

**The Texture of Her Skin:
A Studio Project Excavating and Reweaving
Visions of Female Subjectivity**

Kathleen Just

Master of Arts (Research), Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting), Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia

Bachelor of Science (Filmmaking), Boston University, Boston, USA

Document submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Fine Art, Faculty of Art and Design

Monash University

July 2013

Notice 1

Under the Copyright Act 1968, this thesis must be used only under the normal conditions of scholarly fair dealing. In particular no results or conclusions should be extracted from it, nor should it be copied or closely paraphrased in whole or in part without the written consent of the author. Proper written acknowledgement should be made for any assistance obtained from this thesis.

Notice 2

I certify that I have made all reasonable efforts to secure copyright permissions for third-party content included in this thesis and have not knowingly added copyright content to my work without the owner's permission.

Notice 3

Any third-party images herein that have been reproduced without permissions comply with the fair dealing exemption in the Copyright Act that permits reproduction of such material for the purposes of criticism and review.

Declaration

This document contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. I affirm that to the best of my knowledge, this document contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Kathleen Just
July 2013

Abstract

The Texture of Her Skin: A Studio Project Excavating and Reweaving Visions of Female Subjectivity is developed in counterpoint to dominant visual representations that centre on women's object-hood and suppression in skin. Through a series of visual art works, I evaluate the evocative and connective character of skin, and advance its potential to visualise subjective and multi-layered approaches to female embodiment.

Moving beyond the prevalence of literal or singular images of women's skin, my project investigates the potential for sculptural 'relics' to unearth skin's role as a tactile catalyst in accruing our sense of identity and belonging. I also explore whether media bearing a conceptual affinity to skin, including knitting, clay and photography, might recast skin as a texture enfolding greater female subjectivity and agency.

This archive of 'artefacts' was developed in New York, Barcelona, Madrid, Vienna, Krems and Melbourne, reflecting a sustained engagement with a diversity of cultural and visual histories. Comprising a series of surgical tools, archaeological relics, knitted second skins and armours, my works creatively reconfigure surface accounts of the female body, reimagine history from a subjective position, and manifest skin's capacity to sustain our most intimate connections. Studio processes including cutting, kneading, sewing, knitting, carving, tracing and reassembling are deployed to further augment and reweave skin as an active, porous network enfolding a sense of self and connection to the world.

I enrich the texture of my own works by mapping out a genealogy of connection to the work of female artists and theorists. Constructing a textual tapestry of our intersecting perspectives, I document the multifarious approaches to the collective task of reclaiming women's own bodily representation and experience. My own work, centred within this larger body of theory and art practice, exudes optimism that through the tactile threshold of skin, boundaries can be broken, wounds can be healed, and new visions and stories can be forged.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
List of Illustrations	vi
Acknowledgments	xvii
Introduction: Skin: The Fabric of Who We Are	1
1 Skin Literature: The Significance of Skin to Female Representations	6
1.1 The Binary Divide Between Male and Female Skin	6
1.2 Looking at Skin Through the Lens of Female Artists and Theorists	13
1.3 Skin's Tactile Potential and Enfolding Delicacy	25
2 Her Tools: Skin Relics Excavating Female Subjectivity in Skin	30
2.1 <i>Her Keys</i> : Unlocking a History of Female Interiority	30
2.2 <i>Her Tools</i> : Carving Out a Clinical Approach to Binary Representation	44
2.3 <i>Unearthed</i> : An Archaeological Investigation of Skin's Social Character	58
3 Venus Was Her Name: Reimagining History Through an Unlikely Cross Lineage in Skin	70
3.1 The Naked <i>Venus</i> : An Archaic Symbol of Biological Womanhood	73
3.2 The <i>Venus</i> in Skin: Redressing the <i>Venus</i> ' Subjective Potential	80
3.3 <i>In My Skin</i> : Knitting a Skin of Self	84
3.4 <i>Of Hearth and Home</i> : Breaking the Skin Between Cultural and Subjective Accounts of Women	92
3.5 <i>Matrikas</i> : Revising Female Object-hood and Isolation in Skin	100
3.6 <i>VENUS</i> : A Collective Reclamation of Language, Representation and Experience, Through Knitting	108
3.7 In Parting	125

4	<i>The Skin of Hope: Weaving a Vision of Intimacy and Renewal</i>	126
4.1	Mother Matters / Mothers Matter	127
4.2	<i>The Armour of Hope: Knitting a Skin of Bravery and Resilience</i>	131
4.3	<i>The Tools of Hope: Forging a Skin Bond</i>	138
4.4	<i>The Skin of Hope: Capturing a Trace of Optimism Through Skin</i>	140
4.5	<i>The Arms of Mother: An Encircling Subjectivity</i>	147
4.6	<i>The Shield of Hope</i> and a Hope for the Future	151
	Conclusion: Reweaving the Texture of Skin	155
	Postscript: A Burial Suit for the After-world	162
	Bibliography	165

List of Illustrations

	Pages:
Figure 1: Kate Just, <i>Mothercraft Tattoo (For Mom, after Dad)</i> (2013) ¹ Digital Type-C Print 40 x 30 cm	xix
Figure 2: <i>Medici Venus</i> (18th century) Anatomical wax model Life-size Medizinische Universität, Vienna	10
Figure 3: 'Buffalo Bill' played by Ted Levine <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (1991) Directed by Jonathan Demme	12
Figure 4: Antonio Banderas and Elena Anaya in <i>The Skin I Live In</i> (2011) Directed by Pedro Almodóvar	12
Figure 5: Perfume advertisement for Dior J'adore (1999) Christian Dior, Paris	14
Figure 6: Inez van Lamsweerde, <i>Joan</i> (1993) From the <i>Thank You Thighmaster Series</i> Cibachrome print mounted on Plexiglas and aluminium 185.4 x 120.6 cm Matthew Marks Gallery, New York	16
Figure 7: Kiki Smith, <i>Pee Body</i> (1992) Wax sculpture with beads 68.5 x 71 x 71 cm Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge	16

¹ Although my official name by birth is Kathleen, I go by the name of Kate professionally and personally. Excepting the front matter, all future references to my artworks and written publications herein are under the name 'Kate Just.' All images by Kate Just are courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer Gallery.

Figure 8:	Louise Bourgeois, <i>Arch of Hysteria</i> (2000) Mixed media 14 x 44.4 x 27.9 cm Collection of Claudia and Karsten Greve, Paris	19
Figure 9:	Nancy Grossman, <i>Head</i> (1968) Wood, leather, metal zippers, lacquer and metal nails 40.6 x 19.7 x 22.2 cm Whitney Museum of American Art, New York	21
Figure 10:	Catherine Opie, <i>Self-Portrait/Cutting</i> (1993) Chromogenic colour print 100.7 x 76.1 cm Whitney Museum of American Art, New York	23
Figure 11:	The cover of Heide Hatry's book <i>Heads and Tales</i> New York: Charta Art Books (2009)	23
Figure 12:	Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Installation detail from the exhibition <i>Inward Gathering</i> (2010) Nellie Castan Gallery Epoxy resin clay, wire, shoe polish, paint, cotton Dimensions variable (wall is 1300 x 800 cm) Photo: Simon Strong	31
Figure 13:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Photo: Simon Strong	32
Figure 14:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Photo: Simon Strong	33
Figure 15:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Photo: Simon Strong	34

Figure 16:	Louise Bourgeois, <i>Femme Maison</i> (1947) Ink on paper 25 x 18 cm Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York	36
Figure 17:	Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Detail of the key with 'Hestia' symbol in the bow and 'domus' symbol in the blade Photo: Simon Strong	40
Figure 18:	Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Detail of the key with an Egyptian hieroglyph for placenta in the bow Photo: Simon Strong	40
Figure 19:	Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Detail of three keys bearing personal annotations and forms Photo: Simon Strong	41
Figure 20:	Kate Just, <i>Her Keys</i> (2010) Detail of a knitted fragment on a key sculpture Photo: Simon Strong	43
Figure 21:	Kate Just, <i>Her Tools</i> (2010) Installation detail from the exhibition <i>Inward Gathering</i> (2010) Nellie Castan Gallery Collage with magazine cuttings, glue, archival paper, Perspex frames 42 x 30 cm each Photo: Simon Strong	45
Figure 22:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Her Tools</i> (2010) Photos: Simon Strong	46
Figure 23:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Her Tools</i> (2010) Photos: Simon Strong	47

Figure 24:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Her Tools</i> (2010) Photos: Simon Strong	48
Figure 25:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Her Tools</i> (2010) Photos: Simon Strong	49
Figure 26:	Surgical implements in the film <i>Dead Ringers</i> (1988) Directed by David Cronenberg	51
Figure 27:	Film still from an operating scene in <i>Dead Ringers</i> (1988) Directed by David Cronenberg	51
Figure 28:	Details from Orlan <i>Mouth of Europa and the Figure of Venus</i> (1990) Live plastic surgery/performance, Paris Gallery Michel Rein, Paris	53
Figure 29:	Lancôme Paris cosmetic advertisement	54
Figure 30:	Sally Smart, <i>The Anatomy Lesson</i> (1995) Synthetic polymer paint on fabric with collage elements 244 x 335 cm Vizard Foundation Collection, Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne	56
Figure 31:	A Wartenberg pinwheel and the Kate Just, <i>Her Tools</i> (2010) collage that refers to it	56
Figure 32:	Kate Just, <i>Unearthed</i> (2011) Installation view at Craft Victoria Epoxy resin, wire, cloth, wood Dimensions variable Table is: 75 x 62 x 600 cm Photo: Lily Feng	59
Figure 33:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Unearthed</i> (2011) Photo: Lily Feng	60

Figure 34:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Unearthed</i> (2011) Photo: Lily Feng	61
Figure 35:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Unearthed</i> (2011) Photo: Lily Feng	62
Figure 36:	<i>Amulet Representing Two Fingers</i> (332–30 BC) Egypt, Ptolemaic Period Obsidian 1 x 2.2 x 8.3 cm Brooklyn Museum, New York	64
Figure 37:	<i>Right Eye from an Anthropoid Coffin</i> (1539–30 BC) Egypt, New Kingdom or later Obsidian, crystalline limestone, blue glass 2.1 x 5.8 x 2.6 cm Brooklyn Museum, New York	64
Figure 38:	Judy Chicago, <i>The Dinner Party</i> (1974–79) Mixed media including ceramic, porcelain, textile 1463 x 1463 cm Brooklyn Museum, New York	66
Figure 39:	Judy Chicago, <i>The Dinner Party</i> (1974–79) Detail of core imagery in the Virginia Woolf place setting	68
Figure 40:	Kate Just, <i>Venus Was Her Name</i> (2011) Installation view at the Kunsthalle in Krems, Austria Mixed media, dimensions variable Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	71
Figure 41:	<i>The Venus of Willendorf</i> (24,000 - 22,000 BC) Front and side views Limestone and red ochre 11 cm high Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna	72

Figure 42:	<i>The Capitoline Venus</i> (4th century BC) One of the best preserved copies of Praxiteles' Cnidian Venus Marble; 194 cm high Capitoline Museums, Rome	75
Figure 43:	Unattributed photograph of <i>The Venus of Willendorf</i> in the palm of a man's hand Figure sourced from "The Woman of Willendorf" web page	77
Figure 44:	Stills from Hayden Fowler, <i>The Long Forgetting</i> (2010) HD video, 16:19, colour; 3 channels, 20 minutes GBK Gallery, Sydney	77
Figure 45:	Judy Chicago, <i>The Dinner Party</i> (1974–79) Detail of the 'Fertile Goddess' place setting	79
Figure 46:	Carolee Schneemann, <i>Interior Scroll</i> (1975) Still from a performance in East Hampton, NY PPOW Gallery, New York	79
Figure 47:	Comparative views of <i>The Venus of Willendorf</i> and a young, pregnant woman in Catherine H. McCoid and Leroy D. McDermott, "Toward Decolonizing Gender: Female Vision in the Upper Paleolithic," <i>American Anthropologist</i> 98, no. 2 (1996).	82
Figure 48:	Photograph depicting a range of Venus figurines from around the world. (1) <i>Willendorf Venus</i> (Rhine/Danube), (2) <i>Lespugue Venus</i> (Pyrenees/Aquitaine), (3) <i>Laussel Venus</i> (Pyrenees/Aquitaine), (4) <i>Dolní Věstonice Venus</i> (Rhine/Danube), (5) <i>Gagarino Venus</i> no. 4 (Russia), (6) <i>Moravany Venus</i> (Rhine/Danube), (7) <i>Kostenki Venus</i> no. 3 (Russia), (8) <i>Grimaldi Venus</i> (Italy), (9) <i>Chiozza di Scandiano</i> <i>Venus</i> (Italy), (10) <i>Petrkovice Venus</i> (Rhine/Danube), (11) <i>Modern</i> <i>sculpture</i> (N. America), (12) <i>Eleesivitchi Venus</i> (Russia); (13) <i>Savignano Venus</i> (Italy), (14) The so-called <i>Brassempouy Venus</i> (Pyrenees/Aquitaine), (15) <i>Hohle Fels Venus</i> (SW Germany). Figure sourced from Alberti's Window web page	83

Figure 49:	Kate Just, <i>In My Skin</i> (2011) Hand knitted acrylic thread, MDF, paint Knitted skin is 178 x 88 x 1 cm Plinth is 20 x 210 x 220 cm Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	85
Figure 50:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>In My Skin</i> (2011) Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	86
Figure 51:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>In My Skin</i> (2011) Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	87
Figure 52:	Process photographs of <i>In My Skin</i> (2011) Photos: Paula Russell	91
Figure 53:	Kate Just, <i>Of Hearth and Home</i> (2011) Epoxy resin, wire, cotton, poppy seeds, paint, wood Twenty-two parts Table length is 82 x 680 x 85 cm Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	94
Figure 54:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Of Hearth and Home</i> (2011) including a <i>Venus</i> 'helmet', my glasses, a tampon, a 'snow' <i>Venus</i> , a spindle and a sculpture tool Photos: Christian Redtenbacher	95
Figure 55:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Of Hearth and Home</i> (2011) including knitting sticks, a spindle, a circular spider web and a cloud symbol Photos: Christian Redtenbacher	96
Figure 56:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Of Hearth and Home</i> (2011) including stacked fingers, an anthropomorphic vessel, an archaic textile tool and a version of an archaic fertility symbol Photos: Christian Redtenbacher	97

Figure 57:	Details of Kate Just, <i>Of Hearth and Home</i> (2011) including a thunderbolt, a runic symbol and an interpretation of a <i>Daphne</i> sculpture Photos: Christian Redtenbacher	98
Figure 58:	Kate Just, <i>Matrikas</i> (2011) Collage with magazine cuttings, glue, plywood 58 x 640 x 16 cm Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	102
Figure 59:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Matrikas</i> (2011) Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	103
Figure 60:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Matrikas</i> (2011) Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	104
Figure 61:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>Matrikas</i> (2011) Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	105
Figure 62:	Hannah Höch , <i>Die Süsse</i> (1926) Photo-collage with watercolour 30 x 15.5 cm Museum Folkwang Essen	107
Figure 63:	Front and back views of Kate Just, <i>VENUS</i> (2011) Cardboard, tape, hand knitted twine 112 x 690 x 22cm Photos: Christian Redtenbacher	109
Figure 64:	Kate Just, <i>VENUS</i> (2011) Detail of the 'N' Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	110
Figure 65:	Kate Just, <i>VENUS</i> (2011) Detail of the 'E' Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	111

Figure 66:	Kate Just, <i>VENUS</i> (2011) Detail of the 'S' Photo: Christian Redtenbacher	112
Figure 67:	Gilbert Islands Armour Knitted coconut fibres American Museum of Natural History, New York City	113
Figure 68:	Examples of knitting symbols that were used in place of alphabetic letters in <i>VENUS</i> (2011)	116
Figure 69:	Pieces of knit 'graffiti' by the Vienna based knitting collective 'Knitherstory' to celebrate the centenary of International Women's Day (2011)	119
Figure 70:	Members of the Stitch 'n Bitch London group knit together at a local café in Waterstone (2006) Photo: 'Deadly Knitshade'	119
Figure 71:	'Knit for <i>VENUS</i> ' events with students in Krems and crafters in Vienna	120
Figure 72:	'Knit for <i>VENUS</i> ' events in the Burggarten, Vienna and outside the Kunsthalle museum in Krems	121
Figure 73:	'Knit for <i>VENUS</i> ' events bring knitting to public presence in the streets of Krems and the parks of Vienna	122
Figure 74:	The fragments gathered for <i>VENUS</i> (2011) reflect a diversity of knitting styles	124
Figure 75:	Kate Just, <i>The Skin of Hope</i> (2012) Installation view at Daine Singer Mixed media, dimensions variable Photo: John Brash	128

Figure 76:	Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens, <i>The Sense of Touch</i> (1618) Oil on panel 65 x 100 cm Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid	129
Figure 77:	Kate Just, <i>The Armour of Hope</i> (2012) Hand knitted metal and silk 104 x 45 x 4 cm Photo: John Brash	132
Figure 78:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>The Armour of Hope</i> (2012) Photo: John Brash	133
Figure 79:	Kate Just, <i>The Armour of Hope</i> (2012) Digital Type-C Print 61 x 45 cm	137
Figure 80:	Kate Just, <i>The Tools of Hope</i> (2012) Epoxy resin, wire and velvet Three parts: 29 x 12 x 4.5 cm; 30 x 3 x 2 cm; 31 x 16 x 5.5 cm Photo: John Brash	139
Figure 81:	Detail of Kate Just, <i>The Tools of Hope</i> (2012) Photo: John Brash	139
Figure 82:	Kate Just, <i>The Skin of Hope</i> (2012) Digital Type-C Print 48.3 x 65 cm	141
Figure 83:	Detail of Mary Kelly, <i>Introduction</i> (1973) from <i>Post-Partum Document</i> (1973-79) Perspex units, white card, wool vests, pencil, ink 4 units, 20 x 25.5 cm each Collection of Eileen Norton, Santa Monica	146

Figure 84:	Detail of Mary Kelly, <i>Documentation VI</i> <i>Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary</i> (1978) from <i>Post-Partum Document</i> (1973-79) Perspex unit, white card, resin, slate 20 x 25.5 cm, Arts Council of Great Britain Collection	146
Figure 85:	Kate Just, <i>The Arms of Mother</i> (2012) Hand knitted rayon and cotton 92 x 32 x 2 cm Photo: John Brash	148
Figure 86:	Lindsay Obermeyer, <i>Connection Performance</i> (1998) Performance still Photo: Audrey Mandelbaum Courtesy of the artist	150
Figure 87:	Kate Just, <i>The Arms of Mother</i> (2012) Digital Type-C Print 34.5 x 40 cm	152
Figure 88:	Kate Just, <i>The Arms of Hope</i> (2012) Digital Type-C Print 34.5 x 40 cm	152
Figure 89:	Kate Just, <i>The Shield of Hope</i> (2012) Stingray skin, cotton, thread 54 x 19 cm Photo: John Brash	153
Figure 90:	Kate Just, <i>Postscript: A Burial Suit</i> (2013) Bamboo, merino and cotton yarns, steel, paint 220 x 90 x 70cm; Photo: Catherine Evans	163
Figure 91:	Kate Just, <i>Postscript: A Burial Suit</i> (2013) Digital Type-C Print on Dibond aluminium 200 x 76 x 1 cm	164

Acknowledgments

I am immensely grateful to my academic supervisor, Dr Melissa Miles, who has challenged and championed my work every step of the way. Her exceptional diligence, warmth, intelligence, support and insight have made me a better researcher, writer and artist. A beneficiary of her keen navigation skills, I will more confidently traverse the complex journeys that lie ahead.

My research project was funded by a Monash Graduate Research Scholarship; I couldn't have done it otherwise. Thanks go to Robert Nelson, Fiona McDonald, Caroline Durre and Stephen Garrett at Monash University, who provided feedback and support during my candidature. I also thank Fiona Lilley and Karla Wells-Duerr in the Graduate Studies Office for their unrivalled efficiency and kindness through the administrative stages of my degree.

Overseas research, which became a crucial part of the project, was supported in various ways. A Monash Postgraduate Travel Grant facilitated research in New York City in 2010. This trip provided first hand access to art works and historical relics that in turn, informed my first three bodies of sculptural work. My International Artist in Residence period of three months at AIR Krems, Austria in 2011 resulted in the solo exhibition *Venus Was Her Name* at the Kunsthalle. This residency brought further cultural enrichment to the project, inspired new ways of working and expanded the project's scope. Special thanks are due to Andy Tetzlaff at RMIT University, Elke Pehamburger-Mullner at Krems AIR and Karin Pernegger, Curator at the Kunsthalle in Krems for coordinating the creative, practical and social aspects of that residency. I am grateful for the know-how my partner Paula Russell brought to the creation of the armature for the VENUS sculpture there. I also extend warm appreciation to the fifty-four knitters who collaborated on the creation of the VENUS sculpture in knitting events in Vienna and Krems.² They opened my practice to wider social engagement and proved to be the most hospitable hosts I have encountered.

An Australia Council for the Arts residency in Barcelona in 2012 inspired further cultural cross-connections and prompted a deeply personal development in the creative work. Hosts Barb Neil and Des Morris were welcoming and supportive. New friends Suzanne Wales and her daughter Sadia, and Josie Fitzpatrick and her daughter Kate also enriched this creative period. Special thanks are due to Janis Meissner and Lisa Strauss, who visited there and assisted with the production of photographic works.

On home ground in Melbourne, there are many people who supported the development and presentation of the artistic work. Exhibitions at Nellie Castan Gallery, Craft Victoria, Daine

² The knitters are individually named in chapter three.

Singer, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Ararat Regional Gallery, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Substation, and Latrobe Gallery offered ideal opportunities to present the creative works and illuminate their broader contexts and points of overlap. Thanks go to curators and/or gallerists who enabled and assisted with these presentations of my work: Nellie Castan, Nella Themelios, Daine Singer, Caroline Phillips, Jessica Bridport, Anthony Camm and Linda Michael. Catalogue writers for various exhibitions were Olivia Poloni, Craig Burgess, Martha McDonald, Melissa Miles, Anthony Camm and Linda Michael. Their words lent invaluable insights to my own thinking about the work.

A brief residency at the Australian Tapestry Workshop during a particularly intense period of exegesis writing in 2012 offered welcome respite from text and stimulated an unexpected last knitted sculptural work in the project. I was touched by the generosity and support of Judith Mitchell from Morris and Sons Yarns in Melbourne, who made that work possible by providing all the necessary materials free of charge. I am also grateful to have held a three year local studio residency from 2010-2013 in the Shakespeare Grove studios, which are managed and subsidised by the City of Port Phillip. Located within the St Kilda community gardens in vibrant artistic and environmental surrounds, the studio was a creative catalyst for many of the early and later works.

Throughout the period of the PhD, I continued to work part-time at the Victorian College of the Arts as a Lecturer in Art (Painting). Staff there provided immeasurable practical, professional and emotional support during my project, making the juggle between the two roles not only possible but also enjoyable. I owe particular thanks to Janenne Eaton, Jan Murray, Elizabeth Gower, Dr Bianca Hester and Dr Stephen Haley. Students at the VCA generously shared material they thought would be relevant to my own research. I thank Melanie Irwin, Ben Woods, Caroline Phillips and Julie Shiels.

Many close friends and family members have made this challenging journey a more pleasant one. I am grateful in particular to the following people (or groups) who in various ways, have kept my head above water or feet on the ground throughout the project: Nancy Krause, Penelope Davis, Mel Miller, Martha McDonald, The St Kilda Rainbow Family Playgroup, Andrew McQualter, Heather B. Swann, Janis Meissner, Helen Fox, Daine Singer, Sara Barber-Just, Mary-Ellen and Bill Just, Lisa and Mark Fitzpatrick and Pat Russell.

Finally, and most importantly I thank my partner of nineteen years, Paula Russell, and my daughter Hope Margaret O'Neill Russell-Just. The sense of love, joy, hilarity, imagination and self-possession they bring to our gang of three envelops and powers me, making anything possible. I look forward to spending more time with them.

I dedicate this PhD to my mother, Mary-Ellen Just who taught me to knit, defend myself, speak up, work hard, claim love, and reach for the stars. It is also for my father, William Just whose love and unquestioning belief in me has been a gift I carry through everything I do.



Figure 1
Kate Just, *Mothercraft Tattoo (For Mom, after Dad)* (2013)
Type-C Digital Print
40 x 30 cm

I wrap your story around my shoulders
let it tangle and knit with mine
as defiant gestures of skin
a complex network of roots³

³ Qwo-Li Driskill, *Walking With Ghosts*, ed. Janet McAdams (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2005), p. 54.

Introduction

Skin: The Fabric of Who We Are

Enfolding surfaces and depth, skin is the fabric of who we are. Through skin, we experience the tactile and haptic qualities of the world, of others and ourselves. Skin travels with us through every moment of our lives. Freckles, birthmarks, tattoos, wrinkles, cuts and scars accumulate on its surface. Casting our gaze over these marks, we tap a deep internal reservoir of memories and moments; many of these are ours alone. My studio project attends to this evocative and connective character of skin to investigate its potential to visualise subjective and multi-layered approaches to female embodiment in skin. It does so in direct challenge to dominant visual representations that centre on a limited binary model and refuse women's skin these seemingly fundamental, subjective qualities and complexities.

Central to the project are two questions: How might a visual art practice denaturalise and expand binary representations that sustain women's object-hood in skin? Can media bearing an affinity to skin recast skin as a tissue capable of accommodating female subjectivity and desire? Extending beyond a focus on singular or literal images of skin, the project investigates the potential for sculptural objects or relics to narrate the diverse, overlapping, accruing experiences of touch, identity and belonging through skin, over time. The project also evaluates the ways that historical representations of female object-hood might be appropriated, unravelled and rewoven into hopeful images for female embodiment and agency through skin.

Contextualising my approach to skin throughout the project are a number of books on skin by Claudia Benthien, Steven Connor, Jackie Stacy, Sara Ahmed and Bernadette Wegenstein⁴ as well as a wide range of journal articles and sources. These texts document the fixedness of skin's representation where gender is concerned. While male skin is often pictured as a resilient, liberating texture, enfolding the self, female skin usually conceals or masks the self, which remains hidden within. Informed by these sources, my project formulates a counter-approach, emphasising skin's attendant flexibility to promote female expressions of subjectivity and cultural identity.

Mapping out my project's context within a broader field of inquiry, the first chapter

⁴ Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2001); Bernadette Wegenstein, *Getting Under the Skin: The Body and Media Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

constitutes a literature review of texts and visual art works that explore skin's significance to female representations and its problematic depiction along binary lines. My visual analysis spans a wide history; from the 18th century medical model *The Medici Venus* to photography by Inez van Lamsweerde, from writing by Sylvia Plath to films such as *Silence of the Lambs* and *The Skin I Live In*, and from advertising to pornography. In each instance, I reveal the reiteration of female skin as a cage, a violable surface, a biological container, a sexual vessel or a smooth screen reflecting male rather than female desire. I explore the writing of Naomi Wolf and Elizabeth Grosz on our cultural obsession with women's surfaces or depths to argue that binary representations of women's skin correlate to a wider cultural suppression of women's expressions of subjectivity, desire and agency. In my analysis of the work of the feminist artists Nancy Grossman, Catherine Opie, Heide Hatry and Louise Bourgeois, I reveal an increasing effort by women artists to carve out a female subjective presence in skin, while also pointing out some of the limitations of their approaches. In an effort to advance these earlier art practices, I suggest that objects relaying an active life in skin might be used to conceptualise skin as an empowering texture and translate the agency of women to craft, revise and *make sense* of their own representations. Considering how an alternative history of skin might be written for women, I investigate the creation of skin 'relics' that excavate skin's complex character. Held in or made by women's hands, or worn on women's bodies, I suggest these artefacts could metaphorically represent the work needed to transform thinking about women's skin, or constitute missing material evidence of skin's subjective, connective potential for us all.

My early focus on relics, rather than literal depictions of skin, also constitutes an effort to produce works that refuse singular categorisations of race. Benthien suggests the binary divide between male and female skin in Western art and literature corresponds to the paradigmatic oppositions between black and white skin.⁵ Although my often subjectively driven project is inevitably informed by my own racial experience and identity, my invitation to an audience to contemplate the complexities of skin through tactile forms fundamentally honours the potential diversity of that audience.

Following the literature review in the first chapter, the second, third and fourth chapters offer critical perspectives on the various bodies of work that comprise the studio research. Interwoven through all of these chapters is an ongoing investigation of feminist theory and art. Particularly important is the writing of Luce Irigaray. I adopt Irigaray's position that the female body is a space that has been claimed, occupied, defined and suppressed by a

⁵ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 146.

phallogocentric culture.⁶ Appropriating the maternal body's potential to hold and nurture another, Irigaray suggests a woman might metaphorically re-enter this 'envelope' to find and make space for herself. Approaching skin in the same way, I suggest that a subjective reoccupation and reclamation of skin by women might result in a renewed sense of personal and cultural identity.

I also call on Irigaray to support my ongoing emphasis on women's connection to other women through skin. Irigaray suggests that through alliances with other women, and mothers in particular, women can reclaim their right and ability to produce a language that reflects rather than suppresses their desires. Interwoven throughout much of my analysis of my own studio practice, Irigaray's voice echoes and affirms my own thinking that skin can be imagined as a texture enfolding individual identity while also promoting wider social connection and cultural presence. To accentuate this line of thought, I highlight the work of many other women artists working with skin, the body or subjectivity in my exegesis. This genealogy of female artists constitutes a web of intersecting perspectives on how female representation might be developed.⁷ By constructing a dialogue between our works, I acknowledge divergent viewpoints as well as what could be considered our collective aim: establishing women's involvement in the production and narration of their own subjectivity, through skin.

The second chapter, *Her Tools*, highlights three bodies of tool-related works in resinous clay and collage – *Her Keys*, *Her Tools* and *Unearthed* – to tackle delimiting representations of female skin as a biological interior or smooth, desirable exterior. Exploiting the association between tools and notions of progress and repair, the implements revise the frameworks through which we understand skin. *Her Keys*, a series of thirty-two large scale black clay keys bearing archaic female bodily symbols as well as my own annotated forms, transforms a known symbol of biological interiority into one of access – to skin, subjectivity and the world. *Her Tools*, a collage series of fictional surgical, medical and erotic implements, extends this emphasis on female agency by placing suppressive representations of women's skin, rather than women's skin itself, under the knife. Collage – a multilayered, destabilising and accruing

⁶ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 41.

⁷ My approach is inspired by the recent practice of gathering and presenting intergenerational or divergent attitudes to feminism and learning from these intersections. This expansive, rather than divisive strategy, is evident in a wide range of visual art sources including: Cornelia H. Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007); Catriona Moore, *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970-1990* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994); "The View From Here: 19 Perspectives on Feminism," <http://westspace.org.au/calendar/event/the-view-from-here-19-perspectives-on-feminism/>.

process – contributes to this vision of female skin’s complexity. *Unearthed*, a faux archaeological display of forty-six smooth resin-clay relics, excavates women’s sensual and social agency through skin to challenge the cultural emphasis on female biology. The reference to letters and language symbols in all three works underscores the connection between emergent female subjectivity in skin and modifications of representation and experience. As a series of inviting hand-held objects that promote a transformation of and diversification of touch, these works also posit that a renewed sense of self and social belonging through skin is well within women’s grasp.

The third chapter and exhibition *Venus Was Her Name* extends my focus on skin relics to explicitly explore women’s capacity to (re)write their own corporeal histories. In achieving this aim, it establishes the value of links shared by a community of women. The chapter charts a re-imagining of the tiny Paleolithic limestone figurine *The Venus of Willendorf*, an archaic representation of woman from 24,000 BC. Created in a town in Austria where the *Venus* was found, my four bodies of knitted, clay and collage works use skin to contest the *Venus*’ conventional framing as a fertility or sexual symbol, and manifest her alternate history as a self-portrait by a woman weaver. As a means of accentuating the interconnections, repetitions and potential shifts in visual representations of womanhood, my works craft a cross lineage between me, the *Venus*, and other women. Collage works of diverse female figures, and a display of various clay bodily ‘relics’ narrating female creative agency, contribute to a picture of female alliance in skin and disturb rigid boundaries dividing internal and external, and cultural and subjective accounts of the female body. Time-intensive, rhythmic knitted works including a self-portrait *as skin* and a word sculpture collectively crafted by many women position knitting as a texture of embodiment reweaving women’s affinity to self and others. Composed of various interconnected works and fragments, *Venus Was Her Name* epitomises skin’s capacity to enfold greater layers of complexity in the past, as well as present.

Travelling out of the distant past, the final chapter and exhibition *The Skin of Hope* forges skin’s palpable significance to the here and now. It continues my vision of female subjectivity and interconnectivity in skin through a personal portrayal of the ways my adopted daughter Hope and I acknowledge, bond and imprint each other at skin level. In works including talismanic clay knitting needles, a knitted armour for Hope and arm-length scar embroidered gloves for me, I further develop knitting’s metaphoric equivalency to skin. Harnessing knitting’s associations with nurturance, bondage and repair, the works materialise Hope’s and my own past losses, resilience and renewal, epitomising a potential wider-cultural

progression from female embattlement to embodiment in skin. My series of photographic works capturing Hope's and my own bodily traces advance that medium's conceptual efficacy to translate a picture of skin layered with our intimate tactile connections. Across many works, the application of curvy script directly onto skin further avows skin as a receptive and transmissive site, enfolding our narratives of self and familial belonging. Framing Hope and me as separate subjects, gaining from sensorial contact and alliance, the work reinvigorates conventional psychoanalytic discourses focused on severance from the mother. Instead, it emphasises skin and motherhood as social fabrics necessary to our physical, intellectual and psychological development. *The Skin of Hope* captures a tender, fleeting moment and invites future imaginings of women at home in their skin.

Through works that dig deeper for a more complex vision of skin, rewrite history from a female subjective position or evaluate skin's role in bearing out our most intimate and meaningful relationships, my project excavates the complexity and significance of skin. Constituting a three year journey across time, place and various modes of representation, my works avoid a linear approach to skin. Instead my studio research radiates out in various directions, forming a multifarious texture characterised by overlapping threads, perspectives, subjectivities and connections. Traversing skin's enfolding surfaces and depths, my works develop an attentive care for skin's infinite capacity to envelop and extend our sense of self. I hope this sense of care is compelling for the reader, expanding his or her own perceptions of skin's value to female representations and women's presence in the world, beyond that tactile threshold.

Chapter 1

Skin Literature: The Significance of Skin to Female Representations

In this chapter, I outline literature and art focusing on the significance of skin to representations of the female body. I reveal the ways many female representations of skin have been historically aligned with the subordinated side of skin's binary, while representations of male skin emphasise skin's liberating, expressive potential. I cite a range of writers, including Claudia Benthien and Steven Connor, and a number of female artists, such as Nancy Grossman, Catherine Opie, Heide Hatry and others, who resist oppressive female representations in skin, and show it is possible to move beyond outmoded, singular paradigms of the body and skin as a boundary wall or prison.

Through their works and the writing of theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Bernadette Wegenstein, Jackie Stacey and Sara Ahmed, I argue that the concept of skin can be reconfigured, indeed rewoven, as a territory through which exterior and interior accounts of the body might converge. Their studies provide a platform for my project's aim to take up skin's relevance as a tactile texture that can extend representations of femininity. I outline the ways that my project will reimagine skin as a supple network, enabling access to the world and to others through touch. Skin, in my studio project, will be approached as a porous texture, entwining interior and exterior accounts of the body. Never a perfect, unmarred whole, skin is imagined as fragmented, emphasising the unique, multiple characteristics, sensations and experiences of body parts, and individual subjects.

