

NSFW
**Contextual Influences on Perception: Representations of the nude
in public and private spaces**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination through any other institution.


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Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the influence of context on the artistic exploration of the nude figure, in the work of selected artists. Qualitative research methods were used. The research is practice-led, as my art making plays an essential part in guiding my research.

An outline detailing the various influences and changes to artistic practice surrounding the nude – from ancient Greece to the development of feminist ideas - provides an historic context to the study. I look at major sociocultural and technological advances to examine the relationship between artistic representations of nudity and context. This includes a look at the terminology, naked and the nude, and how these shape understanding. Contextual influences are narrowed down to how they have affected the work of selected artists' whose work utilizes the nude as a communication tool. The selected artists that I investigate are Jenny Saville (1970-), Erin M. Riley (1985-), Vinz (1979-), and myself.

In my own work, issues of public and private space are interrogated by looking at aspects of social networking and online behaviour. This exploration focuses on issues relating to the overlap of these two spaces that where once seen as dichotomous.

Through this research I showed that contemporary artists still make use of the historic subject matter. By including symbolism taken from contemporary sociocultural surroundings the nude's communicative value is continuously updated. This supports the idea that context effects the artistic exploration of the nude.

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Log in (Introduction)

This study argues that the artistic exploration of the nude figure is influenced by the context of the artist. I do this through an investigation of artistic practice in relation to sociocultural and technological advancements, and by looking at the contextual influences in the work of Jenny Saville (1970-), Erin M. Riley (1985-), Vinz (1979-) and a small selection of other artists in relation to my own artistic practice.

The nude figure is a vast area of interest; with its multitude of connotations it has been a subject of focus in art for centuries. Because of its importance as an art genre, the nude would become a defining feature of traditional art education. This practice focused on working from a life drawing model and has since been a steadfast part of teaching perceptual drawing – wavering for a period when conceptual approaches began to be favoured during the mid 20th Century with the rise of conceptual art.

My first experience with drawing a nude model was when I started studying. While in the final year of completing my degree, I was employed as a tutor for the extra figure drawing classes. Once I had completed the under graduate course I was employed for more hours teaching first year students drawing. I realized the potential in lecturing as a profession, but felt that there was still a lot to be understood. I felt that selecting to undertake the nude as a topic for a Masters study would provide an understanding of the subject. From the beginning it was clear that the nude figure is commonly perceived to be an old fashioned subject. So why was it still being used and what relevance does it have in a contemporary society? A review of current literature (Clark 1956; 1972; Dijkstra 2010; Borzello 2012; Gualdoni 2013; McCann 2014) shows that the nude takes many forms throughout history and today. The body has the ability to communicate a myriad of emotions, messages and ideas (Barcan¹ 2004). The way in which the figure is explored by an artist lays the way for specific meaning and interpretation. But, a critical reading and understanding of an image seemed to be based on the context of the work; and if this is the case, then how is an artists practice influenced by his or her

¹ Barcan is an associate professor at The University of Sydney (Associate professor Ruth Barcan 2013). Her research interests include nudity and nudism, feminist cultural studies and approaches to the body.

context? This research aims to show that there is a relationship between context and how an artist explores the nude.

Because of the breadth of the nude as a subject, this study is in no way an attempt at a comprehensive analysis of the topic (Clark (1956), Dijkstra (2010), Borzello (2012) & Gualdoni (2014) offer in depth analysis of the nude in art). The scope of the study is limited to Western art because of the numerous changes it has undergone, which are explored in chapter 1. The aim of this paper is to create a cross section of the area to examine the influential effects of context on the artistic exploration of the nude figure and provide some historical context to this topic?

Qualitative research methods were employed in collecting data; I looked at artists' backgrounds, concepts, thoughts and opinions, and analysed artworks. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight² describe qualitative research as:

Collecting and analysing information in as many forms, chiefly non-numeric, as possible. It tends to focus on exploring, in as much detail as possible, smaller numbers of instances or examples which are seen as being interesting or illuminating, and aims to achieve 'depth' rather than 'breadth'. (2006:64)

Artists and artworks were selected using purposive sampling, so as to focus on specific characteristics that are of interest to my practice and research objectives (Purposive sampling 2012).

This study was achieved using practice-led research methods, as my art making formed an important role in my research. Enquiry is based on the "insights, conceptualisation and the theorisation which can arise when artists reflect on and document their own practice" (Smith & Dean³ 2009:5). Secondary data was obtained through the use of various texts; books, journals, Internet sites and electronic databases. Each of these resources provided

² Blaxter is a lecturer in the School of Health and Human Sciences, Hughes in the department of Sociology. Both of which are situated at the University of Warwick. Tight is in the department of Educational Research at Lancashire University. (Blaxter et al 2006)

³ Smith and Dean are both Research Professors at the University of Western Sydney. Smith is in the Writing and Society Research Group, while Dean is in the Music Cognition and Computation at the MARCS Auditory Laboratories. (Smith & Dean 2009: 268-269)

information that was analysed using historical, conceptual and formal approaches. These approaches were used as they relate to aspects of artistic explorations of the nude figure and the surrounding context.

When I commenced this research there were various ethical considerations relating to nudity that had to be complied with. The proposal was scrutinized a number of times by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC). Amongst the issues raised by IREC were: photographic session to gather reference material for artworks (issues here related to the safety and gender of models, as well as storage of reference material); protection for viewers of the artwork. In the feedback supplied by IREC (29 October 2012) it was stated that “certain poses and features may be offensive to young women”. In response I agreed to censor reference imagery by using photo manipulation software, such as Adobe Photoshop, to conceal the model’s identity. Reference material was also to be stored on a password protected, external hard drive. The result of this process led to forms of self-censorship when exploring practical outcomes. Facial features in resulting artwork were also omitted so as to maintain anonymity. This censorship from the IREC mimicked that of social media platforms, on which images of nudity are frequently removed despite the context. Gibbs⁴ (2016) suggests that “censorship of nudity... [is done by applying] a one-size-fits-all approach”. These acts of censorship appear to be “aimed at stopping pornography and abuse” (Gibbs 2016). Censorship in this form is more about protection against offending sensitive persons, rather than repression (Majewska⁵ 2010:8). The element of self-censorship takes away from artistic freedoms and visual enquiry as a form of research. Sullivan⁶ (2005: xvii) states “visual arts research has to be grounded in practices that come from art itself”. Therefore, inhibiting practical outcomes can adversely affect research findings.

Once final approval had been granted by IREC, and research was permitted to commence, I felt that it would be safer to focus on using imagery sourced online as reference. This adds to the study outcomes by utilizing the formative qualities of the contemporary portrayal of the figure. Once research was underway, my research aims and objectives were refined and in

⁴ Gibbs is the assistant technology editor at the Guardian. His focus is on consumer electronics, security, privacy and the wider technology sector. (Samual Gibbs 2016)

⁵ Majewska is a feminist philosopher and activist. She lectures at Gender Studies at the University of Warsaw (Ewa Majewska 2015).

⁶ Sullivan is the Director of the school of Visual Arts at Penn State University. He is also a Professor of Art Education (Graeme Sullivan 2016).

the process eliminated many of the concerns put forward by IREC.

The practical component of this research is a body of work produced during the course of this study. The work explores the nude figure within a contemporary context. I am, therefore, influenced by modern technological advancements and the subsequent sociocultural conventions, such as selfies and other popular forms of image sharing. This exploration looks at the nude figure in relation to contemporary understandings of public and private space, using motifs that reference social networking services and other online elements. The work makes use of various media, from graffiti techniques and printed banners to traditional drawing and painting.

In each of the chapters that make up this paper I make constant reference to the literature on the nude, thereby incorporating the literature review into the whole dissertation. Because of this, it was decided that it was unnecessary to have a separate literature review chapter. The literature used varies to accommodate the diversity of the subject. Seminal texts such as *The Nude* (Clark 1956), *Ways of Seeing* (Berger 1972) & *The Naked Nude* (Borzello 2012) are key resources to this study as they encapsulate ideas and perceptions surrounding the nude at various contexts.

This study is achieved by firstly exploring the historic changes in the subject matter in chapter one. I explore the major shifts in representing the nude and artistic practice in relation to sociocultural advancements. This is often in relation to changing ideals, based on beliefs or technological capabilities. The aim of a historic contextual analysis is to create a broad overview of the nude as subject matter. This looks at the language used to describe the body before moving onto the general trends and mechanisms employed by artists in each period including Ancient Greece, Christianity, Renaissance, Modernism and Feminism⁷.

Secondly, in chapter two, I interrogate the practices of specific artists. The history of the nude has created a multitude of connotations for contemporary artists to draw from. Some of these are explored in the discussion of the works of selected artists. These artists are examined in

⁷ It is understood that Feminism is a continued movement and not a historic one. The emphasis here is on the influence Feminism had on the nude and its exploration in a specific period of time.

relation to their specific contextual influences. Even though 'The Nude', as it came to be known, is a person portrayed without clothing, the effects of social influences are ever-present in the artistic exploration of the body. How do artists imbed motifs that reference the social climate of the time? I look at how context has influenced aspects of their practice, such as the formal quality of the artwork and the intended communication. This look at specific influences of context helps situate my own practice in relation to my surrounding.

Lastly, I look at my own practice, which explores the modern overlap between public and private spaces since the development of the Internet, associated social media platforms and technology. This chapter relies heavily on the practical component of this study. The interrogation of the nude in the context of social media highlighted the tendency for nude selfies to portray his/herself in the best way possible. This influence of social media as a context has allowed the nude to go full circle as it relates back to the historic construction of the represented ideal. This forms the third chapter to this paper before moving onto the conclusion.

Chapter one

#TBT

The aim of this chapter is to interrogate the change surrounding, and subsequent effects on, the nude as subject matter. The effects of contextual changes are present in both practical and theoretical explorations of the nude. “The notion of ‘context’ is frequently used in order to place or explain things” (Van Dijk⁸ 2008:4). This research examines the nature of context as an influence and an important component in understanding; this is achieved by discussing language relating to the body and the differentiation between the nude and naked. The use of language has been a contributing factor to the understanding of the nude. This discussion is led by Clark⁹ (1956) and Berger¹⁰ (1972), who hold discordant views on the definitions of each term, and continued by contemporary authors such as Borzello¹¹ (2012). The way in which the subject is spoken or written about has helped differentiate between real life nakedness and represented nudity. This separation is also visible when one looks at the changes in artistic exploration of the body. From the idealized work created in ancient Greece to the real bodies influenced by photography and Feminism; through this discussion I will show that the artistic use of the nude has evolved from the portrayal of ideals and aesthetics to addressing the body as a conceptual site.

Naked/Nude

To understand contextual influence, it is necessary to survey the linguistic and environmental effects on the nude. Hinton¹² (2014:xi) states that making sense of context relies on how an environment is understood and then “it explores how language takes part in that understanding”. When we speak of historical periods we refer to particular social and cultural

⁸ Van Dijk is a professor at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. His work deals with discursive racism, news in the press, ideology, knowledge and context. He also has a number of publications on context.

⁹ Clark is an art historian who held the position of Director at the National Gallery, London, between 1933 and 1945. He also helped popularize art history on television with his series *Civilization* (Sorensen 2013). He is also the author of the seminal text *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* which was published in 1956.

¹⁰ Berger is a Marxist art historian and literary critic. He created, for television, the art appreciation programme titled *Ways of Seeing* (1972), which was then published as a book that same year – for which he won the Booker Prize (Sorensen 2013)

¹¹ Borzello is an author of a number of books that cover various topics, linking art to social history (Francis Borzello 2016). Her first book, *The Artist's Model*, originally published in 1982, tackled the issue of stereotyped life models as female. While *The Naked Nude* (2012) addresses the nude in contemporary art.

¹² Hinton is the author of a book titled *Understanding Context* and a Senior Digital Experience Architect at State Farm (About 2015)

orders. Later on I will discuss environmental effects on the artistic exploration of the nude as a subject. But before getting into historic roles it is important to understand the influence language has on the nude as subject matter and one's understanding of it. Van Dijk (2008:6) states "language and language use are of course social phenomena". The nude figure in art is a subject that has been referred to by a number of names and discussed in certain light depending on the name it goes by.

When you take off your clothes are you naked or nude? The body stripped of clothing, and its various represented forms, have been central topics of discussion through various, extended, points of time. The nude versus naked discussion has frequented literature since the 1950s. The conversation on this subject focuses on the evolving semiotics and semantics of the unclothed body. Because context comprises unpredictable variables it is often apt to create a conventional understanding of a subject at, or in relation to, a particular time through discourse signifiers. Here, language plays an influential role. Through selective use it is possible to control the perceptual outcomes (Van Dijk 2008:221). The figure in art has been subjected to this use of language. Naked and nude conjure varied images and offer different implications. This section explores the various perceptions of the subject of nudity through language and modes of representation. In this case language becomes the context from which the bare body can be understood; which can generally be considered the historic nude and the contemporary naked.

Through the literature I consulted (Clark 1956; Berger 1972; Borzello 2012) it becomes evident that the nude has many forms of meaning and a different name (naked) depending on the formal elements (the way in which a naked body is represented in art influences the way theorists have spoken and written about it. Is the figure an unknown person who shows no awareness of being naked? Or does the figure have characteristics that could only be specific to an individual? These are amongst the issues discussed in this section). With each of these titles the symbolism changes; the nude has integrity and reveals little, while the naked is shameful or exposing and honest. Even though the images are sometimes similar the language we use suggests different discourses and therefore a varied, sometimes contrasting, understanding of the final work. In discussing these arguments, I refer to the following authors: Clark (1903 – 1983) for his initiation of the discussion on the naked verse nude

dynamic, in which he favours the nude as ideal; and Berger (1926 -) who was selected for his addition to the discourse, in which he opposes Clark's views when speaking to the values of the naked. While these two authors have been cited by a number of authors, the discussion and progression of the naked versus nude argument has most recently been taken up by Borzello (1939 -). Borzello has created an overview of the nude, referring to both of the aforementioned authors and their contributions. But, she was selected for moving the conversation on to how the nude has been recycled and, now, reinvented as the contemporarily relevant naked nude.

The nude has become a subject that is differentiated from just being naked. Clark (1956:1) states that English, "with its elaborate generosity, distinguishes between the naked and the nude". The word operates as a euphemism for the term naked. While the *Oxford Dictionary* (2010:804) does define nude as "wearing no clothes; naked", it also states that it is "a naked human figure, typically as the subject of a painting, sculpture, or photograph". So even though the meanings overlap the nude signifies the artistic form. It is "the body reformed" into an image that is "balanced, prosperous and confident" (Clark 1956:1). This act of looking at the body transformed the subject from flawed and blemished to perfection, to art. Art, in this sense is created, not by "direct transcription" or "imitation, but, by perfecting" (Clark 1956:4), the represented nude is not a living body, "but a design". The body is redesigned for viewing, flaws ironed over and obscenity obscured to evade offence.

Clark was communicating that the artistic process translated and placed real life on a pedestal. Borzello (2012:18) states that Clark's message in *The Nude* (1956) "was that fine art was superior to life and by extension nudity in art was purer than nudity in life". There is a separation between the image and the sitter. So while there might be a level of discomfort in looking at, or being in the presence of, a naked stranger or person other than one's own partner, the nude in art was distanced from these feelings, allowing the nude to be looked at with the same seriousness as other esteemed genres of art making, such as portraiture or history painting. Borzello (2012:18) states that this "allowed artists to use it as a vehicle of expression that could stand for purity and truth as well as beauty". The literal stripping of the sitter also worked as a process that removed identity and transformed the body into a conceptual object.

The unclothed body represents the idea of form (Benjamin¹³ 2010:19) and speaks of numerous conceptual elements such as erotica, academia and art (Vaughn-Evans B¹⁴, pers. comm. 27 March 2012). These elements relate to both the nude and naked. Barcan (2004:77) states that while it is true that the figure cannot be fully understood outside of “it’s particular historical and cultural contexts” it is possible to identify “persistent elements of a symbolic tradition”. Barcan (2004:77) says that these symbols are held “in the most primal cultural binary – the division between good and bad”. Nudity exhibits positive and negative metaphors. Positive associations of the state include, “simplicity, lack of artifice or worldliness”, “honesty, openness”, innocence, humility and childhood”, “freedom”, “nature and ‘naturalness’” and “authenticity and truth” (Barcan 2004). Negative symbolism, which relate to nakedness according to Clark’s (1956) definition of nude, suggests, “exposure”, “a sign of sin and criminality”, “sex”, “death”, “shame”, “anxiety”, “punishment, humiliation and degradation”, “poverty, wretchedness, vulnerability”, “bare humanity” and “savagery” (Barcan 2004). Context brings out different attributes of the unclothed. Some of the main contexts will be explored in the following chapter.

The conceptual differentiation has aided the positioning of the nude in art as “superior to life”, and made it “fit to be viewed by either sex and of great benefit in moral terms” (Borzello 2012:18). The nude was no longer a rude image. Uplifted by the guise of art, which developed in practice and theory through the 18th Century, it became “admired and aspired to” as a symbol of perfection personified (Borzello 2012:18). Through idealization the “uncomfortable overtone” that Clark (1956:1) associates with shame is removed; it gives the unclothed body confidence. Through artistic transformation, flaws are overlooked and proportions and curves may even be altered so as to confirm beauty. This type of nakedness is performative (Floyd¹⁵ 2005:11). The nude is a presentation of the body, an image of, but different from, a naked person. The represented image removes the presence of the sitter, negating the realization that he/she is being looked at, therefore removing any embarrassment.

¹³ Benjamin is a fine art and portrait photographer. He is also a member of the faculty of the International Center of Photography in New York (The naked and the lens, second edition 2016.)

¹⁴ Vaughn-Evans is an artist and former lecturer in the Fine Art Department at the Durban University of Technology.

¹⁵ Floyd obtained a Phd in literature before moving into the visual arts, where he has completed a Master study (Edge of Nakedness 2005).

