Claire Lambe: Mother Holding Something Horrific

Claire Lambe:
Mother
Holding
Something
Horrific

8 April – 25 June 2017

Curators: Max Delany & Annika Kristensen

acca

FOREWORD

ACCA is delighted to present this major exhibition of newly commissioned work by Melbourne-based, English-born artist Claire Lambe. Encompassing sculpture, photography, performance and theatrical *mise-en-scène*, Lambe creates intimate and intense psychological spaces in an ambitious attempt to describe the human condition in its cruel reality and horrifying glory.

Known for her strange and often abject sculptural forms, Lambe's work explores psychological narratives of gender, sexuality, identity and class, leading to anxious objects full of revelatory and emancipatory potential. In a deeply subjective and sometimes transgressive practice of psychodrama and catharsis, Lambe draws upon a rich bank of personal history and reference material as a starting point for her investigation into the ambiguity between memory and experience, reality and re-enactment.

Claire Lambe: Mother Holding Something Horrific charges ACCA's gallery spaces with a series of corporeal sculptures and dramatic tableaux that are at once uncanny, anarchic and full of life and libido. The installation will be further enlivened by an occasional series of performances by contemporary dancer and choreographer Atlanta Eke, developed in the gallery space over the course of the exhibition, continuing an ongoing collaboration between the two artists.

Claire Lambe: Mother Holding Something Horrific continues ACCA's ongoing series of exhibitions that support the development of influential Australian artists at significant moments in their practice, through new commissions and surveys of their work. We would like to sincerely thank Claire for the commitment, ambition and energy that she has devoted to the project, as evidenced by the extraordinary new work that is documented in this publication. It has been stimulating, and an absolute pleasure, to have worked together over the past year, shared conversations and observed the development of Claire's work and thinking. It is especially rewarding to see the realisation of the exhibition take such spirited shape.

This publication presents work in progress, production stills, studio views, artist notes and reference materials. It serves as an accompanying platform for Claire's practice, and our consideration of its implications, and we would like to acknowledge contributors Emma Jane Unsworth for her dialogue with Claire which has led to her evocative essay, to fellow artist Elizabeth Newman for allowing us to republish a poem on Claire's work, and to designer Matt Hinkley for the handsome design of this publication.

I would like to especially acknowledge my colleague and collaborating curator Annika Kristensen for her ever-present insight, intuition and seemingly effortless orchestration of this project. And I equally acknowledge ACCA's wonderful staff across all areas of the organisation, along with our steadfast installation team, all of whom have contributed to the project with great enthusiasm and professionalism. We also thank the artist's representatives, Kate Barber and Vikki McInnes at Sarah Scout Presents, for their support of the exhibition and Claire's work.

Finally we would like to acknowledge our government partners for their support of ACCA's programs, along with our corporate sponsors, media partners, donors and patrons, without whom we could not achieve the bold and ambitious nature of ACCA's projects in support of artists and cultural communities.

Claire Lambe: Mother Holding Something Horrific conjures an intoxicating brew of sculptural forms and cultural contexts and we look forward to the engagement of our audiences over the course of the exhibition and beyond.

Max Delany
Artistic Director and CEO

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BED WETTING.

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Wouter Deruytter

ZELDA CHEATLE

Belgian photographer Wouter Deruytter is fascinated by consanguinity. The subjects of pictures above, New York transvestites, the lion tamer of the National Circus in Cairo and various itinerant Egyptian acrobats – people for whom performance forms an integral part of their lives. A man with a shotgun watches the lion tamer as he puts the beasts through their paces in the Cairo big top. Another picture shows the tiny cages in which the lions are kept. Gamel il Gohri has two wives and 18 children. His oldest son, Sherief, stands tall on stilts holding his youngest brother; a toddler, Sherief also practises his handstands, legs bent round his ears. Standing on her hands, Lucy threads a needle with her toes. On one foot, Mr Gorieh balances his daughter Sonia, her shoulder bruised hard.

Meanwhile in New York, Jere Jordet wears a tutu on the subway, an exotic in a lifeboat about where he emerges it up in a swan headdress. Deruytter shows him relaxing at home, his stocking. Sometimes Jere's enlightened by the light streaming through the window. Debbie reclines on a sofa, the embodiment of whimsical androgyny, and poses in Barney's department store. Vogued in Elizabethan drag, Robert Sherman wiggle-hangs by Robert Moggiethorpe appears hairless at home, and in a cafe on Gay Pride Day, wearing a wig and full drag.

What's odd, especially about the New York pictures, is their lack of drama. Ignoring the themes of the photographic transmit, Deruytter produces low-key images resembling photojournalism that create confusion about the status of the pictures and the events they portray.

Sarah Kent

Hardcore Part 2

FACTUAL NONSENSE

Joshua Compston, who runs this space, greets me at the door. Looking battered and dejected – he has a broken wrist and an impressive scar on his right cheek – he recounts his fall from the first floor of a building while he was drunk at a party. The anecdote builds into a proclamation of his credentials as a hardcore reveller. He is equally keen to assert the seditious sensibilities of these artists, who appropriately represent the 'hardcore' constituency central to the PN ethos.

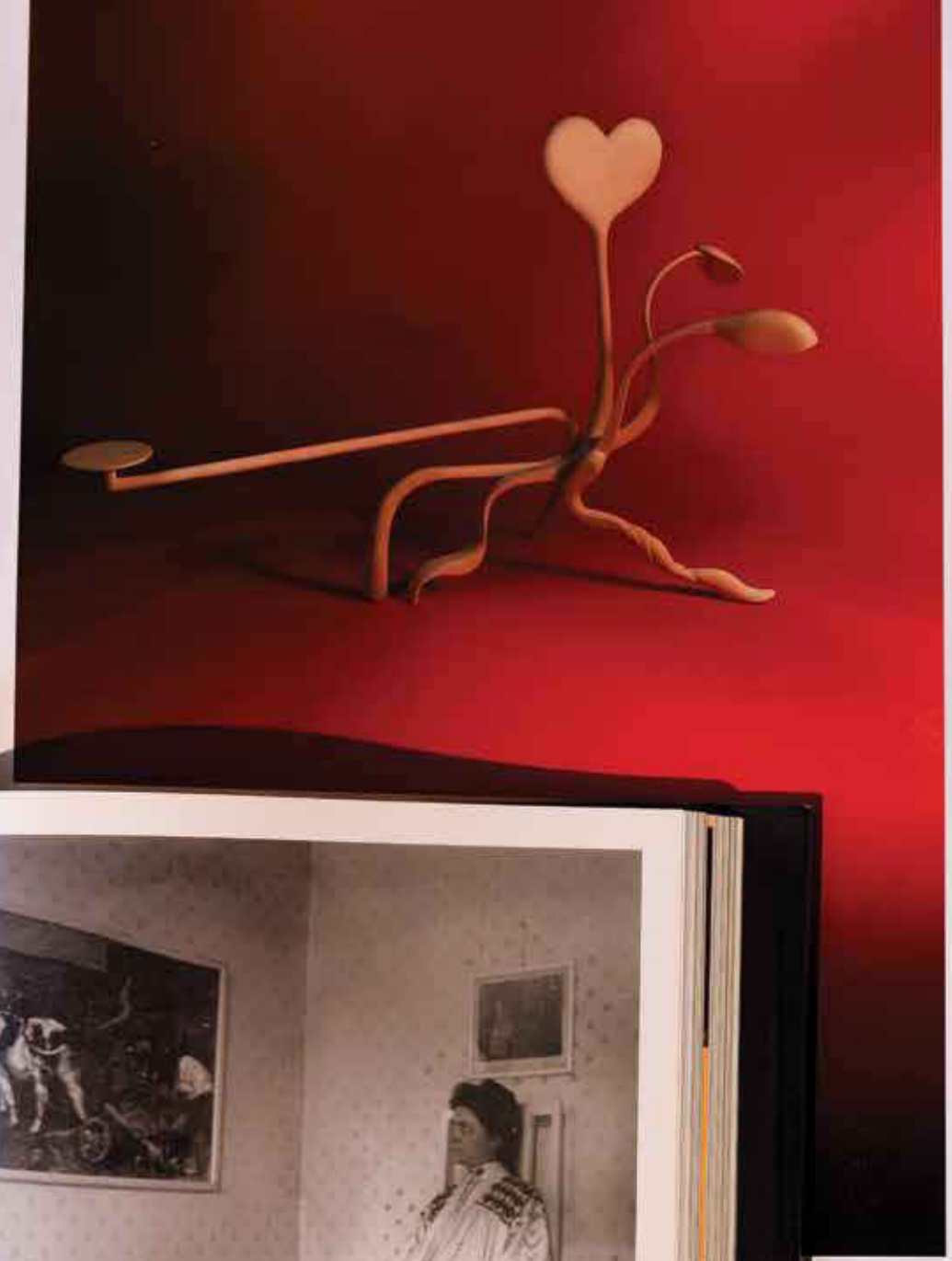
The show has the unpretentious flavour of a 50s happening, but the ideas come soaked in 90s irreverence. Take Gavin Turk's 'Plein d'Air', an empty Perrier bottle rotating endlessly on a white table top. Think back to the feverish sexual anticipation one experienced as a teenager, during games of spin-the-bottle. Gilbert and George are to show 'Tower Bridge Flag', a postcard piece of 1983, but, due to administrative hiccups, they have temporarily substituted a note reading: 'For our darling Hard-Core with hard love and core blimey'. Gary Hume's unashamedly playful and sassy oil painting 'Buttering up my Mind', rails against the iconic simplicity of his R.A. show. One senses his fear of being typecast as a post-pop Dulux man. Dan Brown has photographed the North Pole, but the desolate solitude of the shot reads like a landscape conceived in a dream. It casts doubt on the photographer's claim to reality and also lures the viewer

'Hardcore' by Robert Whitaker

into a stranger's psychic space. Matt Collishaw's photograph shows a man's arm tightly bound by a piece of rubber used for measuring capillary reactions. Medical and sexual connotations collide, confusing the divide between pain and pleasure. Robert Whittaker's photograph of the Beatles rejects a lifestyle 90s, underground feel. The Pudding Basin boys appear swathed in a sheet of plastic, and a piece of plastic draped across the image evokes the original prop.

