

University of Derby

**Presence Through Absence: Gender, Surrealism
And The Unreal Woman**

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Of the University of Derby
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ABSTRACT

This practice-led research investigates the visual language of self-representation in art associated with Surrealism. Through engagement with techniques prevalent in Surrealist art, particularly photographic Surrealism, this research visually and theoretically elucidates recent socio-cultural, political and philosophical shifts decentering the human that influence representations of self, gender, and identity by female artists. Characterised by a cyclical, rhizomatic process, this research is grounded in lived experience and underpinned by a comprehensive analysis of the interrelated histories of Surrealism and feminism.

Feminist theoretical frameworks, incorporating psychoanalytic theory, sexuality, power dynamics, and the male gaze, have rigorously examined Surrealism's subversion of gender roles. This examination has prompted a paradigm shift in Surrealism's traditionally androcentric narrative, giving rise to a gender divide and establishing a gynocentric legacy of gender-subversive art associated with Surrealism. In response to certain interpretations within the revisionist discourse, this research challenges the assumption that Surrealism's subversion of gender roles is unequivocally progressive and questions whether feminist discourse adequately addresses or contextualises the complexities of gendered self-representation associated with Surrealism.

The research explores self-representations at the height of feminism's second wave, which engendered a paradoxical female body that straddles empowerment and objectification. The emergence of Surrealism is situated within its historical context, and consistencies are identified between the techniques and strategies adopted by its artists and those of contemporary female 'surrealist' artists. These parallels facilitate an understanding of why the female body's presence in self-representation remains fragmented or absent, despite a century of female empowerment. This practice-led research examines the use of metaphor and symbolic surrogates, which enable complex ideas to be articulated within an acceptable framework, leading to broader connections. The methodology and framework supporting the practice-led focus of the project provide a comprehensive analysis of the research, further supported by interviews conducted with practitioners in the field.

The female body as a site of creative inquiry lies at the core of this research. The lack of contemporary contextualisation in Surrealism's discourse, addressing the perpetuation of a dismembered self in representations by contemporary female artists, has created a gap in knowledge. This research explores the concept of absence as presence and the complexities of metaphorical self-representations. By augmenting the discourse with current themes of identity politics and inclusivity, and by drawing cross-generational connections, this practice-led approach seeks to enhance understanding of the shifting relationship between Surrealism, gendered identity representation, and the reality of women's embodiment over the last century.

DECLARATION

I hereby submit this thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the College of Arts, Humanities and Education at the University of Derby. I have been supervised by Professor Huw Davies, Dr Robert Burstow, and Vered Lahav.

This thesis, including its appendices, is my intellectual property and original work, except where the work of other scholars and artists has been cited appropriately within the text, captions, and bibliography. The research is original and has not been submitted for any other academic award.

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Introduction

My practice-led research investigates the techniques associated with Surrealism to explore representations of self, gender, and identity. The research is anchored in my personal feelings, frustrations, and even anger at gender bias, its construction, and societal inequity. Therefore, my lived experience is an intrinsic element of the research. The project's rationale emerged from questions that arose during my Master's in Fine Art, particularly why I felt an actual body was a distraction and fundamentally irrelevant to representations of self, identity, and gender within the combined focus of feminism and Surrealism.

I will begin with several opening comments that situate my field of study and contextualize my motivation and rationale for pursuing a practice-led research degree. A review of the key literature underpinning my research will demonstrate the ongoing interest and topicality in this field while identifying a critical gap in the existing knowledge. Subsequently, I will articulate my research questions, delineate my research framework and methodological approach, and provide a synopsis of the thesis chapters. For clarity, I will capitalize Surrealism and the Surrealist movement to differentiate between Surrealism as an historical movement and surrealism as a general term.

0:1 Introductory Opening Comments

The term *woman artist* is problematic. Using the word woman as a prefix is considered a form of covert sexism, as it designates a subordinate position within the Western social order¹. Whitney Chadwick (b.1943) encountered this issue in the 1980s when revising Surrealism's androcentric² narrative. The ramifications of the term *woman artist* and the gynocentric³ perspective of Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* led several women artists to refuse participation. Dorothea Tanning stated, 'You may be a woman, and you may be an artist; but the one is given, and the other is you' (Tanning in Agret & Païni, 2023, p.16).

¹ Western Social Order – A hierarchical system of governance and social organisation.

² Androcentric – A male centred focus.

³ Gynocentric – A female centred focus.

Contemporary gender ideology compounds the problematics of this idiom; however, my identity as both a woman and an artist is equally important. Therefore, I use the term throughout my thesis for clarity and because reality is an essential aspect of my research.

The historical androcentric narrative in Western art history has unjustly eclipsed women artists. Engendered by second-wave feminism, art historians Linda Nochlin (1931-2017) and Griselda Pollock (b.1949) began revealing the objectified, commodified, manipulated, and categorised exploitation of women. The woman artist is not a contemporary phenomenon; women have continuously circumvented societal and institutional restrictions to become artists. Generations of women artists have deftly subverted male notions of femininity through their representations of self, identity, and womanhood. Typifying this history is a cluster of twentieth-century women artists associated with Dada and Surrealism, whose artwork continues to resonate almost a century later.

The physical embodiment of women and women's autonomy in self-representation is rooted in politics, evidenced by the representation of women in the public press during the suffrage campaign. The media exploited women's appearance through implicit attitudes, expectations, and beliefs inferred through the act of looking. The act of looking is central to any critique of art and it has created a complex paradox for women artists, especially in representations of self, gender, and identity. In the mid-1980s, Helen Chadwick's (1953-1996) memento mori *Ruin* 1986 incited derogatory reviews due to this paradox. Photographing herself nude as a rebellion against instigated taboos⁴ provoked a backlash that denounced *Ruin* as 'negative women's work' (Kingsley and Riopelle, 2012, p.104). Chadwick never used the female body in the same way again.

The friction between sociocultural issues and politics was the core element of Surrealism's emergence after World War One (Lusty et al. 2021, p.65). The political ideology adopted by many feminists, coupled with the 1980s sex wars, engendered a condemnation of historical Surrealism as misogynistic. The 2022 exhibition *Surrealism Beyond Borders* dismisses notions of the movement's demise in 1969.

⁴ John Berger defines the difference between nude and naked in *Ways of Seeing* as naked is to be oneself whilst nude is to be naked and viewed by others. (Berger, 1972)

The curator's contemporary revision claims Surrealism to be a 'movement' in the literal sense (D'Alessandro & Gale, 2021, p.23). The exhibition's geopolitical inclusivity utilises contemporary identity politics and, therefore, is constitutive in the movement's continuation and ongoing political core. Furthermore, it aims to move beyond Surrealism's misogynistic⁵ reputation by downplaying the movement's Parisian evolution and androcentric monopoly.

0:2 Context

The complex political dynamics that have enabled women to reclaim the female body in art are inherently unstable. This instability is particularly evident in the ongoing and highly contentious debate over the definition of a woman. Traditional dictionary definitions describe a woman as an adult female human being. However, contemporary ideology has prompted amendments to these definitions. For instance, the Cambridge Dictionary now includes the definition: 'an adult who lives and identifies as female though they may have been assigned a different sex at birth.' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023. Online). The Collins English Dictionary further elaborates on the etymology of the word 'woman' and its historically disparaging usage, while still presenting definitions that imply subordination⁶.

Numerous politicians have grappled with defining what a woman is, including Anneliese Dodds, the UK's Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities. When questioned by the presenter of BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, Dodds was unable to provide a definitive answer, suggesting that the definition depends on the context (BBC Sounds, 2022, 19:52-23:15). Similarly, Elizabeth Truss, during her tenure as Minister for Women and Equalities, advocated for viewing everyone as individual human beings. This nominalist perspective likely influenced her decision to

⁵ Misogynistic – Strongly prejudiced against women. An in-depth definition is provided in Chapter One.

⁶ The Collins English Dictionary has pages of definitions pertaining to the definition of Woman in British and American English. However, its rigor seems to perpetuate a negative connotation due to the sheer number of outdated definitions listed in comparison to the contemporary stance of simply an adult human female. For example: *Informal*: a wife, girlfriend, etc. *Old-fashioned*: a female subordinate, servant, or employee. *Vocative Noun*: People sometimes address a woman as 'woman' when they are ordering her to do something or when they are angry or impatient with her. This use could cause offence. See - Collins English Dictionary, 2023. Online: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/woman>

remove the word 'woman' from the select committee's title when she became Prime Minister in 2022.

Language modification aimed at gender inclusivity has become increasingly prevalent in media and mainstream institutions such as the UK's National Health Service. Terms like chest-feeders, people who menstruate, pregnant persons, and cervix-havers are now commonly used. This shift in language has not been without controversy. For example, the front-page headline of the September 2021 edition of *The Lancet* (Fig. 0:1) faced backlash for dehumanizing women, reducing them to mere body parts. This resonates with the historical use of the female body by male Surrealists, a topic that will be explored in the literature review and Chapter One.

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Fig 0:1 *The Lancet*, Front Page Headline,
September 2021. Image Courtesy of The Daily Mail. 2021

0:3 Motivation

The motivation for this practice-led research primarily stems from my digital fine art photography. Initially, while recognising the value of my subjectivity and lived experience as sources of creative inspiration and inquiry, I instinctively felt it was unnecessary and inappropriate to use the female body in my research. Questioning my stance and understanding why I felt compelled to create visual riddles has been a driving motivation in undertaking a practice-led PhD.

The creative processes I developed during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies compounded a lack of confidence and difficulty articulating my artwork. I frequently described my work as intuitive without fully comprehending my ideas and motivations in exploring gender without utilizing the body. The objects I use resonate with elements associated with domesticity, and the ephemeral nature of femininity. However, the photographic techniques I employed to dislocate and transcend the object/s inherent condition of being, also hindered my ability to confidently situate my artwork within a specific genre or contemporary art context.

Due to the organic elements used and the esoteric nature of my photography, I drew connections with the still-life genre. During the latter stages of my Master's in Fine Art, I related the symbolism within my work as congruent with surrealism. Consequently, in seeking to understand why my creative process concealed the actuality of my female bodily presence, I was motivated to deepen my knowledge of art, particularly Surrealism, through a feminist lens

0:4 Research Rationale

Since the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of interest in surrealist art by women artists, evidenced by several major group exhibitions. *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-representation* ran for a year between 1998 and 1999, staged at the MIT in Massachusetts, the Miami Art Museum in Florida and San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art. A decade later, in 2009, the Manchester Art Gallery curated *Angels of Anarchy, Women Artists and Surrealism*, followed by *Dreamers Awake*, in 2017 at London's White Cube Gallery. The centenary of Surrealism, marked by André Breton's (1896-1966) 1924 manifesto, continues to fuel the movement's

mainstream topicality. The ongoing interest in Surrealism and women artists is vast, evidenced by multiple dedicated retrospectives, including *Dora Maar*, curated by the Tate Modern in London, 2021. The following year, 2022, saw *Eileen Agar: Angel of Anarchy* at Leeds Art Gallery and Toyen's three-venue retrospective, *Toyen: An Absolute Divergence*, exhibited by the National Gallery Prague, the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg and the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. The transatlantic retrospective, *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition*, beginning in 2022, was jointly curated by The Meni Collection and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 2023, the Musée De Montmartre augmented earlier Anglo-American gynocentric group exhibitions and discourse with *Surréalisme Au Feminine?* Bringing together the artwork of these women artists, allows for a compelling group narrative and social commentary through their representations of self, gender, and identity.

Drawing on my subjective experiences has offered valuable insights into how my research reflects contemporary political and sociocultural issues. By incorporating personal encounters, reflections, and lived experiences, I have been able to identify resonances between broader societal dynamics and my research themes. This approach has deepened my understanding of the complexities at play, encouraging me to critically examine the underlying political structures and ideologies that inform these issues, while also recognising the role of personal narratives in shaping both art and academic inquiry. Much gender-themed surrealism depicts the female body whole, contorted, fragmented, or disguised. However, some works, such as Meret Oppenheim's (1913-1985) *Ma Gouvernante - My Nurse - Mein Kindermädchen* 1936, do not use the body directly. The multifaceted concepts and the emotional and introspective nature of gender identity make surrealism particularly suited for exploration due to its self-analysing and transgressive nature. Thus, the significance and value of a practice-led research project studying gender representations by current female artists using surrealist traditions is evident.

My research thematically focuses on representations of self, gender, and identity, with a geographical focus oscillating between France, Britain, and America. This geographical triangulation is relevant to the research as France is the birthplace of Surrealism, and French philosophers have significantly influenced contemporary feminist ideology. Britain and America are pertinent due to the foundational feminist discourse that engendered both the first and second waves of feminism, which have

shaped contemporary feminisms ideologies. Moreover, the relevant feminist art historical literature was pioneered by scholars from France, Britain and America.

0:5 Literature Review

My research is indebted to the art historians who pioneered feminist scholarship by challenging the status quo within the art world, notably Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, Gloria Feman Orenstein (b. 1938) and Whitney Chadwick. The feminist critique of Surrealism centres on two interalted issues: first, gynocritical revisionism and second, the representation of women by male surrealists. Xavière Gauthier began the critique with *Surréalisme et sexualité*⁷ in 1971, declaring that the surrealist woman was 'a male construct' (Watz, 2016, Pp.32-p.33: Rodgers,1998, Pp.129-30). Her work reflects the influence of Simone De Beauvoir's (1908 - 1986) *The Second Sex*⁸ 1949, which rigorously analyses the historical and cultural factors within a Western patriarchal society that perpetuate women's subjection. Beauvoir condemned surrealism's contradictory portrayal of women: both disempowered by, and idealised as, the *femme enfant*.⁹ She stated that 'Breton does not speak of woman as subject' but as an object through which man might transcend his subjectivity via purity, love, truth, and beauty (Beauvoir, 2010, p.260). By examining women's roles and sociocultural expectations, Beauvoir exposed the paradoxical ideals that relegat women to the position of *other*. Beauvoir's foundational text 'haunts' much of the subsequent feminist scholarship on surrealism (Watz, 2016, p.17, p.30). Her existentialist assertion that, *one is not born but, rather becomes a*

⁷ Xavière Gauthier - Despite *Surréalisme et sexualité* becoming a best seller in France with numerous republications and translations into Japanese in 1973, Spanish in 1976 and German in 1980 the English translation commissioned from Angela Carter was never published (Watz, in Strom et al, 2023, p.426) A typescript of Carter's translation was acquired by the British Library in 2006 although it may not be the version submitted to Calder & Boyars for publication. (Watz, 2016, p.21)

⁸ *The Second Sex* - first translated into English by Howard Parshley in 1953. The introduction to the 2010 translation suggests misinterpretation of Beauvoir's text can be accredited to an earlier translation.

⁹ The concept of *femme enfant* originates in Surrealist art and literature, where it embodies a fusion of innocence, eroticism, and mystery. The *femme enfant* is typically depicted as a childlike, dreamlike figure who inspires male creativity, representing both purity and sexual allure. This archetype reflects a fascination with the subconscious and the perception of women as intuitive muses with access to hidden truths. However, feminist critiques have argued that this trope reinforces problematic constructions of femininity, portraying women as enigmatic, dependent on male interpretation, and lacking agency. The *femme enfant* remains a significant figure in discussions of gender, power dynamics, and artistic representation within Surrealist traditions.

woman,¹⁰ remains central to the feminist discourse on Surrealism. While some theorists have accused her of gender essentialism, her work fundamentally rejects biological determinism, framing gender as a continual process of becoming. This perspective aligns with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* 1990, which problematises stable categories of gender identity. Butler's foundational work in queer theory radically challenged feminism's reliance on biological sex as a political category, exposing its limited understanding of gender and heteronormativity. Drawing on autobiographical context, Butler suggests that her lived experience of gender-based discrimination placed her in a marginalized position, allowing her to identify a self-defeating contradiction within feminist theory, one that risked perpetuating oppression through homophobic exclusion.

Her complex argument synthesises French feminism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and linguistics to critique the essentialist notion of the female body as a stable foundation for feminist politics. She contends that defining woman through biology erases crucial intersecting factors such as race, class, gender, and culture. As a result, any feminist movement grounded in a fixed identity would merely shift power within an existing heteronormative structure rather than dismantling it.

Butler deconstructs the category of 'woman' by interrogating the distinction between gender, cultural construction, and sex. She questions the assumption that sex is purely biological, arguing instead that it is also a social construct. However, her originality lies in framing gender as a performative act: an ongoing, reiterated performance shaped by Western power structures and societal expectations of normative roles. Ultimately, she critiques feminist essentialism for overlooking ontological complexities. Moreover, Simone de Beauvoir continues to haunt the debate as she anticipated gender-inclusive language, warning that asking, what is a woman, would inevitably lead to essentialist references of wombs and uteruses.

Anglo-American texts that disavowed phallocentrism,¹¹ such as *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963, by Betty Friedan (1921-2006) and Germaine Greer's (b.1939) *The*

¹⁰ Due to language misinterpretations understandings of Beauvoir's now famous quote, 'One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.' (Beauvoir, 2010 p.293) has caused contention since the book's first translation into English.

¹¹ Phallocentrism prioritises male perspectives, experiences and authority. Advocated by Sigmund Freud in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905 and his theories of psychoanalysis.

Female Eunuch 1970, fuelled The Women's Liberation Movement. Both texts, in line with Beauvoir's materialist perspective,¹² critique stereotypical gender roles and expectations as the societal castration of women (Greer, 1970, p.15, p.62).

Women's subjectivity and objecthood in patriarchy are foundational to feminist scholarship, leading Orenstein in 1973 to suggest that Surrealism's *femme enfant* was partially responsible for the exclusion of woman artists from art historical recognition (Orenstein, 1975. p32).

'How could a woman in her mid-fifties, as these women obviously were now, continue to identify with the ideal of the Woman-Child?', and 'In what way or to what extent did this myth of the Femme-Enfant actually conspire to guarantee the exclusion of the artistic work of the more mature woman from recognition either within the surrealist movement itself or from acceptance within the mainstream of art history as a whole?' (Orenstein, 1975. p32).

Finding only 'casual or anecdotal' references to women artists associated with Surrealism during her doctoral research, Orenstein's essay, *The Women of Surrealism* 1973, is a primary inquiry (Raaberg, 1991, p.1) dedicated to gynocritical revisionism, an approach encapsulated by her phrase 'the lost women of surrealism' (Orenstein, 1975, p.31).

The Civil Rights movement and the student riots of 1968 revealed sexism within progressive factions, prompting a shift within feminism. Activists moved away from egalitarianism towards an emphasis on the differences between the sexes. Consequently, feminist scholarship diverged, with some advocating for a total overthrow of patriarchy and the symbolic order¹³ or for the invention of a new feminine language (Watz, 2016, p.30; Suleiman, 1986, Pp.15-16). Hélène Cixous' (b.1937) theory of female writing *écriture féminine*, as a revolutionary practice 'echoes' Surrealism's automatic writing (Suleiman, 1996 p.17; Conley, 1996, p.24). Expanding the critique toward Surrealist imagery, Orenstein describes Dorothea Tanning's (1910-2012) paintings as a response to the patriarchal dictum 'Biology is Destiny'

¹² Materialist feminism: Views gender as a social construct and studies patriarchal society in terms of economic and sexual benefits that oppress women in favour of male superiority.

¹³ Jacques Lacan's Symbolic Order is a psychoanalytic theory that facilitates an understanding and elucidation of gender formation, stereotypical roles and the experience of self and identity through language.

(Orenstein, 1975. Pp.47-48) and posits Léonor Fini (1908-1996) as a 'precursor of the women's movement through her conscious and intelligent exploration of themes relating to woman's identity' (Orenstein, 1975. p36).

'I was immediately struck by the fact that I had never seen any of these paintings before in any of the books on Surrealism, nor had I ever come across any monographic study of her work' (Orenstein, 1975. p31).

Echoing Nochlin's 1970s call to action in *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, Orenstein demanded an immediate 'rewrite' of art history (Orenstein, 1975, p.52). However, as Patricia Allmer argues, women artists were never truly rediscovered in the 1970s; rather, their contributions were persistently overlooked despite serious museum recognition (Allmer, in Hopkins, 2016, p.373).

'You have these big people who every so often get forgotten, and then somebody discovers them again, and it's like, oh my God, Leonora Carrington, the forgotten artist, she wasn't forgotten; they have serious museum collections [] and then you had people who were very well known in their own countries but not outside of the country' (Appendix One, p.165).

Allmer attributes this erasure to the egotistical and arrogant exaggeration of male artist's importance (Allmer, in Hopkins, 2016, p.368) which facilitated an 'androcentric writing out of women artists from history' (Allmer, in Hopkins, 2016, p.373). A year after its first publication Orenstein presented her research at the Pennsylvania State University conference, *Surrealism: A Celebration*, in 1974. It was republished under the new title: 'Art History and the Case for the Women of Surrealism' for the 1975 *Journal of General Education* (Vol.23) and published again in the winter of 1977-78 in *Obliques: La Femme Surréaliste*. Orenstein's critique of male-centric discourse at the height of the American feminist art movement may be considered a political strategy within the feminist art historical agenda, aimed at highlighting the necessity to reconfigure Surrealism's androcentric narrative and revise women artists' place within the canon.

Published in 1985, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* repositions women artists as autonomous subjects rather than objects of representation. Recognised as a 'significant contribution' (Watz in Strom, 2023, p.431) its prose is more celebratory of a 'sympathetic milieu' (Chadwick 1991, p.11) than polemic. Chadwick outlines her

assessment of mainstream Surrealist views of women and the societal expectations placed on them contextually, before exploring their work as a response from within these positions. Her biographical approach expands the book's scope beyond that of a purely academic text, incorporating anecdotes and numerous personal photographs of artists, including Kay Sage (1898-1963), Lee Miller (1907-1977), and Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). However, Mary Ann Caws suggests it only provides a 'basic' (Caws et al., 1991, p.1) springboard to further research, while Catherine Wilcox critiques Chadwick's narrow focus on a group of 'stars' arguing it risks maintaining 'ambiguity and obscurity, eternally linked to a poetic image of the other' (Wilcox, 2004, p.40) which feminist scholarship sought to dismantle. Nonetheless, regardless of gender, I argue that Chadwick's biographical narrative and historical context have both value and pitfalls in critical analysis.

Chadwick's formulaic phrase 'associated with surrealism' (Chadwick, 1991, p.10) identifies a contention over what constitutes an artist as a surrealist. The awkward phrasing was a compromise due to the ambivalence of many women artists to identify as surrealists. She recounts, 'In some cases, they have accepted the designation, Surrealist, and in others, they have rejected it entirely' (Chadwick, 1991, p.10). However, Penelope Rosemont (b.1942) critiques Chadwick's approach, characterising it as 'intellectually dishonest' and offering a more rigorous framework for defining a surrealist artist (Rosemont, 1998, Pp.xxxvi-xxxvii).

Chadwick also initiated the notion of a legacy by using the phrase 'first generation' (Chadwick, 1985, p.11) to identify women artists associated with surrealism between 1924 and 1947. The *Angels of Anarchy* exhibition catalogue follows suit, boasting that 'the most comprehensive and up-to-date survey' bringing together multiple generations of women artists (Allmer, 2009, p.74 & p.257). Despite numerous references to surrealism's legacy (Strom, 2023, p.20; Conley, 1996, p.25; Chadwick, 1998, p.7, p.10, p.13; Agret & Païni, 2023, p.11) discourse on current women artists is eclectic. Natalya Lusty suggests the legacy expands beyond its gynocentricism into the movement's concepts 'as they morphed, faded and were revived across its protracted history' (Lusty, 2021, p.4) which aligns with Mathew Gale and Stephanie D'Alessandro's *Surrealism Beyond Borders* 2023 revisionist exhibition. However, this raises questions regarding how a contemporary artist becomes associated with

surrealism and how identity politics impacts surrealism's legacy regarding representations of self, identity, and gender.

For an artist to use subjectivity as a creative exploration to comment on life, necessitates a synthesis between internal feelings and external experiences: a duality of perception. The intensive biographical inquiry instigated by 1970s feminist scholarship enabled a deeper understanding of historical women artists' lived experience and their surrealist introspection. However, the androcentric critique of their male counterparts was far less intrusive, engendering a supposed divergence between male and female surrealism. Many women artists associated with Surrealism were wary of the feminist critique; Meret Oppenheim refused outright the reproduction of any of her artwork, whilst Leonor Fini and Dorothea Tanning suggested a solely female focus perpetuated their 'exile' (Chadwick, 1991, p.12).

Published in 1991, *Surrealism and Women* is an anthology of sixteen essays edited by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwenn Raaberg, which focus on the contradictory relationship between women artists and surrealism. Several essays vociferously demonstrate the divergence in feminist thinking and scholarship, at the time of its writing, due to heated debates regarding pornography and sex work. The 1980s sex war split feminist thinking into two opposing sides: anti-pornographic and sex-positive¹⁴. Mary Ann Caws (b.1933) claims Breton had a 'problem with the female gender' (Caws et al., 1991, p.13) and Rudolf E. Kuenzli's sweeping statement suggests male surrealism portrays ubiquitous misogyny by providing 'a good understanding of male desires and interests' (Caws et al., 1991, p.18). Kuenzli aggressively attacked Rosalind Krauss' (b.1941) post-structuralist critique of surrealist photography,¹⁵ in which she claimed, 'the frequent characterisations of surrealism as antifeminist seem to me to be mistaken' (Krauss, 1985, p.72; Suleiman, 1990, p.150). Kuenzli accuses Krauss of ignoring the 'violent, sadistic dismemberment of the female image' by male surrealists and in consistently

¹⁴ The term sex-positive originated in mid-20th-century sexology, particularly in the works of early sexologists like Wilhelm Reich, who viewed sexual expression as essential for well-being. It gained wider recognition in the 1970s sexual liberation movement and was popularised in feminist discourse by Gayle Rubin in her 1984 essay *Thinking Sex*. By the 1990s, sex-positive feminism emerged as a response to debates around sexual freedom and the destigmatisation of sexual practices.

¹⁵ The contention arose from Rosalind Krauss' 1985 *Corpus Delicti* essay written for the *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* exhibition catalogue.

overlooking 'the gender-specific, sexist politics' she 'colludes with the male gaze', blinding her to the 'obvious misogyny' (Caws et al., 1991, Pp. 23-25).

The purpose of the book's criticism, Gwen Raaberg says in the introduction,

'Is not to reject surrealism but to rethink it, expanding our conception of the movement, its principles and its artistic works to include the perspective of the women Surrealists' (Caws et al., 1991, p.3).

However, I argue feminism's approach to surrealism's discourse needs rethinking; as Katherine Conley asks in *Automatic Woman*: why would so many women have been drawn to the movement if it was so onerous? (Conley, 1996, p. 3). Surrealism is unique among early twentieth-century art movements in its welcoming of women artists into its inner sanctum. Whilst there were undoubtedly issues, is it not more accurate to recognise that misogynistic tendencies were socio-culturally ubiquitous? As Dorothea Tanning said in an interview, 'the place of women in Surrealism was no different than her place in bourgeois society in general' (Tanning in Agret & Païni, 2023, p.16). *Surrealism and Women* is incredibly 'hostile' (Watz in Strom, 2023, p.433) in addressing other critics attempts to defend surrealism from claims of misogyny that it not only rejects Surrealism and its historical context but women's tenacity, rebellion, and intellectual capacity to operate within a misogynistic arena. Robert Belton's essay *Speaking with Forked Tongues* (Pp. 50-62) parallels Suleiman's theory of a double allegiance¹⁶ (Suleiman, 1990, p.XVII) by questioning the designation of women Surrealists as pro-feminists. Belton suggests this is too simplified, stating,

'it is clear that surrealist doctrine was ideologically patriarchal, and I submit that the work of female artists requires a double interpretation - what my title designates as a forked tongue. This tongue is both that of the artists involved and that of the interpretive community' (Belton in Caws et al., 1991, p.51).

Belton's essay posits that artistic interpretation endowed Oppenheim, Tanning and Mansor's artwork with feminist readings when he alludes to the impossibility of being

¹⁶ Suleiman's double allegiance is a theory that the best contemporary works by women artists upholds the formal experiments and cultural aspirations of historical male Surrealism whilst simultaneously critiquing dominant patriarchal ideologies and sexual oppression through a feminist lens.

both a surrealist and feminist. Belton appears to disregard both primary source material obtained through interviews with women artists associated with the movement and the artistic autonomy of these women. Suleiman's double allegiance aligns with Carol Hay's theory of feminism's double bind, a continual balance within the lived experience of women (Hay, 2020, Pp.114-115). *Surrealism and Women* provides a fascinating insight into the influence of politics on theoretical thinking and is a text in which 'crotchety critics' masquerade as egalitarianists (Rosemont, 1998 p.xxxv).

The 1990 exhibition, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-representation*, curated by Whitney Chadwick, Helaine Posner and Katy Kline, sought to examine a gynocentric legacy of self- and identity-representation between contemporary women artists and their historical predecessors. Chadwick's earlier research engendered the exhibition, due to the apparent number of self-representations by women artists, that were unparalleled by male surrealist artists (Chadwick, 1998, p.4). However, Chadwick is careful to distance herself from any accusations of biological essentialism, seeking a shared feminine essence or 'herstory' (Chadwick, 1998, p.6) by stating it is the intersections in the strategy of representation and surrealist techniques utilised across historical and contemporary creative practice which provides key insights. Chadwick uses a loose framework of categories to explore these intersections, including 'Self as Masquerade', 'Self as Body' and 'Self as Other' (Chadwick, 1998, p.7) and suggest a unity between body absence and tactility in Dorothy Cross's (b.1956) *Virgin Shroud* 1993 and *Stiletto's* 1994 as well as Meret Oppenheim's *Breakfast in Fur* 1936 and *Ma Gouvernante - My Nurse - Mein Kindermädchen* 1936. However, in line with Suleiman's double allegiance, Chadwick warned that the divergencies in social, cultural, and political comments are confusing and problematic.

Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism 2009-10, curated by Patricia Allmer, demonstrates how women artists became their own muse in an exploration of the self as object to challenge and deconstruct hierarchal structures within society and within the canonical traditions of art itself. This appropriation of the genre is employed to organise the catalogue with chapters exploring the landscape, self-portraiture, interior, fantasy and still life. This system of exploration aligns with the historical context of Surrealism's emergence, modernism's dissatisfaction, and

perceived stagnant traditionalism in art and bourgeois society in general. The exhibition moved beyond Chadwick's first generation to 'present the most comprehensive and up-to-date study' by bringing together thirty-one women artists associated with surrealism across three generations. However, outstripping both *Mirror Images* and *Angels of Anarchy*, the 2017 exhibition *Dreamers Awake* exhibited fifty women artists across multiple generations. *Dreamers Awake*'s significant jump in exhibited artists raises Rosemount and Chadwick's concerns regarding who designates association and categorisation and how, which I will examine further in chapter one. Moreover, this number is surpassed in 2023 by the fifty-eight women artists exhibited by *Surréalisme Au Féminin?*, curated by Alix Agret and Dominique Païni. The American and British discourse suggest the surrealist movement has a protracted longevity whereas the French curator's position is that surrealism terminated in 1969 (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.11). Furthermore, the use of the word legacy is substituted for 'offshoot' (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.11) and, the question mark in the exhibition's title echoes Belton in questioning the coupling of feminism and surrealism (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.12) despite expanding the number of artists. Quotes from first-generation artists attest to the ambiguous relationship between women and the movement, similar to Chadwick's foundational text, enabling the curators to describe Surrealism as a support or 'framework' (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.12) utilised by women artists. Furthermore, Agret & Païni note the contemporary topicality of the subject, listing the predominantly Anglo-American plethora of publications and exhibitions which they suggest, risks the 'cutting-edge subversiveness' of the women artists represented being 'institutionalised' (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.13). Despite this, the aim of the exhibition is to augment the discourse on marginalised women artists and to highlight the scarcity of information, apart from personal details, on already recognised names such as Jacqueline Lamba (1910-1993), Maya Deren (1904-1998), Sheila Legge (1911-1949), Claude Cahun (1894-1954) and Anne Ethuin (1921-2009).

Reading contemporary work through a historical framework and vice versa is fraught with pitfalls, which Chadwick suggests can 'lock us into rigid structures of meaning' and 'strip[s] images of their historical and cultural specificity' (Chadwick, 1988, p.7). Using Claude Cahun's (1894-1954) oeuvre Chadwick warns, reading it solely through postmodernism, disregards the context of the 'pioneering lesbian culture'

therefore, obscuring the complexity of her artwork (Chadwick, 1998, p.24). Catherine Wilcox appears to misinterpret Chadwick and argues in her thesis that Chadwick is suggesting the works of 'camp artists should be placed outside the surrealist canon' (Wilcox, 2004, p.267). In re-examining surrealism's discourse and legacy, I argue that it is essential to adopt Chadwick's assertion that context is paramount, not only in critiquing historical Surrealism but also in questioning whether we are imposing historical narratives onto contemporary art associated with the movement.

0:6 Gap in Knowledge.

The discourse on historical Surrealism rigorously explores the sociocultural and political context from the movement's inception in the early 1940s, which is pertinent to the first generation of women artists. Some scholars insist that Surrealism terminated in 1969 (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.11). In contrast, others posit its continuation and ongoing political core (D'Alessandro & Gale, 2021, p.23). Whichever stance is taken, there is agreement that surrealism has a legacy which, from a gynocentric perspective, appears to be extensive, judging by the number of contemporary women artists included in recent surrealist exhibitions. However, a lack of an in-depth exploration of the impact of socio-cultural and political shifts on the use of the female body as a site of creative inquiry by current women artists associated with surrealism's generational legacy presents a gap in knowledge. Together with an exploration of their convergences with historical and contemporary women artists representations of self, gender and identity in the field.

Arts-based research can involve analysing artistic expression as a means of inquiry. Therefore, in fulfilment of this project I have created a body of artwork and analysed my visual language supported by wider research. My lived experience is integral to my research and aligns with Beauvoir's recognition of girls' difficulties during maturation. During my formative years I observed strong feminine presences, rigid gender roles and maternal expectations which left me feeling confused and conflicted regarding womanhood. Being a woman seemed to be a repetitive succession of unceasing caregiving, organisational and domestic maintenance jobs, coupled with female behavioural expectation and presentation. My experiences are not unique; many women I have spoken to, including friends and fellow PhD

candidates have recalled their prepubescent and adolescent anxieties regarding womanhood and gendered expectations. Despite Beauvoir's text being eighty years old her reference to appearance resonates contemporaneously.

'... the future woman naturally feels indignant about the limitations her sex imposes on her. The question is not why she rejects them; the real problem is understanding why she accepts them. Her conformism comes from her docility and timidity, but this resignation will easily turn to revolt if society's compensations are judged inadequate. This is what will happen in cases where the adolescent girl feels unattractive as a woman: anatomical configurations become particularly important when this happens; if she is, or believes she is, ugly or has a bad figure, woman rejects a feminine destiny for which she feels ill adapted...' (Beauvoir, 2009 p.343).

Gender roles, gendered expectations, stereotyping and the anxiety it causes can be the stimulus to profound lifelong issues both psychologically and medically known as gender dysphoria.¹⁷ My childhood anxieties have influenced my creative interest which has fuelled my research. Images 'have the power to provoke critical questions' (Leavy, 2019) therefore, by placing current artworks and my research, in dialogue with the established historical group narrative of surrealist art by women artists I aim to gain insights to augment the discourse. The gap in knowledge presents two broad questions that underpin the research:

1. How might social, cultural, and political shifts affect contemporary representations of self, gender, and identity in art associated with surrealism by female-identifying artists?

¹⁷ Gender Dysphoria - People who experience this turmoil cannot correlate to their gender expression when identifying themselves within the traditional, rigid societal binary male or female roles, which may cause cultural stigmatization. This can further result in relationship difficulties with family, peers, and friends and lead to interpersonal conflicts, rejection from society, symptoms of depression and anxiety, substance use disorders, a negative sense of well-being and poor self-esteem, and an increased risk of self-harm and suicidality. (Garg, Elshimy & Marwaha, 2023, National Institute of Health, America) Further Information can be obtained at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/>

2. What are the convergences between historical and contemporary representations of gender in art associated with surrealism by female-identifying artists?

Within these two questions are several more minor questions pertaining to lived experience in the wake of identity politics, gender inclusive language, knowledge attainment, commercialism and beauty standards. My project has an 80/20 ratio of creative research over theoretical research. The theory my research generates will augment the discourse within art associated with surrealism and feminism. Furthermore, it will extend the sociocultural commentaries interpreted through self-representation and gender-themed art, providing a springboard for future research. The originality of my research is multifaceted: a critique of feminism's impact on surrealism's discourse, an exploration of the representation of the female body by current female artists associated with surrealism and the body of art that responds to questions raised throughout my research.

0:7 Methodology

My methodological approach revolves around an established cyclical and reflexive process within arts-based research. Subjective experience is an intrinsic element of my research, that is, lived experience, personal feelings and perceptions of self and my location in the world. Subjective experience also needs to be considered in analysing other artists' creative processes and their artwork; as such, a qualitative research approach is required. Qualitative data is non-numeric; rather, it is descriptions of characteristics or qualities and, therefore, appropriate for practice-led research where data is collected from interview transcripts conducted with relevant artists pertinent to my research along with the interpretation of their artwork and other artworks associated with surrealism by women artists. This process necessitates a combined epistemological approach that does not undermine personal truths but legitimises knowing. Everyone has a personal bias which affects our interpretation, choices, perceptions, and beliefs. For example, I am a white British woman raised as a Christian; this bias can limit or skew reality. Critical Realism is a philosophy regarding the nature of knowledge attainment. This

approach allows for understanding how multifaceted factors such as cultural upbringing, political climate, familial hierarchies, and class or race shape our understanding of reality. Therefore, standpoint theory from a feminist perspective is combined with critical realism to allow for the diverse nature of the art and artists I examine.

My research is lens-based, and the inspiration for my photographs is an amalgamation of personal observations and lived experiences augmented with sociocultural inquiry and an engagement with media commentary on gender issues. I manipulate, physically and in camera, inanimate organic and manufactured objects associated with the feminine and domestic realm to create representations of self, identity, and gender, creating an original visual language. My research title is *Presence Through Absence: Gender, Surrealism and the Unreal Woman* and arose from a need to understand my creative practice and the questions it presented regarding my own understanding of feminism, misogyny, gender and surrealism, including why I felt using the actual body was a distraction and fundamentally irrelevant to my representations of self, identity and gender.

0:8 Chapter Synopsis

Chapter One briefly outlines feminism's historicity and explores the structures of oppression that have marginalised women throughout history. An exploration of the media's representation of the female body during the Suffrage Campaign provides context to the avant-garde milieu into which the first generation of women artists associated with surrealism came of age. The conflicting expectations placed on girls and women such as being thin but also curvaceous, attractive and passive rather than strong and autonomous creates unattainable ideals, giving rise to the chapter's title, "The Paradoxical Female Body". The chapter will identify and situate critical figures such as Leonora Carrington, leading to a discussion of lived experience utilised as creative inspiration. The chapter discusses feminism's second wave and how the Women's Liberation Movement impacted art historical discourse and women artists such as Penny Slinger (b.1947) and Helen Chadwick (1953-1996). Finally, I will discuss contemporary political shifts, including post-structuralism's impact on feminism.

Chapter Two explores Surrealism and its emergence which began as a literary movement. The Surrealists utilised symbolism, metaphors and metaphorical imagery to evoke subconscious associations and esoteric meanings. I will examine its mainstream historical context, including the influences of the First World War, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). The chapter then clarifies surrealist techniques employed by women artists cross-generationally. It explores similarities in the creative process, the use of the female body in self-representations and artworks of several women artists, including Brigit Jürgenssen and Loie Hollowell, to examine commonalities and divergences. These intersections will be examined from a biographical, sociocultural and political perspective to gain insights that may account for the changes within representational strategies.

Chapter Three, “Presence Through Absence”, analyses my experiments and the body of research. I will discuss my methodological approach and the epistemology that frames my practice-led research and elucidate the autobiographical context that inspires my research. I will then discuss my techniques and the experiments undertaken to realise the body of work and examine the object choices and their relevance to my representations of self, gender and identity. I will refer to insights gained through interviews with relevant artists and scholars in the field throughout the chapters.

By putting these artworks in dialogue, I aim to gain contemporaneous insights into the complex multiplicities of self-representation and articulate an updated narrative of intersections and divergences of women artists associated with surrealism. The conclusion will establish the significance of my research, address the research questions and articulate findings, insights and potential avenues for further research.

Chapter One: The Paradoxical Female Body

1:0 Introduction

Over the past century, the waves¹⁸ of feminist activism have resulted in profound changes in women's social roles across France, America, and Britain. The suffrage movement focused on political, economic, and educational rights, while the second wave, contested societal sexism and body politics (Wright, 2000, p.6). Feminism and Surrealism share a protracted history. This parallel facilitates an intersection between the two movements, enabling a sole female generational analysis of artists and their use of the female body, creating a centennial opportunity to augment surrealism's gynocentric discourse.

Rosemary Betterton (b.1951) suggests women artists were enabled to take possession of the female body and its autonomous representation during the complex artistic and political shifts that occurred between 1890 and 1914 (Betterton, 1996, p.3). In patriarchal cultures, women have been defined in relation to men, characterised as inferior, lacking, and other (Marks et al., 1981, p.4). In art, the female nude was a 'masculine terrain' (Betterton, 1996, p.3) where woman was represented as myth, an object of desire, or hate. Following the First World War, feminism rejected the traditional oppressive 'ideology of a female nature or female essence' and sought to reappropriate the female by championing difference, subjectivity, and individuality to validate 'undervalued female attributes' (Alcoff, 1988, p.408).

Politically, feminism has struggled to define 'woman' due to the biological and socio-cultural paradox. From a poststructuralist perspective, feminism theorised that a woman cannot 'be' at all (Kristeva, 1981, p.137). What does this mean for women artists' representations of self and identity? If, as Betterton suggests, we possess our bodies, can women then define themselves? Or, are women as Kristeva suggests, trapped in a cyclical quandary of 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it'? Kristeva

¹⁸ American author Martha Weinman Lear (b.1932) coined the term waves in a 1968 New York Times article to differentiate between political objectives within feminist activism. Lear's metaphor evokes feminism's presence, as a continuous ebb and flow.

postulates that a woman is impossible to represent, a concept beyond classification and ideologies (Kristeva in Caws et al., 1991, p.30).

