convey the feeling of isolation and loneliness of the individual figure in a harsh wilderness. This could also be thought of as representing the exposed the marginalised position of women in Western Culture[22]. In spite of these misgivings through their relative absence they also laid claim to the productive power of nature. They pointed to a feminine priority in the history of creativity representing the origins of material and social culture associated with the transformation of the earth into pottery and bricks. The chief distinction between the male view of a feminised landscape and a woman's claim to the earth is one of agency. It is very easy for the former to neutralise the role of woman by naming her as natural and therefore pre-cultural. For a woman to identify with the productive power of nature and the transformative power of culture may, conversely, be empowering.

3. Anxious males

Following female metaphors in landscape the exhibition turned to an observable anxiety in nineteenth-century art associated with male nudity. This anxiety was exacerbated by the threat of a homo-erotic gaze. The inevitability of the homo-erotic arose primarily because of the presumption of a male viewer. The works selected heightened this tension by emphasising tactility which would then lead directly into the next room where tactility and the trace of the artist prepared the way for direct actions by artists. Tactility was eliminated from most academic painting of the nineteenth-century and in part this could be ascribed to the privileging of the purely visual and intellectual. The other senses, particularly smell and touch which require close physical contact have been subject to taboo in western art history.[23] Combining the image of the naked male and tactility that is implied through the subject of the painting and literal in the paint surface, therefore has a particularly disturbing impact.

Francois Salle *The Anatomy Class at the Ecole des Beaux Arts* 1888

---

[22] Charles Merewether, The Unspeakable Condition of Figuration in the catalogue BODY.

[23] George Simmel, *Sociology*, (1908) discussed in P. Falk, *The Consuming Body* (London: Sage Publication, 1994)

Of particular interest was François Salle's, *The Anatomy Class at the École des Beaux Arts* (1888) from the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales. The male model is half naked and is being examined as if he were just a piece of flesh. In spite of his cocky stance, his sturdy muscled torso and rough trousers attest to his lower class status thus rendering him available for objectification by the gentlemen at the academy. The model's standing as a specimen is enhanced by his juxtaposition with a flayed figure, human bones and anatomical charts.

The man has removed his shirt in the theatre since it is draped over the near by stand. His trousers are unbuttoned and are presumably the next to go. In any case the open fly makes him unusually vulnerable. This vulnerability would be unthinkable for the students themselves. Presumably their social distance from a lower class male was so great that no conceivable threat was posed to their own dignity. The student in the foreground stares at the model with no hint of embarrassment. It was as if the man did not exist as a subject in his own right and even in the unthinkable event that he return the gaze it would be of no consequence.

The man himself has his eyes closed. He is removing himself from the possibility of meeting the intrusive gaze of the students. He has withdrawn into himself, into a state of reverie perhaps.[24] The figures of the doctor and the model are framed by the blackboard which is behind them. It is of course a literal depiction of the Academy as it still is today but the coincidence of the man's reverie and the black space behind him is striking. While Duval the anatomy lecturer leans out towards the students and his bald pate is illuminated by the theatre lighting, the model leans back, his dark hair merging with the black field. It is as if there is a struggle going on between consciousness and unconsciousness. This black hole harked back to the voids of Kapoor and acts as a reminder of the occlusion at the heart of Courbet's Tarare in *The Grain Sifters.* This psychoanalytic interpretation may not be as fanciful as it seems given the fact that Duval was a friend of Charcot who publicly demonstrated manifestations of hysterical behaviour in working class women and prostitutes at the time this painting was executed in Paris. Duval has been represented as participating in these displays and although there is no evidence that Salle was directly aware of these experiments he was certainly present in the academy at the same time.[25]

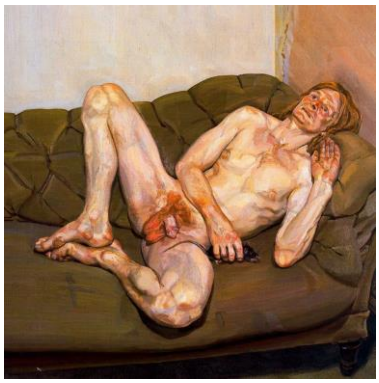
Next to the Salle, the bare torso of a gentleman being examined by a doctor in *Chesham Street* (1910) by George Lambert, is somehow an incongruous exposure only permitted by the notional discretion of the doctor's surgery. Unlike Salle's male

---

[24] I have worked as a model myself and found it common for other models to talk about this state. They would sometimes even practice spiritual meditation or Yoga.

[25] Anthea Callen has identified a likeness of Duval in an etching by Pierre André Brouillet Charcot lecturing on hysteria at La Salpétrière 1887.

model this gentleman would never have exposed himself in public. Furthermore the presumed middle class male viewer would have been made very uncomfortable because of the relative familiarity of the figure. It was too close to home. Although the doctor has every rational reason to be pressing his head up against the exposed abdomen of the athletic gentleman, he does seem very close and the unbuttoned trousers only inches from his mouth could be acutely embarrassing. This painting of Lambert's is unusually sumptuous for this sometimes academic painter. The treatment of the torso is surprisingly similar, when examined up close, to the brush work on the chest of a young man painted by Lucian Freud which is hanging in the same room. The main difference being that Lambert's slabs of colour represent the play of light and shade across the surface while Freud 'sculpts' the form in slabs of coloured paint with little use of chiaroscuro.



This proximity of Freud's *Naked Man With Rat* (c. 1977-78) greatly enhances the tension that the previous paintings introduced. Once again the model has his head thrown back and his eyes, while not closed, stare at the vacancy of the ceiling. He could almost be experiencing a vision, his hand is drawn up palm out as if to receive or fend off the invisible. In his other hand he gently holds a live rat. The rat's tail is draped across his thigh passing only an inch from his flaccid penis. Like an electric pointer this detail enhances our sense of tactility while the quality of the painted marks conveys a disturbing material presence. His marks do not seek to simulate the appearance of flesh like Ingres but like Courbet they require the viewer to integrate the marks in their eye. Freud is different however in that he deliberately makes marks which seem to work against the natural reading of the form. Bonnard's delicate open brush work resolves itself when the figure is viewed within the context of the field. Freud lends his paint such an aggressive materiality that they replace the flesh they represent in a kind of exchange of equivalent materiality. There is nothing visually transparent about the Freud. The paint is sometimes even clogged and densely opaque. The final effect however contrives to be utterly convincing as a substitute for the flesh which is at least as confronting as the real thing. This is because the viewer is always made aware of the matter of the paint so that when the eye makes the transformation to flesh it is as if the viewer were caught too close just like the doctor in Lambert's *Chesham Street.*