There are a number of views that define various processes of nakedness transformed into nude. Berger (1972:54) states that it is to be “seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself”. The nudity depicted in art is an artistic, and transformative, invasion of privacy; it is an invasion that asks for appreciation from the viewer and in turn is a process of objectification. The body becomes a “subordinate, passive object” (McDonald¹⁶ 2001:8). Art has created a context that allows nudity to be placed on display, for the pleasure of the gaze. While some images are defined according to Berger’s definition, others are depicted reacting to being seen. “Gathering up her dress, or shielding her breasts or genitals” (Spivey¹⁷ 1996:175). But these movements to hide body parts lead the eye to specific sites on the body, returning the naked, responsive figure to an object by placing meaning on these body parts. As particular body parts are covered an interest in seeing them develops (Spivey 1996:175). A mania surrounding Aphrodite, goddesses and woman of beauty, gave way for Greek sculptors to make what would become the compulsion to depict the nude female in Western art (Spivey 1995:175).

Berger (1972:53) offers an alternative and somewhat critical interpretation of Clark’s nude: a “balanced, prosperous and confident body” (Clark, 1956:1), when he says that it is a way of seeing that is achieved through art. ‘Nude’ is a term conceptualized to differentiate between the “beautiful, pristine, desexualized and socially acceptable” and “the vulgar...sexual and socially proscribed naked” (Gay 2011:1). It is a state in which the undressed becomes a costume. In contemporary society the ideal figure, the nude costume, has been taken over by advertising agents and “become a marketing strategy” (McDonald 2001:1). It is a subject that speaks about “beauty, perfection, or propriety; all matters that relate to ideals” (Benjamin 2010:19). The ideal figure works for this mode of representation as it is a reflection of “convention” (Dijkstra¹⁸ in Pitts 2010:51).

Nudity in art is a reminder of other branches of experience, “harmony, energy, ecstasy, humility, pathos” (Clark 1956:7), all of which would seem enough to give the nude endless

¹⁶ McDonald is an Honorary Fellow at the School of Fine Arts, Classical Studies and Archaeology at the University of Melbourne (McDonald 2001).

¹⁷ Spivey is a senior lecturer in Classical Art and Archaeology at the University of Cambridge. His research interests include Greco-Roman art. He has written a number of publications on Greek art and sculpture (Dr Nigel Spivey 2015)

¹⁸ Dijkstra is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature and Cultural History at the University of California (Dijkstra 2010).

value. But it is relegated to a period in art history; it is confined in “both space and time” (Clark 1956:7). The nude “is art with a capital ‘A’, the culturally acceptable face of the human figure with no clothes on” (Borzello 2012:6). While the ‘nude’ can still be found in photography, it generally refers to figurative images made before conceptual art. Since then, the nude in art has changed, from portraying ideals and aesthetics to tackling the body as a conceptual site. With this the terminology used in describing bare figures changed; the nude became the naked.

Clark (1956:1) states that “to be naked is to be deprived of one’s clothes”, a description that sheds negative light on nakedness. The idea of deprivation suggests nakedness is the body without protection. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2010:779) defines naked as a person “without clothes”, “exposed to harm; vulnerable” and “expressed openly; undisguised”. This definition does not accommodate the human form in art, as it is with ‘nude’. The naked is the body sans disguise (Berger 1972:54). Nakedness keeps identity intact (Benjamin 2010:10), it shows aspects of the subject’s character. By showing blemishes, scars and impressions left by daily activities, it is the lived body. The naked represents the body in its multiple variants - unlike the approved ‘nude’ that is “singular, academic, historical and exclusive” (McDonald 2001:1). The vulnerability of nakedness can be seen as a result of the naked person’s being aware of their unclothed state. Gualdoni¹⁹ (2012:9) says, “Nakedness is something that is acknowledged, that one is conscious of. It is a state of mind and of the gaze”.

Nakedness is the convention of nudity violated (Gualdoni 2012:123). Contemporary artists (seen in the selected artists chapter) have ignored the convention of nudity in their portrayal of the figure, looking instead at real bodies, “grittier”, bony figures, figures with excess flesh or differences (Borzello 2010:09). These contemporary depictions of nudity are not up to date versions of the historic nude. The use of the undressed figure in contemporary art sits comfortably under the title of ‘naked’. For many, the historic nude is of little interest and on the verge of becoming boring. Borzello states that:

¹⁹ Gualdoni is professor of the History Ancient Art at the Accademia di Brera, Milan. He is the former director of the museums of Modena and Varese and the Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, also in Milan (Gualdoni 2012).

“The very things that made the nudes of the past palatable for general consumption – their timelessness, their ideal quality, their pleasure in being part of the great tradition through their link to the chain of nudes preceding them – are precisely the things that do not interest contemporary artists who work with the nude”. (2012:10-11)

It is important to understand the discourse surrounding the unclothed figure. While the nude versus naked debate is historically relevant, there are developments in contemporary art that have moved beyond the definitions provided by key theorists such as Clark and Berger. Borzello (2012:11) states “it is a very naked nude, created to confront today’s attitudes and anxieties”. This new representation is an amalgamation of the positive and negative symbolism, used to convey contemporary interests. Borzello continues by saying that we now have “a nude that revels in Clark’s ‘uncomfortable overtones’” and that “it is the naked nude”.

Relating to the discussion of terminology used to describe the undressed body is that of framing, which can be directed through contextualization. The body in art is “a sign” that represents the human form along with a myriad of “metaphorical meanings” (Mirzoeff²⁰ 1995:2). These meanings cannot be completely controlled; the artists can only influence the reading by creating the work in a specific context with controlled framing. There are a number of contributing factors in classifying a nude as either art or pornography; “acceptable or unacceptable; sacred or profane” (Eck²¹ 2001:604). There are however categories that fit between these two, as well as further subcategories. There are “a range of cultural distinctions...[and] competing definitions of acceptability and unacceptability” (Nead²² 1992:85). Eck (2001:603) explores the interpretation of “nude images within popular culture”

Eck’s (2001) exploration of the nude provides four categories in which the nude is understood. These categories help frame the nude within commonly understood forms of identification. For example, the use of the nude in medical text books falls into the category of information. Eck’s categories are “art, pornography, information, and ambiguity”. The ‘ambiguous’ grouping usually defines images used as a lure in advertising, “the commodified frame used

²⁰ Mirzoeff is the Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Mirzoeff 1995).

²¹ Eck is Professor of Sociology, and Head of Department, at the James Madison University (Dr. Beth A. Eck 2016)

²² Professor Nead is Pevsner Chair of History of Art and Course Director and Admissions Tutor for the Mphil and PhD History of Art. Her research supervision areas include 19th Century British visual culture as well as Gender and visual representation (Professor Lynda Nead 2016).

in selling products and magazines” (Eck 2001:603). This frame utilizes elements, which are reminiscent of the other frames, such as black and white photography, but the context of the final image forces a new understanding of the nude. When one is faced with an image containing nudity, we draw on a number of cultural or learned factors to understand the image. These components of the image relate to things such as medium, context and the age of the viewer (Eck 2001:604). Nudity out of context can conjure “improper interpretations”, as Eck (2001:605) brings to light in describing the debates surrounding Mapplethorpe²³’s photography (fig. 1). Mapplethorpe’s images, in a 1989 exhibition, featured “male genitalia, homoeroticism, and children with exposed genitals” (Eck 2001:604). The artist imbues the produced work with significance, which stems from the long history of the field. He/she also takes into account qualities pertaining to the artistic process, such as composition, technique and concept. Art is also designed to be displayed in specific environments; galleries, which are predominantly frequented by art enthusiasts, who have a sufficient knowledge of art history and processes. As Eck (2001:605) points out, the gallery is a space where “nudes are often found and expected”. Removing an image created for the ‘art’ classification has the risk of being deemed obscene, which Eck (2001:605) says is the “equivalent to pornography”.

²³ Mapplethorpe is an American artist who known for pushing the boundaries of photography through content and technique (Robert Mapplethorpe 1946-1989 2016)



Figure 1

Robert Mapplethorpe. *Man in Polyester Suit*. 1980. Gelatin Silver Print. 45,5 X 35,7 cm. J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The image of the nude/naked has waxed and waned throughout history. It has lost and regained its central role in the arts. Photography may have taken the ideal away from the represented nude in traditional arts media, but it is ever-present. Sometimes it might be hidden at the periphery. At other times it is in the spotlight. It shocks and surprises. It bores and seems outdated; it is seen as a dusty relic of the classical ideal. But the body can never leave visual communication completely. People are bodies with interests and abilities and these are influenced by the sociocultural climate. The fact that we are corporeal beings means that the body will always be a part of the way we communicate. No matter how important ideas and thinking have become, the body is an identifiable signifier for people. Its exploration may have changed or evolved through time, based on what we know. And for this reason, it is as important as ever. It signifies the past, who we have become and what we are aiming to achieve.

In this section I have introduced context in the form of language and as an important component in understanding. It shapes the way the nude/naked is approached. When it comes to the body the two main lingual descriptors are naked and nude. Each signifies a different vision of the body. The nude spoke to ideals, perfection and beauty while the naked countered that as real and gritty. Borzello's (2012) exploration of the subject suggests that the use of the figure now relates to the naked more than the historic view of the nude, and ultimately calls it the naked nude. But what is the difference? To most they both mean without or wearing no clothes. John Berger (1972:54) refers to the naked as 'to be oneself'; further stating that objectification translates the naked into nude. What this object is seen as when viewed changes the meaning and therefore how the image is categorized. From the social and historical context that Kenneth Clark was working in when he wrote *The Nude* (1954) to the current view proffered by Borzello in the *Naked Nude* (2012) and the frameworks in Eck's (2001) *Nudity and Framing*, it is clear that formal and contextual factors play a determining role in the way the body is viewed.

By examining various authorities on the subject it is clear that the terms 'naked' and 'nude' have different connotations. For simplicity on the matter, from this point on I will use the term nude unless referring directly to a specific definition proffered by one of the aforementioned authorities.

Historical and Social Context of the Nude

The nude is a complex art object that has undergone a number of changes; each significant change in the exploration of the nude figure has happened in relation to the context surrounding the artist. Van Dijk (2008:vii) states that context is understood by way of combining "independent social variables, such as gender, class, ethnicity, age or identity". From this research, I have found that the complex combination of scenarios and components that make up history, from ancient civilizations to present day, have contributed to a very long history of the nude, through which the body has existed as symbolic of various ideas, such as fertility, heroism and sin. One's understanding is structured around, but is not limited to, who, where and when the individual is (Van Dijk 2008:3). This section shows that the artists

of the past have surveyed the subject in extreme diversities; with every social change broadening their understanding of the body. So while the Nude may be a person portrayed without the social constructs of clothing, the effect of society is ever-present in the artistic exploration of the body. The influence of context results in various “products...such as style, register, genre, variation and related notions” (Van Dijk 2008:111). This is easily observed in the arts, particularly with the represented nude figure, which is discussed below by way of exploring historic art periods as well as social and technological advances. This is to support that the context is not only responsible for the perception of a subject or object, but also for the mode of execution.

The nude, or semi-nude, figure has been used throughout art history. The aim of this section is to create a snapshot of the subject during a number of historic periods and social changes. “No art practices exist that are not saturated with experiences, histories, and beliefs” (Borgdorff²⁴ 2012:46). In each period features were conventionalized to meet the ‘ideal’ body of the age. By looking at these changes in artistic representation of the nude one can begin to see the importance of context as influence. Artists have continuously drawn from their contexts as influence over their exploration of the naked figure. This involved using the semiotic qualities of the nude to communicate issues that were relevant to their surroundings. I do this by looking at the nude in relation to the following periods and historic developments: ancient Greece, the rise of Christianity, the Renaissance, Modernism, Feminism and Contemporary society.

Greece

In ancient times nakedness was shameful, a symbol for slaves and barbarians. Fallen warriors were often stripped as a sign of disgrace. The Grecians, however, were naked for reasons that opposed this symbolism; they believed that nakedness differentiated them from other civilizations. This overlapped into the type of art the Grecians made. Displayed nudes embodied the “perfect synthesis between the physical and the moral excellence that denotes the aristocracy” (Gualdoni 2012:21). For them, nudity was contextualized by the fact that

²⁴ Borgdorff is philosopher and music theorist. He is also professor at the Royal Conservatoire, University of the Arts in the Hague and at the Academy of Creative and Performing Art at Leiden University.

their Gods were allowed the privilege of nudity (Gualdoni 2012:17). This therefore gave them a godly appearance. This sanctioned nudity elevated the Greeks from the everyday “realistic to the supernatural” (Spivey 1996:113).

The acceptance of nudity in Grecian society fed into their art making. The nude figure became an important and integral part of art in ancient Greece (Spivey 1996:111). It influenced the art they made; it became the imagery they created. Gualdoni (2012:17) states that it played a “leading role” in “Greek statuary and painting”. But the use of the naked body as subject matter did not start with the Greeks. For them, the use of the nude carried over from pre-existing civilizations. For centuries the body had been used as a symbol for fertility with religious function (Graves²⁵ 2003). An early example of this can be seen in the Venus of Willendorf (fig.2).



Figure 2

Venus of Willendorf. C. 24 000 – 22 000 BC. 11cm high. Oolitic Limestone. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna.

The Ancient Greeks used the figure to honour “strength and beauty”, particularly of the young male (Lucie-Smith²⁶ 1998:18). The Grecian admiration of the body promoted the exploration

²⁵ Graves is a former Associate Lecturer in the Arts at the Open University in Scotland (Life Study: The Nude in Art - a Brief History 2015)

²⁶ Lucie-Smith is an art and design historian who has lectured in a number of countries around the world (Lucie-Smith 1998).

and development of the nude. The body began to be used to represent heroes, athletes and gods in human form (Spivey 1996:38). In this way the body became a symbol of perfection and therefore, according to Spivey (1996:37), a moral quality. The honour attributed to physical beauty provided a context for the Greeks to show off the human form. The images left behind by from this period show us a representation and celebration of “youth, beauty and love of beauty, of the physical strength, of invincibility” (Gualdoni 2012:21). Within this context the nude became a costume, the body dressed as an ideal, worn by those “aspiring to be something (or someone) on a higher level” (Spivey 1996:112).

Greek artists developed the nude figure along a set of visual ideals. According to Clark (1956:3) the nude as art was “invented by the Greeks in the 5th Century B.C”. This creation of an ideal was achieved in a number of ways: firstly, their work became increasingly naturalistic and allowed for greater expression (Lucie-Smith 1998:21). Secondly, the sculpted figure became amalgamations of the human form, bringing together the best attributes of the figure. A physical harmony was created using mathematics to achieve ideal proportions. Polycleitus²⁷ (fl.440) is credited to have said “perfection (beauty) is made up, in the smallest of scales, by many numbers” (Gualdoni 2012:27). His work, *Doryphorus* (fig. 3), was used as the most suitable example of “mathematical proportions and relationships of the different parts of the human body” (Lucie-Smith 1998:24). Sculptors who followed continued the process of idealization by elongating and altering proportions to exaggerate form (Lucie-Smith 1998:24).

²⁷ Policleitus is a Greek sculptor from the school of Argos. He is known for his masterful bronze work and is a significant aesthetician in the history of art (Policleitus 2016).



Figure 3

Polycleitus. *Doryphoros*. C. 440 BC. Marble copy of bronze. Size variable. Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples.

Eventually the connection between nudity and divinity weakened; with the rise of the female nude came notions of relationships between the artist and model. This new influence turned the perception of that naked figure of Aphrodite (fig. 4) into “a sensuous celebration of the gaze” (Gualdoni 2012:34). It also reinforced the notion that nudity was no longer a state of divinity, it was instead human (Gualdoni 2012:34). This change in contextual understanding meant a shift in artistic convention, a separation of human aesthetics from sacredness, which lead to works being made for the sake of “visual pleasure” (Gualdoni 2012:36).

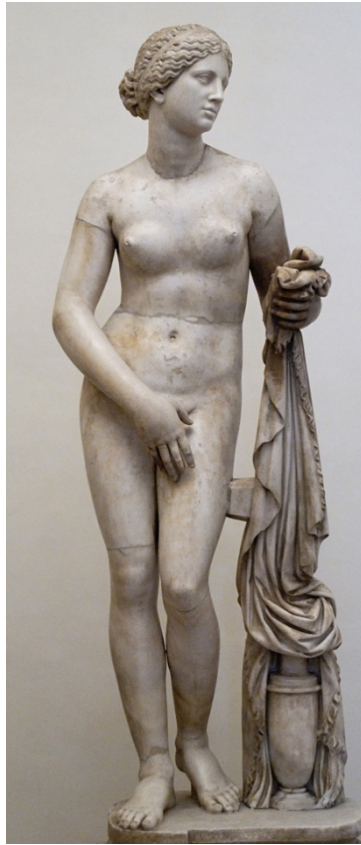


Figure 4

Praxiteles. *Aphrodite of Knidos*. Size variable. Capitol Museum, Rome.

Even with the centuries of development the Greeks made, including their enormous influence on the Roman artistic output, there was a reform of imagery and the exploration of nude figure. The beliefs of the civilization that brought about classicism met their downfall with the rise of Christianity. Art turned away from the sensuality of the nude by becoming uniformed and, contextualized by the rise of Christianity, reinforced Christian viewpoints and ideals.

The Rise of Christianity

As Christianity became the dominating sociocultural context, the artistic exploration of nudes that communicated Grecian values, naturalism, idealism and the sensuality of the gaze, were rejected. The semiotic qualities of the nude under Christianity spoke to ideas of shame, as it did in the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve were both naked, but this bareness was not recognized, they were unashamed (Gen 2:25). The story of Adam reinforces the shame and humiliation that one should hold about the body. The associations of the body began to be

used as leverage against sinful living. The body had now become a symbol of the fallen, the bodies of those unsaved, the ugly and dishonest. “Christ would be crucified naked” (Gualdoni 2012:38). Nudity became a metaphor for shame, it was degrading and reserved for humiliation.