When researching for her revisionist text *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* in the 1980s, Whitney Chadwick (b.1943) interviewed English surrealist Roland Penrose (1900-1984) who told her not to write a book about the women associated with the movement because 'they were not artists.' Penrose, an influential associate who collaborated with the Paris surrealists, had been married to two artists Chadwick was researching, Valentine Penrose (1898-1978) and Lee Miller. He continued, 'Of course, the women were important, but it was because they were our muses.' Chadwick was surprised by Penrose's statement, 'Perhaps I raised an eyebrow' she recalls, 'it was the 1980s, not the 1930s, and histories of women artists no longer felt radical' (Chadwick, 2017, p.9). Chadwick's recollection demonstrates the necessity of comprehending historical context and, as this chapter will show, societal attitudes are in constant flux.

This chapter chronologically charts feminism, exploring the mechanisms that enforce and sustain oppression in Western society. I will outline the emergence of historical feminism across France, America, and Britain and consider the suffrage campaign's press coverage and the representation of women's appearance as a political tool. I will examine the milieu into which the 'first generation' (Chadwick, 1985, p.11) of women artists associated with Surrealism came of age and explore some of their lived experiences that inspired their art. I will address allegations of misogyny within the Surrealist movement before exploring the emergence of second-wave feminism, focusing on several women artists of the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, I will outline the pluralities of contemporary feminisms and then provide a summary of the chapter.

1:1 Structures of Sex Based Oppression and Enforcement

The history of feminism is comprehensively documented, detailing the resistance against sex-based oppression perpetuated by a hierarchical social order and governance system known as patriarchy. Patriarchy positions men as superior and is embedded systemically within institutions that influence individual and cultural perceptions. One significant facet of the Western patriarchal social order is religion,

which often perpetuates male supremacy by portraying women negatively. For instance, in Abrahamic religions, particularly Christianity and Judaism, Eve is solely blamed for the fall of man, Delilah is characterised as treacherous, Jezebel as murderous, and Mary as a prostitute (Walters, 2005, p.9). Thus, in perpetuating inequality and sex discrimination against women, patriarchy is inherently misogynistic. Misogyny, defined as hatred, violence, and contempt towards women, is a globally pervasive phenomenon. Gerda Lerner (1920-2013) and Pat Caplan (b.1942) have examined sex-based discrimination and patriarchy, concurring with John Stuart Mill's (1806-1873) assertion that from the 'earliest twilight of human society' women have been in a state of bondage to men' (Mill, 1869), misogyny is the 'oldest prejudice' worldwide (Holland, 2006, p.7).

As noted in my literature review, revisionist discourse has fervently criticised mainstream surrealism as a misogynistic, androcentric boy's club (Allmer, 2009, p.65; Caws, M. Kuenzli, R. Raaberg, G. 1991, p.18; Chadwick, W. 1985, pp.12 & 25, Belton). If these claims are substantiated, then the principles of Surrealism and feminism are fundamentally opposed or, at the very least, deeply incompatible. A quandary raised by the 2023 exhibition *Surréalisme Au Feminine?* Ingrained misogyny has oppressed women and suppressed their sexuality for millennia. Becoming fully aware of the brutal misogyny inherent within traditional socio-cultural values and personal relationships is a profound distress that may explain the resistance to and, ridicule of feminism and feminists (Hay, 2020, p.18). This ridicule and resistance are relevant to surrealism during the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, misogyny has become a catchall term often conflated with sexism necessitating a definition of gender-based oppression.

Philosopher Marilyn Frye's (b.1941) concept of a 'myopic view' of a barrier offers profound insight into the nature of oppression. Consider the scenario of a bird immobilised by hunger, facing a single strand of wire with a pile of birdseed on the other side. The bird remains stationary, not flying over the wire to reach the food. Frye argues that one must take a step back to understand this behaviour fully. Upon doing so, one would observe another wire, connected to the first, and yet another, until eventually, a network of hundreds of wires becomes visible. These interconnected wires form a birdcage, wholly confining the bird and making its

starvation inevitable. While a single wire might pose no significant obstacle, collectively, they create an impassable barrier, akin to 'the solid wall of a dungeon,' determining the bird's fate (Frye, 1983, pp. 4-5).

If these wires symbolise categories such as education, class, religion, sex, age, race, ethnicity, disability, or equal pay, it becomes evident how the patriarchal social system privileges some while oppressing others. The privileged derive benefits from this systemic oppression, and it is perpetuated through misogyny and sexism.

Philosophy Professor Kate Manne (b.1983) provides a definition of misogyny in which she delineates patriarchal culture into two branches: misogyny and sexism. Misogyny enforces and polices governing norms and expectations, while sexism rationalises and justifies these social relations (Manne, 2018, pp. 78-105). The notion of male supremacy is internalised through the social conditioning of both sexes from birth and is perpetuated systemically. Furthermore, misogyny distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' women, exemplified by the Madonna-whore dichotomy. Sexist ideology frequently relies on stereotypes and narratives of cultural difference, which are perpetuated through confirmation bias¹⁹.

1:2 Feminism: A Brief Outline of its Emergence

The concept of feminism predates its naming,²⁰ with roots in a wealth of discourse by both male and female writers such as St. Hildegard of Bingen (c. 1098-1179), Christine de Pisan (1364-c. 1430), and Mary Ward (1585-1645), attesting to its longevity.²¹ It is the polemical texts of Mary Astell (1666-1731) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) that revealed the androcentric prejudices which gave rise to modern feminism (Walters, 2005, p. 32). Astell's 1706 treatise, *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, critiques politics, the state, and family by exposing the inequities of marriage, suggesting it was comparable to slavery. Similar to Astell's advocacy for

¹⁹ Confirmation bias is a cognitive bias that involves favouring information that confirms and upholds preexisting beliefs and supports preconceptions.

²⁰ The etymology of *feministe* is attributed to the French socialist utopian philosopher Charles Fourier (1772-1837). Fourier was influential to Breton's notions of liberation.

²¹ For early feminist discourse in medieval and early modern Europe, see Newman (1987) on St. Hildegard's contributions to spiritual authority for women. Christine de Pisan's proto-feminist text *The Book of the City of Ladies* is discussed in depth by Willard (1984). On Mary Ward's advocacy for women's education and equality within the Catholic Church, see Ranft (1998).

educational reform, Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) argued that the narrow focus of girls' education on domestic accomplishments left women incapable of independent thought or judgement. Furthermore, she vociferously criticised the superficiality of females' education, leading to an unhealthy preoccupation with appearance, that rendered women complicit in their own subjugation. Social reformers, including Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858), and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) achieved significant educational reforms. Giving rise in the 1890s, to the appearance of The New Woman²² (Macpike, 1989, p.368) who was considered a threat to society and the sexes due to her mannish attire and unconventional pursuits. The New Woman was equally valorised and ridiculed in the media, a woman's appearance became a sensationalised battleground in the public press during the suffrage campaign. Betterton suggests physical appearance became an 'index of femininity' and was mobilised ideologically by both sides²³ (Betterton, 1996, p.50). The campaign's pictorial media demonstrates how the body 'plays an active role in the workings of power' (Betterton, 2008, p.128), using contrasting representations of women as compliant, an archetype of Victorian idealized domestic virtue or as a defiant, hysterical, and sexually deviant figure (Fig. 1:1 and 1:2). Women's visibility was integral to the campaign which the motto, *deeds, not words*²⁴ attests. (Tickner, 1987, p.205)

The Daily Mirror's 1914 *suffragette face* propaganda (Fig.1:2) conflates militancy with deviance and sex, compounding the message with the captions' use of ecstasy, impotent and dishevelled phraseology. Betterton notes the connection to French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot's (1825-1893) photographs of hysteric patients, *The*

²² The New Woman a term used to describe a woman as progressive, independent, intelligent, and politically minded. Known as the *Garçonne* in France

²³ For example, the Suffragists counter-attacked the pathological stigmatisation of shrew and hysteric by presenting the 'allegorical warrior maiden' Joan of Arc. (Tickner, 1987 p.172) To redefine womanliness from the female perspective; however, claiming what were deemed masculine traits such as strength, capability, and independence facilitated an unsexing (Betterton, 1996 p.51) and insecurity in the womanliness of the suffragists.

²⁴ Deeds not Words – motto of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) For the Pankhurst's, militant activity was itself a form of representation. It involved the public embodiment of a new femininity or what Christabel called 'putting off the slave spirit'. (Tickner, 1987, p.205)

Attitudes Passionnelles (1878) that influenced the surrealist protagonists including Salvador Dali's photo collage, *The Phenomenon of Ecstasy* 1933. She conflates the closed eyes, open mouth and raised chin to the *femme fatale*, 'the betrayer and emasculator of men' (Betterton, 1996, Pp.65-68). The Suffragists counter-attacked pathological stigmatizations by presenting the 'allegorical warrior maiden' Joan of Arc, (Tickner, 1987 p.172) to redefine woman from the female perspective. However, appropriating masculine traits such as strength, capability, and independence was deemed unsexing (Betterton, 1996, p.51).

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Image link:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/suffragettes-on-file/suffragette-procession/>

Fig. 1:1. The Suffragettes' Miss Elsie Howie dressed as Joan of Arc. Source: Illustrated London News / UK National Archives (Image in the public domain)

Content removed due to copyright restrictions.

Image link:

<https://journals.openedition.org/cve/docannexe/image/8555/img-8.jpg>

Also –

Tickner, L. (1987) *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14*. London: Chatto & Windus.

P.171. Available at:

<https://archive.org/details/spectacleofwomen0000tick/page/170/mode/2up>. Date last accessed: August 2024

Fig. 1:2 *The Suffragette Face: New Type Evolved by Militancy*

Daily Mirror 25th May 1914 (Image in the public domain)

1:3 Lived Experience as Creative Inspiration

The post-war era into which the first generation of women artists came of age was one of diametrically conflicting attitudes. Nineteenth-century social expectations were deeply rooted, especially in the middle and upper classes to which most belonged. Many rebelled against their families and the conventions of their upbringing including (Chadwick, 1985, p.9; Wilcox, 2004, p.1) French artist Claude Cahun (1894-1954; née Lucy Schwob) who participated in Surrealist activities precisely because her father 'detested them' (Agret & Païni, 2023 p.120). Leonora Carrington's (1917-2011) biography recounts her rebellion from overbearing parents and familial expectations. Her lived experience became her creative inspiration in which she subverted sociocultural and art historical norms to create woman as a fluid, multiple, transgressive self-representation of otherness, which Katherine Conley suggests was possibly a life-affirming 'coping strategy' (Conley, 1996, p.56). Much of Carrington's inspiration comes from tales of Celtic mythology told to her as a child and combines sinister malevolence with alchemical, spiritual, and occult symbolism to create transformative worlds that simultaneously situate and displace the female from the confines of reality. Suzanne Duchamp's (1889-1963) experience of post World War One's authoritarian 'penal incarcerations' for seeking abortion and birth control (Sawelson-Gorse, 1998 p.xiii) appear in *Give me the Right to life*, 1919 (Fig.1:3). Duchamp was a member of the Parisian Dadaists as were many of Surrealism's protagonists, her juxtaposition of disparate objects is a technique that demonstrates the movements' interrelatedness. Duchamp's disembodied head is restricted in speech, sight and movement. The capitalisation of the *R* combined with the *G* in the title emphasises a lack of freedom, i.e., to be *given* the right. The word, *Right* appears twice in the image, its placement within the circle signifying femininity. Coming from inside the circle are increasingly large dashes, with *life* written at the end also, the butterfly or moth and leaf sprigs' reference nature. Duchamp's positioning of the scissors is explanatory; the shading in the thumbhole draws attention to the chiaroscuro's relevance. I read it as yin and yang, two separate scissor blades that must work together to obtain freedom, signifying a necessary union between the male and female.

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Image link:

<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Dada's-female-form-%3A-the-interventions-of-five-and-Hemus/e10e5c136b00ca53e7c3d693a1aac4d7e94b9de2/figure/14>

Also –

Sawelson-Gorse, N. (ed.) (2001) *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

P.90. Available at:

<https://archive.org/details/womenindadaessay0000unse/page/90/mode/1up>. Date last accessed: August 2024

Fig.1:3. Suzanne Duchamp, *Give me the Right to life*, 1919. Private Collection Ó Suzanne Duchamp / ADAGP, Paris/ ARS, New York 2017. Reprinted in Anquinet, E. (2017).

The symbolic positioning of the butterfly touching the scissors suggests the need for change within the status quo, supporting my reading as a feminist comment on women's rights. Furthermore, I had read Duchamp's clock as a body clock; although Emma Anquinet suggests the chaotic 'dichotomy' of objects references industry and war alongside the human body and nature, encapsulating the 'dangerous effects of the latter on the former' (Anquinet, 2017, p.20). However, I believe a multilingual play on words references a magnification of war's oppression on women more forcibly than the dichotomy of objects; the clock hands mark numbers that add up to nine, a pun on the German, French and British, *nein*, *non*, or no, Which, although it applies equally to Anquinet's reading; when read in context, *Give me the Right to life* is a powerful representation of the female body figuratively and literally caught in a battleground dominated on all sides by men.

Duchamp melded lived experience and politics in 1919, fifty years before the personal and political became synonymous with women's liberation. Her gender representation of autonomy in healthcare and body politics is as relevant today as it was a century ago.

1:4 A Critique of Surrealism

Revisionist discourse has characterised 'mainstream' surrealism as an androcentric boy's club (Allmer, 2009, p.65; Caws, Kuenzli, Raaberg, 1991, p.18; Chadwick, 1985, pp.12 & 25). Awareness of inequality and sexism within the movement is evident through statements from women associated with it. Meret Oppenheim, for example, commented on the 'male centredness' of the surrealists, attributing it to the inheritance of late nineteenth-century attitudes towards women, a sentiment echoed by Tanning's 'consternation' at outdated expectations (Chadwick, 1985, pp.11-12).

Rosalind Krauss was vilified by other critics for allegedly adopting a 'male gaze' and ignoring misogyny in Surrealism's portrayals of desire through fetish, pain, and anxiety (Caws et al., 1990, pp.17-25). Literary scholar Katharine Conley contests the numerous accusations of misogyny (Bate, 2003, pp.147-148; Caws, Kuenzli, Raaberg, 1991, pp.13, 17-25; Mundy, Gille, Ades, 2001, pp.171, 177; Krauss, 2000, pp.1, 17). She hypothesises that the movement was not 'unremittingly misogynist'

(Conley, 1996, p.3) however, considering personal accounts of relationships within the movement, Conley's hypothesis appears to be an oversimplified blanket statement that fails to address the double binds of oppression. For example, Breton's second marriage to Jacqueline Lamba was reportedly detrimental to her creative output. The couple had a daughter, Aube, which placed Lamba in a double bind: she could either embrace full-time motherhood, thereby becoming financially dependent on her husband, or prioritise her artistic career and retain her independence. Breton held traditional views, expecting Lamba to conform to the archetypal *Angel in the House*²⁵ role. Using Manne's definition of misogyny, Breton rationalised Lamba's oppression through his confirmation bias that supposes the biological natural destiny of women as mothers. Whilst sexist, the governing norms of the state positioned him as the head of the household and the religious expectations placed on married couples at the time were inherently misogynistic. Double binds typify women's existence in a patriarchal society, where they may feel selfish if they choose a career or financial 'leeches' if they opt to be full-time mothers (Hay, 2020, p.113).

I hypothesise that the double bind may also account for a skewed misinterpretation of two²⁶ of surrealism's most iconic works of art. Oppenheim's 1936 fur-covered teacup, saucer, and spoon, titled *Object* (Fig1:4) by the artist, it was retitled by Breton to *Le Déjeuner en fourrure*²⁷ (Breakfast in Fur) for the 1936 Exposition surréaliste d'objets at Charles Ratton's Paris Gallery. Breton's title directs a reading towards an androcentric emphasis on sex, and male desire or consumption of women. Which is supported by the era's societal conventions and expectations regarding women's sexual behaviour. Simon Baur suggests the title was a

²⁵ *The Angel in the House* published in 1854 was a narrative poem by English poet Coventry K. D. Patmore, (1823-1896) Inspired by his wife the poem idealised women as submissive, charming, virtuous and devoted mothers and caregivers.

²⁶ Oppenheim's second artwork that Breton renamed was *Spring Banquet* 1959. Flowers and food adorned a naked woman's body for a celebratory spring fertility banquet organised for an intimate dinner for three couples. (Bice, 1989, p.70) After seeing a photograph, Breton asked her to reproduce it for the Exposition internationale du Surréalisme. However, he retitled it *Festin (Cannibal Feast)*, which scholar Alyce Mahon relates to the Marquis de Sade's libertine texts without reference to Oppenheim's original piece (Lusty, 2021, Pp.124-125), again giving a skewed male narrative of sexual consumption rather than fertility, nature, the cycle of life and gender hierarchy bringing into question Oppenheim's autonomy as an artist.

²⁷ Oppenheim's fur-covered teacup, saucer, and spoon, retitled by Breton to *Le Déjeuner en fourrure*, available at: <https://womennart.com/2018/03/14/le-dejeuner-en-fourrure-by-meret-oppenheim/>
Date last accessed: 14th June. 2023

paraphrase of an Ernst painting that parodied Édouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862-1863). As such, it overpowers any artistic intention that may associate Oppenheim's *Object* as a metaphor for female roles and female primordial erotic desires as natural.

Man Ray suggests juxtaposition is central to understanding Surrealism, and 'the creative act rests', he says, 'in the coupling of [] different factors in order to produce a plastic poem' (Waldman, 1992, p.150). Similarly to Duchamp's *Give me the Right to life* the point of the poetic object or assemblage is to transcend a definitive reading precisely because of the juxtapositions and word association, thus allowing infinite possibilities. Oppenheim's infamous surrealist object 'magnifies and dramatizes' its modest actuality (Saranne, 1970, p.143). However, Breton's renaming and wordplay demonstrate the impossibility of escaping one's socio-cultural locatedness because he confines *Breakfast in Fur* to a definitive reading and categorical box that the surrealists were supposedly rebelling against.

I argue that Oppenheim's original title transcended a definitive reading and was more aligned with surrealism's liberatory aim. Moreover, Dora Maar's (1907-1997) photograph taken in 1936 shows the domestic objects deliberately positioned on a scalloped napkin. The cup and saucer, symbolising the female, are situated within the napkin's boundary and directly aligned with the napkin's creased bullseye. In contrast, the phallic spoon is positioned both within and outside the napkin's boundary. Maar's photograph offers insight to a wider reading, and I posit that the napkin is integral to the work, especially as she included the napkin when requested to recreate the *Souvenir du Déjeuner en fourrure*²⁸ in 1972.

While the work is referencing misogyny in its depiction of confined female sexuality it is not directed solely at the Surrealist movement, rather Oppenheim has it literally glued down and targeted by the conventions of society. The revisionist critique ignores Oppenheim's animalistic symbolism of primordial desire belonging equally to both sexes and integrates a feminist awareness with psychoanalytic theories of

²⁸ Oppenheim's small souvenir replica is a final rebellion. In trivializing the works conceptual depth and significance Oppenheim ensures *Souvenir du Déjeuner en fourrure*, 1972 exuded femininity through still life symbolism.

identity formation from Carl Jung's school of thought rather than Freud's. Which will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

Whilst Breton's sexism exploited an artist half his age, the revisionist critique exploits interpretation for a feminist agenda. Oppenheim's passivity in this context is recounted in an interview with Chadwick.

'After the War, I met Man Ray again. He said to me: "But you are speaking!" I asked him: "Why do you say that?" He answered: "You never said a word formerly"' ²⁹ (Chadwick 1985, p.12).

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Image link:

<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/ressources/oeuvre/c9XqBRd>

Fig.1:4. Dora Maar, 1936 photograph of Meret Oppenheim's, *Object*, 1936. Image in public domain
Courtesy of: Centre Pompidou

²⁹ Man Ray's statement is unusual as Oppenheim was his muse and lover for a short time, which questions the autonomy of the muse. I discuss this in my interview with Professor Allmer, (Appendix One)

1:5 Feminism: A Second Wave

The genesis of the second wave of feminism is rooted in the aftermath of the Second World War. During which, women were expected to work in factories as a patriotic duty, but once the war ended, they were pressured to relinquish their jobs to men, deemed more deserving (Hay, 2022, p. 13). The British government's withdrawal of childcare funding in 1939, coupled with a declining birth rate and lack of employment opportunities, coerced women into domestic roles. Magazines of the era propagated a modern version of the *Angel in the House*, luring women with domestic appliances and labour-saving devices. Throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the role of housewife was mediated as a source of pride (Pugh, 1992, 209-222).

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Image link:

<https://images.leemiller.co.uk/media/nCO9KWQbTsFDDLkchvt2jA..a?ts=-312VPWBOq-ALClwVSIZVjE5As4-ekdKQXGmFS-77k.a>

Fig.1:5. Lee Miller, *Portrait of Leslie Hurry in a Teapot*, 1943. © Lee Miller Archives

Simone de Beauvoir's central tenet in *The Second Sex* is anti-naturalist, challenging the notion of biological sex as a predetermined destiny. Her analysis of women's lives argued that being a woman involves a series of choices, not a fate ordained by God or inherent nature. Her existential philosophy urged women to recognise and reject oppressive situational myths to make autonomous choices. Through the reflective surface of a teapot (Fig. 1:5) Lee Miller epitomises Beauvoir's sentiment. She subverts the stereotypical role of housewife through her reflection which depicts her active role as the photographer.

The catalyst for the Women's Liberation Movement was the global civil unrest marked by numerous riots and protests in the spring of 1968. Building upon the foundational works of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan's (1921-2006) *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963 and Germaine Greer's (b.1939) *The Female Eunuch*, 1970 further advanced feminist consciousness. Women artists and critics began to focus intensely on themes of the body, sex, and objectification. Works such as Yoko Ono's (b.1933) *Cut Piece*³⁰ 1964, Carolee Schneemann's (1939-2019) *Interior Scroll*³¹ 1975, and Linder Sterling's (b.1954) *Buzzcocks' Orgasm Addict*, 1977 collage³² challenged sexist attitudes through central core imagery, parodies of pornographic centrefolds, and unapologetic performances. The passive-aggressive exhibitionism of much 1970s women's art embodied a duality of defiant complicity and critique of the era's blatant sexism and objectification, a duality employed by Helen Chadwick (1953-1996) who was recognised by Marina Warner as being influenced by Surrealism (Cork & Warner, 1986, p.8). Although her art journals cite Léonor Fini (1907-1996), Penny Slinger, and Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) they also reveal a deliberation and control in her creative practice that contrasts with Surrealism's emphasis on play and chance. Despite not claiming an association with surrealism, Chadwick was included in the 2017 *Dreamers Awake* exhibition. In contrast, Brigit

³⁰ Yoko Ono *Cut Piece* – Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFaYNusT9Cc>
Date last accessed: 14th June 2023

³¹ Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282> Date last accessed: 14th June 2023

³² Linder Sterling's *Buzzcocks' Orgasm Addict*, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/156037> and in full colour: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/14/linder-sterling-its-the-buzz-cock-two-fingered-salute-patriarchy>. Date last accessed: 14th June 2023

Jürgenssen (1949-2003) a self-professed Surrealist, does not appear in any of the exhibitions, despite gaining international recognition posthumously.

As noted in the introduction, there is contention between Rosemont and Chadwick regarding the criteria for designating women artists as surrealists. This contention has been a focal point of my research when reflecting on the creative practices of other women artists in comparison to my own. Rosemont's criteria for designating an artist as surrealist are stringent:

1. Considers themselves a surrealist and/or
2. Is recognised as surrealist by surrealists and accepts the designation, and
3. Takes part in surrealist activity by:
 - A. Producing work recognised by surrealists as a contribution to surrealism,
 - B. Collaborating on surrealist periodicals,
 - C. Participating in surrealist exhibitions,
 - D. Publishing under the movement's 'Surrealist Editions' imprint,
 - E. Co-signing surrealist tracts,
 - F. Taking part in surrealist group meetings, games, demonstrations, and other activities, and/or
 - G. Otherwise publicly identifying themselves with the aims, principles, and activity of the surrealist movement (Rosemont, 1998, p. xxxvii).

According to Rosemont, a surrealist artist must satisfy either or both criteria one and two and, adhere to at least one criterion from number three. However, given that the 117 artists represented in *Mirror Images*, *Angels of Anarchy*, *Dreamers Awake*, and *Surréalisme Au Féminin?* are deemed by curators' worthy of inclusion in contemporary blockbuster exhibitions about surrealism presumes that most artists fulfil number two and therefore, 3C by default³³. Rosemont's criteria emphasise participation within a collective however, for my research, I concentrated primarily on creative processes and technique comparisons cross-generationally.

³³ For accuracy, in respect of Rosemont, it should be noted that gallery curators are not necessarily surrealists, and an exhibition about surrealism is not the same as a surrealist exhibition.

Three artworks from the 1970s explore the domestic realm. Slinger's rose in the *Bride's Cake* series (Fig. 1:8) questions a woman's supposed natural position in a spiritual union as compliant, submissive, pure and impure. Her elevated stance and the camera angle could suggest disdain for marriage; however, Slinger's arms and legs form two triangles. While no definitive symbolic answer exists, inverted triangles are associated with the vulva and upright triangles with the phallic. Spiritually, triangles represent union, signifying her pose as a union between the masculine and feminine. In addition, her elevated position reveres the feminine. The single collaged rose, photographed in colour, stands out against the symbolic purity of the black-and-white image, suggesting impurity is a false label applied to women.

Slinger like Jürgenssen asserts her surrealist credentials, having been mentored by Penrose, who, according to Slinger, 'put wind in my sails from the moment I met him' (Appendix Two, p.178). Slinger's admiration for Penrose, as someone who recognised her artistic talent and 'in no way tried to hold me back', contrasts sharply with Chadwick's reminiscence of interviewing Penrose in the 1980s. Slinger dismisses claims of misogyny, stating she 'never felt any higher or lesser than, [in the] dynamic going on'; it was, she asserts, about 'shooting down the whole icons of the male-centric culture' (Appendix Two, p.177). Speaking with Slinger regarding the use of her body in the late 1960s, 70s, and 80s, she recalled her deliberate courting of the media.

'when I was younger, because I was trying to confound the whole situation, I found that women were objectified; I even deliberately put myself in men's magazines and things like that, nude, but then had articles about me backing up that work so that as I say you get more than you bargained for and I would put things that were shocking in there if I could too just to shake things up a bit' (Appendix Two, p.182).

In contrast, Chadwick and Jürgenssen explicitly portray Beauvoir's myth of domestic bliss as a burden. From a Jungian psychoanalytic perspective their self-representations employ the surrealist strategies of hybridisation and defamiliarization to reveal conscious and unconscious aspects of a housewife's psyche.

Jürgenssen's diptych, *Hausfrauen-Küchenschürze* (*Housewives' Kitchen Apron*), (Fig. 1:6) adopts a 'mugshot aesthetic' (Schor 2009) the side view captures her

stance, with the arch of her back and hands on her hips suggesting strain. Jürgenssen stares forward with downcast eyes, passively accepting her position. Her conservative clothing and 1950s hairstyle evoke dated societal expectations, offering 'some insight into the mentality which she inhabited as a child' (Schor 2009). The apron's shape suggests a bulging pregnant figure, while the open oven door revealing a phallic loaf of bread extends Jürgenssen's commentary to institutional oppression. Comparatively, the concept of woman as a consumable object is directly related to Oppenheim's *Object* and *Ma Gouvernante - My Nurse - Mein Kindermädchen*.

Chadwick's *In the Kitchen (Stove)*, 1977, (Fig. 1:7) reclaims the nude in the style of 1970s female empowerment with its defiant complicity she critiques the era's blatant sexism offering a provocative commentary on consumerism. Chadwick's stripping bare of the mechanics of domesticity is a visual pun on the invisibility of sex-based oppression.

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Image link:

<https://birgitjuergenssen.com/en/works/photos/ph1578>

Fig. 1:6. Birgit Jürgenssen, *Hausfrauen-Küchenschürze*, (*Housewives' Kitchen Apron*), 1975

© Estate Birgit Jürgenssen 2021.

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Image link:

<https://www.richardsaltoun.com/viewing-room/9-helen-chadwick-in-the-kitchen/>

Fig.1:7. Helen Chadwick, *In the Kitchen (Stove)*, 1977 Image credit Richard Saltoun Gallery



Fig.1:8. Penny Slinger, Rosebud: *Brides Cake Series*, 1973. © Penny Slinger 2023 Image reproduced with kind permission of the artist, 5th April 2021.

Debates on pornography, sexuality, and sex work in the 1980s caused a split in American and British feminist scholarship, forming two opposing factions: anti-pornographic and sex-positive. Anti-pornographic feminists argued that pornography was inherently damaging, exploited women, and perpetuated misogyny and objectification, advocating for strict censorship. Conversely, sex-positive feminists championed sexual liberation, autonomous choice, and opposed censorship as a violation of freedoms. These debates significantly influenced art criticism, categorising works and female artists as either good or bad.

Entangled in these debates were Helen Chadwick and Cindy Sherman (b.1954). Chadwick's memento-mori, *Ruin*, part of her *Of Mutability* installation (Fig. 1:9) was criticised in scathing reviews as negative women's work perpetuating the objectification of women. Kingsley and Riopelle (2012) noted, 'A painter can idealise the subject, but the photographer must deal with the reality that the camera lens shows'. Chadwick's creative practice became metaphorical and conceptual, yet even the clothed female body faced objectification. Sherman masks her body with stereotypes that critique the artificiality and superficiality of identities. However, her work, which mirrored modes of media representation, was misinterpreted by Artforum in 1981 as 'reaffirming sexist stereotypes' (MOCA, 2001, p.6) and rape culture. Despite critics associating Sherman's oeuvre with surrealism and its inclusion in the *Mirror Images* exhibition, Sherman herself emphatically denies any historical influence (Chadwick, 1998, p.25).

Kathy Battista observed that women's art prior to the 1970s was fundamentally mimetic, conventionally replicating male preoccupations (Battista, 2013, p.160). The women's liberation movement empowered female artists to utilise the female body as a site of creative inquiry and production. However, it is in the act of viewing and perception that the body becomes an 'unstable medium' (Battista, 2013, p.14) as seen in the work of Ono, Schneemann and Sterling discussed earlier, oscillating between self-exploitation and liberation. This parallels the sexualised stigmatisation of suffragists in the media and the double bind of the surrealist 'project', navigating between artistic autonomy and idealised male desire (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.26). A concept Jürgenssen grappled with in retaliation to labels and criticism of her appearance and use of make-up, (Schor, 2009 p.2) she wrote *Everyone Has His Own Point of View* (Fig. 1:9) in lipstick on her back, saying she wanted 'to show the

common prejudices against women, the role models that society ascribed to them, the ones with which I was always confronted – and I wanted to depict everyday misunderstandings' (Jürgenssen in Schor 2009 p.2).

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Image link:

[https://birgitjuergenssen.com/en/works/-
filter=.photos](https://birgitjuergenssen.com/en/works/-filter=.photos)

Fig.1:9. Brigit Jürgenssen, *Jeder hat seine eigene Ansicht / Everybody has his own point of view*, 1975. © Estate Brigit

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Image link:

<https://www.richardsaltoun.com/exhibitions/59/works/image529/>

Fig.1:10. Helen Chadwick, *Ruin* 1986. Image credit, Richard Saltoun Gallery.

Feminism's second wave gave rise to scholarship exploring language, which is fundamental to Surrealism due to the movement's literary origins. The patriarchal etymology of language often reinforces male dominance. For instance, history is derived from the Greek *historia*, yet in common English usage, it can be interpreted as his-story, implying an androcentric narrative that feminist scholarship during the 1970s and 1980s responded to by adopting, herstory. Similarly, manuscript comes from the Latin *manus* (hand) and *scriptus* (written), reflecting an era when writing was predominantly a male activity, thus marginalizing women's contributions to written culture. The term seminar and seminal as in a seminal text is Latin for *seminarium*, meaning seed plot, derived from semen, which denotes seed, symbolizing male reproductive biology. The etymology insinuates that intellectual ideas and thought are seeded by male influence. Helen Cixous (b.1937) and Luce Irigaray (B.1930) sought to subvert patriarchal linguistic structures. Cixous' 1975 essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, advocates for *écriture féminine*, a form of writing that emphasizes the female body and experience, challenging the male-dominated literary tradition. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1974 and Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* 1977 critiques the phallogentric nature of language such as penis envy³⁴. She proposes the concept of mimicry to expose and disrupt patriarchal discourse, encouraging women to reclaim their voices and experiences. Both theorists argue that language is a powerful tool for feminist subversion, capable of undermining the entrenched patriarchal norms that have historically silenced and marginalized women's voices.

Central to Irigaray's thought is her notion of twoness, she contrasts the singular protrusion of male genitals to the dual and internal aspect of female lips, which like Slinger's 1973 *Read My Lips* (Fig1:11) challenges the binary logic of patriarchal structures that privilege the male as superior. In contrast to the traditional one-dimensional, monolithic view of identity, Irigaray emphasizes sexual difference and

³⁴ Penis Envy - A Freudian concept of psychosexual development in girls. According to Freud, between the ages of three to five, girls become aware of anatomical differences between the sexes and develop envy towards boys for possessing a penis. Freud theorized that this realization leads to feelings of inferiority or a lack leading to the desire to possess a penis, which he believed influenced the formation of female identity and sexuality. Penis Envy has been widely criticized by feminist theorists for upholding patriarchal views and portraying female development as inherently deficient in comparison to male development.

the idea that women's subjectivity cannot be understood within the same framework used for men. Twoness represents a relational and fluid understanding of identity and difference, emphasizing that women's subjectivity and sexuality are not defined by a Freudian lack but by their own distinct and dynamic nature. By foregrounding twoness, Irigaray calls for a new language and symbolic order that honours women's words, feelings and experiences to hear the unique perspectives of women. Advocating for a cultural shift that acknowledges and values gender difference without it being hierarchical.

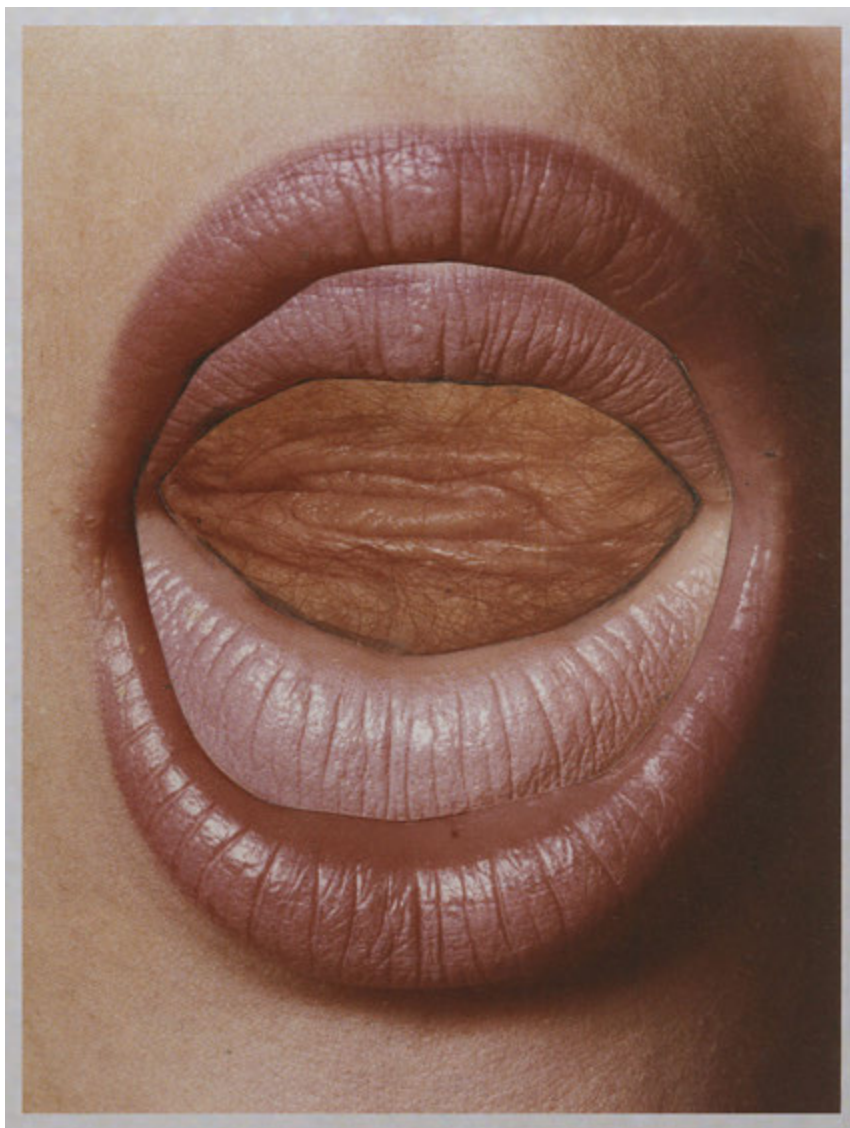


Fig.1:11. Penny Slinger, *Read My Lips*, from the *Mouthpieces* Series, 1973. ©Penny Slinger 2014. In the Roland Penrose Collection. Image reproduced with kind permission of the artist, 5th April 2021.

1:6 Contemporary Feminisms: A plurality

In comparison to historical feminism's focus on suffrage, education and property rights, contemporary feminism evolved in the 1960s and 1970s to include issues of workplace equality, body politics and sexism that diversified into a plurality and nuanced concept of feminisms, encompassing a wide range of issues including intersectionality, ecofeminism³⁵, and global feminism³⁶.

Feminist theorists like Kristeva³⁷, Irigaray³⁸, and Butler have employed psychoanalysis as a critical tool to examine the deep-seated gender biases embedded in culture and language. They reinterpreted psychoanalytic concepts to expose how societal norms shape gender identity and perpetuate women's subordination (Mitchell, 1974. Irigaray, 1977. Kristeva, 1980. Rose, 1987. Butler, 1999. Lusty, 2007. Walsh, 2015). By critically engaging with psychoanalysis, feminists have revealed the ways in which patriarchal values are internalized and, challenged the dominant narratives about female sexuality, identity, and power, thus using psychoanalysis to both critique and transform the structures of patriarchy.

Butler's critique of heteronormativity's restrictive understanding of gender, which confines it to either purely masculine or feminine categories, seeks to broaden this perception, allowing for multiplicity in self-expression and fluidity of thought. Both

³⁵ Ecofeminism - emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s and explores the connection between the exploitation of women and the environment, advocating for a more holistic and inclusive approach to both feminist and environmental issues. Gloria Orenstein, a prominent figure in ecofeminism, has highlighted the interconnectedness of ecological and feminist concerns through her works, such as her 1990 book *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Orenstein argues that the domination of women and nature are deeply linked, and that ecofeminism offers a critical framework for addressing both.

³⁶ Global feminism - emerged as a critical aspect of contemporary feminist discourse, emphasizing the need to address women's issues across different cultures and societies. Seeking to understand and combat the unique challenges faced by women worldwide, this approach promotes solidarity and shared goals while respecting diverse perspectives, cultural differences. Underscoring the movements commitment to intersectional inclusivity.

³⁷ Julia Kristeva's work explores the intersections of language, the unconscious, and the sacred, highlighting how patriarchal structures are embedded in religious narratives and linguistic frameworks. Kristeva's theories, such as abjection and the semiotic chora, provide a critical lens to understand the formation of identity and the role of maternal figures in the symbolic order.

³⁸ In *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (The sex which is not one, 1977), Luce Irigaray employs psychoanalysis as a critical tool to expose the deep-seated gender biases embedded in Western culture and language. Drawing on and subverting Freudian and Lacanian frameworks, she critiques the phallogocentric structure of discourse, arguing that psychoanalysis itself reflects and reinforces a male-dominated symbolic order. Through her concept of *mimicry*, Irigaray performs a strategic repetition of patriarchal logic to reveal its inherent exclusions, demonstrating how women's subjectivity has been historically repressed within the dominant signifying system.

Butler and Beauvoir conceptualise gender as a continuous process of choice, negation, and becoming³⁹. This expanded understanding of identity facilitates the recognition of nuance and intersects with the concept of intersectionality. Originally a legal term, intersectionality was appropriated by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how 'overlapping oppressions' (Hay, 2020, p.46), such as race, class, gender, and age, intersect. The theories of Butler and Crenshaw have become instrumental in contemporary feminist theory, addressing the essentialist 'paradox at the heart of feminism' (McCann & Kim, 2013, p.25) by acknowledging the plurality of women's lived experiences, both in their commonalities and differences. In my discussion with Patricia Allmer, she points out the complexities when examining surrealism through a feminist lens, she says,

'The women artists who work with surrealism are not necessarily feminists; they are not even necessarily women artists'. For example, Dorothea Tanning was very, very angry about my exhibition, really angry about it because she doesn't see herself as a woman artist nor does she see herself very much as a surrealist artist, so she wanted to be detached from that or look at Toyen she refers to herself in the plural, Claude Cahun who identifies with androgyne, so it's interesting. (Appendix One, p.164)

Oppenheim suggested the artist was androgynous, Tanning asserted that art and poetry have no sex along with many other first-generation surrealists such as Toyen, and Fini, they consistently opposed gender segregation and remained sceptical of feminist interventions (Agret & Païni, 2023, p.16). According to Rosemont's classification, Claude Cahun is undoubtedly a surrealist. However, Allmer argues that including her in discussions and exhibitions focusing on 'women artists' is more complex, (Appendix One, p.164) reflecting Wilcox's misinterpretation of Chadwick's caution against viewing her work solely through the lens of post-modern feminism.

Gauthier noted that 'female homosexuality was not rejected in surrealism' (Wilcox, 2004, p.211; Gauthier, 1971, p.242). From a biological standpoint, I contend that exclusion based on gender identity and sexual proclivity is regressive. Hierarchies rooted in sexuality or gender undermine the psyche's masculine and feminine energy and intellectual capacity. Relegating individuals to the status of 'other' through

³⁹ Butler terms this life-long process as performativity (Butler, 1990).

gender identity is as anti-democratic and authoritarian as marginalisation due to biological sex. Contemporary feminist thinking has seen a second split due to differing perspectives on gender ideology. This division primarily revolves around the acceptance and understanding of gender as a social construct versus a biological determinant. Some feminists advocate for a more inclusive approach, embracing transgender rights and non-binary identities, arguing that gender is fluid and should not be confined to traditional binary notions. Conversely, others, often labelled as gender-critical feminists, maintain that biological sex is a crucial factor in feminist analysis and, that conflating sex with gender undermines women's rights and protections. This ideological split has led to intense debates and conflicts within the feminist movement, reflecting broader societal discussions about identity, rights, and inclusion. In my interview with Slinger she advocates for the liberation of both men and women, she said:

‘I think it is a blessing to be a woman at this time; this is the time for the feminine coming into her strength, power, and influence. You just have to hope that the work being put in is going to mean something. If someone really asks, I always say that I have been involved in the liberation of the feminine and that, I claim, because feminists can still be construed in certain ways’ (Appendix Two, Pp.5-6).