The confronting nature of this phenomenon was brought home to me when the Freud painting was presented to the Trustees of The Art Gallery of Western Australia. It was a very difficult acquisition and it lead to the resignation of one Trustee. It was sent back to the curator three times for further justification. One of the requests was for a list of similar poses in paintings belonging to public collections. I suggested that one such pose was that of Adam in the Sistine Chapel. While the most concerned Trustee acknowledged the similarity of bodily configuration he stammered that Michelangelo had not made the balls red! In effect I do not think it was the specific colouration that was of concern but the heightened sense of bodily presence that Freud creates. Michelangelo painted figures that were in a way sculptures before they were paintings. There is no sensation of flesh only a religious ideal of spirit made flesh.[26]

Renoir *Young boy with a cat* 1868-69

On the end wall of this room between the Lambert and the Freud there were two extraordinary paintings. Auguste Renoir's *Young Boy with Cat* (1868-69) and Paul Gauguin's *Breton Youth* (1889). These are sexually ambiguous images of young boys. The two works are dramatically different from each other, Renoir's being a finely finished and elegant painting while the Gauguin is awkward with strangely blurred features. Most striking of all is the fact that The Renoir youth is a healthy sensual creature standing with ease and glancing coyly backward over his shoulder at the artist/beholder. The Gauguin boy by contrast is seen from above, Gauguin must have literally stood over him to paint the figure. The boy's body is ungainly and almost looks broken like the figure in a deposition from the crucifixion. His eyes are slightly open but the pupils are not visible only a milky stripe can be made out like the eyes of a cat that is partly asleep with its second lid closed. It is a look of uncanny slippages. The boy could even be dead. He is at least slipping into an unconscious state which leaves him looking vaguely demonic.

---

[26] This is my recollection of the discussions at one of the meetings of the trustees at The Art Gallery of Western Australia during the acquisition of the Freud. At the time I was the Assistant Director and the Curator responsible for the acquisition.

Both figures are disconcertingly androgynous. *Young Boy with Cat* shows the youth from the back in a pose similar to one of the three graces in classical painting. His face is nuzzling a cat's head while the cat returns the affection, yet the boy's gaze is partly turned towards the artist or the beholder. The cat seems to function as a vehicle for sympathetic contact between the viewer and the model, just as it does for Bonnard and Balthus.

4. Tactility and the trace of the artist

The tactile quality of these anxious images of male bodies was enhanced in the next two rooms where narratives about the five senses were juxtaposed with expressionism in which the mark of the artist begins to detach itself from the logic of representation and emerge as an index of the artist's presence. I will not describe this section in detail since it is only tangentially relevant to this book.

Jill Bennett wrote in the catalogue for *BODY* about tactility and vision, focusing on images that represent and engage all our senses without privileging the purely visual.[27] In this way intimacy and even leakage between bodies is invoked. The paintings and sculptures in this room combined intimate visualisations of touch with the tactility of the painted surface. This tactile apprehension of the artist's mark continues the theme introduced in my discussion of Courbet. In this section the artist's incarnation in the trace becomes increasingly assertive and finally obliterates the image that is ostensibly being represented.

Egon Schiele *Self Portrait Masturbating* 1911

Following on from Freud's *Naked Man With Rat*, Egon Schiele's preoccupation with erotic imagery finds expression in *Eros (self-portrait masturbating)*(1911). Apart from the obvious references to touch, there are some more subtle indicators of implied contact in the drawing. The gown is pulled back to reveal a breast which seems

[27] Jill Bennett, *Kama and Eroticism*. in the catalogue for *BODY*.

sexually ambiguous, and the fabrics the figure is sitting on are draped to suggest female genitalia. Schiele believed that the marks an artist made could capture the way in which the outer form reveals something of the inner world of the subject. In this case the projected fantasy of the bi-sexed body during masturbation is made visible in the composition. His use of watercolour paint is surprisingly tactile and is laid on in dabs and strokes which enhance the sensitivity of the image.

Two paintings by Otto Dix dominate this room. They are not examples of the trace of the artists hand since they were painted after Dix abandoned expressionist techniques in favour of a more descriptive mode based on his close study of the painting techniques of Dürer and Cranach. However they are highly tactile and strangely empathic works. Like many of his paintings of the period they seem at first to be vicious parodies of the human form satirising aspects of hedonistic Weimar society. It is true that Dix was a harsh critic of the excesses of the time. He saw the devastating effect it was having on ordinary people and on women in particular. His quarrel was not with the victims however. His painting of *The Three Women* (1926) cruelly exaggerates the shape of the models. The attention to detail is obsessive, with veins and blemishes meticulously rendered. In spite of the undeniably grotesque appearance of the three women, the intimate attention Dix pays to the minute details of their skin and hair makes the viewer acutely sensitive to their vulnerability. The Renaissance technique is followed down to the use of minute brushes to draw single pubic hairs that curl in golden strands over the exposed pudenda of the skinny standing figure. Veins on the large woman's breast echo the veining on the marble balustrade against which the standing woman is leaning. The kneeling woman has Dix's monogram tattooed on her arm. The monogram is designed in the manner of Dürer. This signature on the woman's body could potentially be taken as a sign of identification between artist and model, a kind if literal reference back to Courbet's attempted pictorial merger.

Otto Dix *Drei Weiber* 1926

The Odd Couple (1925) is another gross satire which contrasts the shrivelled and varicose body of the old man with the plump perfection of the young woman on his knee. The contact between their respective bodies is loaded with pathos. We are caught between disgust for his desire and terror at her potential to consume him. The wind from the open window blows her hair and the curtain into serpentine shapes which suggest the head of Medusa or of a fearful Valkyrie. Having said this it is necessary to note that there is no sense of condemnation of the characters by Dix. They are involved in a social contract that meets their very real needs. The real villain is viewed through the window. Contrasting with the warm colours of the figures and the interior the view is of a cool, harsh industrial landscape, the unchecked capitalist environment which created the conditions that trapped the figures into their current circumstances. The wind which charges her with demonic energy emanates from this external world. The juxtaposition of Paula Modersohn-Becker and Dix creates a dramatic contrast in this room. Dix's grotesque figures are set against the self-absorbed and rather tragic figures painted in almost classical purity by Modersohn-Becker. The paint is built up with sculptural attention to form in the rendition of these sad little girls.

Another group of paintings in this room prefigured the works of the London school and in particular the paintings of Francis Bacon. The paintwork and colour in Walter Sickert's *Mornington Crescent* (1907) evoke a mysterious dark luminosity and brooding atmosphere in this intimate London interior which was to become a trade mark of the London Group. This group held a significant realist position in that they invariably restricted the subject matter of their art to representations of their immediate urban environment and of their most intimate friends and associates. David Bomberg transmitted Sickert's influence to another generation including Bacon Auerbach Kossoff and Freud.