1.1 The Binary Divide Between Male and Female Skin

In her book, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, Claudia Benthien provides broad coverage of the transformation of concepts surrounding skin throughout the ages.⁸ Although her focus is wide ranging, encompassing literature, science and the arts, she consistently returns to the problematic binary accounts of the female body through skin. This focus on the binary schema associated with skin, forms a significant critical basis for the development of my own research in sculpture, which examines how binary concepts of both skin and femininity might be entwined and reconfigured.

In language, identity and self-consciousness are often linked to skin. Phrases such as 'jumping out of her skin,' 'trying to save her own skin' or 'getting under someone's skin' inform

⁸ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*.

Benthien's claim that 'speech about one's own skin is speech about one's own self, about oneself as body.'⁹ Similarly, Didier Anzieu concludes that the ego (or self) is conceived through skin – as a projection on the psyche through the surface of the body.¹⁰ In contrast to this positive conception of skin as the stand-in for person, spirit, body or life, in literary and visual representations, a binary conception of skin also exists. In it, the skin contains, masks or imprisons the self inside.¹¹

Benthien argues that this binary is gendered. According to Benthien, the idea of skin *as self*, an autobiographic, sensory, even liberating membrane, correlates to literary and artistic representations of male skin. Meanwhile, the concept of skin as masking or containing regularly pertains to accounts of female bodies, in which the skin becomes a 'body prison, a skin wall, in which the mask becomes the true self... that which conceals becomes the identity.'¹² Benthien asserts that this gender divide arises from the 'dominant figurative system of Western discourse which sees the female body as vulnerable... sexually accessible, susceptible to penetration, exploitation, rape, pregnancy.'¹³

Benthien cites contemporary male poets including Robert Lowell and Walt Whitman, to describe how in masculine portrayals, 'the naked body shedding all its coverings stands for self-liberation, authenticity and strength,'¹⁴ while the female body remains defenseless and bound up in her skin.¹⁵ In *Song of Myself* (1957) Whitman writes: 'I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,'¹⁶ while In *The Dolphin* (1973) Robert Lowell proclaims 'so much joy has come, / I hardly want to hide my nakedness.'¹⁷ In both poems, the naked male body represents an unhindered self, blissfully at home in the world. In contrast, female poets including Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath present a self that is concealed and masked.¹⁸ Many of Dickinson's poems deal with the threat of 'prying eyes' through images of a body armoured, gilded or plated, while others focus on nakedness as an unwanted exposure of the vulnerable self, demanding coverage. In the poem *1412* Dickinson writes:

⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 49.

¹¹ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, pp. 23-4.

¹² Ibid., p. 34.

¹³ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁴ Benthien's argument in *ibid.* draws from Kathleen Lant, "The Big Strip Tease: Female Bodies and Male Power in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath," *Contemporary Literature* 34, no. 4 (1993), pp. 629-69.

¹⁵ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 94.

¹⁶ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), pp. 28-9.

¹⁷ Robert Lowell, *The Dolphin* (New York: Farrar, 1973).

¹⁸ Terence Diggory, "Armored Women, Naked Men: Dickinson, Whitman and Their Successors," in *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 136.

Shame is the shawl of Pink
In which we wrap the Soul
To keep it from infesting Eyes –
The elemental Veil . . .¹⁹

In Plath's poem *In Plaster* (1961), 'this new absolutely white person' is a pure, female sheath of skin that replaces the self, signifying the 'desired pure and marble-like surface of the woman and simultaneously for her social masking, of her fragile self.'²⁰ Plath's passive captivity in her skin continues in *The Bell Jar* (1963) in which she describes 'the wall of my skin' and a feeling of imprisonment in the 'cage of my body.'²¹

This concept of the female body, trapped or masked within skin, gives rise to an idea of stepping out of, or shedding the bodily skin. However, according to Benthien, in the 'history of gender, the leaving and overcoming one's own skin are positive only in male poets, philosophers and artists.'²² This sweeping generalisation is problematic, and obscures the diversity of men's and women's creative practice and thinking. Nonetheless, a tendency towards a gendered approach to the skin remains evident in a wide range of twentieth century poetry, philosophy and art. Benthien also considers that in the few male representations of skin as an armour or a mask, the tendency is to emphasise 'its thickness and strength' or the firmness and solidity of the shape that lies underneath.²³ On the other hand, she suggests representations of female skin revolve more around 'the idealized smoothness of the surface, and the space-creating function of the sheath.'²⁴

These conceptions of femininity and skin also pervade popular notions of feminine beauty and have a marked impact upon women's movement in the public realm. The feminist writer Naomi Wolf makes direct links between a Western cultural fixation with the radiance and sheen on the surface of smooth female skin and the suppression of women themselves. She argues that female beauty's 'self-consciousness hovers at skin level in order to keep women from moving far inside to an erotic centre or far afield into the big space of the public realm,'²⁵ and cautions that 'the synthetic glow women seek through makeup, oils, lotions and

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 140.

²⁰ Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 158.

²¹ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London: Heinemann, 1963), p. 23.

²² Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 124.

²³ Ibid., p. 239.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: W. Morrow, 1991), p. 81.

creams, is a betrayal of real soulfulness, since people “light up” and objects don't.’²⁶

Earlier evidence of the binary conception of the female body as either a smooth exterior or reproductive interior exists in an analysis of 18th century female medical anatomical models. Realistic male anatomical models of the time bear yellow, hardened looking resinous skin and bloodied insides. They reveal the nervous system, lymphatic system and veins – in other words, all of the complex terrain of the body. Meanwhile, female models emphasise an opposition between the interior and polished exterior. The most famous of these models is the life-size *Medici Venus* (anatomical wax model, 18th century), which is depicted with a silky exterior comprising doe eyes, a formal hairstyle, a pearl necklace, and powder white makeup, and laid out on a soft satin bedded recliner (figure 2). Reference to her bodily function is made via her gaping abdomen revealing a detailed replica of her reproductive system.²⁷ The model illustrates the historical thesis that while the female body had become a public space, it only applied to its ‘deep hollows’ and ‘outermost surface.’²⁸

Elizabeth Grosz also problematises the gendered duality of skin representations. Grosz suggests that notions of the skin as a smooth, masking surface, house or vessel are actually two sides of the same coin, reflecting the conception of woman as a hollow space with an enveloping, smooth external skin. Both notions of the skin function to ‘contain,’ since if the skin is removed, woman’s body will no longer be a container. Grosz attributes this approach to a long history of literature centred on female bodily fluids.²⁹ In this literature, the incontinence of the maternal female body is construed as abject and dangerous.³⁰ As a result, the male body was gradually represented as an impermeable body while the female was construed as ‘a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid.’³¹ In turn this ‘phallicisation of the male body’ gave rise to the oppositional and idealised concept of the female body as a

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 86.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 198.

³⁰ Philosopher Julia Kristeva also provides an extensive critique of the abjection of female bodies. Drawing on historic and philosophic discourses, she differentiates between the unified (phallic) subject and the leaky (usually maternal) female subject. Kristeva’s work reorders existing patriarchal structures, reclaims the materiality of the female body, and locates it as a site for exploring subjectivity. Australian theorist Barbara Creed extends these discourses with her analysis of the ‘monstrous feminine’ in cinema—her term for depictions of female bodily abjection in films from the last thirty years.

³¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, p. 203.

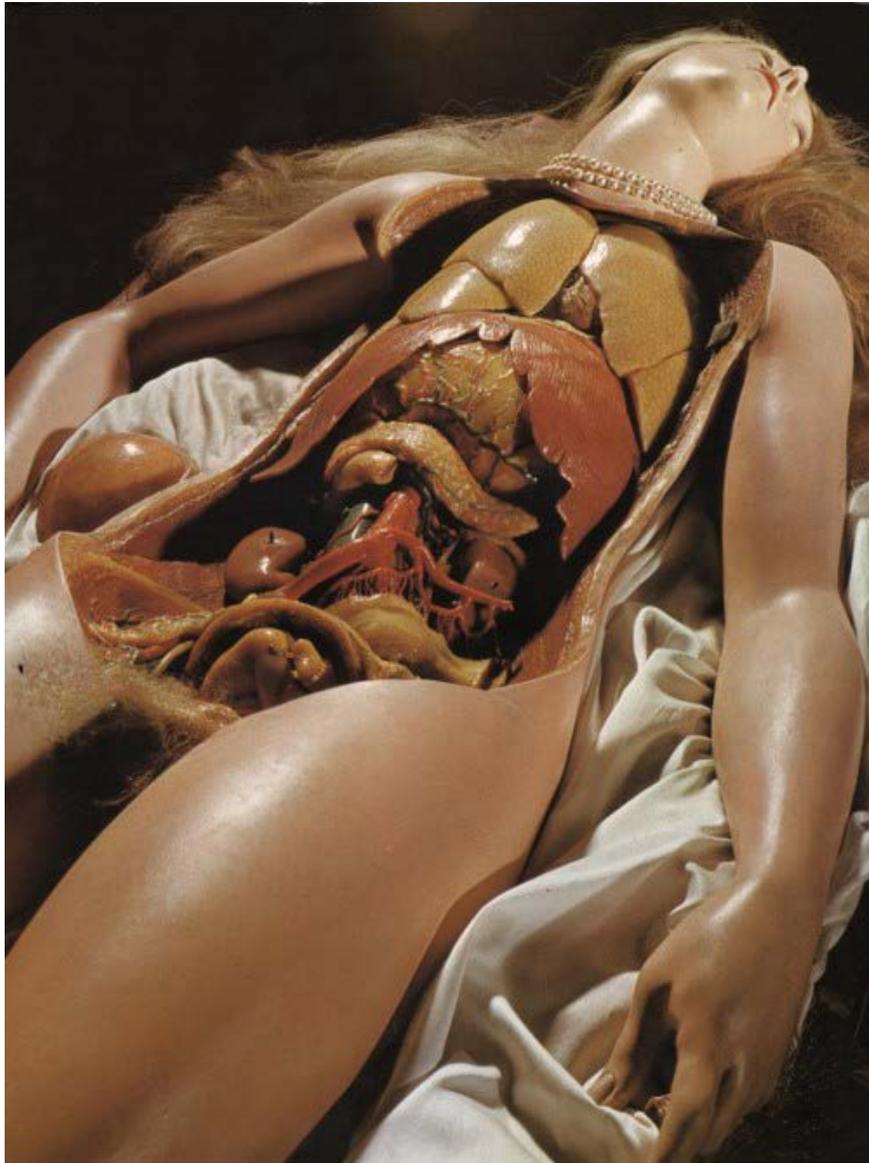


Figure 2
Medici Venus (18th century)
Anatomical wax model
Life-size
Medizinische Universität, Vienna

container or vessel, in relation to the skin.³²

Ideals regarding the thickness and strength of male skin and the desirability, smoothness, fragility and containing qualities of female skin are also epitomised by filmic representations of skin, including *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)³³ and *The Skin I Live In* (2011).³⁴ In both films, these binary concepts are advanced by narratives that focus on the organ of skin, and its transplantation, as a means of literally recreating a newly gendered subject. In the former, a psychopath named Buffalo Bill (played by Ted Levine) is desperate for the sex change operation that he has been refused (figure 3). As a means of recreating himself as a woman, he decides to capture and kill female victims and remove their skin so he can make himself a female skin suit. Referring to his female victims as 'it,' he forces them to treat the skin of their back with special lotions to ensure it is soft and glowing before removal, an action highlighting the significance of smoothness and exterior radiance to female skin. As his fantasy and the actions required to achieve it take on more urgency, it becomes clear the female 'cloak' of skin holds greater metaphoric and physical potential than any sex change operation; it offers the opportunity to entirely envelope, contain and mask his inappropriately male body.

In the latter film, *The Skin I Live In*, Dr Robert Ledgard (played by Antonio Banderas) uses a skin transplantation technique referred to as 'trans-genesis' to reconstruct his dead wife, a burn victim who committed suicide upon seeing her disfigured reflection in a window. He attempts to bring her back by enclosing the man who sexually assaulted his daughter in a 'female' skin suit resembling his wife (figure 4). In this film, the act of totally redressing the male attacker in female skin and genitalia reverses the paradigm of *Silence of the Lambs* but maintains the binary divide. It strengthens implicitly fragile female skin using artificial means, and weakens implicitly strong male skin by enclosing and suppressing it in a new female body. This process becomes clear in scenes where the doctor tests the new female skin's resistance to a blowtorch, maintains the skin's softness using lotions and treatments, and insists his newly named patient 'Vera' wears makeup, providing her with magazines to instruct her on its application.

Dualistic representations of the radiant female surface of skin, and the open, gaping hollow space of the female body persist throughout the modern and postmodern eras and are

³² Ibid.

³³ Directed by Jonathan Demme, *The Silence of the Lambs*, 35mm (1991; New York: Orion Pictures Corporation), Film.

³⁴ Directed by Pedro Almodóvar, *The Skin I Live In*, 35mm (2011; New York: Sony Pictures Classics), Film.



Figure 3
'Buffalo Bill' played by Ted Levine
The Silence of the Lambs (1991)
Directed by Jonathan Demme

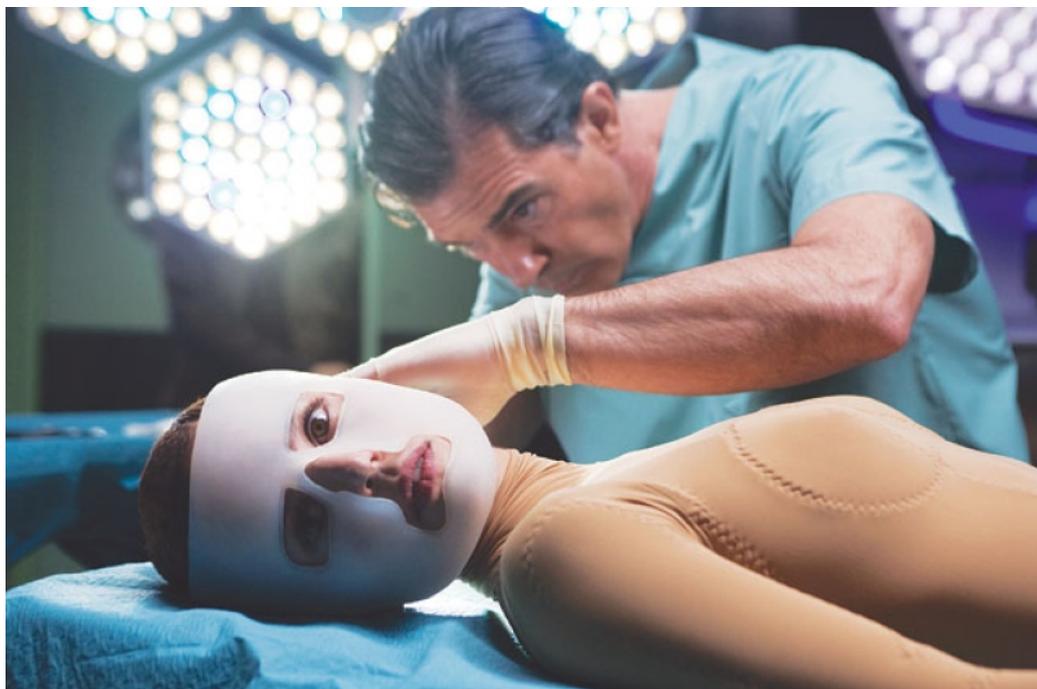


Figure 4
Antonio Banderas and Elena Anaya in *The Skin I Live In* (2011)
Directed by Pedro Almodóvar

evident in a variety of media. Connor locates their dual presence in advertising and photography. In giant billboards and glossy magazines, the excess of evidence of female skin, and the skin-like objects in its proximity, are employed to foster envy, desire, and consumption.

The skin of these models advertising sport shoes, ice cream, mascara and brassieres is just one kind of skin, with a secondary skin covering objects they wear, hold, caress, ingest or recline in...all this skin *glows*, as if with its own serene, interior illumination.³⁵

Exemplifying this concept of a unified, radiant layer of skin is the perfume advertisement for Dior J'adore that features a woman with gilded hair, skin, jewellery, clothes and perfume, submerged in a pool of golden water (figure 5). According to Connor, and following Woolf, this light promotes desire – specifically desire to touch – while simultaneously resisting it since ‘the ideal, unbroken smoothness of the body’ is ‘incorruptible because untouchable.’³⁶

This persistent and problematic binary model of female skin, which is desired but never desiring, touched but never touching, forms the basis for my own studio investigation that reconceives skin as a tactile network. In my vision, skin must be reconceived as an active tissue in which a woman locates, imprints and conceives of her own identity and desires and acts upon it. Through creative works, I identify this conversion of the skin from a passive screen into an active web, from objective surface to subjective tissue, as a means by which women can achieve and maintain embodied, empowered conceptions of themselves.

As I have shown in Benthien, Connor, Wolf and Grosz, representations of female skin signify women’s lack of empowerment, both in their own lives and in the public realm. My project tackles this problem in reverse. By poetically reconfiguring skin as a tactile network unlocking and liberating the self through a world of experience, I offer an imaginative model of conceiving women’s access to themselves and the world *through* skin.

1.2 Looking at Skin Through the Lens of Female Artists and Theorists

Like me, many female artists see the skin as a territory ripe for investigation. This is evidenced by an array of artistic projects resisting outmoded binary conceptions of the female body. The artist Inez van Lamsweerde directly confronts the façade of smooth perfect

³⁵ Steven Connor, "Mortification," in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 38.

³⁶ Ibid.

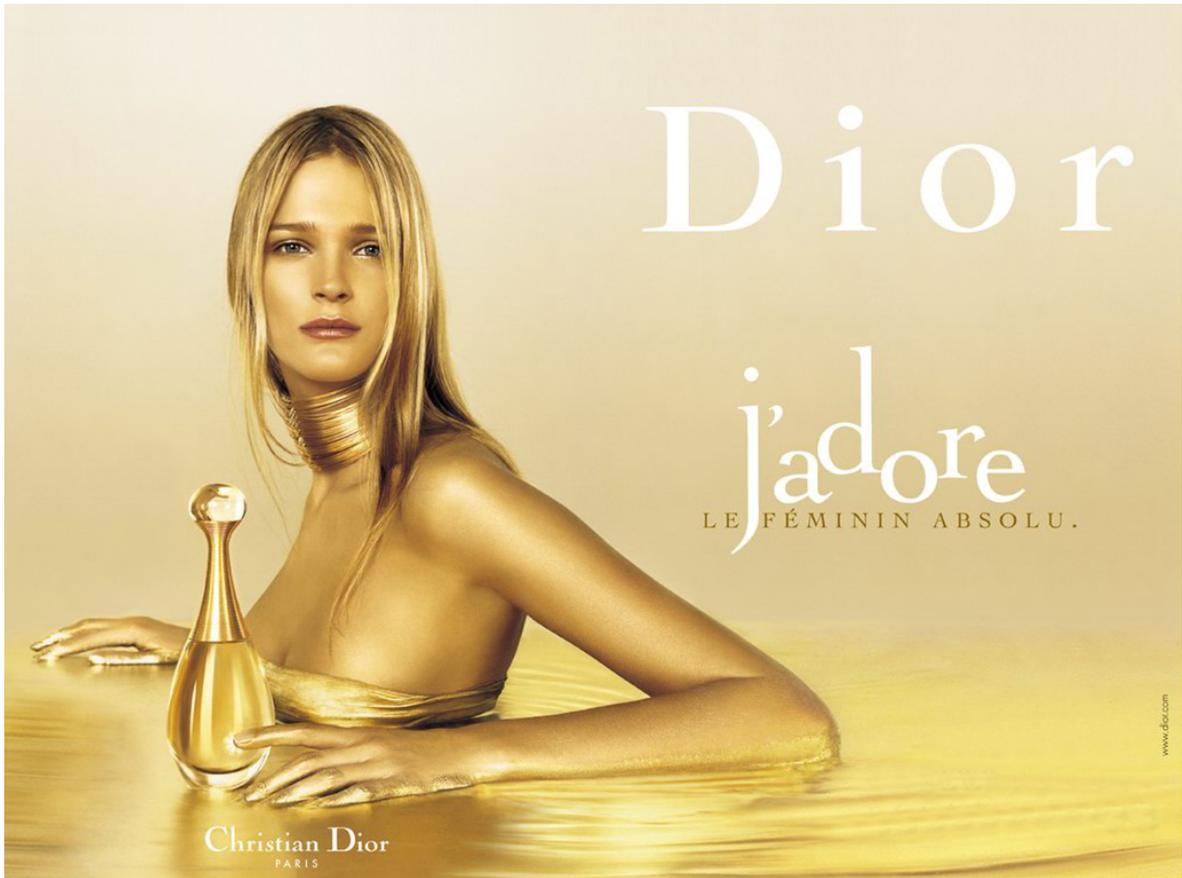


Figure 5
Perfume advertisement for Dior J'adore (1999)
Christian Dior, Paris

skin, alongside imagery of female penetration, psychic defencelessness, and excessively thin skin.³⁷ In her digital photograph *Joan*, from the series, *Thank You Thighmaster* (1993), she depicts a mannequin-like, rocker-wigged, naked female body with plastic looking skin, completely closed orifices, and the absence of nipples or genitalia (figure 6). The hunched figure presents rigid hands, which seem as though they can neither touch nor feel, to the viewer. This image visualises the bind in female depictions in skin, by maintaining an image of a thin, glossy, hairless model so familiar in beauty advertisements, but taking it to an artificial extreme. Completely sealing up the innermost hollows susceptible to attack, leakiness and penetration, the artist alerts us to the disturbing problem of positioning bodies as mere objects and surfaces.

Conversely, many other women writers and artists prefer to explore skin's potential to advance female representations by privileging the other side of the binary. Bernadette Wegenstein analyses skin in relation to media theory. She argues that a generation raised on films featuring serial killers making 'skin-suits' from their victims are well prepared to accept the concept that skin can be 'separated from its natural body-environment... its sole function of *surfacing* a body.'³⁸ Wegenstein argues that such visualisations lead to the rejection of the idea of skin as a wall, house or barrier between inner and outer body, giving way, in more positive incarnations, to its potential as a connection between self and other.

The work of artist Kiki Smith exemplifies this reconceptualisation of skin as an autobiographic, endogenous and exogenous³⁹ tissue. Her fabric, bronze and papier-mâché sculptures of texturally layered bodies are extended by beaded glass entrails of blood, milk, excrement, and urine, revealing the ectoderm's inherent openness (figure 7). Smith writes:

You always have these boundaries in your daily life, but also in your physical life as well. Skin is the surface, or boundary line, of the body's limit. The skin is actually this very porous membrane, so on a microscopic level you get into the question of what's inside and what's outside. Things are going through you all the time. You're really very penetrable on the surface; you just have the illusion of a wall between your insides and the outside.⁴⁰

Smith's focus on the fluidity of the body held particular currency in art and theory of the 1980s and 1990s. Smith's work offers a potent visual framework for understanding Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, which links the human reaction of horror to the fragility of the

³⁷ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 31.

³⁸ Wegenstein, *Getting Under the Skin: The Body and Media Theory*, p. 104.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Carlo McCormick, "Kiki Smith," <http://www.jca-online.com/ksmith.html>.



Figure 6
Inez van Lamsweerde, *Joan* (1993)
From the *Thank You Thighmaster Series*
Cibachrome print mounted on Plexiglas and aluminium
185.4 x 120.6 cm
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York



Figure 7
Kiki Smith, *Pee Body* (1992)
Wax sculpture with beads
68.5 x 71 x 71 cm
Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge

body's boundaries with the violent scission in infancy between self and (m)other.⁴¹ For both Smith and Kristeva, this perceived loss of the distinction between subject and object, self and other, inside and out that arises from this state is pertinent to explorations of subjectivity.

Wegenstein emphasises that in a rethinking of skin's boundaries, women's bodies in particular are being imagined as multiple sites of potentiality in which interior and exterior accounts are reassembled in relation to each other:

No longer a place of exclusion and sexualisation, female *bodies* (and I emphasise the plural) can now be described as the accumulation of different layers of media. In this model of subjectivity, identity is a process that never comes to a halt, as bodily layers can be taken off one by one and rearranged anew.⁴²

In my project, I will show how this rearranging, reframing and entwining of interior and exterior accounts of the body is an attempt to actively recuperate an empowered vision of the body, which has too long been conceived of as a gleaming surface or hollow interior. As Wolf argues, the lack of depth in depictions of skin limits and prevents women's experience of their own desires for themselves and in the world.⁴³ To tackle this problem, my works investigate the interior's relation to the thought, intellect, and psyche of a female subject and the exterior's relation to the transmission and location of identity in forms of touch and self-inscription. Weaving together these active, meaningful insides and outsides, I assert that they are inextricably linked and will continue to accumulate and interact in dynamic (mutual) relation. Therefore, these territories of inside and outside, when enfolded together in skin, move toward complex and ambiguous accounts of living in the body, and living in the world, *through* that body.

A related sense of the skin's particular material capacity to enfold subjective, interior and exterior accounts is evidenced in the work of a range of women artists working across diverse media including photography, textiles, writing, sculpture, installation and collage. Most of these artists' work focuses on direct representations of skin as a surface bearing out the inner most self. On that surface, stories of the body and the person living inside it are written or revealed by the marks, scars, lines, character and changes to skin. Louise Bourgeois, Heide Hatry, Kiki Smith, Wangechi Mutu, Candice Breitz, Cindy Sherman, Julie

⁴¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁴² Wegenstein, *Getting Under the Skin: The Body and Media Theory*, p. 21.

⁴³ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, p. 81.

Rrap, Peta Clancy, Doris Salcedo, Nancy Grossman, Mary Kelly, Ellen Gallagher, Eva Hesse, Annette Messager, Jenny Holzer, Alba D'Urbano and Lisa Deanne Smith, among others, have all imaged skin as a substantive, subjective tissue. In many instances, autobiography and multiplicity (of voices, perspectives, bodies, fragments and images) becomes a strategy for imbuing depictions of the skin with individuating, recharging subjective potential for women.

While my own research employs many of these approaches, including autobiography, fragmentation and the enfolding of interior and exterior accounts, it also differs substantially. Although I also sometimes create direct representations of skin, I also explore how objects and relics can act as proxies for skin, invoking the sense of *feeling* and *making* ourselves and the world through the tactility of skin. I will now elaborate on the work of these women artists to reveal the strength in feminist representations of skin, and the potential to extend these further through my project.

The late artist Louise Bourgeois used roughly sewn, pink gauze fabric to materialise skin-like wrappings around her sculptures of female figures. In works such as *Arch of Hysteria* (2000), a suspended fabric woman approximates the artist as a naked floating figure (figure 8). The arch of the body suggests it is in a state of pain or sexual ecstasy, both experiences felt intensely at skin level. The figure's suspension by string, and closed eyes, alert us that the body is undergoing a particular moment or experience. Yet the visible darning of multiple wrapped layers of fabric skin hint at the body's continual ability to change, and affirm the artist's ongoing concern with psychological repair through the skin. Bourgeois writes: 'I always had the fear of being separated and abandoned. The sewing is my attempt to keep things together and make things whole.'⁴⁴ Ironically this work, which presents female skin tissue as the primary material symbolising, structuring and repairing the self, also inspired the Almodóvar film *The Skin I Live In*, which ultimately propagates a dualistic model of the skin.⁴⁵ The film cuts between coverage of Bourgeois' own sculptures and scenes of the doctor artificially reconstructing a female skin suit for his male captive in a laboratory. Transplanted within the movie, her works slowly lose their sense of skin as a self-renewing or self-repairing substance, signalling the significance of context to female representations of body and skin.

⁴⁴ Louise Bourgeois as cited in "Louise Bourgeois: The Fabric Works: 15 October - 18 December 2010," Hauser & Wirth Gallery, <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/743/louise-bourgeois-the-fabric-works/view/>.

⁴⁵ David Ebony, "Flesh for Fantasy," *Art in America*, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/finer-things/2011-10-13/pedro-almodovar-the-skin-live-in/>.



Figure 8
Louise Bourgeois, *Arch of Hysteria* (2000)
Mixed media
14 x 44.4 x 27.9 cm
Collection of Claudia and Karsten Greve, Paris

Like Bourgeois, many artists, including Nancy Grossman, Catherine Opie and Heide Hatry image the skin as a flexible leaf or second skin on which a woman can write her own narrative, often in resistance to dominant cultural discourses. Focusing initially on the exterior of the skin and its 'dressings,' they reveal the extent to which the skin might also express interior identity, subjectivity and experience. In line with Wegenstein's theory, they resist the 'holism' of skin, instead accentuating its coming into being through processes that emphasise the body as a fragmented, multiple, unique and experiential site.

In the 2006 exhibition *Skin is a Language*, the Whitney Museum of Modern Art showcased sculptures, drawings, photographic and print works from its collection to explore the significance of the 'the body's outer layer' to identity. Featuring works by Opie and Grossman, Roni Horn, Annette Lemieux, Félix González-Torres, Eva Hesse, Ellen Gallagher and others, the exhibition broadly explored various concepts of skin as 'an index of identity; a permeable boundary, a tactile surface and a site for cultural and sensorial perception.'⁴⁶ Perhaps due to the constraints of curating from a limited amount of works in collection, the exhibition lacked a focused approach to skin, instead gathering strong works which attest to skin's recurrence as a visual motif across different movements, media and time periods. Despite this general approach, the work of women artists in the exhibition substantiates Benthien's argument that representations of female skin are so often masking and suppressive. Grossman, Horn and Lemieux invoke an image of a woman masked while Gallagher and Opie image the cutting of the female body. However, in the case of Opie's and Grossman's work, produced in two different generations of feminism, there are clear efforts to move beyond these binaries, toward empowered accounts of their own lives and experiences.

Grossman's *Head* (1968) is a self-portrait of the artist's head bound in a black leather balaclava laden with zips and stars (figure 9). One of the oldest works in the show, it was the key source for the curators, Carter Foster and Apsara DiQuinzio, who began with an interest in the idea of skin as a form of masking or disguise.⁴⁷ Grossman is a significant artist in New York's early Women's Movement. *Head* characterises many of her works in which a fierce mask reflects the artist's anger about the violence of the 1960s, the Vietnam War and women's lack of rights – issues that she saw as clearly interconnected.⁴⁸ At first glance, the mask – with eyes covered, bound and sewn shut – alludes to victimhood or suppression. Yet the black leather, zips, stars and identifying marks in Grossman's work evokes a sensuous

⁴⁶ Curators Carter Foster and Apsara DiQuinzio in Anne Schwartz, "Skin is a Language," New York Arts, <http://www.nyartsmagazine.com/may-june-2006/skin-is-a-language-anne-swartz>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.



Figure 9
Nancy Grossman, *Head* (1968)
Wood, leather, metal zippers, lacquer and metal nails
40.6 x 19.7 x 22.2 cm
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

and fierce form of battle armour. It suggests that this second skin has the power to signify, energise or liberate the self it covers, all attributes that Benthien identifies with representations of male skin.

Emerging in a second wave of feminist art concerned with the body's relation to identity, Opie's photographic work *Self Portrait/Cutting* (1993) also attempts to convert a suppressive experience in skin into a more empowered one (figure 10). In this work, the artist reveals her bare back, which has been razor-cut with a stick-figure scene: a cottage, a cloud, two birds and two female figures standing in the foreground, holding hands. The still bloody imprint of the artist's childlike drawing of love between two women merges an image of the artist's lesbian identity with her hope for a happy family. Although the violence in Opie's mark suggests this might only be achieved through great struggle, the artist is clearly willing to wage this battle.⁴⁹ However, beyond this surface reading, the act of cutting (skin) in Opie's photograph is characteristic of works exploring gay and lesbian identity during the rise of the AIDS virus. Featuring an image of marked skin and ambivalence to living in skin, it also operates as a challenge to the widespread suppression of homosexuality and body panic prevalent at the time in which it was made. This work, and others I will continue to cite throughout this text, enhances my argument that the limits imposed on skin mirror real life limitations. As Opie shows, it is possible and crucial to confront both, so that we may live in the world as ourselves.

More recently, the New York based German contemporary artist Heide Hatry has been lauded for her innovative, sometimes gruesome use of skin in her critique of the violent assembling and disassembling of the female body in culture and language. A butcher's daughter, Hatry's early fascination with animal skin led her to later employ it as her primary sculptural medium. For her book *Heads and Tales* (2009), Hatry created figurative sculptures of women using clay, untreated pigskin, raw meat and pig eyes (figure 11). To make these 'women' more life-like, and contextualise them within different periods of history, Hatry applied wigs, jewellery and makeup, and photographed them in a diverse range of settings including gardens, offices and bedrooms.

Like van Lamsweerde, Hatry uses the motif of skin to grossly exaggerate the cultural construction of woman as a flesh object or calendar girl ripe for consumption. In *Heads and Tales*, black eyed, waxy skinned figures peer back at us like bewitched dolls. Recalling the

⁴⁹ Catherine Kaelin, "Catherine Opie Etches Sex and Gender Onto the Canvas of her Skin," *Columbia Spectator*; <http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2008/11/14/catherine-opie-etches-sex-and-gender-canvas-her-skin>.



Figure 10
Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Cutting* (1993)
Chromogenic colour print
100.7 x 76.1 cm
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

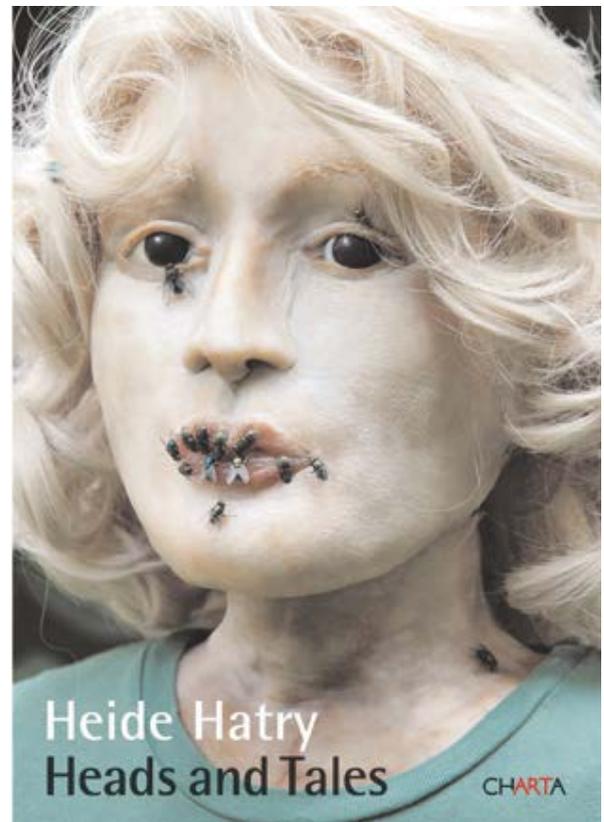


Figure 11
Front cover of Heide Hatry, *Heads and Tales*
New York: Charta Art Books (2009)

Medici Venus or 'overdone' plastic surgery patients, their 'deadness' and plasticity override any sense of their desirability. However, Hatry articulates a poststructuralist awareness of the extent to which the body is also written in language, by providing a textual antidote to women's historical existence as 'material girls.' Hatry appointed a number of female writers to write a first-person story about each figure, to excavate her long-lost internal subjectivity. As Hatry's artwork evokes issues of violence, death and the construction of gender identity, the writing communicates similar concerns specific to women. 'Finding a way to be a woman is finding a way to live with fatal knowledge,'⁵⁰ says Catharine MacKinnon in her introduction to the book that Hatry compiled of the entries. Hatry and her collaborators speak to and of that fatal knowledge, long suppressed.