Hollowell acknowledges the privilege feminist activism has afforded her as an artist but believes that viewers' perspectives can interpret the work through their personal experiences and intuitions. She stated:

‘My work is my work; whether it's feminist or not is up to the viewer. An achievement of the feminist movement itself is that I do not have to be labelled a feminist artist. The feminist movement has influenced my work, and getting the opportunity to show my work at all is a result of those efforts. To me, it means equality of all people. The fact that I'm able to make work about my sexuality is a direct effect of first and second-wave feminism. Because of the advancements of feminism, I feel very unaffected by a male-dominated art world. That doesn't mean that world hasn't tried to change my work, but it doesn't affect what I put out’ (Appendix Three, p.192).

1:7 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how the representation of the female body became a contested site in the public press, imbued with symbolic meaning and metaphorical significance. Surrealism's lens provided women artists with liberatory techniques to question systemic oppressions and societal expectations. For the first generation of women artists, the freedoms won by first-wave feminism and the inward gaze of Surrealism enabled them to explore their lived experience as a site of creative enquiry, resulting in an unprecedented level of artistic autonomy.

It is undeniable that many historical women artists were acutely aware of the multiplicity of double standards within Surrealism, both professionally and personally. Their collective feminist awareness and the interplay of the personal and political are evidenced in their representations of self, gender, and identity. Feminist scholarship critically examined the phallocentrism of language, viewing it as a central issue in the liberatory aim of feminism, while also utilising this critique to advance its own agenda of gender equality and empowerment by overlooking nuances.

Furthermore, this chapter has elucidated the broader empowerment of women artists to use the female body as a site of creation, creative enquiry, and protest during the Women's Liberation era. However, the second wave of feminism, with its focus on sexism and body politics, along with technological advancements in photography, created a paradoxical representation of the female body. Self-representations began to precariously oscillate between emancipatory expressions and objectified self-exploitation.

In summary, the chapter has shown that the interplay between surrealism and feminist thought provided women artists with tools to challenge and redefine their roles and representations within art and society. Aware, and in despite of the challenges, these artists paved the way for greater autonomy and creative freedoms. This complexity was exacerbated by negative critiques and the internal split within feminism into two opposing factions: sex-positive and anti-pornographic. Moreover, Chapter three will explore how recent philosophical theories and the advent of identity politics are engendering further division in feminist thinking, creating contention between views of gender identity as either inclusive or oppressive.

The interrelated philosophical frameworks of New Materialism⁴⁰, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO)⁴¹, and Posthumanism⁴² move beyond anthropocentric and binary frameworks of identity by decentring the human subject and foregrounding the agency of non-human objects, materialities, and environments. Such shifts resonate deeply with the Surrealist legacy of dissolving boundaries between humans and objects, as well as between reality and fantasy.

⁴⁰ New Materialism foregrounds the vibrancy and agency of matter itself, destabilising the hierarchy that places humans above the material world. This resonates with contemporary feminist surrealist practices, which engage with fluid identities and mutable bodies, challenging Cartesian dualisms of mind/body, subject/object, and male/female. The New Materialist emphasis on the entanglement of bodies, objects, and environments offers a framework for critiquing the objectification of women without reinscribing a binary opposition between subject and object.

⁴¹ Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology challenges the human-centric worldview by proposing that objects exist independently of human perception and interpretation. Surrealist art, particularly the work of female surrealists, already engaged with this decentring of human subjectivity by granting agency and symbolic significance to everyday objects.

⁴² Posthumanism further disrupts human-centric frameworks by interrogating the boundaries of the human body and subjectivity. In feminist self-representation, this involves rejecting the idea of a stable, autonomous self in favour of fluid, fragmented, and distributed identities. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of digital media and hyper-individualism, where the self is continually mediated and reconstructed through images and algorithms.

Chapter Two: The Metaphorical Female Body

2:0 Introduction

Surrealism, akin to feminism, emerged from a desire for emancipation. Initially a literary movement, Surrealism combined poetry with psychoanalysis to liberate human consciousness from the bourgeois mentality rooted in Enlightenment rationalism and perpetuated by patriarchal natalist gender politics and authoritarian Catholicism in post-World War I France (Susik, 2021, pp. 29, 80; Spiteri & LaCoss, 2003, p. 26; Sawelson-Gorse, 1998). The influence of Sigmund Freud's identification of sexual instincts as central to human development, both 'individually and within civilisation' (Mundy et al., 2001, p. 11) combined with Marxist egalitarianism, situates gender and identity at the core of Surrealism's liberatory aim.

Artistic movements do not arise in isolation; understanding the socio-cultural climate that sparked a revolution in artistic thought is essential. However, it is crucial to appreciate Surrealism's evolutionary nature, which critics often overlook (Lusty, 2021, p. 3). Since its inception, the movement has courted controversy and contentious critique. Its discourse, both internal and external, is contradictory primarily because it 'evolved as it grew', (Rosemont, 1998, p. xlvii; Gascoyne, 1970, p. 57) experimentally navigating a path through politics, optimistic idealism, and nihilistic revolt (Benjamin, 1997, p. 234). Furthermore, Surrealism's unique encompassing of media and modes of expression contributes to its fragmentary discourse, leading to contradictions that, in art critic Lucy Lippard's words, render Surrealism 'confusing, unreasonable, and often bewilderingly poetic' (Lippard, 1970, p. 1). This elusiveness echoes the title of a text by Surrealism's leading founder, André Breton (1896-1966), describing it as elusive as a poisson soluble [a soluble fish].

This chapter will establish *Surréalisme*'s⁴³ emergence, historical context, and political and theoretical influences. I will discuss surrealist techniques and the female body as

⁴³ Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) accredited with coining the word *Surréalisme* as a neologism to identify an imagining that goes beyond reality. Poet, playwright, and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire⁴³ (1880-1918) was a highly influential figure in Montparnasse, his modern art Manifesto of 1917, *L'esprit nouveau et les poètes*, called for pure invention and total surrender to inspiration. His texts portray a fascination with novelty, invention, and the imagination, most notably his 1903 play *Les mamelles de Tiresias: Drame surréaliste* (The Breasts of Tiresias), which possibly drew parallels from the phenomena of the *Garçonne* or New Woman's appearance in the late nineteenth century, due to its gender-bending

a tool of creative expression by historical male and female artists'. I will comparatively analyse the visual language of historical and contemporary women artists associated with Surrealism and the melding of Surrealism with feminist political awareness, including body positivity. I will conclude the chapter by addressing the postmodern consequence of sexual objectification before providing a summary of the chapter.

2:1 Historical Context

The Montparnasse artistic quarter in Paris was an eclectic melting pot of bohemians, thriving on a combination of disillusionment and modernist optimism after the First World War. Surrealism developed gradually within this milieu, where many of its protagonists were initially members of the Dada movement. André Breton, generally considered Surrealism's primary driving force, called the movement's gestation period, 1919-1924, the 'intuitive phase'. In Surrealism's early discourse the movement's key figures were all male and had been members of Dada either in Paris, America, or Germany.

Dada was a nihilistic art movement rebelling against bourgeois values and rationality. Rejecting traditional art forms and academic rules, Dadaists mocked conventions like mimetic representation and canonical hierarchy. Their exhibitions became chaotic spectacles, attracting audiences more for the disorder than the art. Clifford Browder argues that Breton distanced himself from Dada due to its 'repetitious foolery,' driven by his idealism and pursuit of enlightenment over defeatism (Browder, 1967, p. 14).

Breton's medical training is fundamental in the genesis of Surrealism. He later 'insisted on the fact' that Surrealism cannot be understood historically 'without reference to the war' (Becker, Breton, 1945). His scientific mind was on a 'restorative mission' (Hopkins, 2004, p. ii. Ades, 1974, p. 29) that organised and restructured reactionary anti-art into a tool of elucidation, aiming to liberate human consciousness from bourgeois mentality and French authoritarian religious doctrine.

satire exploring sexual roles and power structures. Apollinaire believed that in comparison to modern technological advances, art was stuck in a cycle of mimetic expression, constantly regurgitating the same ideas of their predecessors that had little relevance to their own lives.

Clifford Browder identifies the necessity to distance Surrealism from Dada's 'self-defeating logic' (Lusty, 2021, p. 4) and nihilistic reputation as a strategy. Suggesting the movement's affiliation with Karl Marx (1818-1883) and communism legitimised Surrealism through a revolutionary political cause, while Freud's progressive theories of psychoanalysis validated the movement as modern, intellectual, and revolutionary. Surrealism's influence and affiliation with these two diametrically opposed systems of nineteenth-century thought may seem incompatible; however, at the core of Marx and Freud's theories is a joint aim; to alleviate the human condition. The principles causality and liberation are fundamental to Surrealism.

Psychoanalysis, developed by Freud in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, situated key concepts such as the unconscious mind, repression, and the significance of dreams, in the reshaping our understanding of human behaviour, culture, and art. Freud's influence extended beyond psychology, with figures such as Carl Jung⁴⁴ expanding on archetypes and the collective unconscious, and Jacques Lacan highlighting the central role of language in shaping identity and the unconscious.

Lacan's notion of the symbolic order, introduced through language and social structures during early childhood, in what he termed the mirror stage⁴⁵ shapes how individuals perceive reality and form relationships. He argued that language mediates desire, identity, and the unconscious, influencing behaviour and cultural expression. Lacan's focus on language and its structures provided a bridge to 1970s

⁴⁴ The concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious are central to Carl Jung's analytical psychology. Archetypes are universal, primordial symbols and motifs embedded within the collective unconscious, which is a part of the unconscious mind shared by all human beings. According to Jung, the collective unconscious consists of inherited psychic structures and patterns that influence human behaviours and experiences. Archetypes manifest in various forms, such as characters, themes, and symbols, recurring across different cultures and historical periods. Key archetypes identified by Jung include the Self, the Shadow, the Anima/Animus, and the Persona. These archetypal images and motifs are expressed through dreams, myths, art, and religious rituals, reflecting the shared human experience and inherent psychological tendencies. Jung's theory suggests that engaging with these archetypes can facilitate personal growth, self-awareness, and the integration of the unconscious with the conscious mind.

⁴⁵ Lacan's Mirror Stage occurs between 6 and 18 months of age when an infant first recognizes their reflection in a mirror. It is a formative experience where the infant identifies with the image of themselves, leading to the establishment of the "I" or the ego. This moment of identification involves an internalisation of an external image, which becomes a cornerstone of the individual's self-identity. Lacan's theory suggests that this process introduces a fundamental misrecognition or *méconnaissance* as the child's self-image is always an idealized and ultimately unattainable representation. Thus, the mirror stage sets up a lifelong tension between the ego's self-perception and reality, underscoring the fragmented and constructed nature of human identity. (Walsh, 2013, P.52)

feminist theory. Julia Kristeva introduced her theories on the semiotic and the symbolic, blending psychoanalysis, linguistics, and feminist theory to refer to pre-linguistic, bodily rhythms experienced between an infant and the mother. Kristeva maintained that the semiotic, which coexists with Lacan's symbolic order, disrupts established norms in art and literature, demonstrating how creativity can challenge and transform them.

Both a political movement and social theory, Marxism provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how society is shaped and oppressed through economic structures and class relations. Developed in the 19th century by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism's philosophical foundation combines dialectics and materialism. Dialectical thinking recognizes that all phenomena are interconnected and constantly in motion, driven by the conflict between opposing forces. Materialism is the belief that the material conditions of life, that is, economic and social conditions, shape human consciousness and societal structures. Therefore, by examining social processes through the lens of dialectical materialism, Marxism aims to uncover the underlying dynamics of power and exploitation, with the goal of achieving a classless, equitable society.

Marxism revealed systemic causes of oppression, while Freud sought to uncover the individualistic processes of unconscious repression. Their combined influence constituted a two-pronged attack on the 'partitioning of lived experience' (Spiteri & LaCross, 2003, p.5). Surrealism's synthesis of cause and liberation through the unconscious and conscious aspects of self, was an aim to transcend the limitations imposed by traditional and societal structures and personal repression, offering a holistic pathway to creative and psychological freedom.

Poetry is a form of expression characterised by its ability to evoke emotional response, vivid imagery, and complex ideas, imaginatively condensed through symbolic and metaphorical wordplay. Surrealism's fusion of the conscious and unconscious, facilitated by the integration of poetry and psychoanalysis, enabled a profound exploration of the human psyche and fostered diverse creative expression. René Passeron described this as its 'greatest originality' (Passeron, 2001, p.9).

'One could dispel alienation by restlessly exposing, disassembling, and rebuilding morality, knowledge, aspiration and desire; surrealist politics sought

to maximise the disruptive forces unleashed by the quest to recover the lost potential of human experience, encouraging a heightened awareness of how the centuries of repressive ideology had whittled away at absolute human liberty' (Spiteri & LaCross, 2003, p.5-6).

Surrealism shares with psychoanalysis a capacity to explore repressed emotions, challenge norms, and expose the influence of unseen power structures. Through its symbols and narratives, art opens space for confronting personal and collective realities. This process invites a deeper engagement, where art becomes a means of navigating the complexities of self and society.

Innate elements within Marx's and Freud's theories have engendered contradictions in surrealist discourse, often utilised by critics to disparage the movement. For instance, Marx acknowledged the oppressive nature of the patriarchal family unit however, as an economist, his notion of equality for women was primarily financial. Marxism's proposal to alleviate women's caregiving responsibilities aimed purely to enable women to join the collective workforce. A larger workforce would allow for a reduction in working hours and, with equal pay, the traditional patriarchal nuclear family would dissolve. Under Marxism, equality for women would eliminate the necessity of financial support in relationships, thus granting women an equal choice in personal relationships, referred to as free love. Free love does not imply sexual promiscuity but rather mutual respect, desire, and an unbiased parity in caregiving responsibilities. However, gender parity within historical Surrealism remains problematic and contentious. Lee Miller's biography recounts the 'chagrin and bewilderment' of male surrealists when she suggested the surrealist notion of free love was hypocritical (Conley, 1996, p.21; Penrose, 1985, p.23).

Breton found writing a definition of Surrealism in the movement's First Manifesto 'frustrating' (Nadeau, 1989, p.22) despite five years of experimental activity between 1919 and 1924. Although he reworked the definition as the movement evolved, the initial definition, cited below, took precedence in the media as a convenient referent. Breton employs a dictionary-style definition, stating:

Surrealism, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any

control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (Breton, 1972 [1924], p.26).

Encyclopaedia. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all, all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life (Breton, 1972 [1924], p.26).

Maurice Nadeau suggests Breton's frustration might have stemmed from juggling dichotomous conflicts such as 'passive automatism and active revolution, optimistic faith in man's future and pessimistic doubt over the disasters of civilization' (Nadeau, 1989, p. 22). The discourse on Surrealism is replete with contradictions, including those in Breton's own writings. Critics, however, often fail to recognise the privileged biases of their own context, influenced by the distance of time. This oversight neglects the turbulent milieu of conflicting attitudes, the experimental nature of Surrealism as a collective and individual endeavour and the uncertainty faced by a young generation in the aftermath of a devastating war.

The prefix "sur" means over, above, beyond, in addition to, or super, and in the context of Surrealism, it is generally associated with something beyond reality. However, this notion of being beyond reality led to Surrealism's contemporaneous mutation into the surreal, becoming a 'mere adjective and vague psychologism' (Bate, 2004, p. 254; Rosemont, 1998, p. xxxvi) thereby causing further confusion. This prompted Penelope Rosemont to emphatically state, in order to clarify the confusion, that Surrealism 'does not signify unreality', nor does it imply any denial or refusal of reality (Rosemont, 1998, p. xxxiii).

2:2 Surrealism's Techniques and Strategies

Freud's psychoanalysis employed dream analysis and free association to unearth hidden meanings, desires, and fears from the seemingly nonsensical ramblings of mentally ill patients, whom Breton found to be 'honest to a fault' (Breton, [1924]

1972, pp. 4-5). The Surrealists appropriated these techniques to unlock the creative potential of the unconscious, which they deemed innocent and free from repression. The convergence of the conscious and unconscious, art and psychoanalysis, yields a rich, evocative visual language that intertwines with a profound exploration of the psyche, revealing the interplay between the conscious and the mysterious realms of human experience. This creates a space for cathartic self-discovery and potential liberation.

To relinquish conscious control and emulate the seemingly insane babble (Breton, 1972, [1924] p. 23), the Surrealists experimented with trance, hypnosis, hashish, and collaboration (Bate, 2003, p. 65). The Surrealists aimed to capture chance, spontaneity, and uncensored thought, generating techniques such as automatic writing⁴⁶ and the exquisite corpse⁴⁷. Surrealism employed dreamlike imagery, symbolism, and metaphors as bridges between the explicit and the veiled, revealing deeper psychology for 'decoding of the psycho-sexual instinct' (Mundy et al., 2001, p. 10) which are central to Freud's theories of human development. However, a gendered artistic divide becomes apparent when desire is deemed 'the sole motivating principle' of life and the 'authentic voice of the inner self' (Mundy et al., 2001, p. 10). This generated a propensity for male Surrealists to project desires, often reinforcing existing stereotypes that feminist revisionism criticised as misogynistic, compared to female Surrealists who expanded and redefined the traditional stereotypes.

Strategies brought about by chance and play, such as collage, mirroring, distortion, displacement, and juxtapositions of objects, often infused with esoteric eroticism (Fort & Arcq, 2012, p. 71) were utilised to achieve free associations, aiming to manipulate the viewers into recognising the reality in fantasy by revealing the hidden depths of humankind and civilisation. Doubling, humour and linguistic puns are strategies employed visually and linguistically throughout surrealism and a technique I employ in my research, as detailed in chapter three. Photography's ability to create

⁴⁶ Automatic Writing – began in 1919 by Breton and Soupplant - it is a literary experiment to write at speed without conscious thought, stopping or reading to produce text that transforms the verbal into the visual with impossible meanings, contradictory elements and Dionysian absurdities.

⁴⁷ Exquisite Corpse – A collaborative drawing game where each participant draws and then folds over the paper leaving only connecting marks visible for the next participant. The drawing is revealed in its entirety when unfolded.

a 'duplicate world of reality' was, according to Susan Sontag, where Surrealism was most triumphant (Sontag, 1977, pp. 51-52). This was exemplified by Man Ray, who extended photography into surrealistic 'realms of chance, transformation, and metamorphosis' (R. Krauss & J. Livingstone, 1985, p. 160). Within photographic practice, numerous strategies produce a surrealistic image, raising questions regarding location and whether it is the actual photograph, or the object being photographed that is surrealistic. David Bate differentiates three categories or 'types of signifying relations': the mimetic, the prophotographic, and the enigmatic (Bate, 2004, p. 29).

A mimetic photograph is a conventional or straight photograph where the signified is stable, producing a code of the real. The prophotographic is also a straight photograph, but the object photographed already possesses surreality and is not an in-camera or post-production effect. For example, in Ray's *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* 1920 (Fig. 2:1) the mimetic function, Bate explains, is not 'challenged or disturbed, merely frustrated' by the cloth, leaving us only able to guess at what lies beneath (Bate, 2004, Pp. 29-30). The surreality is attributed to the enigma or mystery of the thing signified, not to the photograph itself. The enigmatic photograph is where the photograph itself is manipulated to create a contradiction in the signified and is the most typical type of photograph in Surrealism. The artist can utilise numerous techniques to manipulate an image, such as angle, lighting, double exposure, and scale; therefore, surrealistic photography can combine all three categories. Man Ray's *Élevage de poussière (Dust Breeding)* 1920 (Fig. 2:2) is an example of an enigmatic image. The angle of photographing, close-cropped framing, scale manipulation, and lighting obscure the signified, and therefore, the photograph itself controls perception. This was compounded by the caption, *Vue Prise En Aéroplane*, which suggested, when it appeared in the Surrealist publication *Littérature*⁴⁸ in 1921, that the image was an aerial view.

⁴⁸ Man Ray & Marcel Duchamp, *Élevage de poussière (Dust Breeding)* – Full caption: (Void le domaine de Rose Selavy. Vue prise en aeroplane igzi. Comme il est aride. Comme il est fertile. Comme il est joyeux. Comme il est triste!) Void the domain of Rose Selavy. View taken from an Igzi aeroplane. How dry it is. How fertile it is. How joyful he is. How sad he is! *Litterature* 1921.

Content removed due to copyright restrictions.

Image link:

<https://manray-photo.com/gb/objects/155-the-enigma-of-isidore-ducasse.html>

Fig. 2:1. Man Ray, *L'Enigme d'Isidore Ducasse*, 1920. © Man Ray Trust

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Image link:

<http://www.manraytrust.com/>

Fig. 2:2. Man Ray & Marcel Duchamp, *Élevage de poussière*. (*Dust Breeding*)
1920 © Man Ray Trust

2:3 Gender and Identity as Core Concepts.

Surrealism represents a heightened awareness of intersecting factors that collectively, socio-culturally, and individually shape reality. Thus, surrealism is infinite and immeasurable, influenced by individual lived experiences and perspectives. My work fits within this sensibility, as it emerges from a deeply personal yet interconnected understanding of reality, one shaped by unconscious processes, identity, and external influences. By prioritising broad symbolic or aesthetic markers of surrealism rather than its deeply introspective and fluid nature, Bate's categorisations risk reducing the movement to a set of stylistic conventions, rather than recognising its inherent responsiveness to lived experience. My work, much like surrealism itself, resists rigid categorisation, embracing the unpredictable interplay between the conscious and unconscious, the personal and the collective. Joyce Mansour (1928-1986) stated, 'It is not the technique of painting that is surrealist, but rather the painter and the painter's vision of life' (Rosemont, 1998, p. xxxiii). This view is supported by Slinger (Appendix Two, p.178) and echoed by Oppenheim, who remarked, 'It is a part of my nature which is surreal or surrealist' (Oppenheim in Caws et al., 1991, p. 68). As a state of mind, surrealism should, therefore, portray and advocate egalitarianism, reflecting the diverse beliefs, lived experiences, and perspectives of its artists. However, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) argues that the identity and intent of the author should not dictate interpretation, asserting that meaning is constructed by the reader rather, than imposed by the creator (Barthes, 1977). While this allows for multiple interpretations and liberates a work from a single authoritative meaning, I argue that it is problematic within surrealism, leading to misinterpretations or the overlooking of visual artists' nuances and gendered subjectivity. Julia Kristeva challenges Barthes by highlighting the role of the semiotic, the unconscious, bodily dimension of language, which suggests that artistic intent, even when unconscious, remains embedded in the work (Kristeva, 1980). Likewise, Luce Irigaray critiques the *Death of the Author* as reinforcing a male-centred perspective, ignoring how gendered language shapes meaning (Irigaray, 1974). When interpretations detach surrealist art from its psychological and socio-political contexts, they risk distorting its liberatory intent. While Barthes' approach does not negate surrealism's rebellious spirit, meaningful interpretation must engage with both the artist's context and the unconscious structures shaping their work. Whilst

subjectivity is a key principle of surrealism, one issue hindering my ability to align my work with Surrealism was its seemingly rigid categorisation of a hierarchical gendered subjectivity articulated in the discourse.

The androcentric narrative valued male subjectivity viewing women through a fetishised, objectified, or mythical lens. Feminist discourse suggests that the surrealist muse archetypes of *Melusine* and the *Femme Enfant*, described as 'the ideal conception of the surrealist woman' (Rosemont, 1970, p.15) contradict gender parity and, more than any other 'single factor,' excluded women artists from the 'theoretical aspects of surrealism and artistic maturity' (Chadwick, 1985, pp.19, 74). The *femme enfant*, or woman-child, is classified as young, naive, pure, and innocent, whose natural celestial essence guides man to salvation (Caws et al., 1991, p.19; Chadwick, 1998, p.157). This interpretation has been used by androcentric critics, as Orenstein notes, to marginalise women artists (Orenstein, 1975, p.32). Feminist revisionism has also employed this view to argue that Surrealism is male-centric and misogynistic. However, situating Breton's description of childhood within the historical and socio-cultural context of Surrealism reveals an oversimplified notion of the *femme enfant* that aligns with the feminist agenda discussed in chapter one.

'Under the pretence of civilisation and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices' (Breton, 1972 [1924], p.10).

Breton's statement alludes to a fundamental divergence between feminine and masculine qualities or energy: as boys grow into manhood, they conform to rationality, a 'pretence of civilisation and progress', abandoning qualities such as innocence, 'fancy' and 'superstition', traits that womanhood, in Breton's view, is deemed to preserve. He uses the collective 'we' to position childhood as 'closest to one's 'real life' (Breton, 1972 [1924], p.40). However, Breton then shifts to a supposed uniquely male condition of being unable to return to the carefree world of childhood, 'where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective, risk-free possession of oneself' (Breton, 1972 [1924], p.40). War, reason, and rationality have robbed men of this state, stripping them of their childhood 'virginity of

mind', so that they can no longer be 'nourished by fairy tales' (Breton, 1972 [1924], p.16). Breton's poetic invocation of 'virginity of mind', is not a derogatory statement towards women's intellect or mentality as childlike; rather, it is a passionate expression of grief over the loss of male innocence and carefree spontaneity. The horrors of war and masculine conformity to bourgeois rationalism had severed men of their childhood purity and vitality that Breton deeply valued. In this light, the *femme enfant* should not be perceived as an idealization of female sexual purity or passivity, but rather as an embodiment of the New Woman with her spirited, free-thinking, and self-possessed optimism. However, this is not to say that the men of this era, shaped by the trauma of battlefield injuries, shell shock, and armed combat did not also perceive women's lived experiences through a lens of naivete, especially younger first-generation women artists such as Carrington and Oppenheim. The shift in Surrealism's focus from dream interpretation to desire fuelled the notion of the *femme enfant* as a misogynistic construction. This was an era of shifting gender expectations, and it is unrealistic to assume the ingrained structures of upbringing could be easily or readily discarded (see Chapter One's discussion of Breton's marriage to Lamba). However, it is telling that in a 1984 interview with Robert Belton, Oppenheim took offence to his inference that her youth and impressionability 'alienated' her from the male Surrealists. 'I was not a *femme enfant* if that is what you mean,' she retorts, 'I was sexually active at seventeen' (Oppenheim in Caws et al., 1991, p.67). Oppenheim's reference to being sexually active aligns with a 1980s sex positive discourse that ultimately reinforces the gynocentric reframing of the *femme enfant's* as a purley misogynistic trope. This demonstrates how historical and political context can alter perception, undermining the complexity of Breton's original concept. Thus, I suggest that the *femme enfant* was not merely a patriarchal fantasy aimed at infantilising women but also stemmed from a subconscious idealisation, perhaps even a desire, for feminine power, a dynamic that could be understood as *vulva envy*,⁴⁹ a reversal of Freud's *penis envy*.

⁴⁹ The concept of *vulva envy* is introduced here as a theoretical inversion of Freud's *penis envy*, reframing Surrealist masculinity as shaped by a subconscious longing for the perceived qualities associated with the *femme enfant*. Drawing from affect theory, *vulva envy* can also be understood as an emotional and embodied response to the alienation of men from these affective states, particularly in the wake of war and the demands of rational masculinity. While this thesis provides an initial exploration, a more detailed examination of *vulva envy* and its implications for Surrealist gender dynamics will be developed in future research.

2:4 The Gender Divide

Patriarchal oppression affects both men and women; however, its impact varies by gender, particularly regarding caregiving roles and responsibilities. For centuries, women have been socialised from birth to be fluid in existence, adapting and performing to meet others' needs and desires as well as their own. This is exemplified by the phrase, 'a whore in the bedroom and a goddess in the kitchen'⁵⁰. Male socialisation was equally rigid, with a lack of overt masculinity deemed shameful, despite France being more progressive than America regarding same-sex relationships before the First World War.

The gender divide in Surrealism stems from the self-referential creative process rooted in Freudian theory. The second phase of Surrealism, post-1925, saw Freud's psycho-sexual notion of desire permeate the movement. Humans were seen as 'agents for desires' continually seeking an 'object' (Mundy et al., 2001, p.13). Breton's philosophical investigation of desire was not ubiquitous within the movement, but his explorations of concepts such as chance encounters, erotic objects, ideal love, and the marvellous encouraged self-analysis and autobiographical inspiration. However, not all Surrealists adhered to Breton's idealised vision of desire as a quasi-mystical and transformative force. Georges Bataille challenged his perspective, portraying desire as raw, transgressive, and bound to the realms of excess, violence, and the grotesque rather than poetic revelation. Hans Bellmer and Pierre Molinier explored eroticism through fetishism, fragmentation, and perversion, contradicting Breton's notion of desire as a path to spiritual or psychological enlightenment. Female Surrealists such as Leonora Carrington and Claude Cahun rejected Breton's tendency to frame women as passive muses, instead reclaiming desire as a means of self-transformation and subversion of traditional gender roles. These divergent approaches illustrate that

⁵⁰ While there isn't a specific origin for this exact phrase, it encapsulates the dichotomy of expectations placed on women, which has been a subject of critique in feminist literature and discourse. It can be traced back to older adages and cultural expectations that women should be both sexually available and enticing in private, while also being domestically skilled and nurturing in public or family settings. These dual expectations have been perpetuated by various cultural narratives over time, including traditional views on gender roles.

while Breton shaped Surrealism's discourse on desire, the movement encompassed a spectrum of perspectives that extended beyond his romanticised and poetic framework. it is the male Surrealists' 'refashioning' and manipulation of the female body to evoke erotic obsession and Freud's notion of the fetish that prompted backlash from feminist critics. Mundy suggests, 'they left reason and rationality behind in an exploration of desire' in the pursuit of 'uncensored' (Mundy et al., 2001, p.20) representations of human nature.

Fort and Arcq suggest that the exploration of the unconscious differed significantly between male and female Surrealists, resulting in a lack of individual, personal experience in male artwork in favour of outward expressions of desire, compared to the self-referential 'traumas and nightmares' (Fort & Arcq, 2012, p.27) of women artists. However, suggesting a lack of personal experience, feelings, or identity in male Surrealist art ignores the fundamental liberatory endeavour of Surrealism. Historical male Surrealism is prolific in representing self-referential anxieties, trauma, nightmares, feelings, and experiences. If it were not, feminist critics could not have criticised it so fervently as misogynistic. Additionally, esoteric content in male self-referential artwork has often been overlooked or misinterpreted, rather than read through the biographical narrative typically applied to women artists associated with Surrealism.

An example of this is the juxtaposition of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table conjured in Comte de Lautréamont's (pseudonym of Isidore Ducasse) narrative poem *Chants de Maldoror* (1868-1869). Celebrated for its early modernist prose, *Maldoror* flagrantly dismisses poetry's fundamental principles. Man Ray's *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* has been critiqued as a commentary against the art establishment; the object is a sewing machine concealed beneath an army blanket securely lashed with rope, referencing Ducasse's simile. However, as Rosemont notes, Surrealists have a 'fondness for double meanings' (Rosemont, 1970, p.15) and I believe the work to be a self-representation, which Milly Heyd's essay supports (Baigell & Heyd, 2001, pp.115-141). Heyd comments on the self-referential sources in Man Ray's photograph and other works such as *Cadeau* (1921) a flat iron with a row of tacks glued onto the plate. She furthers understanding of Man Ray's 'anthropomorphic' (2001, p.115) foreboding assemblage by relating it

to his Jewish heritage, immigrant sweatshop experience, and family. His mother was allegedly 'interfering and forceful, sharp-tongued, strict, overbearing, and theatrical in nature' (Baldwin, 2001, pp.4-5). Baldwin supports Heyd's reading by suggesting that Ducasse's struggle for freedom from a repressive background would have resonated with Man Ray (Baldwin, 2001, p.38).

If the same biographical exploration had been applied to Man Ray's art as to the women artists associated with Surrealism, the divergence between male and female Surrealism would appear less assured. It is necessary to be aware that Ducasse's *Maldoror* relates to homoerotic pederasty and is referenced by Man Ray in several works, furthermore, there are several curious statements alluding to his sexual proclivity. He recounts being asked 'point-blank' if he was homosexual, as there were 'lots of rumours about me, rumours which I never protested' (Man Ray, 1963, pp.264-265). Refusing to answer the question, Man Ray recounts how he was given a forfeit to strip; however, he goes on to say he jumped on the table and 'performed a little dance' which he states had 'psychological significance' for the Surrealists, along with numerous other little 'incidents' (Man Ray, 1963, p.265). His self-representations allude to camouflaging identity; furthermore, *Rue Férou* 1952 is a divergence in style questioned by friends. Man Ray uses a curious anecdote about a ten-year-old girl watching him paint a still life. Looking at the objects and then at the easel, the girl asks, 'Why do I [Man Ray] want two of the same thing?' (Man Ray, 1963, p.382) suggesting that he assimilates *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* and *Rue Férou*. Herd also connects the two works, albeit solely to his heritage (Herd, 2010, pp.15-16). Man Ray describes *Rue Férou* as an academic painting; however, the phallic symbolism is prolific. The painting's atmospheric oppression is much larger than the pitiful figure hunched by its weight. The cart is veering away and passing the doorway as dark and unknowable as the concealed burden itself. 'All this pseudo-profound wordiness,' says Man Ray, 'to cover up a simple human urge and desire' (Man Ray, 1963, p.382). Arturo Schwarz suggests an artist may not be intellectually aware of the deeper sources of his imagination, which is essentially the definition of an enigma (Bate, 2003, p.22). However, Man Ray's use of the word is perhaps a surrealist double riddle, suggesting he was fully aware of the self-referential nature of the artwork.

Breton's moralistic sanitation of *Maldoror's* homosexual content, which had no English translation at the time, together with Man Ray's personal silence and mysterious existence (Man Ray, 1963, p.380) deflected self-referential readings. Man Ray told Arturo Schwarz that Lautréamont provided the 'stimulus to do things I was not supposed to do' (Schwarz, 1977, p.161). Herd's critique and my postulation call attention to the gendered divide in Surrealism being a matter of critique rather than artwork content. Moreover, it renders Fort and Arcq's claim that self-referential content was lacking in male surrealist art, (Fort & Arcq, 2012, p. 27) to be fundamentally at odds with a movement dedicated to exploring the human psyche, lived experience, and the unconscious for creative inspiration.

2:5 Appropriating the Still Life genre

Surrealist artists, across generations, have transformed the still life genre, including René Magritte (1898-1967), Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), Dora Maar (1907-1997), Mimi Parent (1924-2005), Francesca Woodman (1958-1981), Josette Exandier (b.1970), Nevine Mahmoud (b.1988), and Jessica Stoller (b.1981).

Literature linking the movement and the genre in depth is scarce, with references mainly to influences such as Marina Warner's articulation of Helen Chadwick's oeuvre, (Cork & Warner, 1986, p.15) as discussed in chapter one. Warner equates Chadwick's *Of Mutability* 1986 installation with the *Nature Morte* (Cork & Warner, 1986, p.9). Alyce Mahon's essay (Mahon in Allmer, 2009, Pp.54-63) identifies the still life's feminine connection within Surrealism and references Griselda Pollock's notion of female visibility.

'Women surrealists turned to the still-life genre as a means of addressing the spaces of femininity, not only as traditionally characterised by nature, domesticity, and duty but as "the product of a lived sense of social locatedness, mobility and visibility, in the social relations of seeing and being seen"' (Mahon in Allmer, 2009, p.55).

The surrealist revolt against tradition is evident in the appropriation of the still life; its conventional, staid, and moral commentary befitting the nineteenth-century female

artist becomes suffused with irony and surrealist black humour. Linguistic puns, displacement, and erotically charged objects liberate the surrealist still life from 'pre-determined ideas' (Rowell, 1997, p.140). Oppenheim demonstrates all three in *Ma gouvernante - My Nurse - Mein Kindermädchen* (1936) (Fig. 2:3) with shoes trussed like a roast joint of meat, fresh from the oven and ready to be served. Women's shoes, especially stilettos, have a fetish association. White symbolises purity, contrasting starkly with the upturned soles, revealing extensive use and several dark patches of wear. The upturned soles may be read metaphorically as a baring of the soul/sole. The title, *My Nurse*, in three languages, is often equated with the Oppenheim family's nanny, who allegedly had an affair with her father. However, repeating the title three times is a linguistic trick called a tricolon, which Oppenheim, as a poet, was undoubtedly aware. The technique is evident in religion, for example, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, plus myth, cultural rhetoric, and jokes such as, the Englishman, the Irishman, and the Scotsman. Oppenheim gives her joke away in 1982 when she says that for her, the shoes evoked 'two thighs squeezed together' (Mundy et al., 2001, p.45) which is suggestive of self-pleasure rather than intercourse, accentuated by the narcissistic reflective surface of the meat platter, which displaces the association of the piece with her nanny's affair.

Jessica Stoller's humour is overtly ironic in her intricate porcelain sculptures, such as *Still Life* 2013 (Fig. 2:4) and *Bloom* 2019, which depict an orgy of fragmented female bodies. Her compositions often exude a sense of opulence and excess, filled with intricate details and luxurious materials. This abundance serves as a metaphor for the excessiveness of societal beauty standards and the artificiality of the ideals imposed on women. The overwhelming metaphors invite viewers to reconsider contemporary values in a modern memento mori. Her use of skulls, wilting flowers, and rotting fruit connects the transience of beauty and life with the societal pressures on women to maintain an eternal, youthful appearance deepening the metaphorical content of her ceramics.

Stoller's still life elements symbolise traditional female roles and the domestic sphere. Similar to Chadwick, she portrays the accoutrements of femininity with Rococo excess and feminine debauchery, mocking 'narrow-idealised notions of femininity' (Appendix Four, p.198). Her surrealism aligns with Georges Bataille's notion of 'superficial observation' and the erotic undertones beneath the surface of

gendered expectations (Stoekl, 2021, p.10). The juxtaposition of organic matter with garish artificiality and uncomfortable kitsch influences challenges the viewer's perceptions of beauty and purity. Suggesting a grotesque Bataillean commentary on the patriarchal devaluation of everything associated with the female (Appendix Four, p.198-199) reminiscent of Barthes' plastics mythology.

'The age-old function of nature is modified: it is no longer the Idea, the pure Substance to be regained or imitated: an artificial Matter, more bountiful than all the natural deposits, is about to replace her, and to determine the very invention of forms' (Barthes, 1991, p.98).

Deepening the metaphorical content of Stoller's ceramics is the influence of religious iconography and historical ceramic techniques and styles. Creating a metaphorical link between past and present, highlighting how certain standards and expectations of women have persisted over time. This is exemplified in (Fig.2:6) *Untitled (Pry)* (2022) a barefoot, robed figurine simultaneously concealed and exposed, with overly large, disembodied hands menacingly retracting her pregnant bulge. Stoller's sculpture suggests a return to antiquarian female bodily autonomy inspired by the recent repealing of abortion rights in America.

Stoller's work shares significant thematic and stylistic connections with the broader surrealist movement and with individual artists like Tanning. Both Stoller and Tanning explore complex themes of femininity, identity and the grotesque, using their art to challenge societal norms and invite deeper reflection. Stoller's intricate, metaphor-rich ceramics align with the Surrealist tradition of subverting expectations and delving into the subconscious, offering a contemporary critique of enduring issues related to gender and beauty.

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Image link:

<https://sis.modernamuseet.se/objects/1330/ma-gouvernante--my-nurse--mein-kindermädchen>

Fig. 2:3. Meret Oppenheim, *Ma gouvernante - My Nurse - Mein Kindermädchen*, 1936 /1937
Purchased by the Moderna Museet's collection, Stockholm. © Prallan Allsten/Moderna Museet



Fig. 2:4. Jessica Stoller, *Still Life*, 2013. Installation view. © Jessica Stoller. Image reproduced with kind permission of the artist, 7th July 2023.



Fig. 2:5. Jessica Stoller, *Still Life*, 2013. Installation view (close-up). © Jessica Stoller. Image reproduced with kind permission of the artist, 7th July 2023.



Fig. 2:6. Jessica Stoller, *Untitled (Pry)*, 2022. © Jessica Stoller. Image reproduced with kind permission of the artist, 7th July 2023.

2.6 The Female Body as a Site of Creative Inquiry

As a framework, Freud's psychological tripartite structure⁵¹ enables women artists using the female body as creative inspiration to question and subvert patriarchal oppression. Oppenheim's *Ma gouvernante - My Nurse - Mein Kindermädchen*, 1936 (Fig. 2:3) exemplifies its use. The work, featuring a pair of women's high-heeled shoes trussed and presented on a silver platter, engages the id through its erotic and fetishised elements, the ego through its confrontation with societal norms and expectations of femininity, and the superego by invoking feelings of guilt and moral judgement associated with these desires. She challenges traditional notions of domesticity and female roles, highlighting the interplay between unconscious desires and societal constructs. Compounding the identification of a gendered divide in surrealist works by revisionist discourse. However, as previously discussed, female artwork can sometimes be interpreted in ways that reflect masculine desires and perspectives, even if that was not the artist's intention. This can happen because Surrealism often uses complex language, manipulation of imagery and abstraction. Oppenheim's use of metaphors 'problematise the feminine without referring directly to a body' (Caws et al., 1991, p. 39) and bridges the modernist view of the self as transgressive with postmodernist deconstruction. These techniques demonstrate how powerful language and imagery manipulation can be in shaping perceptions.

The journey from transgressive subversion to deconstruction is exemplified in the oeuvres of Chadwick and Jürgenssen. Chadwick's self-representations underwent a radical transformation after 1986, becoming organic, metaphorical abstractions such as *Meat Lamp* (1989). Interestingly Jürgenssen's oeuvre demonstrates a more gradual process of 'identities in transition' (Schor, 2009, p.2) through the technique of masking, a metaphor for transformation used by Claude Cahun and Jürgenssen. By the mid-1980s, both Chadwick and Jürgenssen's bodies were radically deconstructed. Chadwick's use of the memento mori in *Ruin*, 1986 seemingly portends Jürgenssen's 1995 still life, *Ich bin* (I am) (Fig. 2:7). The body is lost,

⁵¹ Freud's tripartite structure consists of three components: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id represents the primal, unconscious desires and instincts driven by the pleasure principle. The ego, governed by the reality principle, mediates between the unrealistic id and the external world, functioning in conscious and preconscious levels. The superego, incorporating the values and morals of society, strives for perfection and judges actions, creating feelings of pride or guilt. This structural model illustrates the dynamic interactions between these elements in shaping human behaviour and personality. See: Freud, S. (1923). *The Ego and the Id*. London: Hogarth Press.

rendered invisible, circling back to the self-representations of first-generation Surrealists. This is evidenced by Jürgenssen's comment that the certainty of identity is as precarious as chalk on a chalkboard. However, 'erasure', Natascha Gruber suggests, is also an opportunity to redraw. (Gruber, 2010)

Content removed due to copyright restrictions.