Francis Bacon's statements about the immediacy of the artist's gesture, which allows the paint to act upon the nervous system of the viewer, form a key to enjoying much of the art in this part of the exhibition[28]. Bacon admired the work of Jean Dubuffet, in particular his earlier figures such as *Gymnosophie*, which is included in the next room. Dubuffet gouges the outline into paint like a child scratching in wet cement. Bacon felt that these images captured the urgency of feelings rapidly expressed, like the graffiti on the back of a lavatory door. Bacon articulated the principle that paint should be made to function as an equivalent to the sensations of the body rather than merely reproducing the body's appearance. In his last filmed interview, with Melvin Bragg, at the time of his retrospective at the Tate Gallery London, Bacon said "I wanted to bring about the sensation of the thing without the boredom of its conveyance." This is, in part achieved by the simple response which I am proposing between hand and eye that binds artist and viewer through the action of the body, and our response to that action.

Jackson Pollock's *Naked Man With Knife* (1938) was included but it was the film of the artist in his studio by Namuth that best expresses his role in this theme.[29] It is possible to present this image of the artist painting as a transition from Action painting to performance as I have already outlined. Other Abstract Expressionist works are less credible in terms of their realist interpretation. Willem de Kooning's *Two Figures in a Landscape* (1968) is a particularly loose painting where the images of the two figures almost dissolve in the gesture of the paint. This kind of distortion may reasonably be considered misogynistic in its painterly brutality, but it is also a record of the artist's body and a trace of his tantrum. This is a case where Harold Rosenberg's view of the art being a mirror of the artist's interior states is undisputably true.[30] This room also includes gestural figure paintings by Georg Baselitz and Dubuffet and culminates with *Overpainting-Totem* (1983/84) by Arnulf Rainer.

---

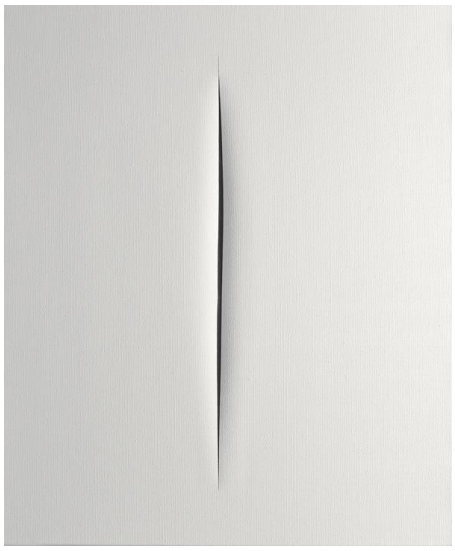
[28] In his interviews with Bragg and earlier with David Sylvester Bacon constantly returns to this theme. David Sylvester Interviews with Francis bacon Thames and Hudson London 1962-1979

[29] Jackson Pollock 1951 16mm film Directed by Paul Falkenburg and Hans Namuth.

[30] Harold Rosenberg The American Action Painters, The Tradition of The New. (New York: Horizon Press) p27 Reprinted from Art News, LI (December 1952)

Arnulf Rainer *Over painting Totem* 1983-84

This is a photographic self-portrait that has been almost completely covered over with daubings of paint. The trace of the artist's fingers has virtually taken over from his represented image. Rainer has clearly identified this strategy as imposing something real over the representational appearance. This work is closely associated with the Wiene Aktionismus movement which was represented through photographic documentation and residues of performance in another room.

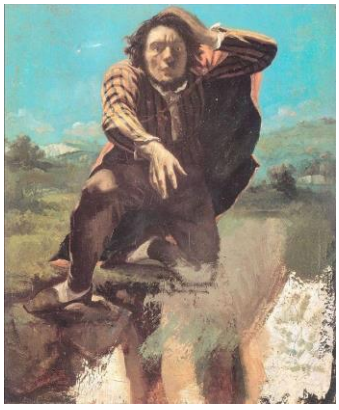


Lucio Fontana *Concetto Spaziale*

6. Leaping, puncturing and levitating

On entering the next room two of Lucio Fontana's slashed canvases, *Concetto Spaziale and Concetto Spaziale, Attese*, emphasised the crisis in representation brought on by Abstract Expressionism. The emphasis on the surface of the painting as a site for real time action which culminated with Rainer made us very aware of the sensitivity of the canvas as a boundary between real and imaginary. The crisis in representation which is often thought of as a modern dilemma is in fact an ancient one that is a consequence of our condition — suspended between matter and idea.

Fontana was born in Latin America and now lives and works in Italy. The Catholic iconography of the wound can hardly have escaped his attention. It is an easy step to consider the slash in the pure skin of the monochrome canvas as a wound and then to associate it with the crisis Doubting Thomas resolved by plunging his hand into Christ's side. The visual associations between these cuts and wounds, rupture the veil or screen of representation at the brink of the void. Because this veil is metaphorically related to the skin which separates the body from its surroundings, the orifices created by Fontana naturally evoke the openings of the body itself. The paintings are also relics of actions more decisive than the gestures of painters discussed in *Tactility and the Trace.* Thomas' doubt perfectly expresses our anxiety at living in a world that is only available to us through the mediation of visual appearances and the word.



Courbet *Man Mad with Fear* 1843

Yves Klein *The leap* 1960

A striking group of images in this room continued the theme of passage through the veil. Yves Klein's *Anthropometrie 118* hung next to a large photographic record of his famous *Leap* in 1961 and a photographic enlargement of Courbet's *Man Mad with Fear* (1843).

Yves Klein was a complex and contradictory artist whose overall project seems to have been inextricably linked to aspects of transcendence.[31] Yet he was also a realist with a passionate dislike of solipsistic expressionism in art, particularly when it presents the internality of the artist's psyche as necessarily being a revelation of genius. In the post-war years, Abstract Expressionism in America and Informel painting in France dominated the contemporary art market. A significant component of the meaning of this art was supposed to be the expressive quality of the artist's gesture. The gesture was reported to reflect the inner world of the artist which was presumably more interesting than average because of their heightened state of

[31] See chapter 4 in this book.

consciousness.[32] Francis Bacon was also scathing about Abstract Expressionism and constantly affirmed his desire to make work which would resonate with sensations of the viewer's reality rather than express his personal feelings[33].