Although the works by these four women artists are inextricably linked to the specific political and cultural context in which they were produced, they more broadly bring to mind recent feminist theories of embodiment put forward by Diana T. Meyers. Her theories centre on exploring how women can resist cultural meanings imposed on their bodies and selves by actively producing their own exterior and interior inscriptions and meanings. Meyers states that:

Because some of the meanings with which women's bodies are imbued recruit them into accepting oppressive social structures or engaging in self-subordinating behavior... a theory of emancipatory psycho-corporeal agency must also account for personal transformation, including how to purge the body of the pernicious meanings it has absorbed.⁵¹

Adding to the contribution of female artists working with the motif of skin, are feminist writers locating skin as a site at which female psycho-corporeal agency, or the reclamation of the bodily experience, can take place. In their book, *Thinking Through the Skin*, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey pinpoint earlier literature on feminism and embodiment by Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, Rosie Braidotti and others, to flag a shift from the body as a site of privilege, towards the skin as a material for *thinking through* embodiment. Grosz's book, *Volatile Bodies*, brought a substantial critique of mind/body dualisms, which prompted a challenge of the surface/depth model of subjectivity. Epitomising surface and depth, skin had great potential in addressing this issue.⁵² Braidotti's concept of embodiment, inspired by Gilles Deleuze and

⁵⁰ Catharine MacKinnon, "Creating New Life in Heads and Tales," in *Heads and Tales*, ed. Heide Hatry (New York: Charta Art Books, 2009).

⁵¹ Diana T. Meyers, *Being Yourself: Essays on Identity, Action, and Social Life* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), p. 89.

⁵² Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, p. 218.

Félix Guattari, brings skin to mind when it describes the body in terms of folding: a folding in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outward of affects.⁵³ Butler's materialisation of the body similarly employed terms such as boundary, surface and fixity, characteristics that prompt consideration of skin.

Ahmed and Stacey argue that these earlier theories of the body made way for skin – ‘the fleshy interface between bodies and worlds’⁵⁴ – to emerge as a primary subject of feminist scholarship, a material finally weaving together long separated interior and exterior accounts of the female body. Bringing together the works of authors including Tina Takemoto, Jay Prosner, Steven Connor, Shirley Tate and others in their own anthology, Ahmed and Stacey further contribute to the field with a specific focus on how accounts of pregnancy, illness, aging, sexuality, tattooing, writing and cutting reconfigure skin's conception as solely a boundary object or an idealised, soft surface. Instead they emphasise thinking of skin as a connective texture capable of revealing how female subjects live, ‘are written, narrated, seen, touched, managed, worked, cut, remembered, produced and known.’⁵⁵ Like Wegenstein, they maintain a central thesis that bodies refuse to be contained on the inside or outside, and are unstable, or in a constant process of becoming.⁵⁶

1.3 Skin's Tactile Potential and Enfolding Delicacy

Advancing this existing body of literature and art about skin as a substantive tissue in female representations, my own studio research will be accounted for in the subsequent chapters. It will contribute new sculptural ways of engaging skin as a tactile territory, enfolding and collapsing previously separated binary terms. There are important differences between my own creative work and the work discussed in this chapter. Many artists who explore both subjectivity and bodily experience through the materiality of skin rely primarily on the image of the skin of one body, whether through photography of human skin, or sculptural recreation of skin using materials similar to it, including cloth, animal skin or translucent paper. None of the artists I am aware of have also extensively explored the skin through the world of objects or other bodies that come into contact with the skin. In my own work, these objects and other bodies will be imagined traversing the skin's interface between interiority and exteriority. Despite providing powerful, even unforgettable images, which go a long way to challenge

⁵³ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 9.

⁵⁴ Ahmed and Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin*, Introduction.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

binary representations of female bodies, the artists I have mentioned depict a singular female body, often suppressed, contained, bleeding or bound. This type of imagery provokes a prevailing sense of isolation in skin. Although this is a useful strategy for critiquing binary depictions of women, it does not provide any solution or imagine the tools or agency that may be employed to envisage the transcendence of a suppressive experience of skin.

Picturing the glowing, wrapped, tattooed, constructed, sick, cut or reconstructed ectoderm of skin, these artists' works pave the way for visions highlighting skin's subjective character. However, the ways our identity accumulates through the sense of touch is less evident in their works. In contrast, my research project will reveal that it is also possible to imagine skin's role as a sensory conduit, through which we locate ourselves and come to greater presence in the world. My range of tools, objects and relics will engage how an active conception of self arises through the tactile experience of skin. Where I create an image of a singular person's skin, I emphasise its outward connection to other bodies and representations. This idea of self, located in but moving through skin into the world, seeks to offer an image of both embodiment and liberation from the body that Benthien claims is so absent.⁵⁷

I create a world of objects that might mark or signify a skin network. Through the sense of these objects' touch on our skin and vice versa, I visualize the transmission of sensual and psychical experience and cultural or personal identity. Thus my project brings together a select group of objects and images that express the idea of skin as a permeable, accruing, tangible connective texture. The resulting works include larger than life clay key totems, encoded with age old female symbols and imprinted with my fingers; a collage series of surgical tools assembled from pictures of cosmetic, perfume and other containers; a giant six metre long tool roll of evocative resinous hand held objects that fit in individual pockets; a series of faux archaeological objects, skins and fertility icons inspired by *The Venus of Willendorf*; a child sized, knitted, skin armour and photographs of my daughter's texta drawing on my skin. In each new work, I return again to the potential of objects and tactility as a means for rethinking female skin, past and present. These works also refer constantly back to hands and active bodies, emphasising the extent to which the subject in bodily skin will continue to actively reassemble itself, in the experiences of touching, feeling and making.

These varied works are inspired in part by objects located and residencies undertaken around the world. From New York City to Austria and from Melbourne to Spain, and referring to time spans as vast as the Paleolithic to the modern day, I will continue to write and rewrite

⁵⁷ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 124.

aspects of women's complex, ever changing relation to skin. Where I focus on objects that historically or metaphorically convey oppressive conceptions of female skin as solely exterior or interior, I do so to acknowledge and then extend limited representations. However, I examine whether or not, through media known for its particular tactility or affinity with skin (including knitting, collage/magazine skins, and clay), skin can be reassembled as a tactile fibre enfolding subjectivity. By juxtaposing and reimagining objects at once functional and magical, known and unknown, I rethink skin as both a surface of real inscription and a storehouse of psychical experience, alluding to the ways these inform each other, and our constant sense of becoming, through touch.

The idea that objects activate the senses of touch and the feeling of skin is drawn from the work of Alfred Gell, Bernard Berenson and Marisa Lazzari, who show how the tactility of the body arises through a relation to objects, and vice versa. Berenson suggests that the tactility of hand-made or process-oriented objects provoke in humans a genuine physical encounter through ideated sensations that he terms 'tactile values.'⁵⁸ The sensuous response one has of gripping a beautifully carved wooden handle, ceramic vessel or finely knitted garment, enlivens the senses and invites the viewer/user to touch the hand of the maker.⁵⁹ Although my works cannot be touched in a gallery setting, I use making and installation strategies to evoke these possibilities, by creating smooth, shimmering objects approximating skin, or by placing objects on a long roll of cloth pockets at hand height. This strategy invites viewers to *imagine* themselves taking objects out of their fabric sleeves, and into their hands. In this way objects can *call out* to viewers, provoking sensuous thinking about one's own body and skin.

Gell acknowledges that an object has capacity to generate a haptic experience even from afar. He suggests that objects operate as stand-ins for bodies, of others and ourselves, 'evoking through their history, material, technological and representational traits, body-like performance capacities,'⁶⁰ such as stroking. According to Gell, our sense that objects have a social and aesthetic function can also help us enter beyond the physical, exterior world into 'the realm of the imaginary.'⁶¹ In my tactile objects evoking skin, I suggest that through objects, we can imagine, even *dream* about what our bodies have experienced and can experience.

⁵⁸ Bernard Berenson as cited in Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Chichester: Wiley, 2009), p. 103.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁶⁰ Alfred Gell as cited in Marisa Lazzari, "The Texture of Things: Objects, People, and Landscape in Northwest Argentina," in *Archaeologies of Materiality*, ed. Lynn Meskell (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2005), p. 134.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

As I will show in the coming chapters and exhibition, material media embodying tactile, imaginative qualities are central to this task and my studio research. The knitted and textile works discussed in chapters three and four operate metaphorically as a membrane or tissue mimicking skin, and contribute to a material reconceptualisation of the skin wall as a porous network, enfolding the subjective self. Knitted works are flipped inside out, sewn with visible seams and are full of holes. In Spanish, the word for knitting is 'de hacer punto', literally translating as to make holes, conjuring the connective membrane like structure of skin.

The use of clay, also discussed by Vincentelli in terms of its long cultural associations with female flesh,⁶² is another surface I use to reinterpret female skin. According to Connor,

The warm and the soft – wax, clay – are a kind of reciprocal, emollient flesh, which soften the hand and the finger. When wax or clay dries, it seems to form a scar or cicatrice, which seals in the meaning, as though a skin had formed over it, protecting it from degradation and change. It is the body that writes and in writing, discovers, or bestows a skin in the world wherever it writes.⁶³

In my own project, clay is a stand in for female skin, and is used to write the history of my own body and female bodies whose history or experience I have researched.

I also use the process of collage, or the cutting of 'women's' magazine 'skins.' I reveal how the binary concept of skin armour in mass media depictions of women, which keep inside and outside firmly separated, can be reconsidered through tools or objects that enact the entwinement of interior and exterior, self and other. For example, I literally cut out images of female skin, or the containers of creams, mascaras and brushes used to maintain skin's radiance and youthful perfection. I reassemble the pieces into sensuous tools that might prise that idealised armour open, looking for missing depth. Other times, I work in reverse, rearranging pictures of richly coloured, tactile objects into abstracted bodies of women. These works highlight the danger of surface accounts of skin while also advancing its potential as an intense, fragmentary, accruing, sensory site.

In this chapter, I have linked the image of a woman suppressed in her skin with the idea of a woman suppressed in the world. In all my works imaging the permeable or fragmented ectoderm of skin, I entwine cultural accounts of the female body with my own past and

⁶² Moira Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁶³ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 83.

present recollections of bodily experience in skin, in an attempt to tap skin's liberating, identifying and connective potential. Evaluating skin as a membrane which bears out historical or personal struggles, Connor argues it is time to move from 'the skin's duress,' towards 'many kinds of finesse that are associated with the skin.'⁶⁴ With regard to female representations in particular, he believes that skin's perceived weakness or sensitivity, which he terms *delicacy*, can be reconceived of as 'a delight of care'⁶⁵ for skin. Crucial to this reframing of skin is an awareness of its significance and a movement beyond its surface. In the next chapter, *Her Tools*, I highlight a series of three tool related artworks focused on achieving deeper accounts of female bodily experience *through* skin. Entwining interior and exterior, and subjective and cultural accounts of skin, *Her Tools* begins the creative journey towards visualising skin's liberating, identifying and connective potential for women.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 259.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 2

Her Tools: Skin Relics Excavating Female Subjectivity in Skin

'In rendering something ready-to-hand, in using it as a tool, I may seem to take it into myself, make it part of my substance, my repertoire of possibilities.'⁶⁶

In this chapter, I will reveal the early emphasis in the studio research on creating a range of tactile tools or instruments that promote an expansion beyond female skin's suppressive binds in representation. With the sculptural and collage works *Her Keys* (2010), *Her Tools* (2010) and *Unearthed* (2011), I harness symbols of bodily exteriority and interiority such as keys, surgical tools and age-old bodily relics that relate to binary conceptions of female skin as a sealed boundary wall, prison-house, or idealised soft surface. By reconfiguring each of these symbols as objects of access, inquiry and sensory experience, I envisage female skin as a recharging, subjective, identifying, feeling tissue. I analyse the visual and material strategies employed in these works to encourage shifts in thinking about and representing skin. These approaches include the use of media bearing a relation to skin's tactile, reparative potential (including knitting, clay and collage), and the letter-like and body-like crafting of objects to promote the body's alliance with language, speech and subjectivity. I discuss how the scale, display and titles of works inform a metaphorical and material reunion between the surfaces and depths of skin, and imagine women as the owners of tools that perform an empowered experience of the self, through skin.

2.1 *Her Keys: Unlocking a History of Female Interiority*

The first body of work *Her Keys* (2010) comprises a set of thirty-two oversized, polished, clay-modelled black keys bearing archaic female symbols, writ large across a wall (figures 12-15). The key symbol is commonly understood as an instrument that locks and unlocks interior rooms, spaces and objects. In this work, it is harnessed to engage and shift conventional representations of female skin as locked space, 'a masking armoured surface, house or vessel' or 'hollow space with an enveloping, smooth external skin,'⁶⁷ as discussed with reference to Claudia Benthien and Elizabeth Grosz in chapter one. Moving beyond an iconography of imprisonment and interiority, *Her Keys* act as totems of access, language and repair.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 264.

⁶⁷ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, p. 198.



Figure 12
Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Installation detail from the exhibition *Inward Gathering* (2010)
Nellie Castan Gallery
Epoxy resin clay, wire, shoe polish, paint, cotton
Dimensions variable (wall is 1300 x 800 cm)
Photo: Simon Strong

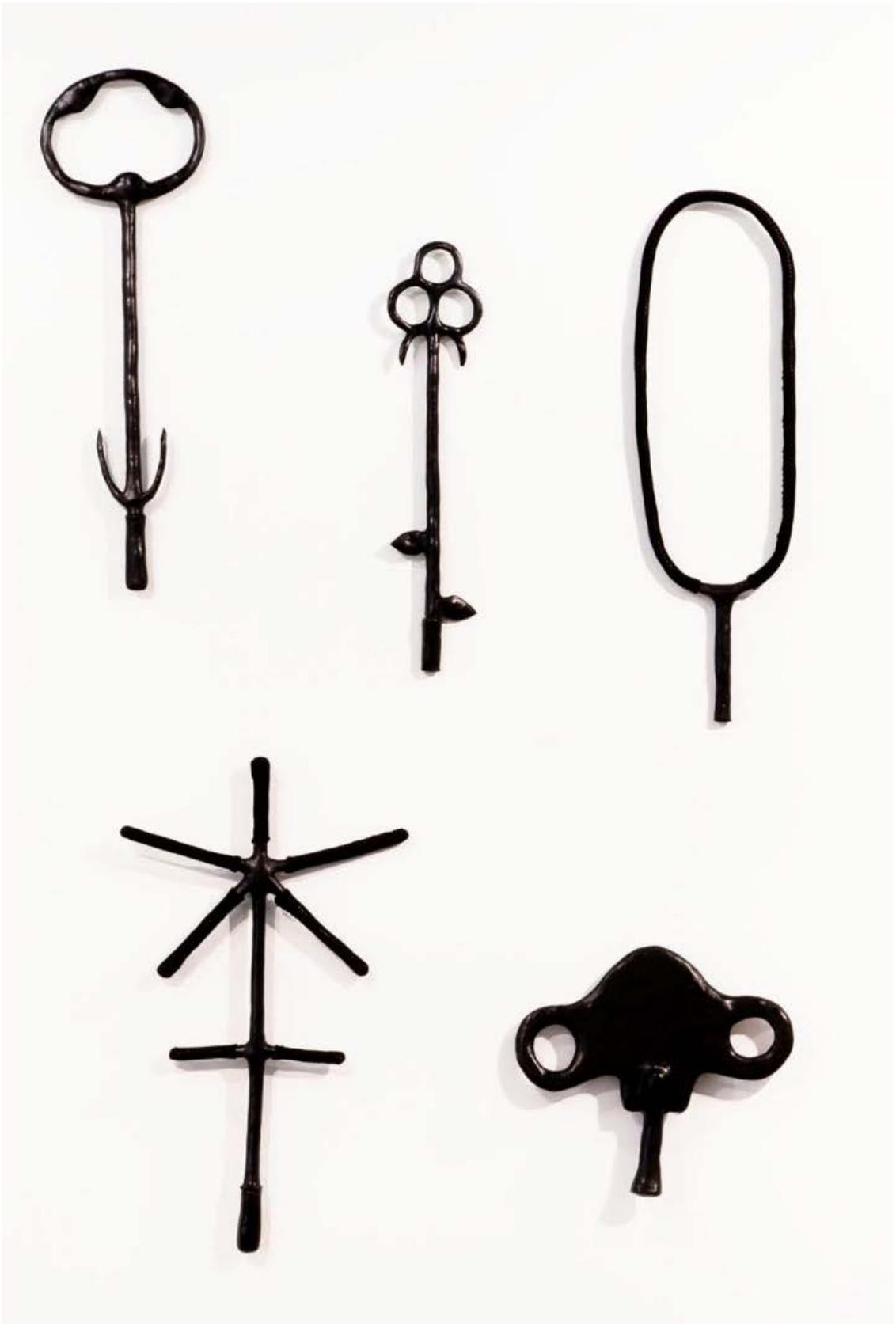


Figure 13
Detail of Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Photo: Simon Strong



Figure 14
Detail of Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Photo: Simon Strong



Figure 15
Detail of Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Photo: Simon Strong

Her Keys capitalises on an existing relation in literature and art between keys and the suppression of women in their skins. Frances Dolan's literary study of nuns compares the architecture of the cloister to the interior bodily architecture of women, revealing that keys, gates and hatches functioned as a visual short-hand for vaginas and hymens. The locking of these gates was a literal means of keeping men's fluids out and keeping women's fluids in.⁶⁸ Garthine Walker also affirms that 'locks and keys constituted common metaphors for sex in various kinds of early modern narratives;' women describing sexual assaults often turned to 'metaphors of open, closed and locked doors and chambers.'⁶⁹ Meanwhile, in Freud's dream analysis, the key is the male instrument or a 'decidedly male symbol' unlocking the 'house' (or female body).⁷⁰

While Benthien cites Inez van Lamsweerde and Sylvia Plath as artists who contend with the cage of skin, *Her Keys* draws more of a connection to Louise Bourgeois' *Femmes Maison* (or woman-house) series from the 1940s, which indirectly evokes the key symbol (figure 16). Created during the ten year period that Bourgeois spent at home raising three young children, the *Femmes Maison* relate directly to the female bodily suppression implicated in prevailing expectations that wives and mothers retreat from the world at large to attend to 'their duties' at home.⁷¹ In each work in the series, a singular woman's body is shown naked except for the house that covers her head and torso. The concealment of the woman's head powerfully invokes a double image of sexual exposure and sensory deprivation; she lacks sight, taste, smell, hearing as well as communicative capacity. As such, Bourgeois poetically illustrates the bind in which 'woman' is a home-base for others, while becoming exiled from herself. However, in each work the waving or flailing of the woman's hands suggests an irrepressible desire to make contact, an element that signals this enclosure may be short lived.

Her Keys picks up this latent potential to disturb visions of female containment in skin. Echoing the image of hands in Bourgeois' work, the keys herald a newfound contact with oneself, the world, and language. This emphasis is made evident through a range of processes and approaches in the work. At least fifty times larger than life, my sculptures match the scale of the oversized keys a mayor gifts honoured citizens or parents bestow their twenty-one

⁶⁸ Frances Dolan, "Why are Nuns Funny?," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2007), p. 516.

⁶⁹ Garthine Walker in *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth, 1963), p. 158.

⁷¹ Julie Nicoletta, "Louise Bourgeois's Femmes-Maisons: Confronting Lacan," *Woman's Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1992), p. 22.

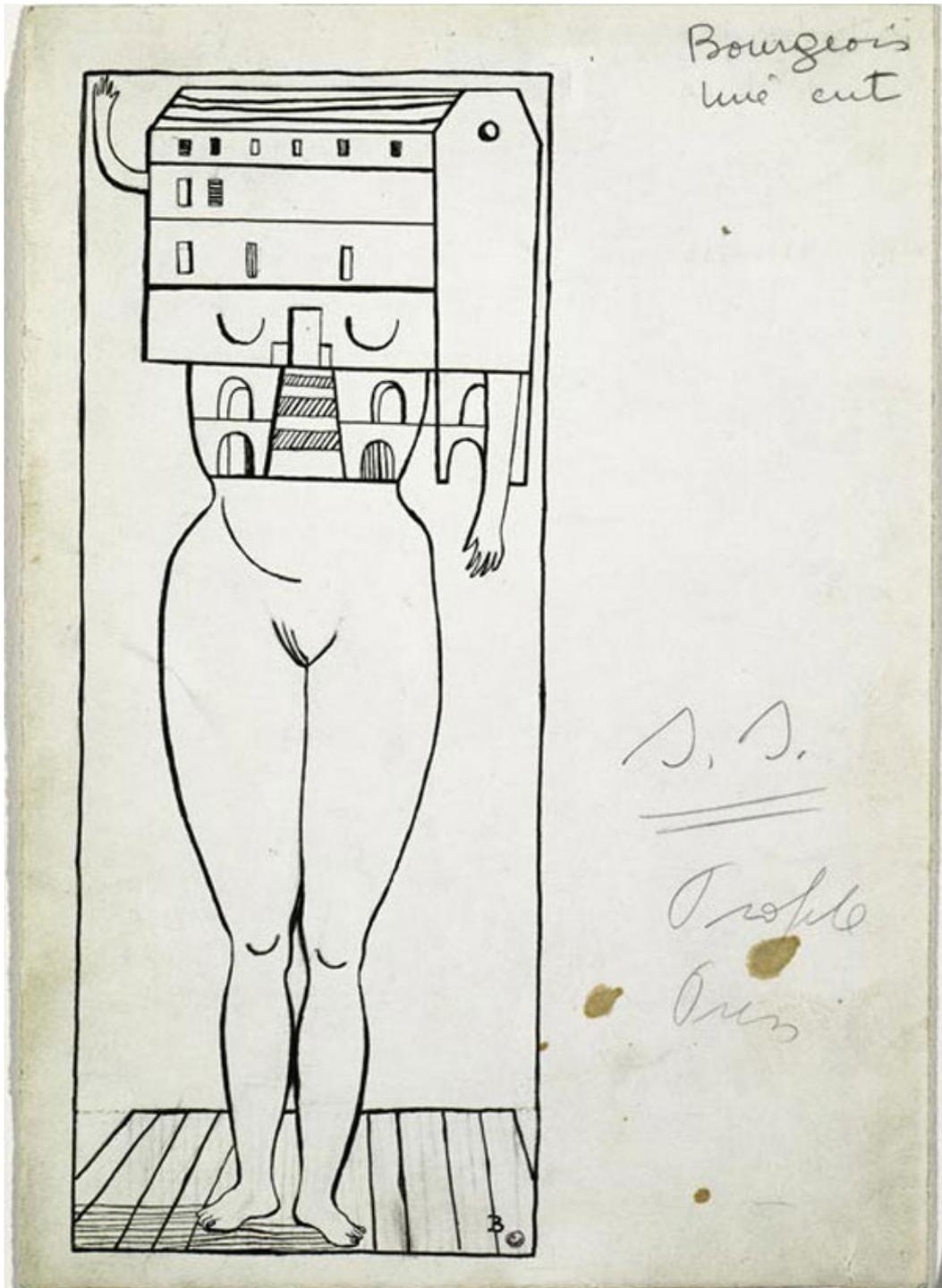


Figure 16
Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison* (1947)
Ink on paper
25 x 18 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

year olds in celebration of their arrival into adulthood. This enlargement frames *Her Keys* – attributed unambiguously to women – as tokens promising unprecedented privilege and entrée into unforeseen realms.

My material exploration of the key as a symbol of access and ownership connects to the writing of Luce Irigaray who believes that women need to reclaim the subjective space of their bodies and skins before they can find a space in the world. For Irigaray, like Bourgeois, the body-house metaphor is a sign for motherhood, as it signals a male desire to return to the maternal body. Irigaray writes that:

If woman could be inside herself, she would have at least two things in her: herself and that for which she is a container – man and at times the child. . . . It seems that she can be a container only for one thing if that is her function. She is supposed only to be a container for the child, according to one moral position. She may be a container for the man. But not for herself.⁷²

In other words, woman is place but ‘she has no place of her own.’⁷³ According to Irigaray, this disavowal of femininity and maternal presence in philosophical discourse is evidence of women’s widespread exclusion from culture and language, where the feminine functions as a mirror to the masculine.

To return women and matter to discourse, Irigaray conjures body-object metaphors that evoke skin. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray refers to the ‘envelope’ as a space that holds thoughts, experiences and desires. ‘Each of us (male or female) has a place – this place that envelops only his or her body, the first envelope of our bodies, the corporeal identity, the boundary, that which delineates us from other bodies.’⁷⁴ For Irigaray, the reclamation of this envelope precedes contact with the other and entry into the world (or discourse).

Critics of Irigaray’s seemingly essentialist⁷⁵ focus on motherhood metaphors dismiss her emphasis upon the body. The identification of femininity with women’s bodies is seen as problematic after feminists argued successfully against biology’s significance to women’s

⁷² Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, p. 41.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

⁷⁵ Essentialism is the view that, for any specific kind of entity, there is a set of characteristics or properties that any entity of that kind must possess. Essentialism is a generalisation stating that certain properties possessed by a group (e.g. women) are universal. Much feminist art and philosophy relying on essentialist strategies employs images or language of the female body and biology as a symbol both of oppression and empowerment.

identity.⁷⁶ However, Irigaray and her supporters, of which I am one, believe her engagement with essentialist views is 'a strategy of mimesis,' which holds up for phallogocentric culture its own discourses that function at the exclusion of female subjects.⁷⁷ Bodily presence becomes a tool by which Irigaray reframes the centrality of women to culture and language. This space of the envelope also epitomises this close relation in Irigaray's work between bodies and language, as it simultaneously refers to the embryonic space of contact between mother and child, and a paper envelope, a device literally used to hold language.

Her Keys employs an object metaphor not unlike Irigaray's envelope. The key is presented as an object signalling a return and reoccupation of the skin of the self and promoting female subjective presence in culture. In this space where a woman re-enters the envelope or skin, an 'inward gathering' or an accrual of new energy can take place. Anzieu's study of skin's functions refers to this process as 'recharging.'⁷⁸ In *Her Keys*, the interior space of women's bodies and selves is promoted as a metaphor for 'access to internal strength . . . which is indispensable . . . in order to face new experiences.'⁷⁹

Her Keys also features real and invented language forms and hieroglyphs in the bows and blades of the keys. The inclusion of these forms acknowledges the emphasis on female interiority in dominant cultural representations, including language, but subverts and expands these with subjective signs and forms. Archaic female symbols are imbedded in the upper parts of the keys. Many of these symbols hark back to Neolithic Pre-Indo-European cultures in which women's existence as reproductive body and homemaker prevailed. One key's bow bears the symbol of Hestia, who in Greek mythology was the Goddess of the Hearth (figure 17). Barbara Walker tells how Hestia 'represented the home place, every man's centre of the world.'⁸⁰ On the bottom of the same key I used the Latin symbol for 'domus' meaning 'home for the gods.'⁸¹ Other symbols include the vesica pisces, considered in sacred geometry to be the source of all creation, literally 'the womb of the universe' that Walker makes synonymous with the yoni, or vulva.⁸² A racket shaped key refers to the Egyptian hieroglyph

⁷⁶ Four feminists evaluate Irigaray's essentialist strategy and its relevance to the future of feminism in Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell," *Diacritics* 28, no. 1 (1998), pp. 19-42.

⁷⁷ Sara Donovan, "Luce Irigaray," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/#SH5a>.

⁷⁸ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 105.

⁷⁹ Jorge Ulnik, *Skin in Psychoanalysis*, (London: Karnac, 2007), Kindle Book, p. 1252.

⁸⁰ Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: Harper Collins, 1983), p. 400.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

for 'placenta' (figure 18). My reproduction of symbols that cast women *as place* for man, god and children, bear material witness to Irigaray's critique that Western discourses, both visual and theoretical, foreclose women's subjective presence in culture.

Expanding these conventional symbols, the keys bear invented fictional symbols of my own imagining. These personal icons and annotated forms haunt my journals. Shapes include curved handles, an upside down heart with a hole, a base that looks like an egg beater, strange feet, musical forms, magic wands, and cartoon-like silhouettes. Each relays through instinctual visual form a direct personal experience (figure 19). Arising from the body, resisting literal meanings, and acting as a counterpoint to known language forms, these keys are informed by Julia Kristeva's theory of the 'semiotic.' For Kristeva, the semiotic is a preverbal, archaic dimension of language arising from contact with the mother that offers alternatives to dominant forms of written and spoken language.⁸³ As the physical and female basis of language, the semiotic refers to the sounds, tones and rhythms of the body that come before and enable access to the 'symbolic' – the dominant, male lingual realm. Kristeva, like Irigaray, asserts the centrality of the maternal body to theory. However while Irigaray evokes motherhood to destabilise and transform a sexed culture that suppresses female subjectivity, Kristeva uses it to show how we become subjects through various dimensions of language. I do not claim *Her Keys* exist as a form of pre-language, in the strict Kristevan sense. However, *Her Keys* sculpturally manifests a combination of ancient maternal and/or personal motifs to suggest an emerging resistance to dominant forms of language.

I also sought to reinvigorate the enlivened potential of female skin in *Hers Keys* through the use of clay and knitting. As I intimated in the first chapter, both these media bear a resonance with the materiality of skin and are imbued with 'tactile values' that Bernard Berenson suggests arise with hand-made or process oriented objects.⁸⁴ By emphasising the delicate touchability of objects and skin, I wanted to extend imagery of sealed or armoured female skins in art works such as Inez van Lamsweerde's *Joan* or Nancy Grossman's *Head*, discussed in chapter one. While their works focus on the protection or strengthening of a violable female body, my own works associate the reclamation of sensation with being in the world.

⁸³ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University, 1984), pp. 49-50, 62-65, 68-71.

⁸⁴ Bernard Berenson as cited in Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, p. 103.



Figure 17 (above left)
Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Detail of the key with 'Hestia' symbol in the bow and 'domus' symbol in the blade
Photo: Simon Strong



Figure 18 (above right)
Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Detail of the key with an Egyptian hieroglyph for 'placenta' in the bow
Photo: Simon Strong



Figure 19
Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Detail of three keys bearing personal annotations
and forms
Photos: Simon Strong

In both their crafting and finish, *Her Keys* invoke a sense of touch through the hands. They are informed by Berenson's theory that the sensuous response one has of gripping a beautifully carved object or knitted garment awakens the senses, and engenders in the viewer an awareness of touch and an imagined connection to the hand of the maker.⁸⁵ Hand-modelled with rich, black epoxy clay, each key, on close inspection, bears the fine imprints of fingers that kneaded and pressed the flesh-like material before it dried. Sustaining these marks, the keys maintain a tangible relation to the body by which they were made, while also inviting touch, even if only metaphorically.

Similarly, the tightly knitted handles stretched around many keys suggest the sensation of cloth on skin, or refer to the porous quality of skin itself (figure 20). These fragments, knitted with the same black thread but bearing unique patterns, speak both to the texture of skin and its sense of individual character and experience. The knitting fragments on the keys also relay the parallel significance of skin and knitting to ongoing accounts of female identity. Joanne Turney, author of *The Culture of Knitting*, suggests knitting historically maintained its position as a popular female domestic art, until second wave feminists began to suggest it might be one of 'many chores that enslave women, bind them to the domestic environment and keep them occupied in mundane and lowly activities.'⁸⁶ However, in its contemporary guise, knitting, like skin, is being reclaimed and reconceived of by women as a pleasurable, tactile, connection-making and empowering texture. Turney summarises the shift as the 'move away from knitting as an extension of thrifty housewifery and chores toward one of pleasure, leisure and luxury.'⁸⁷

The physical pleasure of knitting is emphasised in current knitting discourses whereby yarn is described as 'indulgent, tactile, rich and luxurious.'⁸⁸ Knitting, like skin, can be understood as a cultural fabric, connecting people. As an activity once undertaken in the isolation of the domestic sphere, knitting now offers women a way of coming together *outside* of the home. In urban areas all over the world, still mostly-female knitting groups 'yarn bomb,' 'knit graffiti,' and 'stitch 'n bitch' in pubs, parks and streets, giving knitting, women, and political and social concerns greater cultural visibility.⁸⁹ Bound to tools promoting self-expression, access, sensation and social connection to others, the knitting in *Her Keys* enfolds a relation to subjective expression that can also be cultivated in skin.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), p. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.



Figure 20
Kate Just, *Her Keys* (2010)
Detail of a knitted fragment on a key sculpture
Photo: Simon Strong

As the thirty-two keys are made in an array of sizes, many bear bows or blades that look like 'heads' and 'feet.' They appear to be a gathering of bodies, unique and connected, forming a message on the wall. The crux of this message, unfolding in the making and presentation of *Her Keys* is that the thoughts and experiences arising through female skin *must* emerge and take shape in the world. If they are no longer immobilised or suppressed, the body referred to in *Her Keys* can become a body 'that writes, and in writing, discovers, or bestows a skin in the world.'⁹⁰

2.2 *Her Tools*: Carving Out a Clinical Approach to Binary Representation

Her Tools (2010), created concurrently with and installed in direct proximity to *Her Keys*, places its alternative emphasis on reframing idealistic representations of female skin as an exterior surface. The series comprises seventeen black and white collages sealed in individually lit Perspex boxes. Each references real and imagined surgical implements such as knives, scissors, oral tools, endoscopes and speculums as well as other body tools such as hand mirrors, and erotic toys (figures 21-25). As a clinical archive of objects that traverse, reshape or reflect the outer territory of skin, *Her Tools* attempts to elicit a critique and dissection of the illuminated, smooth ideal mask of femininity prevalent in films, popular advertising, pornography and art. Contextualised in relation to Naomi Wolf's argument that an obsession with female skin's exterior prevents women's access to their erotic centre(s) and the world at large,⁹¹ *Her Tools* are offered as objects that reshape problematic media, promote subjectivity within skin and emphasise the connection between touch and desire.

Employing the motif of the surgical or gynaecological tool, *Her Tools* echoes the prevalence of 'cutting,' violence and objectification in visual and filmic representations of women's skin. Connor describes how the unbroken, untouchability of idealised bodies in advertisements gives way to the violence of pornography, where the surface of skin is finally offered up for 'sadistic defacement.'⁹² In my analysis of films such as *The Skin I Live in* and *Silence of the Lambs* in chapter one, I showed how this same defacement takes place as female skin is sliced, flayed and sewn up to accommodate the insatiable desires of the films' male protagonists. In scenes involving the stroking and application of lotion to female skin that is being removed or reconstructed, the virtues of woman's smooth exteriority is extolled.

⁹⁰ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 83.

⁹¹ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, p. 81.

⁹² Connor, "Mortification," p. 38.



Figure 21
Kate Just, *Her Tools* (2010)
Installation view from the exhibition *Inward Gathering* (2010)
Nellie Castan Gallery
Collage with magazine cuttings, glue, archival paper, Perspex frames
42 x 30 cm each
Photo: Simon Strong



Figure 22
Details of Kate Just, *Her Tools* (2010)
Photos: Simon Strong



Figure 23
Details of Kate Just, *Her Tools* (2010)
Photos: Simon Strong



Figure 24
Details of Kate Just, *Her Tools* (2010)
Photos: Simon Strong



Figure 25
Details of Kate Just, *Her Tools* (2010)
Photos: Simon Strong

The ominous line-up in *Her Tools* intentionally references the operating table full of gleaming fictive implements that appear in David Cronenberg's film *Dead Ringers* (1988) (figure 26).⁹³ *Dead Ringers* is a formative influence in my own study of cinematic representations of women, as it closes the distance between what Elizabeth Grosz termed 'two sides of the same coin' – the smooth exterior and the seeping reproductive interior of woman.⁹⁴ The film centres on the efforts of twin male gynaecologists, Beverly and Elliot, to aesthetically correct the 'mutant' female reproductive systems of various female patients including their glamorous movie-star lover, Claire (figure 27).