The realization that it was not just the subject matter of an artwork, but the stylistic finishing that influenced perception, meant that the way in which a work was crafted needed to support the social aims of Christianity (fig. 5). “The Church saw painting as a means of spiritual education, of helping a largely illiterate population to contemplate the mysteries of Christianity” (Witkin²⁸ 1995:54). It was thought that realistic depictions of bodies were more likely to entice the viewer into sinful thinking. Since the nude in religious iconography had to speak to the soul, naturalistic representations of the figure were faced with suspicion. They were believed to be “deceitful and tempting [in] appearance” (Gualdoni 2012:46). So, when hints at nudity were described they were rendered in stylistic ways that negated any naturalistic form. The nude became representative of specific characters, formed in a more schematic manner. It was restricted to the context of religious script and allegory.



Figure 5

Unknown Venetian Craftsmen. *The Last Judgment*. C. 1225. Mosaic. Size unavailable. Baptistry of Il Duomo,

²⁸ Witkin is Professor Emeritus from the University of Exeter, department of Sociology (Emeritus Professors 2016)

Florence.

As time went by the exploration of the nude as subject became more accepted. The commission of work, from kings and wealthy private buyers, allowed artists to explore the nude in ways that captured beauty and emotion. According to Gualdoni (2012:36) this was the sort of nudity that led to the rediscovery of the classical, Hellenistic, form that allowed a segue into Renaissance.

Renaissance

As the grip of Christian modesty loosened artists gained new freedoms. They became more than a means to spread a message; they became creators (Gualdoni 2012:58). And in order to create the best work possible they were encouraged to look at what artists of the past had accomplished. The Renaissance provided a context that allowed the nude to become a vehicle for pure artistic exploration. It no longer needed to be justified as a fallen man or woman (Gualdoni 2012:48). The naturalistic execution was no longer a threat to one's morals, but instead, as the "measure of human perfection" (Lucie-Smith 1998:28).

As the artists of the Renaissance delved into the Greco-Roman knowledge base, their understanding of anatomy developed. They showed a resurgence of lifelike art (Strickland²⁹ 1992:30). But the work created at this time was not a simple reproduction of life; the nude, once again, became an exploration of an ideal. "Classical proportion was not simply a look. It symbolized a specific belief: the interpretation of human and divine" (Fox³⁰ 2014:18). For artists to represent the divine they felt that they needed to work according to a geometric scale, which would represent true beauty. An example of this is seen in the figure depicted by Vitruvius, and later by Leonardo Da Vinci (fig. 6.), of a man in a circle and square. The technical proficiency achieved during this period was viewed as a triumph, as it had been for the Greeks.

²⁹ Strickland is an art critic and former lecturer with a PhD from the University of Michigan (Carol Strickland 2016).

³⁰ Fox is a ceramic sculptor who has a Masters in History of Art from the New York University (Fox 2013)

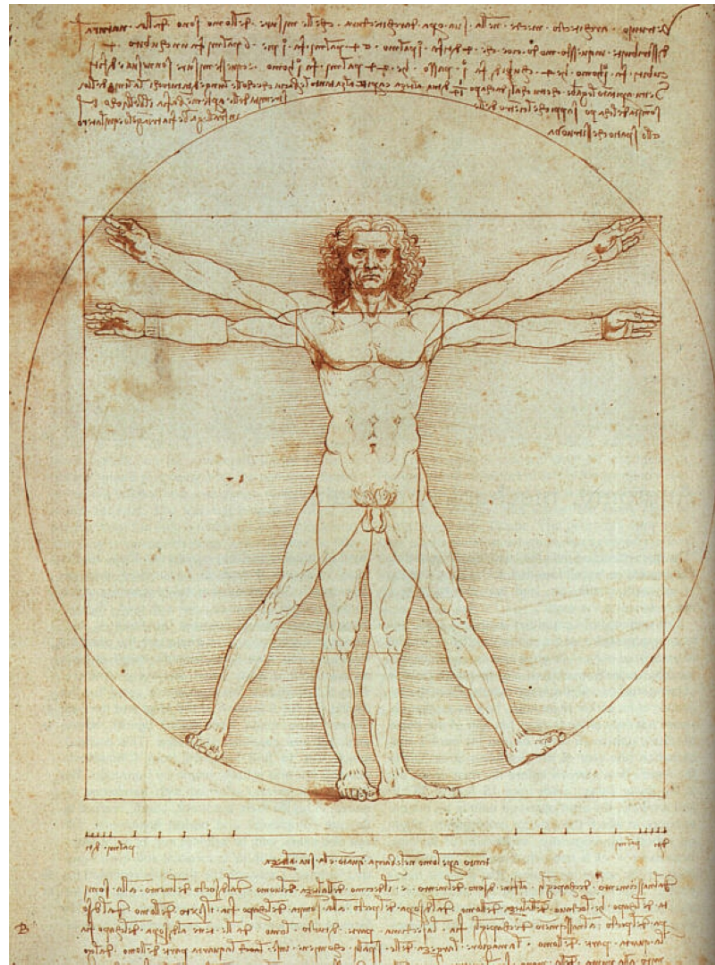


Figure 6

Leonardo da Vinci. *Vitruvian Man*. C. 1490. Ink. 35 X 26cm. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

The body had moved back to the center of artistic representation, and with this it became common practice for artists to investigate the formal qualities of the figure in various ways, which extended beyond what they had already learnt from antiquity. One of these ways was to draw models from life, another was through scientific enquiry. Both of these activities provided a context for artists to acquire knowledge of the body's structure. According to Lucie-smith (1998:28) they would "dissect corpses and record what they observed in meticulous drawings". This knowledge allowed Renaissance artists to idealize form based on actual discovery. It also provided the material needed to produce books that detailed the internal structure of the body. These practices provided a source of information that gave a greater anatomical understanding to that of the Greeks.

The Renaissance ushered the "Western idea of the nude...[into] maturity" (Gualdoni

2012:63). Since then it has remained at the center of artistic expression. “The body has been the principal subject of Western art since the Renaissance” (Mirzoeff 1995:2). Each period, however, carried with it its own set of aesthetics and ideal proportions. Naturalism continued to prevail, as artists were the purveyors of imagery and the arts had become a source of visual pleasure. In the centuries that followed, photographic techniques would evolve and enable higher degrees of naturalism. But the spread of photography would influence new, extreme changes in the way artists explored their subject matter.

Photography and Modernism

The emergence of photographic technologies had tremendous influence on artistic practice, and therefore the nude. “Photography made its first public appearance in 1839” (Edwards³¹ 2006:72). Society was changing and so too were the creative outputs. Photography became a tool that artists could use to aid their practice. It allowed artists to refer to a scene, sans the ever-changing elements, such as light and the models positioning. This in turn led to various forms and developments of realism before eventually changing the formal qualities of art in the larger modernist movement.

The camera allowed artists to see their surroundings and subjects in an entirely new way. Edwards (2006:4) states that in the 1830’s “the German critic Walter Benjamin...had in mind the ability of the camera to extend human observation beyond its normal parameters”. The camera has done this and more. With these new processes publications such as the works of Muybridge³² (1830 – 1904) (fig. 7), which showed photographic images of people engaged in a multitude of activities, rebutted the rules that governed the figure within the classical ideal (Lucie-Smith 1998:39).

³¹ Edwards is a Research Lecturer in the Open University. His field of interest includes: History and theory of Photography, Cultural Theory and Film and Video (Professional biography 2016)

³² Muybridge is a British photographer famous for capturing movement studies of animal and humans (Edward Muybridge 2016)

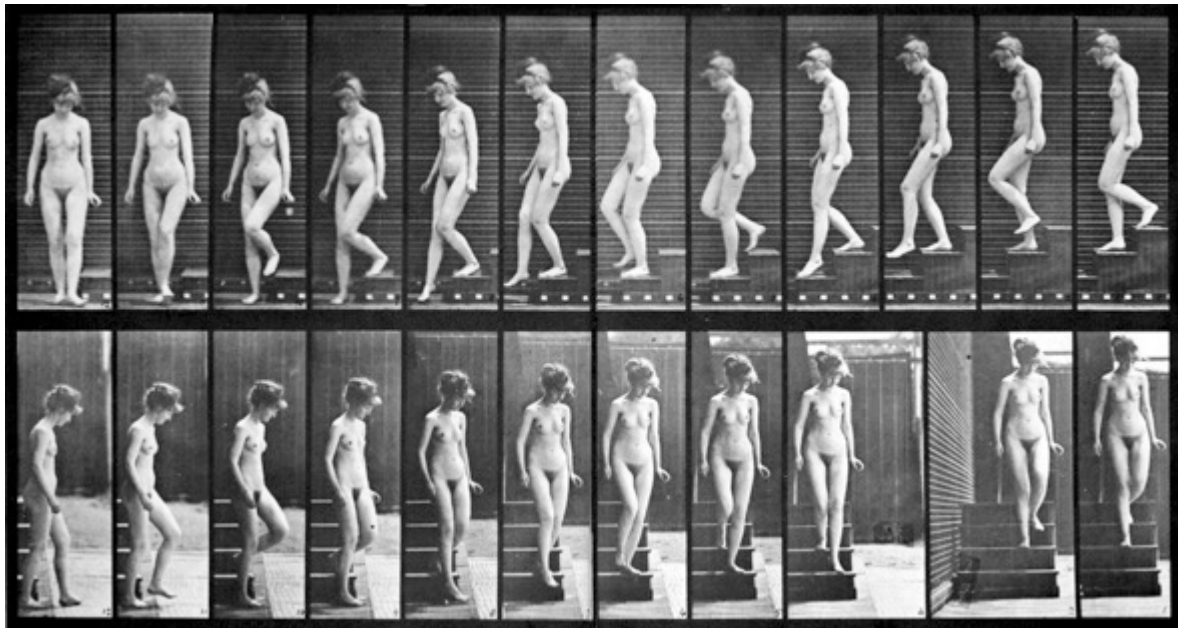


Figure 7

Eadweard Muybridge. *Woman walking down stairs*. Photographic print. Size unavailable. Late 19th Century.
Location unavailable.

The camera brought “the nude out of mythology and into the here and now” (Borzello 2012:26). Suddenly historic works, which had been seen as realistic, had their flaws exposed. Photography showed how figures were altered in the artistic process to create the ideal. This new context allowed artists to see artistic representation of the nude in new ways. The advent and availability of photography allowed a change in representing the nude, such as different angles and a new level of realism, which conveyed little relation to the ideal (Borzello 2012:26). The camera, when used as a tool to generate reference material, spurred on various realistic representations in art. But not only has the camera aided in observation, it affected artistic perceptions. It forced artists to re-examine the way they looked and therefore the resulting pictorial form of their subject.

Technological advances began to make realistic representations redundant. Artists could no longer elevate the body, by fixing its flaws and separating it from real life. While the common method of art training still emphasized realism and the figurative, there was now the problem of image making being democratized. Anyone with a camera could “replicate the world around them with the pressure of one finger” (Borzello 2012:21). Not only was this new

technology able to produce an image faster, it was more accurate. This meant that artists now needed to find an “alternative, non-representational approach that differed from that of the camera” (Childs³³ 2008:114), as well as the realistic form of historic painting.

The camera may have nudged artists into the new world, but it was only one influential element that came from the decades that preceded it. The industrial revolution and its push into modern life had a great impact on the context of the artist. “Technological changes meant that modernism was an art of a rapidly transforming world” (Childs 2008:22). These ‘rapid’ times spurred on successive changes in the art world. Artists began to attempt to capture the essence of a scene or object, an ‘impression’ of their subject. The rules that once bound art to exact replication were loosening. Judy Fox (2014:17) states, “modernists...freed ‘The Nude’ from the stale conventions of anatomy and proportion...and used its form like a language”. As modernism was born the nude, at least it’s ideal form, fell aside. There were a number of artistic evolutions and innovations that helped this “death of the ideal nude” (Borzello 2012:20); movements such as Impressionism, Cubism, Minimalism and Abstract Art. It was an age of reform. Modernism provided an environment for artists to enact change in their exploration of subject matter. A general proclamation of modernism is for a “radical break from the past” (Childs 2008:40). So if artists of the past painted idealistically, artists of modernism would abandon ideals. Realism began to be looked down upon as it was now the task of photography.

With the move away from paintings with historic or biblical narrative artists began to portray images that held their opinions, knowledge and passions as well as interests and therefore aesthetics. As “a consequence of the growing awareness of different cultures” (Childs 2008:35) artists began to look for new areas of inspiration. Cultures outside of Western society became valuable wells of visual reference; African statuary was a newfound influence that further altered the representative form of the figure. Picasso³⁴ used this as influence for his painting of nude women, *Les Femmes d’Alger* (O.J. 1907) (fig. 8). ‘Primitive’ art was seen as the

³³ Childs is Pro Vice Chancellor for research and scholarship at Newman University. His research interest include Modernism, Colonial and Post-Colonial writing (Prof Peter Childs 2016)

³⁴ Picasso is cofounder of the Cubist movement and is one of the most influential artists of the 20th Century (Pablo Picasso and his paintings 2009)

new vehicle for change, it was the “bridge to the future” (Borzello 2012:29) and the influence that would allow artists to get beyond the ‘restrictive’ bound of realism.



Figure 8

Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)*. Oil on Canvas. 243.9 cm × 233.7 cm Museum of Modern art, New York.

Borzello (2012:20) states that alongside the evolving art practices were sociological changes; there was an “expansion of education, psychology’s interest in the darker corners of the mind, agitation for the emancipation of women and the questioning of the teachings of the church”. These sociocultural developments created a context that aided the downfall of the ideal nude. It was a time that afforded artists new freedoms. The avant-garde encouraged originality and innovation (Borzello 2012:21). Tradition was changing; artists began to make work that they felt transcended the art of the past, these works often contradicted previous practices and ideals.

Much of the art created in the past was done so with the finished product in mind. The nude had been crafted into an ideal and represented as perfectly as possible for public consumption. But, the surrealists sought direction from the ideas presented in the writing of

psychologists such as Sigmund Freud³⁵ (Surrealism 2016). In doing so, surrealist artists used the realistic form to further emphasize the visual impact and the thoughts they conveyed (Borzello 2012:29). Suddenly, what appeared to fit in with the classical history of painting was filled with dreamlike imagery. This new wave of art demanded distortion. Many Surrealists used the nude, or parts of it, to reference subconscious sexuality (fig. 9). Their interest in Freudian psychology often led to work that had an aspect of eroticism (Surrealism 2016). The surrealist interest in “psychoanalysis, sex, and the eternal feminine made it inevitable that they would find the female nude helpful in expressing their ideas” (Borzello 2012:29). With the exception of surrealism, the ideal had lost its footing in the art world. Artists focused on questioning the idea of beauty. This ‘questioning’ and disregard for beauty was also fuelled by the modernist experience of the effects of war. “With devastation on such a scale, it became absurd to celebrate noble ideas like human dignity in art” (Childs 2008:21).

³⁵ Freud was a neurologist who developed the theories and techniques for psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud Biography 2016)

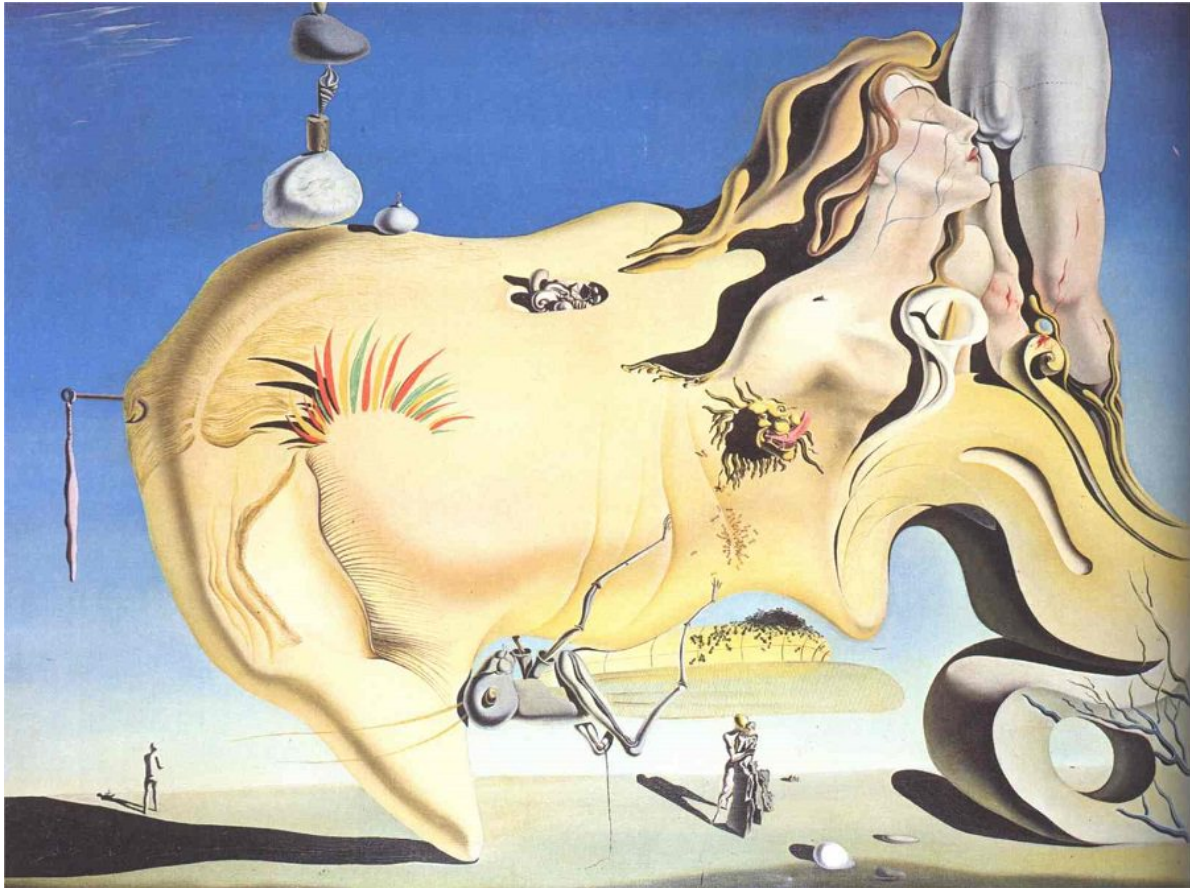


Figure 9

Salvador Dalí. *The Great Masturbator*. 1929. Oil on Canvas. 110 X 150,5 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

The aforementioned developments in art a direct impact on the way artists were trained (Borzello 2012:22). Realism had been abandoned in favour of freer practices. There was instability in the longstanding practice of replicating life and creating an allusion of the real. The new view gave esteem to “the art made by children, the mentally ill, the untrained...‘primitive’ cultures and...subconscious...free expression” (Borzello 2012:22). Thus teaching methods changed, for a while there was equal emphasis placed on the old, traditional methods as on the new, expressive modes of art production. But the balance was not long lasting. “Traditional teaching no longer impressed the students or their teachers” (Borzello 2012:22). The role of the life drawing class, the home of the nude sitter, morphed into an environment that urged students to capture the gesture of the figure (fig. 10). It was as much about representing the space the body occupied as it was about making expressive marks. Judy Fox (2014:17) says, “Modernists...freed ‘The Nude’ from the stale conventions of

anatomy and proportion...and used its form like a language". There was no longer room for overcritical realism (Borzello 2012:23). Art education was changing and the direct result fed the newly found trend in art making. Internationally, art schools were being upgraded "into degree-conferring institutions where theory was as important as traditional techniques" (Borzello 2012:23). Within this context, art slowly began to lean toward the conceptual and the body became a symbol of the past. Art academies, possibly the last spaces influenced by the modern, avant-garde, had accepted the new areas of expression and submitted to their role of producing artists who can compete in a contemporary climate.

