

Exploring the body as a site of inscriptions

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'The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural and geographical inscriptions, production or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, the cultural product¹.'

As one of our strategies we decided to concentrate on parts of our bodies which may be characterised for many women as sites of bodily anxieties, for example flabby bellies, crêpey bosoms, cellulite pitted buttocks and thighs, love handles and triple chins, and sought to find ways to re-present them. We photographed each other's bodies, accentuating the 'ugly' bits. We then experimented with double exposures, to intensify the notion of becoming, and overlapped the images, for example photographing the effect of breathing out and relaxing muscles with breathing in and tensing muscles on our flabby bellies. We cropped in very close to the body, seeking out sites of displeasure to make these images transgress the boundaries of the frame. We discovered that when we made selections from the photographs we had produced and placed images together as a continuous frieze of colour photographic prints, in which one image appeared to merge with the next, they became aesthetically gorgeous bodyscapes. It became possible to look at these fragmented parts of our bodies, which we had previously viewed 'as if' through the judgmental eyes of others, in startling new ways, no longer 'ugly', they rather bore the traces of lives lived, inscribed by time. The response to these images, when they were exhibited as a huge frieze at Lighthouse in Wolverhampton included

'The act of looking at the undulating folds and contours of the skin becomes pleasurable and manifold, as though the artists are playfully interrogating our assumptions of how the ageing body should appear. By juxtaposing a visual exploration of how it feels and looks to inhabit an ageing body with a sense of liberation (corporeal, aesthetic and political) Martin and Goodridge question the stigma of growing old, which so often becomes a process of de-eroticisation under the gaze of contemporary society. Furthermore, by engaging with the dynamics of representing the old(er) female nude, the absence of the older woman in visual art is challenged. Within a patriarchal frame, only the smooth, healthy body is considered an appropriate body type for art: anything other than this is out of bounds/monstrous².'

We also chose to examine the sense of having an unstable body, foregrounded by our own experiences, for example of feeling one day fit and healthy, the next crippled by rheumatism and straining knee joints when running. By overlapping images of movement to represent instability with images frozen by flash light, we used multiple exposures to confront notions of the unstable body, containing echoes of its history, projections towards its future, within itself.

'On the inner screen of ageing, these shadows - memories of younger selves, anticipations of older selves - meet, conflict, interact. ... Incorporating previous states we become the sum of what we have been. It is, paradoxically a permanent inchoate process. As a rule loss and mourning accompany the discourse of ageing. Yet loss's travel companion is accumulation - of imaginary selves, of psychic objects, of all the "baggage" of the past³.'

We also used these multiple exposure ideas to make portraits of each other, combining movement and stasis to make visible ideas of change and instability. We created traces of both the past and the future within the images, for example in one image of Rosy, the movement gave back the bright auburn- red colour to the hair, in another the loose movement of the jaw offered up an image of a premonition of old age.

1. Grosz, Elizabeth (1994) 'Volatile Bodies' . Indiana: Indiana University Press
2. Gear, Rachel (2000) 'The old hags are laughing: a response to Outrageous Agers' *Make No.* 87 March - May
3. Cristofovici , Anca (1999) 'Touching surfaces' in Kathleen Woodward (ed) 'Figuring Age' Indiana: Indiana University Press.