Image link:

<https://birgitjuergenssen.com/en/works/ - filter=.sculpture>

Fig. 2:7. Brigit Jürgenssen, *Ich Bin (I am)*, 1995. © Brigit Jürgenssen Estate.

Julie Curtiss' hypnotic draughtsmanship (Fig. 2:9) evokes the foreboding atmosphere of female stricture within Marion Adnams' *L'Infante Égarée*, 1944 (Fig. 2:8) and *Alter Ego*, 1945. Curtiss' fragmented and whole figures are entirely faceless, metaphorically representing the erasure of individual identity much like Adnams', presenting unsettling and alien worlds. By exaggerating certain features like nails, hands, and feet, Curtiss transforms them into metaphors for societal beauty standards and the pressures women face. Her grotesque and caricatured representations challenge traditional notions of beauty and highlight the often unrealistic and oppressive ideals imposed on the female body. In contrast, Adnams' paper dolls, constrained and suggestive of a lack of autonomy, imply that womanhood is akin to constructed and meticulously shaped puppetry. Curtiss' figures, however, are enigmatic and vacant, open to fluid possession. As Curtiss remarks, her figures are 'vessels that allow the viewer to project their self' (Curtiss interviewed by Hessel, 2020, 0:2:25) echoing Arthur Rimbaud's assertion, 'I is another,' and aligning with identity politics and Gruber's hypothesis of redrawing the female body. Furthermore, Curtiss and Stoller employ dismembered body parts and everyday objects to explore identity and alienation in a hyper-consumerist world. In this context, the objects depicted are not merely symbolic stand-ins for the female body but can also be viewed as active participants in the construction of meaning (Harman, 2002. Harman, 2018. Delap, 2021. Delap & Thomas, 2020). By placing these fantastical metaphoric elements in strange, uncanny environments, Curtiss, like many other women artists associated with surrealism, including Adnams, Carrington, Tanning, and Kay Sage (1898-1963); emphasises the alienation and disconnection that arise from living within the confines of rigid gender roles and expectations. The surreal settings amplify the metaphorical critique of how femininity is constructed and perceived in society.

Loie Hollowell employs her lived experience and changing body as a site of creative inquiry, delving into the biological inner self inspired by themes such as pregnancy, ageing, menstruation, and childbirth. These themes echo second-wave feminist art, which was criticised as self-exploitative however, Hollowell fragments the female body. Fragmentation as a metaphor can challenge societal tendencies, addressing the disjointed and compartmentalised ways in which women are often viewed.

However, to focus on parts of the female body rather than the whole person can paradoxically reinforce reductive and objectifying androcentric perspectives.

Hollowell's sculptural paintings (Fig. 2:10) evoke a hypnotic spiritual aesthetic reminiscent of Marie Wilson's (1922-2017) organic totemic central axis symmetry. Hollowell's symmetry can be perceived as a metaphor for balance, harmony, and the cyclical nature of life and womanhood. It also alludes to spiritual and sacred imagery, suggesting a deeper, meditative and holistic mystical connection to the themes she explores. Her use of colour and light serves as a metaphor for emotional and physical states. Bright, warm colours can suggest vitality and life, while darker shades may represent the hidden or more intimate aspects of female experience. Furthermore, she incorporates texture to evoke physicality and sensation. Hollowell's utilisation of chiaroscuro, surface, and texture creates an immersive blend of Kay Sage's (1898-1963) geometry and Georgia O'Keeffe's⁵² (1887-1986) esoteric sensuality and resonate with Slinger's work that blurs the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual, suggesting that the body is a vessel for spiritual experience and transformation. Her surreal imagery often conveys a sense of transcendence, where the physical form becomes a conduit for exploring deeper metaphysical themes and hidden dimensions.

Female surrealists often depicted themselves as alien or monstrous in order to challenge societal norms of femininity and beauty. By dissolving boundaries between the human, the animal, the machine, and the unconscious, surrealism laid aesthetic and philosophical groundwork that aligns with posthumanist critiques of human-centered thought. Contemporary artists, Curtiss builds on this tradition by portraying bodily forms that transcend traditional gender representations. Furthermore, Slinger and Hollowell's work emphasise the intersection of the physical and the spiritual, offering layered explorations of the feminine experience that transcends the ordinary and delves into the mystical.

Hollowell's kaleidoscopic sensuality has a resonance with Tanning's later abstract works from the mid 1950s. Tanning recounted in 2005 her move away from her 'pictures being a kind of puzzle' when they were 'so-called 'surrealist' (Tanning in

⁵² Georgia O'Keeffe is generally not associated with the surrealists; however, she chose to exhibit in a surrealist group exhibition in 1936

Carruthers, 2020, p.100). Interestingly, there is also a parallel with Curtiss, during the period where Tanning distanced herself from Surrealism her figures of the 1970s and late 1980s are rendered faceless and unidentifiable which Victoria Carruthers suggests enables the viewer a 'transformative' recognition through their own experiences (Carruthers, 2020, p.180).

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Image link:

<https://collections.manchesterartgallery.org/collections/item/9e6fe925-0948-34c9-8896-da2055e3d2d1/?s=Marion+adnams%26view=grid&pos=5>

Fig. 2:8. Marion Adnams, *L'Infante Égarée*, 1944. © Manchester Art Gallery.

Content removed due to copyright restrictions.

Image link:

<https://www.whitecube.com/artworks/spinsters>

Fig. 2:9. Julie Curtiss, *Spinsters*, 2020. © Julie Curtiss.



Fig. 2:10. Loie Hollowell, *A Gentle Meeting Of Tips*, 2018. © Loie Hollowell. Image reproduced with kind permission of the artist, 7th October 2021.

Stoller's ceramicist techniques have innate elements of chance in contrast to Curtiss and Hollowell's work. Meticulously devoid of chance, play, and spontaneity, Hollowell states, 'Every element of my practice is done consciously and methodically' (Appendix Three, p.190). Rather than signalling the demise of surrealism again⁵³ or relegating contemporary surrealist-associated artworks to the debased and surreal, Hollowell and Curtiss' paintings revisit the debates Breton addressed in the 1920s concerning surrealism and painting. Technical skill and conscious composition were seen as antithetical to the surrealist goal, but Breton maintained that the initial impulse and, the core of the creative act, should stem from the unconscious. He suggested that while some conscious decisions were inevitable, the artist's primary task was to minimise their interference, allowing the spontaneous and the irrational to dominate (Breton, 1969). Hollowell, Curtiss and Stoller utilise the female body as a site of creative inquiry while articulating their awareness of feminism, ongoing sex-based oppression and identity politics. How well they reflect the enduring influence of Breton's surrealist principles is problematic in their navigation between conscious technique and the evocation of deeper, supposed unconscious themes. Whilst they do not adhere strictly to the original surrealist endeavour their works embody the spirit of surrealism and societal critiques by exploring identity and the inner self.

2:7 Conclusion

Freud and Marx's influence on Surrealism is central to understanding the movement's artistic endeavour as self-reflexive and politically motivated, with a transgressive intentionality to liberate human consciousness. Although contentious in their coupling, Freud and Marx can be seen as two sides of the same coin: causality and liberation. Bringing Freudian and Marxist theories together engendered a potent source of creative production in an epoch of progressive attitudes. Yet, Surrealism's commitment to liberation was not without contradictions, particularly in its construction of gendered archetypes such as the *femme enfant*.

Man Ray's esoteric imagery shows male artists also used themselves as muses, metaphorically although seemingly less prolifically than their female counterparts.

⁵³ Surrealism has been pronounced dead several times and whilst a cohesive movement no longer exists surrealism as a pursuit of the mind is essentially interminable.

This perhaps suggests a repressive socio-cultural era exacerbated by the bias towards heterosexuality within the movement, and overlooked by the gendered approach in critiquing. Yet, the technique of masking enabled the play with multiple identities for male and female artists alike.

In the wake of the 1980s sex wars, identity and self-representation turned towards conceptual and metaphorical symbolism. Postmodernist deconstruction has impacted notions of self, identity, and gender with inclusive identity politics, rendering the female body an invisible vessel enabling fluid possessions. This is a radical fragmentation far beyond the 'headless' women going 'to pieces' that Mary Ann Caws lamented in the 1990s (Caws et al., 1991, p.11). The visual language employed by historical and contemporary women artists associated with Surrealism reveals a profound engagement with feminist political awareness and body positivity. Historical figures such as Carrington, Tanning, and Oppenheim utilised surrealist techniques to subvert traditional representations of the female body, blending dreamlike imagery with personal symbolism to explore themes of identity, autonomy, and empowerment. Contemporary artists like Jürgenssen, Slinger, Stoller, Curtiss, and Hollowell continue this legacy by employing similar surrealist methods to address contemporary issues of gender and identity. Although, when viewed collectively the unique visual languages of these artists appears to highlight an ongoing paradoxical struggle in reclaiming the female body in self-representations.

The importance of metaphor across the generations lies in its ability to transcend time and cultural shifts, providing a universal language through which artists can convey complex ideas and emotions. Metaphor enables historical continuity and innovation, allowing contemporary artists to build upon the symbolic frameworks established by their predecessors while addressing current social and political issues. This cross-generational dialogue enriches the artistic discourse, as metaphors rooted in historical contexts gain new relevance and depth when reinterpreted through contemporary lenses. Through this metaphorical lineage, artists can both honour the past and challenge present-day perspectives whilst also fostering a dynamic and evolving narrative within surrealism and the broader art world.

Chapter 3. Presence Through Absence

3:0 Introduction:

This chapter will outline my methodology and epistemological framework, followed by an in-depth analysis of my research. I will engage with themes discussed in previous chapters, including contemporary political and social shifts, lived experience, symbolic communication, and techniques associated with surrealism.

The inspiration for my images stems from a blend of personal observations and lived experiences, augmented by socio-cultural inquiry and media commentary on gender issues. I manipulate inanimate organic and manufactured objects associated with the feminine and domestic realm and, using photography, create representations of self, identity, and gender. My practice-led research emerged from a need to understand my visual language and investigate why I felt that using the female body was a distraction and fundamentally irrelevant to my artwork.

In addressing my research questions, I aim to uncover conscious, or unconscious motivations within my research that will explain why using an actual female body is unnecessary in my representations of gender, self, and identity. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on surrealism and the contemporary women artists associated with its legacy. Whitney Chadwick suggested, 'It is perhaps through their many and diverse images of embodied femininity that women Surrealists left their most powerful and pervasive legacy to subsequent generations of women artists' (Chadwick, 1998, pp. 7-13). A fundamental aspect of this study is to examine the extent to which my research sits within Surrealism's legacy and uphold Lusty's assertion that the aesthetic and political concepts that preoccupied historical Surrealism endure and, can be linked to my own critical thinking and provocation (Lusty et al., 2021, p. 4).

My research is anchored in a female perspective, influenced by my upbringing, lived experience and sexual proclivity. Therefore, a research framework that supports my use of personal experience, feelings, and perspective as a site of critical inquiry is essential. Additionally, interpreting artworks and interview transcripts from artists and scholars in the field requires a combined epistemological approach that validates personal knowledge without undermining individual authenticity.

Standpoint Theory is an epistemology that argues all knowledge is constructed from a specific position and conditioned by social differentiation. However, Standpoint Theory is not solely about individual experience; it relates to the historical and shared group experiences particular to a social location (Sprague. 2016, pp.47- 50). For example, as a white Western woman, multiple further categories can be incorporated, such as religion, sexuality, or class. While Standpoint Theory underpins my perspective within a social location, it is necessary to accommodate divergences between the artists, artworks, and scholars I examine in the research. Therefore, combining Standpoint Theory with Critical Realism achieves a more rigorous framework.

Critical Realism⁵⁴ is a philosophy regarding the nature of knowledge attainment (Sprague, 2016, pp. 43-46, 60-62). This approach allows for multifaceted factors such as cultural upbringing, political climate, familial hierarchies, and how gender, class or race shape our understanding of reality, providing a more nuanced approach to knowledge attainment. Critical Realism argues that reality exists in three domains: the empirical, the actual, and the real. The empirical domain concerns observable and measurable phenomena from which we obtain data. The actual is what is known but not necessarily visible, and the real is unseen but a necessary precondition. Critical Realists deem knowledge inconclusive without acknowledging these domains, as it otherwise disregards hidden structures such as power relations. By foregrounding the agency of oppressed groups and interrogating social structures that perpetuate marginalization, critical realism offers a powerful framework, for understanding the conditions that enable systemic injustice, while advocating for transformative social change, exemplified in Judith Butler's 1990 text, *Gender Trouble*. Therefore, this combination of epistemologies ensures that the research framework is robust enough to acknowledge Robin Nelson's multiple 'modes of knowledge' and its fluidity (Nelson, 2013, pp. 37-47, 53-55) encompassing the triad of the knower, the known, and the process of knowing.

⁵⁴ Critical realism is a philosophical approach primarily developed by Roy Bhaskar, his concept of emancipatory praxis encourages engagement with marginalized voices to challenge dominant narratives, emphasizing that knowledge production is inherently political

3:1 Context

My lived experience aligns with Beauvoir's recognition of the difficulties girls face during maturation. Her reference to appearance, especially, echoes my own sense of inadequacy. My experiences are not unique; many women I have spoken to, including friends and fellow PhD candidates, have recounted their prepubescent and adolescent anxieties regarding sexuality, womanhood, and gendered expectations.

‘... the future woman naturally feels indignant about the limitations her sex imposes on her. The question is not why she rejects them; the real problem is understanding why she accepts them. Her conformism comes from her docility and timidity, but this resignation will easily turn to revolt if society's compensations are judged inadequate. This is what will happen in cases where the adolescent girl feels unattractive as a woman: anatomical configurations become particularly important when this happens; if she is, or believes she is, ugly or has a bad figure, woman rejects a feminine destiny for which she feels ill adapted...’ (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 343).

Despite the text being eighty years old, its contemporary resonance is disheartening. The current crisis across the West, with alarming numbers of young girls and a smaller proportion of boys suffering from gender dysphoria, attests to the ongoing problem. Gender roles and gendered expectations, and the anxiety they cause, can stimulate profound lifelong issues both psychologically and medically. My childhood anxiety, confusion, and desire to distance myself from familial expectations and a female destiny have been underlying factors fuelling my research.

3:2 Methodology

My theoretical inquiry and socio-cultural exploration inform each other in a cyclical reflexive methodology recognised in practice-led research. To facilitate understanding and discussion of my methodological approach, I have utilised Edward Weston's photograph, *Nautilus Shell* 1927, as a visual aid.

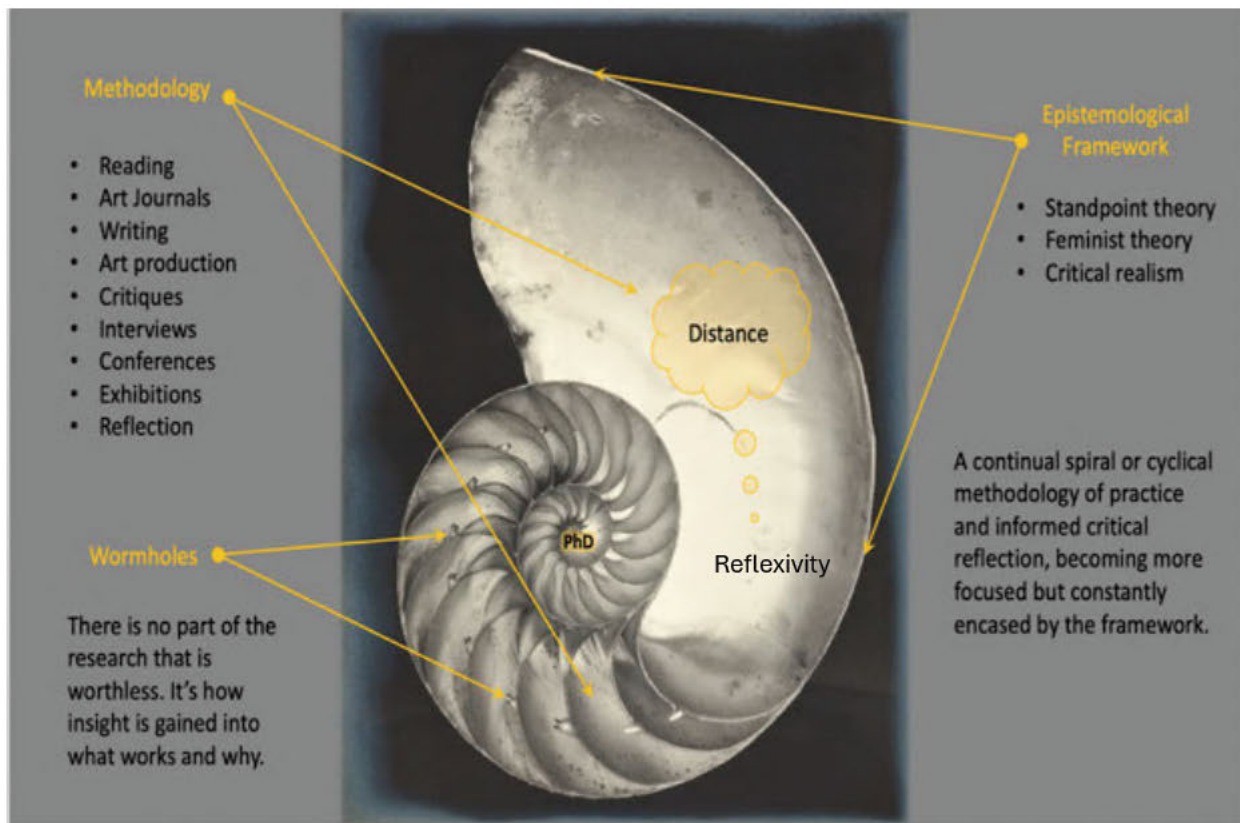


Fig.3:1. Jeannean Howe, *Ph.D. Research Methodology Diagram*

Utilising Edward Weston's *Nautilus Shell*, 1927. © Christie's Images Ltd.

At the heart of the shell is the goal: the PhD. Every aspect of the shell's structure represents numerous intrinsic objectives; therefore, the whole shell constitutes my methodological process. The cyclical process is encased within and supported by the outside of the shell, or in other words, the epistemological framework. The inside of the shell has two distinct areas labelled methodology: the activities that swirl together and inform each other. The spiral at the base of the shell represents the tasks that are a continual swirl of activity in the research process in comparison to the upper space. The shell analogy demonstrates the necessity for distance from the iterative process as integral to achieving reflexivity. Reflexivity is a continual process of informed critical reflection on the progression of the research and understanding my perspectives as new insights are gained.

The shell's opening or entrance is a symbolic reminder that knowledge is not universal but relative and, therefore, the necessity to be open to external influences

that can inspire new work and understanding. Furthermore, the shell highlights an aspect of research I have titled 'wormholes'. These are areas of research that can result in dead ends, however, I have found that no part of the research is worthless or, in fact, a dead end. As Robin Nelson suggests, the key to new insight is continual reflexivity (Nelson, 2013, pp. 44-45) and reminding yourself of the research questions. Wormholes, and the work I have produced when in one, have sometimes provided the most significant insights into knowing what, why and how aspects of the research inform each other; an example of this is my research into the four group exhibitions dedicated solely to women artists associated with surrealism since revisionist discourse began: *Mirror Images*, *Angels of Anarchy*, *Dreamers Awake* and *Surréalisme Au Feminin?* The pertaining exhibition publications have been key resources to my research and often the first introduction to an artist. It was evident from the exhibition catalogues that the *Dreamers Awake* exhibition included far more contemporary artists. In researching the exhibited artists, contradictions arose regarding the criteria for designating an artist as a surrealist or as associated with surrealism. This prompted further investigation, revealing that the evolving postmodernist definition of surrealism and the perspectives of critics and curators can influence our understanding of surrealism more significantly than the artists themselves. As a woman artist this appears antithetical to both surrealism and feminism creating a contemporary contradiction that my research addresses. The 2017 *Dreamers Awake* exhibition showcases artists working between 1924 and 2017, with a significant number of fourth, fifth, and sixth-generation artists, supporting Chadwick and Lusty in their assertion of an ongoing legacy. This contrasts with the 2023 French exhibition, *Surréalisme Au Feminin?* which is more consistent with earlier exhibitions, this analysis enabled insights into the political and social shifts and cultural differences that impacted the curation of these exhibitions. For example, *Dreamers Awake* was curated as intersectionality emerged as a concept of feminism's plurality in 2013.

3:3 My Visual Language

In the introduction to my thesis, I characterised my work as intuitive and whilst intuition serves as a source of inspiration, allowing one to 'remake reality in tune with

your intuitive sense' (Appendix Two, p.159), it is crucial to consider what it is and why and how it impacts my research. Intuition is often regarded as an illogical and blind belief system, understood as the instinctive grasp of something without conscious reasoning. What it does, is provide access to stored implicit knowledge that guides thoughts and feelings. Although culturally specific and not universal, symbolism is pervasive in contexts such as the West, evident in both religious iconography and modern symbols like the Apple logo. An arts education is not a prerequisite for understanding symbolic references. This suggests symbolism can be anchored in implicit knowledge and its use creatively can be both a conscious and unconscious process.

Intuitive insight has 'guided the evolution of human cultures' (Campbell, 2012, p.422) since the earliest known cave paintings. Such so-called 'primitive' art drew significant interest from many Surrealists. French child psychologist G. H. Luquet (1876-1965) explored play as a creative strategy by examining and comparing children's art with primitive art. Although Luquet published extensively in the late 1920s and 1930s, his hypothesis was found inadequate (Guerlac, 2007, p.32). Consequently, George Bataille developed his theory of the *informe*, which includes the concepts of actualisation and 'useless figuration' (Guerlac, 2007, p.50). Bataille's theory involved bringing hidden, suppressed, or taboo elements into conscious awareness to facilitate an authentic understanding of human experience and existence, rather than a superficial impression.

My creative intuition is deeply rooted in my conscious and unconscious lived experiences. Therefore, Naumburg's hypothesis that 'the unconscious speaks in symbolic images' (Naumburg, 1955, p.441) underpins my creative process of symbolic communication, augmented by Bataille's base materialism,⁵⁵ for instance, the flowers and petals I use symbolise nature and natural beauty (Fig. 3:2). Shells also symbolise nature but additionally draw on their historical use in art as a symbol of the feminine, as seen in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c.1484-1486), (Appendix Seven, p.213). Spoons evoke nurturing and symbolise the domestic environment, a

⁵⁵ Base materialism, a concept developed by Georges Bataille, challenges conventional hierarchies and celebrates the chaotic, formless aspects of matter. When applied to the concept of flowers, base materialism can reveal a deeper, more transgressive understanding of these natural objects, which are often romanticized and imbued with idealized beauty.

theme recurrent in my images with many employing primordial symbolism that has evolved over history. The stylised symmetry is associated with the use of Pagan symbolism in Christian iconography, such as the Vesica Piscis, an oval shape often surrounding the Virgin or saints to symbolise the feminine aspect of creation (Naumburg, 1955, p.441; Inman, 1922, pp. 7-8) coupled with the confrontational centrality often seen in portraiture. This symbolism, appropriated as 'central core' imagery, was used extensively in the 1970s by artists like Judy Chicago (b.1939) to highlight, celebrate, and critique women's roles in society (Chadwick, 2020, p.374).

Although my symbolic communication felt intuitive, it is rooted in my socio-cultural context. My practice-led research often aligns with Bataille's concept of baseness through its erotic connotations that can extend beyond my artistic intentions. While I use sexual connotations to engage viewers, the interpretation of the work on multiple levels is uncontrollable, due to viewers' subjectivity. Play and chance, rooted in Surrealism's experiments since its inception in 1924, are creative tools that, combined with semiosis and my intuitive knowledge, foster originality in my artwork. My unique perspective, informed by lived experience and my technique of image production, which includes symbolism, still life, assemblage, and photography, melds traditional symbolism and everyday objects with contemporary theories and the symbolic order. This synthesis addresses current issues while referencing their historical context. (Appendix Seven, pp. 219-221).

3:4 My Creative Practice as Research

The first stage involved devising a fixed set of critical questions for data collection. Applying these questions to each photograph allowed for comparisons and connections, promoting reflexivity and driving a cyclical process that enhanced the research and creative inspiration.

1. How does the image inform my inquiry?
2. How does the image reflect Surrealist strategies and techniques?
3. How does the image reflect a feminist context?
4. Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?
5. What comparisons can be made between images?

6. What does the image communicate/evoke?

7. How does it relate to work by other artists?

The data and reflexivity arising from these questions and reflexivity were recorded in my research journals, which also include relevant media clippings annotated with my thoughts and inspiration, such as phrases, memories, and odd words. Additionally, I noted ideas for objects to photograph, which continuously contributed to the research.

The reflexive process revealed that my intuitive deconstruction of flowers and organic objects during my Bachelor's and Master's in Fine Art sought an inner reality, essence, or truth beneath their superficial character (Bataille, 1985, p.10). My practice-led research evolved to explore broader themes of womanhood and gender expectations within contemporary society, addressing socio-political constructions while acknowledging my personal experiences and feelings. Appearance is deceptive, and surrealism elucidates through puzzling riddles, humour, and phantasmagoria (Carruthers, 2020, p.100). My research aimed to address the conscious or unconscious interconnected relationship of familial nurturing and oppression in female identity formation and gender expression.

3:5 The Metaphorical and Paradoxical Body

Using objects or assemblages to portray something symbolically creates a metaphorical representation, as the objects can suggest deeper meanings beyond their literal appearance. By arranging and presenting objects in specific ways, they evoke ideas, emotions, or concepts related to the subject, much like a metaphor in language conveys broader meaning through association. The female body as a metaphorical transformation is a process utilised by Meret Oppenheim, Brigit Jürgenssen, and Jessica Stoller.

Gender expression involves the repetitive performance of expected socio-cultural behaviours. I explore this notion which is often rooted in anger at having to bear societal and familial expectations. Aggressiveness or anger is considered assertive in men, while women are taught to be kind and compassionate; expressing anger is

deemed an ugly trait, rendering a woman worthless. This Western narrative resonates in the psyche of many women. In acquiescing to social norms for psychological self-protection, women perform a paradox or double bind⁵⁶.

Marcel Duchamp posits that 'one half of each surrealist work was made by the artist and the other half by the viewer' (Remy, 1999, p. 20). This myriad of interpretations is augmented by the interplay of conscious and unconscious elements in the artist's creative process. Mimetic representation is consciously executed, whereas 'intuitive actualisation' involves portraying what is felt or known but not seen, often as an unconscious action (Naumburg, 1955, pp. 439-440). From an artistic perspective, identity politics renders the pictorial representation of the actual body problematic. The biologically sexed body is a dominant factor in my lived experience, yet sexuality is not the primary aspect I am addressing. Using myself or a model in my photography would dictate the sex of the gendered experience. By avoiding the use of a body, I can achieve greater ambiguity and therefore, inclusivity across a spectrum of gendered viewing experiences within the framework of patriarchal language.

French philosopher Luce Irigaray (b. 1930) was the first to critique Freud and Jacques Lacan's (1901-1981) phallogocentric theories of female sexuality from a feminist standpoint. Linguistically, Irigaray theorises that the primacy of the phallus reduces and negates the multifaceted reality of female sexuality. The texts of Hélène Cixous (b. 1937) affirmed the necessity for women to 'write their bodies' in 'white ink' (mothers' milk). Although Cixous recognised bisexuality as comprising dual traits of masculinity and femininity, she, like Irigaray, was denounced as essentialist (Suleiman, 1990, p.127). In contrast, Monique Wittig (1935-2003) rejected the notion of woman entirely as a creation of heterosexual bourgeois capitalism. For Wittig, the defining difference between men and women, masculinity and femininity, was solely political (Suleiman, 1990, p.130). Susan Suleiman aligns the Marxist aim to abolish

⁵⁶ In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler examines *Womanliness as a Masquerade*, 1929, an essay by British psychoanalyst Joan Riviere's (1883-1962) which describes an analysand's multiple gender performances as a strategy to cope with the multifaceted roles women perform, including wife, mother and professional. Asking what is being masked by the masquerade, she concludes that Riviere's discourse is autobiographical and rooted in her lived experience as a rare female professional in a male-dominated environment at the time of its writing. Butler suggests that what is covered by the mask is not sexuality but rage.

class socially and economically with the feminist aim to abolish sexual categories; however, she identifies the paradox that language creates.

This theoretical backdrop of gendered language informs my work, specifically my title *Crown Jewels* (Fig. 3:2). Metaphors can give rise to sexual connotations that can be exploited and used as forms of subversion or critique. The term is British slang for an asset of great value, often referencing male genitalia. The Crown or State awards medals, such as military honours, to recognise a person's actions. My use of the pun 'crown jewels' validates a woman's self-worth and identity as a domestic caregiver while simultaneously challenging the notion of patriarchy as an exclusively masculine power structure. The juxtaposition of the shells and spoon in figure 3:2 highlights a natural, man-made dichotomy, a strategy seen in Oppenheim's *Object (Le Déjeuner en fourrure)*.

My assemblage interrogates the myth that biology is destiny, positioning the metaphorical female paradoxically at the centre of the traditionally male role of creation and the perpetuation of Western patriarchal societies, rather than being entirely subservient to it.

The concept of androgyny plays a crucial role in both feminist theory and Surrealist art. The blending or presence of both masculine and feminine characteristics, challenges traditional gender polarities and resonates with the critiques posed by Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig. Surrealist artists often embraced androgyny to subvert societal norms and explore the fluidity of identity. Oppenheim believed the artist to be an androgynous entity. By presenting figures that embody both male and female traits, Surrealist art reflects the dualities and ambiguities of gender. The androgynous figure becomes a powerful symbol of resistance against the patriarchal imposition of gender roles. In my work, this androgynous representation underscores the critique of patriarchal structures, as seen in *Crown Jewels* (Appendix Seven, p.213). The interplay between natural and man-made elements, accentuates the dissolution of binary distinctions, echoing Surrealism's use of ambiguity and multiplicity. Thus, the androgynous metaphorical body serves as a site of artistic and ideological convergence, challenging the viewer to reconsider the constructed nature of gender and the inherent fluidity of identity.



Fig. 3:2 Jeannean Howe, *Crown Jewels*, 2021. © J.Howe 2024

3:6 Surrealist Techniques and Photography

My research falls into Bate's prophotographic and enigmatic categories of surrealist photography. My objects or assemblages are created before the photograph is taken, but the viewpoint from which I take the photograph manipulates a view of the object that may not ordinarily be perceived. The 'oscillation of opposites' (Carruthers, 2020, p.55) such as natural and manmade, real and unreal, masculine and feminine, permeate my work. The surrealist techniques I use to distort reality include macro and close-up cropping, which isolates the object and, in doing so, decontextualises it, enabling free associations to be perceived. Rotation is a manipulation strategy I use to defamiliarise an object and make it strange, strategies Bate's uses to identify where the surreality exists in Man Ray's enigmatic photograph *Élevage de poussière* (*Dust Breeding*) 1920 (Fig. 2:2) discussed in chapter two. Chance is an element of surrealism I only realised was present in my research through reflexivity. Many of my images are created with reflections, a process of placing object/s such as a petals, shells or spoons onto a reflective surface and then photographing both the object and its reflection in camera. Although only half of my image exists, the prophotographic image produced portrays a symmetrical, whole. This symmetrical whole is a representation that melds visual realism and intellectual realism, which frustrates the objects actuality creating the surreality through a combination of the conscious and unconscious elements hypothesised by G. H. Luquet. The photographs I take are, to borrow Magritte's words, 'an act of visual thought', they are my interpretation and interrogation of the socio-cultural expectations on girls and women and the illusion and reality constituting feminine power. Visual thought is a process that involves seeing beyond the literal appearance of things which can reveal hidden connections, absurdities or contradictions in reality, which aligns with Breton's definition of automatism as a 'photography of thought' (Guerlac, 2007, p.39).

'Their [artworks] validity can only be judged by the extent to which they widen the perception of the relationship between things, deepen the understanding of what lies behind the façade of reality, and create an endless, forever insoluble, interrogation of not only what one sees but what one is' (Remy, 1999, Pp.19-20).

Rather than delving into the subconscious through dreamlike imagery, Magritte's approach was intellectual and conceptual. His paintings were designed to provoke thought rather than merely evoke emotion, offering new and often disquieting perspectives on reality. Magritte emphasises the distinction between an object and its representation, prompting viewers to realise that seeing is not the same as understanding.

I take numerous photographs, each movement of the object/s, camera, or lighting will produce a different outcome, impossible to achieve again. The element of chance impacted in several ways in the production of figure 3:2 and 3:5. Firstly, the image was inspired by a chance encounter: the set-up of a play area in a local government-funded preschool (Fig.3:3). I was struck by its gendered stereotyping which made me think of the phrase: spoon-fed (Appendix Seven, p.212-213). Whether the arrangement of toys by the all-female nursery staff was conscious, or unconscious is speculation; however, subliminally the play area reinforces stereotypical gender roles. Secondly, the reflections captured in the bowl of the spoon are, as Bate's suggests, a straight photograph. The blue reflection of the camera's flash reacting with the lilac colour filter and the pink reflection of the tea set created a chance intensity of colour reflected in the spoon's stem. However, my enhancement of the colour saturation during post-production renders the image a combination of Bate's prophotographic and enigmatic, as I felt the resulting intensity of colour transformed the potency of the photograph's gendered message. Although the prevalence of pink reflects my personal bias on female power in the phallic image, it serves to underscore the critique.

The critical questions I consistently apply to all images create a cyclical process of reflection, inspiration, and insight. My choice of the silver spoon (Fig. 3:6) was initially aesthetic, however, upon reflection, its decorative handle evokes notions of wealth and class, thereby expanding the photograph's potential for political commentary. *Womanland* (Fig. 3:5) was produced with minimal alteration to my original concept although this was an exception as most images undergo a process of play, chance, reflexivity, and reworking in a cyclical manner, driven by a phrase, pun, or metaphor that informs my object choices.



Fig. 3:3 Jeannean Howe, *Nursery Play Area* 2021.



Fig. 3:4 Jeannean Howe, *PLR#1*, 2021.



Fig. 3:5 Jeannean Howe, *Womanland*, 2021. © J.Howe 2024.

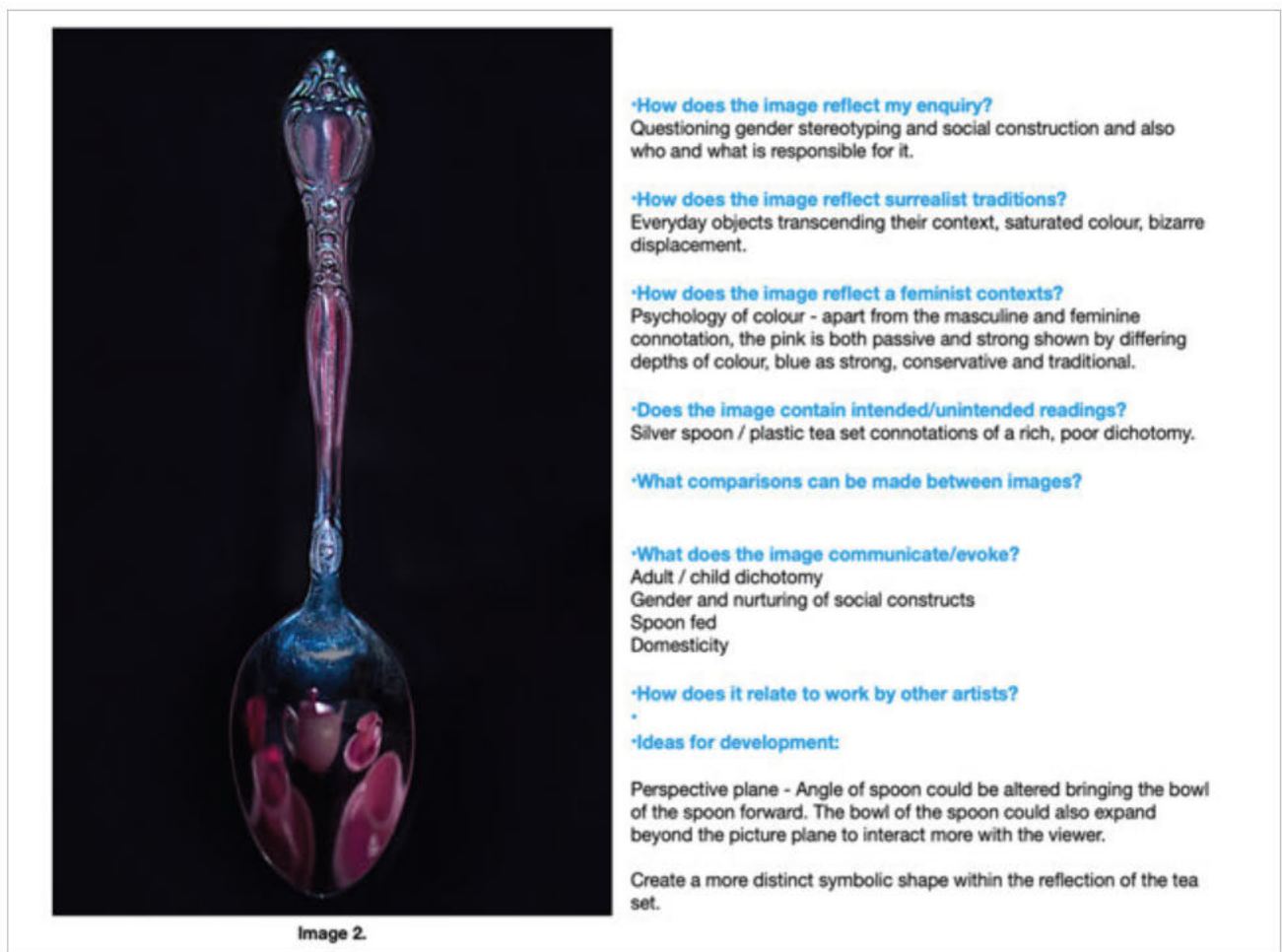


Fig. 3:6 Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#1*, 2021.

Chance and play lead to numerous experimental compositions and inspire further experimentation. Women are often assigned labels such as witch, whore, or crone when they do not conform to societal or institutional expectations, and Madonna, angel, goddess, or Wonder Woman when they do. The omission of Mary Magdalene's voice in the formation of the organised Christian church and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c.1484-1486) are examples of suppression, oppression, and categorisation. My process of play and chance often involves abstracting until I distil my thoughts to their simplest essence. For example, the shell soaked in brandy (Fig.3:11) was overly complicated and by separating the objects, I achieved a far simpler stylistic aesthetic (Figs. 3:12 & 3:13) reflective of my ambiguous visual language. Furthermore, by chance, the brown burn marks on the shell complement the image's tones and direct the gaze to the symmetrical central core at the heart of the final image.



Fig. 3:7 Jeannean Howe, *PLR#2: Scalloped spoon and shells*, 2021.



Fig. 3:8 Jeannean Howe, *PLR#3: Scalloped spoon and shells*, 2021.



Fig. 3:9 Jeannean Howe, *PLR#4: Scalloped spoon and shells*, 2021.

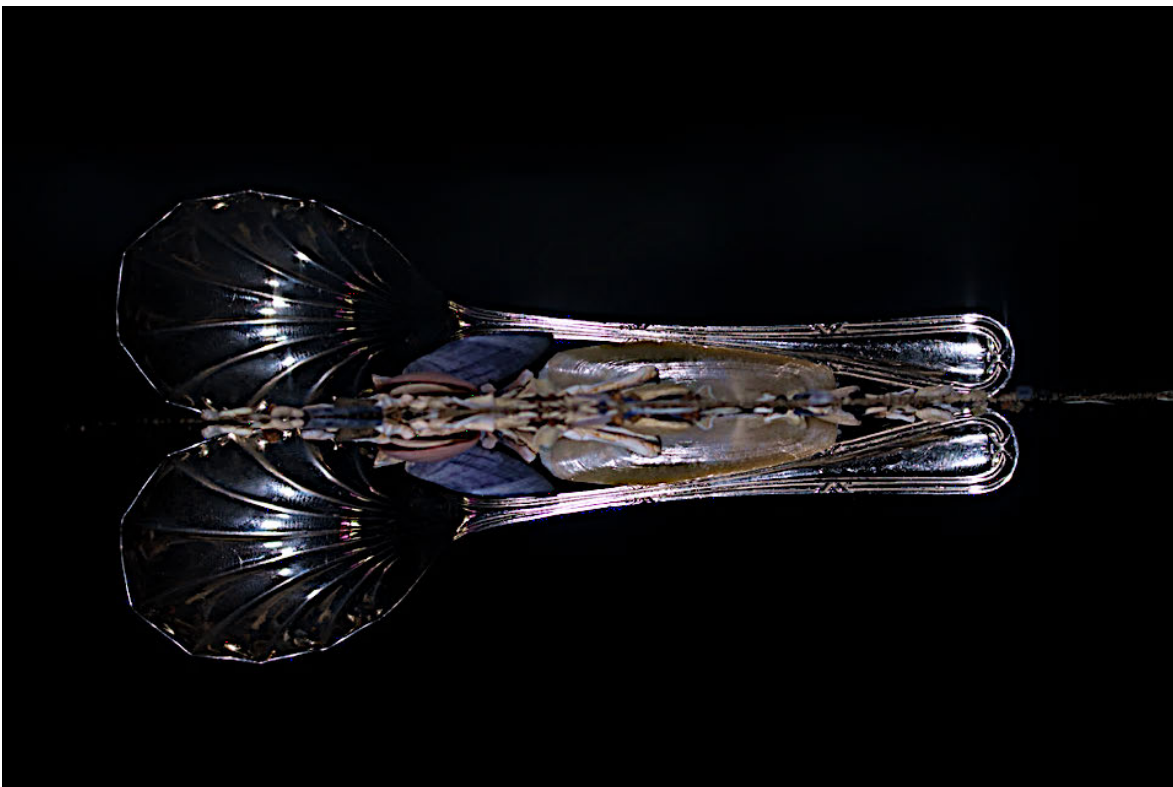


Fig. 3:10 Jeannean Howe, *PLR#5: Scalloped spoon and shells*, 2021.