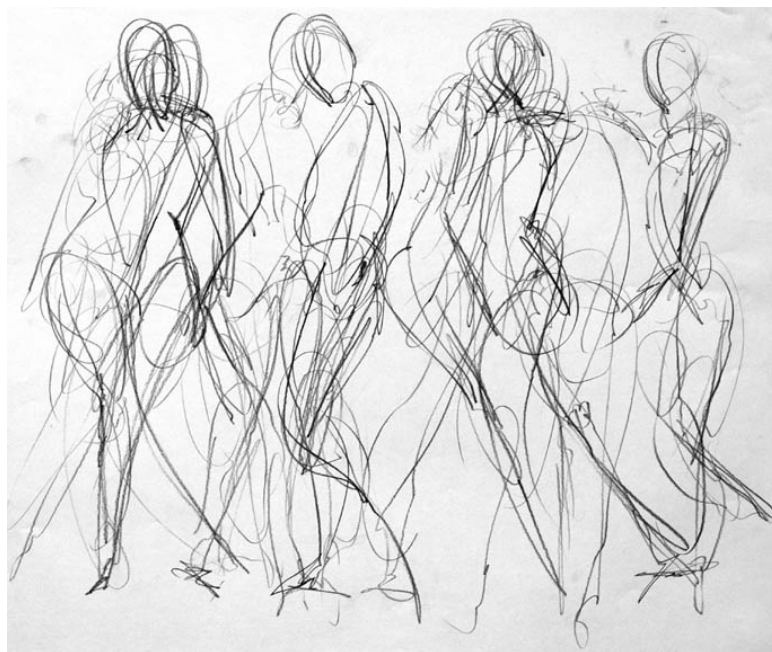


Figure 10

Unknown artist. Gestural studies.

What is seen from the aforementioned is that photography spurred on a number of developments in the art world, the biggest change to happen since the rise of Christianity. The camera had forced viewers to recognize the naked as a person. It changed the way artists looked at and interpreted their surroundings. Another movement that came about during a similar time period was that of Feminism. Feminism was the next wave of influence over how artists explored the nude.

Feminism

Feminist movements afforded women many liberties that had previously been withheld; such as the control they held over their own body - which feeds into ideas surrounding body politics - whether in the form of oral contraception to avoid pregnancy or in the way they were represented in pictorial form. The later was due to education having been a privilege only afforded to men. Holt (2010:2) states, “they were rising up against the restrictions that held them back for so long”. This included the traditions of art. Until the end of the 19th century women had not been afforded equal education opportunities. The first wave of Feminism came to being “in the second half of the 19th Century” (Jenainati³⁶ 2007:20). Up until this point Art schools had only accepted men. Women had therefore been excluded from studying the nude figure, which negated any mastery over the subject, relegating them to genres that were considered inferior.

The entry of women into art academies meant that they could now successfully tackle the figure as a subject. Many of the female graduates, having undergone the same training as their male counterparts, “produced the same sort of art as the men” (Borzello 2012:57). Oftentimes women would depict scenes that men had portrayed on numerous occasions, the mother and child or the pubescent transition (fig. 11). But, while their art may have been the ‘same sort’ in terms of content, there was an application of emotion that gave an intimate feel to the content of the canvas. Their representation made sense to be different, because their experience of these depictions was different. Borzello (2012:54) says “some of the most exciting changes in the presentation of the female nude in the last hundred years have been introduced by women artists”. All of a sudden there were new perspectives, the nude was no longer a subject solely set upon by the male artist.

³⁶ Jenainati is a professor in the English Department of Warwick University. Her research interests include Women's writing in the North American continent and Theory and History of the Women's movement (Professor Cathia Jenainati 2016).



Figure 11

Paula Modersohn-Becker. *Reclining Mother and Child*. 1906. Oil on Canvas. 82,5 X 124,7 cm. Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen.

A major influence on the representation of the nude was in reaction to that of the female nude; the objectified body had been presented for what seems entirely for (male) visual pleasure. This, in film, was the subject of Mulvey's³⁷ 1975 essay, *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*. The role of woman as object had been highlighted as a subject presented for "voyeuristic pleasure" (Heffernan³⁸ 2014:173). This was achieved by way of coding their appearance "for strong visual and erotic impact" (Mulvey 1975:837). This 'coding' came from traditions within a patriarchal context. Like the modernist artists', feminist artists' broke away from the historical convention of the ideal. Some artists began to use their own bodies in performance rather than representing form through a traditional medium. Feminist's appropriated the body to confront ideas surrounding "social constructs of gender" (Holt 2010:2). The idea that men and women have different capabilities is determined by culture and the behaviour toward, and expected from, them. As Simone de Beauvoir³⁹ (1953:273) puts it, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine". For artists influenced by feminism the aim was to "make a break by examining patriarchy with the tools it provides" (Mulvey

³⁷ Mulvey is a Film Theorist whose writing helped establish feminist film theory as a field of study (Burke 2014).

³⁸ Heffernan is a painter with a MFA from the Yale School of Art (Heffernan 2016).

³⁹ De Beauvoir was an author who helped establish the modern feminist movement. She was also an existential philosopher (Simone de Beauvoir Biography 2016).

1975:834). Because of its long history as an art genre the nude body was a perfect object to use. Especially as women/feminist artists' tackled the longstanding, male portrayal of women in art.

The 1970s saw female artists begin to use knowledge of "women's history and current situation to inform their approach" (Borzello 2012:67). Feminist artists were not only motivated by the difference between male and female experience, but by a need to reclaim female nudity. Women artists began to use the body to communicate and contend with ideas surrounding sexuality and gender. "The contemporary feminist art can be treated as a part of the feminist body politics, that strive for a transgressive understanding of the female body" (Frydrysiak⁴⁰ 2012:301). Borzello (2012:68) says that by this point it was understood that art had been produced "by men for men". The new art was a stance that presented the female form as it was experienced and as the feminist artist wished to portray it. "Not as the male artist or spectator expects to see it" (Borzello 2012:68). Female nudes were not objects for visual pleasure, they offered an introspective view that could only come from a feminine context.

This new wave of artists used the historic convention of the figure while breaking away from tradition. They painted male nudes from the perspective of the woman artist. Often overtly referencing some of the revered works from the past. Women had moved from being a passive figure to the subject taking action. "Unlike the traditional nude who had nothing to say for herself, the feminist nude had plenty. Their work replaces the silent nudes of the past with the outspoken nakedness of the present" (Borzello 2012:76). Another tool used by feminist artists was that of photography and its ability to capture the 'real' (Holt 2010:4). In this way they negated any associations with the painted and/or sculpted ideal nude. These artists often used their own bodies and kept owner/authorship over the portrayal of the female nude (fig. 12).

⁴⁰ Sandra Frydrysiak has a PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, where she also lectures (Frydrysiak 2012)



Figure 12

Hannah Wilke. *S.O.S. Scarification Object Series*. 1974-82. Black and white gelatin silver prints with 15 chewing gum sculptures mounted on board. 104,1 X 147,3 cm. Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The influence of women highlighted the “unsuitability” of the definitions of “masculinity and femininity...[in] a modern age” (Borzello 2012:86). The rights obtained for women through the feminist movement allowed access to many privileges only offered to men. Most importantly, for the arts, was the admission of women into art academies. This allowed women to change the presentation of the nude, transforming this historic content in a way that affected more than just style. Artists were forced to question the ideal and confront real bodies through various forms of body art and documentation processes. It is safe to say “the entrance of the feminists into art changed our ways of thinking about the nude forever” (Borzello 2012:77). Many of the changes set in motion by feminist artists spurred in the contemporary nude.

Contemporary

The contemporary nude is everything that the historic, ideal, nude is not. The historic nude is poised and fictional while the modern artist’s nude is heavily influenced by the world around the artist; it is a depiction of the real body affected by bodily issues, which are ever-present and absorbing. “Articles about food, weight, fashion, sexuality, health, genetics, pornography,

medicine, science, exercise, plastic surgery – the list is ever expandable” (Borzello 2012:10). We are swamped with stories that relate to these matters in all forms of media, new and old. Borzello (2012:10) argues that the nude of today is conscientiously made with these “issues and congruities” at hand. With backs turned toward the idea of perfection, artists represent bodies that “ask awkward questions and behave provocatively” (Borzello 2012:11).

The contemporary nude began evolving in the 19th Century. When classicism reigned the nude represented a ‘universal’ ideal. But now the body could be used to represent the specific. Manet⁴¹’s *Olympia* (1865) (fig. 13) captured a naked woman styled as a modern prostitute (Borzello 2012:26). This painting was an image of real nakedness, removed from the pedestal on which the nude had been placed for centuries. Artists began to represent the figure realistically, naked with flaws. In the 20th Century some artists turned their gaze on themselves by painting nude self-portraits. “These naked portraits follow no tradition” (Borzello 2012:119). Suddenly artists were exposing more of themselves, they began to intertwine ideas of public and private with this new “collision of artistic codes – the portrait face being public while the naked body is private” (Borzello 2012:126). This trend further specified the nude; while the body was being generalized as the modern ideal in commercial media.

⁴¹ Manet was a painter who was influential in the change of realism to impressionism (Biography.com Editors 2014)



Figure 13

Édouard Manet. *Olympia*. 1863. Oil on Canvas. 130,5 X 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In contemporary culture the advertising industry has been built up to the point where it is the prevailing form of imagery people see. We are now faced with a modern dictatorship of the body, constantly being shown how we should look. The image of the body presented through popular media is deeply rooted in the historic ideal. In advertising, the body is presented as flawless, and the film stars who grace our screens are “more perfect than real life” (Borzello 2012:10). While photography may have allowed extreme accuracy in depiction, editing software, such as Photoshop, has allowed photographic imagery to be distorted and warped to fit modern standards of beauty. We are in an age where the ideal is achievable, through utilizing digital software, physical exercise and diets, or the extremes of cosmetic surgery. Today’s standard of photography utilizes post processing to fictionalize the real. Many contemporary figurative artists make art in reaction to this. They operate in contrast to the popularized content of glamour and fashion magazines (fig. 14).



Figure 14

Mario Testino. *Miranda Kerr Photographed for GQ*. April 2014.

Many contemporary figurative artists still use the nude. In some cases, this might be because of the historic standard practice, but in other instances the artists are drawing a link to the reverence of the body. Because “Despite iconoclastic movements like Dada, Pop, Postmodernism, and anti-aestheticism, the human image has come back, for it is still a potent metaphor for the human condition” (Fox 2014:18). Artists are consciously using the metaphors of nudity to convey thoughts and messages about their contemporary context. This will be looked at in more detail and with reference to specific artists in the following chapter.

Conclusion

At the crux of it, context is “what one thing means in relation to something else” (Hinton 2014:3) and we can therefore only make sense of an object or term, in this case the nude, by looking at it within a context. Nudity is a phenomenon that consistently reoccurs through art history. Van Dijk (2008:11) states “Phenomena must always be studied in relation to a situation or environment”. It is therefore important to look at the artistic - practical and theoretical - exploration of the nude as a reaction to the context of the artist and/or theorist. Van Dijk (2008:16) contrasts the view of “contexts as objective properties of social, political or cultural situations” by stating that he believes them to be defined (inter) subjectively. The

situation may therefore be “socially based” (Van Dijk 2008:56) but it relies on the interpretation of the individual, and communities, to create contexts (Van Dijk 2008:16).

In this chapter I have shown that the nude as subject matter is affected by context, which ranges from the way it is spoken about to the social environment the work is created in. I did this by first looking at the way in which the body is discussed, focusing on the dynamic between the naked and nude. This showed that language creates a context for the subject to be understood. While the terms naked and nude technically have a similar definition they prompt different understandings of the body. These differences were also present in art practices; the meaning behind the term nude described the historic exploration of the unclothed body. So while the historic nude may have been fictional, poised to represent an ideal, it was a reflection of the artist’s context. It was the product of the social construction of the body. As societies changed so did the artistic explorations.

I then showed that artists are continuously influenced by the surrounding sociocultural trends and developments. This was done by investigating artists and their context in various periods: from the Grecian use of the body to align the human with the divine to the Christian application of shame to the semiotics of nakedness. The nude and its classical ideals were rediscovered during the Renaissance, when artists studied the progress made by Greek artists and through scientific enquiry, before being transformed by the developments and context of modernism. The industrial revolution brought about new technologies, specifically the camera, which aided artists with seeing and achieving new levels of realism, but allowed almost anyone to capture images. In reaction to this, artists turned away from tradition and sought new avenues of expression. At a similar time, feminist action was winning rights for women, gaining access to education for female artists, who could now explore much of the same subject matter as male artists of the past, but were able to apply their experiences and control over the representation of female bodies. Contemporary artists have built onto these changes and apply meaning to the figure in ways that speak against many of the modern influences over body image, which are largely conveyed through media platforms - the new home for the ideal nude. Whether the influence is direct or causes an artistic reaction, it is evident that sociocultural/political conditions affect artistic perceptions and practice.

The following chapter focuses on a selection of artists and examines how the work they make is influenced by, and relates to, their contexts.

Chapter Two

People you may know

This chapter explores contextual influences in the work of selected artists. The aim is to examine the relationship between each artist's sociocultural environment and their work, which focuses on the nude figure as subject matter. This is done by looking at their use of signifiers that relate to contemporary issues. Berger (1972:53) states that the 'nude' is continuously conventionalized. It cannot remain the same, with a change of context the conventional way of seeing an object changes as well. The semiotic theorist Danesi⁴² (2004:185) states, "the nude body is, in a word, a powerful sign. This is why visual artists have always had a fascination with the nude figure". The exploration of this 'fascination', as shown in the previous chapter, has shifted a number of times. The artists' aims, and means of achieving these aims, change with social and cultural developments; this is due to the influence of context. Contemporary artists employ an understanding of cultural connotations in order to frame the nude and use the body to communicate in a contemporary visual culture. "Nudity can only be interpreted culturally" (Danesi 2004:184). Artists generally make work that responds to their sociocultural context. "A culture produces signs and/or attributes meaning to signs" (Chandler⁴³ 2014). As a result, the elements added to the subject of the nude produce meaning "according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions" (Chandler 2014). By bringing relevant contextual elements into their artworks, artists use semiotic principles to imbue meaning into, and contemporize, a historic genre.

The influence of context is made clearer when looking at the work of specific artists. The following selected artists are explored in relation to the contextual influences in their work. Each of the artists makes use of the nude as a platform to speak about issues that relate to his or her sociocultural context. Jenny Saville was chosen for her use of 'real' bodies that communicate feminist ideas. Her work explores concepts of beauty in reaction to the

⁴² Danesi is a Professor at the University of Toronto, his research interests include Linguistic anthropology, semiotics and youth culture (Marcel Danesi 2016).

⁴³ Chandler is a semiotician who has worked at Aberystwyth University. He is now an Emeritus lecturer in Media and Communication Studies (Chandler 2014).

standards of fashion magazines and the contemporary ability to mould one's body through cosmetic surgery. Erin M. Riley is a fibre artist who weaves tapestries of nude and semi-nude selfies she finds online. Her work explores views on modern sexuality and the resultant exploration. The influence of the internet and sharing place her work as commentary on the shifting division between the public and private. Vinz is a street artist who makes use of fine art techniques. His work is influenced by the control over society through policing. This is expressed through the use of the nude as a symbol for freedom. He also comments on consumerism by referencing advertising, which is an ever-present force in a contemporary social context. Finally, I look, very briefly, at a number of contemporary artists who deal with the nude. This is an attempt to show the breadth of exploration and contextual influences in contemporary representations of the nude.

In addition to using contemporary contextual signifiers to speak to modern issues, these artists make reference to the past. They do this by way of appropriating elements of historic works of art. In this way they comment on the timelessness of body issues, while at the same time focusing on the modern sociocultural influence and effect on both the body and the perception of the body.

Jenny Saville

Jenny Saville (1970 -) is a British artist who is known for her oversized paintings of overweight, female figures. Her approach to the figure echoes the feminist idea of control over one's own body, how it is represented, and the application of female experiences. Her subject matter is predominantly the female nude, but she contemporizes it and "precludes any kind of voyeurism" (Becker⁴⁴ 2014:24). This is often achieved by making the subject assertively gaze back at the viewer (Becker 2014:24). This removes the figure from its traditional, passive role as object. In doing this, the nude females are positioned in a way that foregrounds femininity instead of the sexuality presented through the male gaze. Becker (2014:24) states that Saville uses gender "as a mark of identity". Her work, however, is made in such a way that the material she uses, oil paint, becomes synonymous with flesh and therefore about

⁴⁴ Becker is a contributing author to the catalogue of an exhibition of Jenny Saville and Egon Schiele's work. Her text is titled *Intimacy and heroism: Aspects in Jenny Saville's Oeuvre*.

corporality and humanity. Saville (in Hudson 2014) states, “I paint flesh because I’m human”. Her focus is determinably on the figure; backgrounds and surrounding elements that might create an obvious narrative are omitted. Saville, instead, opts for neutral toned backgrounds or composes the figure to take up the entire canvas (fig. 15) and therefore, because of their scale, envelope the viewer’s field of vision.