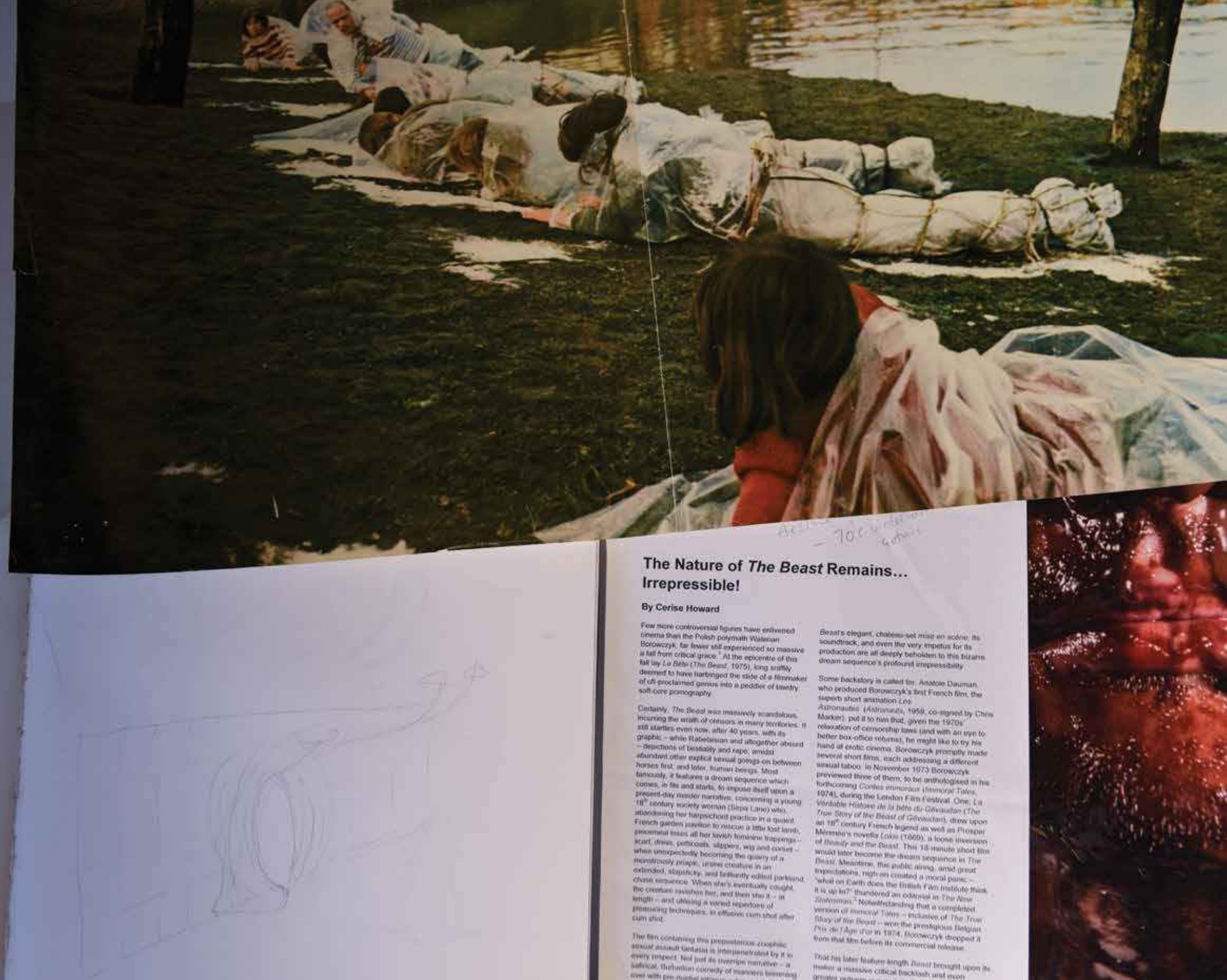
At play in a debate on the parallels between Pop art and young British art was A Grill show; and Joshua, get well soon.

Tamsin Garlick



Person — wife
environment — interior
home
furniture
— image
decorating wall
clothing
designed by husband

Blackpool postcard
look on face of young girl
man smoking



The Nature of *The Beast* Remains… Irrepressible!

By Cerise Howard

Few more controversial figures have enlivened cinema than the Polish polymath Walerian Borowczyk, far fewer still experienced so massive a fall from critical grace.[1] At the epicentre of this fall lay *La Bête* (*The Beast*, 1975), long snidely deemed to have harbinged the slide of a filmmaker of oft-proclaimed genius into a peddler of tawdry soft-core pornography.

Certainly, *The Beast* was massively scandalous, incurring the wrath of censors in many territories; it still startles even now, after 40 years, with its graphic – while Rabelaisian and altogether absurd – depictions of bestiality and rape, amidst abundant other explicit sexual goings-on between horses first, and later, human beings. Most famously, it features a dream sequence which comes, in fits and starts, to impose itself upon a present-day master narrative, concerning a young 18th century society woman (Sirpa Lane) who, abandoning her harpsichord practice in a quaint French garden pavilion to rescue a little lost lamb, piecemeal loses all her lavish feminine trappings – scarf, dress, petticoats, slippers, wig and corset – when unexpectedly becoming the quarry of a monstrously priapic, ursine creature in an extended, slapsticky, and brilliantly edited parkland chase sequence. When she's eventually caught, the creature ravishes her, and then she it – at length – and utilising a varied repertoire of pleasuring techniques, in effusive cum shot after cum shot.

The film containing this preposterous zoophilic sexual assault fantasia is interpenetrated by it in every respect. Not just its overripe narrative – a satirical, Buñuelian comedy of manners teeming over with pre-nuptial intrigue, wherein sordid family secrets compromise both a deformed noble

Beast's elegant, chateau-set *mise en scène*, its soundtrack, and even the very impetus for its production are all deeply beholden to this bizarre dream sequence's profound irrepressibility.

Some backstory is called for. Anatole Dauman, who produced Borowczyk's first French film, the superb short animation *Les Astronautes* (*Astronauts*, 1959, co-signed by Chris Marker), put it to him that, given the 1970s' relaxation of censorship laws (and with an eye to better box-office returns), he might like to try his hand at erotic cinema. Borowczyk promptly made several short films, each addressing a different sexual taboo. In November 1973 Borowczyk previewed three of them, to be anthologised in his forthcoming *Contes immoraux* (*Immoral Tales*, 1974), during the London Film Festival. One, *La Véritable Histoire de la bête du Gévaudan* (*The True Story of the Beast of Gévaudan*), drew upon an 18th century French legend as well as Prosper Mérimée's novella *Lokis* (1869), a loose inversion of *Beauty and the Beast*. This 18-minute short film would later become the dream sequence in *The Beast*. Meantime, this public airing, amid great expectations, nigh-on created a moral panic – "what on Earth does the British Film Institute think it is up to?" thundered an editorial in *The New Statesman*.[2] Notwithstanding that a completed version of *Immoral Tales* – inclusive of *The True Story of the Beast* – won the prestigious Belgian *Prix de l'Age d'or* in 1974, Borowczyk dropped it from that film before its commercial release.