Like *Silence of the Lambs* and *The Skin I Live in*, *Dead Ringers* posits the violent reconfiguration of the female body as the means by which the broken male ego can reform itself. In *Dead Ringers*, an operation on Claire's womb is seen as offering a transformation of the twins' divided relationship. This filmic practice of supplanting the female with a male subject exemplifies Irigaray's argument that representations of women as *place* illustrate the exclusion of women from discourse. *Dead Ringers* contributes a graphic fictional account of female objectification and brutalisation while acknowledging that a reconstitution of the female body to suit male desire is doomed to failure. When Claire abandons the brothers to work on her own film project, she signals both her refusal to be suppressed by them and her ability to express her subjectivity elsewhere.

The despondent Bev responds by fashioning grotesque and harmful surgical and gynaecological implements for use on other patients. Increasingly confused by the inside and outside of the body, Bev misuses a gold retractor, pushing a patient's vagina into her abdomen. The cumulative reliance on instruments in the film signifies the brothers' lack of connection and unstable grip on reality. Eventually they turn on each other; Bev disembowels Elliott and then dies in his dead brother's arms. Marcie Frank suggests that the film, which fails to represent women as anything other than mothers, even when they are infertile, can be 'regarded as an (Irigarayan) failure in principle.'⁹⁵ However, she believes it also subverts that paradigm, since in the final moment, 'the power of *Dead Ringers* is that it records the cost to the male body.'⁹⁶

Not surprisingly, a number of feminist artists have deployed this same surgical aesthetic to

⁹³ Directed by David Cronenberg, *Dead Ringers*, 35mm (1988; Toronto: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), Film.

⁹⁴ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, p. 198.

⁹⁵ Marcie Frank, "The Camera and the Speculum: David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*," *PMLA* 106, no. 3 (1991), p. 468.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 26
Surgical implements in the film *Dead Ringers* (1988)
Directed by David Cronenberg



Figure 27
Film still from an operating scene in *Dead Ringers* (1988)

critique problematic concepts relating to female skin. Referring to Laura Mulvey's classic essay "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," Linda S. Kauffman suggests that a surgical aesthetic in feminist artworks inspires a critique of 'the culture's deep seated investments – economic and psychic – in woman's 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' characterised by an obsession with the surface of her skin.'⁹⁷ As discussed in chapter one, Heide Hatry's stitched up female figures in *Heads and Tales* emphasise the butchery involved in female representations and refute the smooth mask of femininity posited by popular media and films such as *Silence of the Lambs*. Orlan's plastic surgery works also expose the real and metaphoric violence involved in remodelling women to reflect beauty ideals in popular media and art history. In works such as *Mouth of Europa and the Figure of Venus* (1990), Orlan is operated on by a feminist plastic surgeon, who calls herself an aesthetician (figure 28). During procedures, Orlan is awake and reads theory, affirming her conscious agency and close relationship to language. These traits are often missing from filmic portrayals of women under the knife including *Dead Ringers*. Acquiring an eerie mish-mash of ideal and iconic female features from Western classical paintings, including the nose of Diana, the mouth of Europa and the forehead of the Mona Lisa, Orlan indicates the 'necessary mutilation to reveal that the objective is unattainable and the process horrifying.'⁹⁸

While also tackling the problems of reconstructive approaches to women's surface and interior, *Her Tools* avoids graphic imagery of women's violation. Instead, it reframes the surgical instruments prevalent in these films as tools for moving past binary representations of women. The process of collage enables a transformation of predictable images relating to idealised skin, while the resulting image unveils the relationship between touch, desire and subjectivity. This disassembling of problematic representations is enabled by a reworking of photographic media itself. Each surgical tool is created seamlessly from six or more pictures, cut from women's magazines, relating to the ideal surface of female skin (figure 29). Imbedded within each fictional implement are fragments of jewellery, mascara wands, lipstick tubes, wrinkle-filling serum droppers, hair-cutting scissors and cosmetic brushes. Gleaming parts of furniture legs, table-tops, bathroom mirrors, shower faucets and wrist watches are also featured, affirming Connor's thesis that the proximity of skin-like objects to skin accompany our concept of desire.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Linda S. Kauffmann, "Cutups in Beauty School," in *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Gail Weiss (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 59.

⁹⁸ Barbara Rose, "Is it Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act," *Art in America* 81, no. 2 (1993), p. 125.

⁹⁹ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 38.



Figure 28
Details from Orlan, *Mouth of Europa and the Figure of Venus* (1990)
Live plastic surgery/performance in Paris
Gallery Michel Rein, Paris



Figure 29
Lancôme Paris cosmetic advertisement
Pictures similar to these were gleaned for the collage series *Her Tools*

By removing these objects from magazines, and rearranging them into objects that can prise back these very layers of media, *Her Tools* identifies simplistic representations of women, *not women themselves*, as the candidates requiring major surgery. The virtually seamless transformation from pictures of cosmetic ephemera into surgical blades acknowledges the threat of violence seemingly embedded within portrayals of perfect female skin. It simultaneously reveals the potential for dramatic revision of media that promotes perfection.

My use of collage to 'dissect' conventional representations of womanhood is further elucidated by Australian collage artist Sally Smart's self-proclaimed forensic approach to the revision of the female image. Smart's immersive, large-scale fabric wall collages such as *Daughter Architect* (2002-4) and *The Anatomy Lesson* (1995) feature amalgamations of bodies comprised of limbs, insects, clothes, furniture and organs (figure 30). Although her works are more figurative than my own, Smart describes the act of imagining and creating these works as 'a forensic activity, an external and internal examination of the body environment: clothes, house, furniture, landscape. This becomes an anatomy lesson; where dissected parts are examined and reconstructions are made for explanations.'¹⁰⁰ As such, Smart politicises the act of 'cutting' in collage, ascribing it an agency to transform culturally imbedded meanings of womanhood. I continue to outline the relevance of this practice to feminist art practice in chapter three.

Her Tools embodies this politics of cutting, by resisting the 'holism' of women's skin, conceptually and materially. *Her Tools'* illustration of how media and women's identity in media can be layered anew visually engages with Bernadette Wegenstein's theory that female bodies and identities come into being through a constant accumulation of layers that can be taken off one by one and re-arranged.¹⁰¹ *Her Tools* also lends itself to being read as an archive of physical experiences, which relay identity and subjectivity rather than suppress it. Although some of the tools reference blades or scalpels that might cut or reshape the skin of bodies, other unidentifiable forms suggest body tools of our inner imagining. Experiences of sex, dental surgery, tattooing or gynaecology direct our attention outward to the objects or bodies we are in contact with, and inward to the sensations of our own body. As somewhat recognisable, yet dream-like altered forms, *Her Tools* reconciles this subjective interplay between interior and exterior, visually prompting the experience of remembering sensation.

¹⁰⁰ Sally Smart, "Writing: Sally Smart – Family Tree House (Shadows and Symptoms)," <http://www.sallysmart.com/cms-writing-13/index.phps>.

¹⁰¹ Wegenstein, *Getting Under the Skin: The Body and Media Theory*, p. 104.



Figure 30
Sally Smart, *The Anatomy Lesson* (1995)
Synthetic polymer paint on fabric with collage elements
244 x 335 cm
Vizard Foundation Collection, Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne



Figure 31
A Wartenberg pinwheel (left) and
the Kate Just, *Her Tools* (2010) collage that refers to it (right)

The gentle curvatures of *Her Tools*, mimicking the female body, also invite the imagination of the instruments as objects that elicit desire at skin level. Like botanical specimens or small bodies with curved hips, the arch and sway of these instruments seem to reveal an affinity to pleasure-ready bodies and their skins. As tools that traverse the ectoderm or push past it into the body's insides, *Her Tools* affirms that the sense of touch, from gentle to painful, is at the cornerstone of desire. As sight, and thus appearance, is 'deficient when it comes to desire,'¹⁰² the sense of touch promoted by these objects offers the 'closing of distance promised by skin contact.'¹⁰³ With a long handle, and a head with tiny sharp pins radiating from it, one tool forms a reinterpretation of the Dr Wartenberg pinwheel (figure 31). Rolled across patient's skin to test nerve reactions, the tool often elicited pleasurable sensations. As a result, it was later reincarnated as an erotic toy.¹⁰⁴

Unlike Dr Wartenberg, the *Dead Ringers* character Bev bears little concern for his patients' intimate reactions to his ominous instruments. He declares that there is nothing wrong with the instruments he wields, only the women's bodies for which they are intended. According to Frank, 'Cronenberg's basis of reliance on instruments, whether the gynaecologist's speculum, the sculptor's chisel, or the filmmaker's camera, is panic about what the body actually is like.'¹⁰⁵ Refuting this oppositional approach to the body, *Her Tools* instead stands as a creative contribution for women to contemplate their relationship to media, as well as their own recollections of pain, pleasure and illness. The tools connect to Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's idea that it is possible – in this case through collages of imaginary instruments – to provide an account of lives that are actively 'written, narrated, seen, touched, managed, worked, cut, remembered and produced.'¹⁰⁶ Illuminated in their vitrine-like frames and paraded across a wall, *Her Tools* is offered as a critical and hopeful archive recording this active process of the production of knowledge and experience, inside, outside, and through skin.

¹⁰² Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 223.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Miller and Molly Devon, *Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns: The Romance and Sexual Sorcery of Sadomasochism*, 1st ed. (Fairfield: Mystic Rose Books, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Frank, "The Camera and the Speculum: David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*," p. 467.

¹⁰⁶ Ahmed and Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin*, Introduction.

2.3 *Unearthed*: An Archaeological Investigation of Skin's Social Character

Unearthed (2011), the last major body of tool related works in the PhD project, comprises a series of forty-six finely modelled, carved and rounded grey resin domestic, personal and medical tools laid atop a six metre long folded canvas tool belt (figures 32-35). Harnessing an archaeological aesthetic and title, *Unearthed* furthers the focus sustained in *Her Tools* and *Her Keys* on redressing conventional or binary representations of female skin. *Unearthed* constitutes a diverse array of 'skin relics' relaying a female body's active connection to sensation, language, rituals and other people over time. It narrates the significance of skin to female embodiment and presents this as a 'cultural discovery.'

Like the works that preceded it, *Unearthed* acknowledges the presence of dominant binary representations of women, while stressing the necessary expansion and transformation beyond these limits. Tools of force, 'self-improvement' and manipulation include archaic versions of makeup brushes, mirrors, cosmetic pens, giant speculums, uterine clamps, surgical tools and force-feeding devices. These forms bear witness to the stereotypical depiction of women as passive, malleable flesh, embodied in films like *Dead Ringers*.

However, *Unearthed* also narrates a history of embodied personal inscription and experience through skin. This shift is achieved partially through the casting of a 'common skin' of weathered resin over all the implements in *Unearthed*. Covering tools relating both to this 'sexed' and pleasurable experience of skin, this surface conflates previously determined hierarchies, foregrounding the tactile, socially connective nature of skin and its potential to accommodate new experiences.

Reiterating the dream-like forms first created in *Her Tools*, the sculptures in *Unearthed* feature organically curved handles and bodily forms such as 'spines,' 'hairstyles,' 'hips,' 'faces' or 'limbs' conflating both the physical form and psychical, bodily recollections of their owner(s). Because they are placed at random amongst a wider array of personal or imaginary tools, they also chart a bodily identity in constant flux, accrual and transformation. Skin's characteristic permeability is actively cultivated by the inclusion of objects that bridge the gap between the inside and outside of the body. Bearing permanent fingerprints or scratch-marks, archaic pipes, spoons, talismans and musical instruments promote the transmission and intermingling of 'real' substances such as smoke, sounds and smells with experiential matter such as thoughts, emotions and sensations.

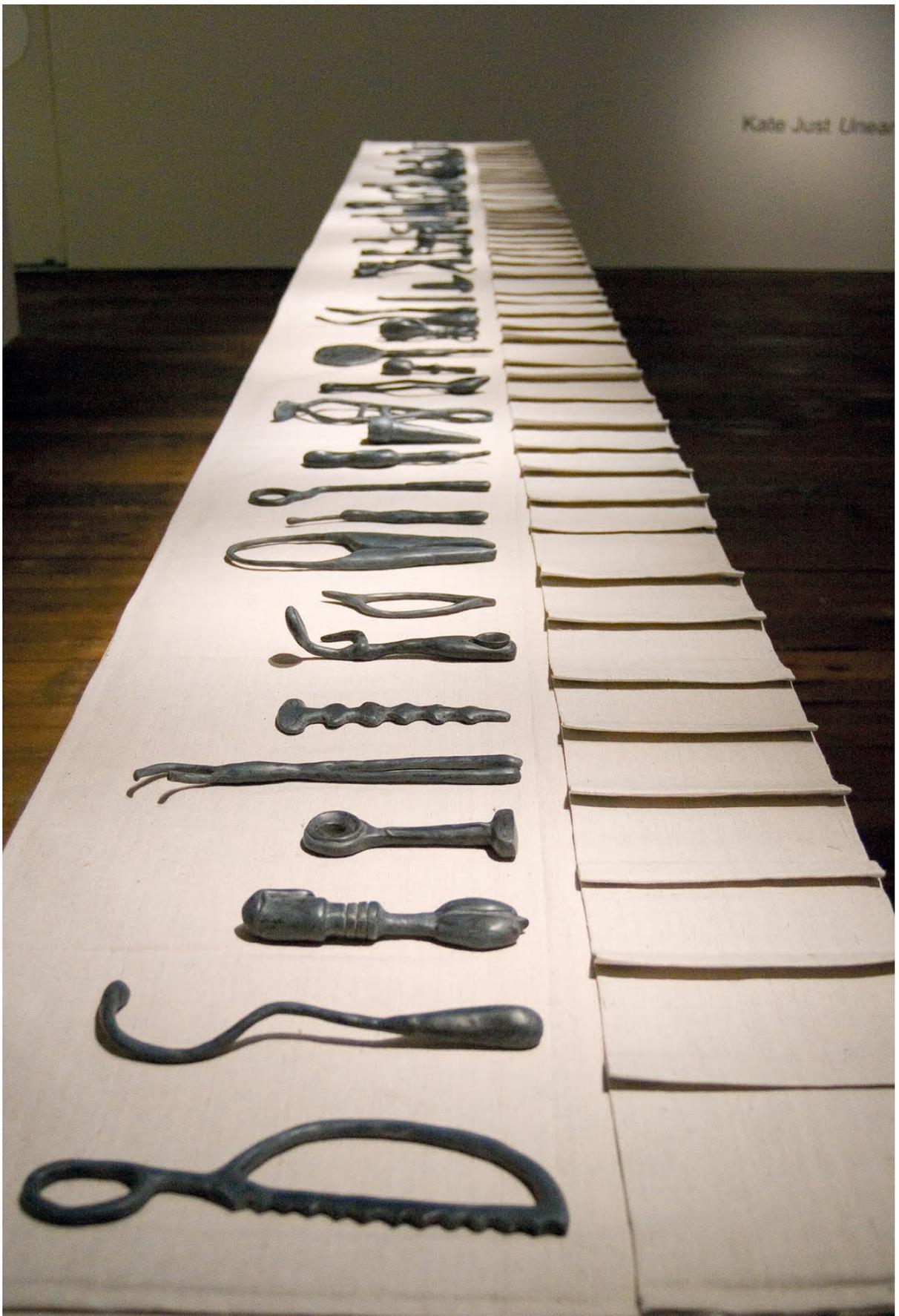


Figure 32
Kate Just, *Unearthed* (2011)
Installation view at Craft Victoria
Epoxy resin, wire, cloth, wood
Dimensions variable
Table is: 75 x 62 x 600 cm
Photo: Lily Feng



Figure 33
Detail of Kate Just, *Unearthed* (2011)
Photo: Lily Feng



Figure 34
Detail of Kate Just, *Unearthed* (2011)
Photo: Lily Feng



Figure 35
Detail of Kate Just, *Unearthed* (2011)
Photo: Lily Feng

In *Unearthed*, these traces are imagined lingering on both the surface and depths of skin, and the tools themselves. Tools representing a body's constant attempts and desire to write itself into the world include pens and tattoo tools, a computer mouse and a letter opener.

Meanwhile hand tools used to make clothes, sculptures, and furniture – including tiny mallets, comically shaped sculpture tools, saws, sewing scissors, and carving or sanding tools – imply a body gaining from constant engagement with its sensorial contact and self-representation.

This wide array of evocative implements in *Unearthed* was inspired by research undertaken in the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Two exhibitions at this museum offered me new strategies for advancing this 'cultural' or 'historical' display centred on the value of female embodiment in skin. The first exhibition, *Body Parts: Ancient Egyptian Fragments and Amulets*,¹⁰⁷ presents thirty-five representations of individual body parts, including eyes, hands, feet and ears, in the museum's ancient Egyptian collection. The crafting and presentation of the fragments asserts the sensations, special powers and word or language forms associated with each body part. In *Right Eye from an Anthropoid Coffin* (1539–30 BC) an obsidian, crystalline limestone and blue glass eye with a black centre doubles as a mirror, emphasising sight (figure 36). A similarly shining black obsidian form, *Amulet Representing Two Fingers* (332–30 BC), comprises only the unusually long index and middle fingers of the right hand, simultaneously invoking a stroking pose, a letter form, or a talisman against danger (figure 37). Amulets such as these often guarded the body part they represented or its efficacy, which in the case of fingers, could be writing, touching and making.¹⁰⁸ According to the Brooklyn Museum website, body forms and their corresponding hieroglyphs especially represented that part's 'ideal' or best possible view, since the Egyptians believed in the divinity of each part.¹⁰⁹

This exhibition informed my approach in *Unearthed* to create skin relics that catalogue the diverse sensations and rhythms of bodies, including my own, through the skin of the hands in particular. The imagined transmission of attributes, physical and otherwise, between the skin of women and the skin of objects in the world is employed to emphasise the sense that the Egyptian artefacts, and my own tools in *Unearthed*, can 'incorporate in their bodily form the rhythms of the practices that gave rise to them.'¹¹⁰ To further accentuate the connection

¹⁰⁷ "Body Parts: Ancient Egyptian Fragments and Amulets," Brooklyn Museum Website, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/3208/Body_Parts%3A_Ancient_Egyptian_Fragments_and_Amulets.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Lazzari, "The Texture of Things: Objects, People, and Landscape in Northwest Argentina," p. 128.



Figure 36
Amulet Representing Two Fingers (332–30 BC)
Egypt, Ptolemaic Period
Obsidian
1 x 2.2 x 8.3 cm
Brooklyn Museum, New York



Figure 37
Right Eye from an Anthropoid Coffin (1539–30 BC)
Egypt, New Kingdom or later
Obsidian, crystalline limestone, blue glass
2.1 x 5.8 x 2.6 cm
Brooklyn Museum, New York

between these practices and language, the monochromatic tools in *Unearthed* take on the same letter-like qualities employed in *Her Keys* and *Her Tools*. Lined up in a row, the grey tools present as a long sentence of hieroglyphs. Unreadable in a denotative sense, they instead narrate physical rhythms, contributing to Kristeva's assertion that semiotic dimensions of language offer as much as the dominant 'symbolic' realm.¹¹¹

Like the Egyptian fragments, *Unearthed* presents relics that promote an ideal vision for 'the life in skin' they represent. They provoke imagining of touch and bodily activity, highlighting the value of contact. This was demonstrated by the ways in which gallery visitors interacted with the exhibition. While not literally invited to handle the work, many viewers broke unwritten 'gallery rules,' stroking, picking up and even rearranging the objects. In his catalogue essay for the exhibition, Craig Burgess remarks on the tangible attraction of the tools: 'I can feel my body connecting, tentatively reaching out, trying to find a similar frequency, trying to make contact. Even in my looking, I am touching the surface of these objects with my eyes.'¹¹² Engendering a sensory 'awakening,' the objects in *Unearthed* reveal the possibility to reclaim connection to one's own skin, and the world around us.

A first hand sighting of the iconic feminist work, *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979)¹¹³ by Judy Chicago was also formative to my development of *Unearthed* (figure 38). Representative of the valuable feminist strategy arising in the 1970s 'of excavating women from the archives, and criticizing . . . masculinist biases,'¹¹⁴ *The Dinner Party* stimulated the idea to create an archaeological display in *Unearthed*, exhuming women's affinity to skin. My critical consideration of Chicago's work also prompted my decision to employ the table, tool and pocket motifs. Produced thousands of years after the Egyptian relics on display in the nearby gallery, Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) also engenders the actual and symbolic power of the body through fragments, cloth, texts and ritual. Comprising a massive ceremonial banquet and tiled floor honouring over a thousand significant women throughout history, *The Dinner Party* was produced by Chicago 'to teach a society unversed in women's history something of the reality of our rich heritage.'¹¹⁵ *The Dinner Party* commemorates the cultural contribution of important historical or mythological female figures from prehistory,

¹¹¹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp. 49-50, 62-65, 68-71.

¹¹² Craig Burgess, "One of These Forms," ed. Craft Victoria (Kate Just, *Unearthed* Exhibition, 2011).

¹¹³ Judy Chicago, "The Dinner Party," The Brooklyn Museum, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party/.

¹¹⁴ Maura Reilly, "The Dinner Party: Reclamation," Brooklyn Museum, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/reclamation.php.

¹¹⁵ Judy Chicago, *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist* (New York: Viking, 1996), p. 45.



Figure 38
Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (1974–79)
Mixed media including ceramic, porcelain and textile
1463 x 1463 cm
Brooklyn Museum, New York

Classical Rome, the Reformation period, and the American Revolution through to the twentieth century women's revolution. The figures include Ishtar from Mesopotamia, the snake goddess from Crete, Elizabeth I of England, the Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi, the abolitionist Sojourner Truth, the novelist Virginia Woolf, and the artist Georgia O'Keeffe, among others. Bearing thirteen place settings across each side of a triangular table, *The Dinner Party* converts a dinner table, conventionally a place of private domestic space, into a public and highly symbolic space like that represented in the Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Each detail of the work – embroidered runners, gold chalices, finely rendered utensils and hand painted porcelain plates with vulvar and butterfly forms – emphatically redresses the lack of cultural representations of women's bodies, artistic skills and other achievements, and dismantles hierarchies placing craft outside the valued domain of 'high' art.

The Dinner Party was heavily critiqued during the 1980s for its prevalent use of central core or vaginal iconography, another feminist strategy of its time (figure 39). However, Chicago specifically chose to use 'core' imagery for each of the plates 'in order to demonstrate that the one thing that united these forgotten historical subjects at the table was that they all had the same genitalia.'¹¹⁶ Like Irigaray and Kristeva, Chicago asserts the power of the female body as a creative site, the presence of which enables artistic and literary achievements and challenges the dominance of a phallogentric culture. While continuing to embrace *The Dinner Party's* positioning of the female body as a central metaphoric and creative site, *Unearthed* also adopts a strategy relative to its own time. Instead of focussing on biological depictions of the body, it advances an image of embodied femininity through 'the inscriptions and transformations of (female) corporeal surface, or skin.'¹¹⁷

In direct homage to the unique and ambitious vision of *The Dinner Party*, *Unearthed* presents viewers with a cloth-lain table laid with objects of imagined significance to female representation. While Chicago emphasises the transformation of the domestic 'dinner table' into a ceremonial banquet, I redress the potential for a tool belt, stereotypically associated with a can-do masculinity, to refer to creative female agency and the potential repair of an exclusive and still sexed culture. Reflecting both the size of the task, and the mounting evidence for a successful repair, the table stretches from one side of a six metre room to another.

¹¹⁶ Maura Reilly, "The Dinner Party: Core Imagery," Brooklyn Museum, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/core_imagery.php.

¹¹⁷ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, p. x.



Figure 39
Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (1974–79)
Detail of core imagery in the Virginia Woolf place setting

The uniquely sized, folded pockets that run along the bottom edge of the 'belt' supplant biological representations of womanhood with my preferred 'female fabric' of skin, and form a texture that enfolds internal and external experiences. These pockets materially manifest Irigaray's concept of the unique bodily envelope, offering a subtle metaphor for female bodily skin. The pockets, like the Irigarayan envelope, offer a protective, intimate resting space for the tools and the bodies they represent. Open at the top, they also permit a re-emergence into the world and the activities awaiting women there.¹¹⁸ As every tool is perched on the flat part of the cloth, the work invites a reading of 'bodies' ready for tactile engagement in the world. Already displaying imperfect surfaces riddled with scratches, finger-prints and pock-marks, the tools in *Unearthed* avow the value of this embedded experience.

Unlike my previous works *Her Tools* and *Her Keys*, I chose not to refer to gender in the title of *Unearthed*. Although presented in this exegesis as a work narrating and attributing value to women's embodiment in skin, in a public gallery context, *Unearthed* refuses easy categorisations of gender. Narrating a 'living' experience of skin, *Unearthed* alludes to the shared importance of this identifying, human fabric.

Her Keys, *Her Tools* and *Unearthed* focus on the production of particular relics that might expand delimiting past representations of female skin and accommodate subjective expressions of embodiment in the present. The next chapter "Venus Was Her Name" develops a more complex vision of skin's contemporary relevance to women. It constitutes a journey through time to reweave a cross-lineage between myself and a significant historical representation of womanhood. In that chapter, I diversify my material processes, shift toward more figurative representation and sustain particular focus on developing the analogous relation between knitting and skin. Across four diverse works, I reclaim skin's individuating and social capacities and investigate the value of women's interrelationships in retrieving subjective accounts of skin in the present.

¹¹⁸ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, p. 36.

Chapter 3

Venus Was Her Name: Reimagining History Through an Unlikely Cross Lineage in Skin

Following my initial studio research into tactile tools or instruments that advance complex visions of the female body through skin, my next body of work focuses on reinterpreting a historical art work epitomising stereotypical approaches to the female body that continue today. Entitled *Venus Was Her Name* (2011),¹¹⁹ my series of knitted skins, letters, armours and sculptural objects tackle binary biological and sexual frameworks that surround the Paleolithic artefact *The Venus of Willendorf* (24,000 - 22,000 BC) (figures 40-41). Across four works, I weave a cross-lineage between myself and *The Venus of Willendorf*, underscoring the significance of subjective presence to accounts of the female body. My interest in *The Venus of Willendorf* arose because it offered a means of reflecting on the longevity of gendered inscriptions of skin. By delving into the past, I hoped to construct a layered vision of female representation for the present.

The creative work was undertaken during a three month residency in Krems, Austria and exhibited at the local contemporary art museum, the Kunsthalle. Krems is the neighbouring town to Willendorf, where *The Venus of Willendorf* was found in 1908 by the archaeologist Josef Szombathy during excavations of a railway line. In the first part of this chapter, I will outline the ways that many scientists, archaeologists, historians and contemporary artists limit the *Venus*'¹²⁰ signification to her sexual and reproductive role, despite a lack of conclusive evidence regarding the sculpture's origin, method of creation or meaning. I suggest this simplistic approach to the *Venus* typifies binary approaches to women's skin in which the female body, seen to lack subjectivity, is primarily positioned as an object of sexual desire or biological capacity. Engaging with the work of Cynthia Eller, I then argue that my own creative works expand the insistent maternal emphasis on *The Venus of Willendorf* and other female figures. Picking up the threads of possibility that *The Venus of Willendorf* was a self-portrait by a woman whose woven head-covering signals her textile skills, I create works that narrate a homecoming to skin, and female subject-hood, for me and the *Venus*.

¹¹⁹ The title was taken from the Shocking Blue song "Venus" (1969) which was later covered by Bananarama (1986). Though referring to the Roman Goddess of Love, rather than *The Venus of Willendorf*, the chorus 'And Venus Was Her Name,' resonated with my interest in reclaiming the language used to delimit the female body.

¹²⁰ For much of this chapter, I refer to *The Venus of Willendorf* simply as *Venus*, or 'the *Venus*.' This is for purposes of brevity and readability of the text. It also attributes the figurine more of a persona, an idea that is developed in the artworks.



Figure 40
Kate Just, *Venus Was Her Name* (2011)
Installation view at the Kunsthalle in Krems, Austria
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 41
The Venus of Willendorf (24,000 - 22,000 BC)
Front and side views
Limestone and red ochre
11 cm high
Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna

3.1 The Naked *Venus*: An Archaic Symbol of Biological Womanhood

In the first chapter, I cited Benthien and Wolf to reveal gendered approaches to skin. I showed that in female representations, the self is often concealed, hidden or masked beneath the skin, which operates as a desirable surface, or maternal vessel.¹²¹ According to Wolf, this surface reflects male desires rather than female experience.¹²² On the other hand, according to Benthien, male skin is seen as strong, liberating and identifying, enfolding and revealing the depths of the self.¹²³

Approaches to the 'body' of *The Venus of Willendorf* exemplify this gendered divide. Although some believe a real 'Woman of Willendorf' is represented by the figurine, this view has been largely ignored.¹²⁴ Carved from fine, porous oolitic limestone, *The Venus of Willendorf* is an almost symmetrical female statuette, with her head slightly tilted toward the right breast. Her thin, tiny arms, with bracelets incised at the wrists, rest gently on full heavy breasts, giving the figure an appearance of relaxation, even ease with her body. She has a large protruding belly that hangs over but does not hide her pubic area, which is characterised by detailed labial folds. She has wide hips and thighs, pressed together down to the knee. The surface of the sculpture is pockmarked with thousands of large and small holes that give it the lifelike quality of lumpy flesh. Her large head and face are masked entirely by a prominent woven hat, which is formed by seven rows of concentric circles. The hat and her tilted head engender an inward looking, contemplative quality: '*The Venus of Willendorf* does not look at us; she is self-contained, focusing inwards, possibly on a different reality.'¹²⁵

Despite a lack of supporting evidence, most scholars assume the mysterious figure was carved by an Ice Age man, and agree that 'the apparently exaggerated sexual attributes of the figurines signal a clear emphasis on sex and fertility. . .'¹²⁶ Described as a magical talisman promoting the increase of the human population, the *Venus* has remained a 'sex object made from a male point of view, her body relevant as an expression of male concerns and interests.'¹²⁷

¹²¹ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 239.

¹²² Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, p. 81.

¹²³ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 127.

¹²⁴ Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, "Venus of Willendorf," <http://arthistoryresources.net/willendorf/>.

¹²⁵ Walpurga Antl-Weiser, "Venus Of Willendorf," in *VENUS*, ed. Sylvia Lammerhuber (Baden: Edition Lammerhuber, 2008), p. 33.

¹²⁶ Catherine H. McCoid and Leroy D. McDermott, "Toward Decolonizing Gender: Female Vision in the Upper Paleolithic," *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 2 (1996), p. 319.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

This categorisation of the *Venus* recalls Benthien's assessment of binary approaches to women's skin defined with reference to masculine desire.¹²⁸ From the moment she was named *Venus*, the Willendorf figurine was framed and understood within phallogocentric logic. This appellation determined her future as a sexual and biological icon. Ironically coined by Josef Szombathy, the name was a play on the *Venus Pudica*. Meaning 'modest' *Venus*, this title refers to marble-skinned, Western classical statues of beautiful young women such as the *Capitoline Venus*, who conceal their sexual features with a hand or flowing sheet of fabric (figure 42).¹²⁹

'Clothing gives human beings their anthropological, social and religious identity in a word – their being. From this perspective nudity is a negative state, a privation, loss, dispossession.'¹³⁰

Displaying no such modesty, the Willendorf figure challenged Szombathy with a physical and sexual self 'unrestrained, unfettered by cultural taboos and social conventions.'¹³¹ Though not obviously pregnant, the figure's large breasts and detailed genitalia represented a primitive and uncontained image of femininity that Szombathy associated with a maternal body. By eliciting a failed comparison between the figure and his preferred Western icons of femininity, Szombathy reassured viewers that civilization had succeeded in subjugating an unruly female body and sexuality.

The assumptions about the *Venus* implied by her naming exemplify Elizabeth Grosz's argument that the desired smoothness and containment of the female skin relates directly to fears of the fluid, maternal body that the exterior feminine ideal helps to suppress.¹³² It also supports Luce Irigaray's argument that since ancient times, mothers have been associated with nature, emotion and matter, and that 'woman' has historically been associated with the role of mother. Irigaray writes that whether a woman is a mother or not, her identity is always defined according to that role, and this denies her endowment as a full subject in culture like men.¹³³

¹²⁸ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 127.

¹²⁹ Andrew F. Stewart, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹³⁰ Mario Perniola, "Between Clothing and Nudity," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part 2*, ed. M. Feher, R. Naddaff, and N. Tazi (New York: Zone, 1989), p. 237.

¹³¹ Witcombe, "Venus of Willendorf."

¹³² Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, p. 198.

¹³³ This theme is woven throughout Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London: Continuum, 2008).

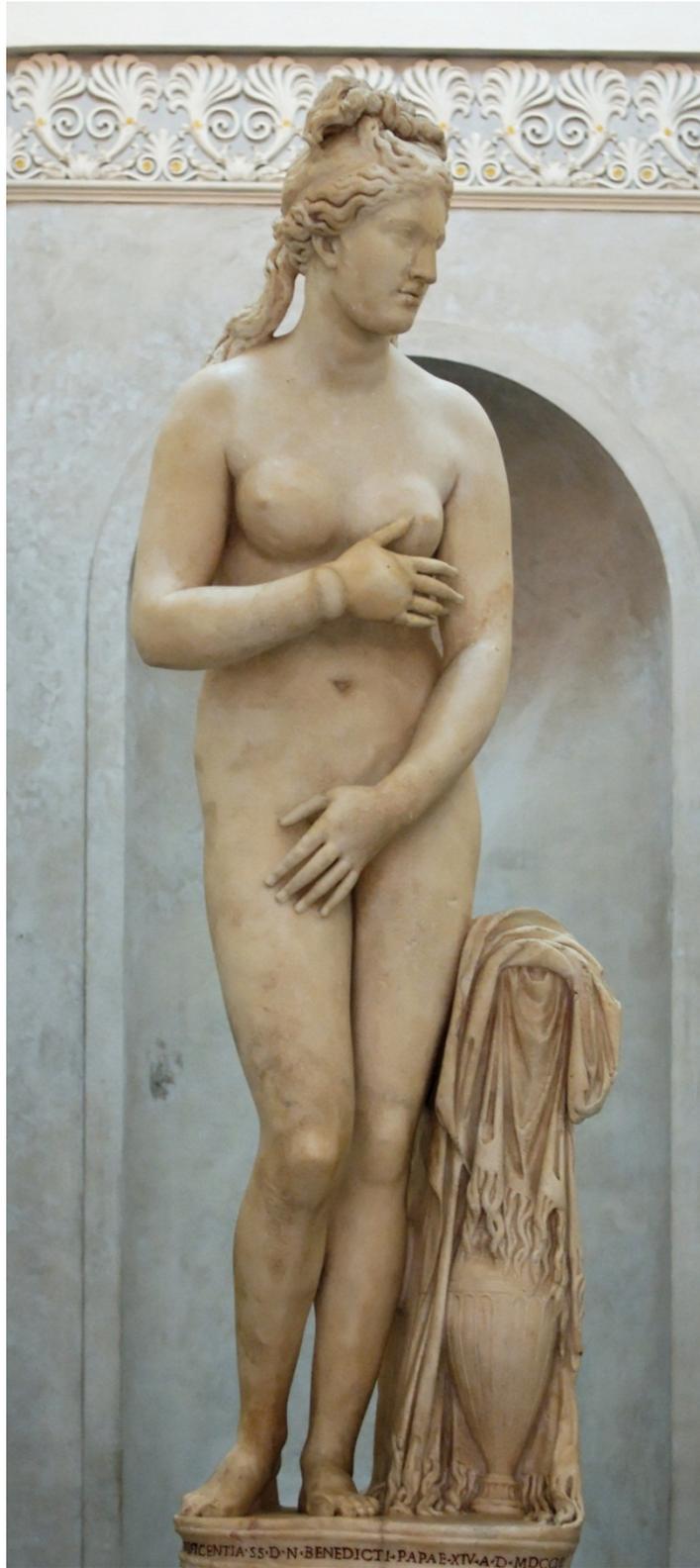


Figure 42
The Capitoline Venus (4th century BC)
One of the best preserved copies of Praxiteles' Cnidian Venus
Marble
194 cm high
Capitoline Museums, Rome

Following Szombathy, other experts fixate on the 'skin' of *The Venus of Willendorf* as an indicator of the figure's maternal signification. Alexander Groenen assumes that the ritualistic priming of the *Venus'* skin with red ochre relates to the 'life, blood and reincarnation inherent in the female cycle'¹³⁴ despite the fact that red-ochre has been documented as a significant material in rituals and artworks across genders, cultures and historical periods.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, scientist V.S. Ramachandran uses contemporary neurological data to argue that *The Venus of Willendorf's* desirable Ice Age 'features of fatness and fertility' would have elicited 'hyper-normal stimuli that activated neuron responses . . . in the artist's own brain'¹³⁶ implying the artist was most certainly male.