Klein's view was that the internal world of the emotionally disturbed was best left where it was. He believed that an artist's efforts should be directed outwards to reveal something in the real world.[34] In *Anthropometries* such as *Ant 118*, Klein used a model's body as a means of applying paint to the canvas. He claimed that these images capture the energy and the presence of the body. The *Anthropometries* are part of a series in which he 'collaborated' with nature to produce the paintings. As a variation on the 'living paintbrushes' which he named *Cosmogenies*, he tried holding his prepared canvases up against grass waving in the rain and the wind to capture the vitality of the elements. Many of the *Anthropometries* were executed as performances intended for photographic documentation. The stage was designed by his photographers so that the documentation would most effectively show the performers, an orchestra playing Klein's *Monotone Symphony* and the audience dressed as for a formal theatrical event. Klein himself wore a tuxedo and white gloves. The venue he chose was the gallery where the Informel artist, Mathieu, exhibited. Mathieu had given public displays of gestural expressionism inspired by the Namuth film of Jackson Pollock in his studio. Klein's performance was a deliberate parody of Abstract Expressionism. In the context of this exhibition a body print acted like a trace of the real model and the viewer had the sense of being able to reach out and touch the trace where the body touched the canvas.

The traditional representational surface acts as a kind of screen on to which images of the world are projected. But when the surface of the painting becomes evidence of the artist's actions rather than the site of an illusion we are made aware of the literal presence of the support. The visual penetration of this surface by the illusion of pictorial space may now become literal penetration.

Courbet's self-portrait, *Man Mad With Fear* (1843) provided a graphic image of the desire to pass through this screen. Courbet has been discussed in several other places in this book in relation to quasi-corporeal merger. In particular his self-portraits which show the artist pressing up against the pictorial surface or the frame of the composition as if he was about to burst through the viewer's side of the canvas. This dramatic painting provided an extraordinary metaphor for the terror of representation because absorption entails a partial loss of self for the artist and the viewer. The

---

[32] Harold Rosenberg.

[33] See Interviews with Sylvester .pp 66, 92.

[34] Yves Klein *Due to the fact that* pp 8-9, by Yves Klein in the Archives with the Klein Foundation Phoenix Arizona. Also my chapter on Klein in this book.

surface of the painting has been associated above with a veil or screen which separates the material world from our understanding of it. The veil reveals, just as it conceals, because perceptions of the world can never be the equivalent of reality. For the painter the struggle to dissolve the border between representation and the real world may become obsessive, as seems to have been the case with Courbet. In this painting the figure of the artist leaps into the pictorial void—signified by the cliff at the lower right hand side — and into the viewer's space. Michael Fried has argued that such voids at the margin of a composition are linking spaces which provide entry for the artist and the viewer.[35] In *Man Mad With Fear* the void is 'fortuitously' left unfinished: precisely at the point where the artist is about to leap through the pictorial surface the paint breaks down into an abstract scumble. Representation is seen dissolving in front of our eyes.

Bob Law painted a series of virtually blank canvases in the late 1960s entitled *Nothing to be afraid of.* They consisted of unpainted stretched canvas with a biro line that framed the space just inside the edge. In the corner were the words "Nothing to be afraid of" He said that this partly referred to the banal comfort people give to anyone mad with fear or having a nervous breakdown: "There there, there is nothing to fear." But for someone who is experiencing fear itself and has no object to attach it to, nothing (or the void) is of course the most terrible thing.[36] It is not reasonable to suggest that in 1843 Courbet could have consciously depicted the breakdown of the surface of representation, an idea that comes into play through the investigations of twentieth-century modernism. For a contemporary viewer, however, the implications of this work are striking. Courbet may however have been able to imagine a nervous breakdown when fear of letting go and being drawn into the void yields to a mad desire to hurl yourself through the veil into the immaterial or is it the world of madness.

Juxtaposed with Courbet's *Man Mad With Fear* there was a photograph of Yves Klein's *Leap,* 1960. This work and other immaterial explorations was described in detail in chapter 4. This action of leaping from the second floor window of Collette Allendy's studio in 1960 was in part a demonstration of his achievements in Judo and other spiritual exercises, yet he deliberately set himself up to be caught faking the evidence. This photograph by Harry Schunk shows a cyclist on the road and a tram across the end of the street. This was the image Klein inserted in a simulated edition of the newspaper, *Dimanche* which he placed on news stands all over Paris immediately after the event. Within a short time he had the same photograph, but this time without the cyclist and tram, published as a poster for his exhibition in Krefeld.

---

[35] Michael Fried in his description of *Burial at Ornans* in *Courbet's Realism*.

[36] Bob Law in an interview with the author 1966.

A careful study of the photograph shown in this exhibition reveals that it has been spliced, presumably to remove the image of a safety net.

The authenticity of the performance has been much debated. The interesting thing, however, is the fact that the photograph as an art work is authentic irrespective of the means of production. If we want it to be literal evidence we are not accepting its role as an art object. The viewer may be curious about whether Klein actually leapt, but they will see in the photograph a convincing image of someone flying upwards into the void with a fiercely determined expression. There can be no doubt that Klein wanted to fly and this photo conveys that as expressively as Courbet renders a man fleeing from fear itself. At the same time Klein is clearly making use of the black and white photograph as evidence and as a trace of the thing itself to heighten the drama of his slight of hand.

Suspension pieces by Stelarc and Ken Unsworth from the 1970s provide an Australian response to these issues. These photographic documentations of performance, from the collection of The art Gallery of New South Wales, continue the theme of levitation (overcoming the restraints of the material world) introduced by Klein. In the case of Stelarc, transcending bodily limits has always been important. In more recent times he has made use of medical technology to extend the performance of the body and to disrupt its boundaries. In the suspension works, however, Stelarc draws our attention to the limits of the body in another way: by attaching the wires which hold his body aloft to meat hooks pierced through his skin. Unsworth presented his body as an element in formal sculpture in the same way that he balances and props plates of steel and rocks in his Minimalist sculpture and installation. Balance and equilibrium were the constant themes of these works, yet the body is placed in highly uncomfortable positions sometimes reminiscent of medieval martyrdom.

Mike *Parr Leg Spiral and Cathartic action, Social Gestus: Arm Chop*

These works introduce performance art in which the body of the artist becomes the site of the work, thereby conflating figure and field. Some of the issues associated with performance and body art in the 1960s and ‘70s are discussed in relation to an interview with Mike Parr in chapter 8. In the next room more theatrical forms of performance art, for example the rituals of the Vienna Aktionismus group, are

contrasted with the direct investigation of bodily limits by Mike Parr, Marina Abramovic, Valie Export, Gina Pane and Chris Burden.

Hermann Nitsche *Altar piece* 1984

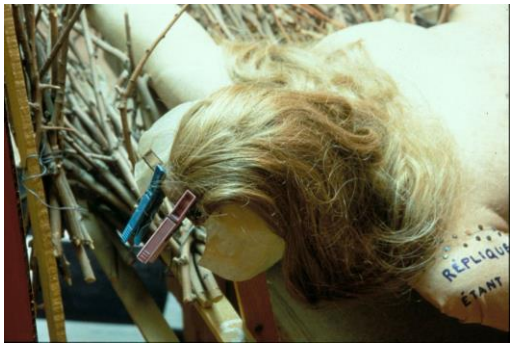
The Aktionismus artists clearly continue an abstract expressionist painterly trajectory by literally splashing paint and other materials around to create colourful images incorporating human bodies in place of canvas. These images are then recorded in film and colour photographs. They are distinctly theatrical in ethos since they document fabricated fantasies that have little grounding in actual limits of the body or the world. In as much as they explore limits it is the legal and moral limits of their actions which often took the form of ritualised orgies.