That his later feature-length *Beast* brought upon its maker a massive critical backlash, and even greater outrage is surprising, as Borowczyk's erotic preoccupations had been telegraphed

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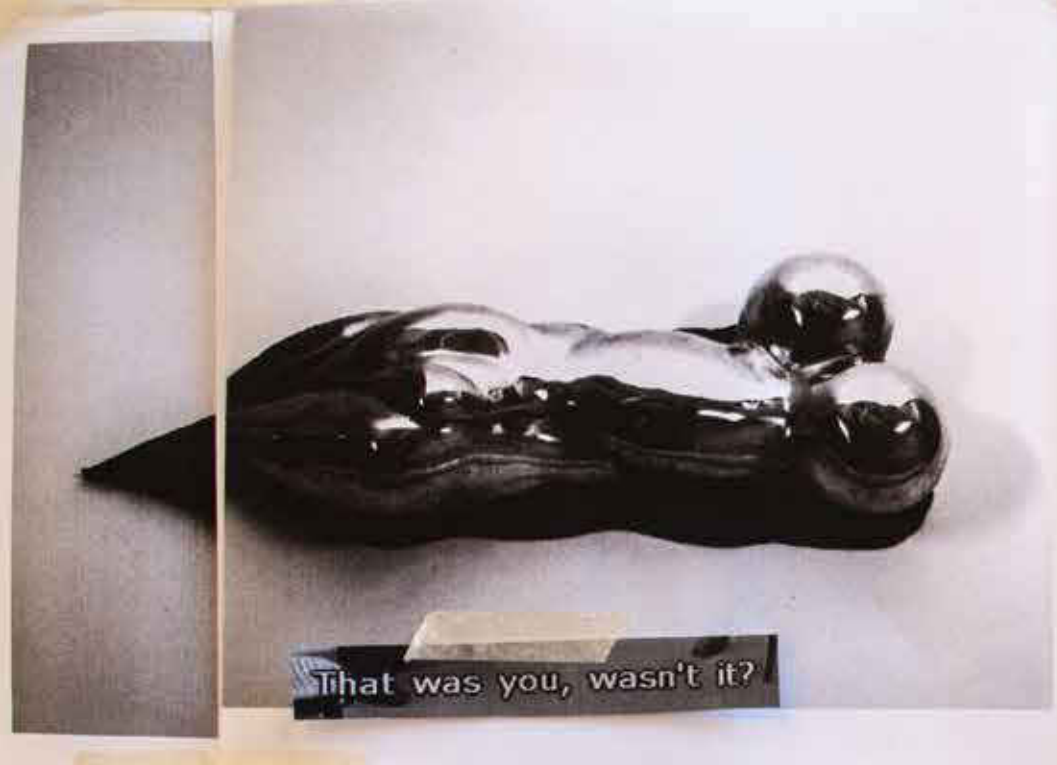
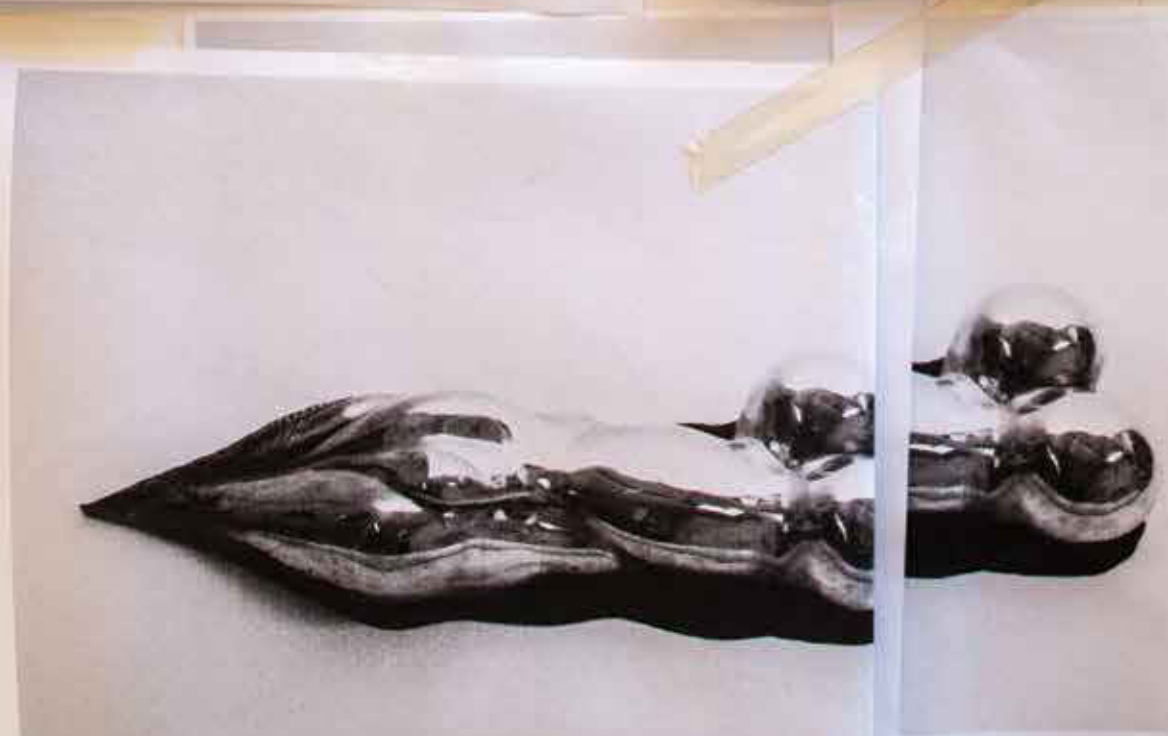
WOODEN ROOM





monster

VINCENT MALLE présente

SWEET MOVIE

UN FILM DE DUŠAN MAKAVEJEV

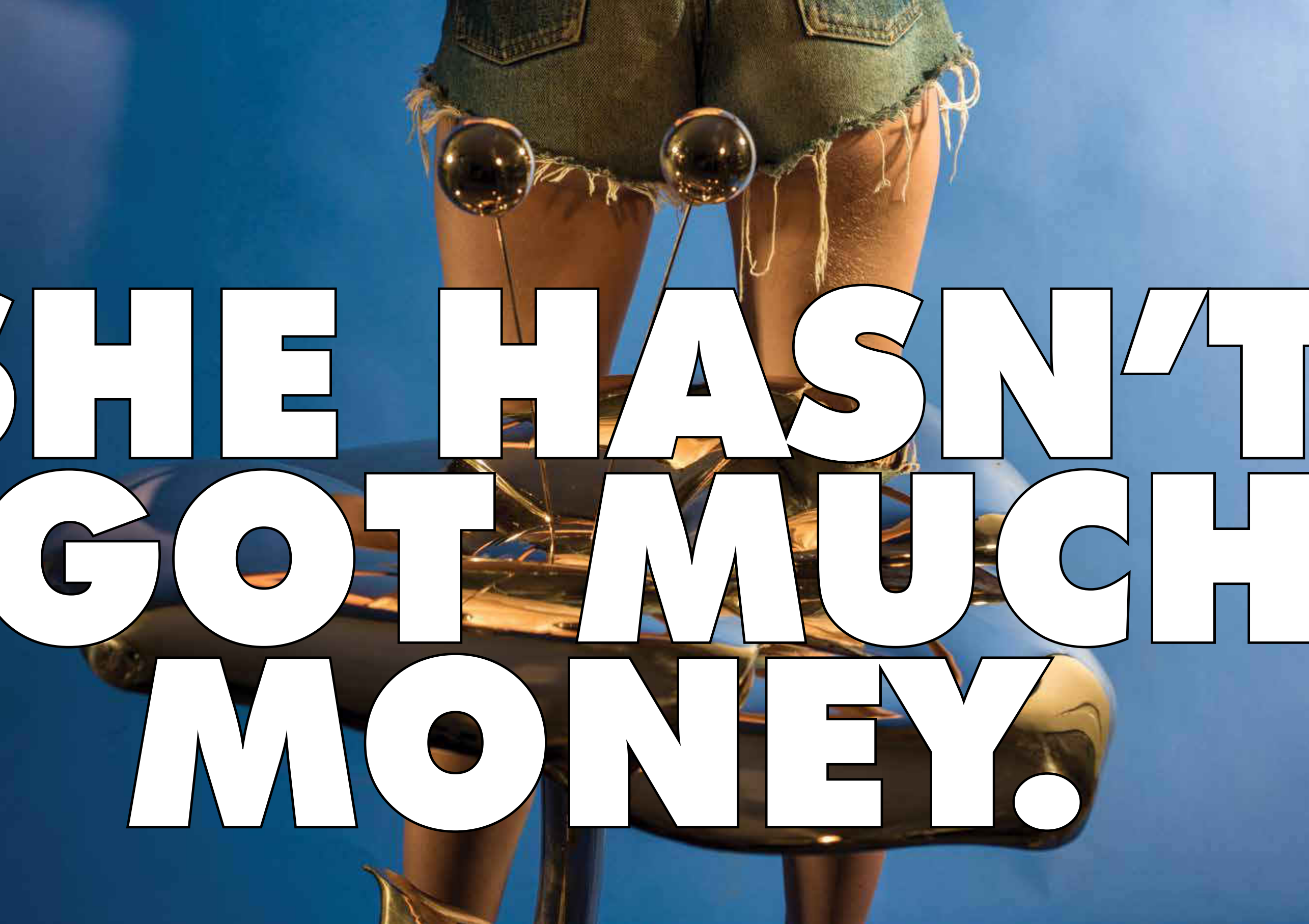
Distribué par A.M.L.F /Paris

INTERDIT AUX MOINS DE 18 ANS

Cell

Start frame


SHE HASN'T
GOT MUCH
MONEY.



SHE HASN'T GOT MUCH MONEY.