Some commentators underscore *The Venus of Willendorf's* erotic potential as a pornographic tool, a 3D 'feely' serving the same stimulatory purpose a *Playboy* or *Hustler* might today.¹³⁷ This idea is highlighted by an unattributed photograph of a male hand holding the figure in historian Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe's online article "The Woman of Willendorf" (figure 43).¹³⁸ Witcombe's text accompanying the photograph further attests to the *Venus'* touchability as an object: 'As fingers are imagined gripping her rounded adipose masses, she becomes a remarkably sensuous object, her flesh seemingly soft and yielding to the touch.'¹³⁹

As well as drawing on these responses to the *Venus*, my project replies to feminist and contemporary artistic reinterpretations of *The Venus of Willendorf* that emphatically embrace the biological emphasis of the figure. These interpretations illustrate the persistence of binary accounts of womanhood into the present. Contemporary Australian artist Hayden Fowler's video work *The Long Forgetting* (2010) asserts *The Venus of Willendorf's* relevance as an archaic mother symbol to a contemporary culture distanced from 'the environment and from our natural state of being.'¹⁴⁰ In Fowler's video, an obese, naked woman dressed in a scaled hat lies unconscious on a pedestal of stone while in the foreground, naked men with blue painted bodies roll sticks and participate in a ritual (figure 44).

¹³⁴ Groenen as cited in Antl-Weiser, "Venus Of Willendorf," p. 34.

¹³⁵ Michael (curator) Douma, "Pigments Throughout the Ages: Red Ochre," Web Exhibits, <http://www.webexhibits.org/pigments/individ/history/redochre.html>.

¹³⁶ "Venus of Willendorf: Exaggerated Beauty," <http://www.pbs.org/howartmadetheworld/episodes/human/venus/>.

¹³⁷ Antl-Weiser, "Venus Of Willendorf," p. 34.

¹³⁸ Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, "The Woman of Willendorf," <http://arthistoryresources.net/willendorf/willendorfwoman.html>.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Rhianna Walcott, "Hayden Fowler," *DAS Super Paper*, May 2012, p. 38.



Figure 43
Unattributed photograph of *The Venus of Willendorf* in the palm of a man's hand
Figure sourced from "The Woman of Willendorf" web page



Figure 44
Stills from Hayden Fowler, *The Long Forgetting* (2010)
HD video, 16:19, colour; 3 channels, 20 minutes
GBK Gallery, Sydney

Fowler separates and paralyzes the female figure in his work, while emphasizing the social clothing and agency of the men. For Fowler, the work probes an 'examination of the biological power of the female form and the mysticism that surrounds the female form of life giver, care giver and matriarch.'¹⁴¹

According to Cynthia Eller, the spiritualist feminist interpretations of 'icons' like *The Venus of Willendorf* as matrilineal goddesses, also fail to push the ground of female representation outside the phallogocentric parameters of womanhood. To Eller, an emphasis on female nakedness and iconic maternal status does not equate to contemporary women's participation as equal subjects in culture.¹⁴² An example of an older, albeit spiritual feminist reclamation of the Willendorf figurine can be seen in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, in which the figurine takes pride of place at the *Fertile Goddess* setting (figure 45). Emphasizing the fibre techniques and materials used by Paleolithic-era women, including bone needles, wool and drop spindles, coil baskets, pottery and coarse burlap central to food production and farming, Chicago's place setting affirms Paleolithic woman's contribution to ancient society.

Continuing her strategy of mimesis and essentialism in *The Dinner Party* overall, Chicago frames this evidence of the *Venus*' social 'skin' through the use of central core imagery including breast-like and vaginal forms and natural elements linked to female fertility, such as seeds. Chicago's work, though clearly honouring and celebrating multifaceted aspects of the *Venus* and positioning the maternal body as empowering, also illustrates Eller's belief that feminist art can potentially contribute to 'a long-standing tradition of objectifying women and reducing them to their sexual parts.'¹⁴³ Eller acknowledges that the use of strategic essentialism in the works of Chicago, Carolee Schneemann and others has contributed a great deal to women's increased presence and acknowledgment in art and culture (figure 46). She nonetheless argues that the spectator's reaction does not always follow the artist's intention and warns that when art is viewed out of context (as the *Venus* is now) viewers tend to resort to mainstream conventions for understanding female nakedness.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Cynthia Eller, "Divine Objectification: The Representation of Goddesses and Women in Feminist Spirituality," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 1 (2000), p. 30.

¹⁴³ Ibid.



Figure 45
Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (1974–79)
Detail of the 'Fertile Goddess' place setting



Figure 46
Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll* (1975)
Still from a performance in East Hampton, NY
PPOW Gallery, New York

3.2 The *Venus* in Skin: Redressing the *Venus*' Subjective Potential

The Venus of Willendorf, then, within her culture and period, rather than within ours, was clearly richly and elaborately clothed in inference and meaning. She wore the fabric of her culture. She was, in fact, a referential library and a multivalent, multipurpose symbol.¹⁴⁴

Researching the *Venus*' potential as a representation of a female subject connected to the surfaces and depths of her body and mind through skin, I located various alternative positions that became crucial to the development of my sculptural works. Walpurga Antl-Weiser, respected historian and custodian of the Willendorf figurine in Vienna, emphatically discounts the likelihood that the figurine was a fertility idol, enthusing 'it is quite difficult to imagine that not very young, obese women should have been considered symbols of fertility.'¹⁴⁵ Rather, she characterises it as remarkably realistic representation of an obese woman, whose 'curves are rendered so naturalistically that they could not have been invented.'¹⁴⁶

Emphasising that no absolute meaning for the *Venus* can ever be determined, Antl-Weiser suggests that experts fail to address the marked difference in cultural context between Paleolithic hunters and Neolithic farmers, who were far more focused on goddess worship.¹⁴⁷ She points out the Willendorf figurine's closeness to dzuli figures from North East European and Siberian tribes. Replicas of dead female ancestors, dzuli are kept at the hearth of the home as fierce guardians of the family.¹⁴⁸ Although it embodies Irigaray's critique of the ways the female body is designated as 'place' for others, this interpretation also elicits the notion that the object is 'filled' with powerful female bodily presence and agency, rather than male desire. This idea became central to my work *Of Hearth and Home*.

Catherine McCoid and LeRoy McDermott contribute to the view that the figure may have represented a real, rather than iconic woman. They hypothesise that *The Venus of Willendorf* and other *Venus* figurines may have been created as self-portraits. Considered from that perspective, the tactile detail and inward pose of the figure implies a woman simultaneously translating her inner thoughts and external characteristics through the porous skin of

¹⁴⁴ O. Soffer, J. M. Adovasio, and D.C. Hyland, "The "Venus" Figurines: Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Paleolithic," *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 4 (2000), p. 511.

¹⁴⁵ Antl-Weiser, "Venus Of Willendorf," p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

limestone. Citing M. D. Gvozdover, McCoid and McDermott note that the characteristic features of *Venus* figurines, including their faceless downturned heads, thin arms, voluminous, pendulous breasts and abdomen, and often oddly bent, unnaturally short legs resembles the foreshortened view a woman might see looking down on herself (figure 47). Drawing on comparative photography between *The Venus of Willendorf* and a young, pregnant woman's view down onto her body, they suggest the figurine was a crucial female self-inspection tool for maintaining health and hygiene, since 'mastery and control of the female cycle continues to be of fundamental importance to women today.'¹⁴⁹

The idea that a female point of view was involved shifts the interpretive frame considerably, inviting subjective rather than objective interpretations of *The Venus of Willendorf's* body and the experiences of the woman it may have represented. However, the authors fail to take up this potential when they assert a singular emphasis on the pregnancy of *The Venus of Willendorf* and declare the sculpture a literal instrument for gaining 'control' of the reproductive cycle. Unfortunately, this returns the depiction of a Paleolithic woman to the singular realm of existence that they set out to expand.

Patricia Rice fundamentally challenges the predominant sexual and maternal emphasis on *The Venus Of Willendorf* and the one hundred and eighty-eight other *Venus* figurines she has studied. Rice's analysis reveals that a surprisingly small percentage of the *Venus* figurines appear to be pregnant; the *Venus* figurines depict women throughout the entire life span, including very young women and elderly women (figure 48).¹⁵⁰ Given that the *Venus* statuettes represent women of different ages in proportion to their probable frequency in the population, Rice believes there is a strong case that they represent women in real-life roles.¹⁵¹

Scholars Soffer, Adovasio and Hyland address the contextualisation of the *Venus* among a society of women. They draw on studies of the various *Venus* figurines' headgear, body bandeaux and skirts to argue that *The Venus of Willendorf's* head piece was likely 'a fiber-based woven cap or hat – rather than a hairdo.'¹⁵² This research affirms the hat's significance to the *Venus'* identity, operating as a form of dress indicating social prestige. Conceding that

¹⁴⁹ McCoid and McDermott, "Toward Decolonizing Gender: Female Vision in the Upper Paleolithic," p. 323.

¹⁵⁰ Figure sourced from Monica Bowen, "Excavation Sites for Prehistoric and Ancient Female Figurines," Alberti's Window, <http://albertis-window.com/2012/04/excavation-sites-for-prehistoric-and-ancient-female-figurines/>.

¹⁵¹ Patricia Rice, "Prehistoric Venuses: Symbols of Motherhood or Womanhood?," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 4 (1981), p. 412.

¹⁵² Soffer, Adovasio, and Hyland, "The "Venus" Figurines: Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the

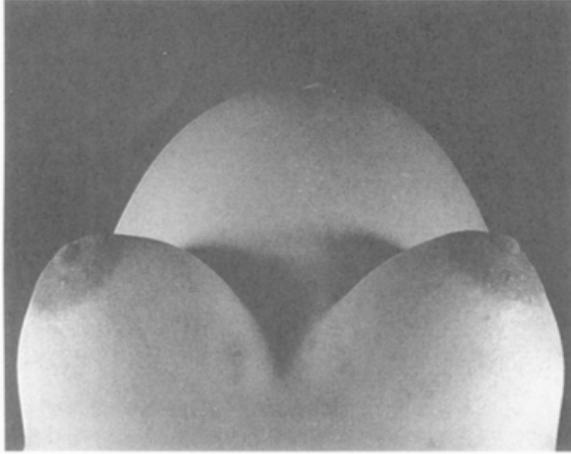


Figure 4

View of her own upper body by 26-year-old female who is five months pregnant and of average weight.

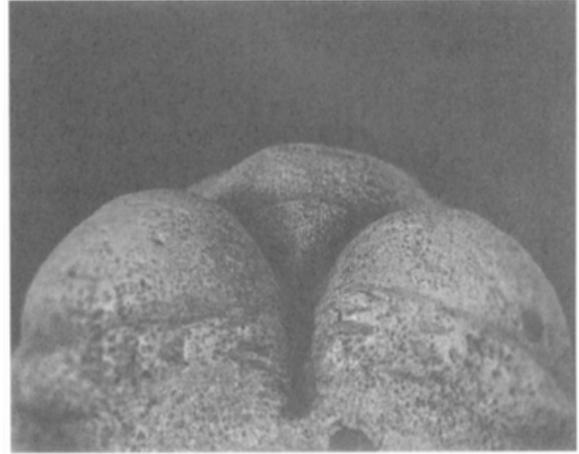


Figure 5

View of upper body of Willendorf figurine from same perspective used in Figure 4.

Figure 47

Comparative views of *The Venus of Willendorf* and a young, pregnant woman in McCoid and McDermott, "Toward Decolonizing Gender: Female Vision in the Upper Paleolithic."

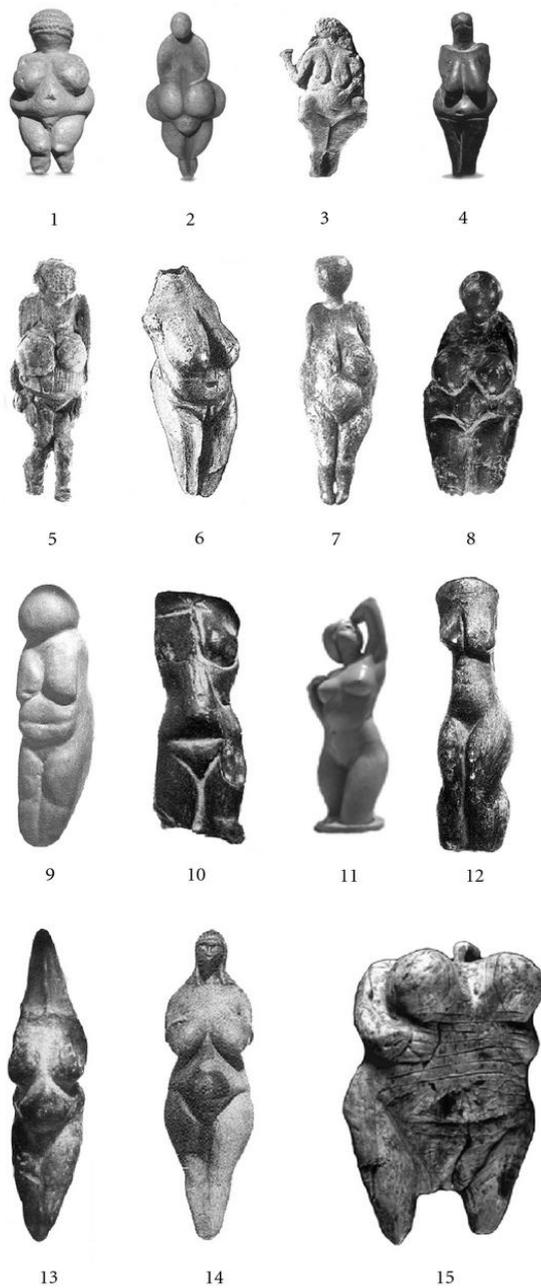


Figure 48

Photograph depicting a range of Venus figurines from around the world. (1) *Willendorf Venus* (Rhine/Danube), (2) *Lespugue Venus* (Pyrenees/Aquitaine), (3) *Laussel Venus* (Pyrenees/Aquitaine), (4) *Dolní Věstonice Venus* (Rhine/Danube), (5) *Gagarino no. 4 Venus* (Russia), (6) *Moravany Venus* (Rhine/Danube), (7) *Kostenki Venus no. 3* (Russia), (8) *Grimaldi Venus* (Italy), (9) *Chiozza di Scandiano Venus* (Italy), (10) *Petrkovice Venus* (Rhine/Danube), (11) *Modern sculpture* (N. America), (12) *Eleesivitchi Venus* (Russia); (13) *Savignano Venus* (Italy), (14) The so-called *Brassempouy Venus* (Pyrenees/Aquitaine), (15) *Hohle Fels Venus* (SW Germany). Figure Sourced from Alberti's Window web page

the carver may have been a woman, the scholars believe the hat might indicate her intimate familiarity with the female, collective textile practice of the Paleolithic.¹⁵³ This informed my idea to recast the *Venus* as a figure connected to the female domain of textile crafts in my collectively knitted word sculpture *VENUS*, to be discussed below.

Frustrated with the problems facing the naked female form, Eller proposes that women should 'refuse representation altogether, or at least take a hiatus on the representation of women,' as she believes it is 'folly to try to communicate alternative conceptions of female existence through the medium of naked women.'¹⁵⁴ I disagree with Eller's position of problematising then rejecting female representation. Instead I offer my four works in *Venus Was Her Name* as evidence that skin can act as a middle ground that represents the body's presence while yielding that body's intimate, subjective relation to the world. In my work the mediums of knitting, clay and collage position skin as a fabric that can render all the intimate details, activities and sensations of the female body, while reconfiguring and re-clothing that body's relationship to thought, sensation, language and the ground of culture.

3.3 *In My Skin: Knitting a Skin of Self*

'The male subject, 'as the ultimate liberation fantasy' can free itself of its skin, while the female subject remains bound up in it... the female skin remains a mask.'¹⁵⁵

The first work produced during the residency in Krems, *In My Skin* (2011), is an ivory coloured, delicately knitted portrait of my own skin (figures 49-51). The ghostly colour of this woolen sheath highlights skin as a spectral, missing presence in so many female representations. Laid upon a stage in the centre of the gallery, the work acts as a signal of skin's readiness to be reclaimed. Constructed stitch by stitch, both with a knitting machine and by hand, the making of *In My Skin* involved a process of poetic recollection and re-enactment of the idea that *The Venus of Willendorf* rendered her own self-portrait in limestone. This weaving of a 24,000 year old cross-lineage was an attempt to unravel binary accounts of the female body as naked, reproductive matter, and refashion a portrait of a woman invested with subjectivity. Presented both as a naked skin and cosy knitted garment, *In My Skin* refuses easy classification relating to female 'undress.' Instead, it positions the porous bodily organ of skin as an intimate fabric of the self, an identifying net interlaced with

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Eller, "Divine Objectification: The Representation of Goddesses and Women in Feminist Spirituality," p. 40.

¹⁵⁵ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 94.

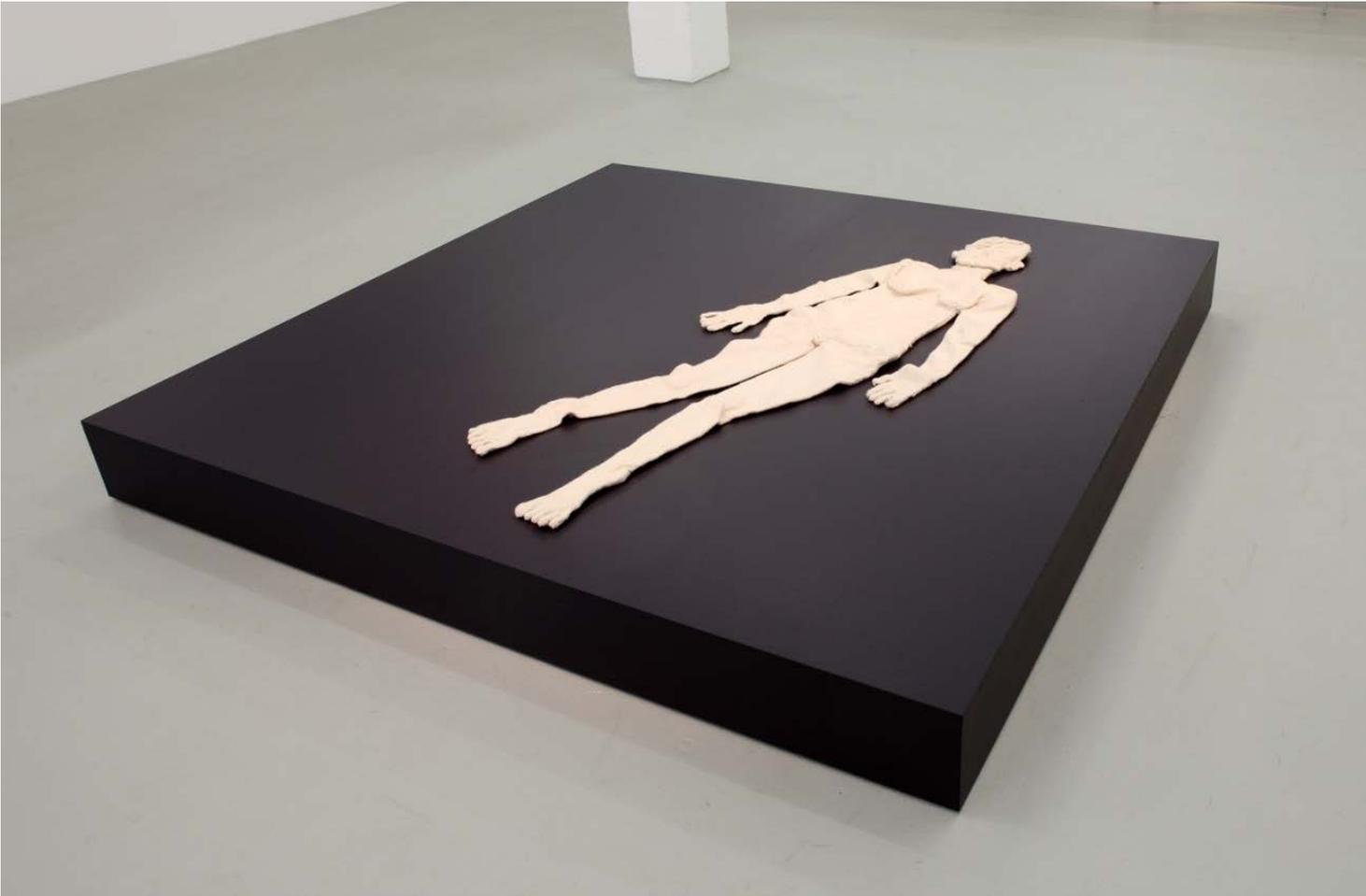


Figure 49
Kate Just, *In My Skin* (2011)
Hand knitted acrylic thread, MDF, paint
Knitted skin is 178 x 88 x 1 cm
Plinth is 20 x 210 x 220 cm
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 50
Detail of Kate Just, *In My Skin* (2011)
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 51
Detail of Kate Just, *In My Skin* (2011)
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher

accruing experience.

This soft portrait of my skin *as self* contends with Grosz's and Benthien's theses that many representations of women's skin focus on a desirable exterior or maternal interior. On first glance, the ivory tone brings to mind the white veneer of classical Roman goddesses. This pale 'female sheath of skin' resonates with Plath's sentiment that 'the desired pure and marble-like surface of woman stands . . . for her social masking, of her fragile self.'¹⁵⁶ However, on closer inspection, the knitted skin defies definition as a generic portrait of a desirable female figure. Quite simply, it does so by refusing to act as a 'body.' An image or sculpture of a naked female body, as demonstrated by Eller, can prompt immediate imagining of 'woman' as an object that can be touched, held, stroked or possessed by another. Such claims regarding the *Venus*' own body were made apparent by Witcombe's comments relating to the *Venus*' sensual yielding to the touch of a male hand.¹⁵⁷

As a knitted skin presented on its own, *In My Skin* denies unwanted occupation and acquisition. By failing to maintain its shape and offering nothing to 'grab onto,' this skin stands instead as the relic of a woman who has lived (and lives). The seams on the legs, arms and neck reveal a skin that has been sewn back into one piece, underscoring the impossibility that it could be 'tried on' by others. Like skin, this knitting is constructed from – and is punctuated by – small holes. Thus, it is cast as a porous, receptive, transmissive layer, despite the seams. These marks and holes indicate skin is imperfect and unique.¹⁵⁸ *In My Skin* fails to render female skin as an impermeable or alternately, maternal vessel,¹⁵⁹ instead offering a personal frame for interpreting the female body.

By intimately revealing the detailed features of the one and only self it represents, *In My Skin* also stands as an authentic texture of my body, the depths of which only I know. Depicting my long fringe and short-sided haircut, tilted eyebrows, angular jaw, and slightly asymmetrical smile 'so naturalistically that they could not have been invented,'¹⁶⁰ *In My Skin* forms my uncanny likeness in wool. Attesting to the resemblance, the work quickly became a useful visual reference for visitors at the exhibition opening who wanted to locate the 'real me.'

¹⁵⁶ Plath and Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p. 158.

¹⁵⁷ Witcombe, "The Woman of Willendorf."

¹⁵⁸ In contrast, established UK artist Freddie Robins' work *The Perfect* (2007) features exact multiples of flat machine knitted skins without facial features to explore her own and a cultural preoccupation with achieving bodily perfection and consistency in garment manufacture. Freddie Robins, "The Perfect," http://www.freddiebobins.com/work_current/perfect.htm.

¹⁵⁹ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁰ Antl-Weiser, "Venus Of Willendorf," p. 33.

Meanwhile, intimate details of my breasts, nipples, belly button, toenails and pubic hair further assert the inimitable character of my own and all skin.

The medium of knitting in this work strongly contributes to the repositioning of female skin as the fabric that enfolds rather than masks the self. The sense that the very process of knitting involves the close transmission and reflection of the identity of the maker is further asserted by crafts writer Julian Stair:

It would seem that craft . . . can be seen as a fundamental means of reinforcing our sense of self. If body and hand gestures are regarded as the precursors of verbal language, then what are craft objects but material gestures of the body, operating as externalised, pre-linguistic expression that through haptic engagement reinforce the very source they spring from.¹⁶¹

The sense of knitting's affinity to the self comes also from our body's close connection to textiles in daily life. Knitting and textiles offer our bodies protection, keep us warm, dry, clean, and covered. Through our choices in relation to dress, textiles express the way we feel and want to be seen. With knitting, I encourage the imagining of a female body re-clothed in the identifying and sympathetic texture of skin.

Doubling as a portrayal of naked skin and a garment, *In My Skin* also conflates the binary approach to the female body in which the inside and outside remain divided or hidden. In both garments and skin, we experience sensation on the inside and outside simultaneously. Knitted jumpers and bodily skin face inside and outside and both have a front and back. In the case of knitted garments, it is the stockinette (or 'right side') that is worn to the outside. The purl side (the 'wrong side') reveals the garment's process of production and finishing, and is usually hidden. This implied sense of value epitomises prevalent approaches to female skin, in which the 'public display of the 'perfect' self' is meant to suppress 'the concealed, chaotic and imperfect interior.'¹⁶² Szombathy's adverse reaction to *The Venus of Willendorf's* form reflected this same deeply imbedded belief.

As a strategy for subverting delimiting expectations of female exteriority, which were exposed in the naming and framing of *The Venus of Willendorf*, *In My Skin* flips the purl or 'wrong side' of the knitting out, presenting it as the surface of my skin. By presenting this usually hidden

¹⁶¹ Julian Stair, *The Body Politic: The Role of the Body and Contemporary Craft* (London: Crafts Council, 1999), p. 10.

¹⁶² Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 108.

inside on the outside, I assert the double-sided transmissive quality of skin. The ridged purl side also subtly imitates the pockmarked skin of limestone on *The Venus of Willendorf's* body. Since both our portraits convey skin as a richly textured surface, I imagine they exemplify a lifetime of tactile memories imbedded in the grooves, scars and bumps of our bodily skin.

Like the tool related works that preceded it, *In My Skin* also expands the maternal narratives deployed in the imagery it springs from. It frames female 'reproductivity,' as the making of a space (skin) through which a subjective self can take shape and attain presence in the world. Reinterpreting the interior, maternal emphasis on the *Venus* as an external process of transference, I produced my pieces of knitted skin by measuring, creating and 'grafting' them to the outside of my body (figure 52). As each knitted piece was completed, it was tightly sewn around the corresponding body part; when each piece was pulled off, it remained imprinted with my bodily impression.

This private, maternal materialisation of the way (my) self is born of and through skin is enhanced by the established idea that deep psychological exchange occurs between knitters and receivers. Researching knitting as a mediated expression of emotion for my 2009 publication "Purl Your Heart Out," I recorded people's wide range of experiences both making and receiving knitted garments. Artist Geoff Lowe recounted an uncomfortable adolescent awareness of his mother's sublimated desire as she intimately touched, measured and knitted for his body in 'endless sessions.'¹⁶³ Meanwhile, seven-year-old Edith Arc-Dekker spoke of her willingness to wear itchy jumpers knitted by her grandmother, because she knew that to do otherwise would constitute a form of rejection.¹⁶⁴ By knitting a skin for and of myself, I shifted this established dynamic of the woman whose knitting enables her to nurture, care for and sustain emotional bonds to others. Instead, *In My Skin* embodies Irigaray's proposition of the envelope, whereby a woman 'enters' the imaginary potential of her own bodily space to claim a subjective position in culture.

For craft critic Joanne Turney, the sense that craft can engender this kind of expansive, subjective space strongly connects with the concept of the semiotic chora as defined by Kristeva.¹⁶⁵ As discussed in chapter one, Kristeva's semiotic is a space of intense stimulus, relating to contact with the mother, which promotes the development of language. Central to the semiotic, is the significance of rhythm, repetition and interruption. Turney suggests that

¹⁶³ Geoff Lowe in Kate Just, "Purl Your Heart Out!," in *Hao Guo*, ed. Olivia Barrett (Singapore: Olivia Barrett, 2006).

¹⁶⁴ Edith Arc-Dekker in *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 154.



Figure 52
Process photographs of *In My Skin* (2011)
Photos: Paula Russell

in knitting, this same emphasis is discovered through the sound of the knitting needles clicking as stitches form. This clicking sound creates a rhythm. Every body of every knitter has its own rhythm; in many knitters, this rhythm induces a sense of emotional calm, or a confrontation with one's most inner thoughts and feelings. In knitting testimonials this experience is described as 'a collapse of distance between the interior and exterior self.'¹⁶⁶ As a result, the act of knitting can be seen to emulate the fabric of female skin in its most ideal capacity. It transcends the supposed divide between inside and out, allowing the self, thought and language to emerge.

For many knitters, the act of knitting involves a large and small journey. While travelling forward through the process of knitting row after row, knitters meditate on their lives, what is happening at the time, and upon the long history and tradition of knitting itself.¹⁶⁷ As an act of simultaneous repetition and thought, knitting offers 'the ritualised recognition of the present through recollection.'¹⁶⁸ The knitting of my skin *as self*, in a town near where the *Venus* was found, constituted a similar form of forward and backward revelation. As I knitted stitch by stitch, I often contemplated with frustration the ways 'womanhood' has and will continue to be constructed and misconstrued. However, as I let the rhythm of my knitting transport me, I began to enter a dreamier space. For just a moment, I imagined I was working next to the 'Woman of Willendorf.' As my needles clicked, her carving knife flicked. Neither of us looked up. By the sounds in the air, and the sensation in my skin, I could feel us both working to make an image of a woman, at home in her body, and in touch with herself.

3.4 *Of Hearth and Home: Breaking the Skin Between Cultural and Subjective Accounts of Women*

I continued this perceived 'telepathic' connection with the 'Woman of Willendorf' in my work *Of Hearth and Home* (2011), a table of twenty-three sculptures (figures 53-57). *Of Hearth and Home* reimagines the wide array of associated fictional personal and cultural relics that might have been found alongside the *Venus* at the scene of discovery near Krems. Featuring small renditions of talismanic forms and figures, textile tools, vessels, depictions of body parts and bodily accessories, the series juxtaposes and conflates interior and exterior, and cultural and personal accounts of our bodies. Employing wry humour and a plural rather than singular

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁶⁸ David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 72.

approach, *Of Hearth and Home* wrests 'from the earth' a new vision of the *Venus* and me as social and creative selves.

The title *Of Hearth and Home* derives from Rice's argument that many of the *Venus* figurines depicted women who gathered food close to home, while men went out to hunt. As many of the figurines had holes and could have been used as pendants, Rice suggests that men may have worn them on the hunt as reminders 'of hearth and home,'¹⁶⁹ affirming Irigaray's perception that women historically signify a place to return for men. Reclaiming this phrase as a metaphoric marker of a female psychic domain, *Of Hearth and Home* instead narrates the self-nourishment women might provide themselves through the acknowledgment of their own complex creative, intellectual and bodily experiences.

Paralleling my use of knitting in *In My Skin*, the process of modelling clay in *Of Hearth and Home* symbolizes the imagined creation of a subjective second layer of 'experience' denied in so many responses to *The Venus of Willendorf*. Like knitting, clay bears the imprint, pressure and rhythms of a body writing its identity, thoughts and sensory experiences into the world via material contact. Connor affirms clay's analogous relation to skin and concepts of renewal, suggesting that the kneading of clay relates strongly to the giving of new life and new potential. For Connor, the contact between skin and material in the process of kneading corresponds directly to a desire to enliven and rethink a connection to the past:

The action of kneading makes the material alive because it invests it with energy. One literally puts work into kneading, inserting kinetic potential into the previously dead substance. When one kneads dough or clay it is if one were winding a spring . . . Time has been folded into it along with work and air . . . It is the action that testifies to the skin's power to be turned from a layer, barrier or surface, into a mingled and mingling substance, into flesh and into more than flesh . . . and is frequently associated with the making of new life.¹⁷⁰

In one small sculpture, I recast a renewed creative and social emphasis into *The Venus of Willendorf* by referring to her potential textile practice, suggested by her woven hat. Bearing the impressions of my thumbprints, the fist-sized, yellowish ceramic rendition of the *Venus'* hat completely covers the curvaceous body we expect to see; only a pair of rounded feet juts out beneath it. Like a tortoise's giant hardened shell, the hat operates as a form of body

¹⁶⁹ John Noble Wilford, "Venus Figurines From Ice Age Discovered in an Antique Shop," New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/01/science/venus-figurines-from-ice-age-rediscovered-in-an-antique-shop.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 225.



Figure 53
Kate Just, *Of Hearth and Home* (2011)
Epoxy resin, wire, cotton, poppy seeds, paint, wood
Twenty-two parts
Table length is 82 x 680 x 85 cm
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 54
Details of Kate Just, *Of Hearth and Home* (2011) including a *Venus* 'helmet,' my glasses, a tampon (at top) and a 'snow' *Venus*, spindle and sculpture tool (at bottom)
Photos: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 55
Details of Kate Just, *Of Hearth and Home* (2011) including knitting sticks and a spindle (at top)
and a circular spider web and cloud symbol (at bottom)
Photos: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 56
Details of Kate Just, *Of Hearth and Home* (2011) including stacked fingers, an anthropomorphic vessel and an archaic textile tool (at top) and a version of an archaic fertility symbol (at bottom)
Photos: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 57
Details of Kate Just, *Of Hearth and Home* (2011) including a thunderbolt (at top) and a runic symbol and an interpretation of a *Daphne* sculpture (at bottom)
Photos: Christian Redtenbacher

armour for the *Venus*, offering her a momentary respite from centuries of undress.

Meanwhile, the sculpture of the tiny white snow-*Venus* with a liquid puddle at her feet heralds the *Venus*' seasonal shape-shifting to image the potential disintegration of a usually fixed framework of femininity. It inspired local school children who visited the exhibition to populate the lawn of the museum with 'Snow Venuses' in winter months. Their act mischievously challenged the gendered pastime of building snowmen, and for a moment, also contributed to a reincarnation of the *Venus* as an agent of change.

Further affirming the renewed agency of the *Venus* and me, many of the objects on the table, like the objects in *Unearthed*, relate to the tools the *Venus* or I might reach for in the studio to manifest our own vision of womanhood or lived experience. As a further nod to textile practice, these items include knitting needles (sticks), versions of archaic spindles, a needle and thread and a yarn winder. My creation of simplistically rendered, earthen toned female figures, vessels, mirrors and tools with female body parts add complexity to McCoid and McDermott's idea that the *Venus* and other figurines may have served as women's tools for self-inspection.¹⁷¹ By positioning my own forms alongside seemingly 'magical' relics such as thunderbolts, runic letter shapes and circular spider webs, I underscore the anthropomorphic possibility that such objects might convey their maker's innermost wishes, fears or desires.