Fig. 3:11 Jeannean Howe, *PLR#6: Shell/Flame*, 2021.



Fig. 3:12 Jeannean Howe, *Unorthodox*, 2021. © J.Howe 2024



Fig. 3:13 Jeannean Howe, *Rigidity*, 2021. © J.Howe 2024

One shell I picked up reminded me of the anxiety evoked in Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) and prompted reflections on female-specific anxiety. To create the arms, I initially used spoons; however, the vast difference in size necessitated the image's production as a composite. Digital photo collage enabled me to manipulate the scale of both the spoons and the shell, therefore, a combination of all three of Bate's categories. Several attempts were made with different spoons and angles, but it was the symbolic vessel shape I aimed to create with the spoon handles that caused difficulties in achieving a vibrant metaphor. This led me to artificially highlight the spoons by reflecting paper onto their surface. Ultimately, I created the image using sugar tongs (Fig. 3:17) rather than spoons, reiterating the commentary on class and wealth previously evoked in figure 3:5, moreover, it evokes a colonialist narrative. The paper highlighting inspired a triptych (Fig. 3:18) reminiscent of a clock pendulum, commenting on the current fierce antagonism regarding the word 'woman' discussed in the introduction and demonstrating the cyclical nature of my epistemological framework.

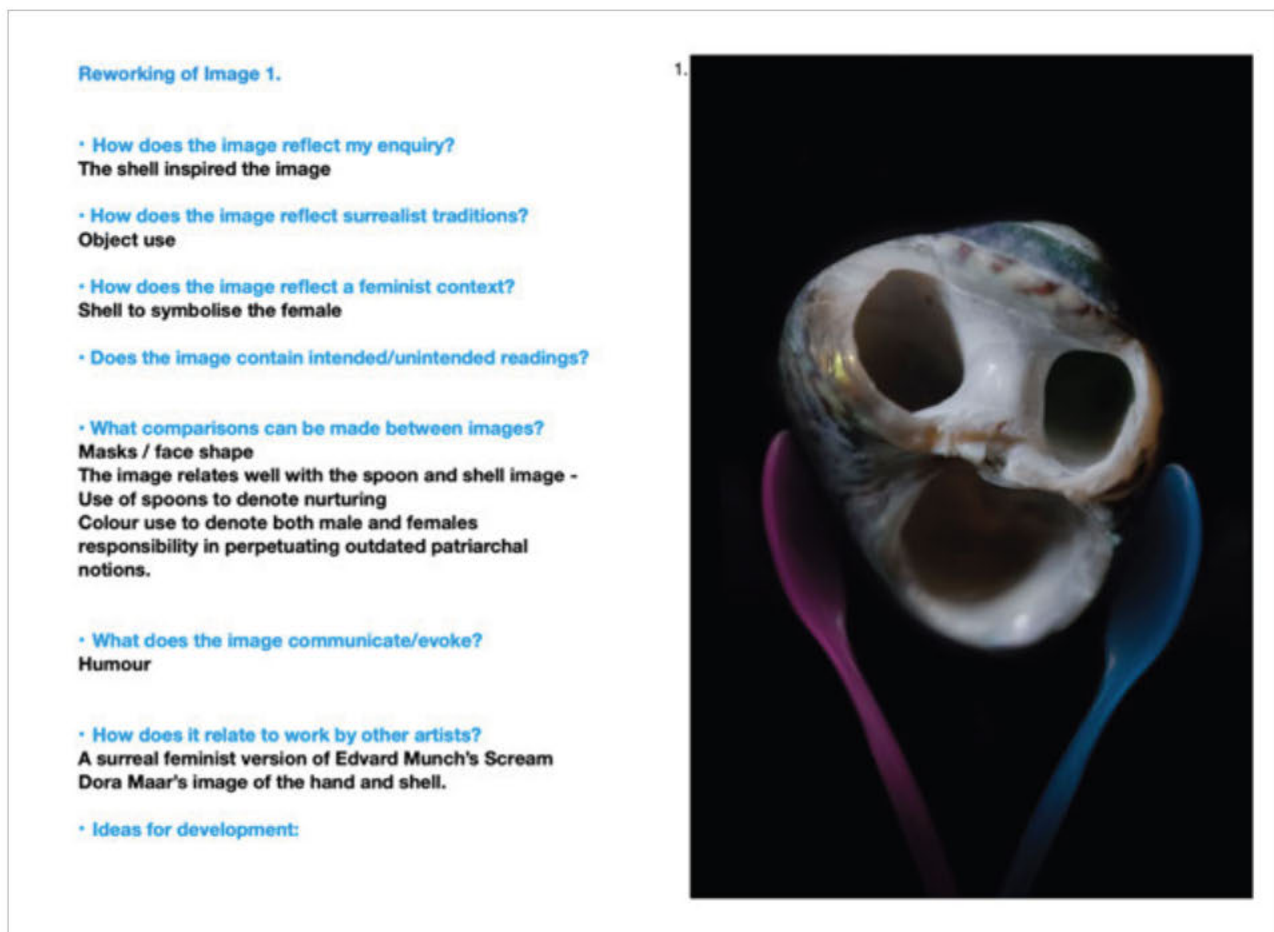
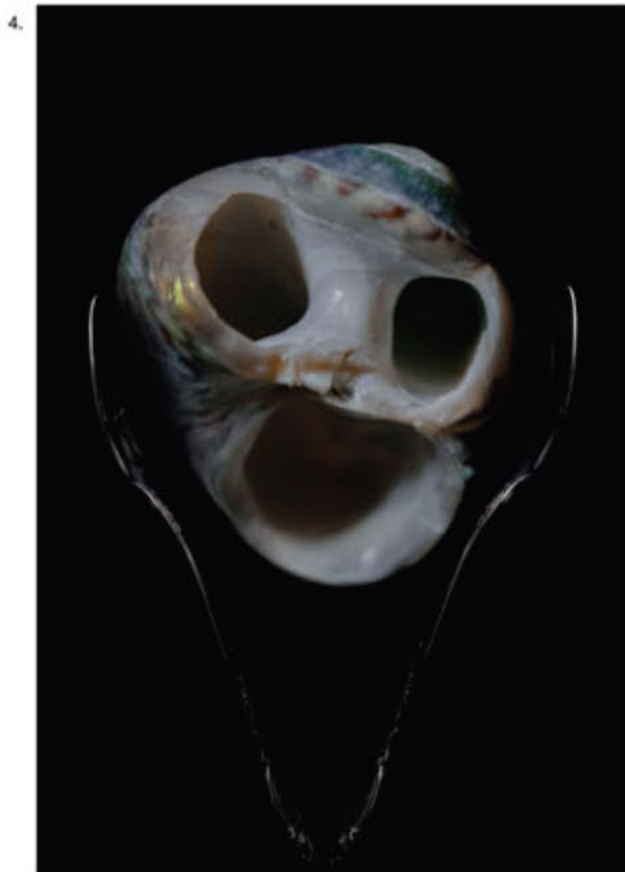
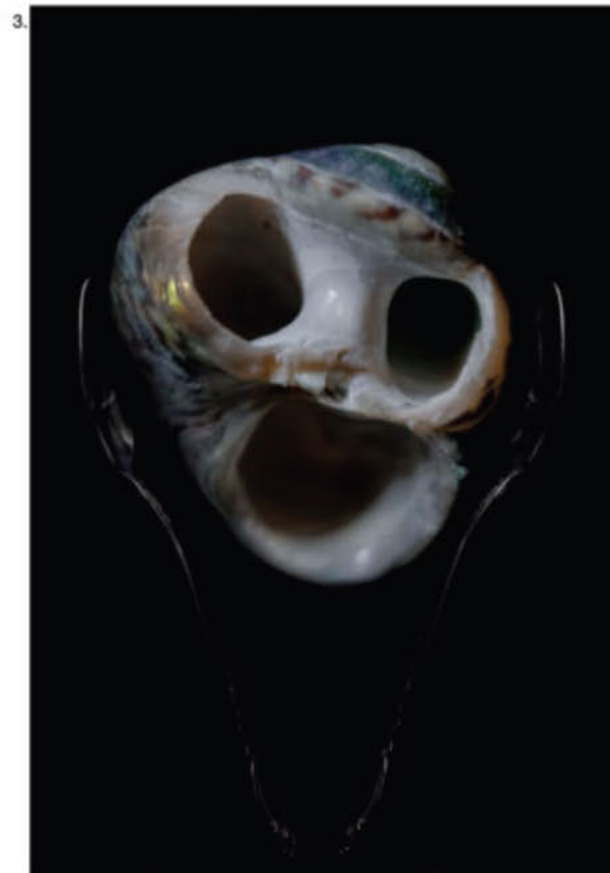
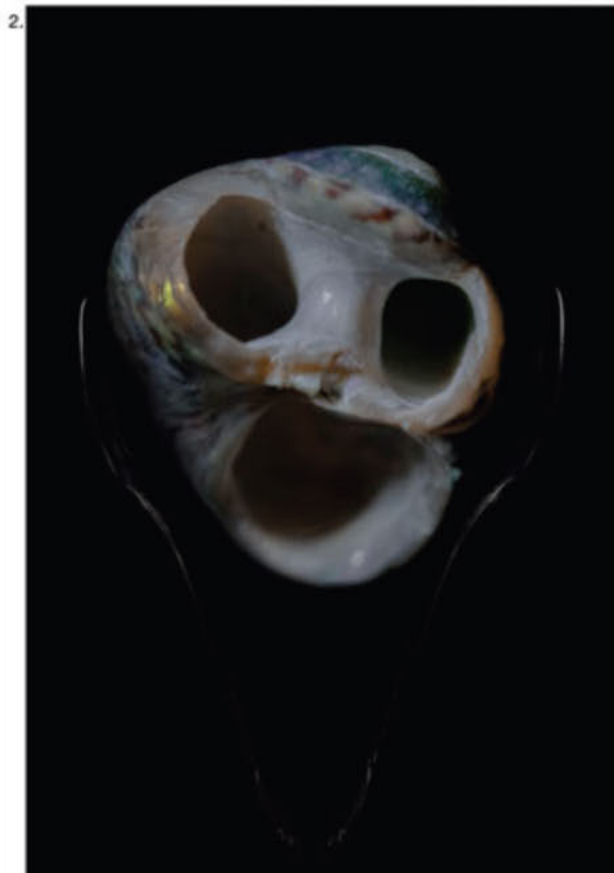


Fig. 3:14 Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#2*, 2021.



• How does the image reflect my enquiry?

Images 1-3 are attempts to use teaspoons whilst sourcing sugar tongs.

Comments on the natural being, directed or forced by domestic convention.

• How does the image reflect surrealist traditions?

Object use

• How does the image reflect a feminist context?

Shells have been used in both surrealism and the still life to symbolise the feminine.

• Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?

Eating snails!

Edvard Munch's *The Scream*

• What comparisons can be made between images?

As previously - Masks / face shape.

The image also relates to the 'Crown Jewels' spoon and shell image.

I used blue and pink plastic spoons previously in image 1, to communicate nurturing and both male and females equal responsibility. The use of silver teaspoons loses the nurturing connotation but keeps the domestic aspect. The negative space between the spoon handles is also vessel shaped communicating femininity.

Not keen on images 5 and 6, they are too fussy however, the shell size was reduced and the composition of image 5 looks the best out of all the images taken so far.

• What does the image communicate/evoke?

Humour - anxiety at the female condition.

• How does it relate to work by other artists?

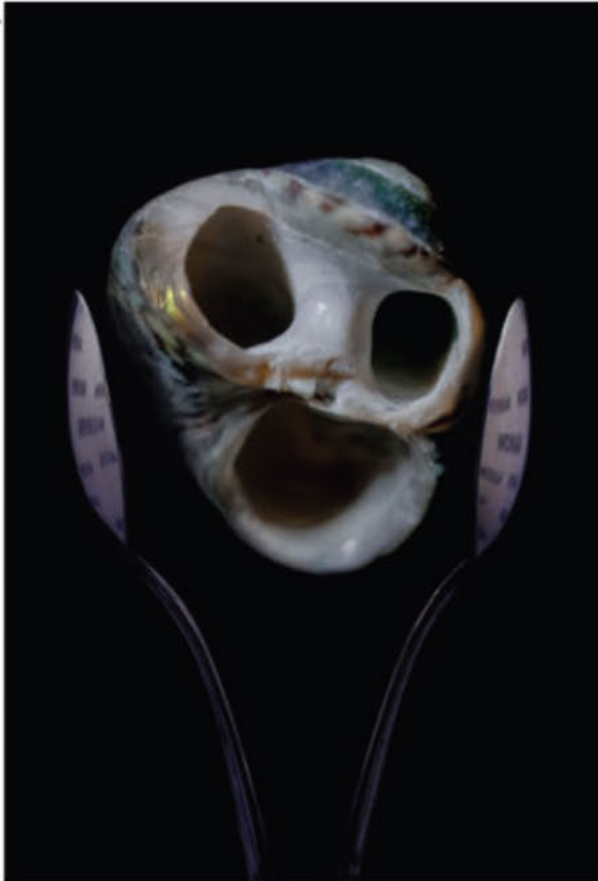
An opposite version of Dora Maar's image of the hand and shell.

• Ideas for development:

Use the composition of image 5 with sugar tongs or teaspoons as in image 4.

Fig. 3:15 Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#3*, 2021.

5.



6.



1.



• How does the image reflect my enquiry?

The images were taken whilst playing with spoons for the images above however, they work far better on their own and the distortion and multiplication of the word by the scallops makes it impossible to define a single woman (word). The images comment on the multiplicities of womanhood, its changing nature and the rigidity of stereotypical roles.

• How does the image reflect surrealist traditions?

Displacement of objects

• How does the image reflect a feminist context?

Shell shaped spoons / Domestic kitchen object

• Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?

Clock pendulum - especially image 3
Distortion of WOMAN

• What comparisons can be made between images?

The spoon has been used in several images and is also referenced by the icing sugar and hair image (Silver Spoon Icing Sugar).

• What does the image communicate/evoke?

I think the images work well as a triptych communicating different woman are and the multiplicity of being female.

• How does it relate to work by other artists?

The precise folds in the metal of the spoon remind me of Marion Adnams paintings of paper dolls and the precise folds in the napkin/cloth beneath Meret Oppenheim's *Breakfast in Fur*, which relate the narrow, confining and multiple roles of women.

• Ideas for further development:

Image 1 could be retaken at the same distance as images 2 & 3.

Fig. 3:16 Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#4*, 2021.



Fig. 3:17 Jeannean Howe, *Screech*, 2023. © J.Howe 2024.



Fig. 3:18 Jeannean Howe, *Untitled Triptych*, 2023. © J. Howe 2024

3:7 My Appropriation of the Still Life genre

My practice appropriates and transforms the still life genre using abstracted space and dislocation, as discussed in Chapter Two. The appropriation of this genre has been acknowledged in artworks associated with surrealism by both male and female artists. Throughout my studies, I believed that my work had a connection with the still life genre, not specifically in terms of aesthetics but regarding consumerism. This encompasses the ingestion and regurgitation of social, cultural, and political concepts, in line with Pollock and Parker's perspectives. For instance, being spoon-fed stereotypical gender roles and notions of femininity dominated by a heterosexual and patriarchal framework.

MOMA curator Margit Rowell's publication accompanying the 1997 international exhibition *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life* regarded the appropriation of the genre by Dada and Surrealist artists as a significant site of inquiry. Rowell argues that the evolution of the still life can signify actuality or concept. By liberating the still life from the tabletop into abstract space, Rowell suggests the genre's scope expanded, positing that contemporary artists may use the still life 'as a catalyst for the transgression and subversion of their inner logic, identity, and meaning' (Rowell, 1997, p.123) also aligning with Pollock and Parker's view.

'By this transformative gesture, the artist makes the object into a poetic statement. This metamorphosis – from reality to fiction, from concrete subject into an artificial system of meanings – is a central principle of the still life genre.'⁵⁷

Categorising contemporary artists and artworks with historical terms such as still life or Surrealism alludes to historical periods that have little contemporary relevance however, this does not mean that historical concepts are not contemporarily productive. My inspiration for figure 3:18 began with the gender-categorising nursery rhyme, which defines little girls as made of sugar, spice, and all things nice,

⁵⁷ Exhibition pamphlet by the Museum of Modern Art for: *Objects of desire: The Modern Still Life*, 1997. Available At: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/249> Date Last Accessed: January 2023

combined with my lived experience. As a 'tomboy', I had very short hair, which was not a personal choice but an apparent necessity that resulted in teasing from my peers; the hair on a woman's head is like the icing on a cake, the crowning glory. As an adult, I could choose my own hairstyle regardless of tangle maintenance. Furthermore, decorating a cake with icing is like decorating the face with make-up, masking surface appearance and creating artificiality.

From my childhood perspective, which can be associated with primitive thinking described earlier, the defining difference between males and females was hair. Hair, similarly with fur, is an iconographic device of 'potent, sensual, bodily and even dangerous' (Carruthers, 2020, p.47) connotation, anchored in religious belief and even when a body is absent it is a relic of its presence (Malt, 2004, p.120). Tanning's use of hair is often associated with puberty and transition. However, my title, *Cupcake*, often used to refer to girls as being sweet, fits with my nursery rhyme inspiration but has sexualised connotations. According to the Urban Dictionary, icing or frosting the cupcake is defined as the act of ejaculating onto a woman's pubic hair. This term exemplifies unintentional sexualised or erotic content that a viewer may perceive subjectively, potentially obscuring the socio-political commentary. However, masking is an interesting concept that adds ambiguous depth to the work. The icing sugar and hair assemblage (Fig. 3:19) lacked symmetry compared to images created earlier in the research by extending beyond the photograph's frame; therefore, I reworked the image to fit my minimalist and layered stylistic tendencies that emphasised my concepts and allude to the dominante centrality of historical portraiture and its confrontational focal point (Fig. 3:20). Reflexively critiquing the two images comparatively from my epistemological standpoint enabled me to identify an insight through Nelson's knowledge triad:

'Invention begins when what signified exceeds its signification – when what means one thing, or conventionally functions in one role, discloses other possibilities ... in general a double movement occurs, in which the found elements are rendered strange, and of recontextualisation, in which new families of association and structures of meaning are established' (Nelson, 2013, p.41).

My tacit knowledge had driven my intention to create a self-representation (Fig. 3:19) of female autonomy. There is no symmetrical mirroring, doubling, or reflection; the assemblage pushes against the image frame to renounce restrictive control. However, the signifiers reference conventional phallogentric language to create the metaphorical female body.

The reworking of the image (Fig. 3:20) to align with my previous stylistic tendencies only reinforces the sexualised connotations rather than fostering an ontological or experiential perception. This may explain my frustrations with the image, resulting in a crushed box by attempting multiple compositional adjustments. Upon further reflection and viewing the work side by side, the expansion and contraction offer insightful perspectives. The assemblage and the crushed state of the box obliterate the spoon's face, and the chance lighting difference between the images creates a compelling commentary on the affect of oppression in self-control through internalised misogyny. Using a diptych (Figs. 3:19 and 3:20) more effectively conveys my feelings than a single image; the differences evoke a more dynamic commentary that encapsulates women's autonomy and sexuality within the confines of heterosexual thought.



Fig. 3:19. Jeannean Howe, *Untitled (Cupcake#1)*, 2022. © J.Howe 2024.



Fig. 3:20. Jeannean Howe, *Untitled (Cupcake#2)*, 2022. © J.Howe 2024.

Consumerism and beauty standards were the inspiration underpinning the images in figure 3:21, which is another example of still-life appropriation. In critiquing the image, I was unhappy with my technical photographic ability, which aimed to emulate product photography and the unrealistic appearance of the lipstick. Created from raw beef, the inspiration was a linguistic pun about the beauty industry as a meat market (Appendix Seven, p.221). However, when critiquing the reworked images, the power of the original image (Fig. 3:22) was diminished. My attempts to perfect the image quality and the lipstick shape, by freezing the meat and then carving is an interesting realisation on perfection and gender expectation. After reflection, I decided the original image already contained the duality between perfection and imperfection. This was an insightful realisation regarding my socially conditioned perfectionism and control over appearance, in this case, my photography, which initially masked my ability to see the strength of the image.

A conversation with a friend who said she could not walk to the local shop until she had put her eyelashes on inspired several images commenting on artificiality and beauty standards. False nails and eyelashes have become ubiquitous to the point where they are considered natural appendages, which only exacerbates women and girls' propensity to feel inadequate, showing their natural, unadorned selves. Both false nails and eyelashes feel hard, are unyielding and look very artificial and unpleasant to the point of ugliness, which seems contradictory to their use as something to increase the perception of beauty, a subject utilised by Julie Curtiss. The first image I attempted considers how the perpetuation of false beauty expectations promotes addictive consumerism. However, I struggled with the eyelashes definition in the photograph, noting in my critical questions to try a natural, artificial dichotomy. This progressed into using an eyelash glued to a natural rose petal, which was initially attempted with a deep pink petal (Appendix Seven, p.215-216), to support the symbolism of femininity. However, it took experimentation with much paler petals to realise the final image. Femininity as an artificial construct was also explored, and again, there was a change in colour, from using red false nails to natural-coloured false nails to achieve the desired effect. As the body of work grew, connections between the images enabled the creation of a cohesive collection of research addressing the subjective and objective contradictions of being a woman, highlighting complex and often conflicting realities.

Images above are a reworking of image 3, (No. 16 in the first critiques document)

• How does the image reflect my enquiry?

Suggesting beauty ideals are as commercial as a meat market

• How does the image reflect surrealist traditions?

Uncanny / displacement

• How does the image reflect a feminist context?

self as commodity

• Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?

Phallic

Commercial / sales

Negative connotation towards the beauty industry. (No. 16 in the first critiques)

• What comparisons can be made between images?

The commercial feel to the image works to make the image stronger with the idea of self as commodity. I was unhappy with the original photograph due to the distortion in the gold lipstick barrel due to moisture from the meat seeping over it however, despite shaping the meat into a lipstick shape in images 1. & 2. They seem to have lost some of the visceral quality in the original image.

• What does the image communicate/evoke?

Unease / disgust

• How does it relate to work by other artists?

Meret Oppenheim's fur tea cup

• Ideas for development:

Keep trying

3.



1.



2.



Fig. 3:21 Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#5*, 2021.

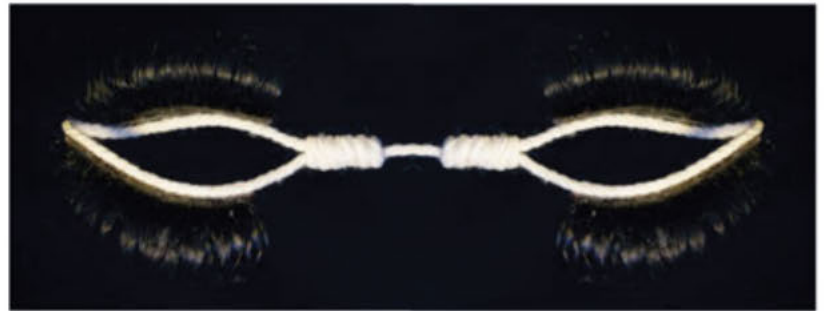


Fig. 3:22. Jeannean Howe, *Untitled*, 2021. © J.Howe 2024.



Image 5.

- How does the image reflect my enquiry?
Attempting to reflect the masquerade of femininity.
- How does the image reflect surrealist traditions?
- How does the image reflect a feminist contexts?
Falseness of femininity
- Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?
The noose overpowers the suggestiveness of the image.
- What comparisons can be made between images?
- What does the image communicate/evoke?



• Ideas for development:

Turning and doubling the image, as if reflected produces a masquerade mask however I think this is too illustrative and a weak image and as such does not strongly reflect my enquiry and therefore perfecting this image is not appropriate however I think the false eyelashes attached to something already deemed beautiful and not in need of enhancement would portray the idea of the feminine masquerade more abstractly.

Fig. 3:23 Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#6*, 2021.



Fig. 3:24 Jeannean Howe, *PLR#7: Petal / Eyelash*, 2021.



Image 11.



Image 12.

• **How does the image reflect my enquiry?**

It reflects the natural and man made / constructed nature of gender. The real and the unreal

• **How does the image reflect surrealist traditions?**

As in the previous pink petal attempt: Uncanniness, displacement and mirroring.

• **How does the image reflect a feminist context?**

The rose is a symbol of femininity. Eyelashes are commonly used to enhance features. A wider eye is perceived to be more feminine. The delicate colour of the petal used. The shape of the object created.

• **Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?**

Sexual / Aggressive femininity / Metamorphosis / Dichotomy of natural and un-natural / The beauty industry.

• **What comparisons can be made between images?**

The alignment of the petal in image 11 creates the eye shape, however the rotation of image 12 creates a vulva shape which gives further readings to the image regarding pubic styling and seeing or looking at identity through female sexuality or gender and metamorphosis.

• **What does the image communicate/evoke?**

Confusion / Absurdity / Unease.
Caterpillar / Butterfly - therefore metamorphosis
Venus Fly trap.
Victorian depictions of chastity belts with teeth.

• **How does it relate to work by other artists?**

The vulva shape is used by many artists in relation to feminist work such as Juliana Notari's recent sculpture.

• **Ideas for development:**

I think the fuller eyelashes used previously on the pink petal (Image 6.) would be a stronger metaphor for an eye in image 12 as the images rotation loses the shape of the eye as seen in image 11 however this would then affect the association with a caterpillar/ transformation and pubic hair and therefore due to the numerous readings is a stronger image.

Fig. 3:25 Jeannean Howe, Fixed *Critical Questions*#7, 2021.



Fig. 3:26. Jeannean Howe, *Hung Up*, 2022.© J.Howe 2024.



Fig. 3:27. Jeannean Howe, *Untitled (This is not a Woman)*, 2022. © J.Howe 2024.

• **How does the image reflect my enquiry?**

A reworking of the below image attempting to make a more ambiguous statement that comments on unreality of femininity.



• **How does the image reflect surrealist traditions?**

Displacement of objects.

• **How does the image reflect a feminist context?**

Beauty products and shape formed.

• **Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?**

Falseness

• **What comparisons can be made between images**

There is a similar message to the petal and eyelashes image below, in that items used in the beauty industry create false impressions and hide natural beauty.

The overall shape created in image 1 is better than image 2.



• **What does the image communicate/evoke?**

Confusion / Unease / Distaste

• **How does it relate to work by other artists?**

• **Ideas for development:**

Improve the position of the object to give a better shape. Use the pink or blue spoon in the image

Fig. 3:28. Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#8*, 2022.

Development of previous image (Critiques 5)

• **How does the image reflect my enquiry?**

The idea for the image is taking something natural and forcing it to adhere to a certain path

• **How does the image reflect surrealist traditions?**

Objects used

• **How does the image reflect a feminist context?**

Flowers are synonymous with femininity

• **Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?**

Unnatural path

• **What comparisons can be made between images?**

The image contains a domestic utensil as with several other images and the use of a real flower compares with the composite images opposite.

Also as with the spoon and shell image below, it questions how patriarchy is perpetuated within the domestic environment.



• **What does the image communicate/evoke?**

Forced / Unnatural / Twisted / Contortion

• **How does it relate to work by other artists?**

• **Ideas for development:** Image two clearly portrays the splitting stem and its contortion but is over exposed so needs re taking. I also think a paler pink flower would fit the body of work better.

Fig. 3:29 Jeannean Howe, *Fixed Critical Questions#9*, 2021.

3:8 Conclusion: A Cohesive Body of Work

My aim for the images was to comment on the pressures and unattainable expectations placed on girls and women. Underpinning my practice-led research is the notion that woman, as a concept, is an abstract idea. Gender identity and expression are subjective, conscious senses of self, while societal and cultural constructs shape our understanding of gendered roles, behaviours, expressions, and stereotypes. These constructs operate at both conscious and unconscious levels to influence gender performance on an individual level. Therefore, using a sexed body, female or male, restricts any commentary on such a multifaceted concept. The use of reflection in my images represents the reality of gendered performance and the subconscious anxieties of mirroring an expectation. My representations of self, gender, and identity are simultaneous constructions of the unconscious and conscious, in other words, a real, unreal dichotomy.

The pressure to conform to societal and familial gendered expectations can become all-consuming, eclipsing any sense of self or autonomous identity. To portray this, I experimented with the scale and colour of objects within the image frame so that the visible entity is a centrally positioned assemblage to denote importance and overlaying the negative space. The consistent scale of the image contrasts with the varying scale of the objects photographed, expressing unreal self-representations that are either paradoxical or acquiescing to societal and familial expectations. The colour and amount of negative space in the images contribute to my commentary on the pressures of elements on women, such as the Machiavellian commercial gain that feeds off gendered expectations and exacerbates body issues. If the void of black negative space is a female identity, the multiple factors that make an expression of gender ubiquitous, such as consumerism that fuels beauty standards, overlay the void. Attempting to represent one's reality, autonomous self, and desires into the future whilst simultaneously acknowledging familial, peer and wider traditional social order expectations captures the dynamic interplay between the past, present, and future, highlighting the unique journey of self as a balance between external influences with internal desires. The diptych is a self-representation of struggling to break free from the confinement of gendered expectation by pushing against the frame of the image, although the symbolic references are problematic in the images' universality.

Desire is a key word in surrealism that can trip up female artists because historically, the concept of desire has often been framed through a predominantly male gaze, which objectifies and sexualises women. This framing can marginalise and constrain female artists, making it challenging for them to express the multifaceted nature of desire authentically. My interpretation of Oppenheim's *Object* which has often been interpreted through a male gaze, emphasising themes of fetishism and eroticism addresses this.

In defining gender, a formless aspect of the psyche, my images engage with Bataille's concept of the informe and the duality in nature discussed in his essays including, *The Language of Flowers*, where Bataille deconstructs the conventional symbolism associated with flowers. Revealing their inherent contradictions and base material aspects, thereby challenging the idealised view of flowers as pure and beautiful by emphasising their ties to decay, sexuality, and the grotesque. Bataille's analysis of flowers as symbols of duality parallels my use of doubling. By portraying the body as a metaphorical surrogate, I question the rigid boundaries imposed by societal and cultural expectations through an awareness of objecthood—the state of being perceived and treated as an object. Desire in photography is often fuelled by what is absent⁵⁸ or implied in an image, (Burgin, 1982) using surrogate objects rather than the female body exposes power dynamics and cultural ideological frameworks that define what is desirable such as contemporary beauty standards and gender inclusivity. This approach critiques historical gender essentialism and contemporary feminist theories recognising the limitations of both. New materialism's emphasis on the dynamic and interconnected nature of matter is reflected in my exploration of gender as a fluid and evolving concept. By using metaphorical representations, my work highlights the agency of the material and symbolic aspects of gender, suggesting that identity is not a fixed entity but a process of becoming. This perspective resonates with feminist critiques of gender essentialism, offering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of what it means to be a woman.

⁵⁸ In *Thinking Photography* 1982, Victor Burgin explores how photographic images construct meaning and desire, particularly through absence and ideological positioning. He emphasises how photography does not merely reflect reality but rather constructs it through signs, surrogates, and cultural codes. Furthermore, in *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* 1996, Burgin discusses how images generate desire not by direct representation but through what is left unsaid, suggesting that the power of photography lies in its ability to imply and withhold.

Furthermore, beauty in photography possesses the power to create an initial moment of captivation, drawing the viewer in or, as Esther Teichmann (2011) describes, causing them to '*fall into*' the image, often without conscious resistance. This surrender suggests a loss of control, an immersion in the medium's affective power. Such a fall is linked not only to beauty's ability to arrest and overwhelm but also to the structure of desire itself, desire is not about possession but about longing, an insatiable pull towards something perpetually beyond reach. It enacts a dynamic of yearning, whether for a lost past, an idealised other, or an unattainable beauty standard, leaving, as Teichmann suggests, '*a paradox and impossibility of grasping a body*' (Teichmann, p.9).

Within my images, beauty functions beyond surface aesthetics; it serves as a threshold that invites deeper emotional and psychological engagement rather than mere superficial observation. As Slinger acknowledges, 'the surface is just an entrance' (Appendix Two, p.192), highlighting how beauty in photography is not only an aesthetic experience but an *affective* one, activating the unconscious and prompting introspection. This resonates with the later works of Tanning and Maar as well as contemporary artists *Hollowell, Curtiss, and Stoller*, whose practices convey womanhood through emotion, materiality, and experience rather than through conventional figuration. My research embodies this approach, presenting womanhood as multifaceted, fluid, and often conflicted, reflecting the shifting gender landscape and challenging static, monolithic representations of the feminine.



Fig. 3:30 Jeannean Howe, *Pick Me*, 2023. © J.Howe 2024.

Conclusion

4.0 Introduction

This thesis investigates the self-representations of female artists associated with Surrealism, alongside the shifts in feminist thinking over the past century.

Recognising that human existence is contextual and inseparable from its social, cultural, and political milieu, I have delved into the depths of my identity, conscious beliefs, and tacit knowledge. My lived experience, values, and ideals have fuelled my research, which is supported by theoretical inquiry and sociocultural exploration. The impact of recent social and political shifts on artists' representations of self, gender, and identity within surrealism's legacy has been underexplored, highlighting a significant gap in knowledge. By comparatively investigating the thematic and technical convergences in self-representations between historical and contemporary women artists, my thesis aims to position my practice-led research within the trajectory of feminist shifts and Surrealism's legacy.

My literature review is bookended by two influential feminist philosophers, Simone De Beauvoir and Judith Butler, who significantly contributed to the understanding of gender as a complex, socially constructed phenomenon. Beauvoir laid the foundation by analysing the material and social conditions of women's lives in *The Second Sex*. Rejecting biological essentialism, she elucidated femininity as a construct rather than preordained, due to and perpetuated by the rigid and oppressive gender roles of a patriarchal social order. These phallogentric stereotypes are foundational to the feminist critique of Surrealism instigated by Gloria F. Orenstein. Whitney Chadwick assessed mainstream surrealist portrayals of women and the societal expectations on women contextually in *Women Artists and The Surrealist Movement*. Chadwick explored women artists and their art as a response from within these positions using an in-depth biographical approach, unlike most accounts of male surrealist artworks. Chadwick initiated the notion of a gynocentric legacy and a supposed divergence between male and female Surrealism. The contradictory relationship between women artists and Surrealism was further confused by heated debates as feminist scholarship became polarised by anti-pornographic or sex-positivity conflicts.

While feminist discourse has critically examined the phallocentrism and androcentrism within Surrealism, there remains much to explore regarding whether the discourse fully addresses the complexities of gendered self-representation within the movement. Feminist critiques of Surrealism have highlighted the biases and limitations imposed on female subjectivity; however, this thesis extends the discussion by engaging with contemporary feminist theories that propose more fluid and inclusive interpretations of gender and identity.

During this research, my intuitive selection of objects has been guided by word and phrase associations such as, 'spoon-fed', 'pick-me girls', 'cattle market' and 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', which reflect deeper cultural and gendered narratives. However, intuition has a significant conceptual overlap with Affect Theory⁵⁹. In the visual arts, both affect and intuition help explain how artworks generate profound emotional and sensory experiences beyond rational thought. Affect refers to the immediate, embodied responses that art can provoke, emotions and sensations that arise before they are articulated in words. Intuition similarly operates on a pre-cognitive level, shaping both the creation and interpretation of art in ways that transcend purely intellectual processes.

For artists such as Loie Hollowell, Julie Curtiss, Jessica Stoller, and myself, these ideas influence both the making and reception of our work. Hollowell's abstract forms and luminous colours evoke visceral, bodily sensations, engaging the viewer's senses before rationalisation can occur. Curtiss' faceless, fragmented compositions generate a tension between attraction and unease, provoking an intuitive emotional response to the uncanny. Stoller's highly detailed porcelain sculptures, which juxtapose delicacy with grotesque exaggeration, elicit a strong physical and emotional reaction, simultaneously fascinating and unsettling the viewer. Similarly, my layered, haptic images align with Stoller's exploration of materiality, while the

⁵⁹ Affect Theory examines the relational, embodied, and pre-cognitive dimensions of emotion, emphasizing its circulation across bodies, objects, and environments. Brian Massumi (2002) distinguishes affect from emotion, viewing it as an autonomous, non-representational force, while Sara Ahmed (2004) explores how emotions shape collective identities and power structures. Karen Barad's (2007) agential realism reframes affect through quantum entanglement, where meaning and matter co-emerge, and Rosi Braidotti (2013) situates affect within a posthumanist framework that transcends anthropocentrism. Together, these theorists expand affect theory's scope, bridging it with new materialism, posthumanism, and feminist thought to explore how affect operates beyond individual subjectivity.

interplay between reflective and matte surfaces echoes Hollowell's chiaroscuro. These visual and material dynamics do not solely rely on deliberate engagement but register through visceral sensation and pre-cognitive processing, navigating the space between abstraction and recognition, form and material.

Affect and intuition transcend traditional meaning-making, allowing art to be felt as much as it is seen. The intensity of colour, scale, and magnification in my work, for instance, elicits a sense of foreboding anxiousness. If we were to align affect theory with intuition, we might conceive of an *affective intuition*, a mode of knowing that is immediate, embodied, and relational, shaped by personal significance. Furthermore, affect is not solely transmitted through facial or bodily expressions; rather, the composition and inherent narrative of an image can activate affective responses even in the absence of human figures (Massumi, 1995; Ahmed, 2010; Cordal & Tedesco-Barlocco in Volkmer et al., 2024).

Additionally, Karen Barad's theory of *agential realism* allows this research to reconceptualise gendered self-representation as fluid, interconnected, and materially embedded (Barad, 2007). Within this framework, objects are not passive signifiers but active participants in material-discursive entanglements. For example, the spoon, initially appearing as a mundane object, emerged at the outset of this research in response to the gender stereotyping I witnessed at a government-funded nursery. However, it quickly evolved into a vital participant in the inquiry, acquiring its own ontology. Within a new materialist approach, the spoon does not merely symbolise gendered social norms but actively intra-acts (Barad, 2007) with them, co-constituting realities by shaping how gender is enacted and reinforced in everyday life.

The use of surrogate objects, rather than an actual female body, foregrounds how desire functions as an affective force, shaped by ideological and cultural structures mediated through objects, spaces, and materiality. Rather than viewing the fragmented female body as a site of disempowerment, contemporary theories propose a more nuanced perspective: the body as a hybrid assemblage of objects, environments, and identities. New Materialism's emphasis on material agency and the entanglement of humans with non-human entities highlights the role of everyday objects as active participants in shaping identity and representation. This perspective

aligns with Object-Oriented Ontology, which decentralises the human subject and asserts that objects possess independent agency beyond human perception. Within surrealist art, this challenges anthropocentric readings of self-representation, positioning everyday objects as ontological surrogates for the body. These approaches move beyond binary feminist critiques of surrealism, offering a posthumanist framework that acknowledges the complex entanglements between bodies, objects, and materialities in the construction of identity, where the boundaries between self and other, subject and object, and the real and the unreal are deliberately blurred.

For instance, in *Clout* (Fig. 7:3), a halo of typical 1970s dessert spoons, used in my family for special occasions, crowns a blank mask overlaid with a barcode from processed meat, transforming the figure into a secular goddess of commercialism. Traditionally a symbol of divinity, the halo references power structures while simultaneously evoking domestic labour and a specific era of feminist intervention that gave rise to an unprecedented level of female autonomy. Resonating with Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, pp. 93–117), the image highlights how the feminist promise of equality in the 1970s coexisted with the persistence of entrenched gender stereotyping and generic, unpaid domestic labour. The spoons, objects of both celebration and servitude, embody these contradictions, aligning with Ahmed's *Happy Objects* (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, pp. 29–51), which explores how material culture carries emotional expectations.

Inspired by the constructed personas of social media influencers, the image suggests that identity is both confined and shaped by capitalism. The barcode, replacing facial features with a commercial marker, recalls Clough's argument that affect, bodies, and subjectivity are mediated through market forces (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, pp. 206–255). This substitution unsettles individuality, mirroring the paradox of performative hyper-visibility and relentless policing in influencer culture. The absent body is invoked through objects, reflecting Gibbs' concept of affective transmission (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, pp. 186–206), wherein emotions and histories move through materiality, not only leaving behind echoes of past experiences but also resonating in the present, shaping perception and affective response.

Within a posthumanist and new materialist framework, *Clout* resists a human-centred perspective, instead positioning objects and commodities as active participants in the construction of identity. Where human and non-human forces co-constitute one another in networks of power, affect, and consumption. Thus, the spoon halo, barcode, and mask are not merely symbols; they are active forces shaping our understanding of gender and identity as fluid and materially entangled rather than inherent human traits. In this context, 'woman' is not a stable or essential category but rather an assemblage, surreal, beyond reality, where the female body itself lacks the ability to fully represent identity, gender, or selfhood. Consequently, this research augments feminist discourse on surrealism, addressing not only historical representations but also the evolving nature of gendered self-representation in contemporary art.

Despite the differing views regarding Surrealism's endpoint, its legacy is evidenced by recent exhibitions I have discussed in this thesis. Chadwick jointly curated *Mirror Images*, which focused on intersections in surrealist techniques to provide insights into surrealist practice. Using categories like 'Self as Masquerade', 'Self as Body', and 'Self as Other', the exhibition explored artistic strategies such as body absence and tactility. Patricia Allmer's exhibition, *Angels of Anarchy*, validated the women artists associated with Surrealism by exploring themes such as the still life, landscape, and portraiture that challenged societal as well as traditional artistic hierarchies. *Dreamers Awake* and *Surréalisme Au Féminin?*, further examined women's roles in Surrealism, raising questions about association, categorisation, and institutionalisation.

The institutionalisation of Surrealism within mainstream art institutions has brought both advantages and challenges. While it has preserved the movement's legacy and expanded our understanding through academic and curatorial efforts, it has also led to the potential dilution of its radical essence. As we continue to engage with surrealism, it is vital to contextualise its subversive and revolutionary spirit within the era in which it emerged. Understanding the social, political, and cultural conditions of the time is essential for appreciating the movement's original intentions and impact. Therefore, it is equally important for contemporary concepts to be taken into consideration and necessitates a critical approach that both honours its origins and

adapts to modern contexts. By recognising the historical context that shaped Surrealism and engaging with its evolution in contemporary art, we can ensure that the movement's legacy remains a powerful and relevant force in both historical and present-day discourse.