Figure 15

Jenny Saville. 1999. *Fulcrum*. Oil on Canvas. 261,6 X 487,7 cm. Saatchi Gallery.

Saville composes some of her works in a way that allows them to speak directly to historic works of art, creating a conversation with the past. In doing this she seems to show that the historic context of the subject matter is understood. Some of her recent works have a direct relation to figures such as Da Vinci’s *Madonna and child*. But in this instance the children are sliding in her arms and falling over her (fig. 16). She has captured a viewpoint that comes from someone who has experienced childbirth and motherhood, which is an important theme in this work (Becker 2014:24). In this way her work echoes that of feminist artists who showed female introspection. The nude is used to emphasize the connection between her children and her body. Becker (2014:24) believes that Saville has come “to focus...on her own body and the changes” it underwent through pregnancy and childbirth. In a similar way, Saville

draws focus to the body and its changes in her work *Reflective Flesh* (fig. 17). This work “brings to mind Courbet’s *Origin of the World*” (Borzello 2012:103)(fig. 18). Saville’s intention with this work moves the subject matter from being held in a gaze that is alluring to a “female insistence on the biology of the body” (Borzello 2012:103). In this way Saville foregrounds female gender and “the simple pride in having a female body” (Becker 2014:24). Many of Saville’s visual statements are made from her context as a woman who has undergone pregnancy and childbirth, and understands natural and imposed bodily changes.



Figure 16

Jenny Saville. 2011. *The Mothers*. Oil on Canvas. 270 X 220 cm. Gagosian Gallery.



Figure 17

Jenny Saville. 2002-2003. *Reflective Flesh*. Oil on canvas, 305.1 × 244 cm, Gagosian Gallery.



Figure 18

Gustav Courbet. 1886. *L'origine du monde* (Origin of the World). Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.

Saville's visual exploration takes place while being surrounded by contemporary advertising and fashion magazines that present the body as an ideal. As a contrast to these glossy images her work is large and grotesque; nothing about her subject is pretty. She is quoted as saying, "I don't like things to be too polished. We've got fashion magazines for that" (Hudson 2014). In what could almost be seen as a reaction to the obsession over perfection presented by these 'fashion magazines', Saville paints figures of women who clearly do not fit the contemporary ideal. Her figures are painted from angles that accentuate the over-weight aspects of her subjects. Saville examines flesh, the imprints of clothing and modifications as extreme as cosmetic surgery. Meagher⁴⁵ (2003:23) says that Saville's work "interrogates

⁴⁵ Meagher is an Associate Professor in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Alberta. Her research interests include feminist art and feminist art-history (Meagher 2016).

assumptions about beauty” through her use of unconventional body types; they “are not the refined and evenly proportioned nudes found in classical art”. Her figures are representative of real women, whose bodies have blemishes and trace marks left from wounds or underwear. In *Trace* Saville depicts the impressions left behind from wearing underwear that pulls and holds specific parts of the body ‘in place’ (fig. 19). Borzello (2012:6) describes Saville’s work as an “expression of a new and defiantly female talent”.



Figure 19

Jenny Saville. 1993-94. *Trace*. Oil on canvas. 213.5 x 165 cm. Saatchi Gallery.

Along with the prescription of body types and ideals presented in magazines are the extreme actions taken by some to align themselves with contemporary ideals. Amongst these measures are plastic surgery procedures, which Saville also refers to; having observed and documented these procedures photographically (Harrison 2014:28). In doing this Saville goes against the pervasive ideal nude by questioning the concept of beauty (Borzello 2012:33). She forefronts the extremes women go through to 'become' beautiful. *Plan* (fig. 20) depicts a nude female who has lines drawn over the surface of her skin. These marks reference the contours that show areas of elevation on a map. The angle and semiotic inference suggest that this type of body is seen as large. The lines also speak to the marks drawn by surgeons. Borzello describes Saville's work as being "in tune with contemporary female concerns about diet and body image" (2012:99). In this way she comments on a theme in popular magazines and contemporary society. Saville's work ties in with the control that some people enforce over their bodies, from cosmetic surgery to the process of gender reassignment. Saville states, "thirty or forty years ago these bodies couldn't have existed" (Schama⁴⁶ 2005:126). These bodies are of our time, of a time where bodily self-examination is a relatively normal social action (Sylvester⁴⁷ 2005:14).

⁴⁶ Schama is Professor of Art History and History at Colombia University (Simon Schama 2016).

⁴⁷ Sylvester was an Art Critic whose focus was on Modern Art (Jobey 2001).

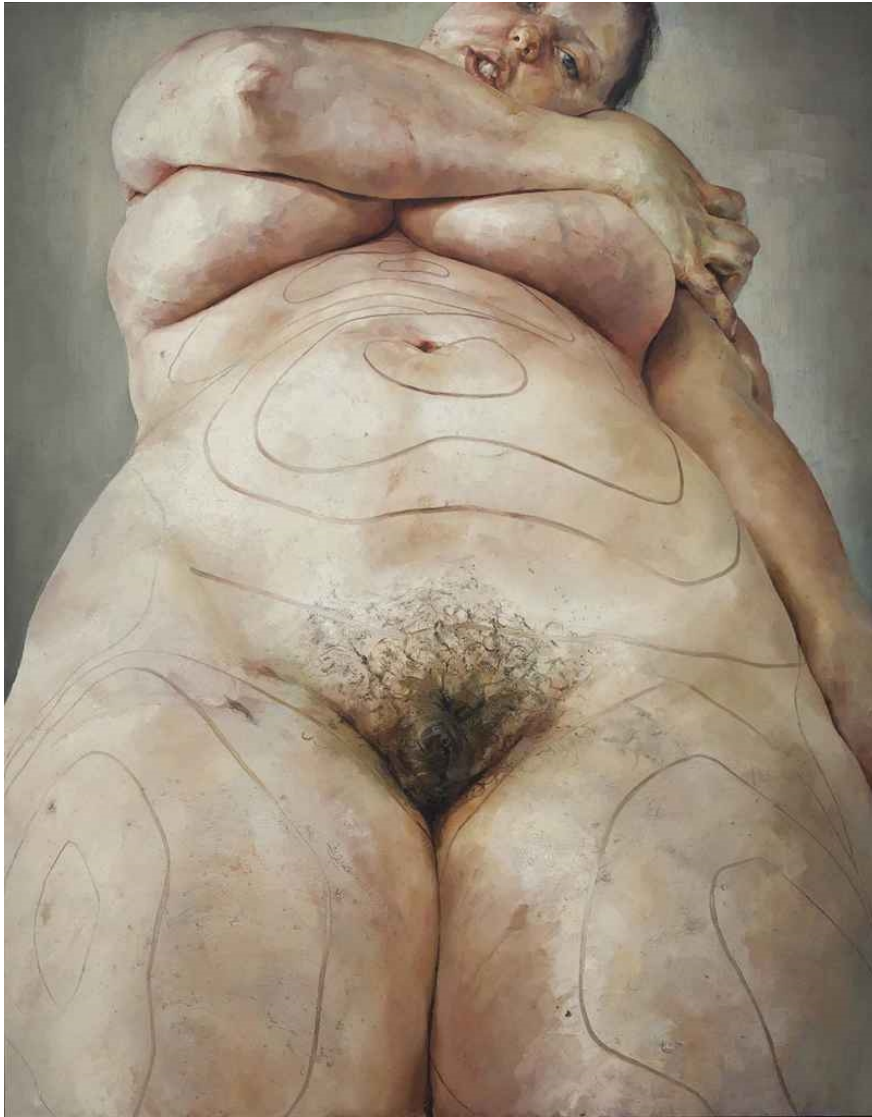


Figure 20

Jenny Saville. 1993. *Plan*. Oil on canvas. 274 x 213.5 cm Saatchi Gallery.

Saville's work is constructed in a way that is only possible because of the development of photography. She makes use of pictorial reference, photographed and sourced from journals, to construct her larger than life work. Using photographic reference for life painting allows Saville's models to sit in "unnatural poses" (Becker 2014:24) that can only be held for a short time. Nochlin⁴⁸ calls Saville's work painting "mediated by the photograph" (2005:11). She often overlays and combines various images and/or angles of the same subject. For her this links to the way

⁴⁸ Nochlin is the Lila Acheson Wallace Professor Emerita of Modern Art at the New York University. Her research interests include: Contemporary art and theory, and Women and art (Linda Nochlin 2016).

we experience information today...layers of images seen through time, of images within images, it's like the way we see the world through computers: not as a single reality, but many realities at the same time. (In Hudson 2014)

Saville seems to be aware of the importance photography plays in her work and how this relates to our contemporary, Internet driven, context. She uses the camera to capture her subjects, herself in some cases, at particular angles, which would be difficult to obtain through live observation. She also draws from photographs that surround her, such as the printed images in medical journals. Her painted bodies are assemblages of imagery.

Saville's figures are subjects borne from the history of the nude. She draws on historic visual narrative with updates that speak to contemporary human concerns. Her exploration of the nude is, like the people she depicts, a product of the context she lives through; from the influence of fashion magazines and bodily transformation to the use of the camera and computer as a way of looking.

Erin M. Riley

"I grew up on the Internet, so for me nudity is very normal" (Riley in OSBX Films 2014).

One cannot escape the Internet as an area of influence on the contemporary arts, and therefore the nude. The Internet, and the resultant interactions, is a large sociocultural context that has influence over a number of aspects of contemporary society. Since the development of the smartphone a plethora of images people have shared are stored online. Some of these photographs are meant for others to see, the ones of friends and family, others are private; direct messages (DM), sexts – sexually suggestive text messages - and photos (semi-nude and nude). Erin Riley is an artist who uses Internet searches to find these kinds of images, the ones that were shared between people as "stills in a tryst" (Riley in Lamothe 2015) and find their way online (fig. 21). She started out by trawling websites such as Tumblr, Google & Instagram, but she also gets images sent via direct messaging. Riley uses imagery influenced

by “sexting” and “trends in Tumblr” (in The Blind Architect 2014). She also cites “feminism, Tinder, death, and reality TV” (Riley in Lamothe 2015) as being influential. Along with daily activities, which include “interactions with men on the street, cat calls, having a boyfriend, being sexually active, dealing with birth control, condoms, etc., feminism, blogs, tumblrs, facebook, etc!” (in The Blind Architect 2014).

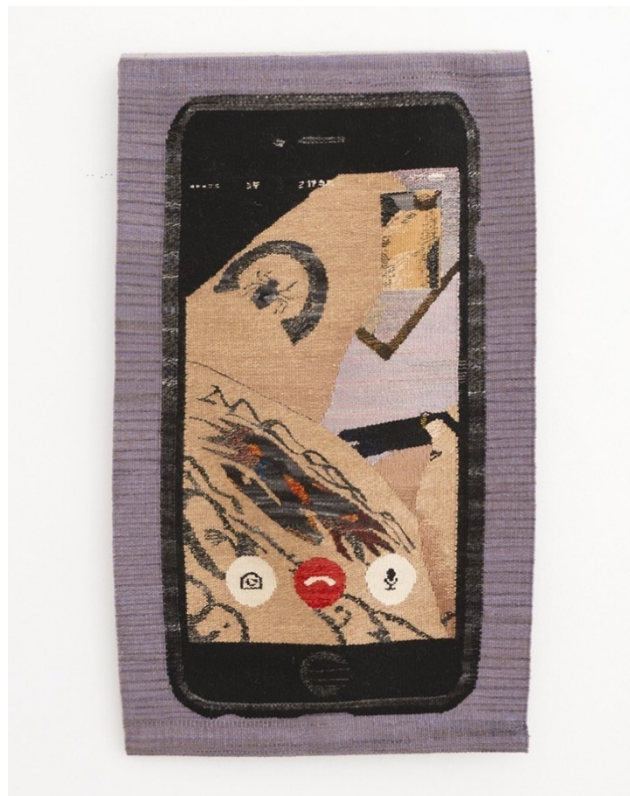


Figure 21

Erin Riley. *True Love Him*. 2016. Wool and Cotton. 61 X 106,7 cm. Hashimoto Contemporary, San Francisco.

Erin Riley weaves her Internet sourced images in the tradition of tapestry. “This somewhat brutal juxtaposition of the sordid with the traditional has the effect of creating a satirical and brow-furrowing reflection of modern society” (Skidmore⁴⁹ 2013). It is extremely easy to find images of naked people on the Internet. For the most part, this imagery is of a specific style, its foundation is eroticism. The sharing capabilities of being connected via the internet have meant that alluring images can easily be sent between couples. These images, as with a lot of imagery online, are self-generated and usually sexually provocative. Riley’s portrayal of sexual

⁴⁹ Skidmore is a freelance writer and editor, her areas of specialty are art, design, fashion and culture. She is also Deputy Editor at AnOther Magazine (Skidmore 2016)

imagery stems from her interest in “domestic abuse and the assault of women and the changing views on sexual activity” (in *The Blind Architect* 2014). Sexting can be seen as a result of the changing views and expectations surrounding sexual activity. In *Nudes 9* (fig. 22) Riley depicts a woman taking a selfie on a bed. The figure is semi-nude, on knees and elbows across a bed. This type of image is supportive of modern society’s online behaviour as exhibitionist and voyeur. Many images of this sort often end up online as acts of revenge by an angry partner. Riley states that while she understands that many of the images she depicts may be shocking, her intention is to show that “this is what’s going on” (Riley in OSBX Films 2014). Mobile applications such as Snapchat seem to have been developed with nude selfies/sexts in mind. The automatic deletion of an image once viewed lends itself to increasing sexual exploration and expression “through images in text messages” (Interview: Erin M Riley 2016). While technology has enabled new avenues of exploration, these acts have created a new context for the body and in turn influenced the way artists, myself included, use the nude.



Figure 22

Erin M. Riley. *Nudes 9*. 2013. Wool and Cotton. 106,7 X 96,5 cm. Artist Collection.

Riley's interest in "gender politics" led her to explore the way "young women are sexualised, or encouraged to sexualise themselves" (Skidmore 2013) and the way "pornography has influenced sexuality" (in Messinger 2015). This type of imagery is a result of contemporary society, in which ideas surrounding modesty have changed drastically. Riley represents these modern freedoms of feminine sexuality by depicting young women who are comfortable with their bodies and the various erotic connotations (fig. 23). Many of these images, if made by men, would be a continuation of the male gaze. For Riley, these images speak to liberties that give the subject power. Iverson⁵⁰ (2016) states "the sharing of these images expands their sense of power and ultimately, the control they have over their own lives". These nude selfies are taken when the women feel good about themselves; they are not taken from a position of weakness (Riley in Smith 2015). These selfies are excerpts from a narrative between two people. For Riley, the fact that these are images that were made to be shared with a partner add value and make them different from any image uploaded on social media (in Smith 2015).

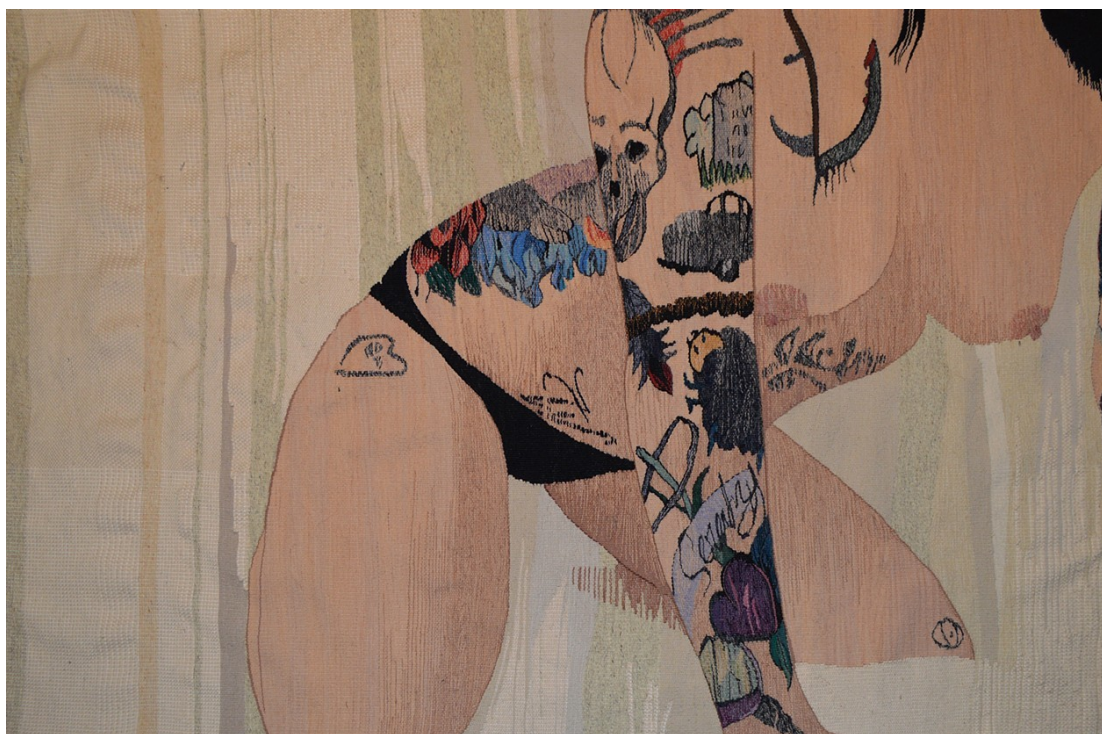


Figure 23

Erin M. Riley. *Self Portrait 3*. 2015. Wool and Cotton. 182,9 X 123 cm. Artist Collection.