I expand this idea of deferred sculptural agency with four abstracted figurative relics, whose plurality is made plain by the wide array of skin tones. These relics double as minute reinterpretations of larger scale knitted sculptures that I have made in the past ten years, including my portrayal of the Greek figure Daphne. Imagining women in flux, these reincarnated replicas connect with Antl-Weiser's description of the dzuli, carvings of long gone powerful female ancestors believed to still hold powerful presence.¹⁷² The sculptures attest to my creative and intellectual stimulus, and thus are offered as guardians of my own and other women's subjectivity.

The female body's capacity to write its subjectivity through skin contact is exemplified by my sculpture of two stacked fingers. The fingers differ in size and 'skin' colour; this reference to parts from different bodies gives form to my imagined contact and alliance with the *Venus*. The fingers also extend my exploration in chapter two of body fragments in Egyptian art that

¹⁷¹ McCoid and McDermott, "Toward Decolonizing Gender: Female Vision in the Upper Paleolithic," p. 323.

¹⁷² Antl-Weiser, "Venus Of Willendorf," p. 34.

relay heightened sensations and protective capacities. Forming a crossed T-shape, the fingers threaten to ward off danger and engender the body's will to language throughout the ages and through the hands.

Other sculptures reinterpret my body's internal and external experiences and posit these as significant cultural relics. Like the *Venus'* hat, my thickly rendered pair of black cat-eye spectacles signals a form of social dress, and marks my context within a specific place and time. The glasses also accentuate my intensely visual predisposition, positioning this as a form of aptitude. A more personal relic is a carved imitation of an unused tampon, a signal of my failure to menstruate for a record ninety days in Austria.¹⁷³ The tampon doubles as a humorous play on McCoid and McDermott's problematic thesis the *Venus'* might merely constitute a woman's obsession with 'mastering' her bodily cycle. It also relishes association with the tampon's appearance in feminist artworks over the last thirty years to counter taboos about the female body's fluidity and impurity.¹⁷⁴

Lastly, the mounds of poppy seeds around the relics in *Of Hearth and Home* further prick the skin between cultural and subjective accounts of womanhood, and interior and exterior accounts of the *Venus* and my body. Called 'mohn' in German and grown in poppy farms throughout Krems, the seeds feature heavily in Austrian desserts and baked goods. They became an addictive daily facet of my residency. Distributed in a 'ritual scattering' around the works, they gave visual form to the granules of dirt dusted from the *Venus'* skin, the seeds gathered by women throughout the Paleolithic, and the sprinkles of pleasure ingested by my body.

3.5 *Matrikas*: Revising Female Object-hood and Isolation in Skin

The body of work continues with *Matrikas* (2011), a motley crew of seven¹⁷⁵ abstracted female figures collaged together from pictures of archaeological and sculptural objects from various time periods (figures 58-61). These works show female object-hood to be a construction-in-process, subject to vital revision. The series is displayed on a long shelf at

¹⁷³ Having never missed a period in twenty two years, I remain convinced this was a sign of my body's empathic response to my intention with this work to move beyond a longstanding emphasis on women's/ *The Venus'* biology. On the day after my show opened in Austria, I boarded the plane for Melbourne and 'it' returned.

¹⁷⁴ Tampons have appeared in works by Mariana Castro de Ali, Judy Chicago, Tracey Emin, Shelley Lowell, Karin Luner, Vadis Turner, Joana Vasconcelos, Nellie Sheedie-Reinhard and many more.

¹⁷⁵ In the exhibition in Krems, eleven *Matrikas* were exhibited. However, after my discovery that the term '*Matrikas*' refers to a fierce Hindu Heptad of mother goddesses, I decided to exhibit them in future as a group of seven female figures.

mantle height and continues my reframing of the hearth as a psychic female space. In *Matrikas* the hearth becomes a gathering point for unique female figures forming a powerful alliance. The concept of female collectivity, poetically imagined in *Matrikas*, lays the groundwork for the future real-life assembly of women to follow in the creation of the sculpture *VENUS* (2011).

Matrikas challenges the historical grouping of over one hundred and eighty-eight categorically different *Venus* figurines under the same name. By configuring my present day *Venus*-like figurines in all shapes, sizes and body types, I continue my ongoing practice of 'mining the duplicities underpinning the history of the representation of women: both historical and pop cultural; archetypal and stereotypical.'¹⁷⁶ Continuing the strategy I deployed in the collage series *Her Tools*, the source material gleaned for *Matrikas* is informed by Benthien's thesis that representations of female skin continually revolve around 'the idealised smoothness of the surface, and the space-creating function of the sheath.'¹⁷⁷ These suppressive concepts of the female skin as a sealed surface or container are underscored in *Matrikas*, a group of figures assembled from pictures of archaic jugs, vessels and containers. They also bear cuttings of pictures of *The Venus of Willendorf* and a Roman *Venus* to acknowledge the surface-depth dualities and oppositions established in readings of these female representations. Nylon and plastic balloons double as a pair of inflated yellow breasts while a roughly hewn cage like structure with a bun of hair manifests Sylvia Plath's sensation of imprisonment in the 'cage of her body.'¹⁷⁸

Through the use of collage in *Matrikas*, archetypal images of female containment, smoothness and wholeness are soon ruptured. Heads are turned upside down, glass eyes replace real ones, and spoons replace legs. The abdomen of *The Venus of Willendorf* becomes the doughy head for one figure while her woven hat now warms the head of her Roman sister. The collages are mounted on a raw timber page with a swirling wood grain pattern that resembles the variations and gradations in a fingerprint and the inner rings of a tree. Collapsing and juxtaposing inside with outside, past and present, and body with object, *Matrikas* splits false armours of female skin and disassembles seamless ideals of womanhood.

Matrikas continues my attempts to draw lineage to female artists deploying collage in the critique of female representation, including Hannah Höch (1889 –1978), a German artist in

¹⁷⁶ Helen Hughes, "Kate Just: Bombshell," in *Studio 12*, ed. Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (Melbourne: Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, 2009), p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 239.

¹⁷⁸ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, 1979, p. 23 in *ibid.*, p. 124.



Figure 58
Kate Just, *Matrikas* (2011)
Collage with magazine cuttings, glue, plywood
58 x 640 x 16 cm
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 59
Detail of Kate Just, *Matrikas* (2011)
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 60
Detail of Kate Just, *Matrikas* (2011)
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 61
Detail of Kate Just, *Matrikas* (2011)
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher

the Berlin Dada movement who was a pioneer of the photo-collage technique, and contemporary artist Sally Smart, whom I discussed in the second chapter (figure 62). Höch often worked with 'women's' magazines, to explore her own sense of the difference between women in media and the 'real' world. In provocative works exploring women's role in marriage, Höch fashioned women who were childlike or doll-like, lacking agency in their own lives. She also depicted many lesbian couples. Writing about Höch and other artists, Lucy Lippard identifies the significance of collage to female artists working with 'positive fragmentation' – the mixing and matching of fragments to provide a new whole and a new type of representation.¹⁷⁹ This practice is also seen in the present in the work of Wangechi Mutu and Candice Breitz.

My method of reconfiguring the female image heeds Bernadette Wegenstein's thesis discussed in chapter one. Wegenstein suggested that women's bodies should be imagined as multiple sites of potentiality, where interior and exterior accounts are reassembled in relation to each other. *Matrikas* epitomises this accrual of identity by imaging bodily layers that appear to have been prised apart and rearranged anew.

The fracturing and layering of the *Matrikas* is also informed by Monique Wittig's writing. To Wittig, the fragmentation of body parts constitutes a productive method for destabilising a phallogocentric society that sacrifices a female body to male desire. Wittig's re-conception of female sexuality in *The Lesbian Body* depicts desire between women, long suppressed, being violently and viscerally unleashed. Wittig incorporates eight pages of lists that name the parts, fluids, excrescences and uses of the female body. These lists include: the lungs, the nerves, the vulva, the arterial blood, the fat, the saliva, the embraces and the shrieks.¹⁸⁰ Like Irigaray and Kristeva, Wittig positions the fluidity of the body as the site where subjectivity and language appropriate to female desire can be retrieved. In her description of the puncturing, biting and shattering of the female body, Wittig arrives at what she calls the lesbian-speaking subject. That subject is 'a continuously metamorphosing body whose integrity and coherence is in question.'¹⁸¹

With pogo stick legs, upside down heads and missing arms, the *Matrikas* embody this concept of a body in flux. Wearing parts of each other's bodies in the wrong places, some of the

¹⁷⁹ Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 136.

¹⁸⁰ Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body* (London: Peter Owen, 1975), pp. 115, 28, 15, 76, 40, 28, 41 & 28 respectively.

¹⁸¹ Janne Cleveland, "The Power of the Word: The (Unnameable) Lesbian Body," *Thirdspace: A Journal of Feminist Theory and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2001), pp. 21-38.

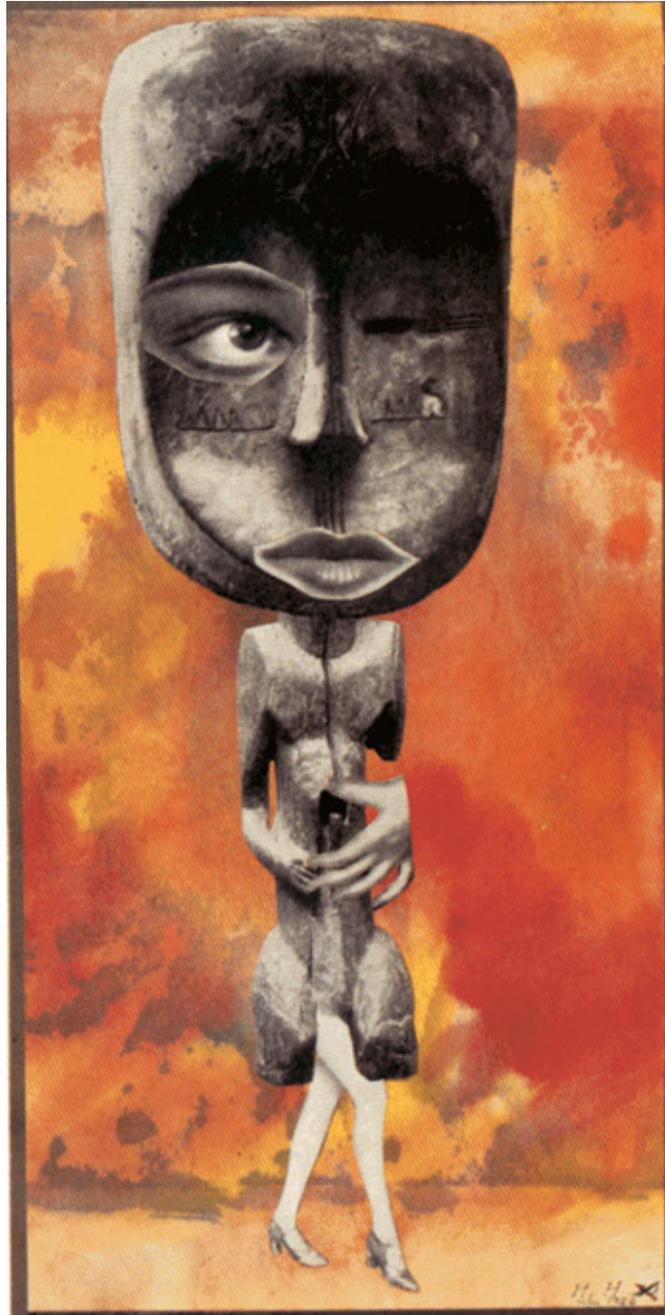


Figure 62
Hannah Höch, *Die Süsse* (1926)
Photo-collage with watercolour
30 x 15.5 cm
Museum Folkwang Essen

Matrikas seem – like Wittig’s own subjects – to be consuming each other through the process of becoming themselves. The name *Matrikas* also embodies Wittig’s vision of a destructive female body’s power to break down unreliable systems of order. In Hinduism, the Sanskrit word ‘*Matrikas*’ means ‘the Mothers,’ and refers to seven goddesses who engage in battle against evil gods. Not literally mothers, these *Matrikas* embody powers of creativity, take on different shapes and are attributed a great deal of dangerous force,¹⁸² sustaining my own metaphoric vision for motherhood in the project overall. As a roll call of ‘women’ bent on transformation, *Matrikas* advances a female alliance and vision(s) of womanhood that will no longer be contained.

3.6 VENUS: A Collective Reclamation of Language, Representation and Experience, Through Knitting

VENUS (2011) extends *Matrikas*’ emphasis on female connection to the broader social domain by embracing a collective approach to dressing *The Venus of Willendorf*. *VENUS* is comprised of cardboard boxes, shaped to form abstract machine knitting symbols that closely resemble the alphabetical characters in the name ‘*Venus*’ (figures 63-66). Evenly spaced on a diagonal angle, this abstracted ‘name’ and ‘body’ of *The Venus of Willendorf* stands reconfigured and covered in a custom cloak of variously sized and patterned knitted pieces. The pungent brown fragments, which were created in public, communal knitting events with other women, recall Paleolithic fibers and early forms of knitted body armour used to protect the skin in a hunt or battle (figure 67). This collective female effort to reclaim the subjective terrain of the female body in *VENUS* also manifests and asserts knitting’s contemporary standing as a tool of communication and social transformation.

VENUS marks my continued attempt, evident throughout all the works in *Venus Was Her Name*, to shift the ground of the female body outside depictions of conventional ‘nakedness.’ By reconfiguring the word *VENUS*, I identify discourse surrounding the female body as the framework requiring substantial reconfiguration. In the first section of this chapter, I outlined the delimiting approaches to *The Venus of Willendorf*, highlighting how this process begins in language, with a name. By defining *The Venus of Willendorf* as an iconic figure reflecting male needs and desires, Szombathy and others fail to address the subjective potential of *The Venus of Willendorf* and her connection to other women. Through the *VENUS* sculpture, I dismantle this historical practice of masking women’s distinctive presence.

¹⁸² Madhu Jain and O. C. Handa, *The Abode of Mahashiva: Cults and Symbology in Jaunsar-Bawar in the Mid - Himalayas* (New Dehli: Indus Publishing, 1995).



Figure 63
Front and back views of Kate Just, *VENUS* (2011)
Cardboard, tape, hand knitted twine
112 x 690 x 22 cm
Photos: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 64
Kate Just, *VENUS* (2011)
Detail of the 'N'
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 65
Kate Just, *VENUS* (2011)
Detail of the 'E'
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 66
Kate Just, *VENUS* (2011)
Detail of the 'S'
Photo: Christian Redtenbacher



Figure 67
Gilbert Islands Armour
Knitted coconut fibre
American Museum of Natural History
New York City

Instead, I underscore knitting's relation to skin to foreground language as a force that rises up from within women. In *VENUS*, this physical and psychical female presence is affirmed by the scent of the twine and the sound, touch and rhythm in each body during the construction of the knitted loops. Resonating with the interplay between communal activity and individual expression, the knitted pieces blanket *VENUS'* name and her body in new meaning.

My use of knitting to create a 'social,' rather than biological skin for the *VENUS* connects to Irigaray's theory that production of a specifically 'female' language can destabilise phallogocentric modes of speaking from and about female bodies. Having studied the gendered character of language for over twenty years, Irigaray deduces that 'language and the systems of representation cannot translate woman's desire.'¹⁸³ As mentioned earlier, this is also foundational to Wittig's work. To prove her theory, Irigaray conducted research that draws parallels between the speech patterns of men and women and the exclusion of women from subjectivity in Western culture. She concludes that general speech patterns specific to each sex exist, and demonstrates that women often do not occupy the subject position in language.¹⁸⁴ In her text *I Love to You*, Irigaray details extensive experiments in French in which male and female subjects continually chose the masculine pronoun. In the case where a female pronoun is provided, both male and female participants follow the conventions of the French language and avoid using it from the active subject position. Since language and social structures mutually affect each other, Irigaray believes that transformation of language is crucial to social change. To challenge the reality that 'sexual differences become embedded in language,'¹⁸⁵ Irigaray proposes that women must invent and use their own forms of language.

Although she does not offer specific frameworks, Irigaray believes that 'extending the sphere of existent speech' would involve invoking 'rhythms of the body.'¹⁸⁶ From her perspective, a rhythmic woman's language would be plural, autoerotic and diffuse and might: '... articulate experiences that are de-valued or not permitted by the dominant discourse: the most important ... the sensual/emotional relationships of women with their mothers and with other women.'¹⁸⁷

The knitted *VENUS* can be critically interpreted through the lens of Irigaray's theory of female language, since it involves the reconstitution of language structures and uses knitting to

¹⁸³ Luce Irigaray, "Women's Exile," *Ideology & Consciousness* 1 (1977), p. 71.

¹⁸⁴ Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity Within History* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁸⁵ Carolyn Burke, "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass," *Feminist Studies* 7, no. 2 (1981), p. 288.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

evoke the rhythms of the body and female relationships. The reclamation of the female position in language begins with the armature of *VENUS*. Each seemingly runic 'letter' is created from recycled cardboard boxes. The replacement of alphabetic characters with knitting symbols continues my emphasis on expanding language in *Her Keys* and *Unearthed* (figure 68). In *VENUS*, the knitting symbols also signify bodily action. The large bold V shape represents the act of slipping a stitch; the E is a fork-like symbol for knitting three stitches together; the N is two pronged letter symbol that refers to the transfer of a right stitch to an adjacent left needle. The upside down U refers to knitting a stitch below the current row and a backward S denotes the creation of a winding stitch. By prising the name *VENUS* from within the primarily female realm of knitting, the sculpture imagines the collapse and reformation of past and present meanings of the word.¹⁸⁸ In this guise, it could denote the phrase 'women knit.' As proof of the literary transmogrification of the word and its characters, female knitters at the opening excitably declared their recognition of the symbols, while some male viewers admitted they had failed to see a word at all.

A challenge to the one-dimensional visions of femininity applied to *The Venus of Willendorf* also resides in the sharp odor of the twine. An antidote to the cultural suppression of female physical and subjective existence, the acidic intensity of the scent and knotty surface of *VENUS* exaggerates a body whose smells and hair remain unsuppressed by perfumes and razors.¹⁸⁹ In *VENUS*, this imminent olfactory punch highlights Connor's notion that body odor alerts us to the powerful difference between 'self' and 'not-self.'¹⁹⁰ The direct result of a group of women who occupied ground, knitting for a woman's right to be herself, *VENUS* harnesses smell as a form of territorial space-marking and space-making.

With the work *In My Skin*, I foreground knitting as a 'maternal' space in which a woman might manifest her own body's subjective presence through skin. In *VENUS* I cast a wider net, revealing knitting's expanded capability as an ideal social and political device for women.

¹⁸⁸ The revision of the word *VENUS* reflects the feminist deployment of mimesis and alteration to 'pry loose dominant cultural paradigms.' This strategy is discussed in Moore, *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970-1990*, p. 7. Sue Best extends this discussion to male naming and women's self representation from an Irigarayan perspective in pp. 163-4.

¹⁸⁹ Gillette's popular brand of women's razors is called *Venus*. Online articles and advertisements featuring product spokeswoman Jennifer Lopez draw parallels between smooth, hairless skin and feeling like a 'Goddess,' of the Roman derivative. Jennifer Lopez, "My Goddess Moments," Gillette, https://enca.gillettevenus.com/en_CA/goddess_central/goddess_showing/jennifer_lopez_story/index.jsp.

¹⁹⁰ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 212.

Right side		Wrong side	
	knit		purl
	purl		knit
	M1		M1
	yo		yo
	left-slanting-increase		
	right-slanting-increase		
	(k1, p1, k1) in 1 st		(p1, k1, p1) in 1 st
	k2tog		p2tog
	Ssk or k2tog-b or skip		p2tog-b
	p2tog		k2tog
	p2tog-b		Ssk or k2tog-b or skip
	sl2-k1-p2sso		sl2-p1-p2sso
	k3tog or sl1-p2tog-b-pssso		p3tog
	k3tog-b or sl1-ssk-pssso or ssk or sl1-k2tog-pssso		p3tog-b
	p3tog		k3tog
	sl-p2tog-pssso, p3tog-b		k3tog-b or sl-ssk-ppo or ssk or sl1-k2tog-pssso
	knit below		purl below
	sl1 with yarn in back		sl1 with yarn in front
	k1-b		p1-b
	twisted st		twisted st
	BO		BO
	w&t		w&t
	no stitch		no stitch

Figure 68
Examples of knitting symbols that were used in place of alphabetic letters in *VENUS* (2011)

Since the 1970s knitting as a political tool has been elevated as a means of articulating feminist ideals, drawing attention to what had ostensibly been described as women's work. Like women's lives, knitting acted as a communicative tool, expressing histories that had been hitherto hidden, marginalized or ignored. In this vein knitting has now become . . . a means of demonstrating the power and discontent of the ordinary individual in an increasingly homogenized world.¹⁹¹

Confirming this trend, the contemporary 'team' of fifty-four Austrian knitters¹⁹² who responded to my call to 'knit a new skin for *VENUS*,' were primarily feminist or female collective knitters with an established history of craftivism.¹⁹³ One such group 'Knitherstory,' run by Betina Aumair, Antonia Wenzl and their crew of strickistinnen (anonymous yarn-stormers)¹⁹⁴ are famous in Vienna for their often large scale, overnight knitting installations that challenge women's exclusion from history (figure 69). On International Women's Day in 2011, they hung banners displaying facts from women's history and posted knitted pictures of their favorite female heroes and a sign which read '100 Jahre Frauenpower.'¹⁹⁵

The involvement by artists Susanne Frantal, Claudia Neugebauer and Janis Meissner in my *VENUS* work further locate the project within contemporary discourses of knitting as a female power tool. Frantal and Neugebauer had previously created art works exploring *The Venus of Willendorf's* significance as an alternative religious icon or symbol of realistic beauty

¹⁹¹ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 203.

¹⁹² Contributors were me, Paula Russell, Hope Russell-Just, Ka Ruhdorfer, Betina Aumair, Jen Liu, Claudia Neugebauer, Snježana Rock, Waltraud Zenz, Antonia Wenzl, Janis Lena Meissner, Michelle Molesch, Anna Dracas, Lucie Lamster-Thury, Christa Langheiter, Birgit Formanek, Pippi Bierbaum, Laura Gföhler, Veronika Mungenast, Kristin Smeral, Christina Gohli, Susanne Frantal, Rafaela Göls, Angela Orlovits, Andrew McQualter, Gregor Kremser, Lisa Steurer, Verena Mistelbauer, Franz Friedrich, Sidal Keskin, Kathi Hackl, Julia Hackl, Susanne Zaussinger, Tanja Nessler, Kathrin Hahn, Marlena Böswarth, Rebecca Klutz, Anja Scherzer, Patricia Endl, Julia Fuchs, Elisabeth Reinberg, Regina Binder, Teresa Binder, Hermann Binder, Maria Wannener, Wolfgang Müllner, Petra Nitschmann, Veronika Kremser-Falb, Annemarie Falb, Heidi Jaeger, Martina Wagensohnner, Züleyha Altıntaş, Young Hee Park and Siegrid Mayer.

¹⁹³ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 203.

Craftivism is a term coined by Betsy Greer, used to describe the synthesis of craft activity and political protest or commentary. It has become popular method for delivering a difficult message, since it appears 'likeable' on the surface and translates the emotional significance of the issues. For example, UK group Craftivist Collective draws attention to issues of refugees in detention through their ongoing series of hand-embroidered messages displayed in urban areas in London.

¹⁹⁴ Due to terrorist attacks in urban cities, yarn-storming has increasingly replaced the term 'yarn-bombing.' Both terms were invented to address the solo and group practice of knitting bright covers for items in public, urban settings such as traffic poles, buses, phone boxes and bike stands. Across the world, yarn-storming has become a popular activity for knitters who want to publicly transform their cities, make social statements, or promote craft as a relevant and enjoyable activity.

¹⁹⁵ The English translation is '100 Years of Women's Power.'

for large women. A self-proclaimed yarn-stormer, Meissner's practice of challenging social stereotypes and revealing hidden histories was likewise extended as she 'knitted for *VENUS*.' In one of Meissner's past works, the artist created a tiny knitted sculpture featuring Maria from *The Sound of Music* to explore the often underplayed Austrian involvement in the Nazi movement. Involving these female knitters with serious concerns of their own, my events affirm the position that stitch by stitch, knitters literally can *make* change.¹⁹⁶ Further, the artists' generosity and willing participation across each other's projects challenges the art industry's usual emphasis on authorship, commerce and competition.

The involvement of less political but still socially motivated knitters from the 'Stitch 'n Bitch' group in Vienna also epitomises the shift from knitting as an isolated domestic activity toward knitting as a form of physical and emotional literacy. 'Stitch 'n Bitch' is a name now commonly used by a wide range of knitting 'circles' around the globe. It refers to the occurrence of knitting and talking, stitching and storytelling. Constituting still mostly-female gatherings of women in pubs, on public transport and in coffee houses, these groups emphasise knitting as a medium whereby female relationships and skillfulness are made explicitly visible to the public (figure 70).

In my project and in Irigaray's theory of language, no emphasis is placed on the exclusion of men; rather it focuses on creativity and the assertion of a female subjective presence. Responding to the call for knitters of all ages and genders to work on *VENUS*, five men joined the group. My three knitting events also involved a slew of interested local shopkeepers, historians, schoolchildren and mothers. Held in the Royal Burggarten in Vienna, on the footpath of the museum residency site and outside the Kunsthalle Museum in Krems, these 'happenings' provoked a great deal of attention (figures 71-73). As various members of the public stopped to talk and ask what was happening, the work fostered wider debates and discussion about knitting, art, *The Venus of Willendorf*, and women's representation more broadly. In this way, knitting continued to fulfill its role as a social 'skin' through which new discourses about the female body and its activities might emerge.

The processes and outcomes of the knitted fragments also enhanced the subjectivity and social character of the skin for *VENUS*. Knitters for the project were invited to knit pieces twenty centimetres wide, however, they were encouraged to knit in any of four thicknesses of twine, use whatever knitting needles and knitting patterns they liked and knit any length up

¹⁹⁶ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 204.



Figure 69
Pieces of knit 'graffiti' by the Vienna based knitting collective 'Knitherstory' to celebrate the centenary of International Women's Day (2011)



Figure 70
Members of the Stitch 'n Bitch London group knit together at a local café in Waterstone (2006)
Photo: 'Deadly Knitshade'



Figure 71
'Knit for VENUS' events with students in Krems (at top) and crafters in Vienna (at bottom)



Figure 72
'Knit for VENUS' events in the Burggarten, Vienna (at top) and outside the Kunsthalle museum in Krems (at bottom)



Figure 73
'Knit for *VENUS*' events bring knitting to public presence in the streets of Krems (at top) and the parks of Vienna (at middle and at bottom)

to a metre. The flexibility of these guidelines affirmed similarities between knitting, skin and language, whereby a structure exists but individual rhythm, experience and expression are accommodated.

Knitting's capacity to transmit and reflect the identity of its maker continued in *VENUS*, and is evident in the wide variation between knitted fragments. While one knitter's piece is worked in a very loose, open stitch, another's imparts a systematic, machine-like proficiency (figure 74). Embodying the significance of interpersonal relationships to many public crafters, some knitters handed pieces back and forth, resulting in a fabric woven with the rhythms of various bodies. A few knitters employed patterns that referred to the plaited or knotted hat on the figurine, as a nod to *The Venus of Willendorf's* original form of dress and its textile referent. Meanwhile, fragments with coral like protrusions, and a plethora of knitted nipple like bumps acknowledge the historical positioning of *The Venus of Willendorf* as a biological or sexual icon.

Pieces bearing women's signatures, or self-invented patterns, stress the need for continued expressions of individual identity in otherwise generic female representations. These unique knitted fragments operate as material 'name tags,' connecting to knitting mythologies in which traditional sweaters, particularly those made within fishing communities, act as familial identification should the wearer be lost at sea.¹⁹⁷ However, deviating from this female practice of promoting the identities of loved ones, *VENUS* offers women a chance to nurture their own presence.

When meeting new people in groups, I am often unable to remember names. However, as I returned to the studio after the knitting events, I found myself able to connect each individual piece in my hands to an image of the woman who had knitted it, and to my knowledge of that woman's name. Operating as a transmitter, the knitting somehow held and conveyed in its weave, the 'text' of the woman associated with it. Laying the fragments out, I sewed Janis to Paula, to Kate, to Susan, to Anna, to Lucie to Krista, and on and on. Eventually all fifty-five of us covered the sculpture. Standing back, I saw a *VENUS* dressed in a skin interlaced with tactile traces, skills, memories, desires, thoughts, and friendships. While *In My Skin* stood as a portrait of a woman looking deep within, *VENUS* reached out through that skin. In reaching, it connected to the clicking, talking, dissatisfaction and jubilation of women who cast a new name and a new skin over the *VENUS*.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 55.



Figure 74
The fragments gathered for *VENUS* (2011) reflect a diversity of knitting styles

In turn, we made a name and a space for ourselves.

3.7 In Parting

David Levin believes that when artists employ time intensive craft methods, they are able to provoke ‘the ritualised recognition of the present through recollection.’¹⁹⁸ Travelling ‘across’ time to Austria to meet and contend with one of the earliest and most significant depictions of a woman in sculpture, I attempted to retrieve a lineage and reweave a layer of skin between and for *The Venus of Willendorf*, myself and future female bodies.

In each work, the media being used belied the specific potential to redress naked, biological or sexual depictions of womanhood in the subjective fabric of skin. In *In My Skin*, knitting’s affinity to the skin of the body was harnessed in the creation of a soft mantle of self, enfolding my inside and outside experiences. In *Of Hearth and Home*, I outlined clay’s symbolic relationship to renewal as I cast the *Venus*’ and my creative powers in a personal and humorous light. This focus on female agency continued in *Matrikas* where I destabilised concepts of female object-hood with imagery of women in flux, using collage as a media epitomising identity and its many layers. In *VENUS*, I returned to knitting, outlining its alternate capacity as a social and communication tool for women and a rhythmic form of female language.

In my work, I continue to assemble a complex, plural, personal and renewed cultural image of womanhood through skin. Each bearing a series of visible fragments, the four works in *Venus Was Her Name* weave together a rich tapestry of female narrative and experience, insisting on the potential, always there, to excavate subjective depictions of women, into the future. In the next chapter *The Skin of Hope* I extend my focus on the past and the wider social domain to explore skin’s intimate significance to the present moment. As a personal and subjective portrayal of the ways my adopted daughter Hope and I connect at skin level, it manifests a tender vision of optimism for embodiment, through skin.

¹⁹⁸ Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism*, p. 72.

Chapter 4

The Skin of Hope: Weaving a Vision of Intimacy and Renewal

On a bright autumn day in 2009, following two weeks of intense transitional work preparing Hope to enter our family, we (two women and one girl) finally walked hand in hand to our car. Watching Hope hike her own bag over her two year old shoulder, and feeling her tiny hand squeeze mine, I was suddenly struck by an image of her wearing a soft suit of armour. In the moments leading up to this point, and in this moment, Hope had continued to reveal herself as someone who had already protected herself from many hurts, while somehow remaining truly open, even joyous, in the face of new experiences.¹⁹⁹ Today, at age five, she continues to reinforce this impression.²⁰⁰

The Skin of Hope marks a personal turn, and ending, to the PhD project. Produced during an Australia Council residency in Barcelona, the hand knitted, sculptural and photographic works weave an account of the ways my adopted²⁰¹ daughter Hope and I acknowledge, bond and imprint each other at skin level. Materialising our past wounds and present, tactile connections, my works include a hanging, child-sized, knitted suit of armour for Hope, a series of knitting needle talismans in roman numeric formation and a reversible pair of

¹⁹⁹ I grew up closely bonded to my brother, Billy. He was adopted, struggled all his life with this fact, and died tragically at the age of twenty-one. My partner and I had the care of nine different foster children in the two year period preceding Hope's arrival. We had experienced, expected and been trained to work with children with profound emotional difficulties. She was the only child we had ever met in her situation, who despite the upheaval of her life, presented as having fundamentally retained a strong sense of resilience, self-concept, and joy. All of the other children (and reasonably so) presented as human beings already deeply compromised by their life experiences. Epitomising the meaning of the word Hope, given to her by her first mother, she had maintained the sense that 'what is wanted can be had' and behaved as someone who thinks 'events will turn out for the best.' As such, she taught us anew that the circumstances of life do not infinitely determine outcome.

²⁰⁰ Diary entry by the author: April 19, 2009.

²⁰¹ Throughout the text I refer to Hope as adopted, as this term is widely used and understood. However, for the purposes of general knowledge and specificity to Hope's life story, I would like to clarify that Hope came to be placed with my partner Paula and I through a process called 'Permanent Care.' In Australia, very few children are locally 'adopted.' Hundreds of children a year of all ages (from birth to teen years) whose parents are unable to care for them for a range of reasons, move from Foster Care, which is seen to be a temporary arrangement aimed at reuniting children with their families of origin, into Permanent Care. Offering parents and children the same legal rights as adoption, Permanent Care places children with new families for life. The terminology used by workers with children in the transition is 'Your Forever Family.' Many children in Permanent Care, including Hope, benefit from knowledge of and continued access to their biological families, which may include mothers, fathers, siblings and other relatives. While Australian adoptive law prevents gay and lesbian and often single parents from adopting, Permanent Care programs in Victoria and other states in Australia 'match' children to a wider range of families deemed most suitable to the children's specific needs, personalities and history. Permanent Carers thus include single parents of both sexes, gay and lesbian families, older families and families from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

knitted arm-length gloves for me, scar-embroidered with surgical stitches and the words 'Hope' and 'Mother' (figure 75). In these intimately crafted works, and the photographs I present of us wearing the garments, I reflect on Hope's and my own resilience, repair and capacity to love. In a photographic work featuring Hope's texta drawing of herself on my naked back, I further frame skin as both a receptive and transmissive space, bearing witness to our most intimate moments. Continuing a key thread that has run throughout my project, *The Skin of Hope* contends with binary approaches to female skin as a biological and objectified territory, and moves beyond them to identify skin and the maternal body's potential as a social and sensual network, enfolding subjective female experience.

4.1 Mother Matters / Mothers Matter

The Skin of Hope conveys my own experience as a lesbian and adoptive parent, expanding predominant visual, psychoanalytic and cultural concepts of mothers as 'objects' for their children, culture and men, but never subjects in their own right. A key image illustrating this paradox, and influencing my work, is the Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens collaboration *The Sense of Touch* (1618), which I first saw in Madrid in 2012 (figure 76). In the painting, a mother and baby clutch each other in a tender, naked embrace in what looks like a partitioned area of a domestic home with curtains, paintings, rugs and other furniture. Womb-like references pervade this space, including a painting of a long, dark cave on the wall, a large pink tissue-like fabric hanging above the figures that separates the 'inside' area from 'outside,' and a red blanket that is draped around the mother's lap. Surrounding the mother and child, at left and in the background, is a field littered with shells of empty battle armour. A memorable image exploring the sensation of touch, the painting conjures two converse experiences; the first is the soft, warm, gentle, loving touch offered by a mother in childhood; the other is the hard, cold sensation of metal cladding (male) skin from violent attack in battle. By setting up this dichotomy, the painting positions the naked and biological body of the mother as the space of contact that nurtures and sustains others, readying them, but not herself, for a life in the world. To survive out there, one clearly has to be able to fight for one's life.

