



Grace Kingston: Embodied

A solo show at Plump Gallery
240 Enmore Rd, Enmore
7th of April 7pm
Running until 15th of April
gracekingston.com

Exhibition Catalogue

Grace Kingston: Embodied Solo Exhibition at *Plump Gallery*

April 2011

The online body and the modified body are both prosthetic, similarly composed they proceed towards visibility through a process of intervention and exaggeration. In so far as I know, my research is the first structured investigation into the common aesthetic and formal process endured by bodies designed by their own authors, for display. My research will exist in the arena where the online body and the modified one compete for attention. Where some theorists have posited a reading of the hybridised body as a post modern construct [Sobchack, 1990] or an articulation of technological-fetishistic desire as a metaphor for feminist desire [Haraway, 1986], my work looks instead towards the willfully problematised practice of body art, such as the work of Orlan, Julie Rrap or Stelarc

The online and modified bodies are both stages for rhetorical display and are therefore best understood as loci before they are flesh. On this body, as a site for desire changes are imposed in the same way that farming imposes changes on the landscape and for similar reasons. My research contextualises within a set of art historical references, such as the authorial process common to the construction of an online identity - and the composition of the fetishised body. Both bodies – ethereal and corporeal are fictions and therefore they proceed from an act of sustained and creative authorship. My research intends to engage with the language used to articulate the composited body as part of an investigation into the possibilities that its grammar has considerable relevance to visual artists working on themes on or around the body.

Bloody Machine

2011

Bloody Machine is an endurance performance piece, which seeks to appropriate retro imaginings of the future of computers with people, and juxtapose it with the reality of contemporary technology. Early discourse around Cyborgs and cybernetics, such as those featured in *Neuromancer* and *Snow Crash*, had a tendency to focus on the literal aesthetic of computers 'plugged' into people. Or featured the idea of a personality 'downloaded' into the machine, leaving the organic body useless as discussed by N. Katherine Hayles et al.

However the reality has been much less extreme but just as dependent. The body is still left 'untapped' in relation to the machine, yet copies of the data that relate to us as individuals are stored on a number of our personal machines (laptops, phones etc) as well as those kept by government and corporate agencies. Provided the physical mechanics of these computers are not damaged they should be permanent testaments to who we are/were, long after our deaths.

Inspired by Fiona McGregor's bloodletting performances documented in *Strange Museums* I propose to set up a lead from a vein in my arm and 'plug it into' an iPhone. As I bleed the device will sustain damage to its hardware and I will weaken from blood-loss, thus creating a race to see who will pass-out/shut-down first. This image aims to be reminiscent of the Cyborgian images mentioned earlier as well as adding to the discourse of contemporary body modification performance. I have chosen to focus on Apple products because they are the dominant technological brand on the market with designs that are widely recognised as future-forward.

Embodied Facebook

2010

This series is based on the premise that our online persona(s) can be seen as an extension of the embodied self and the practice of adding and withholding information from our profiles mirrors many acts of modification we inflict on our physical selves. It is important to note that this kind of comparison is only really applicable within the realm of social networking, as opposed to profiles on online games such as World of Warcraft. This is due to these characters operating in a fantasy setting not the real world, we can consider these representations of self as costume more than modification. Therefore even if an individual chooses to set up an account of purely fictitious information, they are still speaking as the author to the 'real' world, this kind of scenario can be considered an extreme form of online self-modification.

These self edited representations show what the user perceives as their best points, flattering profile pictures and witty information pages attempt make a connection with others who view themselves in a similar light. Another similarity to physical modifications is that these platforms often also leave traces of the edit (that can however, later be deleted) on the individuals page, bulletins like "Grace has edited her profile information" act like a scar on the body allowing others to potentially piece together what was formerly present. Also like a corporeal body, there are basic limitations to the customization of your profile, some more limiting than that of a real body. Most sites like Facebook will insist on forcing the user through drop-down box channels of limited selection, a key example being gender where only female or male are available, leaving many trans people and gender queer in the dark. Another draw back to these online branches of self is the deception of privacy. Being given the power to accept or deny people as 'friends' on Facebook fosters the illusion that we are operating within an arena of peers, not the entirety of the Internet. However as many of us have already discovered, the information we are forced to give to Facebook on our initial sign-up period and the types of pages we "like" is then shared with advertising companies target marketing their products to demographic that we are seen to fit into. It is then that we often see what assumptions are made about our constructed identities by the rest of the world, and they are not always as flattering as we might have thought.

Disembodied Bondage

2010

This installation piece discusses the redundancy of our natural physical body with the rise of our online presence and body modification/self-directed evolution. Each addition we make takes us another step away from that which we were born with and as more people begin to regard the body as a site of performance and art making, the modifications we impose can be considered literal etchings on our blank slate. These etchings, particularly those of reasonable permanence are highly symbolic in nature and provide a coded biography of the self-imposed directions of the individual. In the past we looked at the features and skin tone of a person to discern cultural origin and therefore make assumptions of them based on our beliefs of that ethnicity. While the notion of racial profiling is highly flawed to begin with, the phenomenon of globalisation and rise of individualism has made this practice entirely redundant. We no longer look at a person's heritage to glean meaning, but rather their prosthetics.

Bio-Wallpaper

2010

Wallpaper has always fascinated me, particularly floral of *fleur de lys* designs as they're stylised versions of a natural aesthetic, which is similar to the results of cosmetic surgery/intervention into the human body – a smoothing out of organic imperfections. To play on this phenomenon the wallpaper design is a tiled image of a moss-root system that I physically styled into shape, photographed and colour doctored to create a traditional wallpaper likeness.

Special Thanks:

- Casimir J. Nolan – Web designer, Photographer, Design editor, All-round All-star
- Garth Knight – Bondage king, Patient planner
- Mim Spring – Film whiz, AV Queen, Photoshop master
- Willow Kirkbright – Gracious *Plump* host
- Paul Thomas – Inspirational supervisor, Fedora authority
- Viv McGregor – Photographer, Scooter siren, Arm flailer
- Ilise Houghton – Tolerant manager, Catering, Proverbial whip-cracker
- Sam Mooney – 24 hour tec/brain/heart support
- Stephen – Projector savior, Ginger good'un
- James Kyle – Transportation, Hug provider