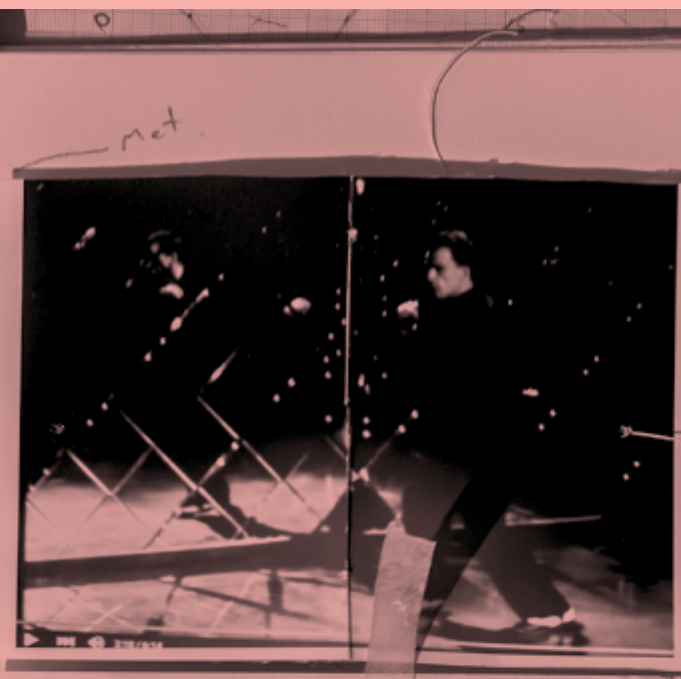

She never speaks about herself, she could be anything.

CLAIRE I AM
Elizabeth Newman

dissection articulates a modern malaise
society frays at the edges
decay and deformity challenges
beauty manifests
in modes of display.

When I was 15 I had a stalker,
I lived in Macclesfield, North England,
and it was 1977
edgy abject nightlife
modernism was king
weld big chunks of metal

draw from all learning experiences
underpinned by a passion
the curator brokers an extraordinary
relationship
wooden clad boardroom



Misha ISCP.
This is my Mom
Beautiful
end scene.

VIDEO

JAPAN EYE TIT

3 X

① DARK BACKDROP STUDIO SHOT

② MIRRORED ROOM SET.

③ LIVERPOOL JULIE/MELL

EMOTION

camera lense.

Inward, outward gaze
Loosian window.
"defensiveness"

Sexuality and Space
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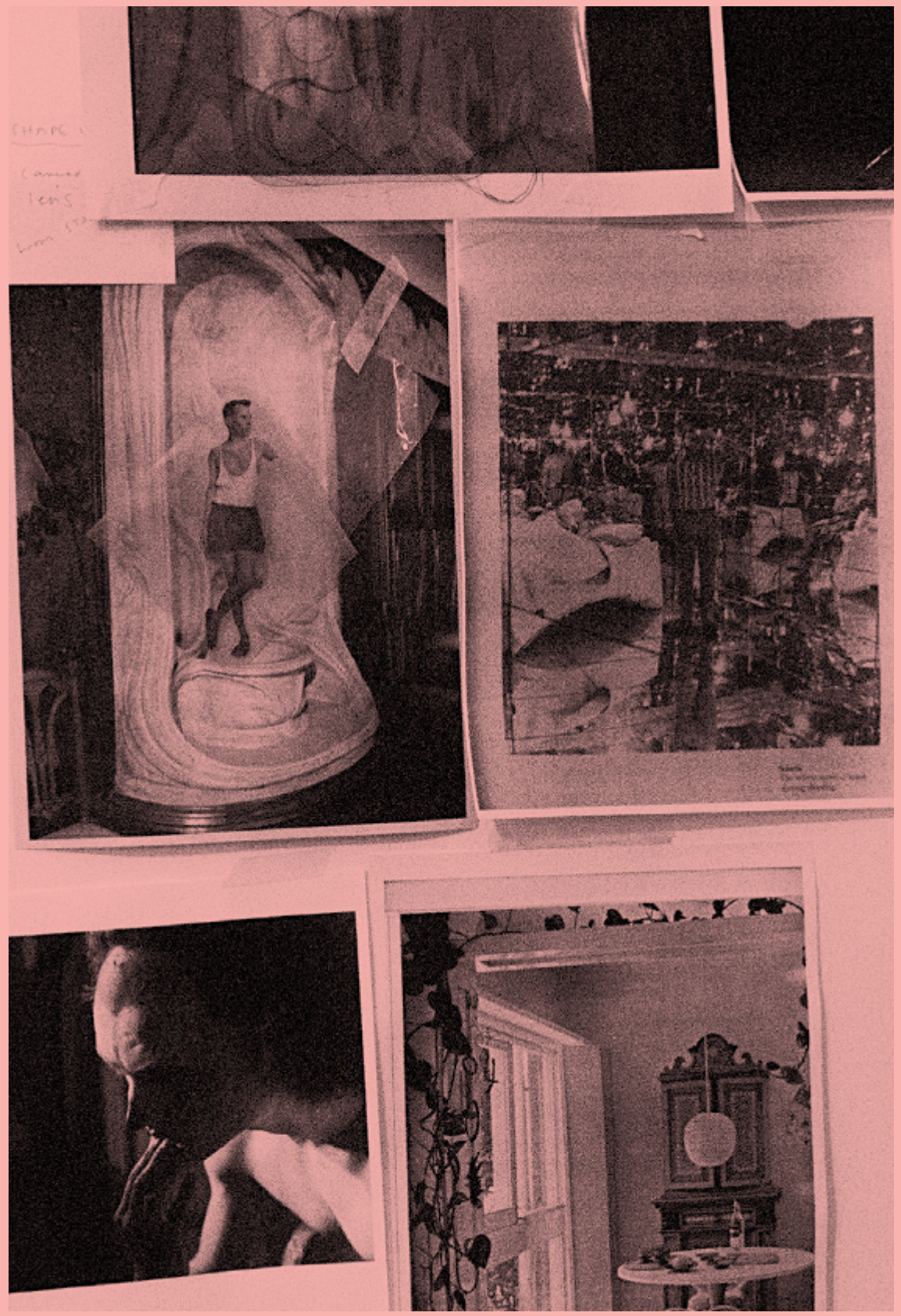
ment is still located in a nineteenth-century city: it is a penthouse in the Champs-Elysées. In "ideal" urban conditions, the house itself becomes the artifice.

For Le Corbusier the *new* urban conditions are a consequence of the media, which institutes a relationship between artifact and nature that makes the "defensiveness" of a Loosian window, of a Loosian system, unnecessary. In *Urbanisme*, in the same passage where he makes reference to "Loos' window," Le Corbusier goes on to write: "The horizontal gaze leads far away. ... From our offices we will get the feeling of being look-outs dominating a world in order. ... The skyscrapers concentrate everything in themselves: machines for abolishing time and space, telephones, cables, radios."[46] The inward gaze, the gaze turned upon itself, of Loos' interiors becomes with Le Corbusier a gaze of domination over the exterior world. But why is this gaze horizontal?

The debate between Le Corbusier and Perret over the horizontal window provides a key to this question.[47] Perret maintained that the vertical window, *la porte fenêtre*, "reproduces an impression of *complete* space" because it permits a view of the street, the garden, and the sky, while the horizontal window, *la fenêtre en longueur*, diminishes "one's perception and *correct* appreciation of the landscape." What the horizontal window cuts from the cone of vision is the strip of the sky and the strip of the foreground that sustains the illusion of perspectival depth. Perret's *porte fenêtre* corresponds to the space of

Beatriz Colomina
113

been replaced
ting, "without
and the camera
sonal observa-
ew." In framing
system of cate-
tion. It collects
is a system for
the picture is the
windows. In another passage from the same book the window itself



SPACES IN BETWEEN AND UNDERNEATH
Emma Jane Unsworth

Layers. That's what we end up talking about. Layers in work, and in life. The people we are, the places we come from – how these are like skins and coats that we wear, building up over the years, woven by memories and experiences. At the time of our conversation, Claire Lambe is back in the UK, revisiting filmic memories in her old hometown of Macclesfield to feed into her new exhibition, *Mother Holding Something Horrific*. I'm fascinated by how it must feel to have moved to the other side of the world and then come back and confront visuals from your past, as a foreigner, as a free spirit, in a place that is both home and not-home. Lambe's work is multi-layered, skewering wide-screen themes of gender, sexuality and class with ballsy brio. She tackles things head-on, as a sculptor and a thinker, even that most elusive of modern ills: anxiety. In this way, she's opening channels of dialogue in tricky, uncomfortable areas; peeling back the sheets to reveal spaces in between where there's room for manoeuvre as an artist, for conversation as a viewer, and for an emotional response that's perhaps beyond both.