The Sense of Touch might also be read as a visualisation of the *mourning* of lost contact and connection to the maternal body. The separate zones of the painting and the kinds of touch on skin associated with each area imply that the cozy nest of the maternal body is the space one must eventually leave in order to 'ascend' in culture, where a male logic presides. A most



Figure 75
Kate Just, *The Skin of Hope* (2012)
Installation view at Daine Singer
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo: John Brash



Figure 76
Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens, *The Sense of Touch* (1618)
Oil on panel
65 x 100 cm
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

violent severance from one way of life to another, it marks women's presence and object-hood solely within the imaginary as a tactile, place of origin and desired return. As such, the image illustrates what Irigaray terms as the process whereby, for entry into phallogocentric logic, '...the immediacy of *the relationship to the mother* is sacrificed.'²⁰² Referring to the pitfalls of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Irigaray suggests that the disavowal of the maternal body becomes a central tenet: 'Every utterance, every statement, will thus be developed and affirmed by covering over the fact that being's unseverable relation to mother-matter has been buried.'²⁰³ Also lamenting the pervasive psychoanalytic emphasis on psychic separation from the mother, Dorothy Dinnerstein diagnoses it as 'part of a constellation that constitutes our cultural sickness.'²⁰⁴

As a measure of reparation, Irigaray underscores the necessary reconnection to, rather than severance from the mother. For Irigaray, the mother daughter alliance is particularly crucial to a transformation of this problem. She identifies that both the act of mothering, and the daughter's expected separation from her mother – the female reference point for her ego as well as for her sex – entails a disavowal of self.²⁰⁵ As a result, Irigaray believes mothers must present themselves to their daughters as subjects, and likewise acknowledge their daughter's own unique subjectivity. In *Je, Tu, Nous*, Irigaray offers suggestions for developing mother-daughter relationships, including displaying images of the mother-daughter couple, or consciously emphasising that the daughter and the mother are both subjects in their own right. The representation of mothers and daughters, for Irigaray, can heal many of women's ills – including not just distress but competitiveness and destructive aggressiveness. It will help women move out of the private into the public sphere, out of the family and into society where they live.²⁰⁶ She believes that thinking and changing the mother daughter role, 'is equivalent to shaking the foundations of the patriarchal order.'²⁰⁷

Adrienne Rich joins Irigaray in questioning why in theological doctrine, art, sociology and psychoanalytic theory, it is the mother and son who appear as the eternal determinative dyad.²⁰⁸ She suggests that in imagining the mother daughter pair, we can challenge the fact

²⁰² Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 204.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁰⁴ Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) as cited in Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 83.

²⁰⁵ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 66.

²⁰⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 189.

²⁰⁷ Luce Irigaray and Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 50.

²⁰⁸ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1986), p. 226.

that: 'Women are made taboo to women – not just sexually, but as comrades, cocreators, conspirators.'²⁰⁹ She goes on to say: 'In breaking this taboo, we are reuniting with our mothers; in reuniting with our mothers, we are breaking this taboo.'²¹⁰

My own work, *The Skin of Hope*, acts out this spirit of mother-daughter alliance while repositioning both motherhood and skin as subjective, tactile terrains through which we become ourselves. Offering Hope's and my own unique relationship as a model for female embodiment through skin, my works affirm continued contact and alliance with *at least one* maternal body. Imaging both the pains and joys of living and becoming, Hope and I reveal the wider scope for healing, loving and renewal through skin.

4.2 *The Armour of Hope: Knitting a Skin of Bravery and Resilience*

Central to the exhibition *The Skin of Hope* is *The Armour of Hope* (2012). This title refers to two works in different media. The first is the knitted sculpture of a child-sized armour for Hope suspended in the gallery space (figures 77-78). The second is the photograph behind it of Hope at age four years, wearing the suit (figure 79). Both works visualise my impression of Hope as gently armoured on the day she made her way into our car and our lives. Through the media of knitting and photography, *The Skin of Hope* redresses the conventional associations of armour with masculinity.²¹¹ It also casts the child that wears it in a layer of maternal love, self-protection and a fierce will to presence.

Suspended from the ceiling by fishing line, Hope's lacy silver armour resembles the soft outer shell of a crustacean, a layer of ectodermic protection likely outgrown. Although the front section is knitted in thick metal thread that closely resembles chainmail, the arms, legs and helmet section are knitted on tiny needles in a soft thread bearing two intertwined strands of metal and silk, exemplifying Hope's capacity for both self-protection and openness. With tiny mitten shaped hands, slipper shaped feet and a rounded hood, the armour also takes the form of a child's snow suit or pajamas, underscoring the particularly diminutive scale of the body for which it is made. This suspended outer layer is covered in tiny holes, metaphorically signalling skin's promise as a tactile network. Through these holes, internal and external, past

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 255.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ 'The armoured skin is a male body image . . . it is nothing less than the overarching concept of the narcissistic male fantasy of an invulnerable, impenetrable, phallic body' in Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, p. 136.



Figure 77
Kate Just, *The Armour of Hope* (2012)
Hand knitted metal and silk
104 x 45 x 4 cm
Photo: John Brash



Figure 78
Detail of Kate Just, *The Armour of Hope* (2012)
Photo: John Brash

and present experiences can be continually transmitted and received. In her essay on the work, Melissa Miles refers to the softly swaying armour's symbolic potential: 'A defense and an invitation, this porous surface opens a way through, breathes life in and provides a means of seizing life's experiences in its net.'²¹²

The knitted armour stands as a relic of the bravery Hope has needed to muster in her early life and honors the loss and continued presence of Hope's biological mother in her life and our relationship. Moreover, the medium of knitting, and its associations with contact, conveys the potential to recraft new connections. In psychoanalysis, the concept of armoured skin correlates closely to the separation of children from their mothers, either during the process of subjective emergence that Irigaray critiques, or in traumatic situations including adoption. Didier Anzieu's theorisation of the 'skin ego' focuses on the connected relation between mother and child in skin. For Anzieu, the functions and development of the ego (or self) are closely related to the psychic functions of the skin as a boundary, support, integration and formation of the internal and external spaces.²¹³ From the earliest moment in a baby's life, the skin is understood as a container, through processes of feeding, touch and bathing by the mother.²¹⁴ In Anzieu's theory of development, babies hold a fantasy that they share a 'common skin' with their mother. However, eventually this fantasy is replaced by an awareness of separateness, characterised by a fear that one's skin is being, or will be ripped off. After a 'clingy' phase grasping for the mother, the child begins to have a sense of his or her own skin. Indicating the same pattern of ascendance in the Lacanian mirror stage, this stage of separation from the mother is framed by Anzieu as necessary for the individual's progress toward autonomy.

In contrast, my own work's exploration of the significance of early contact between mother and child, through skin, aligns more closely to theories of adopted or neglected children. Adoptive mother and psychologist Nancy Verrier suggests that the severance of the physical connection between the child and biological mother causes a primal or narcissistic wound: 'All adopted children begin their lives having already felt the pain and, perhaps, terror of separation from the first mother.'²¹⁵ In Esther Bick's theories of how this translates to an experience of skin, children who suffer an untimely loss of contact are often described as

²¹² Melissa Miles, "Kate Just: The Skin of Hope," Daine Singer, http://www.dainesinger.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/2012_just_room-sheet.pdf.

²¹³ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*.

²¹⁴ In this regard, Anzieu refers to the skin as an 'envelope.' This may explain Irigaray's use of the term to refer to the first space in which the self is nurtured and discovered.

²¹⁵ Nancy Verrier, "The Primal Wound: Legacy of the Adopted Child" (paper presented at the American Adoption Congress International Convention, Garden Grove, California, April 11-14, 1991).

having developed a second skin, or protective psychic skin-armour.²¹⁶ This state arises from the child's feeling of longing for contact or for fusion²¹⁷ and his or her effort to hold oneself together.²¹⁸ Bick refers to this mental projection of muscularity, as a means of 'guarding' oneself in the way the mother cannot.

Accounts of psychic armouring in this literature primarily concentrate on the failure of the mother to act as a consistent object and document the negative effects this has on the child. However, my own work with armour considers how the child's (Hope's) tendency to self-protection, fusion and renewed maternal contact can be honored, acknowledged, and reframed productively through connection to another. As a knitted garment traced from my body to hers, the armour for Hope poetically translates the complex dualities of the real-world battles Hope has had to wage as well as our potential to recraft individual and maternal connections through skin. Much of this transformation of pain and lack into connection is channeled through the rhythmic action and processes of knitting, and its associated emotional resonance. Through the sounds and presence of my body knitting in the Barcelona studio, and the act of measuring her body, Hope and I made contact. As I cast each loop of her suit between my hands, dressed Hope's body in this 'special' layer acknowledging her strength, and positioned this work as central to an exhibition, I performed and transmitted to Hope her belonging in my life, the value of sustained maternal contact and my respect for her experiences. As such, the armour corresponds to Joanne Turney's assessment that knitted objects act as physical narratives, providing a link with the past in the present. Pondering the familial significance of knitted items, Turney suggests:

These are not merely 'bygone' objects but triggers for experience, an 'authentic' link with the past. These objects are kept – displayed, hidden . . . associated with people, places, times, events and lives, and therefore can be described as sentimental.²¹⁹

Historically, textiles act as substitutes for the body, marking transitions through different life phases.²²⁰ At naming ceremonies, weddings, christenings and funerals, we don special

²¹⁶ Esther Bick, "The Experience of the Skin in Early Object Relations," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49 (1968), p. 484.

²¹⁷ Ulnik, *Skin in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 1441-43.

²¹⁸ Joan Symington, "The Survival Function of Primitive Omnipotence," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 66 (1985).

²¹⁹ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 144.

²²⁰ In Australia, a number of artists harness the potential of textile 'relics' to translate significant transitions through life, love, illness, death and across time. Works by Louisa Bufardeci, Georgina Cue, Stephen Gallagher, Mark McDean, Martha McDonald and Louiseann Zahra-King continue to inspire my own use of textiles to this end.

blankets, gowns, robes and suits. As a tiny outfit, already well outgrown, the knitted *Armour of Hope* thus is offered as a significant relic that attests to Hope's rite of passage through difficult experiences that revealed her strength *and* vulnerabilities, her self-reliance *and* desire for connection.

The photographic work *The Armour of Hope* brings Hope to presence, and presence to the suit. Featuring a child just out of toddlerhood, *The Armour of Hope* seems to also suggest a parental desire to wrap or cover one's child in cotton wool or offer excess protection from the outside world. However, Hope's classical pose on a Moorish tiled floor also conjures an image of other brave young women in armour, from Athena to Joan of Arc. This aligning of Hope's emotional battles within a lineage of female power avows Irigaray's insistence that the mother can reflect the daughter's subjectivity to her in creative ways that will be powerful and transformative, to her own life, and within culture.

The work also embodies my own subjective experience of being mothered and in turn, my own values about mothering. Raised by an outspoken, adventurous, educated, ambitious, adoptive²²¹ mother and self-proclaimed feminist father, I had the experience of being mentally, physically and emotionally prepared to fight, work for and claim a meaningful existence in the world, beyond them.²²² The photograph of Hope wearing armour extends this familial genealogy of female strength and independence into the next generation.

The medium of knitting, embodying associations of maternal love, is also emphasised as a medium of repair and renewal in this work. Commenting on the relationship between needlework and emotional transformation in her home and later works, Louise Bourgeois says:

When I was growing up, all the women in my house were using needles. I've always had a fascination with the needle, the magic power of the needle. The needle is used to repair damage. It's a claim to forgiveness. It is never aggressive, it's not a pin.²²³

²²¹ to my brother Billy.

²²² I eventually did leave my whole family behind to migrate to Australia permanently to be with my (Australian) partner Paula in 1994. The USA still does not permit same-sex partner immigration.

²²³ Louise Bourgeois as cited in Frédérique Joseph-Lowery, "Through the Eye of a Needle," Artnet, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/lowery/louise-bourgeois6-15-10.asp>.



Figure 79
Kate Just, *The Armour of Hope* (2012)
Digital Type-C Print
61 x 45 cm

My use of knitting carries these same associations of maternal contact and repair. Writing my artist statement about this mother-daughter transmission for my work in the exhibition *Louise Bourgeois and Australian Artists*, I recalled:

While training to be a painter at the age of twenty-six, I was shaken by the loss of my adopted younger brother Billy. After the funeral, my mother taught me to knit. Looking back, this obsessive loop-making was a solemn tribute to the social rather than biological weaving of our family. It also operated as an act of resistance against any further unravelling. As I knitted, I repetitively felt the sadness, the silence, the clicking, the counting, the sadness, my mother's breathing, the clicking, the closeness of her body, the sadness, the counting, the clicking, the clicking, the clicking, the clicking.²²⁴

4.3 *The Tools of Hope: Forging a Skin Bond*

The associated sculptures of knitting needles, *The Tools of Hope*, further illuminate this relationship (figures 80-81). The title's play on Hope's name positions the tools as talismans of the bond between mother and daughter, and optimism against the odds. The three resin-modelled pairs of knitting needles are held together with velvet ribbons that crisscross to form a Roman numeric script. Although they refer to the number fourteen, no 'symbolic'²²⁵ significance lies in these archaic digits. Rather, the use of numbers continues my emphasis on reuniting the female body with language, rhythm and subjective force. As fetishistic tools enabling a calculated structure of knots and loops, the needles guard against further physical and emotional separation and promote future healing. Knitting thus becomes a mirror of my mother's, my own and Hope's lost connections and traumas, while attesting to our will to reweave these into new connections in the present. This plurality of female vision and transmission further establishes my aim to move beyond singular accounts of skin, the body and motherhood.

My mother's and my own shared experiences of being adoptive parents, also extends an emphasis on female biology in visual culture. Our experience of *forging* rather than expecting a relationship with our adopted children also corresponds to Rich's concept of non-biological mothers:

²²⁴ Kate Just, in *Louise Bourgeois in Australia*, ed. Linda Michael (Bulleen: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2012), p. 114.

²²⁵ In this context, meaning denotative or literal meaning.

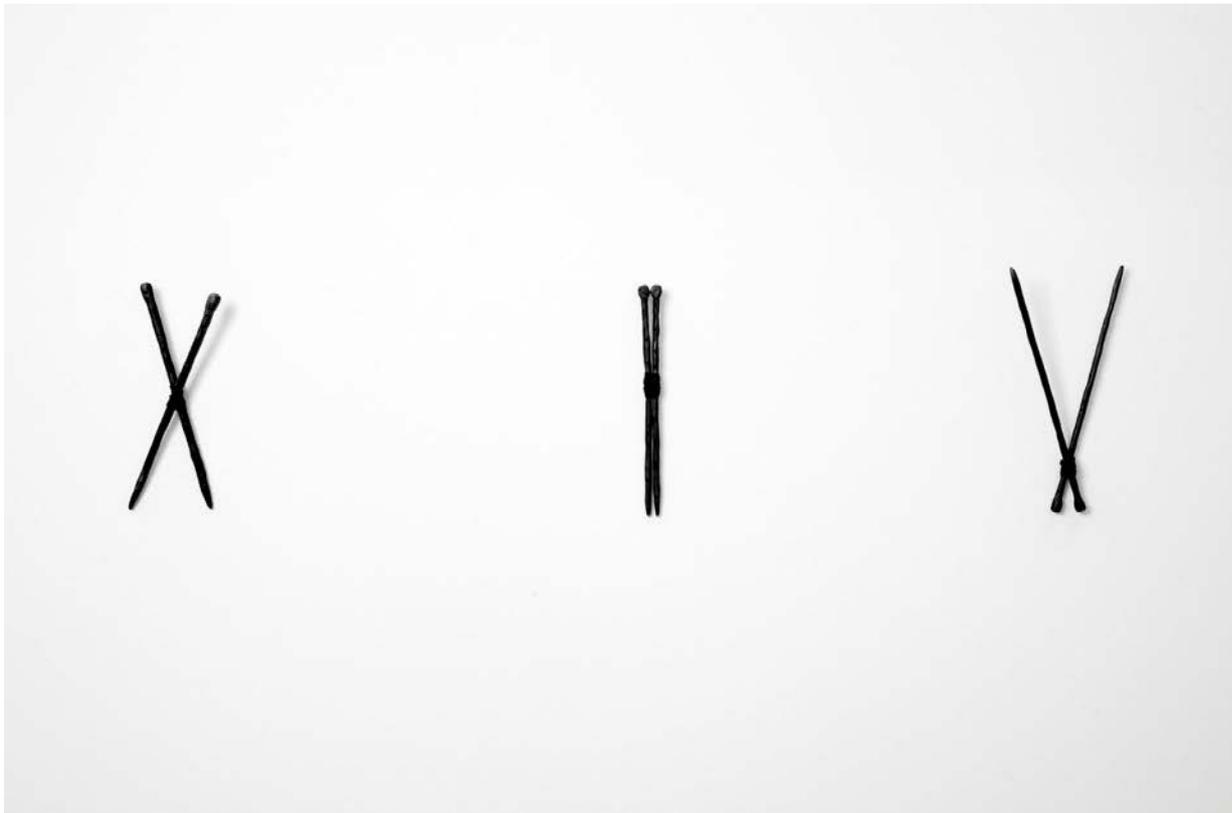


Figure 80
Kate Just, *The Tools of Hope* (2012)
Epoxy resin, wire and velvet
Three parts: 29 x 12 x 4.5 cm; 30 x 3 x 2 cm;
31 x 16 x 5.5 cm
Photo: John Brash



Figure 81
Detail of Kate Just, *The Tools of Hope* (2012)
Photo: John Brash

For centuries daughters have been strengthened and energized by nonbiological mothers, who have combined a care for the practical values of survival with an incitement toward further horizons, a compassion for vulnerability with an insistence on our buried strengths.²²⁶

The photograph of Hope in her armour pays tribute to her beauty and strength, confirming knitting as a medium capable of translating this transference of power. For Turney, knitted garments often operate as relationship markers, because even once the object has been 'made,' it still maintains the identity and memory of the maker. Turney refers to this as 'a means of making or "leaving" one's mark, or as poesis. Poesis is the rebirth or transformative process by which sensory memory brings the past into the present.'²²⁷ For Turney, the garment thus reveals, from the maker's perspective, 'How I remember' (you) as well as 'How I want to be remembered.'²²⁸

In *The Armour of Hope*, I offer these impressions to Hope. It is my wish that when she looks at it in the future she will remember the past and find us both there, making our way together, again.

4.4 *The Skin of Hope: Capturing a Trace of Optimism Through Skin*

'You have scored your name into my shoulders, referenced me with your mark. The pads of your fingers have become printing blocks, you tap a message on to my skin, tap meaning into my body.'²²⁹

Another pivotal image of Hope's and my own connection through skin is *The Skin of Hope* (2012), a photograph of Hope's texta scrawled self-impression upon the skin of my back (figure 82). I am seated on the same tiled floor that Hope stood on in her armour, suggesting our separate yet shared occupation of the space. The darkly shadowed edges of the photograph accentuate my freshly cropped hair, slightly tilted head and naked back, which are illuminated. Echoing Hope's deportment in her armour, my arms hug my knees up to my chest in a posture of both comfort and self-containment. Made at the time Hope herself was

²²⁶ Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, p. 252.

²²⁷ Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p. 143.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 89.



Figure 82
Kate Just, *The Skin of Hope* (2012)
Digital Type-C Print
48.3 x 65 cm

learning to write, the photo plays on the significance of the maternal body to identity, while giving it a social slant by highlighting the skin as a substantive tissue. Recording Hope's traces on my skin, the work envisages the ways touch and contact influence our changing sense of self and love.

The Skin of Hope continues my use of non-conventional language forms to write a female language of experience. Like the knitting symbols, hieroglyphics and roman numerals in other works, Hope's child-like scrawl on my skin translates a female body's will to sensation and language. It operates as a reverse image to Hope in her armour, which presents a picture of Hope's body traced with 'knitting's cursive script.'²³⁰ For this work, I invited Hope to sketch something back onto me, giving no instructions as to what type of image was preferred. Using a thick, smooth texta, she set about drawing a picture of herself. While she worked, she hummed and gently held and caressed my neck, shoulders and arms, tickling me with her fingertips and the marks and lines of her pen. This unexpectedly reversed Hope's bed-time ritual in which I 'draw' over her arms, hands, legs and back with my fingers while singing her to sleep. Therefore, the photograph documents an ongoing transmission Hope and I enjoy that promotes our connection and belonging through skin.

Photography is a particularly potent medium in translating Hope's and my bond through touch on skin. To Geoffrey Batchen and Roland Barthes, photography epitomises the connection between vision and touch. Batchen suggests looking is 'already contaminated by traces of touch.'²³¹ Roland Barthes conjures the materiality of the maternal body and skin to reveal the symbiosis between a photographic image, what it captures and the viewer: 'A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.'²³²

Resonating with the precious and fleeting quality of time, the photograph *The Skin of Hope* also acts as a mirror. Hope's drawing of herself on my back corresponds to my image of her in armour. Hope drew herself as smiling widely, arms outstretched, as if reaching toward the letter-like or musical notations surrounding her body. To contain and protect herself within this happy realm, she enclosed herself within an unbroken, wonky, circular line. In both of our images she is self-protective but open to new sensation and experience.

²³⁰ Miles, "Kate Just: The Skin of Hope."

²³¹ Geoffrey Batchen, "Carnal Knowledge," *Art Journal* 60, no. 1 (2001), pp. 21-3.

²³² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 80-1.

As one of Hope's adoptive mothers, aware of her growing concept of her origin and future self, I could not help but also read the circular form that Hope drew around herself as a transplantation of herself to a place 'inside' of me. This further corresponds to real life experiences I have with Hope, in which she stages a 'pretend' game re-enacting her birth, casting me in the role as her biological mother. After I 'pace the hospital,' 'lie in bed,' and finally 'birth' this oversized infant, I am ordered to name her, cuddle her and promise to keep her close forever. In this game, she is asking to return to an experience she likely does not remember at all,²³³ while rewriting the script either to eliminate the hurt in it, or better reflect her growing sense of belonging within our family.

The re-framing of female pain into love, through skin, also directly connects to Catherine Opie's *Self Portrait - Cutting* (1993), which I discussed in chapter one. Having made *The Skin of Hope*, I realised I had unwittingly referenced the Opie image of love between women scored into the back of the artist. The carving of an image of women in love, etching into Opie's back by artist friend Judie Bamber,²³⁴ speaks to a painful yet powerful insistence upon one's identity in the face of a suppressive culture. Made almost twenty years later, my image contends with the same challenge to claim love, despite pain. However, as a text tracing rather than razor cutting, my work epitomises Steven Connor's sentiment that it may be time to move from 'the skin's duress,' towards 'many kinds of finesse that are associated with the skin.'²³⁵ In my own work, this gentler touch transmits a newfound care for self and other and exudes a sense of promise for what life may hold.

This prominence of intersubjective narrative between mother and daughter in *The Skin of Hope* also connects to a growing emphasis by psychoanalysts on the mother's right to the same desire and subjectivity afforded her child(ren). Amber Jacob's critique of contemporary psychoanalysis considers the replacement of the 'occluded mother' in Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan with the theories and practices of Melanie Klein, D.W. Winnicott, John Bowlby and W.R. Bion. Detailing their work on attachment, intensity and reverie between mother and child, she outlines the centrality of the mother to the psychic development of her child. However, Jacobs reveals that a wide range of psychoanalytic feminist scholars, including

²³³ We were both surprised to find on a recent visit with Hope's birth mother that she had been delivered by C-section, so devoted had we become to our version of events.

²³⁴ Christopher Knight, "Catherine Opie: American Photographer at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum," Los Angeles Times, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/arts/la-et-opie9-2008dec09,0,6219144.story>.

²³⁵ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 259.

Janice Doane and Devon Hodges,²³⁶ Jessica Benjamin,²³⁷ and Jacqueline Rose,²³⁸ critique these frameworks, suggesting that phallogentric binaries remain, in which '... the mother is only ever an *object* in these theories; whether object of fantasy, need or blame.'²³⁹

Benjamin in particular argues that the mother's mental work must be also seen as essential to the construction of the mind and subjectivity, and critiques the fact that the mother's own mind is never represented. She says, 'As long as psychoanalysis could not theorize maternal psychic work as an aspect of subjectivity, it could not formulate a mother who is more than merely a mirror to the child's activity.'²⁴⁰ According to Jacobs, psychoanalysis remains complicit with a model that continues to relegate the mother to the realm of the imaginary. Jacobs argues that the mother must be able to be theorized as a subject whose relation to 'generational transmission' is given expression in the symbolic economy.²⁴¹

As a work framing the mother's skin and body as a surface and depth through which the child sees herself and understands her relationship to the mother, my photograph *The Skin of Hope* affirms some conventional ideas regarding the role of the maternal 'object.' However, sitting within a wider body of artworks expressing my own familial connections and identity as a mother, the photograph positions skin and the maternal body as an equally transmissive and receptive site through which the subjectivity of mother and child emerge and renew over time.

Albeit focusing on a personal rather than formal archival documentation of mother and child connection, *The Skin of Hope* also draws lineage to the work done by Mary Kelly to establish the mother as a subjective, desiring force in *Post-Partum Document* (1973-1979) (figure 83). This famous feminist artwork sought to deploy and extend the problematic psychoanalytic model of the mother as a passive object, fulfilling Benjamin's later call for this kind of discursive shift. Beginning when Kelly's son was an infant and concluding as he began to develop language and enter school, Kelly's work constitutes an exhaustive written and

²³⁶ Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

²³⁷ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

²³⁸ Jacqueline Rose, "Of Knowledge and Mothers: On the Work of Christopher Bollas," *Gender and Psychoanalysis* 1, no. 4 (1996), pp. 411-27.

²³⁹ Amber Jacobs, "The Potential of Theory: Melanie Klein, Luce Irigaray and the Mother-Daughter Relationship," *Hypatia* 22, no. 3 (2007), p. 178.

²⁴⁰ Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 57.

²⁴¹ Jacobs, "The Potential of Theory: Melanie Klein, Luce Irigaray and the Mother-Daughter Relationship," p. 178.

pictorial archive charting her son's feeding, toilet and behavioural habits, including the emotional separations and connections between Kelly and her son as he underwent various stages of development. In *Documentation VI: Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary* (1978), Kelly documents her son's acquisition of writing on a large slab similar to the Rosetta Stone (figure 84). On the stone, Kelly imprints her son's writing of his first name, which interestingly is Kelly, alongside her writing on his development and typed entries from her diary. Literally using a slate and revealing the way the mother and child's impressions interact and inform each other, Kelly also affirms the position of the mother as connected to, rather than severed from the child's development of language and identity. In tags bearing her thoughts on the experience of parenting, Kelly also delighted in her sensual connection to her son: 'I'm really enjoying my present relationship with K., going out to lunch, to the park, shopping together. He's fulfilling my fantasy image of a son as a little companion/lover.'²⁴² This evocation of one to one sensuous connection and imaginary role play is palpable in my works with Hope, which break taboos of intense intimacy between mother and child, often suppressed in society.²⁴³ Revealing both the mother and child to be desiring subjects and establishing this as a relevant topic for art, Kelly's work and my own operate as 'an assault against the gamut of cultural restrictions put on the mother. . .'²⁴⁴

Clearly transgressive and ambitious, Kelly's work also depicts an image of heterosexual and biological motherhood, rarely challenged, that my own work seeks to expand. Unfortunately, thirty years after Kelly's work, feminist research on motherhood 'continues to assume a generic heterosexual woman and lesbian mothers rarely occupy even a token role in feminist writing about motherhood.'²⁴⁵ Furthermore, real life depictions of non-biological motherhood in contemporary art are so rare that I struggled to find any, with the exception of Lindsay Obermeyer, whose work I discuss in the next section. As a result, my work in *The Skin of Hope* can be seen to offer a further contribution to feminist art, by imaging the unique mother-daughter alliance that Irigaray calls for and emphasising skin's unique capacities as a writing surface and social fabric, interweaving non-biological connections.

²⁴² Mary Kelly as cited in Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 30.

²⁴³ Most notable in news coverage of women publicly breastfeeding, or breastfeeding toddler aged children, long ago expected to have severed their ties to the physicality of the mother's body; Adam Morton, "Breastfeeding Expert Decries Parliament Ban," *The Age Newspaper*, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/02/27/1046064151684.html>.

²⁴⁴ Mary Kelly as cited in Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, p. 30.

²⁴⁵ Nollaig Frost, "Mothering on the Margins of Space: Meanings of 'space' in accounts of maternal experience," *Radical Psychology*, <http://www.radicalpsychology.org/vol9-2/frost.html>.

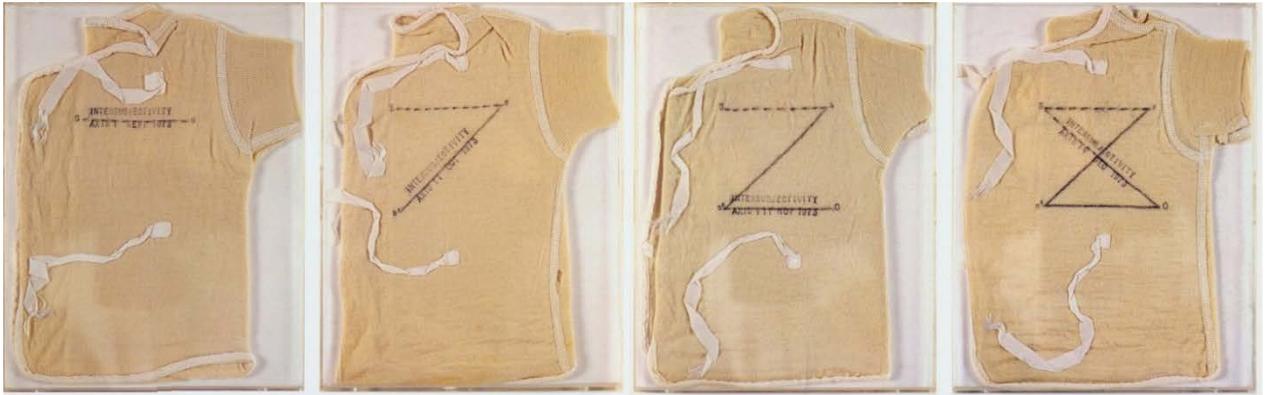


Figure 83
 Detail of Mary Kelly, *Introduction* (1973) from *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79)
 Perspex units, white card, wool vests, pencil, ink
 4 units, 20 x 25.5 cm each
 Collection of Eileen Norton, Santa Monica

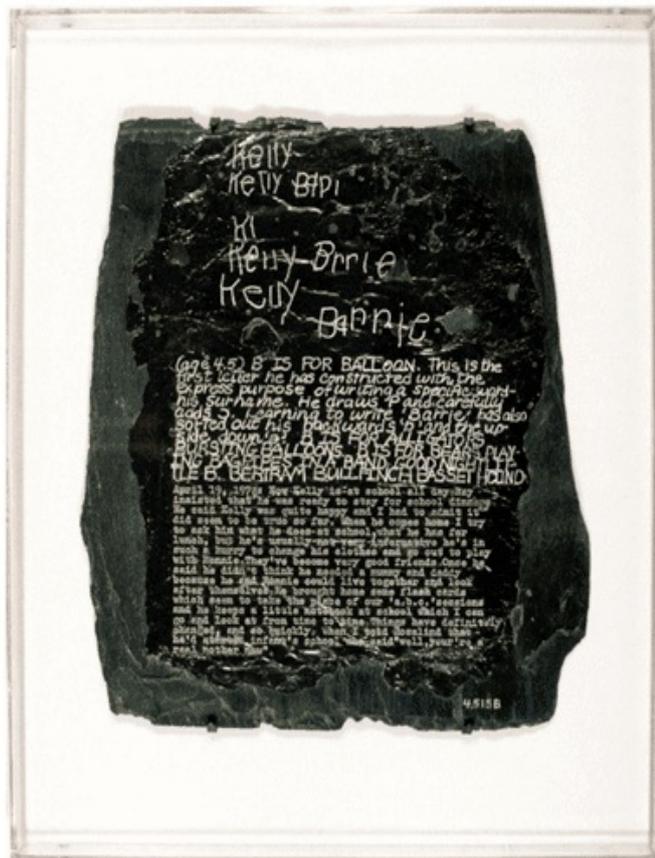


Figure 84
 Detail of Mary Kelly, *Documentation VI*
Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary (1978)
 from *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79)
 Perspex unit, white card, resin, slate
 20 x 25.5 cm
 Arts Council of Great Britain Collection

4.5 *The Arms of Mother: An Encircling Subjectivity*

There was, is, in most of us, a girl-child still longing for a woman's nurture, tenderness, and approval, a woman's power exerted in our defense, a woman's smell and touch and voice, a woman's strong arms around us in moments of fear and pain.²⁴⁶

Women growing into a world so hostile to us need a profound kind of loving in order to learn to love ourselves. But this loving is not simply the old, institutionalized, sacrificial mother love which men have demanded: we want courageous mothering. *To refuse to be a victim:* and then to go on from there.²⁴⁷

In *The Arms of Mother* (2012), I continue to frame female skin as a territory through which an intersubjective mother-daughter relationship and identity can be claimed, defended, repaired and renewed (figure 85). *The Arms of Mother* comprises a shimmery pair of skin-toned knitted gloves with harnesses, bearing surgical stitching and the scar embroidered cursive scripts 'Hope' and 'Mother'. Also titled *The Arms of Mother* is photographic work featuring a close-up of my crossed arms wearing the gloves. The dual meaning of the word 'arms' in the title conjures a picture of a maternal haven, like that in the *Brueghel-Rubens* painting *The Sense of Touch*. It also refers to a stockpile of defensive weaponry, reflecting my own experience as a mother and daughter of what is required for the role. Manifesting the recent changes to my bodily and familial fabric since Hope has arrived in our family, the stitches and scars sustain the indelible presence of my daughter in my world, and the hopefulness I hold for both our lives. However, the black surgical stitching above our names refers to a recent cut, as if the acts of both hoping and mothering involve physical or emotional risk as well as healing. These scarring details directly translate my own experience of loss, and pair this with the wish to love again. After the death of my brother Billy, friends and family expressed incredulity that I chose to foster many children and eventually adopt a child. I always gave the same answer: 'I have hope.' Eventually, that is just what (and whom) I received. The surgical scars and marks on the arms personally commemorate through needlework and skin the ways my mother, Hope and I have lost love, but continue to find it again.

The reference to the arms of a mother also connects to Anzieu's theorisation of the skin as a

²⁴⁶ Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, p. 224.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246.



Figure 85
Kate Just, *The Arms of Mother* (2012)
Hand knitted rayon and cotton
92 x 32 x 2 cm
Photo: John Brash

support structure for the psychic mind. Anzieu compares skin's 'holding' capacity to the physical and emotional support offered by the arms of a mother as she holds a baby.²⁴⁸ Poetically enacting a reconnection to maternal limbs in the case of adoption, Lindsay Obermeyer's *Connection Performance* (2006) illustrates her own desire to safely encircle her daughter (figure 86). Obermeyer's work consists of two soft red knitted jumpers perfectly sized to mother and daughter that connect their arms in fifteen foot long, umbilical-like sleeves.

Wearing the jumpers in public, and speaking to passers-by, the two bring to presence their connection and their individual perspectives on it. Obermeyer began using knitting when she adopted Emily at age seven from Romania to:

...explore and express the tremendous elasticity of the mother-child bond. Like a knitted garment, this bond can stretch, rip, fray or unravel as the child grows and matures. It is in a perpetual cycle of mending and loosening until death creates the final separation.²⁴⁹

The red hue of the jumper and long lines of the connected arms seem to emphasise a biological mother-daughter bond and 'flow.' Like my armour for Hope, the garment's reference to a maternal body acknowledges and materialises the loss and presence of Emily's first mother and the sense that this informs the new relationship between Obermeyer and her daughter. However, as a knitted sweater encircling the pair, it simultaneously suggests the potential beyond this loss to recuperate through the 'crafting' of new connections. Held within the 'nurturing' fabric that attests to the primacy of their bond, Obermeyer and her daughter challenge the lack of empowered representations of non-biological families and their capacity for intense connection.