7. Surreal fragments and recombinations

Following on from the explosive effects of this rupture in the pictorial field there was a room devoted to the fragmentary residue of modernism. At the heart of this room were the exposed workings of *Etant Donnés*. In Baquié's version the installation was intended to be seen in the round. This effectively undoes the Duchampian strategy of the fixed viewpoint and reveals all. This was in itself a Duchampian gesture that put the moustache on Duchamp's final masterpiece. In *BODY* I gained permission to install the work so that it had two lives, one as Duchamp intended and the other at least in part as Baquié subverted it. In a way it is more shocking to discover the butchered body which had previously been seen as whole. Octavio Paz and Anne D'Harnoncourt both describe the body as being an image of seduction seen in a rural idyll. While I have never been able to see it this way this view behind the scenes completely changes any possible readings. I have described the scene from my previous visits to Philadelphia and Duchamp's original and can vouch for the

accuracy of Baquié's copy. The main difference is that he has not recreated the rips to the fabric which I observed in the original.[37]

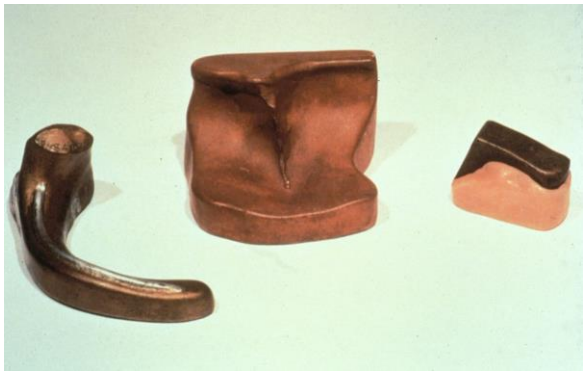
Detail of Baquie's reconstruction of *Etant Donnes*



The most disturbing quality of *Etant Donnés* is the fragmentation and depilation of the model. What is not obvious from the original view through the keyhole is that the figure is incomplete. Baquié has faithfully reproduced Duchamp's installation which only provides as much of the body as the viewer could see through the hole in the bricks. Now that we are permitted behind the scenes, the image is revealed as the site of an atrocity. The carcass, for that is how it looks, holds up the phallic lamp as if locked in rigor mortis. Surrounding this bizarre tableau in the central part of the exhibition is a cabinet of curiosities including fragments and recombinations of the body[38].

[37] See my detailed analysis of this work in chapter 3 of this book.

[38] See my comments in Chapter 3 regarding Orphic fragmentation of Modernism replacing an Oedipal desire for re-absorption in the mother.



Duchamp's sculptures *Objet Dard Coin du Chastité and Feuille de Vigne Femelle* 1951to 1963

The most important of these were Duchamp's sculptures *Objet Dard Coin du Chastité* and *Feuille de Vigne Femelle* which relate to the process of producing *Etant Donnés*. Although these appear to be casts of genital areas they remain visually obscure. Moulding and casting are the sculptural equivalents of the trace in painting. Duchamp uses the idea of the mould to suggest the border of matter and thought, where representation may be characterised as being like a veil draped over matter, concealing as much as it reveals. The mould shares this association with the Wilson/Lincoln effect where two possible readings of an image alternate perceptually. Duchamp uses this effect in describing the horizon in *The Large Glass.* The horizon, which is also the bride's dress, separates consciousness from its object just as it binds them together. Duchamp used the phrase ;

..to grasp an object with the mind like a vagina holds in a penis.

The process of moulding is erotic since it implies the pressure of material on the body and in the case of Duchamp's *female fig leaf*, on the genitals. Rodin's *Iris, Messenger of The Gods* reappears in a smaller version in this room recalling Duchamp's debt to this work in *Etant Donnés*. As the messenger, Iris could pass between the material and the immaterial domains.

The theme of the fragmented body returns in a vitrine of works by Rodin. Rodin kept in his studio a vast collection of casts of fragments: arms, legs, heads and torsos. These casts were repeatedly recombined to produce the great array of figures in his compositions. This vitrine contains a small group of assemblages from such fragments. Joan Miro's *Tightrope walker* (1970) is a surreal figure composed of fragments including bones, a gourd and a dolly, all assembled and cast in bronze.

Hans Bellmer *Demie Poupe* 1971

Hans Bellmer also used dolls. His *Demie Poupée* 1971 is a late work from the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales. The Poupée series was started in the 1940s and related to Surrealist games of that time. The series of near life-size articulated dolls were fabricated to his specifications by craftsmen. He subsequently played games with the dolls where they were placed in various situations and photographed. Bellmer also produced drawings of the body in which it seems to be turned inside out. Sexual organs are enlarged in proportion to their sensory potential, creating images that represent tactile rather than purely visual experience. *Demie Poupée* is not only a distorted and fragmented figure it is also unstable in terms of gender. Her one leg emerges from her pelvic area in such a way as to displace any possibility of a vagina. The leg could then be thought of as phallic extension. The head is formed with a penile slit in the top and the only feature is the mouth which is distinctly vaginal.

Chapman bros *Two-Faced Cunt* 1997

Pierre Molinier's Surrealist phantasies were represented by photographs of multiple figures modified to produce almost flower-like patterns of human bodies in complex sexual combinations. Distortion took the form of mutant or morphed human bodies in the sculpture *Two Faced Cunt* by Jake and Dinos Chapman. Fantasies of corporeal merger and of the doppelganger take on perverse form here, seriously undermining the stability of the body's boundaries. The twins are joined at the head and at the point of conjunction there is a fleshy growth which is clearly a vagina. Like the Bellmer Poupée the girls wear white socks but they are children of the nineties and the little legs disappear into enormous running shoes. These artists belong to a new generation who imbibed weird cartoons with their mother's milk.

Rebecca Horn's *Pendulum with Emu Egg* and *Love Thermometer* are two erotic sculptures which play off Duchamp's idea of the mechanical bride. Both these works are in the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales. The five meter pendulum hangs like a javelin or pointer with its sharp end almost touching an emu egg which is precariously attached to the wall by a small rod. Suddenly the pendulum jerks into action, swinging wildly from side to side. It threatens to smash the fragile egg with each swing yet as it slows down before returning to the rest position it begins to seem more like a caress. The machine threatens but also completes the bride's orgasm. *Love Thermometer* plays a counterpoint to this 'blossoming of the bride'[39]. The oversized glass thermometer rests in a lined case like a piece of precious jewellery or a violin. If the viewer picks up the instrument by the bulb the heat of the hand causes the red fluid in the bulb to be forced up the stem in an image of

[39] Marcel Duchamp refers to the pink cloud in the bride's apparatus in *The Large Glass* as the blossoming of her orgasm.

engorgement. The closely fitted case with its soft fabric lining also makes use of the metaphorical association between fabric and flesh which I described in Courbet's *Sleepers*. Like *Coin de Chastité* by Duchamp it also suggests the vagina holding an engorged penis.

