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The Gift

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In Marcel Mauss's seminal essay *The Gift*, he examines the anthropological roots of exchange. Mauss highlights how objects of exchange in primitive societies are imbued with both personal and cultural significance, composing of talismans or other symbols of wealth. This interplay between object and soul resonates with my own experience of gifting, where the act itself mingles lives together, blurring the boundaries between the personal and the material. To present them constitutes a request; to accept them is to commit oneself.

My recent series of works explore the theme of gifting within intimate relationships by focusing on my own experiences—portraying female hands, modelled after snow white's and the evil queen's—holding apples that carry significant symbolic weights: pleasure, value, danger and desires. Similar to the glossy smooth polishing of a mini-cooper, once gifted to me, signify not only care and love but also the subtle expectation of reciprocation and manipulation of desires, whether emotional or material. A gift that seduces, pampers, and corrupts the receiver, creating a reliance on the luxurious comfort, turning the giver to a subjugator. The works meditate on the moral complexities of giving and receiving, raising questions about the unspoken obligations that underlie romantic exchanges.

Mauss suggests that to present a gift is not merely to give but to entangle oneself in a social contract. The power of a gift lies not in its physicality but in the soul it carries—a fragment of the giver's essence. In Maori culture, gifting is an act that fuses souls, cementing relationships through the exchange of objects that are, in a sense, extensions of the self. This sentiment echoes in the exhibition: the hands hold more than objects—they clutch at the invisible threads of connection, of expectation, of unspoken commitment.

The apple and the car, become, in this light, 'clinging gifts'—to borrow Bronisław Malinowski's term—that seal the transaction of intimacy. But there's a darker side to this, too. In offering a gift, there's always the risk of the benevolence becoming transaction, a situation where the pressure to reciprocate overrides genuine connection. One might question the fine line between giving as an expression of love and giving as an assertion of power, where the exchange becomes a subtle form of control, rivalry and destruction.