The works in *The Skin of Hope* contrast Obermeyer's image of bodily entwinement between mother and daughter, which binds mother and daughter in the same skin. I refer to the impressions Hope and I leave on and with each other's skin, while also picturing each of us free to inhabit our own space. This representation of our separate-yet-togetherness sustains Irigaray's imperative that a mother and daughter can live in alliance, literally and metaphorically, while standing their own ground. Irigaray terms this 'brand' of intersubjective connection as being able 'to be two in order to be able to be one in this third

²⁴⁸ Ulnik, *Skin in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 1186-90.

²⁴⁹ Lindsay Obermeyer as cited in Karen Searle, *Knitting Art: 150 Innovative Works from 18 Contemporary Artists* (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2008), p. 73.



Figure 86
Lindsay Obermeyer, *Connection Performance* (1998)
Performance still
Photo: Audrey Mandelbaum
Courtesy the artist

which is love,'²⁵⁰ a concept that resonates with my relationship with Hope.

The photographs of Hope's and my arms in the garment further affirm this separate-togetherness. The photograph of me wearing the gloves (also titled *The Arms of Mother*) depicts my torso in a black top with my scar-stitched arms tightly crossed over my chest in a posture of anger or defence (figure 87). Beside this photograph is a picture of Hope's own arms in her armour, softly arched in a pose of containment and openness consistent with her 'stance' in the rest of the exhibition (figure 88). The juxtaposition of the fierce and defensive body of the mother against the contentment of the daughter is developed in relation to Rich's concept that toughness is an agreeable characteristic in mothers: 'A woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create liveable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist.'²⁵¹

One viewer of the exhibition noted that the scar embroidery in the photograph of my arms was difficult to read because it was 'upside down.' This apparent backwardness of 'writing' there, and in the *VENUS* sculpture, is a method for asserting that a text should remain primarily invested with(in) the body that it comes from. This standpoint exemplifies my thinking that female skin is a territory that is to be finally reclaimed, reoccupied and lived in by women.

4.6 *The Shield of Hope* and a Hope for the Future

The last work in the exhibition is the mysterious and singular sculpture, *The Shield of Hope* (2012), a cuirass of stingray skin with shoulder harnesses, matching the size of Hope's torso exactly (figure 89). Conjuring the oceanic creature's whip-smart retaliation instincts, this glimmering sheath is also offered as fortification against emotional injury. This delicately beautiful relic of a once living creature is pinned to the wall, confirming sacrifice, in Hope's life and my own, as a necessary element of protection (of self or other). Like the knitting 'wands' in *The Tools of Hope*, this skin relic is offered as a metaphoric tool, imparting to Hope my dual desire to protect her, 'while leaving her free to take on the world on her own terms.'²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 23.

²⁵¹ Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, p. 247.

²⁵² Miles, "Kate Just: The Skin of Hope."



Figure 87
Kate Just, *The Arms of Mother* (2012)
Digital Type-C Print
34.5 x 40 cm



Figure 88
Kate Just, *The Arms of Hope* (2012)
Digital Type-C Print
34.5 x 40 cm



Figure 89
Kate Just, *The Shield of Hope* (2012)
Stingray skin, cotton, thread
54 x 19 cm
Photo: John Brash

On the day in 2009 when my brave and small daughter stood beside me and placed her hand in mine, I believe she transmitted, and I received, an image of her in armour. Taking up this signal and mirroring it back to her as a shimmering knitted layer, I found myself immersed in our separate, yet connected, deeply personal narratives of loss, connection and repair. In chapter one, I suggested that through my research project, I would 'reconceive of skin as an active tissue in which a woman locates, imprints and conceives of her own identity and desires and acts upon it.' Ruminating on Hope's and my relationship, I did not need to *reconceive* of skin in this way. It was already connecting and enfolding us in its web. Within its tiny filaments, we uncovered who we had been, who we are, and who we might become.

When Connor referred to the problems of female representations in skin, he suggested that female skin's perceived weakness or sensitivity, what he called *delicacy*, might be reconceived of as 'a delight of care' for skin.²⁵³ Gently, lovingly retracing Hope's and my sustained connections through skin, I understood that through this delicacy comes a real optimism for the future.

As it turns out, there is always Hope.

²⁵³ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 259.

Conclusion: Reweaving the Texture of Skin

The skin is central to our communication with others. The delicacy of skin over our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and hands facilitates a tactile engagement with all of our senses. By paying attention to the way the things around us are 'skinned,' we acquire a sense of who we are, the world and our place in it. Skin, from this perspective, is not a boundary between inside and out. It is a living, breathing porous surface that acts as an interface with our environment and with each other, 'a milieu, mingling and manifold.'²⁵⁴

The Texture of Her Skin: A Studio Project Excavating and Reweaving Visions of Female Subjectivity attends to skin's potential as an open weave, a palpable texture through which we continue to accrue a complex sense of our own identity, subjectivity and social belonging. An enfolding surface and depth, the project acknowledges skin as both the threshold and fabric of who we are and who we might become. My focus on this materialisation of skin arose from my primary research questions. I asked how a visual art practice might denaturalise and expand binary representations that sustain women's object-hood in skin and refuse women's access to skin's liberating qualities. I also questioned whether certain media bearing an affinity to skin, and the creation of material relics referencing skin's socio-historical character, could reevaluate skin's potential as a subjective and connective network for women.

At the locus of my creative investigation have been a number of entwined filaments that when woven together constitute a vision of female subjectivity and collective agency through skin. The warp – or constituting structure of the project through which its various strands of studio research are interwoven – is comprised of problems relating to existing binary visual representations of women in skin and the underlying potential in theory and practice to reframe skin from a subjective standpoint. Using my first chapter as a foundation, I outlined the ongoing segregation of female skin to the subordinated side of the binary in representation. I cited Claudia Benthien, Steven Connor, Naomi Wolf, Elizabeth Grosz and Bernadette Wegenstein, to reveal the delimiting depictions of female skin in literature, art and film as a biological container or sexual vessel, a screen, a cage, an unfeeling boundary wall, a violable fabric, or a smooth, graspable surface. I argued that these images correspond to a phallogentric culture's limited frameworks for representing womanhood or female experience, and in turn continue to psychically imprint women's perceptions of access to

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 282.

their subjectivity, desire and agency in the world.²⁵⁵

In my analysis of feminist artists, including Inez van Lamsweerde, Catherine Opie, Orlan, Louise Bourgeois, Nancy Grossman and Heide Hatry, I revealed a sustained challenge to female skin's binary position in representation. Although their works image isolated women bleeding, sealed, cut, stapled and fragmented – indeed bound within a suppressive relationship to skin – they also picture women's agency to write, cut and reassemble a subjective experience through that skin. In response to the delimiting representations of female skin and the substantial groundwork laid by these artists, I developed a project that would probe skin's more empowered potential for women.

My own studio investigation reconceived of skin as a tactile network. I argued for the reweaving of a female affinity to one's own skin, other bodies and the world. As support for my project's materialisation of skin as a texture enfolding self and other, I referred throughout to the theories of Luce Irigaray. Drawing on Irigaray's metaphoric re-conception of the maternal body as an envelope of space where woman can finally excavate and nurture her subjective self, I suggested skin could also be visualised as a subjective 'home' for women. I also deployed Irigaray's genealogical approach whereby women's subjectivity and presence within culture is regained through lineages of connection with other women, suggesting skin could be likewise be reimagined as a web of belonging, radiating outward.

Early on, I marked my intention to focus the studio research on the creation of tactile skin relics including tools and second skins. Diverse relics poetically relaying skin's role in shaping our identity could emphasise skin's social and cultural character and expand conventional representations of battered or desirable female skin. A series of hand held tools and relics could also manifest skin's progression beyond fixed concepts of interiority and exteriority, and visualise a metaphoric transfer of agency into the hands of women. By emphasising the historical nature of objects I hoped to acknowledge skin's binds in representation, while marking out its future orientation toward change. I also questioned whether mediums with a complex relation to skin's trace, surface, depths, memories and tactile impressions including knitting, photography, clay and collage could further establish the connective power of skin for women.

The exploration of these parameters in the studio comprised the 'weft' of the project. Woven over and across many of the works, these and other key threads contributed in diverse ways

²⁵⁵ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, p. 81.

to female skin's enlivened potential. The first strand involved the conjuring and reworking of imagery that correlates to binary thinking of female skin as a smooth surface or biological interior, an object shapeable to phallogenic desire. By challenging the binaries as a natural or given state, I exposed them as a product of cultural thinking that is capable of being revised.

My engagement with binary thinking about female skin was particularly evident in the tool related sculptures and collages, which tackled skin's reputation as a fixed boundary between inside and out. *Her Keys* (2010) harnessed an iconographic symbol of female interiority and enclosure to acknowledge the depiction of women as caged or suppressed in their skin. However, as clay totems bearing texts and individual knitted tags, they were reframed as objects of access and return, to one's own skin, subjectivity and worldly presence. In *Her Tools*, the transformation of conventional beauty advertisements into fictional surgical and erotic implements enacted a cultural dissection of idealised representations of female skin's exteriority. As gently curved hand held implements, they were presented as imaginary tools for women, to unlock sensorial memory and desire or reproduce a subjective experience of skin.

The fragmented figures in *Matrikas* also destabilise immobile narratives of female exteriority or interiority. With reassembled 'shards' of objects referring to both skin's surface and depths, this work depicted skin's capacity to enfold both, and pictured the process of entwinement as one of flux. Meanwhile, in *Unearthed* and *Of Hearth and Home*, tools and relics cueing female skin as a natural, or malleable texture were augmented or supplanted by implements relaying creativity, self-inscription and sensorial affinity through references to taste, sight, touch and hearing. Moving beyond a binary idea of skin's limited capacity for women, each of these works showed skin's greater affinity for tactile engagement.

Another thread of my studio research has been the use of language forms to relay female skin's capacity to engender subjectivity, self-expression and social connection. Through my emphasis on archaic, pictorial or bodily scripts, I sought to subvert the conventional phallogenic discourses applied to the female body and overwrite these with subjective, corporeal texts. In *Her Keys*, the juxtaposition of ancient letters and symbols denoting the female body's placement in history alongside my own invented and personal annotations, revealed an emergent subjectivity in skin. My assertion that touch through skin precedes, or operates in tandem with language, was unfolded in the line-up of skin relics taking letter-like forms in *Her Tools* and *Unearthed*. Meanwhile, *VENUS* involved a collective transformation of

a generic name denoting women's limited roles as maternal or sexual objects. As a knitting text, *VENUS* epitomised Irigaray's concept that rhythmic, plural, collective expressions of language can promote women's agency to write their own bodily subjectivity within or despite the limits set by phallogentric culture. I also established knitting as a form of language and parallel texture to skin in *The Tools of Hope*. These pairs of knitting needles bound in Roman numeric forms write the fierce inter-subjective bond between mother and daughter. In *The Arms of Mother* and *The Skin of Hope*, delicately curved ectodermic scripts translate impressions of subjective experience and wider connection to others through skin.

Through my project, I also highlighted the sensation in the skin of the hands to expand limiting representations of female skin as a texture reflecting male desire. Since the hands assert the 'right to their own . . . wishes, feelings, moods and occupations,'²⁵⁶ I refer to their potential to bestow the same agency to female skin. In this sculptural project, the agency of my own hands was affirmed throughout by my use of tactile media including knitting, clay and collage. The tactility of these mediums was not merely evoked by their skin-like surfaces; the sensuality of touch resonated in the works' implied *handling* – pressing, kneading, carving, knitting, cutting, and sewing. As evidence of this tangible process, the traces of my fingerprints reside in many of the clay tools and relics, while the implied rhythms of my hands working thread and needles are woven into the knitted works.

The significance of the tactility of hands in my works also extends to hands beyond my own. In *Her Keys, Her Tools, Unearthed, Of Hearth and Home* and *The Tools of Hope*, I metaphorically positioned tools used to rewrite history, transform representation, or forge connection through skin, back into the hands of women. This transference of agency through hands suggests women can 'make sense' of themselves, and fully grasp and shape the possibilities for their future, through skin. The etched yet also smooth surface of the tools and implements in *Unearthed* and *Of Hearth and Home*, as well as their placement at viewer's own hand height, further invite an ideated sensual experience of touch through skin. Offered as both imaginary histories of touch and invitations to future female hands to write their own experience in skin, these works affirm that 'through impressions of touch we shake the hands of countless generations.'²⁵⁷ The knotty twine squares in *VENUS* also bear the material traces of various knitters and their bodies. As such, the work metaphorically enacts the joining of many hands, and positions this contact as a valuable sensorial and social alliance. Returning

²⁵⁶ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), p. 56.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

to a smaller circle of connection, Hope's hand-scrawled text trace on my back, and the casting of my cursive knitting script over both our bodies in *The Skin of Hope* also highlights the significance of hands to 'making sense' of our identity from an early age. Throughout the project, hands and the sensuality of touch through hands contribute to a sense of female skin's attendant delicacy – unfolding our knowledge of self and our wider place in the world.

I also sought to denaturalise female skin's position on the subordinated side of the binary by visualising skin's relationship to history and its potential transformation over time. An extension of this historical focus has been my establishment of a female genealogy of skin. My examination of skin through past representations and the implied intersections between different women served to emphasise that various female points of view could be assembled 'within the framework of an emergent coalition.'²⁵⁸ This chain of connection asserts female agency in skin and its representation and affirms skin's character as a multifarious plane.

In *Her Keys*, I visualised skin's proximity to history via iconographic bodily symbols spanning different time periods and cultures. In *Unearthed*, the fictive display of archaeological objects narrating a female life in skin over time shifted the emphasis on female skin's biological status and excavated skin's socio-cultural significance for women. In both works, the display of unique implements in a line or en masse hinted at a gathering of bodies. This multiplicity suggested that the subjective representation of identity and experience in skin involves successive shifts by individuals as well as wider social alliances.

In *Venus Was Her Name*, I consolidated my emphasis on skin's historical and connective quality. Through works imagining a cross lineage with *The Venus of Willendorf*, I more actively 'rewrote' the past to show that women's cross-affiliation might contribute to more complex and subjective representations of skin. In *Of Hearth and Home*, I juxtaposed personal and cultural relics to extend the *Venus'* isolation in representation to a wider context. The material fragments attesting to women's historical positioning as isolated objects in *Matrikas* were disassembled and reconstituted as a line of women sharing each other's body parts. My reclamation of the word *VENUS* also reshaped a historical concept of womanhood through newfound threads of female connection. *The Skin of Hope* continued this line of argument revealing the gains Hope and I have made through a partly chosen rather than inherited genealogy.

²⁵⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 14.

The reference to expanded female lineages was mirrored in the exegesis via the comparative analysis of my works to those of female artists and theorists. I redrew connections to Louise Bourgeois, Luce Irigaray, Orlan, Judy Chicago, Hannah Höch, Mary Kelly, Adrienne Rich, Catherine Opie, Lindsay Obermeyer and others to highlight that visual representation, like skin, is a tapestry made richer by the interlacing strands of female expression.

In many works, I reweave skin's potential as *the very fibre* of our selves. Moving beyond binary depictions of female skin in which the self is hidden or masked, my knitted second skins reclaim skin as a unique and intimate tissue enfolding our self-identity. A self-portrait *as skin*, *In My Skin* verifies skin as the ultimate texture of personal identity. *The Armour of Hope* and the knitted *Arms of Mother* are also custom fitting garments that refer to specific bodies; they capture personal features and subjective narratives including my past familial loss and Hope's resilience in the face of a difficult start to life. Harnessing knitting's associations with nurturance, protection and a capacity to transmit corporeal traces and thoughts, the works bear out skin's ideal potential. As such, my works suggest skin is imminently capable of capturing our complex life experiences in its web, while sustaining our contact and connection with others.

Twisted into skin's capacity to enfold the self, was my attention to skin's social and connective powers. My focus on skin's connectivity was used to underscore women's facility for wider social-cultural presence and agency beyond skin. The relation between the individual body or skin to the wider social domain was first implied in the multiple fragments and objects in the tool-related works. However, in the works *Venus Was Her Name* and *The Skin of Hope*, the foundational sociability and intimacy of skin was made more explicit. Featuring an invitation to and acceptance by strangers to work collectively with me in public, the *VENUS* knitting project cast skin as a far reaching network, enabling new connections, communication, thoughts and experiences. *The Skin of Hope*, on the other hand, embodied skin's significance to our psychological development and wellbeing by exploring the transmission of delicate impressions between mother and daughter. Depicting the allegiance between a mother and daughter in skin, *The Skin of Hope* epitomised the project's vision for female renewal and connection through skin, and offered hope for the future.

The diversity of my methods in excavating and reweaving complex visions of skin offer many threads that might be picked up in future research. By liberating the female body from its ongoing depiction as a singular entity oriented to a suppressive culture, I hope future artists will join me in finding ways to write diverse subjectivities of skin that affirm skin's wider

sensual and social connections. My own project's focus upon archaic referents and craft media as a means of acknowledging and moving past historic binds in representation also provoke contemplation of how artists working with the internet, digital or interactive media might extend (female) skin's attendant potential as an individual network within a globally networked realm. I imagine artists working with digital media might cast their nets forward, to capture the not-so-far-off future of skin. Likewise, performance works involving the individual body's entwined and empowered relation to a social fabric, could bring greater tangible corporeal presence to artistic investigations of skin. My framing of the skin as a historical texture through which transformation of language, social agency, communication or personal identity arise, also cues skin as a substantive tissue for artists working from a wider range of socio-political perspectives, including discourses of race and ethnicity.

As a network enfolding every one of us, skin will remain the texture with which we are most in contact, whether it is being studied or not. As our relationship to it extends, so then do we. Contemplating the impossibility of capturing the multifaceted aspects of female identity, Irigaray speaks instead with a *sense* of wonder of the journey to discovery:

Because we are always open, the horizon will never be circumscribed. Stretching out, never ceasing to unfold ourselves, we must invent so many different voices to speak all of 'us,' including our cracks and faults, that forever won't be enough time. We will never travel all the way round our periphery: we have so many dimensions.²⁵⁹

Also woven with infinite individual narratives, connections and voices, skin might be approached with the same wonder. Once each of us is at home in our skin, it seems there is no limit to where we might go together.

²⁵⁹ Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 1 (1980), p. 75.

Postscript: A Burial Suit for the After-world

I had found at last a use for them. Like a tailor, I cut out these portions of cutaneous tissue into a suit of clothes. I adjusted the front, the back, the arms, the legs, until it was a single sheath which could envelope me completely, head, feet, hands and all. . . This mantle of suppleness, beauty and warmth will lap me in its illusion for the long passage into eternity.²⁶⁰

In the final stages of writing this exegesis, I began work on a knitted, geranium-pink burial suit for myself (figures 90-91). The suit is constructed from a series of knitted rectangles, made one at a time, that will eventually be stitched together to form one sheath. Referencing the wooden or clay format of an Egyptian sarcophagus, it is covered in pictures and texts of things, places, times and people who matter to me. These include runic letters, numbers, domestic objects, plaster strips, music notes, spider webs, body parts, tools of my trade, art works I have made, names and more. The text-laden outfit pictures skin as a rich tapestry, woven with multiple memories and narratives. There are also empty patches; some stories remain untold.

This seemingly macabre craft project aimed at my future end in fact winds its way backwards in time, overlapping with a childhood recollection of being at home in my skin. As day meets dusk, my mother submerges me in a hot bath, where I soak off the dirt, sweat and grime of a day spent climbing trees, digging holes, doing cartwheels and painting pictures. I float calmly in the water until my skin become prune-like and the water goes cold. Emerging in a shiver, I quickly dress in my favourite pyjamas: a full body zip up suit of soft pink flannel including padded feet. Clean, safe and warm in this second skin, I climb into bed, shut my eyes and dream.

I am sure it is no coincidence that I am manifesting this convergence of past and future moments at the close of a particularly intense period of focus and creative production. My skin is heavy with a yearning to rest. It also tingles with a *rest-less* curiosity about what might come next.

Perhaps I am only preparing to move on to another place *in my life*.

With each stitch, I cast a wish for my fruitful passage.

²⁶⁰ Didier Anzieu, *L'épiderme Nomade et la Peau Psychique*, [The Nomad Skin] (Paris: Apsygée, 1990), p. 26.



Figure 90
Kate Just, *Postscript: A Burial Suit* (2013)
Hand knitted bamboo, merino and cotton yarns, steel, paint
220 x 90 x 70cm

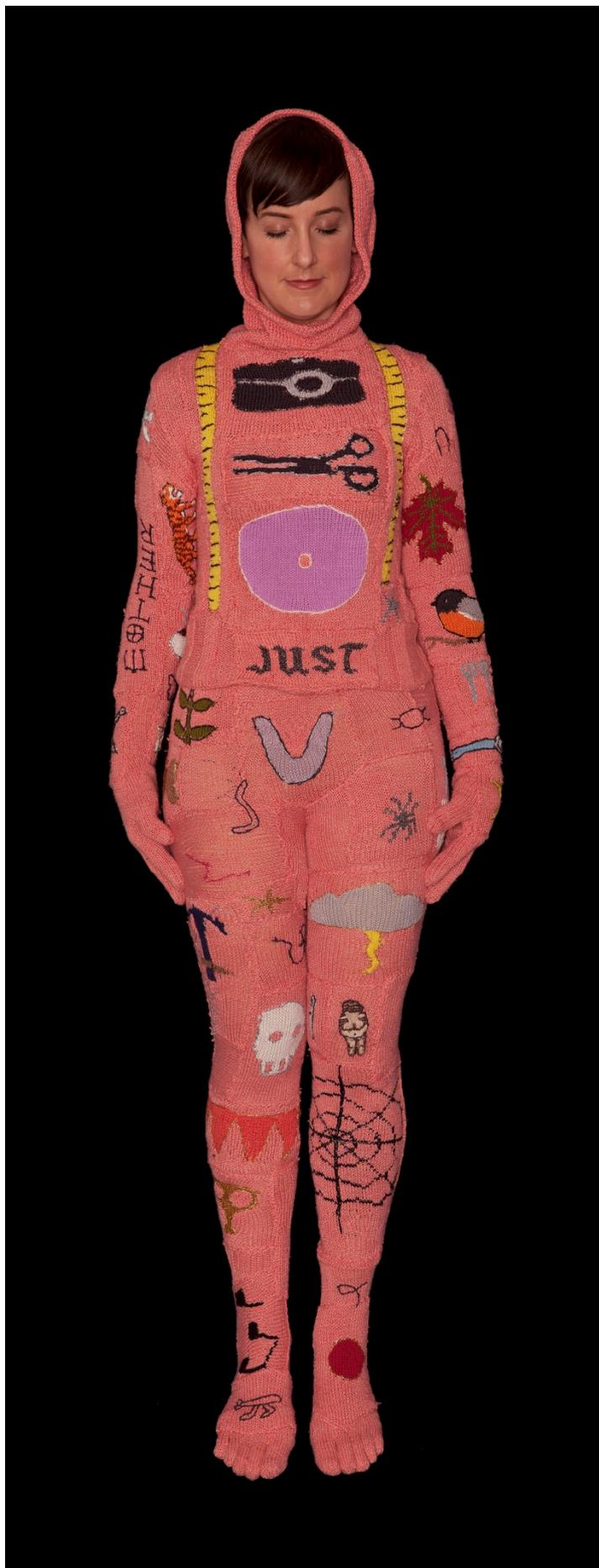


Figure 91
Kate Just, *Postscript: A Burial Suit* (2013)
Digital Type-C Print mounted on Dibond aluminium
200 x 76cm x 1cm

Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara, and Stacey, Jackie. *Thinking Through the Skin*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Almodóvar, Pedro. *The Skin I Live In*. 35mm. 2011. New York: Sony Pictures Classics. Film.
- Antl-Weiser, Walpurga. "Venus Of Willendorf." Chap. 2 In *VENUS*, edited by Sylvia Lammerhuber. 29-34. Baden: Edition Lammerhuber, 2008.
- Anzieu, Didier. *L'épiderme Nomade et la Peau Psychique* [The Nomad Skin]. Paris: Apsygée, 1990.
- . *The Skin Ego*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 1st American ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Batchen, Geoffrey. "Carnal Knowledge." *Art Journal* 60, no. 1 (2001): 21-23.
- Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- . *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- . *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Benthien, Claudia. *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Bick, Esther. "The Experience of the Skin in Early Object Relations." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49 (1968): 484-86.
- "Body Parts: Ancient Egyptian Fragments and Amulets." Brooklyn Museum Website. http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/3208/Body_Parts%3A_Ancient_Egyptian_Fragments_and_Amulets (accessed December 25, 2010).
- Bowen, Monica. "Excavation Sites for Prehistoric and Ancient Female Figurines." Alberti's Window. <http://albertis-window.com/2012/04/excavation-sites-for-prehistoric-and-ancient-female-figurines/> (accessed July 5, 2012).
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Burgess, Craig. "One of These Forms." edited by Craft Victoria: Kate Just, *Unearthed* Exhibition, 2011.

- Burke, Carolyn. "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass." *Feminist Studies* 7, no. 2 (1981): 288-307.
- Butler, Cornelia H., and Mark, Lisa Gabrielle. *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Cheah, Pheng, and Grosz, Elizabeth. "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell." *Diacritics* 28, no. 1 (1998): 19-42.
- Chicago, Judy. *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist*. New York: Viking, 1996.
- . "The Dinner Party." The Brooklyn Museum. http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party/ (accessed June 18, 2012).
- Cleveland, Janne. "The Power of the Word: The (Unnameable) Lesbian Body." *Thirdspace: A Journal of Feminist Theory and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2001): 21-38.
- Connor, Steven. *The Book of Skin*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- . "Mortification." Chap. 2 In *Thinking Through the Skin*, edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Cronenberg, David. *Dead Ringers*. 35mm. 1988. Toronto: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. Film.
- Demme, Jonathan. *The Silence of the Lambs*. 35mm. 1991. New York: Orion Pictures Corporation. Film.
- Diggory, Terence. "Armored Women, Naked Men: Dickinson, Whitman and Their Successors." In *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. 135-50. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- Doane, Janice, and Hodges, Devon. *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Dolan, Frances. "Why are Nuns Funny?" *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2007): 509-35.
- Donovan, Sara. "Luce Irigaray." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/#SH5a> (accessed June 5, 2010).

- Douma, Michael (curator). "Pigments Throughout the Ages: Red Ochre." Web Exhibits. <http://www.webexhibits.org/pigments/indiv/history/redochre.html> (accessed August 28, 2011).
- Driskill, Qwo-Li. *Walking With Ghosts*. edited by Janet McAdams. Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2005.
- Ebony, David. "Flesh for Fantasy." *Art in America*. <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/finer-things/2011-10-13/pedro-almodovar-the-skin-live-in/> (accessed October 25, 2011).
- Eller, Cynthia. "Divine Objectification: The Representation of Goddesses and Women in Feminist Spirituality." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 1 (2000): 23-54.
- Frank, Marcie. "The Camera and the Speculum: David Cronenberg's Dead Ringers." *PMLA* 106, no. 3 (1991): 459-71.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis." Translated by James Strachey. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth, 1963.
- Frost, Nollaig. "Mothering on the Margins of Space: Meanings of 'space' in accounts of maternal experience." *Radical Psychology*. <http://www.radicalpsychology.org/vol9-2/frost.html> (accessed 17 October, 2012).
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Hughes, Helen. "Kate Just: Bombshell." In *Studio 12*, edited by Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces. Melbourne: Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, 2009.
- Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- . *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity Within History*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- . *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . *Sharing the World*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- . *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- . *This Sex Which is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- . "When Our Lips Speak Together." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 1 (1980): 69-79.
- . "Women's Exile." *Ideology & Consciousness* 1 (1977): 62-76.

- Irigaray, Luce, and Whitford, Margaret. *The Irigaray Reader*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- Jacobs, Amber. "The Potential of Theory: Melanie Klein, Luce Irigaray and the Mother-Daughter Relationship." *Hypatia* 22, no. 3 (2007): 175-93.
- Jain, Madhu, and Handa, O. C. *The Abode of Mahashiva: Cults and Symbology in Jaunsar-Bawar in the Mid - Himalayas*. New Dehli: Indus Publishing, 1995.
- Joseph-Lowery, Frédérique "Through the Eye of a Needle." Artnet. <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/lowery/louise-bourgeois6-15-10.asp> (accessed November 5, 2011).
- Just, Kate. In *Louise Bourgeois in Australia*, edited by Linda Michael. 114-17. Bulleen: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2012.
- . "Purl Your Heart Out!". In *Hao Guo*, edited by Olivia Barrett. Singapore: Olivia Barrett, 2006.
- Kaelin, Catherine. "Catherine Opie Etches Sex and Gender Onto the Canvas of her Skin." *Columbia Spectator*. <http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2008/11/14/catherine-opie-etches-sex-and-gender-canvas-her-skin> (accessed January 4, 2012).
- Kauffmann, Linda S. "Cutups in Beauty School." Chap. 3 In *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Gail Weiss. 39-59. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Knight, Christopher. "Catherine Opie: American Photographer at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum." *Los Angeles Times*. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/arts/la-et-opie9-2008dec09.0.6219144.story> (accessed October 27, 2012).
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- . *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Translated by Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University, 1984.
- Lant, Kathleen. "The Big Strip Tease: Female Bodies and Male Power in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath." *Contemporary Literature* 34, no. 4 (1993): 620-69.
- Lazzari, Marisa. "The Texture of Things: Objects, People, and Landscape in Northwest Argentina." In *Archaeologies of Materiality*, edited by Lynn Meskell. 126-61. Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2005.
- Levin, David Michael. *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism*. London: Routledge, 1985.

- Lippard, Lucy. *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- Liss, Andrea. *Feminist Art and the Maternal*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Lopez, Jennifer. "My Goddess Moments." Gillette.
https://enca.gillettevenus.com/en_CA/goddess_central/goddess_showing/jennifer_lopez_story/index.jsp (accessed December 5, 2012).
- "Louise Bourgeois: The Fabric Works: 15 October - 18 December 2010." Hauser & Wirth Gallery. <http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/743/louise-bourgeois-the-fabric-works/view/> (accessed January 18, 2012).
- Lowell, Robert. *The Dolphin*. New York: Farrar, 1973.
- MacKinnon, Catharine. "Creating New Life in Heads and Tales." In *Heads and Tales*, edited by Heide Hatry. New York: Charta Art Books, 2009.
- McCoid, Catherine H., and McDermott, Leroy D. . "Toward Decolonizing Gender: Female Vision in the Upper Paleolithic." *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 2 (1996): 319-26.
- McCormick, Carlo. "Kiki Smith." <http://www.jca-online.com/ksmith.html> (accessed January 5, 2011).
- Meyers, Diana T. *Being Yourself: Essays on Identity, Action, and Social Life*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.
- Miles, Melissa "Kate Just: The Skin of Hope." Daine Singer. http://www.dainesinger.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/2012_just_room-sheet.pdf (accessed June 25, 2012).
- Miller, Philip, and Devon, Molly. *Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns: The Romance and Sexual Sorcery of Sadomasochism*. 1st ed. Fairfield: Mystic Rose Books, 1995.
- Moore, Catriona. *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970-1990*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994.
- Morton, Adam. "Breastfeeding Expert Decries Parliament Ban." The Age Newspaper. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/02/27/1046064151684.html> (accessed December 5, 2012).
- Nicoletta, Julie. "Louise Bourgeois's Femmes-Maisons: Confronting Lacan." *Woman's Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1992): 21-26.
- Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005.

- . *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. Chichester: Wiley, 2009.
- Perniola, Mario. "Between Clothing and Nudity." In *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part 2*, edited by M. Feher, R. Naddaff and N. Tazi. New York: Zone, 1989.
- Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. London: Heinemann, 1963.
- Plath, Sylvia, and Hughes, Ted. *Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981.
- Reilly, Maura. "The Dinner Party: Core Imagery." Brooklyn Museum. http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/core_imagery.php (accessed July 27, 2012).
- Reilly, Maura. "The Dinner Party: Reclamation." Brooklyn Museum. http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/reclamation.php (accessed July 27, 2012).
- Rice, Patricia. "Prehistoric Venuses: Symbols of Motherhood or Womanhood?" *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 4 (1981): 402-14.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1986.
- Robins, Freddie. "The Perfect." http://www.freddierobins.com/work_current/perfect.htm (accessed June 22, 2012).
- Rose, Barbara. "Is it Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act." *Art in America* 81, no. 2 (1993): 83-125.
- Rose, Jacqueline. "Of Knowledge and Mothers: On the Work of Christopher Bollas." *Gender and Psychoanalysis* 1, no. 4 (1996): 411-27.
- Schwartz, Anne. "Skin is a Language." New York Arts. <http://www.nyartsmagazine.com/may-june-2006/skin-is-a-language-anne-swartz> (accessed November 15, 2011).
- Searle, Karen. *Knitting Art: 150 Innovative Works from 18 Contemporary Artists*. Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2008.
- Smart, Sally. "Writing: Sally Smart – Family Tree House (Shadows and Symptoms)." <http://www.sallysmart.com/cms-writing-13/index.phps> (accessed December 6, 2012).
- Soffer, O., Adovasio, J. M., and Hyland, D.C. "The "Venus" Figurines: Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Paleolithic." *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 4 (August - October 2000): 511-35.

- Stair, Julian. *The Body Politic: The Role of the Body and Contemporary Craft*. London: Crafts Council, 1999.
- Stewart, Andrew F. *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Symington, Joan. "The Survival Function of Primitive Omnipotence." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 66 (1985): 481-87.
- Turney, Joanne. *The Culture of Knitting*. Oxford: Berg, 2009.
- Ulnik, Jorge. *Skin in Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac, 2007. Kindle Book.
- "Venus of Willendorf: Exaggerated Beauty."
<http://www.pbs.org/howartmadetheworld/episodes/human/venus/> (accessed July 26, 2011).
- Verrier, Nancy. "The Primal Wound: Legacy of the Adopted Child." Paper presented at the American Adoption Congress International Convention, Garden Grove, California, April 11-14 1991.
- "The View From Here: 19 Perspectives on Feminism."
<http://westspace.org.au/calendar/event/the-view-from-here-19-perspectives-on-feminism/> (accessed February 10, 2011).
- Vincentelli, Moira. *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Walcott, Rhianna. "Hayden Fowler." *DAS Super Paper*, May 2012.
- Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. New York: Harper Collins, 1983.
- Wegenstein, Bernadette. *Getting Under the Skin: The Body and Media Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. New York: New York University Press, 1965.
- Wilford, John Noble. "Venus Figurines From Ice Age Discovered in an Antique Shop." *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/01/science/venus-figurines-from-ice-age-rediscovered-in-an-antique-shop.html> (accessed September 21, 2012).
- Williams, Zoe. "Close Knit." *The Guardian*.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2005/jan/08/weekend.zoewilliams1>
 (accessed February 20, 2011).
- Winterson, Jeanette. *Written on the Body*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Witcombe, Christopher L.C.E. "Venus of Willendorf."

<http://arthistoryresources.net/willendorf/> (accessed June 10, 2011).

———. "The Woman of Willendorf."

<http://arthistoryresources.net/willendorf/willendorfwoman.html> (accessed July 15, 2011).

Wittig, Monique. *The Lesbian Body*. London: Peter Owen, 1975.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. New York: W. Morrow, 1991.