Rebecca Horn *Pendulum and Emu Egg* 1987 and *Love thermometer* 1988

More assertively surreal and allied to the work of Bellmer are Cindy Sherman and Robert Gober. Sherman's photographs reveal figures poorly assembled from prosthetics and rubber body parts. Sherman was first recognised for a series of photographic self portraits in which she played the role of various starlets in B grade movies from the fifties. So good was her projection into the parts that it is hard to believe that they are all the same woman. In the late 1970s and early 1980s these works were discussed as feminist critiques of the roles women are expected to play and became a paradigm of the identity shifter. Taking the movie still as a starting point can be seen as a continuation of the realist tendency in Pop Art which based its imagery on the pervasive visual influence of the mass media in every day life. (A small group of these early works are represented in the Collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Sherman however rarely speaks about this aspect of the images preferring to claim an intuitive process of invention. In the later 1980s the roles came up to date by referencing genres such as science fiction and violent future fantasy. The make up became more extreme with mutant and hybrid animal forms appearing. In the Civil war series the figure often disappears in a mess of decay and human waste. In the example of this series shown in *BODY* a doll lies face down in ordure surrounded by the detritus of a technological age. Hanging next to Etant Donnés it revealed several similarities. The figure is represented by a substitute doll which is placed in a landscape. It is fragmented by virtue of being half buried in the rubbish which defines the scape as post industrial. The intimations of violence in the composition are also powerful. In a formal sense the work relates to the Cubist principles of fragmentation and dissemination through the field which elsewhere in this exhibition indicated a

continuity between the body and the field. From this perspective the Modernist tendency to fragment takes on a more sinister aspect. (Untitled 1988 (MP #184) is also in the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Robert Gober
Man Coming Out of Woman 1993

Cindy Sherman *MP#259* 1992

Robert Gober's *Man Coming Out of Woman* is a wax sculpture which disturbingly simulates flesh, although the waxwork quality lends it a macabre effect that jars with the subject of an improbable birth scene. This fantastic scenario seems to link the original object of fixation, the mother, with the artist's sexual investment in the male body. Gober's mother had been a nurse and apparently told her young son about seeing an amputated leg at the hospital one day. This clearly left an impression on him since legs separated from their bodies are a recurring theme in his sculpture.

This image of the clothed and shod leg emerging from a vagina could be seen as an hilarious allusion to adult phantasies of regression on the other hand it is not unlike the Bellmer *Demie Poupée* where the leg seems to become a phallic attachment. However the leg comes to be detached from its normal place it necessarily acts as a sign of loss, or of fear of loss. It brings to mind a critical moment in Ronald Reagan's autobiography when he recalls a complete identification with a character he was playing. The character was a pilot who has just come round after an amputation, he sits up and asks, Where is the rest of me? It is not clear why Reagan himself should have found this moment of identification so compelling but not being 'all there' has a certain ring of truth to it.

The body parts have been cast from actual bodies and hairs added one by one to the male leg. On close inspection the female body reveals details of its history including the subtle trace of an appendix operation. The female pelvic area is isolated somewhat like the figure in Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* but since the figure is three dimensional the interruption of the legs again takes the aspect of amputation. The rest of the figure from the waist up disappears into the wall. This cutting by the architecture may owe something to André Breton's image of a figure cut in two by a window. This is a primal image of Modernism from Breton's Papers on Surrealism.

8. Imagining the body inside out and Embodied memory.

Imagining the body, and in particular representing the inside on the outside or recreating the feel of a body rather than its appearance, was another critical component of this exhibition. Louise Bourgeois' sculpture, *Janus Fleuri* is a highly concentrated form which is based on female genitals framed by polished mounds that could be interpreted as penile. It does not simply present the visual appearance of the body, and is not reducible to a deformed fragment such as *Objet Dard* by Duchamp. It refers to the sensation of sex rather than depicting the outward appearance of organs. The wings of the form, corresponding to thighs, are smoothly finished and polished bronze. The central area which occupies the space of the genitals is, in contrast, roughly formed and ill defined. It seems more like an accumulation of fatty matter than an anatomical detail. The polished area becomes an outside or a skin while the contrasting unformed part seems to be the interior normally available only by touch. It was of interest to monitor public reaction to the piece because this turned out to be fairly consistently gendered. Male viewers saw the whole piece as feminine normally reading the forms at the side as stumps or rudimentary legs. Women on the other hand invariably saw the whole piece as representing two sets of male genitals back to back. This reading accords well with the title, *Janus Fleuri*. In effect the piece is clearly androgynous or bisexual. In both male and female interpretations there was a consistently tactile response.

Louise Bourgeoise *Janus Fleurie* 1968

Cathy de Moncheaux *Worried about the weather* 1996

Cathy de Monchaux was another artist whose forms conveyed sensation rather than imaging the body as such. In her sculptures she creates a world of fragments which partly suggest genitalia, but they are equally possible to read as independent entities, insects, fungal growths and elaborate jewels, all at the same time. The spiky fractal metal forms that clasp the soft folds of talcumed leather strongly suggest sexual pleasure as well as throbbing pain. These images are not fantasy projections but attempts to represent sensations other than the purely visual in a material way. In this way they connect back to the discussions of the tactile above. Creating images that acknowledge that which is not accessible through outward appearances but essential to any understanding of the body itself is a significantly realist project.

Zoe Leonard was represented by a photograph taken of a medical Venus in a glass case. This is a beautiful and terrible image. The model is an attractive naked woman with long blonde hair

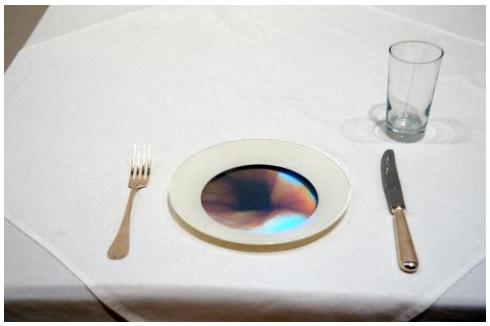
wearing only a string of pearls round her neck. Her abdomen has been dissected to lay bare her entrails and organs. Francis Bacon has spoken of the beauty of a diseased mouth or a road accident, but it is more compelling to hear Orshi Drozdik describe her first encounter with an anatomical dissection when she was at art school. After the initial shock of seeing a beautiful woman lying disembowelled she discovered that the lining of her stomach was a gorgeous, lustrous purple material while the texture of the organs provided a wealth of exquisite forms and colours. From horror to aesthetic pleasure there is a short loop. To see the corpse as beautiful requires a suspension of our awareness of the circumstances of death and mutilation. Inevitably we find the outward appearance of the innards shocking because in everyday life we only experience this sight as catastrophe. On the other hand we are not normally repelled by the sensations of our innards unless we are ill, indeed it is in the hidden recesses of our interior that we feel warmth and comfort after a good meal, or experience sexual arousal. Confronting this paradox may simply be perverse but it is also part of coming to terms with mortality and overcoming the tyranny of appearances.