There are literal layers evident in the new work. Mirrors and frames. Bodies covered, half-covered, buried, wrapped. The images-in-progress I've been privy to are a mix of jumbled film stills, experience and passed down cultural memory – from jelly wrestling in Tokyo, to the petals of a pornographic bronze flower, to Claire's son covered in chocolate. Truths and identities masked and unmasked. Things unfurling. The tease of this. The threat. There's a wild fun to Claire's style. A fierce playfulness. She tells me that she has been experimenting with the use of subtitles, seeking to utilise film tropes without conforming to narrative: taking the form of a discipline and trying to find new spaces within that. That's what makes her work exciting: the gleeful antagonism. The risks.

Playful it may be, but it's also emotional stuff. That's something else we end up talking about: sensitivity. Because if we create things, how much do we *want* to feel? Enough to create, but not enough to be driven to distraction; to be prevented from working. It's a very very very fine line. Worry can be crippling, but wearing your nerves on the outside now and then is necessary for empathy, and the best raw material. Anxiety is a big theme in Claire's work. 'Anxiety is a questioning of the self constantly,' Claire explains. But how to pull out that constant questioning and capture it in an image? Especially within the current global crisis, when it's potentially problematic to go too far inside yourself. Claire tells me that she fears being self-indulgent, and I get this strong sense of responsibility from her, a commitment to engage rather than detach. To give a fuck. Not that her politics play out too overtly in her work. We both agree that the best art keeps its politics implicit. It embodies them as a skeleton rather than wears them as a costume. The term feminism has been branded and rebranded almost beyond recognition in recent years. We need to keep an eye on it. Capitalism keeps us all in our places, after all. We need to get weirder, braver, wilder if we want to really rail against the expectations and normative pressures of society; if we really want to unpick these structures we've been stitched into. So where is the safe environment for a woman to be out of control? Art? Intoxication? As a female artist, Claire seeks to create this space within her work but also comment on it. A manifold aim for a manifold effect.

Politics, implicit and explicit, also relate to a sense of collective experience and collective memory. Claire's work interrogates how memory conditions our actions in the present. Memory that is learned through education and family histories. Memory that is ideologically brought in. The layers of who we are and where we've been – and what we've been told – become filters for us to look through. We are all the sum total of our experiences. Our identity is often constructed around things we haven't directly experienced, but our ancestors or allies have. All these different layered levels in memory build our experience of the present. Can you 'restage' something without the the contemporary being part of that experience? Can you channel the old emotion without the nostalgia? Maybe… maybe through the objects and materials you use, and the thoughts or feelings that they provoke.

Which brings us to the layers in the experience of the work itself. Claire ponders whether sending a sculpture into a situation, a strip club say, would make the sculpture the victim or the voyeur. If it's a staged exercise, it becomes stylised not true. If you insert a form into a real situation, you become complicit. But, she maintains, our own objects are *witnesses*. I find this so interesting. I think of Nick Cave's line about 'objects and their fields' from his song 'The Mercy Seat' – things humming with their own shape and potential. Most objects have witnessed intimate moments, and are carried with us throughout life. These objects then fall into various categories. The things we display in our living rooms. The things we stash under our coats. The things we hold up to the light and look through. Objects also often play a part in our rituals. In our personal pleasure, and public violence. Claire is interested in the relationships between objects and images, and how these might disturb conventional notions about gender, class and sexuality. Anger helps with the disruption, to a point. 'I feel like I've always been angry, which is another layer,' she says. But it's not sheer rage she illustrates. It's more that she draws on that darkness and takes it to another place.

That place might well be Northern England. Certainly in terms of the humour – cheeky, mischievous, sexualised, cruel – which I recognise in glorious abundance in Claire's work. The humour on the streets up North, in the clubs, in the taxi queues, is a peculiar brand of banter. It's warm but also challenging. Deployed in art, it's a way of keeping the channels of communication open whilst simultaneously making powerful points. I do wonder about humour, though. In Claire's portrayals of parts of the female body. In my own use of descriptions of women's bodily functions. I wonder how aggressive we're actually being, despite the laughs. Are we pushing it as far as we can in an attempt to test the boundaries, to test what people can take, what they will stick with us for, and where they will draw the line and turn around? And isn't that reaction, a reaction worth having sometimes? When people tell me they had to stop reading my novel at page 50 because they just couldn't take it any more, I'm not always as offended as they might like. If I am making you laugh, is there a power dynamic in that? As in, am I controlling your response? Or, if it's a pleasurable experience for you, is it just a gift? Does the reader or viewer have the power? It's a complex relationship with humour – it can make us feel good, but it can also disarm us. In general, I suspect Northern working-class sensibilities are a stubborn skin to shed. Formative years spent in the North of England often play out time and time again, in concrete colours and atmospheres, sliced through with brutal fun.

The layered environment of Claire's new exhibition has one last element I want to talk to her about: collaboration. The mirrors and frames will act as a backdrop for a performance with Atlanta Eke, an artist, dancer and choreographer Claire has worked with before, blurring the boundaries between artwork, set and experience of the work. Collaboration fills me with dread and wonder. How do you work with someone and maintain a single vision? How does she feel about her work being a 'backdrop'? Is it hard trusting someone, letting someone in like that? Novelists usually work in solitude, with novels to be read in solitude. I've experienced collaboration as a screenwriter, but it's not easy. I'm curious as to how Claire approaches it. She explains that she enjoys the process of 'generosity and openness'. She says that she doesn't always know how to express herself in the moment, but Atlanta 'works with her body to find the abject'. In this way, the process develops the work. It seems that the layers go on and on – way beyond the moment of the work being produced. There is always more to find. In a way, it is never finished. Again, it's a case of Claire's work keeping dialogue and communication open. It's a generous way to operate. Brave. Open. Full of hidden spaces, and possibilities.

pp 88–90: Atlanta Eke, *Miss Universal* 2015
Commissioned by Chunky Move for the Next Move Program
Artwork by Claire Lambe
Courtesy the artists and Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne

ON BEDWETTING AND FUCKING CLAY: Claire Lambe in conversation with Max Delany and Annika Kristensen

AK: I'm going to start with a broad question in relation to the title of the exhibition: *Mother Holding Something Horrific*. Who, or what, is the mother?

CL: I don't know... I suppose that initially it's self-explanatory. It's a connection through time – for example, you are both a mother and a daughter... and I think that's where we started our thinking for the show, through all those temporal connections. What is a mother? I don't know what a mother is. I guess that's what I try to do: ask questions to myself that I can try and answer, or I can try to animate. I don't want to make any grand claims about the work.

MD: And so what then is the horror? What is being held?

CL: It's one of those binary things. What are you giving birth to? That can be a metaphorical question – sometimes, you don't realise what you're doing, you're just going through a process, and you have to deal with the horror of what you've produced. And it can be a reality as a mother, as well as a creator. It's as simple as that. I think that's the trouble: I don't want to think too deeply about the initial start of production and then I get into trouble because you have to then look at what you've done and sometimes you can't explain it, or – if you try to – it can be confronting.

AK: In that process of not knowing what you will inevitably produce, do you look to art-making as allowing you space to be either in, or out, of control?

CL: Out of control.

AK: And so what is it that you are seeking, in wanting to be out of control, and creating a space for that?

CL: Being out of control, for me, is such an important space, it's like dancing when you are off your face, intoxicated. You have this structure, a beat, rhythm and space to move in, you either consider the audience and perform to that or you go into the body, shut everything out and feel your way through, moving intuitively but slightly out of control, dislocated, uninhibited. It's trying to push yourself – and others too – exploring what you are capable of. That can be both positive and negative. Being out of control means you can't actually tell which direction you will go in. I look for that space where I am allowed to make mistakes. I definitely think that in growing up in Macclesfield in England, in the 1970s, we couldn't be seen to be subversive. As a young woman – if you wanted to explore your sexual identity, or gaze into a different class, literally to get out of what you were locked into both sexually and socially – if you got into trouble, or you pushed it too far, it was your own fault, not that of society. You had to find a safe environment in which to be out of control. It was about trying to find a place where you could push every single boundary and still be able to come back from that.

AK: Maybe we can talk then about collaboration, in light of art-making as a space in which to relinquish control – or the idea of not knowing what you will produce. In Emma Jane Unworth's text she has quoted you as talking about ideas of 'generosity and openness' in

your collaborative process. Could you elaborate on that idea of giving over, asking others to interpret the work, and why that is of interest or importance to you?

CL: I'm not a good collaborator. I find it difficult to see what I am doing within the process and I find it problematic to articulate what it is I am trying to find. I'm uncomfortable with directing others. What excites me about collaboration is the undetermined result of that experience. Atlanta [Eke] and I email each other late at night, after our other lives have wrapped up for the day. I'll send her an image text and then she'll respond. To quote Atlanta: 'I've been thinking quite a bit on horror, about its relationship to the invisible *Mother Holding Something Horrific*. For a performance to avoid producing representations of horror, when most real horrors are invisible, the challenge is choosing how and why to make things visible'. That response is her own, that response opens the work up to me, it is generous and whatever direction Atlanta goes in will be relevant, I can't control that, nor would I want to, so I suppose collaboration is a trust of sorts.

MD: The role that Atlanta plays, what she offers to the project, and the way that you set things up for her, is related to the role of the audience as well, who bring their own experience to bear?