The first two chapters of this thesis have contextualised my practice within an integrated history of feminist thought, art, and rebellion. Surrealism and feminism's combined challenge to art traditions and methods are rooted in the spirit of an anti-art heritage. The analysis of early feminist thought, the New Woman, the suffrage campaign, historical female artists, and Bretonian Surrealism reveals numerous parallels that challenged traditional gender roles in a quest for autonomy and self-definition. The analysis of second-wave feminism and gender theory expands the comparable intersections to include empowerment from restrictive societal norms, gender fluidity, and inclusivity. These intersections reveal a continuous thread from the late nineteenth century that has redefined women's roles and identities. This evolution contributes to a deeper understanding of the ontology of a gendered self. It also highlights the double bind that challenges feminism with its contradictory expectations and pressures.

4.1 Addressing the Research Questions

1. How might social, cultural, and political shifts (in the West) affect contemporary representations of self, gender, and identity by women artists associated with Surrealism?

Male artists' use of the monstrous temptress or beautiful goddess, Surrealism's femme fatale or femme enfant was subverted by numerous historical women artists associated with Surrealism. Their critique of traditional art depictions of the female body reveals the female figure as an artistic tool. This was a strategy they utilised to not only subvert the male gaze but also claim the female body as a mechanism or cipher for self-representation. The androcentrism of Surrealism's mainstream discourse became a key factor in shaping the narrative of the feminist critique. Freud's psychoanalytical theory is descriptive of gender formation, which Lacan situates within a linguistic realm. Lacan's theory of the symbolic order enables an understanding of self, identity, role, and experience linguistically, but because

language is rooted in patriarchy, the symbolic order will always be hierarchical. As such, the revisionist critique of Surrealism by feminist scholarship is problematised by an androcentric bias that locks female subjectivity into the position of 'other' to male subjectivity.

Chapter three discussed language as an intrinsic element of my research and the interrelated concepts of embodiment and subjectivity to portray a feeling, idea, or experience. Without the reflexive process of my research framework, I would not have perceived the extent to which my psyche unconsciously projects into my work. For example, keywords written in my research journal during the early stages of this study include 'independent', 'controlled', and 'controlling' which initially seemed irrelevant, as they were tied to situational emotions related to life stages such as daughter, mother, wife, employer, employee, empty nest syndrome or the loss of parents. However, through reflexivity, I realised my compositional experiments are a response to navigating these life stages. The black negative space, which I now recognise as central to these compositions, is integral to the aesthetic power and expressive potential of the objects.

The body of work not only defies a fixed ontology but also reflects the isolation of a hyper-individualistic society. Technological advances have given rise to a culture of social media, which has intensified individualism to a hyper state through its requirement for self-branding, promotion, presentation, and gender expression. This hyper-individualism has been a major shift socially, culturally, and politically, impacting self, gender, and identity representations. Moreover, the intense intra-sexual competitiveness, especially in physical appearance, is perpetuated by social media. Sustaining the broader social, cultural, and political cycle of oppression, this competitiveness emphasises a female complicity reminiscent of Surrealism's selective and repressive art-historical accounts (Allmer, 2016, p. 10). Intersectionality exposes this as an 'uncomfortable truth that the enemy does not always reside outside the feminist gates' (Hay, 2020, p. 49) revealing a double bind or entanglement that an increasing zeitgeist in feminist scholarship recognises (McRobbie, 2004; Stock, 2021; Perry, 2022; Harrington, 2023; Butler, 2024).

Despite Mary Ann Caws' (Caws et al., 1991, pp. 11-13) plea for the surrealist woman to be given back her body parts, current female artists such as Julie Curtiss, Jessica

Stoller, and Loie Hollowell sustain the headless, footless, and faceless image of women. If we accept Marx's claim that the social being determines consciousness (Marx, 1859) then perpetuating a fragmented female body reflects a consciousness of identity politics, feminist inclusivity, and the subtle power of socialised intra-sexual control, exacerbated by the digital self-promotion of a hyper-individualistic global consumer economy. However, taken to its logical endpoint, if traditional feminist critique or curation, which often operates from a binary perspective of gender (male versus female), could become obsolete because the usual framework of patriarchal oppression would be circumvented. This shift could lead to a form of self-silencing within feminist discourse, as the clear lines of opposition between genders would be blurred. As a result, feminist schools of thought need to evolve to remain relevant.

2. What are the connections and divergences between historical and contemporary representations of gender in art associated with Surrealism by female-identifying artists?

This thesis has discussed several thematic convergences cross-generationally, a key theme being gender fluidity. Historical women artists associated with Surrealism experimented with androgyny on a sexual, spiritual, and mythological level. Oppenheim goes one step further, appropriating Jung's theory of wholeness to expand the notion of androgyny to suggest that the artist's brain is genderless. Psychological androgyny challenges Cartesian⁶⁰ notions of the feminine, enabling the reclaiming of the mind. This not only supports the idea of Surrealism as a disposition but aligns with the numerous historical female artists who insisted they were creating Surrealist art before they were *discovered* by male Surrealists.

Current artist's alienated, abstract, and faceless representations portray the fluid notion of gender not as a dualistic balance of the binary but as an artistic strategy. Utilising inclusivity to engender wider audience resonance, fluidity in contemporary representations is political, giving identity prominence. However, it also creates cross-generational parallels in domestic themes. The kitchen, domestic utensils and

⁶⁰ Cartesian notions of the feminine refer to René Descartes' philosophy, which historically contributed to a dualistic view of mind and body, often associating rationality with the masculine and the body or emotions with the feminine. Psychological androgyny challenges this binary framework, enabling female artists to reclaim the mind, breaking down these traditional gendered associations.

objects have been depicted by many women artists associated with Surrealism cross-generationally, including Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington, through to Brigit Jürgenssen, Penny Slinger, and Julie Curtiss. The female body as a low-grade object of sexual objectification is humorously repudiated through the still-life. The genre is appropriated cross-generationally to contradict traditional gender roles and stereotyping. My technique of reflecting or doubling objects aligns with gender fluidity and combining masculine and feminine aspects to generate a spiritual unified whole. However, the media of photography also challenges the actuality of the object's perceived wholeness through the traditional notion of the camera's reality. I aim to compound this further by questioning assumptions in manipulation as either unreal mirroring created in post-production or the reality in a straight photograph. The phrase 'you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear' is a proverb I often heard growing up, which implies that a low-grade or ugly item cannot become valuable and beautiful. My use of low-grade everyday items, either of utility or uselessness, becomes beautiful objects. In contradiction to the proverb's sentiment, I experimented with false beauty accentuating items to create visceral unsettling images to question reality and beauty ideals. Furthermore, my research utilises the difficulty of female objecthood by making objects into symbolic still life surrogates for the body. Oppenheim's metaphorical work also uses low-grade, useless, and invaluable objects in a similar form of body surrogacy. Techniques such as mirroring, isolation, and photographic manipulations such as close cropping are ubiquitous in mainstream surrealist art. However, it is the inability of photography to idealise the reality of a woman's body that emphasised a problematic paradox in self-representations, creating an insight into the double bind of feminism.

4.2 Significance

The originality of my research lies in drawing connections between surrealism, self-representation, identity politics, and gender inclusivity. I have demonstrated that the legacy of Surrealism continues to evolve through contemporary feminist art practices and through an engagement with contemporary philosophical frameworks. The research contributes to a broader understanding of the posthuman condition and its implications for self-representation by female artists associated with surrealism.

Additionally, it proposes a new framework for the analysis of self-representations as paradoxical, metaphorical, or surrogate bodies, thus incorporating a post humanist and new materialist perspective. Furthermore, the insights into a lens-based visual language utilising techniques, processes, and strategies associated with Surrealist representations of self, gender, and identity within a contemporary political, social, and cultural context, are significant. Coupled with primary source insights from current practitioners, this research reveals how artistic processes and techniques deconstruct entrenched binaries and offer inclusive and fluid notions of identity, relevant to the 21st-century sociocultural factors thus, expanding the current discourse.

The research compares historical and contemporary self-representational art, enabling cross-generational parallels that facilitate an understanding of the complicity in perpetuating a fragmented or absent female body in self-representation despite a century of female empowerment. The legacy narrative of multiple interdisciplinary approaches to rationalise and consolidate personal and universal themes engenders a paradox between empowered artistic autonomy, societal perception, and feminist cultural conditioning, a tension I have utilised throughout this practice-led research. Surrealism, therefore, retains its subversive and revolutionary spirit, but its legacy must be understood within contemporary social, political, cultural and philosophical frameworks. In recognising the historical context that shaped Surrealism and engaging with its evolution in contemporary feminist discourse, this thesis underscores the continued relevance of surrealism in addressing the challenges of gender, identity, and representation today. By exploring interdisciplinary approaches and integrating contemporary philosophical perspectives, this research shows the legacy of Surrealism is a critical force that continues to disrupt traditional narratives and discourses of identity and self-representation.

4.3 Further Study

My research has explored the work of artists at the forefront of Surrealism's gynocentric legacy, experimenting with representations of gender, identity, and self.

A century after Surrealism emerged, they are defining what it is to be a woman in this specific moment. However, the research is limited by its Western-centric analysis, thereby creating the potential to be augmented with a comparative study of non-Western female artists' representations of self, gender, and identity.

Furthermore, the biographical approach to historical female artists suggests shared aesthetic characteristics or a feminine sensibility. This may have inadvertently reinforced negative stereotypes of women artists. While the biographies of male surrealists often uphold the notion of male genius, there appears to be a lack of rigorous analysis connecting biographical details to their art. Contradicting established perceptions, my critique of Man Ray's *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* demonstrates similarities in artistic processes between male and female surrealists.

A further avenue to be expanded on is the feminist critique of the *femme enfant*, largely framed as a misogynistic infantilisation that reduces women to muses rather than autonomous creators. While these critiques remain valid, contemporary perspectives on gender inclusivity, identity politics and affect theory allow for a more nuanced reading. Breton's concept emerged in an era of progressive gender ideas, paralleling discussions today. I argue the complexity of his idea was rooted in an embodied response, subconscious idealisation and desire for feminine power: a reversal of Freud's *penis envy*, *vulva envy*.

Rather than merely a patriarchal fantasy, the *femme enfant* can also be seen as an aspirational figure, offering an alternative to the rigid masculinity imposed by war trauma, rationalism, and bourgeois conformity. Through this lens, *vulva envy* is more than a reversal of *penis envy*; it reflects existential dissatisfaction, loss and subconscious longing. However, *vulva envy*, as conceptualised here, is not biological essentialism; it does not suggest that women are inherently more liberated, but rather that the Surrealists perceived and constructed them as embodying qualities of freedom. Their longing was not for female biology but for what they associated with the feminine: a symbol of childlike nonconformity, spontaneity, purity and carefree erotic innocence.

In this way, *vulva envy* represents a yearning for a lost mode of being. The *femme enfant* was both a projection of male desire and a repository for qualities male

Surrealists felt severed from. Yet, as feminist critics argue, this idealisation functioned a form of control. By locating lost masculine vitality in women rather than reclaiming it themselves, Surrealist men ensured the *femme enfant* remained external, admired but never embodied. This reflects a broader historical pattern, positioning women as custodians of lost or forbidden modes of being and knowing, while men remained trapped within the structures they sought to escape.

In an era of gender inclusivity, the *femme enfant* appears more than a misogynistic fantasy, she embodied Surrealism's unresolved tension: a desire to transcend masculinity yet an inability to do so without externalising it onto women. This tension foreshadowed the later breakdown of rigid gender binaries in contemporary thought. As gender discourse evolves, re-examining Surrealism through this lens exposes its contradictions but also its unexpected resonances with contemporary ideas of gender fluidity and identity transgression.

While Surrealist men may have fallen short of true liberation, their desire to dissolve boundaries, between reason and irrationality, childhood and adulthood, masculinity and femininity, suggests a deep discomfort with rigid gender structures. Thus, the *femme enfant* is not merely a relic of Surrealist misogyny but a symbol of unresolved tension, one still relevant to discussions on gender, surrealism and self-representation.

Investigating these parallels could deconstruct traditional gender dichotomies, offering fresh insights that challenge entrenched stereotypes in Surrealism's discourse.

Drawing from affect theory, *vulva envy* can also be understood as an emotional and embodied response to the alienation of men from these affective states, particularly in the wake of war and the demands of rational masculinity.

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Appendices

Appendix One:

Patricia Allmer Interview

Patricia Allmer is a Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Edinburgh who has published and lectured widely on Surrealism. Her extensive body of work, encompassing books, exhibitions, and essays, has significantly advanced the study of modern and contemporary women artists and Surrealism. In 2009, she curated the award-winning exhibition *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism* at Manchester Art Gallery. Allmer's contributions to art history and her international scholarly impact on the study of women artists and Surrealism have been recognised by several prestigious awards, including a Philip Leverhulme Prize (2010) and an Association for Art History Fellowship (2023).

Among her numerous publications are *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond*, (Manchester University Press, 2016) and *The Traumatic Surreal*, (Manchester University Press, 2022). The latter praised as 'groundbreaking' in its offering of 'new perspectives on female positions and lineages in the history of surrealism' (Woman's Art Journal, 2022). Allmer edited *Intersections: Women artists/surrealism/modernism* (Manchester University Press, 2013) an anthology exploring the legacy of surrealism and the complex, often problematic ways surrealism and modernism intersect.

Allmer's scholarship rigorously weaves together diverse theoretical perspectives, making her a leading voice in the study of surrealism and its cultural implications. Her work not only enriches the field of art history but also offers vital insights into the intersections of gender, art, and society.

Interview participants: Researcher, Jeannean Howe (**JH**) and Professor Patricia Allmer (**PA**)

Date: 31st May 2021

Place: Online Zoom Meeting

JH: As a leading expert on surrealism can I ask what inspired you to particularly to look at women artists.

PA: So basically, I started my studies a little bit later so in the late 90's and then I did my PhD on René Magritte actually. I went to a lot of conferences, and I was at Manchester University at the Surrealism Study Centre, and it was really very useful in promoting surrealism at the time when I started to study it seriously as part of my PhD. So the women artists were always there in these conferences i.e. women artists were covered and there were quite a lot of scholars, in relation to women surrealists or women artists and surrealism, women surrealists I don't quite like you know, stereotyping them because they come from very different backgrounds, some of them identify themselves as surrealists, others have had much longer careers and don't identify themselves so I am very careful with my terminology actually, but women artists in these conferences were always seriously covered, and there were people like Georgiana Colvey who unfortunately has died in 2019, Catherine Conley so these people did some very serious research on women artists and were promoting them all along. I was friends with them and Mary Ann Caws for example, we knew each from the conferences. So, I did have this sensibility from this kind of environment I grew up in as a scholar, and it's the previous scholars who were there who presented and introduced me to the work, more so than the exhibitions, probably. It became very clear that there were not that many exhibitions here on women artists and surrealism. So it's important that the French works and the French surrealist scholars have appreciated the women artists much more, not when it comes to huge exhibitions like in the Pompidou, that's where it falls down but there is a lot of French scholarship on women surrealists and a lot of promoting the women artists' within the French scholars but it didn't quite translate into the big issues and that's why basically Angels of Anarchy eventually happened, but it really did happen with people like Georgiana Colvey, Mary Ann Caws, Katherine Conley, they were really important people.

JH: You didn't mention feminism in there and I just wondered If that is an important aspect of your work.

PA: Well, I think it's a natural aspect of my work because I work on women artists and because they are not very much represented in exhibitions then that is a feminist fact that I don't feel I need to announce it, what else would it be.

JH: It's not a driving force to your work though?

PA: Yes, it's a feminist motivation of course, but it doesn't make it more feminist if I say that its feminist. I think that there are a lot of layers to the whole question around feminism. So, at the time also in the 2000's what is interesting is that feminist scholarship is very specific as well, there is actually a very interesting split between the feminist theorist scholarship and the kind of scholarship around women artists' and surrealism, which also comes out of the feminist theorist scholarship that looks at feminist artists. So that is interesting because the women artists who work with surrealism are not necessarily feminists, they are not even necessarily women artists' for example Dorothea Tanning was very, very angry about my exhibition, really angry about it because she doesn't see herself as a woman artist nor does she see herself very much as a surrealist artist so she wanted to be detached from that or look at Toyen she refers to herself in the plural or Claude Cahun who identifies with androgyne, so it's interesting.

JH: So, in light of oppositions such as Dorothea Tanning's and the general marginalization of women and their works, how did this affect your ability in bringing such a groundbreaking exhibition into fruition.

PA: It depends which artists you are talking about, at the time I was doing Angels of Anarchy there was a big exhibition at Somerset House I think maybe in Brighton on Leonora Carrington, also in Mexico, Susan Abbot had published her book, Frieda Kahlo's was very popular at the time as well so that wasn't too difficult, Kahlo again as surrealist its tricky that's why women artists' and surrealism sits much easier for me rather than starting to define them into surrealist artists.

JH: This was one of my struggles when trying to find connections with my work, there is a scarcity of information on contemporary and current women artists' who

use surrealist traditions or aesthetics in their work, how did you go about finding contemporary, current artists for the exhibition?

PA: Just to go back to the previous question again. You have these big people who every so often get forgotten and then somebody discovers them again and it's like OMG, Leonora Carrington the forgotten artist, she wasn't forgotten, they have serious museum collections in other places. We were very lucky, we had a lot of money at the time, we were just on the cusp of the crash 2009-10 and then you had people who were very well known in their own countries but not outside of the country, and then you had people where it really was like going into someone's living room, where you had one work and everything else was lost and then you had people like Eva Švankmajerová who was known for her set design or doing the costumes for the sets but she wasn't very well known as an artist as such yet she is a really interesting artist, so you had these kinds of very strange constellations. You had people like Josette Exandier who I found extremely interesting who was never exhibited before Angels of Anarchy and also the interesting thing was that people came forward with artists, like Josette Exandier who I didn't know before Angels of Anarchy that just came because I talked to one of the collectors and they talked to me about something else. Penny Slinger for example there you really have genuinely, not because I say but because she's saying it that she left the London art scene and she was gone and then suddenly Angels of Anarchy brought her back into the fold, so you have these kind of artists who were very famous at one point but then disappeared again. So it's interesting the kind of mix and also how they touch on surrealism, sometimes it really is just a notion in their work sometimes they are quite closely aligned to it, other times it is a period in their life and then they moved on and have done something else so it is really very interesting, that's in terms of the variety of different artists and where they come from and what I liked about Angels of Anarchy very much was that we could have Josette Exandier exhibited together with Carrington or Frieda Kahlo and suddenly these unknown artists that have never exhibited were part of this big exhibition and were equally weighted there was no, oh this is a better artist or better known or less well known they were all there because they produced really interesting art. So, yea I liked that about the exhibition. So, in terms of the contemporary artists, it's very interesting, surrealism is very old it is one

hundred years old, are you interviewing artists as well to find out how far they align with surrealism or what they are doing with surrealism?

JH: Yes, I am intending too, Penny Slinger is one who has agreed to participate.

PA: Surrealism is always somewhere in my research, there some sensibility there for me surrealism is in that respect more a sensibility than oh they have to be surrealist after the book, I think artists use surrealism and it is a very important medium still, or a very important way of expressing yourself as an artist but I don't think they are surrealists just because they use surrealism, so like with Penny Slinger she is very explicit at the moment about being a surrealist so she is in some way, I don't know if she has ever gone away from it, certainly her career went into all sorts of different directions as well but she is very explicit about I'm a surrealist, but with other artists, they are not, they use surrealism as a way of expressing themselves with surrealist aesthetic methods, that's not surrealist and not aligning. I would think I don't know but perhaps as a women artist it is also difficult to align yourself with surrealism wholeheartedly, it is tricky and it always has been tricky in terms of its gender politics, not to be dismissed, again it depends who you are as an artists but why would you align yourself with a movement that started a hundred years ago.

JH: Absolutely, it was a very different time so talking about time why do you think surrealism is having such a massive resurgence of interest right now?

PA: I think it always has been there, if we talk about France, surrealism has always been there and there were galleries collecting and exhibiting. In the UK it's a bit of a different story, certainly at the Heywood gallery in the 1970's, I think it was 1977 something like that, there was a big Dada and surrealism reviewed exhibition on and that was huge, and that brought back surrealism into the public eye and from that onwards it just rolled and Dawn Ades was seriously important in that, but it never really went out of fashion as such it just built, built, built and now we are going towards 2024 which is going to be the centenary of surrealism so of course its building up again to the next moment and I think it's just so endlessly interesting, aesthetically interesting what it can combine and of course a lot of artists have drawn on surrealism so it is part of the aesthetic language and it has never left us, like for

example impressionism that's really finished, but surrealism also engaged probably with popular culture to such an extent, not just popular culture but across everything from advertising to magazines to theatre to music that it's everywhere, you know it spread really nicely in all sorts of ways, really it is very powerful how it can express thoughts, how it can express philosophical concepts, how it can express political concepts as well.

JH: Let me share my screen with you so that we can look at some of my images, can you see the images?

PA: Yes, they're very beautiful

JH: The first two images I would describe as a form of portraiture.

PA: So how do you make them, what did you do?

JH: So, the first two images are from my final MA Exhibition which is what started my PhD journey. It was only in the later stages of my study that I began connecting the work with surrealism. So obviously they're photographs but the first two are a little different from the others as they are two images blended together the others are basically straight photography and I use the natural reflection from surfaces such as the bowl of the spoon or my kitchen worktop to double or mirror the objects after I have placed everything together.

PA: So where do your ideas come from?

JH: A lot of my work tends to be intuitive from my thoughts and feelings, the rose petal and eye lashes is about never being good enough naturally and that we have to chance ourselves with false things to appear naturally beautiful. Symbolism is also a favourite thing for me with the shells etc. Obviously, it is also inspired by my research, for example Judith Butler's theories of gender as a social construct. The spoon with the reflected teapot was inspired by a local nursery school where I saw a play kitchen set up. Do you think the references to gender are apparent even though I am not using the human body.

PA: They are very beautiful I like the nature, culture and education. Do you mean in terms of how it recalls other artists work?

JH: Anything that you want to share about them really, one think that I am particularly interested in is would you associate them, or would you think I'm talking about gender even though there is no bodily representation.

PA: Thats interesting, yes that's a very interesting question because I don't know what your gender is.

JH: Okay fair enough, my pronouns are her/she/she's and I identify as a woman.

PA: Thats what I mean unless I know who the artist is, I think you need to know whose art you are looking at otherwise you can't say just by looking at an artwork, oh this is an artwork made by a woman.

JH: So that is really interesting, that was one of my questions, do you think you can tell my gender identity through these images? And you've said no.

PA: No, so if we go up to the first two images, I would bring them together in terms of other artists with Georgia O'Keeffe with her beautiful flowers and Judy Chicargo in terms of her beautiful flower and vagina paintings if I look at it directly, but I know who you are now, but no I wouldn't (assume the gender of the artist) that would be very dangerous to say, unless I really know who the artist is that this was made by a woman. It is really dangerous because you need to know who made the work if you want to start talking about the gendered nature of the artwork or whether it's got a commentary on gender you need to know who, yea.

JH: It never occurred to me to use my body but a lot of gender themed surrealism both historical and contemporary depicts the body either whole, contorted, fragmented or disguised so why do you think that the body has had such a prominent position in gender identity representations previously?

PA: I think that is where we are talking about you as an artist rather than specifically. I don't think as a female artist you have to necessarily use your body; I think this is where these categories of female artist, male artist become a bit problematic because indeed there are a lot of female artists who don't use the body at all.

JH: There are, one I'm thinking of in particular is Meret Oppenheim, her *Breakfast in Fur* and shoes have been quite influential to me, but when I'm looking at contemporary work that I can see surrealist traditions in there seems to be a moving away from photographing the body. Your recent book, *Intersections*, includes an artists called Bridgit Jürgenssen.

PA: Yes, she's brilliant.

JH: Absolutely, I was blown away as I had never heard about her before and have now looked her up and found a lot of information about her on her website. You can almost see I suppose a bit of a timeline if you like, in her work where she starts off depicting the body whole and undisguised going right through to the final work where she was completely covering it up so that the body has disappeared.

PA: Yes it's interesting, I think in some ways a lot of the artist are - there's this reclaiming of the female body and particularly in the early surrealist context that must of been quite significant if we think of Lee Miller as a model and then she photographs herself as well, again this is tricky because where she's a model she is also collaborating in the photography I really want to give women artists who modelled for male artists, I mean there context was so very different and they were partners they've got an agency as female artists but at the same time I think there is also something going on when women artists photograph each other or represent each other or represent themselves as well, there are different dimensions become important there is also a kind of err, taking your own representation into your own hands, having said that I really don't think that we can just say well ok Lee Miller's photographed by Penrose or Man Ray that she is suddenly this passive object, she is not a passive object she is the model, she is part of the photographic image and she is making the image together with him. I am very sure it wasn't that he said, ok you do this and that and she just complies, it was a collaboration. With Jurgensen

case we are looking at a feminist artist and surrealism is part of it but Jürgenssen is a feminist first and I don't know how far she really signed up to surrealism obviously she is very influenced by it, so these are the nuances aren't they.

JH: Whilst reading your book *Intersections* I felt in a way even more lost, because as the canon has become destabilized, so where previously we could fit ourselves into different categories and go yay this is where I fit (as an artist) I got the impression through the book that everything is so open and we can be a bit of this or a bit of that and whilst this destabilization creates opportunity it also creates an unsureness as well.

PA: Yes. I think I'm moving more and more away from what is trying to paint people into one (category) If an artist says to me, I am a surrealist artist then that is what this person is, they are a surrealist artist, but as you said a lot of artists don't state that so I am not sure as an art historian I can go and say, you know what you are a surrealist artist. I can't do that and that's not what my interest is in either, what I am interested in is the intersections between that kind of surrealism and what artists do with it, aside of who they are in terms of how they name themselves or how they are labelled by other people. So, it's this kind of intersection of the surrealist aesthetic and what artists do with that and that could be around gender and identity, or it could be about war trauma or it could be a philosophical concept, so it can go into all sorts of different directions for me.

JH: That's one of the reasons why I included the first two images (Meat and petal and potato peelings and pearls), because the process of creating those two images as I said are two separate images played through a video program until they meld together like an intersection which is exactly how I feel we are, so there are numerous possibilities depending on experience etc. The flower image with the masks

PA: It's magnificent it's so beautiful but I don't think you need to look at this and say, oh this is a surrealist artist because that just distracts as well it completely distracts from the artwork that's the other thing, look at the artwork not where the artist comes from.

JH: Thank you and yes, I agree with that,

PA: It's important to study different art movements that you are perhaps drawn to, I mean is it a requirement in terms of the PhD to identify yourself as something in relation to an artistic movement?

JH: What interests me in that and when I am asked 'am I a surrealist or is my work surrealism' is the idea that we still have to be categorised. Just like gender, even though gender itself is known as a spectrum people are still categorising themselves to feel at home and I find it very interesting that in this categorisation, this labelling to be this or that gender it is just about a feeling of being comfortable and belonging and nobody is particularly happy with this idea of fluidity really. These are just thoughts that constantly come into my artwork and how we become who we are is not really about ourselves to start with, but it is spoon fed by society which is what the spoon and teapot image is about.

As a student, needing to know where your work fits can be restrictive because as I mentioned right at the beginning, I really struggled to align my work with any contemporary artworks.

PA: It's really interesting the artists role in self-definition you just leave it up to the art historians or to journalists who are writing about your work or whether you actually have a more active role by saying well no actually I'm not surrealist, I'm doing my work. There are influences there of course as with every artist nobody works in isolation but it's a big step between being influenced by or working within a visual system or visual traditions but that's a huge step from saying you are a surrealist or from somebody telling you, you are a surrealist if I'm not that if I don't align with surrealism. I don't even know anymore what to align with in terms of surrealism because it is that old and it went through so many mutations.

JH: One of the things I am concerned with and a reason for doing my PhD is future students, especially female identifying ones who will struggle even more than I did if

there is no further discourse on surrealism and women artists because the timeline or legacy you talked about in *Angels of Anarchy* will not continue.

PA: I think the notion for me personally, so I'm really just talking about my own research and thoughts, originally *Angels of Anarchy* was women surrealists', women surrealist artists' or something like that was in the title and I walked away from that because I didn't want to lump them together too much, so that was always important to me. Okay so we have to have women artists' because it's a show about women artists' but nowadays I would say with Toyen for example and Claude Cahun its trickier, where their work sits within women and surrealism. Most of my work the term woman surrealist does crop up, err with horror; but most of my work if you look at my titles, because I am looking at how women artists' address something it is trying to keep it two separate and I am becoming actually more and more explicit about it. I'm talking about intersections here where surrealism is a part of their work but that is very different from being a surrealist.

JH: Do you think it is possible for a gender representation using a surrealist aesthetic to lie between the gender binaries, neither commenting on being wholly male or wholly female that completely subverts objectification.

PA: Yes, absolutely; in terms of modern artists for me Toyen, Cahun, these are the ones who are playing with gender and identity and going across different genders and the fluidity of gender. In terms of contemporary artists mmm, I'm not sure.

JH: I think it is very difficult to subvert objectification if the body is used. I don't think you can ever get away from that unless you remove the body altogether.

PA: Yea it is difficult, but also objectification and eroticism are of course interlaced with each other like for example Dora Maar's photographs of Leonora Fini is very eroticised and there is a gaze but it is a much more complex gaze and engage, she looks back at you as well and there is this kind of exchange and interchange between Fini, the photographer, the viewer so yea there are ways.

JH: One artist that I was thinking of in particular in respect of this is Helen Chadwick and her 1986 *Ruin* and how she completely changed her practice due to the backlash against her naked photograph.

PA: She's a fantastic artist, she has these meat pieces doesn't she and of course the *Piss Flowers*, they are brilliant as well, yes, a magnificent artist.

JH: One last question about being a very successful woman in the art world, can you tell me a bit about your career and have you personally experienced any struggles as a female working in the art world.

PA: I always loved art I should have known it but I didn't, so I always loved art I always hung out with artists and really strange people in Austria, we had the Actionists in Austria and there was this whole commune around Austrian Actionism and it went horribly wrong. I was hanging out with the artists from the commune for quite a while and I was always drawn to the stranger sides of life rather than the more conventional ones, so I should have known that this was where I would sit, but at school I wasn't the best and I had difficulties at school and I was not sure if university education was a part of my future at that point and so I started a teacher training degree just to do something to be absolutely honest rather than go into the work environment and then slowly, slowly I went on an Erasmus exchange program and I came to the UK and there was a course on philosophy and psychology actually and I started that, I thought I might as well just try for a year and if I failed I can always go back to the teacher training program and so the first year went okay the second year went better and in the third year suddenly there was film studies as well and I started to write about René Magritte and research Magritte and then the marks improved a lot and then I applied for an MA at Manchester Metropolitan University and that was in European Studies, so yea I still didn't quite click. I went for this European studies MA because European philosophy, philosophy theory is really important for my work and so I did that and then I applied for a PhD at Loughborough University, with a scholarship in European studies again. It was really just luck that the person I sent my proposal to, my PhD proposal on Magritte didn't bin it but actually handed it over to Colin Rhodes who was in Art History and so there was a scholarship there as well and Colin Rhodes was interested, and I went through the

interview process so that's how I had a PhD scholarship. Yea, but that's life isn't it, it's never straight it's a good journey and I learnt so much about psychology, philosophy and I always utilised it but it's just interesting how much something is present in your life and you just don't see it, you know Magritte was always there, I always collected images of Magritte or even Dahli, between you and me, he was always a very interesting artist and they were there when I was a teenager, they were there when I was 12 and was standing in a in Austria and I looked at Magritte's *False Mirror* and I thought wow this is the most beautiful artwork I have ever seen and you don't think that translates into your adult life but sometimes it does. Then I tried to find a job and did a lot of teaching, hourly and part-time teaching and very often I wished not to get a job because it was too far from where I wanted to be, I wanted to be in the Manchester area really. Sometimes I just felt like oh god I hope I don't get this job even though it would have been a full time one, there was a part time job, a point 4 something that was about leading a research group at MNU and part of that was to organize something around horror cinema. I love horror cinema, I love cinema very much so I thought this is the job I want, so that's what I went for and from that job surrealism came back in and it came because of my PhD as well because I wanted to publish my PhD, I wanted to translate it into a book and I had connections with the gallery by then and basically they were very open to exhibition proposals so that's what happened, I proposed Angels of Anarchy eventually because I thought, ok I'll see what happens if you propose that; and they took it. So, I think it's that kind of thing really, life's little journey.

Appendix Two:

Penny Slinger Interview

Penny Slinger (b.1947) is a renowned British artist who has challenged traditional notions of femininity and sexuality since graduating from the Chelsea School of Art in 1969. Slinger is an interdisciplinary artist known for her provocative and innovative collage and photography. Her work draws heavily on surrealist techniques.

Influenced by her study of Max Ernst and her friendship with surrealists, Slinger explores themes of identity, the feminine subconscious, and female empowerment.

Slinger's influential book, *50% The Visible Woman* (1971), co-authored with Peter Whitehead, explores the complexities of female identity. She uses collage as a medium to deconstruct and reconstruct the female form. Her later works, including *An Exorcism* (1977) and *Exorcism, Inside Out* (2024) continue this exploration.

Slinger is her own muse; she combines her body and personal experiences with creative ideas. She places herself in symbolic settings to explore and challenge issues like fetishism and the exploitation of women. Her work aims to free these themes from traditional views, presenting them through a feminist lens.

Throughout her career, Slinger's art has been exhibited internationally. She has gained acclaim for her bold and unapologetic examination of the female experience. Her work reflects the radical spirit of the 1970s feminist movement. It also contributes to the broader discourse on gender and power within contemporary art. Slinger's enduring impact on the art world is underscored by her ability to merge surrealism with a distinctly feminist perspective. This makes her a key figure in the study of both movements.

Interview Participants: Researcher, Jeannean Howe (JH) and Penny Slinger (PS)

Date: 30th July 2021

Place: Online Zoom Meeting

JH: You were doing your thesis in 1969, that's just before this huge breakthrough of women surrealists came to the forefront of the artworld. Whitney Chadwick's book, *Women Artists and the Surrealists Movement* was written in the late seventies, so you had come into surrealism just before that, your introduction to surrealist art was via Max Ernst's work with which you were fascinated. Whitney Chadwick's book states that many of the women artists in the hay day of surrealism were not happy to state they were surrealists and it also gives the idea that they had been helped by the men within surrealism to get on the ladder as such in the art world, I thought in some respects this was very similar to your introduction by Roland Penrose and I was wondering about Whitney Chadwick's conversation with Roland Penrose, where he said to her 'you don't want to write about women artists' because they weren't really the artists.' Which seems to be a completely different attitude on women artists that you experienced whole you refer to as a lovely gentleman who was really helpful towards you. There are lots of contradictions in surrealism and I wondered if you could enlighten me a little as to your thoughts on what the discourse says about surrealism and misogyny and how you experienced it.

PS: Well, there's certainly lots of contradictions in everything and surrealism being based in the whole paradoxical is bound to have some of these paradoxical things. There is a saying in tantra, which I moved on to as an extension of the surrealist view. I looked into tantric philosophy and the saying is that reality is paradoxical. So we have that as a starting point and I'd kind of like to lay that out just because there is all this talk about it, Those who want to be academic can be art historians but artists don't need to be academic at all and in fact movements like surrealism and dada are very much a kind of spitting in the face of academia and all the institutions and I myself, one of the things I liked about surrealism is something that was in me beforehand so therefore, it was a reflection of my feelings when I met surrealism and it's not being put in boxes and that's what you've been talking about, and I hope we are in less boxes than we used to be and certainly in terms of the use of media. When I was at art school it was still then very much being in either the photography department or the painting department or the sculpture department. I just wanted to mix all the different media from the word go and that wasn't really a very acceptable thing however, I persevered, and did it and I still got a first-class honours degree. So

that shows you two things, that there was a resistance but also that it was possible to break through that resistance, and I think that's really something that I felt when I discovered surrealism, I was more impressed by the power of the male artists in surrealism, particularly Max Ernst. It wasn't as if I just came in and embraced surrealism in one go, I discovered it you see it wasn't really thought about that much in the art market it was more of a European thing there was only a few people in England who really knew about surrealism. So, when I discovered the books on Max Ernst it appealed to me on the level of collage first of all rather than the level of surrealism in the sense of Wow, I didn't know you could do that. I thought collage was something that you could see were the pieces where stuck together and of course we are talking completely pre digital media of any kind, but it was seamless, and you didn't know where one part began or ended. So, it was like a tool for creating ultimate realities and using the part of reality to recreate so therefore, I found it very exciting because for me that is the disruption and revolutionary aspect of art, that you can remake reality in tune with your own intuitive sense. Forget the logical way of approaching things and let yourself into the subconscious realms and dredge up the mercurial and make new versions of reality which are very disruptive and very much break out of boxes and transcend frames and jump from one box to another, so all this I loved. Recently someone was asking me about Max Ernst and saying what about misogyny and I said I never really viewed him like that because to me someone who could so fluidly move between the realms of these alter egos, Loplop was a bird; you know, people are transcending species let alone the dialogue in the male and female, beside himself, his own subconscious, his *Anima* and *Animus* of Jungian theory. So, for me I don't really see any issue in the art and the consciousness appears that made me feel in any innate sense that there was a higher or lesser than dynamic going on between the male and female elements. When you add in images of the lion headed man with all the medals on, it was really very much shooting down the whole icons of the male centric culture that they were coming under and the protesting against the war that Dada and Surrealism was. So therefore, all that was very juicy for me, it meant a fertile bed to make me feel this is amazing and what can I do with this, what can I do with these tools to express my psyche and the feminine psyche, which I did feel was left rather under expressed in surrealism. I never really was that much attracted to the female surrealists, since then I have come to know them more and going to an exhibition in New York and I

was absolutely entranced, I did feel I was coming very close to a lot of her thoughts and feelings because it was curated so beautifully and done by a woman so it's hard to make and hard and fast statements about that but its only that the ambiance and the whole milieu I was trying to break through, and I felt I was trying to do it on my own because there wasn't so much fluidity of communication, certainly between different countries and women doing things in different places that weren't having the kind of exposure at that time. I felt that this was just something that looking through the history of art, it's all men. Women are all over the place as the muse but they're not there as the ones who must make it, so that's when I decided I wanted to be in both places at once, I'll be the muse, but I'll also be the artist. I think that's something that Roland really recognised in me, he could see the muse in me, the muse of the surrealist but also saw that I was very much the one who was actually the subject of my own reality and being the artist myself and I think he found it very exciting and in no way tried to hold me back but he put wind in my sails from the moment I met him.

JH: I've really struggled with this constant idea in the discourse that it was such a misogynistic group I think these were men of a time and generation that were brought up to respect women in a different way to today's society and it can't be understood by sweeping generalisations. Any contextualisation of the era of both their upbringing and lives seems to have been overlooked and we have to understand it in context. People still have the idea that their ideas were particularly detrimental to women, and I have struggled as a feminist to align myself with a movement that is labelled misogynistic although I personally don't think they were, what is your opinion?

PS: Absolutely, I don't have that sense at all, they were breaking out of boxes and that doesn't mean that women couldn't break out of boxes too, and maybe there where some seeds planted which couldn't be fully manifested at that time but people like myself have taken up that mantel and tried to bring it into the next dimension of what we can do with this kind of energy, because I think surrealism is like a state of mind it is not just a movement limited to a certain time, I think it's an approach to reality and I really embrace that and it's with me always.

JH: I recently said in my transfer of registration viva that I thought we are in a similar situation as the original surrealists with regard to dissatisfactions, uncertainty and worry in society, over gender etc, which makes studying surrealism seem very relevant at this point in time. I think surrealism has become popular again because it asks the right questions by saying we don't have to belong to these boxes and these ideas. I think that's what surrealism poses and what appeals to me is the freedom to question reality and the commitment to explore new ways of thinking. So that's really interesting that you agree with that.

PS: Yes and something I want to say about surrealism and today, with all the modern tools we have especially in the digital arena there is such a plethora of surrealistic images so there is that danger that there is a cheapening of that in a sense because it is so easy now to make something shocking or to make something extraordinary, collaged in all kinds of different ways, but first people have the tools to do that now that we didn't really in that time and there are such a range of ways to making images now that what becomes more and more important is what you were just talking about, the way of looking at reality. That's the thing that has breadth and depth as opposed to the eye candy that can be produced so easily. So that when one produces an image that has some newness or shock value it needs to have that real drive behind it to open up new ground and to do something that actually really means something of your own journey and as an expression of yourself in one way or another; because in the end it is our self and unless you see the self-worth and the reflection of our self, in everything we make then how do we start looking outwards to the other, if the other is still a reflection of our self. too This is how I looked to and discovered tantra and found it gave me all these other tools, so at this point in my time I'm a blend of all of that, using all these tools and through being a woman, to almost grow the psyche of feminine because I do feel at this time, it is her psyche that needs to start a doubling of the issue, people don't know who she is really because there has been such a dominance of masculine traits, even saying male and female and putting things into boxes is again a device because neither the feminine is as we thought it would be, awake within the masculine as the masculine

side in the females, it's a union of the two. A whole grade of people have acted with that dynamic within themselves which is not gender specific and these qualities of being where you mix and match and this ends up in your art work. This is something in our age now and we are looking at how the old role playing isn't really working anymore but it is finding out about how the feminine can really start to be a providing force, this is the place that we are at now because just letting the dominating masculinity play out has been disastrous really. The future and only those qualities of empathy, the act of collaborating, we need to find those qualities and emulate those so that we can continue this new age that we are moving into.

JH: The first image on my website is a photograph of a milk bottle dripping milk into soil, it was taken just after my mum died and I was aiming to portray how the feminine had been lost and the essence of women is disappearing. While I've been at university, I have had many conversations with other students about gender, gender fluidity and gender being on a spectrum and each time I have stated that I am a woman I have been told 'no you're a cis woman' and I think, no; I'm just a woman, and I feel like there is a loss somewhere, an invisibility of a real woman. I began university with an ability in sculpting, I didn't know much about photography and as you said I have taken different tools and mixed them up, so I make little sculptures on my Kitchen worktop that is black granite and use its reflective surface to create my images or use the reflective surface of an object. I also feel that some of feminisms drive for equality has caused a lot of problems that are now arising in the gender debate, so much so that I feel to comment about being a woman there is no point in taking a picture of my body, which brings me back to your work; 50% the visible woman. You were talking about the body as only the visible side, or 50% and you have lots of layers to get to the spirituality and the psyche of the woman. My work had started at the other end I suppose, with the psyche, it just hadn't occurred to me to use a female model to represent how it felt to be a woman let alone use my own body, how important was it for you to use your body and be your own muse?