⁵⁰ Iverson is a tapestry artist and former professor in the School of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University (Iverson 2016).

Like many artists, Riley draws her imagery from her observations. Her tool for looking is the Internet. As Iverson notes: “She observes her world and contemporary culture through social media” (2016). Her selection of imagery portrays a very specific side of social media, image uploading and sharing. They are extremely private moments that detail intimacy and “the careless sharing of images on the internet” (Iverson 2016). Many of these moments are not intended for public dispersal, but almost inevitably become self-destructive actions. Riley’s tapestries represent contemporary society’s “frailty and the scale of image/information sharing” (Iverson 2016). In this way the selfie symbolizes the individual’s search for a meta-reality similar to “substances and actions that can take us out of this world, for at least a few moments” (Iverson 2016). In searching for images, Riley has also selected photos she has shared with sexual partners. In this way she is not commenting from the periphery, but is involved in many of the same actions as the other women depicted. She is also affected by this modern context and this comes through in her work.

The irony in using images sourced from the Internet is that the resulting art memorializes the sort of photo that is only important to a moment and an individual or two. Nude selfies are not meant for “a broader audience” (Iverson 2016) and are not meant to last ‘forever’. They are ‘throw-away’ images that survive on Tumblr. These quick snapshots have been combined with a medium that “has a long history of storytelling. These stories are often about religious or political people and events” (Iverson 2016). In this sense, Erin is commenting on the popularity of the ‘reality’ genre. Social networking has become a huge part of daily living; in some ways it is the contemporary religion. It is how people share and communicate about political issues; social media is about global and local activities, and personal universe with oneself at the center. Riley has woven together a stream of images that make up a portrait of modern society that reflects her contemporary context.

Vinz

Vinz is a graffiti artist who uses street art media, wheat paste and spray paint, to make images of nudes. Graffiti is a hugely popular art form that has had influence on many younger artists

since its inception and growth through the 1970s (Lewisohn⁵¹ 2011). Vinz uses these techniques to place his work in public spaces; pasting his figures directly onto the walls of a city. Vinz also takes influence from his traditional art training and combines it with these ‘new’ artistic outlets. His attendance at art school might be looked at as an indicator of his appropriation of the nude, which has historic ties to traditional arts training and is a common genre throughout art history. He uses the symbolism of the naked body and the animals he combines it with to speak to issues pertinent to a contemporary context (fig. 24). In this way Vinz’s expression is influenced by his sociocultural surrounding.

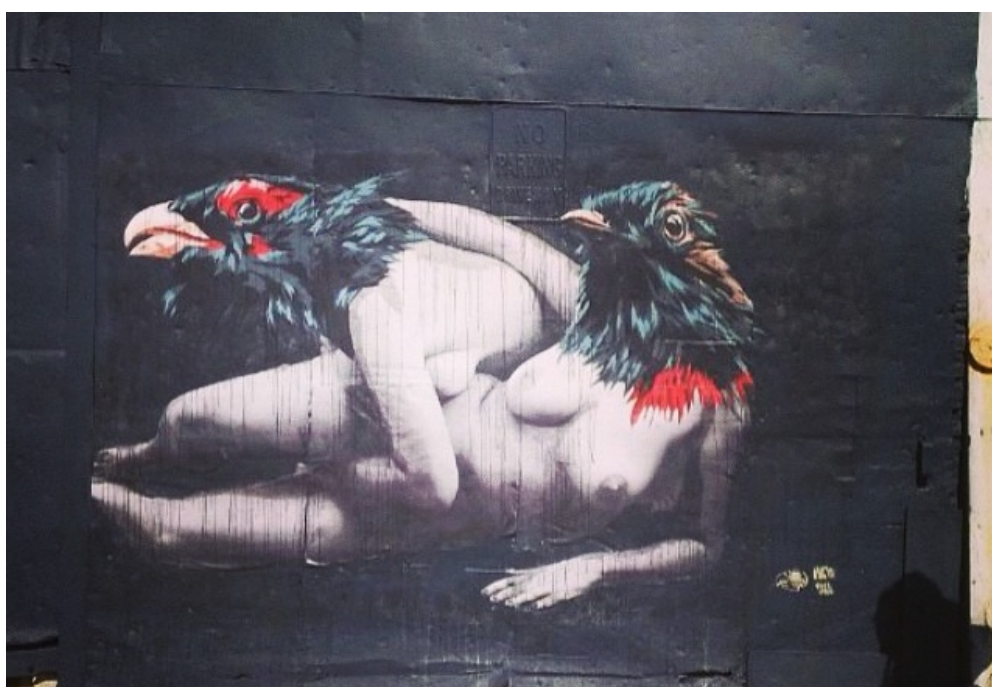


Figure 24

Vinz. Untitled. Wheatpaste. Size unknown. Location unknown.

Vinz combines imagery of naked people with the heads of various animals to create “hybrid subjects with a system of symbols” (Webb⁵² 2013). The animal heads he uses take their symbolism from ancient or religious texts and represent either freedom or oppression. Braun⁵³ (2016) states that these figures “fight for civil rights” by offering “critique of the current global policies, which strive to artificially establish order in civil societies, but at the

⁵¹ Lewisohn is an artist and curator who authored the book *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (Lewisohn 2011).

⁵² Webb is the Arts Editor and a Contributing Editor at *Nailed Magazine* (Webb 2013).

⁵³ Braun is an author for the *Widewalls* magazine, he has written about numerous graffiti/street artists (Author Archives: Maximilian Braun 2016)

very high cost of personal freedom”. The influence of this kind of social context has prompted Vinz to make images of conflict between the ‘free’ nude and the police, who signify the keepers of control (fig. 25). Vinz is commenting on the increased policing of modern society as a way to maintain a norm and restrict individual’s actions. To add to the idea of freedom the figures are given bird heads, while the police are given the heads of reptiles. Vinz is making reference to the ideas of the ‘reptilian agenda’, which “is simply one of control, one towards world domination” (New age of Aquarius 2012).



Figure 25

Vinz. Wheat paste. Size unknown. Location unknown.

As with the previously mentioned artists, Vinz also makes direct reference to art history by appropriating some of the poses in famous works of art. Through these references Vinz is acknowledging the historic context of the subject matter. However, he updates these works of art by contextualizing them with contemporary concerns. He has seated *The Thinker* on an oil drum, with oil dripping across his naked body. Vinz’s exploration and use of the nude is influenced here by environmental concerns brought about by modern effects on nature, from mining and fracking to consumption. In his version of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, he appropriates the logo for the oil company Shell. These two sources of imagery come together in a depiction of Venus floating to shore on the Shell logo (fig. 26). This work, and *The Thinker in Oil*, force the viewer to consider the effects of the oil industry on nature. These, and other, modern day issues are a clear influence on Vinz’s work.



Figure 26

Vinz. Wheat paste. Size unknown. Location unknown.

Working in public means that Vinz shares the visual landscape with the output of Graphic Design, Branding and Advertising. He acknowledges this context by creating work that speaks a similar language to that of an advert. Vinz (in Zante 2015) feels that the use of nudity in public spaces relates “to the overuse of nudity and sex by big companies and their adverts”. In *Honest Ads* (fig. 27) Vinz has deliberately positioned his nude imagery in the format of advertisements, thereby taking part in what is termed ‘brandalism’ or ‘subvertising’, which “typically involves artwork commenting on consumerism [and] cultural values” (Anthony & Groom 2015:29). It is no surprise that an artist who makes pictures for public display would make reference to advertising as it is the force majeure of public imagery. Advertising, which very often sells happiness in the form of a product, also becomes the content of Vinz’s work. *Honest Ads* acts as a reminder that “love and happiness are free” (10 new contemporary

artists). In this way Vinz is subverting the original function of the advert, which, while aiming to sell a specific product, “shape[s] our understanding of what it means to be happy, beautiful and successful” (Why brandalise? 2015).



Figure 27

Vinz. *Honest Ads: Envy Gucci*. Wheat paste. Size unknown. Location unknown.

Vinz’s main objective is to communicate freedom, which has a symbolic relationship with nudity. The naked body and street art techniques have both been used as tools for political change. His use of this subject matter and media therefore works as criticism of “repressive governments” (Itzkowitz⁵⁴ 2014). He depicts police officers in conflict with ‘free’ nude figures. Vinz (in Zante 2015) states that his figures “are naked because they have nothing to hide”. The nakedness also suggests “fragility in the face of the other much more aggressive characters”. These naked figures echo the use of the nude body in various forms of protest. The nakedness in Vinz’s work calls for social change. This aspect of the nude makes Vinz use

⁵⁴ Itzkowitz is a writer for a number of publications, including: The Huffington Post, Business Insider and Untapped Cities (Itzkowitz 2014)

of the body different from the aforementioned mentioned artists. In some cases, nudity might be a simple way of drawing attention to a cause, at other times the symbolism of the body adds to the message “using the power and beauty of” the body “to send out a message” (Lunceford⁵⁵ 2012:3). No matter the reason, it is clear that the body is “an effective weapon in political protest” (Barcan 2004:93).

Vinz’s use of the nude is influenced by his sociocultural context, something that he has in common with the other selected artists. His work is directly influenced by advertising, injustice and politics. Vinz has taken the body to the streets. By using the nude in public space and framing it within the style of advertising he comments on the ubiquitous use of the nude in media, the prevalent visual force of contemporary society. Vinz has also made use of the political implications of the undressed in protest; from environmental plight to action against social control.

Suggested Friends

The following artists are discussed in addition to the aforementioned selected artists. This is an attempt to provide further examples that show the breadth of exploration and contextual influence in the work of contemporary artists.

John Currin’s work is painted in the style of the Romantics, but pinups and fashion magazines influence his stylistic approach to subject matter (fig. 28). His paintings, while using historic subject matter, are “loaded...with modern-day notions of beauty and morality. The standards set by fashion and gossip magazines, with their kitsch clichés, are clearly exposed and gloriously caricatured in the manner of ‘great art’” (Grosenick⁵⁶ 2002:72). The execution of Currin’s paintings lends a satirical look to the work. Currin states, “it is just reflecting the constant prurient provocation” (in Wood 2012:46). In this way Currin’s work exists as both a critique and product of contemporary visual culture, “in which the sexualisation of images is the dominant feature of how we read the world visually” (Wood⁵⁷ 2012:46). This is effectively

⁵⁵ Lunceford is a “rhetorical scholar whose research focuses on new technologies, social movements and protest” (Lunceford 2016)

⁵⁶ Grosenick is an author and editor who worked on a number of art related books (Biography 2016).

⁵⁷ Wood is curator of contemporary art and performance at Tate Modern (Catherine Wood 2016)

achieved by way of the traditional technique Currin employs and the slight nod to the contemporary body ideals presented in magazines, movies and other popular media in our contemporary context. “Currin’s figures spring from a somewhat mystifying combination of highbrow art, historical references and the lowliest of pop-culture sources” (Kunitz⁵⁸ 2011:44). His paintings speak directly to the cultural context they are borne from. Currin states that he uses imagery from “catalogues of advertising stock photos” (Van De Walle⁵⁹ 2002:33). This form of source material gives his paintings a distinctly contemporary appearance, while simultaneously evoking the history of figurative painting.



Figure 28

John Currin. *Maenads*. 2015. Oil on Canvas. 121,9 X 91,4 cm. Gagosian Gallery.

Aleah Chapin uses the nude to speak to issues of body image, a topic that is communicated through commercial magazines and other forms of media. Chapin (in Cohen 2014) states

⁵⁸ Kunitz is a writer. He has been editor in chief at Modern Painters and a contributor to Vanity Fair (

⁵⁹ Van De Walle is a writer and editor at the New York Times Magazine (Mark Van De Walle 2014). He has written about art and pop culture for a number of publications (Van De Walle 2002).

“Most women have issues...we’re told that our bodies are supposed to be a ‘certain height, certain size, certain weight’. But the pictures we see are completely unrealistic; they’re very Photoshopped”. Chapin confronts these issues by painting realistic depictions of people at various ages. Her work represents the naked, real bodies of contemporary society. Cohen (2014) states that Chapin’s “paintings challenge the ageing process: how the years affect our bodies and minds, and how we’re ‘supposed’ to behave at a certain age”. She does this by depicting “several phases of the human experience” (Maidman⁶⁰ 2016). In her work she sometimes contrasts perceptions of age, a mother and daughter standing side by side or a group of older women involved in child-like games. In *Rachel and Wes* (fig. 29) she captures a mother with child, which in a similar way uses the nude to emphasize the connection between mother and infant.



Figure 29

Aleah Chapin. *Rachel and Wes*. 2016. Oil on Canvas. 213,4 X 127cm. Flowers Gallery, New York.

⁶⁰ Maidman is an artist and writer who has been featured in ARTnews, Juxtapoz, American Art Collector and The Artist's Magazine (Maidman 2014).

Lee Price is also influenced by messages communicated through most popular magazines. Her work speaks to the pressure on women to ‘watch their figure’ by dieting and not over eating. Price (Indulgence with Lee Price 2014) states, “in this society, there’s so much pressure for women to be thin. We’re not supposed to have appetites”. Her paintings show women, in comfort, surrounded by food – usually fast food or desserts. This pressure can lead some women to “consume in secret” (Price in Cusack 2011). Price’s traditional subject matter is contextualized by the pressures of consumerism. The women are “getting excessive with food that is considered indulgent, forbidden, or comforting” (Indulgence with Lee Price 2014). The paintings address “the intersections of food with body image, addiction, and unabating desire” (Stringer⁶¹ 2011) (fig. 30).



Figure 30

Lee Price. Lemon Meringue. 2011. Oil on Linen. 81,3 X 182,8 cm. Private Collection.

Juan Francisco Casas makes realistic drawings that resemble most of the imagery shared by today’s, digital, generation. Casas (in Idol Magazine 2014) states “I try to depict ‘the selfie generation’, with compositions similar to those posted on social media, images that glorify everyday existence and encourage self-obsession” (fig. 31). His work references the throw away imagery that is made in abundance since the development of the digital camera.

⁶¹ Stinger is the art editor for The Other Journal (Author Archive: Heather Smith Stinger 2016)

“millions of bad photos plaguing the internet of young hip 20 somethings, having fun, acting, out, getting drunk, and often times getting naked” (Crest 2012). Casas’ choice of image is directly influenced by image sharing and sexts. As with social media, Casas’ images “transform viewers into voyeurs” (Juan Francisco Casas (He)artbroken 2016). In a recent body of work, Casas has used images sent to him by female followers (Selfies by Juan Francisco Casas 2015). All of the images are embedded with sexuality, echoing the content of Riley’s work, the images used are created by the subject of the photographs, thereby giving the women complete control over how they will be seen.



Figure 31

Juan Francisco Casas. 2014. *Lamarimorena/Córdoba/Spain*. Ballpoint pen on paper. 15 x 15cm. Galeria el Museo.

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned evidence one can say that contemporary artists take influence from their surrounding context. These contextual influences affect the way in which the artist explores the nude figure as a subject matter. The history of art has associated the nude with ideals and an objectified, female figure. Contemporary artists have taken this subject matter and added meaning that is significant to a modern context. By doing this they have “imbued [the nude] with particular properties [that] it is not readily associated with” (Crow⁶² 2010:42). In this way the contemporary artist frames the figure to speak about issues concerning modern society; matters that relate to body image presented through popular media, associated eating and dieting disorders as well as exploration of sexuality. The artists discussed above speak to these, and other, issues through the use of symbolic signifiers. The work they produce is specific to a 21st century society; the sociocultural references are directly related to facets of modern society and the associated visual culture.

The historic subject matter, made use of by each of the selected artists, is translated into contemporary visual language through the use of up to date contextual signifiers. From the research conducted, I found that many artists today still use the nude figure, even though it might be seen as an old fashioned subject. But, the bodies presented by contemporary artists are not meant to be passive, presented to be looked at. The artists are influenced by their surrounding context, and therefore make reference to these contexts. In some cases, the use of historic subject matter is about linking the contemporary to the past, at other times it is about the symbolic references it evokes. No matter the reason, the contemporary artist's choice to work with a traditional subject matter is intentional. They understand the reverence that comes with such a historic motif as the nude, its ability to speak to various concerns and the power of it as a sign.

While conducting this research, which included exploring my own contextual influences, I found that the Internet has had profound influence on modern culture and, therefore on, contemporary artists. The Internet and its associated media platforms, have had a

⁶² Crow is Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design and Pro-Vice Chancellor at Manchester Metropolitan University.

tremendous influence on sociocultural experiences, specifically on the shifting definitions of public and private. The effects of sharing have impacted on the way in which two spaces that were viewed in the past as dichotomous, are bleeding into each other. This, amongst other issues, will be dealt with in the following chapter as it is a contextual influence on my own practice.

Chapter Three

NSFW*

*Not safe for work

This chapter places the practical component of this study at its core to discuss and analyse my work and its conceptual underpinnings. The ideas that are unpacked in the art making process both guided, and resulted from, the research undertaken. I have come to realize that the term 'nude', as opposed to naked, describes a specific visual that is felt to be out of date, recalling imagery of reclining, passive female models. But, from looking at a selection of contemporary artists it becomes clear that there are a number of common modern issues that affect the figurative artists' work. From the constant stream of advertising to the ubiquity of social media and online platforms, artists take influence and apply meaning to their work based on the perceptions generated from their context - as seen with the artists explored in the previous chapter. In this way the nude is updated and kept relevant to the times, often crossing the divide between nudity and nakedness thus becoming what Borzello (2012:11) refers to as "the naked nude, the nude recycled for our times". The ideals that created the historic nude have not been left behind; they have been updated and kept relevant to make the body serve the intentions of the artist. This sociocultural influence also extends into my art practice.