Drozdik's installation was also based on the medical Venus photographed by Leonard. Along the wall Drozdik displayed photographic details of the Venus. They were presented in such a way as to make the body seem real rather than a museum model which Leonard makes all too evident. It would be easy to interpret these as post mortem photos from a real mortuary. In front of each photograph a silver plate was poised on a slender steel rod. The plates were engraved with love letters. The text of the letters reminded the viewer of the rhetorical love of inner spaces that so dramatically contrasts with our literal response. I long to be inside you, I worship every part of you, etc. This juxtaposition of text and image provokes this paradox very forcefully. In front of the photos and plates there was a life sized cast of the artist's body posed in the same position as the Medical Venus and laid out on a steel table. The yellow rubber in which the figure was cast gave it an unreality that contrasted with the fact that the cast is a literal trace of the body thereby underscoring the deliberate contradictions between experience and image that characterised every aspect of the installation.

Marc Quinn *Self* 1997

Mark Quinn presented a second version of his 'bloodhead' sculpture, *Self* 1997. This work consisted of nine pints of the artist's own blood collected over a period of time and frozen into a mould of his head. nine pints is the normal amount of blood in a body: for Quinn the fact that it perfectly matched the volume of his head was a compelling coincidence. The plinth for the work was a stainless steel refrigeration unit that lent it a particularly medical or scientific appearance. The idea of this work became an ideal focus for the realist issue in the exhibition while also dealing with the invisible interior and reintroducing a performance element. This was a portrait fabricated out of the body of the subject. The sculpture was both a representation of the artist and literally his own substance. In order to create the image he was compelled to have small amounts of blood removed from his body over an 18 month period. In this sense the sculpture also functioned as a relic or residue of performance. Perhaps the most compelling realist element was the discovery that the volume of the blood coincided with the mould. The principle of "It fits so why not do it" can be attributed to a British development on the principles of truth to materials epitomised by the writing and sculpture of Richard Wentworth.

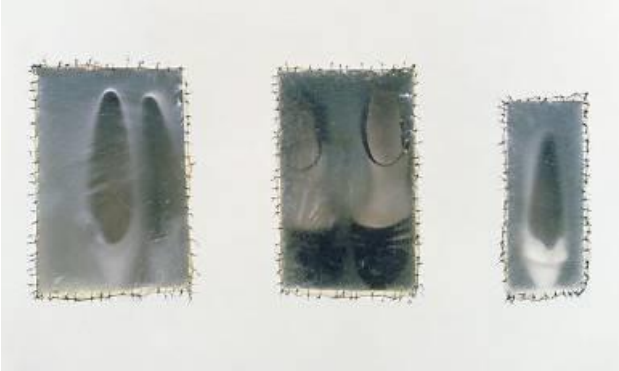
Mona Hatoum created a breakfast table setting in which the plate was a screen showing an endoscopic journey down her gullet to the stomach and beyond.



Mona Hatoum *Deep throat* 1996

Zai Kuning is a young artist from Singapore who recently exhibited at the *Asia Pacific Triennial* in Brisbane, 1996. Kuning is a performance and installation artist and these objects can therefore be thought of, in part at least, as residues of performance. Kuning has created forms by layering sheets of wax or cloth around unknown objects. These bundles are suggestive of body parts or of the abattoir but they remain ambiguous forms. They have something in common with Christo's wrappings in that they seem to be concealing something and in the process becoming some other thing. The idea of secret parcels relates to Duchamp's ball of string within which Walter Arensberg has hidden an undisclosed object. These secrets also suggest bodily mementos, hence Kuning's parcels have an affinity with Doris Salcedo's shrines to the lost citizens of Colombia. In this installation Kuning placed the objects in a shallow tank of water and oil so that the constant flow of water through the system caused the liquids to emulsify into a virulent looking scum. The cloth bundles

became stained and saturated with this scum providing a powerful image of decomposition.



|Doris Salcedo *Atrabiliarios* 1992

Doris Salcedo is able to raise our empathic engagement with others to an exquisite level of pain. In *Atrabiliarios*, an installation from the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales, she evokes absence and loss by using materials and processes that locate memory in the body. The viewer's response is, in turn, emotional—even visceral—rather than purely intellectual. Niches cut into the plaster wall contained shoes as relics or attributes of lost people donated by the families of those who have disappeared in the political and economic violence that has racked her native Colombia. The niches are then sealed with a membrane of animal caul which is literally sutured into the plaster of the wall. Barely visible through the membrane, the shoes are a particularly haunting evocation of their absent owners. The animal skin and the shoes inevitably recall the grizzly souvenirs of Nazi death camps.

This work was created in the Gallery so that it was possible to follow the procedures very closely. Rectangular niches were cut into the plaster at irregular but carefully measured intervals. Each was slightly different from the others. The edges of these perfect niches were then filed down and built up with fresh plaster to produce slightly irregular shapes. This took several days and was very carefully monitored. The finished niches had become individual presences. They seemed to have specific histories as if maintained and weathered over centuries. They could also be said to have acquired individual personalities, conforming to a general range of proportions but exhibiting subtle differences.

The next stage involved stitching horse hair through tiny holes in the plaster around the opening. Once again this was done with extraordinary attention to detail. The hairs had to be spaced to avoid uniformity of thickness and precisely identical intervals and yet they clearly conformed to an orderly preconceived plan. I was reminded of Tony Cragg and his balancing of human thought with the incidents of nature.

The shoes were then placed into the niches. Some of them were wrapped in cow bladder and in some cases the shoe had been removed leaving only its husk in the

material of the dried bladder. Once again there was a variety of presence from the shoe itself to the partially hidden shoe to the shadowy trace. The cow bladder was now applied to the opening. Each one was sutured carefully into the plaster so as not to tear the bladder or the plaster. The skins had to be absolutely taught with no sign of stretching or wrinkles. The hairs entered the plaster cleanly and the holes made good as if they were entering scar tissue. Endless layers of white paint were finally applied to the wall meticulously brushed up to the edge of the skin and the stitches without any trace of splash or overlap. The effect was to make the wall and the niches appear as if they were part of one body that had evolved slowly accruing a patina over time.