CL: I don't set things up for Atlanta; we start with initial texts, questions and conversations, and her response is the work. Like me, I think she opens up to such an extent in the process, filtering every possibility, uncertain but resolute to keep expanding, so collaboration isn't always easy, nor should it be. What is interesting about performance is the discipline within, and inclusive nature of, the development process. It's the same with Daniel [Jenatsch]. As soon as I sent him an email about the project he immediately fired one back, diving straight to the point of the work. I want an audience to experience the work as is, allow it to be what it is, rather than necessarily to understand it.

We presume that the artist knows everything about the work. But working with Atlanta and Daniel allows me to see the experience of making, so hopefully collaboration will create another space – one that I don't yet know.

MD: Your work involves sculpture and film, plus photography, plus performance, plus narrative. And as well as formal collaborators, you have brought in family and friends to set up relationships between people and the environment. In thinking about the kind of dramaturgical situations that you set up, and the biographical elements of your practice, there is a kind of relationship between memory and experience, and then the reality of their re-enactment. Do you want to reflect a little bit about what you are trying to put into play? Which also relates to what Annika was saying about the orderly and the anarchic – you often set up situations that have a rational structure, but then things happen…

CL: I think what happens with hindsight and experience is that you learn the layered outcomes of certain situations, so you can't place yourself in those situations anymore. Memory conditions every action in the present. Memory is comprised of influences that we have been inserted into – for example education systems and family histories. Memory can be ideological, brought to you through community politics or beliefs. We carry the memory of events we are historically part of even if we weren't there. Memories can be transferred across generations. All these different layers or levels of memory build our experience of the present. Both the future and past dwell in the moment.

I am at a point where I have more time behind me than I do in front, so maybe it's more about restaging memories now, so I can, not necessarily understand them, but I can remake them if I want. I can tell a lie if I want. I don't have to be truthful. And I can push it, I can push it further than maybe I wanted to go, or I can retract from where I did go, and present something that is more palatable.

MD: The titles of your new works reference art history and psychoanalysis as much as they do your biography. *The Waterfall* 2017 is constructed like a hall of mirrors, a Mirror Stage, and its title makes reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés* 1946–66. *The Manual of Instructions* 2017 includes a photograph of yourself giving birth, and elsewhere in the exhibition you have a replica of Freud's chair. The childbirth image might be seen as a feminist riposte to Courbet – a restaging of the *Origin of the World* 1866. Freud's chair and the mirrors suggest a staging of desires and dreams and hopes and delirium. Are they conscious or unconscious impulses that bring these things together?

CL: I got called a narcissist the other day, which I had to look at. So, I hope it's unconscious – I don't want to be that person. It's hard to make a case for this *self-indulgent* position in light of our contemporary global awareness – amidst chaos and war – but it's still important for this transgressive space to exist, and to have a right to a deeply subjective position or voice.

It's unconscious but then, as a lecturer, as a teacher, you are constantly telling your students who are going through certain levels of anxiety that we have a choice not to place the self in the picture, to remove the self and research the subject, theme, or object of that anxiety. So it's unconscious, but maybe I'm still trying to remove myself…

MD: I would argue that it's not so much narcissism, but putting social situations in place to incorporate others and, by doing so, test the self in relationship to the world. You create space for the viewer, where they end up watching themselves in the space of looking.

AK: Absolutely, it's about allowing the viewer to enter a psychological space, as well as the creator, and to think about their own anxieties, or emotions, or thoughts…

MD: … and their relationship to those primal scenes…

CL: After an event, you can actually process that moment, look at it, and then remove yourself from it. I'm not ashamed of anything I've done – even though some of those things are shameful – because it's all a learning curve. I talked about this with Emma Jane Unsworth [who is also from the north of England] because I think, coming from a certain place and wanting to get out of it, you had to be so forceful. That force can manifest as a pretentious angry front, just to push through. The class thing in England was so hard to get out of, so you had to really fight. And then when you get to your education, into art school, into the structure of that, then you realise that you are coming from this Benny Hill world, and you're quite ignorant and foolish. You are constantly being confronted with lack.

Recently, I wrote this to Atlanta: 'When I was in the US, I saw Simon Critchley give a lecture at the New School. He talked about a study he had read by

Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, from the early 1900s, stating that they did not read Marx but Dickens, Walter Scott, Charles Carlyle and mostly *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan'. That's what I struggle with, moving from one place to another, one class to another, leaving a part of one's self behind. I'm still trying to look at that self and find a connection (Dickens), rather than trying to impress the scholarly self (Marx). I don't want my work to be just for other artists.

MD: There is a particular, very British tradition of social realism: from Hogarth to Mike Leigh's movies, and Mary Kelly, Sarah Lucas or Nathaniel Mellors, and you also just mentioned Benny Hill. To what extent do you see your own work as being informed by that trajectory – a kind of kitchen-sink, social realism, a critique or comment upon class?

CL: When I saw Nathaniel Mellors' *Ourhouse* 2010, where Babydoll is trying to teach Bobby Jobby how to spell potatoes – you know that bit? I understand so many layers in that one scene: the child, the teacher, the mother, the power we have as parents to destroy, crush, her sadistic nature, the surreal space of not understanding, the English establishment, the Irish, the dunce, the idiot, the fool. It makes me laugh because it's so cruel. I think it is cruelty combined with humour – that's where I feel galvanised. But we are all laughing together, because it's reality as well. I suppose it's why I've looked at Pier Paolo Pasolini's work, 'cruel reality'. How can you illustrate cruelty, make an image out of that? You're not allowed to get away with anything in the north of England, so everybody deals with it through humour. If you don't buy a pint, or you don't contribute in some way, or you're monologuing, then it will be said. But it will be said through humour. It's humour that allows people to get away with being cruel. Or it's humour that delivers a truth in a less brutal way, allowing the awkward to be said. It's a generous space. Again that can be both productive and reductive.

AK: Would you say that humour is also a method of coping or surviving?

CL: Yes. And it's a way of being truthful. It's a way of letting someone know what you really think. It's a way of communicating and dealing with the real. It's so direct. I think I'd like to be crueller (in the work), but I find it difficult. Fiction seems to be able to articulate that space, as does film.

AK: In our studio visits together, we talked about the cruel, abject, or depraved aspects of your practice and how you've been interested in pursuing the horrific, but not yet knowing if you had found it in the making of the work. Do you think now that you've arrived at a point of realising the horrific in the new work that you've produced for this exhibition?

CL: I think I have in the self, in my thinking, in the development and where I would like to go next. I don't know whether I have in the work. I want it to be harder and true, still with some humour in there, but I don't know if I have found the horrific yet. That's why I went home [to northern England]. We can talk about class, but I'm not that anymore, that's the trouble – I'm in no man's land. You go back and you're not in that space anymore, you're not part of it anymore. You're looking at it from behind glass – at a past, or at another self. I'm glad I'm at the point of looking through the glass – but it's also a loss, because you've lost simplicity – I have lost simplicity.

AK: Can you talk some more about the relationship between the past, the present and the future in your work? Because you have spoken before about memory being a continuous narrative, which sort of relates to what you have just said about having glass screens that separate the chapters of your life, but that you can look through. What is it about looking forward, or looking back, or questioning the now, that you are interested in examining in your work?

CL: I suppose that 'now' is always an in-between space. Memory of personal history is one body of knowledge I still draw from, but I also want to synthesise my knowledge of process to pervert some of those stories, to push them. It's too limiting to be based in the real. Writers draw from their own experience and take from what they absorb around them, the factual and constructed. I suppose that's what I've been doing really. Everybody has a different memory of one moment because as individuals we are each in a different emotional headspace at the time. One event could produce an ever-expanding body of work, because you can constantly re-contextualise it with present information, and past recollection, or the imagined future… I don't want to be stuck in any generation. I don't want to be stuck making sculpture, I'd rather give the sculpture a memory from three different times and shove it out there into another fiction, or another relationship. I want to be able to move through any time quite loosely and freely.

MD: You've spoken frequently in the studio about the influence of German film-maker Ulrike Ottinger. She refers to her films as 'living pictures' and tableaux, and your recent work in the studio has very much involved creating *tableaux vivant* – wild tableaus or *mise-en-scènes* involving people, sculpture and photography. A kind of narrative picture-making, with people. In an interview that you sent us, Ottinger talks about the principles of collage and montage that inform her work, and three key drives: stylization, fantasy and ethnography. Fantasy is about dreams, desire, unreality and the unconscious, whilst ethnography is about human behaviour in real social situations. Is that a helpful reading for your own work – a mixture of fantasy and ethnography?

CL: I was drawn to how Ottinger worked with different groups in Berlin in the '80s. It seemed like a similar environment to the one that I migrated to. On a really surface, social level, that's initially why I was drawn to her work. Also, when I originally saw Ottinger's film work, it was *of* the time. When you are inside an event, watching a film in the time that it was made, it's hard to summarise that period. Time marks itself. What I have taken from dramaturgy is that to develop a character you need to give them a past, as well as a present and hopes and dreams for the future. It's about separating time. That's been quite interesting because that's what I've been trying to do, I think, to reinterpret experiences within a different, or fictional space. For example, I talked about making a porn movie with the bronze flower…

In 1987 I was a hostess in Japan. Apart from the formal structure of hostessing (i.e. providing company for a guest), there was another world that you could be drawn into, for example paid sex, or paid to watch sex. I drew a line in the sand, not morally, but for self-preservation. I had to ask myself what my limits were, personally.