PS: It was very important for me then because it wasn't happening, it's happening all over the place now, there are so many of the young girls and women who are using

themselves in performance art and all kinds of plastic arts so it's not something new, but at that point it wasn't really happening and you will see in the history of art so many nude depicting women and yet they were nearly always being painted or depicted by a male artists and so that's why I felt this thing of looking at, how the best person to be able to record what that information is, is yourself. As Frida Kahlo once said when asked, why do you paint yourself all the time, well it's because I'm the person I know best. So, I wanted to go into a genre that I could use as a kind of psychic drip feed, your peeling of the layers and your taking of the clothes maybe you're showing the naked form because it's very magnetic, the female form is super magnetic so that's a matter of fact that draws people in. So, if you can draw people in but then give them something a little bit different from what they expected because you're not presenting yourself as an object but a subject, that was a paradigm that I felt really grabbed me at that time, but we have moved on now. Something I wanted to say about your work, I'm fascinated I had assumed the mirroring was with digital equipment but it's not and it's done with actual reflection. It's so beautiful, I really love the work it's so gorgeous, luscious and sensual and if you look at who we are, we are half nature and we find our reflection in the flowers and the shells and the molluscs and all of these things are a part of us and I love the mirroring and at some point in the early 70's I was so fascinated by mirroring that I created a mirror box which I would then project a montage of slides and project them so that I got a mirroring of the upper images and I loved all the forms that seemed to emerge from the mirroring, of course in the modern era of special effects it has become something that can be rather easily achieved. Yours are very exquisite and now I understand how you actually achieve them and can see why they don't feel like a lot of those digitally manipulated images, they have a lot of presence and vitality in themselves as objects.

JH: There is another reason that I do them so simply and that is because we live in a world where we are bombarded by images everyday on TV, computer screens and the media and I think for an image to actually speak to you, there has to be some sort of questioning, it has to grab you somehow and because images are so polished there has to be a level of, not crudity as such but basic, simplicity in order for you to ask, what is that? Otherwise, it's just another image.

PS: There's nothing crude about your images they are very refined, even though you are saying they are crude in a sense of technical addons, in their simplicity and in their design your aesthetic is very refined and that's what gives them beauty as images, so is it simple, no. I've always found that people were more drawn to the shock value than the beauty, but I absolutely love when one can find and display the beauty in a way.

JH: Another reason I didn't photograph myself was because of the influence of the very radical in your face feminist art of the 70s which was one of the deciding factors in my parents not allowing me to study art when I left school in the mid 80's. The male/female gaze and objectification has obviously impacted on my work, I think you are very brave and even your most recent work uses your naked body so how has the male gaze affected your use of your body.

PS: Well of course when I was younger because I was trying to confound the whole situation I found that women were objectified, I even deliberately put myself in men's magazines and things like that, nude; but then had articles about me backing up that work so that as I say you get more than you bargained for and I would put things that where shocking in there if I could too just to shake things up a bit and so that the whole idea of me being this object and under the male gaze was turned on its head a little bit. I was an attractive young woman and I used that, but I wanted to use it to bring people towards what I wanted to say rather than it being just a screen to get their So as time has gone on I've now been deliberately using my own body at the age of seventy-three naked again, it's not going to have quite the same dynamic because I'm not a hot young women it's not going to have the same pull for men so why I'm doing this is because the older woman or the wise women or older people in general, but especially the feminine side of the equation get so marginalised and made irrelevant in all different fields and I feel that this is a crime against us because we have a lot to offer, speaking for myself. Speaking for myself and speaking for a lot of other people too, if I speak my own truth it's going to have a resonance with others because once you've been willing to step forward and really speak truthfully,

generally we are not encouraged to do that so once you do that I think a lot of people can go, yes and relate to that and that's very important to me. So, I'm using this idea of ageism but doing it by not thinking of ageism as such but actually just enjoy being myself and using myself in my art and trying to make it relevant and that I'm not seen as irrelevant, I am seen.

JH: Some of my work has been said to be pornographic, such as the first two images I sent you. Even though I only used organic things like flowers, fruit, or meat which I found quite surprising as I wasn't photographing a naked body although I was obviously positioning it in such a way to be provocative.

PS: I must say it's very funny because there was such an abundance, a plethora of vagina related art that you see out there all the time, I'm kind of pretty bored with that as an idea because everyone's doing it but something like this, this is not in your face this is showing more quality, you're talking about similarity and how everything relates to one another and the juiciness and delightfulness of nature itself and how we connect with it. We are all connected and the actual physical body is not the only way to represent all that sentient world and the senses we use to connect to it and how we experience it and be able to perceive all that softness and tenderness in the world around us that's a valuable way of seeing, and it is about you without you having to show parts of your body to show that, it shows that we are in everything so it's a reflection.

JH: When I first started to try and figure out what I was doing I started looking at the still life genre and its symbolism which has a lot of reference to religion, I'm not particularly religious, I obviously had a standard English CofE upbringing but I'm more spiritual which is why nature, and the organic elements are so important to me. I see a lot of this in your work, I noticed especially in your latest work and the poetry that goes alongside it quite a bit of symbolism can you tell me more about this.

PS: I'm interested in all this incredible creation and I love to connect and blend with all the different aspect of the natural world and the elements have always been very key players in everything and they are the root cause of all of it including ourselves and so, there is this idea that at the root of animalism if you like, is this respect of the elements and respect for everything having a spirit and everything being sentient. Therefore, we can't misuse and mistreat everything around us because this whole consciousness embodied in all these different things. So that balance between all of the world and blending myself, becoming different animals or blending into flowers or trees has always been an integral part my work right from the start, because I feel it's a recognition of that and understanding and honouring the spirit and being sacred.

JH: I totally believe that our perception of our identity is within our psyche however I don't really align with queer theory and the idea of sexuality being a social construct. If we are to believe that we are on a spectrum rather than a binary of male and female one thing that intrigues me is the possibility of artwork commenting on gender identity being able to resonate with everyone or at least not just women wherever they may feel they belong on that spectrum between male and female.

PS: It's hard for me to look at that in a kind of separate way in the sense that I believe every work of art comes from a marriage of the male and female elements within, so I've already left all that idea of whether you're a man or woman behind, you've got both these elements at play within you and you use them as they come together, they make love and make your baby which is your work of art. So, I'm already in this fluid state of the elements that are within me and they are not dependant on gender it's all about the energies and the principals that you have at your disposal that you blend in different ways to create your art and at the same time I think it's time now for the rise of the feminine and that rise needs to be in the hearts of both men and women alike and to me it's so sad that people have had to go to the extremes of painful surgeries and things to change their sexual identity and that we don't have society which is fluid enough. Ideally if we remove the boxes of how we have to behave that create the man and the women because they are not really working anymore anyway, so these things need to be dissolved and the awakening

of the feminine needs to happen in men and women, it's like a softening in general that needs to happen across the board and that's not gender specific in anyway at all. But I think this is the time because the old ways are plainly not working and if we just keep doing more of the same, we are not even going to have a planet that is habitable anymore, so I think it is going to become pretty self-evident and wise to take action.

JH: I understand that when you first started out as an artist you didn't feel comfortable saying you were a feminist.

PS: No.

JH: But you are quite happy to say you're a feminist now?

PS: Only because the base has broadened for it, and at the time when I was growing up the feminists where a little bit militant and they had the view that you shouldn't really be using your body or your sexuality because then you were playing into the banner but I didn't believe that, I like that and I wanted women to get equal rights but based on who they were not on trying to be the same as men, so that was the thing and some of the things the feminists where looking for I didn't really want I wanted men to wake up to the fact that they don't need them so instead I wanted to honour the principals we attribute to the feminine and having pride in our society and in our whole culture so that its more about the male coming towards the female rather than the female having to go towards the male in order to be successful which was my difference in the feminist viewpoint. But at this point things have broadened more and women have understood moon cycles and all these things have been brought out to view it in a more sacred kind of context and all of that has come into the picture so the whole body is more accepted rather than denied in the art of feminists so that's now made me be able to say that I am a feminist but I would never say I'm a feminist surrealist. Let's not forget surrealism.

JH: I hesitate if I'm asked about being a feminist because it depends on how that person perceives feminism, there are a lot of people who have outdated ideas and don't know how feminism has changed. Defining what contemporary feminism and intersectionality actually are, can be difficult.

PS: That is true. If someone really asks, I always say that I have been involved in the liberation of the feminine and that I claim, because feminists can still be construed in certain ways. I wanted to bring that into my aura and arena just because I don't want to be left out of all of that because I have championed the feminine forever, it's just that I am on a slightly different tack from a lot of what we understand as mainstream feminism of course. A few years ago I did a talk in New York and a young woman came up to me afterwards and she said to me, thank you so much, you've helped so much because she said I'm with this feminist group and up until now I felt that I had to not be feminine and not have my sexuality and the feminism your talking about says you can have all these things. So that's my kind of view.

JH: I completely agree with you, a lot of young girls seem so confused, rising numbers of girls are saying they are trans and are taking puberty blockers having surgery, mastectomies, and irreversible treatment just because they don't feel comfortable being a woman or understand what it actually is to be a woman. I find it really distressing that these girls are lost in a system where their gender dysphoria is affirmed and medicalised. I am not saying that trans people don't exist, but I am saying that it is normal to feel confused about how you are expected to be a woman. I was certainly not a girly girl, and I know if I was growing up now, I would be one of these lost teenagers who didn't know where I belonged, which box I fitted in. So not showing a body, not to show an example of what we have to be to be a woman, because we are all natural, organic human beings and what we look like is not important to me.

PS: I've never been interested in surfaces; the surface is just an entrance to what lies within. I think it's a blessing to be a woman at this time, this is the time for the feminine coming into her strength, power and influence. You just have to hope that the work being put in is going to mean something.

JH: Can you tell me what you think about Images 3&4, they were inspired by my cleaning job in a nursery school that promotes itself as a gender-neutral environment although some of the ways they set up the play areas seem to spoon feed the normative gender roles. All of the staff are women, and it made me think about how women support and perpetuate patriarchal society even if, unintentionally.

PS: Well, interestingly with the spoon on the left I gave it a title. *The spoon on the table at the Mad Hatters Tea Party from Alice in Wonderland*, that's what it made me think of, so instead of a sort of critique it put me into a magical world and I do like the crown jewels aspect of the other one because it has the phallic shape and yet the ornateness of the shape and the colour makes it feel different from a masculine kind of energy so I like the conflict and complementariness of that.

JH: Thank you, I constantly question if my work fits into surrealisms box.

PS: It has things that can definitely relate to surrealism and it has things that can relate it to visionary art. Alice in wonderland is surreal so when you make an association to that through your work then the thread is naturally there and it is something that happened naturally it isn't forced and that's a very healthy way to let people make their own associations that they want to make. It seems that you haven't needed to take your inspiration from history or art history your inspiration is naturally to you. I do think your message is interesting and I think your process is interesting because its different from how people generally would be realising a similar but not the same imagery that's coming in a similar kind of genre, so I think your work would benefit from commentary and that commentary could be in prose or

poetic form, but I think little bits of information both about how you achieved the images and about what you were seeing would not take away from the space that other people have to interpret them, I think it could compliment and enrich it to make people look again from that perspective. I think if you actually said, all these are self-portraits, I haven't used my body, but I've used these things instead people won't expect that, and it is what makes your work unique and vital, and it will more power to it.

JH: Do you think it is apparent that it is a woman who has made the images?

PS: They do have a feminine thing but that not saying a man couldn't tap into those things, I would probably intuitively think it was a woman. I am very interested to see how your work progresses and what you will present in the end.

Appendix Three:

Loie Hollowell Interview

Loie Hollowell (b.1983) is an American artist renowned for her evocative abstract paintings that explore themes of embodiment, sexuality, and spirituality. Hollowell has developed a unique visual language characterised by vibrant colours, geometric forms, and textured surfaces. She gained her Bachelor of Arts in 2005 from the University of California at Santa Barbara and completed her Master of Fine Arts in 2012 at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Her work is anchored in lived experience and explores the intricacies and liminality of the female body, drawing inspiration from experiences such as pregnancy and childbirth.

Hollowell's paintings are marked by their striking use of symmetry and repetition, creating compositions that resonate with a sense of rhythm and balance. Hollowell blends abstract and figurative elements to create a sense of otherworldly presence and introspection. Through her meticulous layering of paint and innovative use of light and shadow, she imbues her canvases with a palpable sense of depth and dimensionality. Her work evokes organic forms and bodily landscapes, blurring the boundaries between abstraction and self-representation.

Exhibiting in galleries and institutions worldwide, Hollowell conveys complex themes with subtlety and power. Her art engages viewers on both an aesthetic and intellectual level, inviting them to contemplate the intersections of the physical and the metaphysical. By pushing the boundaries of abstraction, Loie Hollowell has secured her place as a significant and influential figure in contemporary art.

Interview Participants: Researcher, Jeannean Howe (JH) and Loie Hollowell (LH)

Date: 14th September – 7th October 2021

Place: Email correspondence

JH: In my own practice I question the real and unreal, constructed nature, and although I comment on gender identity and gender issues, I do not use the body. What drives the themes within your work, and can you tell me what inspires you and the artists that have influenced you?

LH: What inspires me are experiences I have in my own body as I age. So, in things like having my period, getting pregnant, giving birth, all things that happen in my female body are subject to exploration. The experiences that happen within my body are physical and emotional and impossible to ignore, my practice in a way becomes therapeutic as a process to explore these bodily changes.

Artists that inspire my practice and this investigation are The Transcendental Painting Group (TPG) including artists such as Agnes Pelton, and Neo-Transcendental artists such as G.R. Santosh, who are interested in the body's relationship to the spiritual.

JH: I first came across your work through the *Dreamers Awake* exhibition, can you tell me how surrealism has influenced your practice, and do you consider yourself to be a surrealist artist and if so why / why not?

LH: I leave categorizing my work to the viewer, but surrealist art has influenced my practice and quite a few female painters of the past are inspirations like Frida Kahlo and Dorothea Tanning. Especially the way that they addressed the subject matter of their own body and documenting bodily experience in their work. I associate surrealism with pictorial, imagined, and illustrative space and I would say my work is more interested in the abstract, the abstraction of my body and sensation.

JH: Can you tell me about the process of your creative practice and are there any particular strategies you employ that would be considered surrealist techniques.

LH: Every element of my practice is done very consciously and methodically and, in that way, given the history of surrealist art practice, I would not say that I have an overlap with a surrealist

way of making. I draw realistic sketches of the subject matter I want to paint, for example, a certain physical viewpoint of a lived experience I am having. Quick sketches which I will then abstract and make more minimal in soft pastel form. And in the pastel, I try to find the right color to describe the feeling of that body position or moment, and then the painting is me trying to perfect the pastel drawing.

JH: Identity as a woman is an overriding theme in the *Dreamers Awake* exhibition, you create abstracted forms that capture a sense of womanhood with such emotion and sensual expressiveness, that although geometric; remind me of Georgia O'Keeffe's flower paintings. Can you tell me how your own identity as a woman and using yourself as a muse feed into your abstracted forms?

LH: For me, in the process of abstraction, the work actually becomes more personal, and I get to add in elements of painterly forms, like color and texture, to elaborate on something. When I abstract through paint, I'm taking something that is physical or emotional, a physical thing that I've done or an emotional space that I've been in and putting it into painting language in a way that then allows me to embellish the subject matter. It is a process of painting something that is already personal to my experience but in a form that is not didactic, that is instead more experiential.

JH: What does feminism mean to you, and has/does it influence your work?

LH: The feminist movement has influenced my work and getting the opportunity to show my work at all is a result of those efforts. To me, it means equality of all people. The fact that I'm able to make work about my sexuality is a direct effect of first and second-wave feminism.

JH: Do you consider your work to be feminist art, and can you explain why or why not?

LH: I would leave that up to the viewer based on their own experience. My work is my work, whether it's feminist or not is up to the viewer. An achievement of the feminist movement itself is that I do not have to be labelled a feminist artist.

JH: Your work is powerfully emotive and very sensual; do you think the male gaze has impacted on the visual language of your artwork?

LH: No, the gaze is my own. Because of the advancements of feminism, I feel very unaffected by a male-dominated art world, that doesn't mean that world hasn't tried to change my work, but it doesn't affect what I put out.

JH: How do you think your work is viewed and understood, and do you think the male /female gaze has any impact on viewers perspectives of your artwork?

LH: The work I made recently about my postpartum body has been received in the most positive light by birthing people and people interested in birth no matter their sex or gender. I would say that overall, due to the abstract nature of my work, everyone has a different experience of viewing it.

JH: Do you think the body is an essential element in artworks that comment on gender issues and if so why / why not?

LH: No, I do not. There are many artists who deal with issues of gender in a very powerful way without using the human body, someone like Roni Horn for example. In actuality, gender happens all *outside* of the body, there is no gender in the body itself.

JH: I was particularly intrigued by a recent you tube video in which you talk about using body casts that you had taken when you were pregnant, can you tell me more about this direction your work is currently taking.

LH: That's the work I was referring to in the previous question regarding audience interest and response. In my recent work I've been interested in investigating what would happen if I used the physical form/cast of my body and that of my friends in place of the geometric spheres and discs that have been stand-ins for body parts in my older work. And in this, I'm trying to see if I can take something that is in reality and move it back into a place that is both bodily landscape and abstraction, in the language that only painting can do.

JH: Gender has become a more fluid concept; do you think it is possible to make artwork that lies between the gender binaries and therefore relatable to viewers wherever they sit on the gender spectrum.

LH: Again, I cannot speak to another person's viewing experience, but for me, in my work, it comes purely from my experience and my experience alone. And when I sit in my own body, I'm not thinking of gender I'm thinking of myself as an individual. Since I could not know what it would be like to be anyone else all I can do is speak to my own perspective. Giving birth, having your period, having sex are all individual experiences for each person no matter their personal identity. There is no such thing as a universal but in painting the personal, there's a chance that someone could relate and therefore start a conversation.

JH: If your art had an overall message for society, what would it be?

LH: The message would be "Please enjoy!". I work in a visual medium; it is for you to look at and hopefully enjoy.

Appendix Four:

Jessica Stoller Interview

Jessica Stoller (b.1981) is an American artist renowned for her intricate and evocative ceramic sculptures. Stoller has developed a distinctive artistic voice rooted in lived experience that considers gender, body image, identity, and femininity. She obtained her BFA in 2004 from the College for Creative Studies and her MFA in 2006 from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan.

Stoller combines craft, art history, and contemporary feminist discourse to challenge traditional representations of women. Her attention to detail, elaborate embellishments, and visceral, rich textures utilises the power of desire, the banal, and the grotesque. By juxtaposing elements of opulence with those of decay and transformation, Stoller merges still life and surrealism in works that are both visually captivating and intellectually provocative.

Stoller's work reflects a profound engagement with feminist discourse and a reimagining of traditional artistic representations of women. Stoller prompts viewers to contemplate deeper meanings and question societal norms surrounding the female body. Through her unique artistic voice, Stoller challenges established narratives and offers a fresh perspective on gender, identity, and representation in contemporary art. Her innovative approach and thought-provoking themes have established her as a significant figure in the realm of surrealism and still life art.

Interview Participants: Researcher, Jeannean Howe (JH) and Jessica Stoller (JS)

Date: 7th July 2023

Place: Online Zoom Meeting

JH: Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research, your work is so sumptuous and vibrant it's like a Venus fly trap, it draws you in with its beauty and then traps you in an abject world of glitzy repulsion. I first came across you through your 2014 *Spoil* exhibition when I was researching feminism and the still life and trying to locate my work within the still life genre. There is very little written connecting surrealism, and the still life so can you tell me a bit about why the still life has influenced you, was it something that came intuitively.

JS: The work I'm doing now and over the past ten years is all very ceramic specific but the work I was doing in Graduate School in Michigan had a feminist lens, theme; but was very different although feminism has been through line, I think that's where the still life came up. I was doing very crazy things like I turned my studio into bedroom for this fictional character I created called Pony Girl. I went to grad school right after undergrad, so I was really young compared to everyone else and I think the work I was making correlated to where I was at mentally. I was childlike but also adult, so in this in-between space, so I was very interested in the branding and marketing of girlhood culture and consumer objects like my little pony just how commercially produced objects for little girls were very different than when I grew up with and they seemed very sexualised and consumed with vanity and so I was thinking a lot about that and so I made my studio into this installation and although it was a ceramics programme I kind of wasn't doing that much ceramics I was making weird furniture working to design wallpaper almost like what the ceramic work was like but if it was a whole room

but I think the feminist critique was still there. I was trying to push myself making videos and taking photographs of me as this weird character which I don't think were that interesting. I think I got more interested in the objects like I was making weird cakes, literally cakes and some things were ceramic but a lot of them were not, like my old birth control container so it was like this mix of real and imagined which I think is something I still do. I realised the objects were more interesting, the video and photography just weren't very compelling, and I think also as a maker it just also made more sense to me. I like to make things and I like the tactile process so yeah I think that's where it first came up because I had all this weird very saccharine stuff

which in a way was like a still life, It was kind of natural it was this environment and of course I wanted to talk about the psychology, objects have so many connotations, meanings and so putting them together in this unique way really conjured a lot. Then that stuck in terms of me working only in ceramics, also it was a way of problem solving because I don't have a giant kiln so I'm not making like giant things I'm making many medium sized things so the still life is a way for me to get at scale, a bigger scale through more manageable parts because I don't want to make giant things that's not my forte so I think it organically evolved from the weird work I was doing in graduate school.

JH: One thing that you mentioned there was the cakes you made, before going back to Uni to study fine art I had used to do botanical sugar sculpting. Some of your techniques in ceramics seem very similar to sugar sculpting, can you tell me about your creative processes and what influences you.

JS: Right now, I'm working on my next show which is slow going and I think that it's all a little bit more intense, so I think it's like a little bit less pleasurable. I think in previous shows some of the work was a little bit more fun celebratory and hybrid I think with this work I'm thinking a lot about the political changes happening like the Dobb's decision in the US and women not having access to abortion and what that means and so I think it's kind of what strikes me, whether it's something current event wise but then I'm always trying to figure out research or texts that further elaborate on that theme. For the current work I'm tying these threads about anatomy and how autonomy and how female anatomy has always been pathologized since the Greeks and there so much still with us, even the clitoris has only recently been discovered to be the same as the penis so to me there's this through line from like the witch trials to the Dobb's decision to maternal mortality being very high in the US.

JH: I understand entirely what you mean by slow going and less pleasurable, the more research I did into feminism and the current situation it was depressing how far backwards we've gone, and it had a real impact on my creativity. Before I started my

PhD, I felt my work was far more intuitive. I've read online that you draw prior to sculpting and your processes are very intricate such as dipping fabric in slip.

JS: Clay is constantly wanting to crack and so I draw or sketch out ideas before I start making. I use photographs and reference images as well as my own body and anatomical drawings, I have a whole reference library of images. I tend not to dip fabrics anymore because of the smoke that filled the studio when it burnt off during firing, I roll clay into really thin sheets now and, turn it constantly to help prevent the cracking.

JH: I understand you also apply numerous layers of glaze, which is all very labour intensive, which is at odds with the Kitsch vibe I pick up on. Did the kitschiness happen intuitively or is it an artistic strategy.

JS: I glaze the objects and then use China paint which allows me to control and develop the colours and specific details to be either very subtle or vibrant. I'm not sure its Kitsch though.

JH: I just wondered if you utilised it as a strategy to comment on woman as commodity which is something I've explored in my work. Researching the surrealist artists of the 30's I've become fascinated with lived experience and, how it affects artists work, for example feminist language wasn't apparent when I was growing up but I remember my grandmother making comments to my mum about her job impacting on her mothering ability which made me feel conflicted because I didn't have the best relationship with my mother but I also didn't want to be a woman and do all the jobs she never had time to do. Has your lived experience and identity as a woman informed your work?

JS: Talking about grandmothers, let me spin my screen round and show you this, it was my grandmothers, (Jessica shows me a large white porcelain, horse-drawn carriage, ornately decorated with painted flowers and gold linework)

JH: Now that is Kitsch!

JS: Yes, (Laughs) she had lots of ornaments like that. I had a really good relationship with my mother I grew up in the suburbs of Detroit, which was very conservative and homogenous, very vanilla, and white. I went to an all-girls catholic school and was surrounded by images that were beautiful and grotesque. There was a lot of violence in the images and contrasting imagery between the Madonna and whore. I remember I had a book of saints with a picture of Saint Lucy holding her eyeballs so yes, I think lived experience influences all artists' work.

JH: You have mentioned in another interview that making was a way to escape feeling overwhelmed, where you rebellious?

JS: Not really, not a lot anyway.

JH: Subjectively subversive then (Laughs) You mentioned the word control, when talking about your creative process. Control and beauty are elements in my own work relating to how we are controlled through socialisation, boxed up into the male preserve of femininity. Female anatomy and control feature heavily in your work and corresponds with the male appropriation of the female body in surrealism such as fragmentation, speech and vision removed. How do you think your work is viewed and understood, and do you think the male /female gaze has any impact on viewers perspectives of your artwork?

JS: I've thought about that a lot, I think humour is a strategy that allows you to show things as they are, so it correlates; in a way, with the male surrealists, but the humour mocks and disrupts narrow-idealized notions of femininity and shows the female revelling in the grotesque, I've made skirt lifting figures, an ancient ritual where women expose their genitals as a symbol of power. I think the work resonates on different emotional levels within the binary. My work has become more political recently with current events like the planet and climate change, so I'm interested in eco feminism, scales, butterflies and nature have become objects in my work, as well as abortion combined with historical anatomical Venus sculptures. There's lots of red paint and pearls, exposed gore, and blood.

JH: Whenever I mention feminism, it is usually met with groans and rolled eyes, but I have to ask, do you consider your work feminist art, also online, you are often referred to as a surrealist artist.?

JS: There is a huge backlash against it with incels in the US, I wouldn't categorise it as feminist art, but I think the theme is obvious and there are surreal elements in the work, but I think the word has changed from its original meaning. I wouldn't say it fits with original surrealism.

Appendix Five:

Exhibition Dissemination & Planning

My initial idea for an exhibition strategy was to evoke a feeling of unease: oppression and restriction. If the images are presented on one wall the viewer has no sense of being corralled and fails to conjure any sense of oppression in the viewing experience. My images resonate with different periods i.e childhood and parental caregiving, adolescence and adulthood. When I separated the images into these categories there is a marked difference in the colour vibrancy (Fig. 5:2, 5:3) of the images. Causality and liberation underpin Surrealism, as discussed in chapter two, this was insightful as the two groups were vastly different in tone: the causality photographs were extremely vivid in colour compared to the black and white and muted tones of the images categorised as effect. Working within each grouping, I placed cohesive images together to facilitate commentary and narrative that responds to my research questions by portraying a journey of female oppression exploring the societal shifts and traditional oppressions that affect childhood and are perpetuated by the caregiver, onto adolescence and the effect of consumerism and gender expression onto adulthood and a recognition of female power but also being locked into gendered expression that conforms to societal norms.

Designing an exhibition space and how the viewer moved around the images was inspired by (Fig. 3:17) an image inspired by Edvard Munch's (1863-1944) *Scream* 1893, which I felt was slightly different to the other images due to its inspiration and was therefore, slightly awkward in the overall commentary. Placing the image in position four on the exhibition plan (Fig. 5:1) means it is angled away from the viewer and positioned facing away from the rest of the exhibition, creating a sense of isolation.

Expanding on the positioning (Fig. 5:4), I placed a second panel to create a forced passageway within the exhibition space.

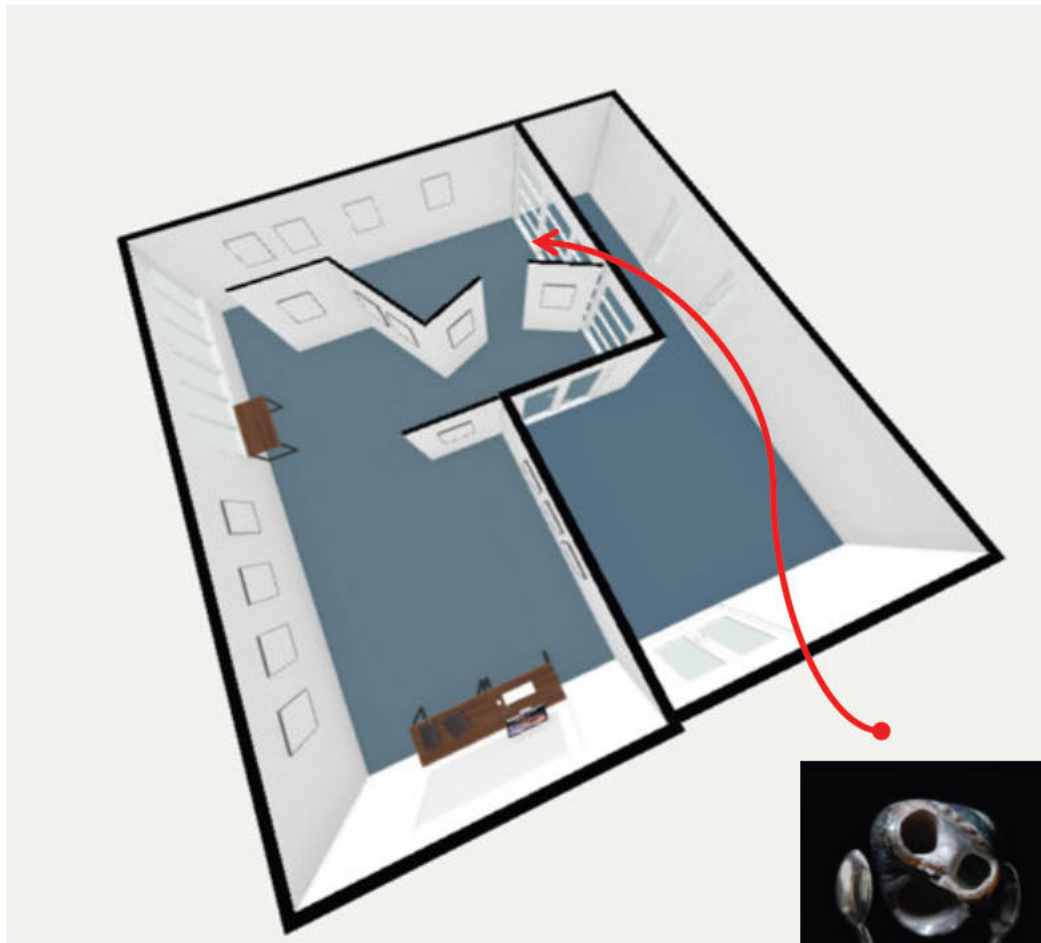
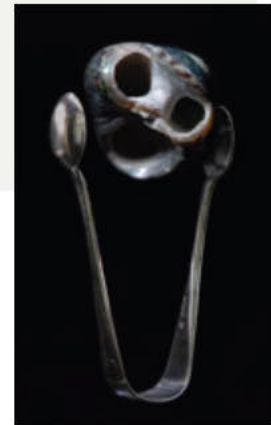


Fig. 5:1. Jeannean Howe, *Exhibition Plan#1*,
Position of Screech 2023.



Using the exhibition plan image numbers denoted in figure 3:33 below: images 4 and 5 are the only two composite photographs in the research however, they portray, a dichotomy: blossoming and withering and both contain symbolic reference to the womb, this in combination with the forced passageway creating a symbolic feminine exhibition space. The screens forming the passage enabled me to position, directly opposite the rooms entrance; two artworks that initiated my research project and demonstrate the projects gestation.

Cause:

- Religion
- Education
- Social & Cultural Expectation
- The Media
- Capitalist Consumer society



Fig. 5:2. Jeannean Howe, *Image Thumbnails#1*, 2024.

Effect:

- **Beauty Standard Ideals**
- **Psychological Issues**
- **Politics**
- **Media and Consumer targeting**



Fig. 5:3. Jeannean Howe, *Image Thumbnails#2*, 2024.

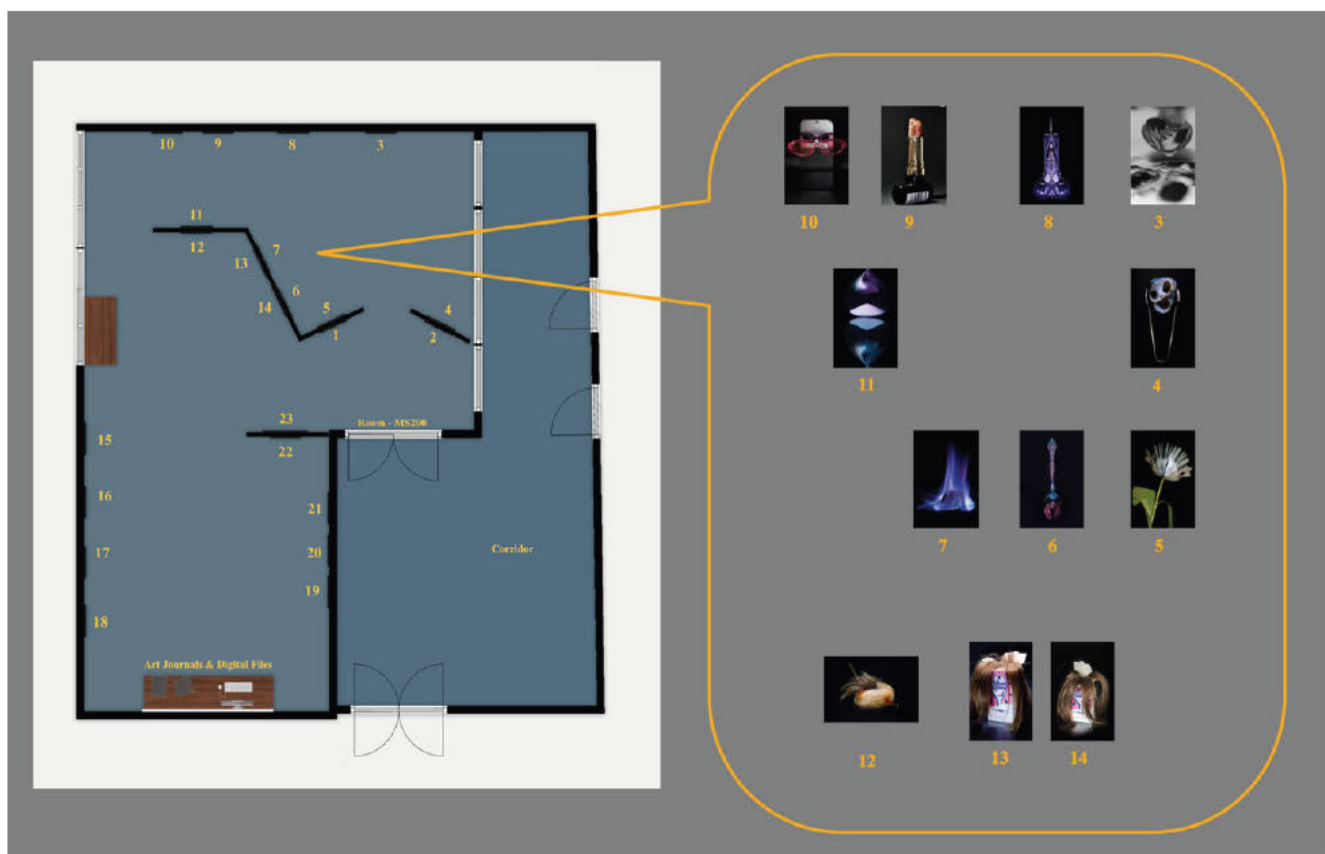
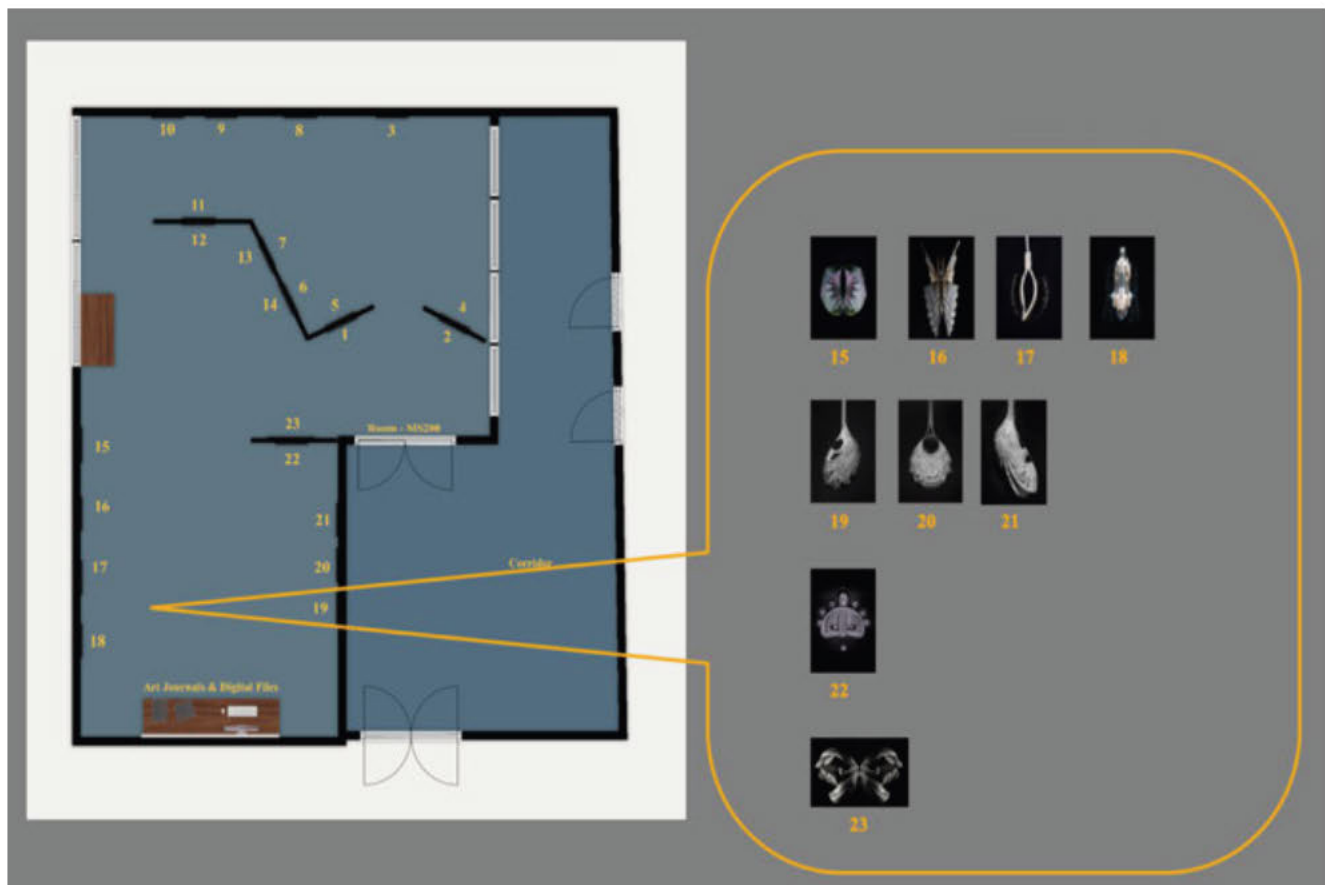


Fig. 5:4. Jeannean Howe, *Exhibition Plan#2, Artwork Positions*. 2023.

The marked difference in colour and vibrancy sometimes happened unconsciously or as an intuitive element of the creative process. Causality is represented by images 1 to 14 (Fig. 5:4) after going through the passage the space is restricted to cause a flow of traffic through the space in one direction. Images 1 to 8 reflect on the nurturing environment where feminine energy continues to dominate temporarily and comments on spoon-fed socio-cultural ideology, conformity, hidden anxiety and feminine power. As the viewer moves through the exhibition space images 9 to 14 bring into the commentary external influences such as beauty standards and consumerism, social media's propensity to present a rose-tinted version of reality, pressures and expectations of gender and sexuality. Which in contrast to the open freedom of space evoke a less dynamic space, conventional and constrained.

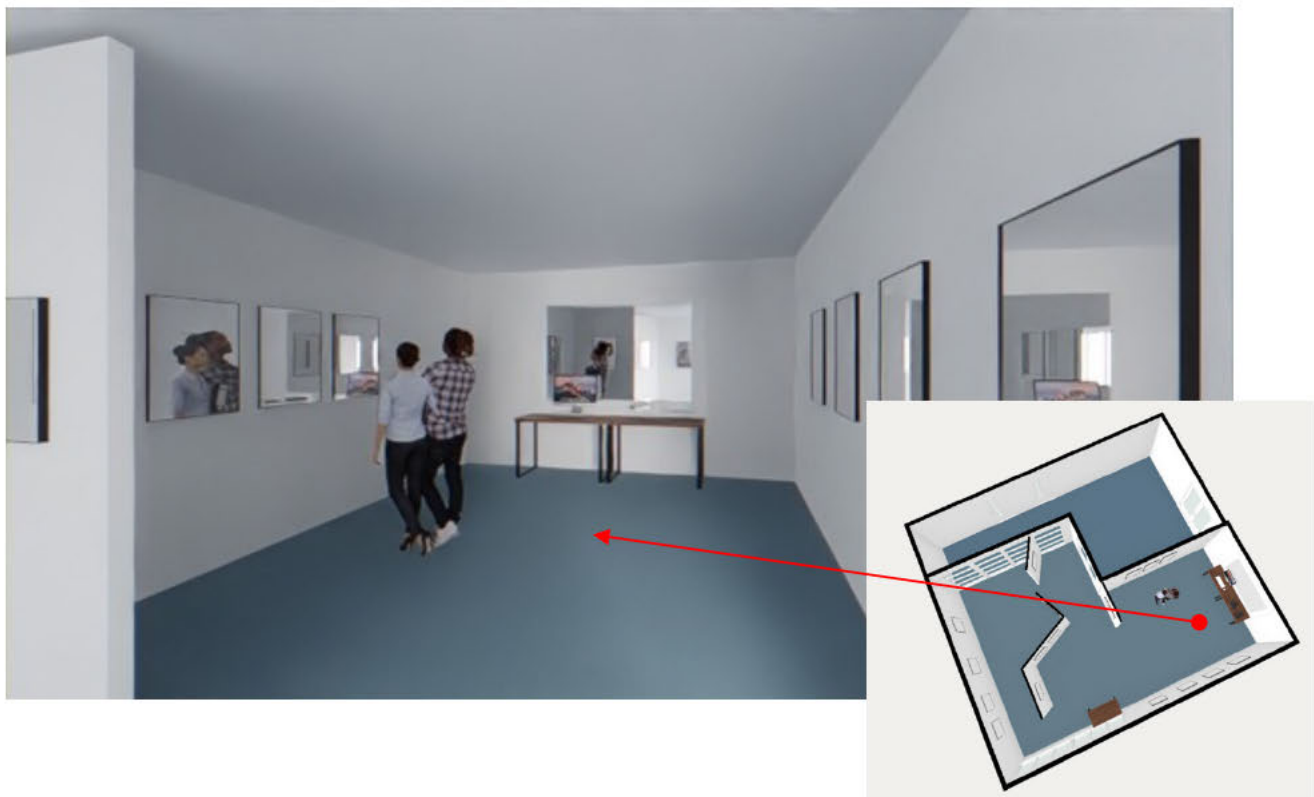


Fig. 5:5 Jeannean Howe, *Exhibition Plan#2*. 2023.