As with the aforementioned artists, my practice is influenced by context. My context is made up of two main factors. The first is that of the Internet and social media. These technological developments have shaped many characteristics of contemporary living, especially in the way we communicate and represent ourselves. This has become a dominant sociocultural influence since the point of connection became a part of our personal effects. "An American 13 year old today has never known a day without the Internet" (Crouch⁶³ 2015). Communication standards have changed substantially with the advent of mobile technologies: smartphones and instant access to online platforms. This immediate connection to the Internet and social networks has created a context that allows one to share

⁶³ Crouch is a writer and the executive editor for Christianity Today. His work has been published in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and Time magazine (Biography 2016).

private moments with more people. The second contextual influence is my background as a graffiti artist, having started writing graffiti in the early 2000's when it was still budding subculture in Durban. Graffiti has, since then, molded the way many people experience various environments. "By virtue of its positioning, it has become a prominent icon in our urban environment" (Günes⁶⁴ & Yilmaz⁶⁵ 2006:3). In more recent times, graffiti and street art have transformed many cities in the form of contemporary murals.

Both of these contexts played a vital role in the completion of my work: The internet became an appropriate source of reference material; I make use of selfies and other motifs that relate to online interaction. This material helps with my exploration of the contemporary overlap between public and private spaces, which is one of the main areas affected by the Internet and social media. Because of this, I will first unpack concepts relating to these two spaces as a way to see how the contemporary understanding of public and private space has evolved. This will provide a broader context for the discussion of the sub-categories interrogated in my work. I examine how, because of this overlap, people share more of themselves via social networking services. I do this by predominantly looking at online media, particularly the selfie, which relates to issues of intimacy, censorship, everyday activities, image quality and control. The element of nudity works as a symbol for exposure, while referencing the sense of intimacy that many online networks create, as nudity is a state that is rarely experienced outside of private relationships. This use of online behaviour further demonstrates the increasing overlap between private and public spaces.

I will discuss the relevance of graffiti, by drawing parallels between the art form and social media. This is done to highlight the importance of graffiti as conceptual signifier as well as an integral part of the final curatorship of the practical component of this research.

⁶⁴ Günes is an Associate Professor at Gazi University in the Faculty of Industrial Design and Architecture (Assoc. Dr. Serkan Günes 2016).

⁶⁵ Yilmaz is a PhD Graduate from the University of Groningen, her area of research was in the field of Language and Cognition (PhD ceremonies 2016).

Early posts (the beginnings)

Before moving onto the discussion of work and concepts that make up the final practical component of this study, it is important to review one of the earliest explorations of this study, which happened as part of a collaborative exhibition (fig. 32), titled *Someone* – with Sakhile Mhlongo, which featured large scale portraits alongside larger than life nude figures painted with spray-paint. This merging of the traditional fine art world, the gallery, portraiture and nude figures, seemed to situate these objects in a contemporary realm.



Figure 32

Dane Stops & Sakhile Mhlongo. *Someone 1*. 2014. Durban University of Technology Art Gallery.

On one of the walls of the gallery I began to make use of nude selfies (fig. 33). This was to further emphasize the interplay between the public and private as well as the temporal aspect of the exhibition; the fact that it would be painted over at the end and that on social media many updates happen so regularly that older posts seem to get lost down ones 'news feed'. This exhibition helped kick start my exploration of the nude; it helped me understand some of the symbolic reference that the figure can have, such as honesty, freedom and truth,

exposure, shame and vulnerability (Barcan 2004), as well as establish a line of visual enquiry into the overlap between the public and private through the use of graffiti techniques and social media elements and practices as contextual signifiers.



Figure 33

Dane Stops & Sakhile Mhlongo. *Someone 2*. 2014. Durban University of Technology Art Gallery.

The exhibition titled *Someone*, and particularly the artwork of the nude taking a selfie, mentioned above, lead me to examine my contemporary social environment with particular emphasis on social media and the Internet. I suggest that one of the biggest influences in today's society is the omnipresence of social networking services and other Internet based platforms. This filters down to the devices and applications used on a daily basis to generate and access a network of connections

What follows is an unpacking of contextual elements relating to social media and the contemporary understanding of public and private space. I feel that it is necessary to explore these concepts, as they are pivotal to understanding my work, which will follow.

Social media as contemporary context

We are living in an information age, with the Internet at its center. Castells⁶⁶ (2014:133) states “The Internet is the decisive technology of the Information Age”. The Internet can easily be looked at as being the transforming technology of this generation. The capabilities of the Internet have driven the development of many modern devices, smart phones for example. It has created ultimate connection, instant capturing and sharing of images. It has extended globalization to the point that trends exist almost everywhere within a few days. “Social media force us to revisit many of the fundamental concepts through which we make sense of our social reality” (Jurgenson & Rey 2012:287). Amongst the numerous areas that the Internet and associated technologies have influenced is the contemporary understanding and navigation of public and private space. It has done this by enabling an exchange of information between the public and private. “The relationship between publicity and privacy is changing in light of recent developments in communication technologies” (Jurgenson⁶⁷ & Rey⁶⁸ 2012:292). The capability to alter this relationship has been amplified through the ability to capture and share images using a mobile phone from almost anywhere. This ability has sparked a craze of sharing parts of one’s life in various forms: in words as statuses and tweets and as visuals through images and video.

This on-hand capability to share means each individual is the director of one’s life. He or she controls the information shared and attempts to frame it in a particular way. Each image and status adds to the online document of our lives. I use the nude as a reference to exposure. Social networking sites are used daily to share the small happenings in our lives. Through social networking we incrementally expose pieces of ourselves in an attempt to create a profile of who we are: a snapshot for our friends, family and followers to know us through. I have tried to draw on various forms of communication, from one on one networking that uses direct messaging to posting and sharing with friends and family on networks that require acceptance by way of friend requests and open networks that allow almost anyone to follow your updates. By doing this I attempted to create a dialogue with the figure and as many

⁶⁶ Castells is a Professor at the University of Southern California. His expertise are in, but not exclusive to, globalization, networks and new media (Manuel Castells 2016).

⁶⁷ Jurgenson is a sociologist and social media theorist (Jurgenson 2016).

⁶⁸ Rey is a PhD Candidate at the University of Maryland. He is co-founder of the Theorizing the Web Conferences. His areas of interest include Social theory and Technology and Society (PJ Rey 2016).

Internet based platforms as possible, this is done in order to show the breadth of influence the context of social networking has. I have also employed various technical aspects of online imagery, such as image quality and censorship.

The ability to go online with one's mobile phone, to connect and instantly share information about one's environment, has become a major influence on the way people behave and define spaces. The Internet has been described as "The most public space in the world, entered from the privacy of our own homes" (Wesch⁶⁹ 2008). This new behaviour allows every individual to share more of one's private activities, to always be in touch with numerous groups while on one's own, and it has also allowed each of us, as a member of the public, to look into the private lives of other people.

When it comes to the new popular imagery, the selfie comes across as mere self-adoration. This is largely due to the numerous uploads of this form of self-portraiture. But, while this observation can be generally true, the act is also reflexive and allows people to look at themselves as others might, and subsequently form a better understanding of who they are. There is already a substantial amount written on the subject of the selfie (Tifentale⁷⁰ 2014; Wickel⁷¹ 2015; Murray⁷² 2015; Giroux⁷³ 2015; Dean⁷⁴ 2016) and it continues to be an area of interest with further insight and light shed on the various aspects of the action. The selfie is just one result of and contributing aspect to contemporary social Internet activity. One of the major influences of the Internet is its repositioning of public and private spaces. Before getting into the societal effects of online culture, and because this is a major effect of sharing via online platforms, it is important to examine public and private spaces and how they have changed through history.

⁶⁹ Wesch is an associate professor of cultural anthropology at the Kansas State University (Wesch 2008)

⁷⁰ Tifentale is a PhD candidate in Art History at the City University of New York (Tifentale 2016). Her essay explores the debates surrounding the selfie by looking at it in the "broader context of photographic self-portraiture" (Theory and reflection 2014).

⁷¹ Wickel explores the selfie as an influence on narcissism and selfishness (Wickel 2015:1).

⁷² Murray "explores the cultural fascination with social media forms of self-portraiture... [as] a powerful means for self-expression" (Murray 2015:490).

⁷³ Giroux explores selfies as "symptomatic of the power of the social media to turn public space into private displays" (Giroux 2015:155).

⁷⁴ Dean writes about selfie feminism taking hold of and becoming the mainstream (Dean 2016).

Public and private

The various Internet based applications in use today have shaped the modern understanding of public and private (Ford⁷⁵ 2011), creating a greater overlap between these once separate spaces. This has allowed an increased amount of publically shared privacy and private conversation, through text, image, video and voice, in public environments. It has influenced the way we connect and what we share, since we can share more frequently. This in turn affects the type of imagery we capture, share and see.

The *Oxford South African Concise Dictionary* (2014:952) defines public in a number of ways: firstly, as “open to or shared by all people of an area or country”. Secondly, “known to many people” and lastly “done, perceived, or existing in open view”. While in the same dictionary private (2014:937) is defined as “belonging to or for the use of one particular person or group of people only”, as well as “not to be shared with or revealed to others”.

By definition the two spaces are separate, understood as a dichotomy. The idea of public and private as separate spaces has molded the larger part of society. Ford (2011:550) explains that:

The public/private distinction is one of the most influential concepts of the modern era, both in terms of social theory and in terms of everyday life. The assumption that public and private are a dichotomous pair has influenced numerous aspects of social life, ranging from the gendered division of labor to the development of the suburb.

The separation of space into city and suburbia created the private space of the home and publicness of work. This division “is a physical manifestation of the relationship between private and public spheres in society” (Madanipour⁷⁶ 2003:6). These subdivisions influence the way we act, and affect the thoughts we project and how a space is experienced.

The inside, private, home became a ‘feminine’ space while the outside, public, work

⁷⁵ Ford is a adjunct professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts. Her research focuses on technology (mainly the Internet) and society (Sarah ford adjunct professor of sociology 2016).

⁷⁶ Madanipour is professor of urban design at Newcastle University. His research interests include: “urban space, its social and psychological significance, [and] processes that shape it” (Professor Ali Madanipour 2016).

environment became 'masculine'. This resulted from the "gendered division of labor" (Ford 2011:563) based on the understanding of the public private distinction. The definition of space creates boundaries for behaviour. Madanipour (2003:1) states that our daily lives involve encounters with a variety of spaces, the "personal", "interpersonal" and "impersonal", and the definitions and understanding of these spaces make us "feel and behave differently". The public place of work might be visually signified through the use of uniforms, or complete lack thereof. It would also require a specific level of professionalism. All of which can be discarded as one moves into the private. These behaviours are also based on the people who surround us. The contextual influences affect the framework of the space.

Definitions, such as 'public' and 'private', are implemented according to environment and distribution of information (Ford 2011:551). Informational privacy is often dependent on the spatial characteristics. Moor⁷⁷ (1997:31) states that it is the "complex of situations in which information is authorized". As we move from one space to another it is not only the environment that changes, but also the people who surround us; from being alone, with close friends or family to the company of strangers (Madanipour 2003:1). The people one interacts with affect the spatial definitions and, therefore, the type of information one shares. But if we carry our friends with us in our pockets then it seems that there would be a degree of similarity in almost all environments. Our personal is being mixed with the public. This spatial overlap reconfigures our understanding of the public and private, and in turn affects behaviour within these spaces. In many ways social media is a manifestation of the overlap between the public and the private.

Much of the understanding of space as a dichotomy still stands in contemporary society even though it is, to a certain degree, outdated. Ford (2011:550) states, "Where the two spheres were once separate, there is now significant overlap and interaction". The Internet has enabled a new level of interaction across spaces. There are more transitions between the two spaces. Many elements of publicness entered the private realm and there are many private spaces pocketed around the public. A car, for instance, allows the characteristics of domestic life to continue while travelling through public space (Ford 2011:554). In the same way, online

⁷⁷ Moor is professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy at Dartmouth College, his professional interests include philosophy of artificial intelligence, logic and computer ethics (James H. Moor 2013).

connections allow individuals to move through spaces in a bubble. All the changes in definitions, and crossover of spaces has not only altered ones understanding of the two spaces it has made it difficult to recognize the separation (Kumar & Makarova 2008:326). We are now able to work from home and have private conversations at work. The interplay between public and private is so frequent that multiple behavioural roles are able to play out almost simultaneously. Meyrowitz⁷⁸ (in Ford 2011:555) reflects this in saying that the difficulty in separating “the public thread of experience from the private one” had been increased by electronic communication devices. The rise of Internet and social media has influenced the relationship we have with public and private space. Ford (2011:550) posits that one can no longer look at the space as a public private dichotomy, but rather as a “continuum”.

As spatial definitions evolved the public and private became increasingly protean. They are “a complex family of” opposites (Weintraub⁷⁹ & Kumar⁸⁰ 1997:xii). Family might be the precise term to use, they are wholly related, create tension and the association between them differs with context. There is a “Multiplicity of ways that they are employed” (Weintraub & Kumar 1997:xii). The rise of social media, from early chatrooms to Snapchat, has had an influencing role in the exchange between private and public. Internet has created more publicity in private life. Other examples of the spatial crossover are private sponsorship of public monuments, park benches and stones laid in memory of an individual, and the many forms of advertising are all examples of privacy in public. The Internet may be an interstice between the public and private but it does not negate their existence. It allows for a crossover by taking rules from both spaces. “The categories themselves are highly complex and ambiguous” (d’Entrèves & Vogel 2000:1). This is even truer since the connection one has to one’s public is private; the mobile phone has created a personal link to a public.

In modern society the overlap created by the Internet, a major influence in everyday life, has resulted in living in partial public privacy. We have the ability to constantly connect with

⁷⁸ Meyrowitz is professor of Communication at the University of New Hampshire. His field of interest is mass media analysis (Joshua Meyrowitz 2016).

⁷⁹ “Weintraub is a social & political theorist, political sociologist, and democratic socialist who has been teaching most recently at the University of Pennsylvania and Bryn Mawr College” (Jeff Weintraub 2016).

⁸⁰ Kumar is a professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia. His interests include: “nationalism and national identity... global history and problems of historical sociology” (Krishan Kumar 2016).

others; it is extremely common to see a room full of people who are engaging with other people via their phones. Or a person walking and checking their email, updating their Facebook or messaging friends. As a result, we share more. In an environment that makes it feel as though one is speaking to friends and family it is easy to give away personal stories. Everything posted or shared on Facebook, all the photographs, tweets and hashtags become available to almost anyone. This indicates that we share more of our private life with the public. This also gives us the opportunity to watch other people. It's not unusual to hear people talk of Facebook stalking; social media also uses terminology such as 'follow', allowing you to watch someone from a distance, with or without their knowledge.

My Conceptual exploration

As an artist who is part of the millennial generation, commonly referred to as 'digital natives' (Prensky⁸¹ 2001:1) because of growing "up with the Internet and smartphones in an always-on digital world" (Millennials: coming of age 2016), I am drawn to much of the imagery that is created and consumed in contemporary society. And, as a figurative artist who works with the human form as a subject I am specifically interested in the way people, generally, represent themselves and their actions online. Through bathroom mirrors, wacky faces, a short quip and emoji, a torrent of images are used to communicate by a wave of people with cameras and 'an audience'. Most of this seems to express very little and spurs on dozens of remarks about narcissism, as if selfies are the only thing that has made people care about what they look like. Fashion magazines, TV and movies have been selling an idea of public image for ages. Yet before the aforementioned forms of media there was art, in which the historic nude imposed a dictatorship over the body. These public expressions of image have been the topic of many contemporary artists, some of which were explored in the previous chapter. For the purpose of this study my focus is on the nude mediated by modern technology; nude selfies, sexts and body parts, when used as visual elements, become symbols for sharing and exposing oneself.

⁸¹ Prensky is a writer, consultant and innovator in the field of education. He is also a leading expert on the connection between learning and technology (Learn about Marc 2016)

To further emphasize the aspect of exposure and sharing I have used the Internet as my main source of imagery. The images I have used are freely available through basic google and Tumblr searches. The imagery and various visual signifiers, which predominantly reference social media, are combined in an attempt to interrogate dichotomies such as public and private. It also examines the contemporary relationship with the body, through social convention and common online practice. A result of this source of reference is that many of the images are of figures that have close to ideal body types. In some cases, I have made a concerted effort to reference bodies that do not commonly exist on mass media platforms. Many images of this kind were not entirely suitable for this study as the subjects had selected to only pose semi-nude whilst taking the selfies. No matter the type of body sourced, the images were always of proud people; people who were happy with who they were and were prepared to share that. This is synonymous with some of the ideas presented by Erin M. Riley, who expresses interest in the pictures women take when they feel sexiest (in Smith 2015).

The remainder of this chapter will analyse works made specifically for the practical component of this study. Although, as mentioned before, issues of public and private, and social media run through the entire body of work, I have further investigated different issues within these concepts. These sub-concepts include selfies, intimacy, censorship, the everyday, image quality and control, as well as graffiti.

The exploration of the selfie

A smartphone is a 'must have' device for the avid voyeuristic exhibitionist. The Internet may have made connections across distances increasingly possible, but the webcam and smartphone have opened personal life, space, thoughts and actions up to the public. These devices also enabled one to share prolifically. The webcam gave access to the inside of homes, to the room the computer was set up in, which was probably a bedroom. The mobile phone, with built in camera gave the opportunity to not only look back at ourselves, but to document and share. It allows us to be watched while looking at and watching others. In 2013 'Selfie' was voted word of the year (The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year is... 2015). It was

defined as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website” (Selfie 2015).

The accumulation of ‘likes’ and ‘shares’ can easily become something that is obsessed over; the more one gets the better one feels. This social currency leads to further uploading and sharing. According to a simple google search with the keywords “what kind of posts get the most likes” the answer lies in sharing images; and in an attempt to garner as much attention as possible the number of images online grows continuously. These ideas are the subject of exploration in *Load More* (fig. 34), which features four images that are presented as they might appear on an Instagram profile. I selected Instagram as it is an image based social networking application. The images are displayed on a grid, as they would online, and are cropped off the canvas to allude that the display extends beyond the surface of the painting. At the bottom of the canvas there is a blue circle, cropped off the canvas. This circle appears when one scrolls to the bottom of the already loaded images. When it first appears it has the words ‘load more’ within the circle, thereafter it shows that more images are about to load. The inclusion of this small visual element refers to the amount of images and personal information one goes through when logged onto social media. The four images used draw from popular image making culture, presenting figures taking selfies in three of the images, with the fourth being that of the ubiquitous cat – it is reported that “15% of all Internet traffic is connected to cats” (Sheld 2013). One of the images has a wash of grey painted over it and the information regarding likes and comments painted as a finishing touch. The numbers presented here are taken from a Kim Kardashien post, which incidentally was of her and another celebrity, topless and ‘appropriately’ censored – nipples hidden - for social media, in a bathroom. The purpose of referencing these high numbers of ‘likes’ is an attempt to comment on the incredibly high reception this sort of image receives. The work interrogates the social value attributed to mundane daily activity, such as visiting the bathroom, while at the same time these images of high social importance are subjected to censorship conventions; the female selfies have their nipples pixelated while the male figure does not.