If I instead sent a sculpture into that situation, and didn't go personally, would it still feel as if I had crossed my

line of self-preservation or would I have become the client? How is it possible to extract that experience or feeling? If I stage the exercise it becomes stylised, not true. If I inserted the form into a real situation, I would also become complicit. It could just exist as an action, that the sculpture has witnessed sex, not porn. It could witness sexual encounters or intimate moments. Most objects have witnessed intimate moments, and can be taken with you throughout your life. Architecture and place tend to stay put.

MD: You have mentioned Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as one of the first English-language fictions, with characters devised so that people could relate to them. Can you talk about the role of folk songs and vernacular humour in your work – we just had a look at a new image that you've produced, with the wonderful caption: 'I wish I had a cockerel to raise me at dawn'…

CL: Well again, I guess it's trying to look back at the culture that you're from… identifying a collective moment and trying to imbed that in the work. I do want people to relate to what I produce, as a character, or have empathy… There is a lot that you bury when you leave a place – you bury it because you can't bear it – and I suppose that through time, and with fresh eyes, you can revisit certain situations and draw from them. Or maybe I've been getting a bit too serious and I just felt that I needed to get some good old-fashioned humour back into the work…

AK: Let's extend that idea of becoming too serious, or maybe digressing from yourself, from who you really are. We've spoken during the course of your making work for this show about the process of art-making as trying to achieve a truth. Do you think that you've reached an inherent authenticity here, in making this new body of work?

CL: I feel that I cannot see it. I don't think you can until you can step back – even in a year's time – and really see it. I am in it. I realised when we had an earlier chat about finding the horrific. That it was important to me but I also want a dark humour, and some pleasure – even if it is a bit bawdy.

MD: The construction of visual pleasure and sensual pleasure is apparent throughout the work – do you see that as related to women's sexuality or libido (in counterpoint to certain branches of conceptual art which sought to disavow the sensual…)?

CL: Oh, you know, this is going to sound really fucked up. But I remember when I used to wet the bed as a child, I remember the pleasure of just pissing in the bed. You know when it seeps out and you just relax? I think if I could just get to that point in the work, dealing with the kind of horrific realism and what comes from your actions afterwards, then maybe that's what it is all about. It's about having to deal with it afterwards. After you've made your mess. But you also need to be able to look back and laugh about it.

AK: And enjoy the moment of it! You've written 'bedwetting' on a note on your studio wall – which appears as an image in this catalogue. And also: 'fucking clay'. Do you want to talk about some of these references to materials, and your relationship to them?

CL: I think, maybe, that's what I didn't have the courage to do in this show…

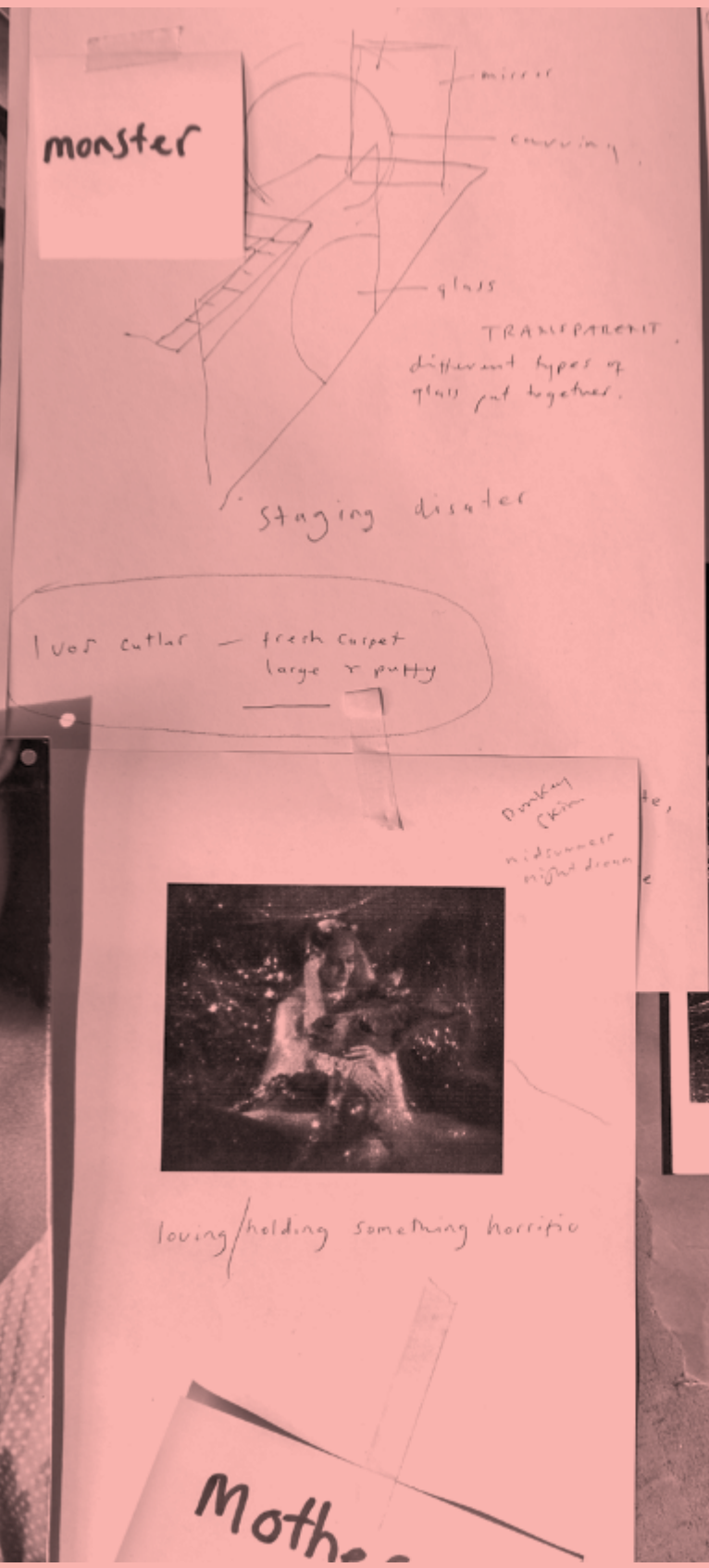
MD: You've gone some way towards it with chocolate, and mud, and burying your family…

CL: I think that's the trouble – I would like to go further. But I have to digest what I've done initially. Especially now, I feel like we are being censored more than ever. We are told how we should behave – there is a lot of normative pressure today. It makes me wonder where the safe environment is in which we are allowed to be out of control. So do we create that space within the work or am I commenting on that?

Art, for me, isn't therapeutic, it's a pain in the arse. Although I did have a fetish relationship with Freud's chair. I used to go to Freud's museum and I wanted that chair. So some of these interests are definitely subconscious. I love the research and the connections that you find in the process of making work, but then you need to put the blinkers on and get back to the guts. We don't initially have to understand what we are doing. Because once you're holding the horror, you can start looking at it from other angles, another time, another voice, another history and be a bit braver…

I spoke to Lou [Hubbard] the other day and she said: 'Are you embarrassed about what you have done'? We both think that's important… but the answer is maybe not enough.


VINCENT MALLE
SWEET MOVIE
UN FILM DE DUŠAN MAKAVEJEV
Distribué par A.M.L.F. /Paris