Fig. 5:6 Jeannean Howe, *Exhibition Plan#3*, 2023.

Further strategies have been employed for planning smaller exhibition dissemination by using the images to form a statement or sentence. Interlaced with text from verses of poetry attempted during the research.



Fig. 5:7 Jeannean Howe, *Exhibition Planning*, 2024.

Appendix Six:

Poetry Drafts – one to be interweaved through images (Fig. 6:1).

In the garden of the mind,
stems of shifting guise are sown,
seeking salvation under darkening skies,
drowned by fears, drowned by lies,
self-worth wilts in truths denied.

When petals unfurl in humanity's grip,
elusive monsters begin to pick,
each to hold in subconscious depths,
in the garden of the mind.

Lost souls wander in a hypnotic maze.

In the garden of the mind, seeds are sown,
Stems of shifting guises, quietly grown.
Seeking solace under shadowed skies,
Drowned by fears, entangled in lies.
Self-worth withers where truth is denied,
As petals unfold in humanity's tide.
Elusive monsters begin their silent pick,
Each one held in the subconscious grip.
In the garden of the mind's winding maze,
We wander, ensnared by a watchful gaze.

In mirrors framed by society's gaze,
we're caught in a mesmerising daze,
where beauty's tale is scripted tight,
and rising standards dim our light.
Reflections bend to fit the mould,
As we chase ideals, our worth is sold.
But beneath the surface, truth runs deep,
Unseen by eyes, a feminine mystique.
What we see is not our soul,
But an illusion, a scripted role.
Mirroring back society's decree,
We lose ourselves; we cease to be.
Yet in the mirror, a glimmer bright,
A rebellion against the scripted plight.
For beauty lies in being true,
In embracing flaws and nature anew.
Let's shatter mirrors of false reflection,
And rewrite the feminine's flawed conception.
For in authenticity, we find our light,
Beyond the confines of society's fight.

In mirrors framed by society's gaze,
We're ensnared in a deceiving maze,

Where beauty's tale is tightly spun,
And others' standards eclipse our sun.

Reflections twist to match the mould,
As we barter our worth for ideals sold.

But beneath the surface, truth runs deep,
Unseen yet felt, the feminine mystique.

What stares back is not our soul,
But an illusion, a scripted role.

Mirroring society's decree,
We lose our essence, cease to be.

Yet behind the glass, a glimmer bright,
A quiet rebellion against the scripted plight.

For beauty blooms in being true,
Embracing flaws, like morning dew.

Let us shatter these mirrors of false reflection,
And rewrite the feminine's flawed conception.

For in authenticity, we reclaim our light,
Beyond the confines of society's fight.

In the kitchen, amidst the strife,
Where domestic pulses stir life,
Reality and dreams intertwine.

With every swirl, every spoon's flight,
Playful ingredients embrace their plight,
As worktops glow within obsidian bright.

In pots and pans, secrets are bound,
Roles unveiled as heights confound,
Where childlike wonder lets spells abound.

A recipe for self, a rhythmic muse,
Generations dance in cyclical hues,
The kitchen is magic; but beware its ruse.

Within the kitchen's sacred embrace,
Spirits are forged in the void of a cage.

A recipe for self, a rhythmic muse,
Dancing through generations in cyclical hues.

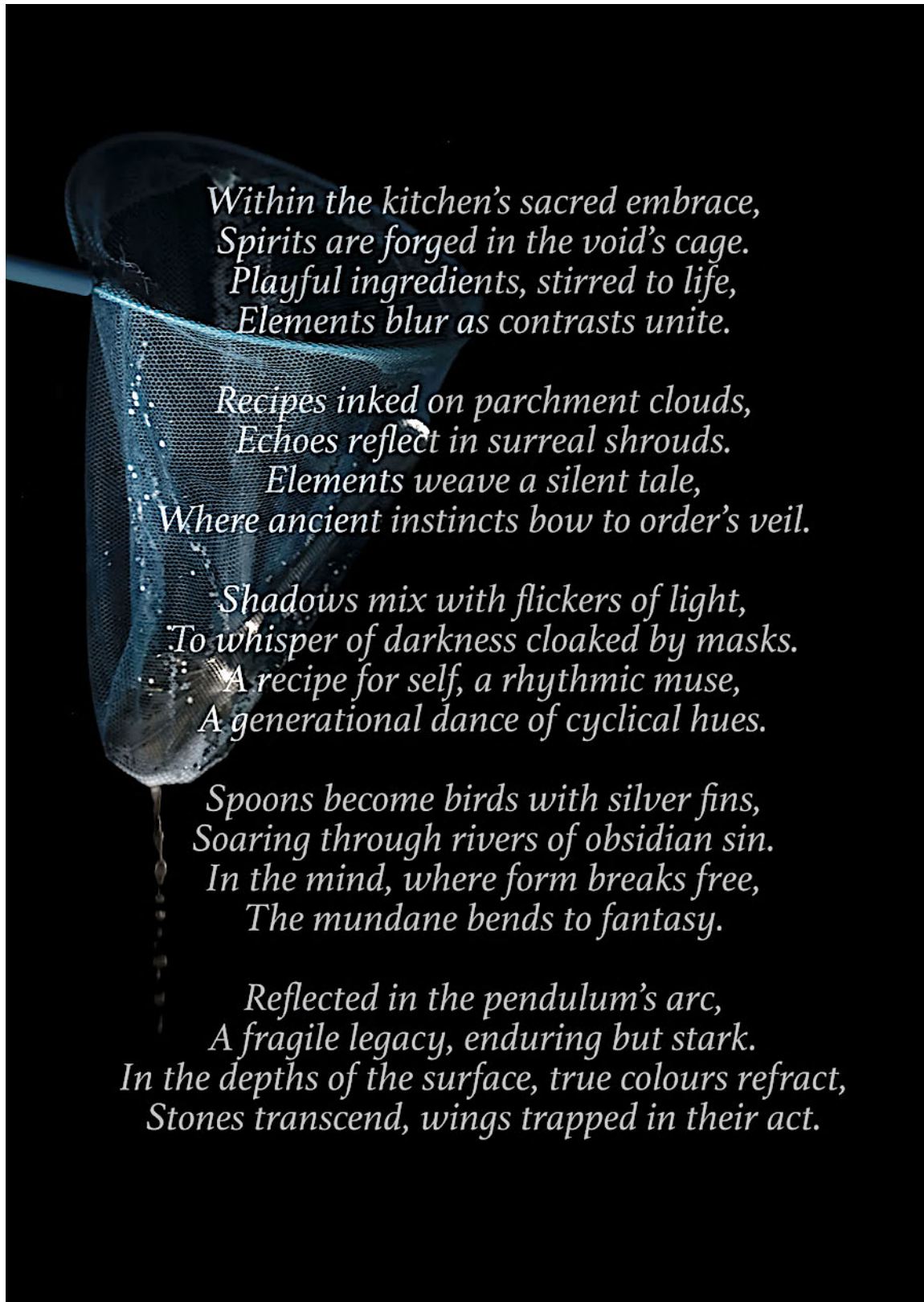
Playful ingredients, stirred to life,
Each element blending, contrasts unite.

Spoons become birds with silver fins,
Flying in rivers of black and bright gloss.

Recipes inked on parchment clouds,
Reflecting like echoes in surreal shrouds.

Pots and pans, ancient oracles of sound,
Silently march to the Sphinx's knowing grin.

Mixing shadows of strangers with flickers of light,
They whisper of darkness beneath the mask.



*Within the kitchen's sacred embrace,
Spirits are forged in the void's cage.
Playful ingredients, stirred to life,
Elements blur as contrasts unite.*

*Recipes inked on parchment clouds,
Echoes reflect in surreal shrouds.
Elements weave a silent tale,
Where ancient instincts bow to order's veil.*

*Shadows mix with flickers of light,
To whisper of darkness cloaked by masks.
A recipe for self, a rhythmic muse,
A generational dance of cyclical hues.*

*Spoons become birds with silver fins,
Soaring through rivers of obsidian sin.
In the mind, where form breaks free,
The mundane bends to fantasy.*

*Reflected in the pendulum's arc,
A fragile legacy, enduring but stark.
In the depths of the surface, true colours refract,
Stones transcend, wings trapped in their act.*

Fig. 6:1 Jeannean Howe, *The Kitchen's Sacred Embrace*, 2024. © J.Howe 2024.

Appendix Seven:

Art Research Journals – abridged catalogue of images demonstrating process and the development of images.



Inspired by my observation of gender-stereotyping in a government-funded nursery school (see p.108), the spoon emerged as a critical object in the early stages of the research, evolving into a source of ongoing inspiration and acquiring its own distinct ontology.

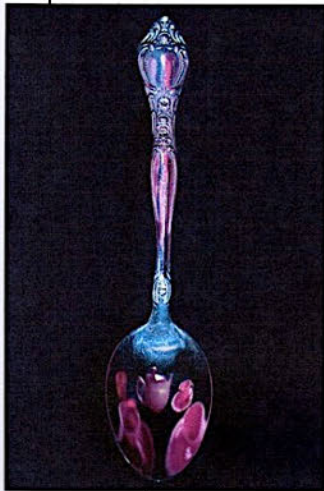


Image 2.

*Penny Slinger gave
this the title Womanland
as it reminded her of Alice
in Wonderland.*

*How does the image reflect stereotypes?
Questioning gender stereotyping and social construction and also
who and what is responsible for it.*

*How does the image reflect stereotypes?
Everyday objects transcending their context, saturated colour, bizarre
displacement.*

*How does the image reflect a feminist context?
Psychology of colour - apart from the masculine and feminine
connotation, the pink is both passive and strong shown by differing
depths of colour, blue as strong, conservative and traditional.*

*Does the image contain intended/unintended readings?
Silver spoon / plastic tea set connotations of a rich, poor dichotomy.*

What comparisons can be made between images?

What does the image communicate/evolve?

*Adult / child dichotomy
Gender and nurturing of social constructs
Spoon fed
Domesticity*

How does it relate to work by other artists?

Ideas for development:

*Perspective plane - Angle of spoon could be altered bringing the bowl
of the spoon forward. The bowl of the spoon could also expand
beyond the picture plane to interact more with the viewer.*

*Create a more distinct symbolic shape within the reflection of the tea
set.*



*I used a
Pink filter
but by chance
the camera
flash added
the blue
light which
I enhanced
in photoshop.*

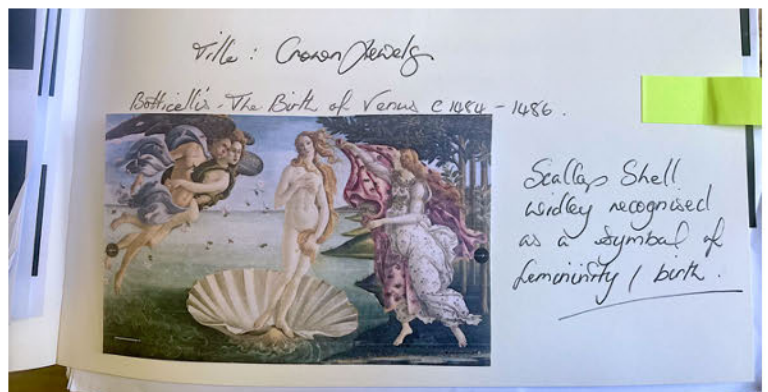
The ornate spoon featured in Fig. 3.5, *Womanland* (p.109), prompted reflection on the significance of spoon designs.

In the 1970s, my mother owned a set of scallop-edged spoons, which were reserved for serving desserts during special occasions. This recollection led me to acquire a similar set for

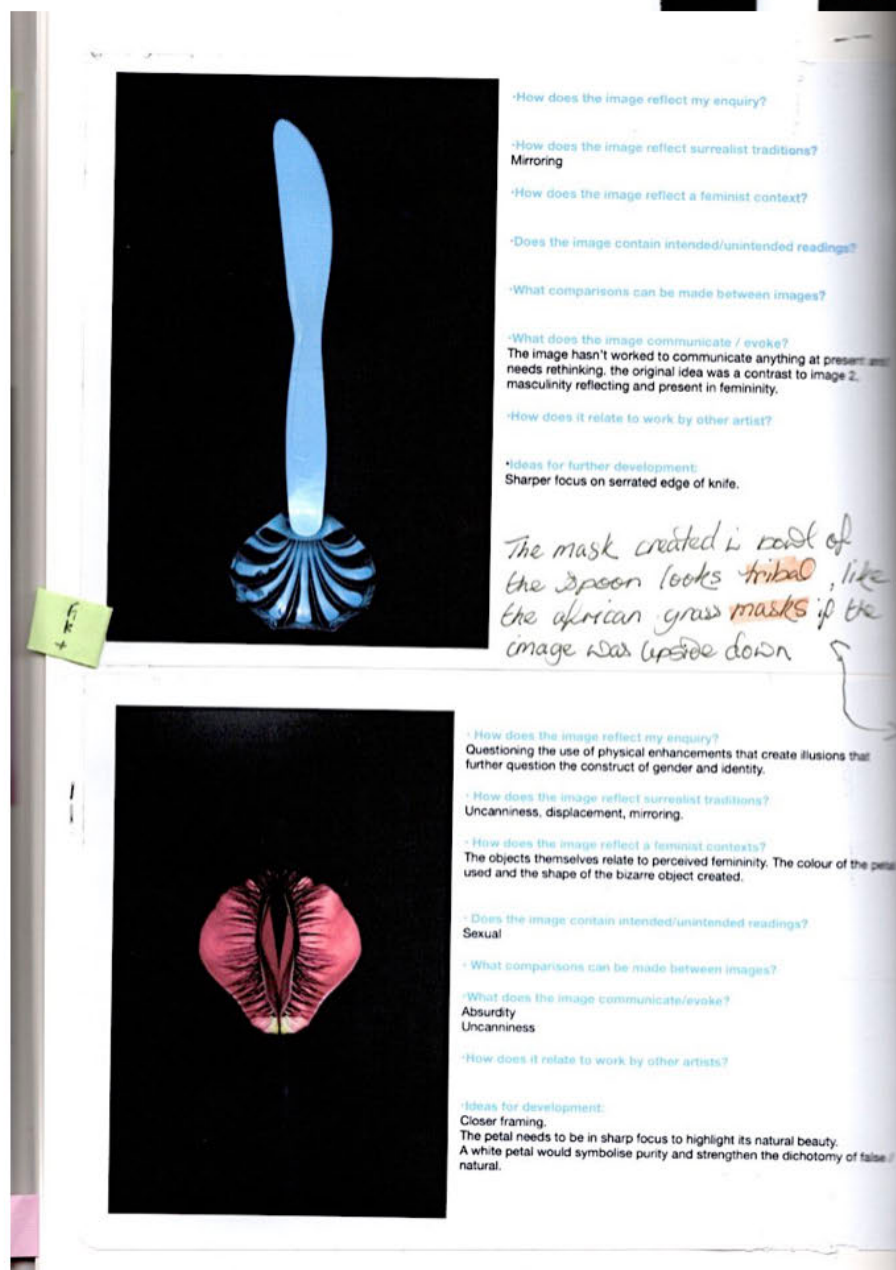
experimentation, due to their visual and symbolic resonance with the scallop shell depicted in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. The scallop shell, is therefore, widely recognised as a symbol of femininity and birth in art history, holding associations with Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty.



Crown Jewels, Fig 3:2 (p.106)



The notion of creating masks emerged from experiments aimed at further exploring the melding of masculine and feminine forms, as seen in *Crown Jewels*. The reflection within the bowl of the spoon was shaped by its scalloped edges, distorting the image to create a primitive mask-like effect. The concept of masks carries a rich symbolic history in art, particularly in relation to identity, transformation, and ritual.



Historically, masks have played a significant role in Surrealism, symbolising hidden desires, fragmented identities, and the subconscious. Surrealist artists used masks to explore themes of disguise, transformation, and the tension between reality and illusion.



Trying to tie a noose was a learning curve - google kept directing me to the Samaritans
Tried adding colour, purple + green to the string but I



The definition of the lashes isn't clear enough to recognise what they are so the message is lost.

didn't like the connotation that Suffrage was the issue.



African ceremonial mask.

I like the peacock affect even the torch light ^{reflection} makes the handle for the mask - just not



Building on the concept of the primitive mask, I incorporated additional elements into the reflection, using a false eyelash to suggest hair and a flower petal, along with its stamens and pistil, to enhance the organic form. By chance, the light source's beam was also captured in the reflection, appearing like a handle and evoking the imagery of a masquerade mask. Although the image lacked clarity, the process sparked further inspiration, engaging with the dichotomy between the natural and the man-made. This interplay reflects a Surrealist approach to combining organic forms with constructed materials, creating new meanings from unexpected juxtapositions.



Fig.7:1. Jeannean Howe, Untitled, 2021
© J.Howe 2024.

My research into the formation and transmission of ideas across generations led me to consider the impact of social media on contemporary cultural narratives. Social media functions as a powerful mechanism for shaping and disseminating ideas, often collapsing temporal and geographical boundaries.

This process led to the use of a mobile phone as a symbol of internet scrolling, paired with a child's rose-tinted sunglasses to evoke the idea of filtered perception and idealised reality. However, the initial images were too dark, prompting me to introduce a white mask to reflect light into the phone's screen and illuminate the composition.

Women's Museum of California

BEAUTY OR TORTURE

The History of Female Hair Removal

Hair removal for aesthetic enhancement of women's bodies has a long history.

The human body contains 5,000,000 hair follicles and while body hair seems pretty useless it actually serves a purpose. Hair helps regulate body temperature, keeping humans warmer in colder climates. It also helps protect the body from outside elements like dirt. **Body hair is natural** and helpful, why then do women spend so much time removing hair from their own bodies?

All in the name of beauty, of course.

The practice of removing female body hair is not new, it can be traced back to ancient Rome and Egypt.

Some of the first razors, made of copper, were used in Egypt and India around 3000 BCE.

Egyptian women removed their head hair and **considered pubic hair uncivilized**. Upper-class Roman women of the sixth century BCE used tweezers, pumice stones and depilatories to achieve the desired degree of hairlessness, while Egyptians of Cleopatra's time used a sugar mixture in a method similar to waxing. Elizabethan women removed their eyebrows and hair from their foreheads to give themselves a longer brow.

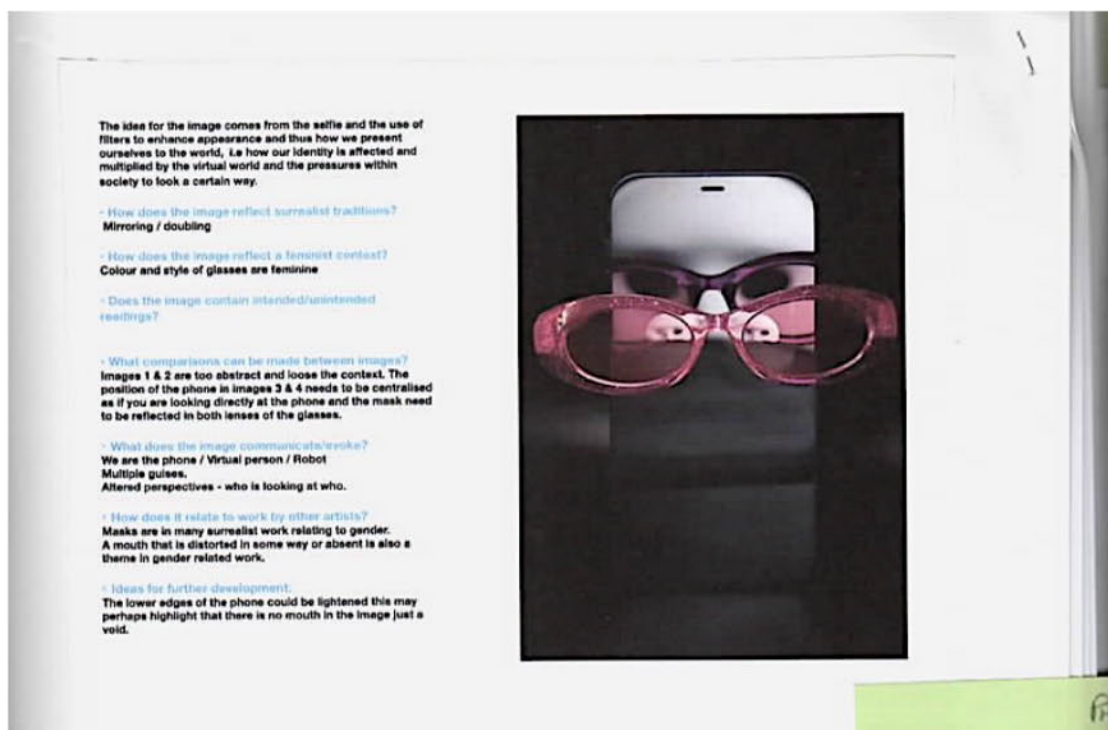
The modern era of hair removal may have been encouraged by Charles Darwin's 1871 book, *Descent of Man*, through the popularization of his theories of natural selection. That is, *homo sapiens* have less body hair than his/her antecedents because less hairy mates were more sexually attractive. **Body hair became a question of competitive selection**. By the early 1900s, upper- and middle-class white American women associated smooth skin with a desirable femininity.

Hair removal was encouraged through the efforts of three different industries: the women's fashion industry, the men's hair removal industry, and the women's magazine industry, each of which recognized and sought to profit from women's new role as consumers. First, hemlines rose, threatening to reveal hairy legs. Then, sleeveless garments bared arms. Exposed limbs in the emerging fashions of the early 1900s pressured women to shave armpits and legs.

While the phone image was ultimately discarded, the mask and its association with identity, concealment, and performance remained central.

The symbolic connection to the influence of social media persisted, reinforcing ideas of how digital platforms shape identity through curated personas and fragmented, mediated realities.

To enhance the lighting for this image, I utilised a product photography box, a tool commonly employed to create controlled, even illumination for public consumption in the media.



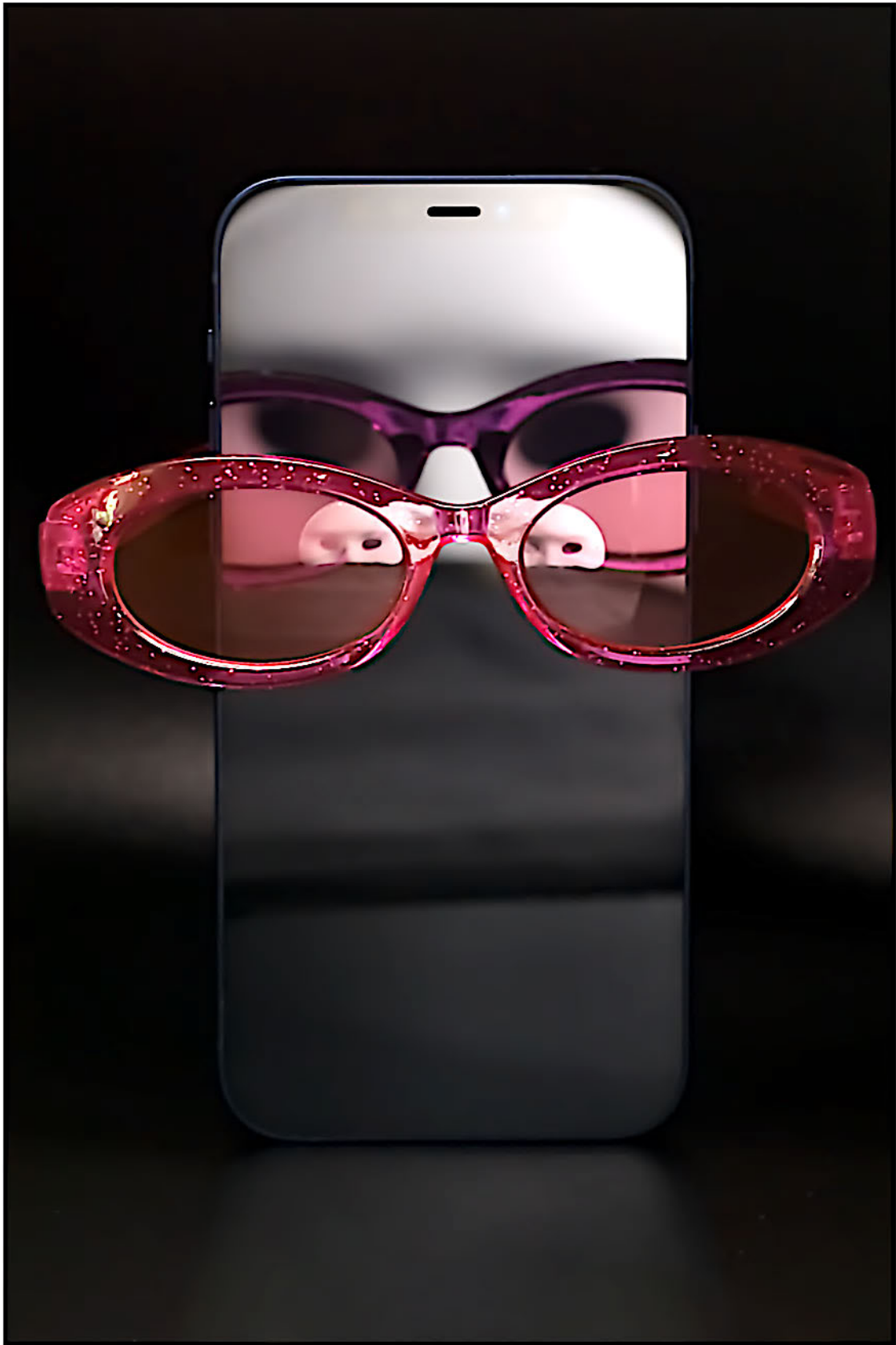
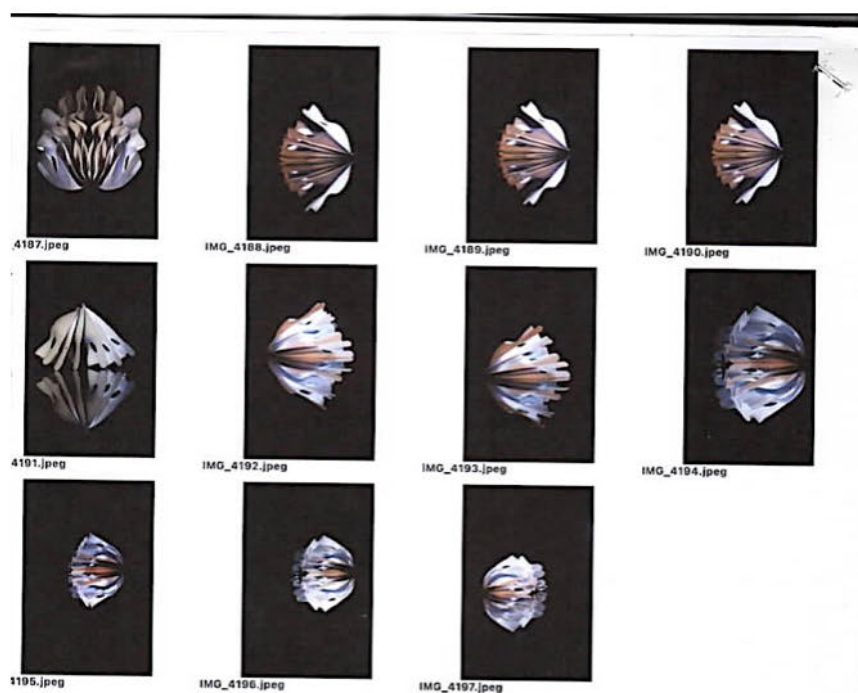


Fig. 7:2. Untitled, 2022. © J.Howe 2024

These first experiments just using several masks and their reflection inspired Fig. 3:30 (p.137).



This was initially just an experiment with no idea
 so didn't critique these as they weren't saying anything.
 It was after printing them that I thought they looked
 like flower heads. There is a term some girls get
 called - Pick Me Girl - she's the perfect girl, fits in
 with anyone, the 'it' girl I remember from my teenage
 years. So I took the heads off of some vulvix
 and attempted to create a flower coming into bloom.



Development:

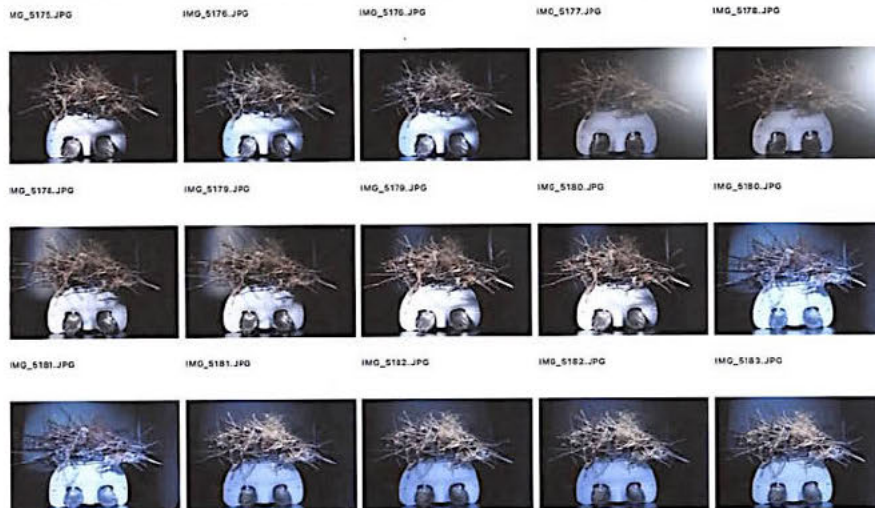
Placing the nest upside down on top of the mask the top lighting cast shadows of the twigs across the mask reminiscent of the crown of thorns.

Gender has been described as the new religion in contemporary discourse.

Coupled with the lamp lead at the top of image 2 that looked like smoke, I create a flame by burning hand sanitiser in front of the mask. I used a spoon for containment

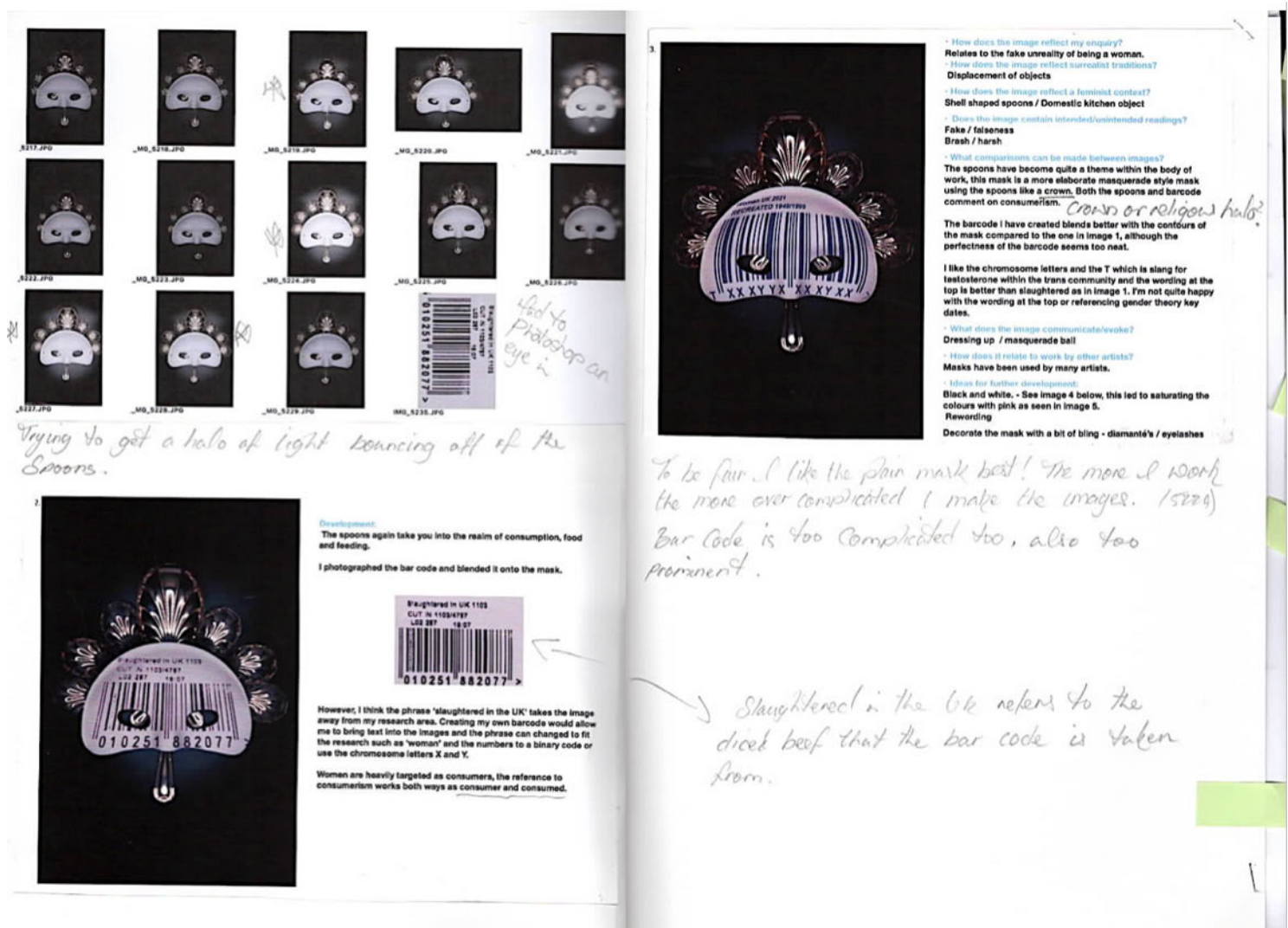


Inspired by a bird's nest discovered whilst gardening, I incorporated it as a crown, with the twigs casting shadows that evoked a crown of thorns. Setting the twigs alight using a combustible material, which required containment, led to the introduction of spoons within the experiment. In this context, the spoon takes on a ritualistic role, blending domestic, religious, and symbolic meanings. The imagery resonates with Surrealist explorations of metamorphosis and the interplay between the sacred and the profane.



The last hundred or so images really weren't working but perseverance set me off with new ideas which the last few images, where I bring back the spoon show their genesis.

Several ideas converged in this experiment: the spoons were arranged to form a crown, while the camera's flash created a halo-like reflection, reminiscent of the *gloria* or halo depicted in historical religious art. The use of the 1970s scalloped spoon, with its associations with femininity, evoked the image of a goddess figure. Building on this, I again used a photograph of a barcode to create a composite image critiquing commodity culture, similarly to Fig. 3.22 (p. 128). The barcode was taken from a packet of diced beef, drawing attention to the agricultural industry's use of euphemistic language, with terms such as *processed* deployed to obscure the violence inherent in animal slaughter. This language reflects a process of de-animalisation, stripping animals of their intrinsic value and reducing them to commodities. This concept parallels contemporary debates around dehumanisation through gender-inclusive language, where certain terminologies are criticised for erasing aspects of identity or subjecthood.



International media headlines – spoons become a symbol of freedom which contrasts with the barcode overlaid on the mask.

Political Spoons

The spoons in this exhibit were to promote a specific person or cause. Oftentimes the symbolism is obtuse and we must study history to understand the spoons and the times that produced them.

To our way of thinking, a spoon is about as apolitical as one could imagine. But this was not always the case. In the 1700's the English would sometimes decorate spoons with political symbols to show their loyalty to either a ruler or a cause. Thus the precedent was set.

Political issues in the 1890's were very high profile and the average citizen paid much more attention to these events than most current citizens. Thus when the souvenir spoon movement began, it was logical for some causes to have spoons manufactured favorable to their point of view.

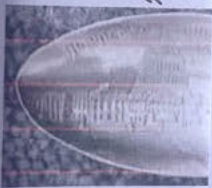
Contrasts with barcode overlaid on mask - clout

Spoons become a new symbol of Palestinian 'freedom'

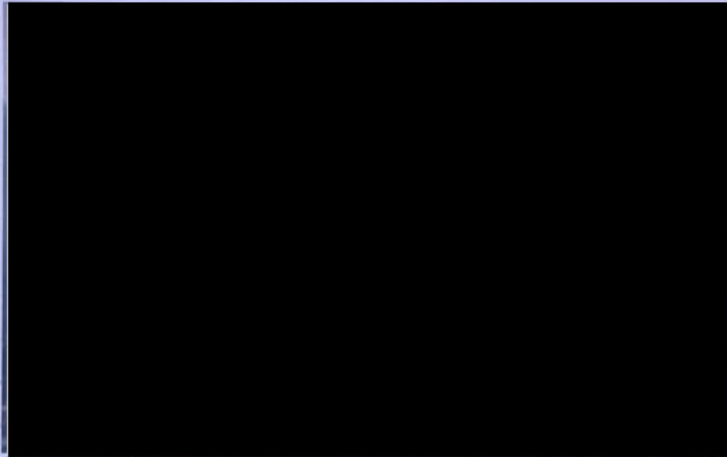
Jerusalem (AFP) –

International media headlines –

Issued on: 17/09/2021 - 05:00 3 min



President Cleveland inaugurated the use of the Capitol building, the only American President



Palestinian protesters hold up spoons as they confront Israeli security forces in the West Bank village of Beita, on September 10, 2021 JAAFAR ASHTIYEH AFP/File

The humble spoon has taken its place alongside traditional flags and banners as a Palestinian resistance symbol, after prisoners were said to have carried out one of Israel's most spectacular jail breaks with the utensil.

When the six Palestinian militants escaped through a tunnel on September 6 from the high security Gilboa prison, social networks shared images of a tunnel at the foot of a sink, and a hole dug outside.

I reworked the image by removing any text from the barcode to maintain the simplicity of my visual language, thereby strengthening its symbolism of entrapment. The barcode retains its scannability, subtly referencing the cattle market, a term historically used to describe marketplaces for livestock but colloquially applied to environments such as nightclubs or beauty contests, where women are often perceived as being on display and judged based on their appearance. This dual reference highlights how commodity culture reduces both animals and people, particularly women, to objects of evaluation and exchange, reinforcing power dynamics rooted in capitalism and patriarchy. The work transforms familiar objects into something mysterious and layered with meaning, aligning with Bate's enigmatic Surrealist photographic practices, which often involve everyday items arranged to evoke dreamlike, unsettling associations. At the same time, the constructed nature of the image, the controlled staging of objects, the manipulation of reflections, and the play of light introduce mimetic elements. Bate's notion of mimetic photography highlights how such compositions create an illusion of reality that feels familiar yet fundamentally altered. Thus, the image can be described as enigmatic-mimetic, reflecting both Surrealism's fascination with symbolic excess and the power of photography to make the mundane strange, inviting the viewer to reflect on the layered narratives.

I titled the image *Clout* to reflect the layered meanings embedded in the work. The term 'clout' traditionally refers to striking something or someone with force, but it also connotes power, influence, and status, particularly in political and social contexts. This resonates with the critique of commodity culture and the social order. On social media, 'clout' has become a slang term associated with influencers. The title thus draws connections between physical violence and the symbolic violence of objectification and oppression. Through a new materialist lens, the spoon and mask transcend their functional roles, becoming dynamic participants in the research process and embodying complex socio-material relations. The spoon's presence has helped define the research inquiry by demonstrating how everyday objects possess the capacity to shape, influence, and reveal social norms within gendered contexts. Far from being a passive utensil, the spoon emerges as an active agent with meaning, agency, and transformative potential within the material-discursive framework of this practice-led research.



Fig.7:3. Jeannean Howe, Clout, 2023. © J.Howe 2024

Appendix Eight: Interviewee Consent Forms.

Interview Consent Form

J. Howe

Research Project Title: Gender, Surrealism and the Unreal Woman.
Researcher: Jeannean Howe

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from UK institutions require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced.
- The recording will be kept for a minimum of six years.
- The transcript of the interview will be analysed by the researcher Jeannean Howe.
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to the researcher, and academic supervisors.
- I understand that my words may be quoted directly and will be fully attributed to me.
- I understand that content from this interview may be used in the researcher's thesis and may be published in the future.
- I understand reproduced images of artwork will be fully acknowledged, attributed to me as the artist and appropriately referenced.

By signing this form I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I can withdraw my consent up to two months after the date of interview.
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above.
3. I have read the information sheet.
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
5. I can request a copy of my interview transcript.
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher/supervisor with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Name: [REDACTED]

Participants Signature: [REDACTED] 5/4/2021

Researchers Signature: [REDACTED] Interview Date: 30th July 2021.

This research has been reviewed and approved by Derby University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher:

Name: Jeannean Howe
E-Mail: [REDACTED]
Telephone: [REDACTED]

Director of Studies:

Name: Professor Huw Davies
E-Mail: h.davies1@derby.ac.uk
Telephone: [REDACTED]

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Participants Name: Patricia Allmer

Participants Signature:

Researchers Signature:

INTERVIEW DATE: -

31st May 2021

This research has been reviewed and approved by Derby University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher:

Name: Jeannean Howe
E-Mail:
Telephone:

Director of Studies:

Name: Professor Huw Davies
E-Mail: h.davies1@derby.ac.uk
Telephone:

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Participants Name: Loie Hollowell

Participants Signature:

Researchers Signature:

*Interview Date :-
(Email Questions) 7th Oct 2021*

This research has been reviewed and approved by Derby University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher:

Name: Jeannean Howe
E-Mail: [REDACTED]
Telephone: [REDACTED]

Director of Studies:

Name: Professor Huw Davies
E-Mail: h.davies1@derby.ac.uk
Telephone: [REDACTED]

Interview Consent Form

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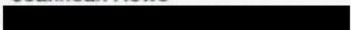
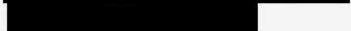
Participants Name: Jessica Stoller

Participants Signature: 

Researchers Signature: *Interview Date: - 7th July 2023*

This research has been reviewed and approved by Derby University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher:

Name: Jeannean Howe
E-Mail: 
Telephone: 

Director of Studies:

Name: Professor Huw Davies
E-Mail: h.davies1@derby.ac.uk
Telephone: 