The lighting was also critical and took a whole day to perfect. The result was to create an atmosphere in which the viewer would not be aware of any light source. However there needed to be enough light entering each niche to make the different presences within visible, while avoiding the image of a spotlight. The effect of the finished room had the feeling of an ancient shrine and yet it was as clean aesthetically as a sol Lewitt. None of the preparations were apparent to the eye precisely because they were so perfectly crafted. The body of the viewer responded to the body of the wall without the intervention of the actions of the artist.

In spite of the intensive crafting of the illusion this work remains fundamentally realist in its intentions and in its grounding in actual objects and events. Salcedo travels extensively in the countryside where the worst effects of political violence can be found. She becomes familiar with the communities befriending people who have suffered under the repression. The most painful thing is that people disappear without trace. No charges are laid, no arrest is recorded, no body is found. Death can be mourned but disappearance leaves an unbearable void. These disappearances are a deliberate strategy to demoralise and terrify the people in order to ensure their silence. If they speak and their relatives are alive in some prison they could be signing their death warrant. They too could disappear at any time. Salcedo collects attributes of the disappeared with the support of their relatives. By constructing the memorials and exhibiting them around the world she has given these people a voice. In a small way our response to their agony strikes a blow against the dialectics of violence.

9. Seeking reconciliation with nature

Antony Gormley represents his own body as a measure of the world. Through the image of his body he depicts humankind arising from the earth and coming to reflect upon its own mortality. In human form clay becomes aware and in this moment shares some of the understanding reserved for the angels thus bridging the material and spiritual divide. While a student of art history at Cambridge Gormley wrote his thesis on *The Church House* of Stanley Spencer. He was the first person to piece together the epic work which never came together since Spencer sold the works

intended for the church as single items over the years. His fascination with Spencer was this great artist's intention to bring together the secular and the profane. Spencer believed that sexuality and simple acts entailed in living our daily life could represent the mystical experiences of Christianity as powerfully as the rituals of the church.

The experience of the wilderness which all great mystics seem to require including Christ himself is not only a test or a temptation it is also a coming together with the natural order. Spencer made this very clear in the unfinished series *Christ In The Wilderness* in the collection of The Art Gallery Of Western Australia. This reconciliation with nature is very important for Gormley and other artists in this section of the exhibition. It is an experience that can be associated with the shamanic trauma or journey to hell and back that is considered a necessary preparation for this ancient form of healing. Joseph Beuys' near death and recovery discussed in chapter 5 of this book is taken as such an initiation and makes shamanism a metaphor for the artist's role.

Antony Gormley *Bearing* 1987

In this exhibition Gormley was represented by the double figure, *Bearing* (1995). He replaced the head of the standing figure with another body crouched as if in childbirth. It could also be an image of the artist returning to the womb. The figure bears and is also born. In the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales there is another work created by Gormley while an artist in residence in Sydney. *A Field for The Great Australian Desert* and *A Field for The Art Gallery of New South Wales* 1989. These two works resulted from a trip to the barren country along the South Australian Border with NSW. In an isolated plain Gormley located a cubic concrete sculpture that represented a casing for his own crouched body. The folded legs and torso making one cube while the head made another at the top. The only openings were positioned for the mouth the ears and the penis. The figure was drawn into itself, sustenance and defecation were possible and the sounds of the desert could be perceived but vision was precluded. The object was carefully placed on a red clay

pan in a location that provided 360° of flat horizon. Gormley anticipated that it would never be found but would become the home for innumerable spiders, crickets and other desert creatures thereby bringing it to life.

On his way back to Sydney he collected a small truck load of red dust which he then used to make 1100 simple human figures each being about 20cm high. The figures were made by moistening the dust and rolling the resulting clay in the hands so that the form exhibited its relation to the shape of the hand. Man made of clay in the likeness of man's hand. Each figure was given two holes for eyes near the top of the head part. The figures were then arranged into a plan of the two hemispheres of the brain which completely filled one of the 12 meter galleries. Between the two hemispheres there was a narrow path down which the viewer could move to a central resting place just large enough for one person to turn round and survey the figures. From this position the viewer found themselves in a godlike relation to the figures and yet they were all staring straight up at you.

While for some viewers the exhilaration of being godlike clouded any further subtleties, most members of the public report discovering an overwhelming feeling of responsibility. These figures are drawn up from the earth. They are the earth just as mankind is and yet what kind of guardians are we? 1100 pairs of eyes reproach us hauntingly. The brain shape of the installation also suggests the relationship between thought and matter which lies at the heart of the dilemma of representation outlined in this book.

Kiki Smith *Mary Magdalen* 1994

Kiki Smith's *Mary Magdalen* was reminiscent of Donatello's wooden *Penitent Magdalen*. Her body is covered in hair, half human and half animal. She drags a chain from one ankle like an escaped beast. When she was making this work Smith was thinking about French legends of the penitent Magdalen who wandered in the wilderness for seven years after Christ's death. The stay in the wilderness carries with it many of the connotations of humanity's search for reconciliation with nature. The Baptist's hair shirt has become the animal trace in Magdalen like a Nebuchadnezzar in reverse. The hair is also a trace of the artists fingers clawing at the surface of the clay. Only the face, breasts, stomach and knees are polished and smooth, highlighting their erogenous nature as points of contact with the earth and with other bodies.

Joseph Beuys *Fat girl* 1955 & *Ohne Titel* 1949

Joseph Beuys spent some years recovering from the trauma of his time as a fighter pilot in the Luftwafe and subsequently discovering the reality of the holocaust. During this period his own return to life was equated with the need for man's reconciliation with nature. His early drawings of the figure represented by several fine examples in this exhibition deal with the pre-linguistic animal origins of humankind, prior to the separation or expulsion of humanity from nature. The Palaeolithic figure of the goddess, which Beuys has called *Beast woman* or *Animal Woman* in his earlier sculptures, reflects his dismay at modern humanity's separation from nature: a moment of loss referred to in many of our key myths. In Genesis and in the Greek story of Prometheus, for instance, loss of innocence is linked with separation from the natural order. The relationship between humankind and nature is one of the fundamental problems of being, and is as central to art as it is to philosophy.

Empathy has been at the heart of all of these themes. Beuys's ideas about reconciliation are both practical and metaphorical. They assume a responsibility for the world we occupy and promote a sense of inhabiting the world rather than accepting a scientifically distanced and objective or instrumental view[40]. An empathic attitude to other people involving a degree of identification is in keeping with this idea and underscored the selection of works for *BODY*.

[40] See Chapter 5 in this book.