monster
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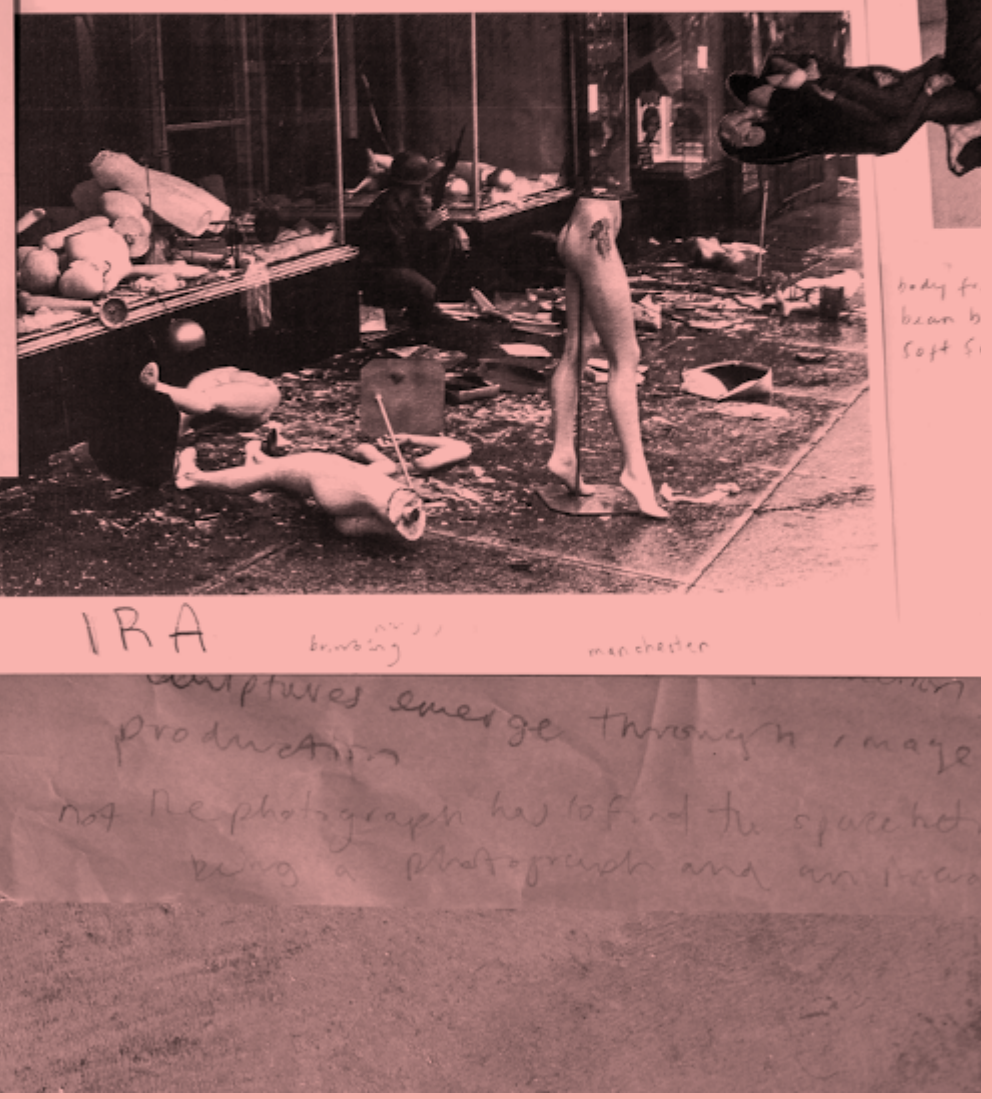
different types of glass put together.
staging disaster
Ivor Cutlar — fresh carpet large & putty



loving/holding something horrific

IRA
manchester


Experianced
VIDEO
She never speaks about herself
She could be anything.
You've simply destroyed the image
monster
Sister
Landscape
Sound TRACK
Soundtrack.
theorema

BIOGRAPHY

Claire Lambe was born in Macclesfield, England, in 1962, and lives and works in Melbourne. Lambe completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Bristol College of Art, Bristol, in 1985, after which she moved to London where she worked as props maker for a community theatre company. This was followed by a period spent in Japan, where she volunteered for the *Survivor*-style military run *Operation Raleigh*, eventually extending her time in Japan and supporting herself by working as a hostess. Relocating to Sydney in 1987, Lambe continued working in props for the Sydney Opera House. Lambe returned to study in 1990, undertaking a postgraduate diploma at the University of New South Wales. She returned to London in 1995 where she obtained a Master of Fine Arts from Goldsmiths. In 2003, Lambe moved back to Australia, choosing to base herself in Melbourne. Alongside theatre and academic work, Lambe presented two exhibitions at Ocular Lab, *The Fitting*, 2004, and *Ultra Primo* 2009. With artist Elvis Richardson, Lambe established the artist-run project DEATH BE KIND above The Alderman in Brunswick from 2010–11. A Studio Artist at Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne from 2012–14, she was awarded a studio residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program in New York in 2016, and is the forthcoming recipient of an Australia Council studio in London in 2017.

Recent individual exhibitions include *Miss Universal*, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 2015, and an accompanying performance, both with Atlanta Eke, for Chunky Move, 2015; *Strangefellows* (with Lisa Young), Wyndham Arts Centre, Werribee, 2015; *Lazyboy*, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, 2012; *Beadlestaff*, Switchback Gallery presented by Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2011; and *Yakety Sax* (with Lou Hubbard), Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, 2011.

Recent group exhibitions include *The Public Body*, Artspace, Sydney, 2016; *Lurid Beauty*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2015; *Melbourne Now*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2013; *Like Mike*, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne, 2013; and *Neverwhere*, an Asialink project presented at Gaia Gallery, Istanbul, 2015, and touring in 2016–17 as *Erewhon*

Claire Lambe is represented by Sarah Scouts Presents, Melbourne
sarahscoutpresents.com

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Rex Butler, et al., 'Critique: 7 Writers for 15 Artworks', *Gertrude Studios 2015*, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 2015

Max Delany and Annika Kristensen (ed.s), *Claire Lambe: Mother Holding Something Horrific*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2017

Helen Hughes, *Contiguous Sexualities: Claire Lambe's Sculpture*, unpublished text, 2011

Kylie King, 'Surrealism and the Monstrous Feminine', in Simon Maidment and Elena Taylor (ed.s), *Lurid Beauty, Australian Surrealism and its Echoes*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2015

Sophie Knezic, 'Claire Lambe's Libidinal Economy', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 296, March 2017, pp. 26–31

Claire Lambe, 'Ultra Primo', in Julie Davies and Brad Haylock (ed.s), *Hostings: Ocular Lab 2003–10*, Surplus, Melbourne, 2012

Vikki McInnes (ed.), *Erewhon*, National Exhibitions Touring Support, Melbourne, 2016

Jess Olivieri, *Claire Lambe and Atlanta Eke: Miss Universal*, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 2015

Toni Ross, 'The Public Body .01', *Artforum*, January 2017, accessed 15 March 2017, https://www.artforum.com/inprint/issue=201701&section=sydney

Dan Rule, 'Claire Lambe: The Strange Beating Heart of the Matter', *Vault*, no. 9, April 2015

LIST OF WORKS

Claire Lambe

House of bones 2017
acrylic screens, steel and wood frames, photographic prints, sculptural objects
3 screens: 220.0 x 320.0 x 20.0 cm; 220.0 x 180.0 x 20.0 cm; 180.0 x 220.0 x 20.0 cm

Ma femme au chat ouvert 2017
bronze, sound, speakers
sound: Daniel Jenatsch
90.0 x 75.0 x 75.0 cm

The manual of instructions 2017
mild steel frame, jelutong wood, wooden birthing stool, photographic prints, light
dimensions variable

She hasn't got much money 2017
C-type photographic prints on aluminium composite panel
3 prints: 94.0 x 140.0 cm

The waterfall 2017
glass mirror, mild steel frame, photographic prints, sculptural objects, found furniture, memorabilia, LED lights
250.0 x 500.0 x 1000.0 cm

All works courtesy the artist and Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne

Atlanta Eke

Mother Holding Something Horrific – The dance 2017
dancers: Atlanta Eke with Annabelle Belharry
musician: Daniel Jenatsch
A weekly performance with music as accompaniment and films; edited via live-feed video recording and playback on TV screen
Courtesy the artist

CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Newman is an artist and psychoanalyst based in Melbourne.

Emma Jane Unsworth is a novelist and screenwriter from Manchester, England.

Annika Kristensen is Curator, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

Max Delany is Artistic Director and CEO, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

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Artist's Acknowledgements

Performance: Atlanta Eke
Sound: Daniel Jenatsch
Production assistant: Marlon Lambe
Photographic models: Emily Taylor, Mel Sullivan, Julie Walker, Remy Johnson, Pascale Dawson
Production: Huw Smith
Glass slumping and mirror: Frank and Marga Kos
Bronze: Mal Wood
Thank you: Joseph Lambe, Boris Lambe, Peter Sheila Hodkinson, Jayne Hughes, Martin Hughes, Simon Hodkinson, Nicola Hodkinson, Richard Hodkinson, Karen Hodkinson, Elvis Richardson, Lisa Young, Louise Paramor, Christine Schmidt, Audrey Schmidt, Phebe Schmidt, Vikki McInnes and Kate Barber from Sarah Scout Presents, and the ACCA team.

Curators' Acknowledgements

Enormous thanks go first and foremost to Claire Lambe, for her enthusiasm, ingenuity and tireless work in producing this exhilarating exhibition. *Claire Lambe: Mother Holding Something Horrific* is the artist's most ambitious solo exhibition to date and it has been an absolute pleasure to develop the exhibition together with Claire, and to introduce her work to new audiences. We are also grateful to Claire's artistic collaborators – Atlanta Eke and Daniel Jenatsch – as well as those who assisted in so many ways with the presentation of the work, especially Marlon Lambe and Huw Smith. Our special thanks also to Emma Jane Unsworth for her catalogue essay, which translates Claire's work into like-minded words, to Elizabeth Newman for allowing us to republish her 2011 poem for Claire, and to Matt Hinkley for his perceptive design of the publication. As always, the ACCA team has worked with great professionalism and enthusiasm in the development and presentation of the exhibition and its attendant programs and events. Particular thanks are also due to our installation crew – Beau Emmett, Patrick O'Brien, Simon McGuinness, Brian Scales, Simone Tops and Danae Valenza – for bringing ideas into reality and the exhibition to life.

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