Figure 34

Dane Knudsen. *Load More*. 2016. Acrylic on Canvas. 1220 x 915 cm. Artists collection.

The act of taking selfies, and other common mobile phone activities, is an example of the changing behavioural patterns created by the overlap between public and private spaces. The way the act seems so completely distant to 'regular' public behaviour. For the brief time it takes to snap a selfie the subject is separated from the world around them. Everything else does not exist. It becomes about the "'me' and 'now'...ordinary people trying to tell their own story" (Abidin⁸² 2014). This Act is not just limited to bathrooms and mirrors; it could be on a stairwell in a shopping centre or the middle of a park. Selfies utilize the body as a form of

⁸² Abidin is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Australia. Her research interests include: sociology, communication and media studies (Abidin 2014).

“self-expression”. The name suggests the focus of the photograph, oneself, but the person usually ends up being “juxtaposed against a backdrop” (Abidin 2014). This ‘random’ aspect to selfies is explored in different ways in various works, such as *Morning Share* and *Post Comment*. In *Morning Share*, the central focus is on the person taking the selfie, but throughout the bathroom are objects that do not add to the sexuality of the subject, such as cleaning detergent and a dog. These unintended allowances into one’s private space create an intimacy in the image. A bathroom sink scattered with various products or a view through the doorway into the adjacent room, a bed with ruffled sheets and strewn clothes, an unaware friend or family member; these are the things we frame and share repeatedly. As *Blake*, a commenter on Abidin’s (2014) article, said “the narcissistic tag comes from the abundance of selfies an individual may post...thousands a year”. Large sums of selfies posted that have no relation to special events or celebrities. They are just a ‘look at me’ moment. Selfies are taken with jest and become “about irony and absurdity” (Clark⁸³ in Scholarly reflections on the ‘selfie’ 2013). It is obvious that there are a number of styles, not just faces pulled, in the selfie genre; from just ‘waking up’ to ‘about to go out’, from the holiday backdrop to titillation in the form of a sext (Streep⁸⁴ 2013). No matter what the form it takes, it is “part and parcel of digital braggadocio and the inevitable envy of all those looking in” (Streep 2013). It is nothing short of the mirror mirror on the wall scenario.

The selfie is the new way to develop self-awareness. As an artistic element, selfies speak of contemporary photographic technology and practices, and a new contextual juxtaposition while shouting about ideas surrounding self-promotion and identity. Self-examination is a major part of the digital environment. From sharing personal interests to activities, and at the center of this personal scrutiny is the ubiquitous selfie. Tiidenberg⁸⁵ (2014) argues that it is “a practice of reclaiming control over one’s embodied self AND over the body-aesthetic”. The act allows one to construct oneself with a particular characteristic, as a way to show that one is more than a given role.

⁸³ Clark is “Director of the Estlow International Center for Journalism and New Media at the University of Denver” (Scholarly reflections on the ‘selfie’ 2013).

⁸⁴ Streep is an author of numerous books; she is “currently working on a book about the Millennial generation” (Streep 2013).

⁸⁵ Tiidenberg is an “Associate Professor of Social Media and Visual Culture at the Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School, Tallinn University” (Tiidenberg 2016).

While many of our thoughts are turned into statuses, the advent of digital technologies and cameras in our pockets has created an image-dominated society that has allowed users to explore their own view of the body, and to document the “identity project” (Giddens⁸⁶ (1991) in Holland 2004:31). Holland⁸⁷ (2004:31) explains Nettleton⁸⁸ and Watson⁸⁹’s (1998:1) definition of the body as “something we both have and are, and it is experienced as something we prepare for public display”. In today’s globally networked community this can mean almost anything and be any time, from #nomakeupselfie and #aftersexselfie to #gymselfie and the many other hashtags out there. Before the mobile phone camera none of these moments meant anything publically, but in contemporary culture they form fragments of who we are. The camera has become something we reach for numerously throughout our daily routines.

Intimacy

With a simple search of the Internet it is easy to come across a myriad of ‘selfies’ that show off aspects of the body, if not the whole body. These portraits are taken from “the most privileged perspective possible” (Franco⁹⁰ 2013:1). They are intimate windows to a private moment. Images are powerful; especially when the image is of a well-known person or celebrity, and it is only “enhanced when garnished with privileged material – anything that says, ‘here is a bit of my private life’” (Franco 2013:2). James Franco (2013:2) defines two types of selfies, the celebrity selfie, which is “a pseudo-personal moment” and the non-celebrity selfie, which “is a chance for subjects to glam it up, to show off a special side of themselves — dressing up for a special occasion, or *not* dressing, which is a kind of preening that says, ‘There is something important about me that clothes hide, and I don’t want to hide’”. These images are quickly becoming the defining visuals of contemporary culture.

⁸⁶ Giddens has a PhD from the University of Cambridge. He is known for, amongst other things, “his theory of structuration, which explores the connection between individuals and social systems” (Crossman 2016).

⁸⁷ Holland is a research fellow at Leeds Beckett University. Her interests include: “gender, sexualities, body/embodiment, ageing, subcultures and leisure” (About Dr Samantha Holland 2016).

⁸⁸ Nettleton is a lecturer in Social Policy in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York (Nettleton and Watson 1998:viii).

⁸⁹ Watson is director of research and evaluation at the Health Education Board for Scotland (Nettleton and Watson 1998:viii).

⁹⁰ Franco is an actor, director and writer (Franco 2013)

Photographer Evan Baden, in the series *Technically Intimate* (fig), tackles issues related to the changing definitions of intimacy. This change in intimacy is spurred on by the creation of seemingly private spaces. Baden (2010) states that:

With new technologies come new ways of thinking, acting, and reacting. Our ability to connect with one another instantly using our now-ubiquitous cellular phones—and the privacy that comes with that use—has lulled us into a sense of security...This new connection and the sense of security it provides... has brought with it a new definition of intimacy... we demand that images and videos be transmitted from one private space to another. To be enjoyed now, and forever to come.

But that sense of privacy is merely an illusion. For while it is easy to create these images and videos, it is even easier to transmit them to someone else. Images can be forwarded, forwarded again, posted, and reposted. As long as there is someone willing to press 'send', there is someone willing to look.

It is clear that these behavioural shifts are connected to the changing relationship between public and private. The public arena of social media is styled to feel as though it is private. This sort of understanding leads some people to disclose private aspects of themselves. An example of this sort of environment is created with the conversational style presented with *Messenger* applications. The key difference is that conversations via social media platforms are recorded. The words and images transferred can be saved or screenshot, thereby changing the narrative the original sender intended.

The aforementioned ideas were explored in *Morning Share* (fig. 35) and *Evening Share* (fig. 36), which are images of selfies taken in bathroom mirrors. The impression that is meant to be conveyed in *Morning Share* is that the photo is taken just before or after taking a bath; in the background one can identify a bathtub, there are slippers and clothes laying on the floor as well as a dog, which just happens to be hanging around in the bathroom while everything takes place. These background elements speak to the almost random array of 'things' that often make their way into selfies, this includes personal mess and pets in private spaces that are made public when shared with another person. The person is faceless as a way to allude to anonymity and censorship; this also suggests that the subject of the image could be 'anyone'. This lack of identity is balanced by placing various emoji over parts of the head. The emoji's make reference to social networking platforms. They also act as masks, creating a character or personality for the individual. In this way it echoes the idea that selfies depict a

persona, as opposed to a portrait which shows the person. The selected emoji are playful and are meant to suggest that this image would be the sort sent to a partner. This idea is further emphasized with *Evening Share* as a partnering piece. This work is executed with darker colouring – mostly red – and is meant to suggest ‘mood lighting’. The red becomes a signifier of passion; the colour can be symbolic of sin and lust. The image is meant to portray the reciprocation of the morning nude selfie. Together these works speak to each other and are meant to relay an idea of sexting.



Figure 35

Dane Knudsen. *Morning Share*. 2015. Acrylic on board. 700 x 1220 cm. Artists collection.



Figure 36

Dane Knudsen. *Evening Share*. 2015. Acrylic on board. 700 x 1220 cm. Artists collection.

Censorship

Socially, nudity is viewed as a danger to innocence. Censorship is rife, from withholding permission to pursue a study because of perceived ethical issues to the restrictions on social media platforms, which only more recently have given way to nudity in traditional art. “And, even as their sons and daughters send nude photographs of themselves to friends over the Internet, parents everywhere continue to insist that nudity should be banned from museum walls in order to protect their innocent brood from harm” (Dijkstra 2010:8). A number of my works examine the concept of censorship through the use of various devices such as simple pixilation and blocking out to remove ‘offensive’ subject matter.

A social understanding of the nude as erotic signifier has been formed through many forms of media. “Clothing the body” has “stimulated curiosity and desire in the body itself” (Danesi 2004:185). The link between nudity and sexuality is clearly the source of reference in a large part of contemporary advertising. ‘Sex sells’ seems a common maxim of the field. While many images in advertising have a sexual undertone they do not show anything overtly sexual.

Public imagery still has to abide by certain rules so as not to offend or negatively influence younger viewers. Because of these issues, and ease of sharing found and sent information, there are often rules that govern the type of images that are permitted on social networking sites, usually enforced in varying degrees of censorship. Similar rules are implemented on social media. *You Have Upset the Community* (fig. 37) is a painting that speaks to the rules and regulations of social networking sites. Many sites prohibit most nudity. The Facebook policy (Community Standards 2016), which is almost identical on many social media apps, states:

We remove photographs of people displaying genitals or focusing in on fully exposed buttocks. We also restrict some images of female breasts if they include the nipple, but we always allow photos of women actively engaged in breastfeeding or showing breasts with post-mastectomy scarring. We also allow photographs of paintings, sculptures, and other art that depicts nude figures. Restrictions on the display of both nudity and sexual activity also apply to digitally created content unless the content is posted for educational, humorous, or satirical purposes. Explicit images of sexual intercourse are prohibited. Descriptions of sexual acts that go into vivid detail may also be removed.

This painting appropriates the message a user is sent when one of their posts is removed because it does not adhere to the above quoted rules. In this case it is taken from Instagram. The message details that the post was removed because it did not follow the “community guidelines” and that the user should read the guidelines so that he/she “can help keep Instagram safe”. The work features the ‘profile’ picture of the user, along with the users ‘handle’ or screen name. In this case I have made the username @olympia, in reference to Manet’s “scandalous representation of a prostitute” (Bernheimer⁹¹ 1989:255). There have been a number of paintings of nude women that have been damaged by viewers who took offence. *Olympia* may not have been one of them, but at the time it had to be placed out of reach of its viewers. Bernheimer (1989:256) states “The bourgeois public took such offence at this affront to its morality that the painting had to be rehung high up out of its retaliatory reach”. The reference to Olympia linked with an image that violates the aforementioned ‘community guidelines’ also links to the fact that Manet had used a prostitute as his subject matter, thereby suggesting that the removed content was explicit or involved sexual activity. A further link for the reference of Olympia is the original paintings direct stare from the sitter

⁹¹ Bernheimer was professor of Romance Languages and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania (Bernheimer 1989).

and the control a user has over his/her social media activity. Olympia's gaze says that she is aware of her nudity and because of this is in control of who gets to look at her. On social media the user only posts images of their choice and for the most part approves who can follow, watch and look at the generated content.

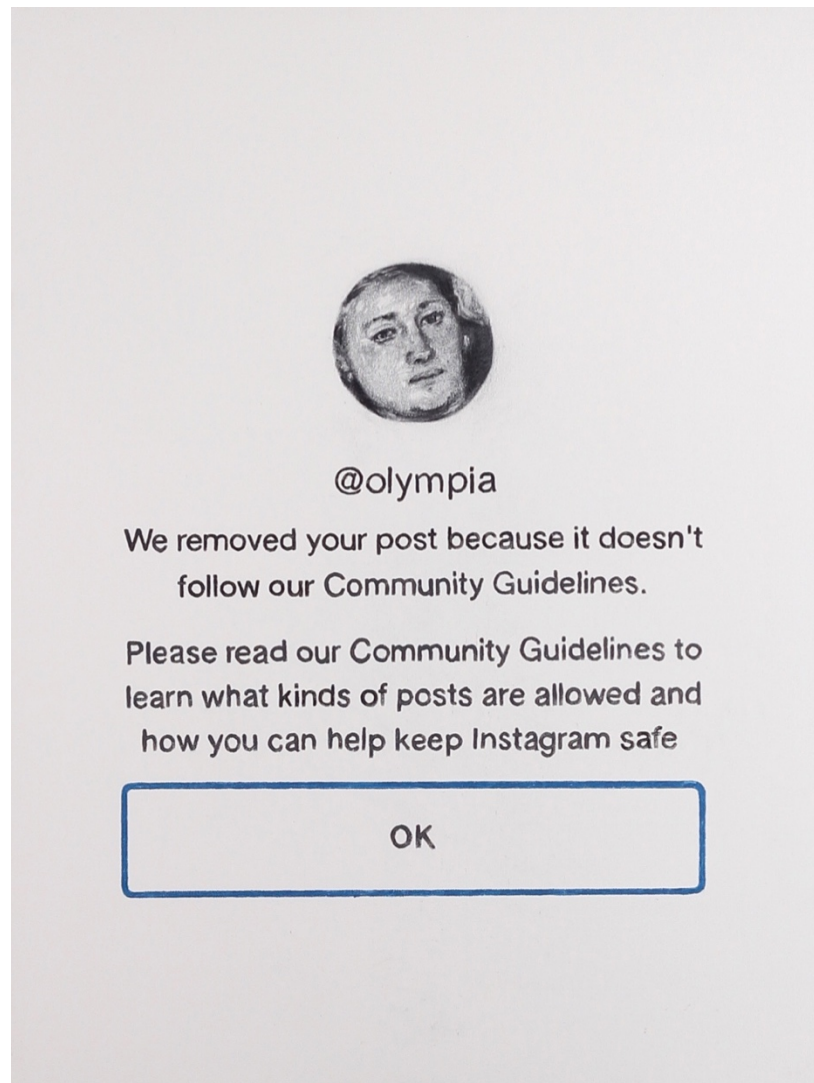


Figure 37

Dane Knudsen. *You have upset the community*. 2016. Acrylic and charcoal on canvas. 1220 x 915 cm. Artists collection.

There is also the element of self-censorship, which relates to the influence of the type of imagery portrayed in popular media. *My other account* shows a woman, sitting on her phone, surrounded by images of nude selfies – all of which are female. The implied scene is that the nudes are what the woman is looking at, and there is meant to be ambiguity regarding

whether the nudes are of her or simply images on a site she is browsing. This work, in a similar way to Riley and Saville, symbolizes the influence of imagery in public space, presented online or in advertising and fashion magazines. The surrounding images depict the objectification of women, the male gaze, which seems to be an influence so strong that it is present in self-shot images. The power of the selfie, to control the way one is presented, is subdued to external pressures and standards of beauty. In this way *My other account* becomes about comparing ourselves to the images that surround us. The work refers to the relationship between publicly displayed imagery, our private lives and the resulting form of self-censorship.

An Everyday 'Thing'

Nudity, like social media, is a part of our daily activities. But the moments of undress are experienced in private, behind closed doors. Inspired by information graphics and the idea of sharing, which is an inherent component of social networking and therefore a part of one's digital life, I decided to make an artwork that conveyed information regarding nudity as a part of the everyday. For the work *December 2015* (fig. 38) I kept track of the amount of time I spent nude, semi-nude and clothed for a month; this included showering, changing, sleeping and being around the house. This information was then calculated down to three percentages and painted alongside the work in the exhibition space. For the painting I decided to use myself as the main subject. Painting a naked self-portrait, which Borzello (2012:110) states "is a 20th Century invention", made sense as the information being conveyed communicated a record of my own nudity. The relay of information links this work to areas of Graphic Design, but in the case of the artwork there is no product connected to the message. Instead the body and information is aimed at conscientizing the viewer to everyday nudity. The title, *December 2015*, indicates that this information is specific to summer. So, while nudity is part of daily routine, the amount of nudity differs.

In using nudity to convey information I attempt to link the nude to vulnerability; definitions of privacy often speak about control over information. The giving away of personal information links to social media activity and ties in with the information age. While many social media updates are crafted to present the best side of oneself or life, the idea of vulnerability comments on the ease in which posts can be removed from the original context.

This also relates to the lack of control one has over the way the information is interpreted, shared or commented on. While this is applicable to almost all online content, when one shares imagery that shows off the body there seems to be a higher risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, especially with the sexualisation of online platforms and the variety of meanings attributed to the (nude) figure. The theme of this work attempts to shift the normal view of sexualized nudity onto the changing states of dress one goes through on a daily basis. Nudity has strong social ties to sexuality; almost all forms of media create links between them.



Figure 38

Dane Knudsen. *December 2015*. 2016. Acrylic on canvas. 2000 x 1000 cm. Artists collection.

Image Quality

An inherent characteristic of media placed online and on social media is lower quality images. This is due to compression processes and bandwidth restrictions. Because of this it is common to see thumbnails of images before selecting the image one wants, so as to allow a single 'large' image to load rather than all the images.

1 of 11700000 – 8 of 11700000 (fig. 39) is a series of miniature paintings and drawings that make direct reference to thumbnails seen online, such as in google image searches and Tumblr archives. These works speak about the urge for more created by the ease of access and fast rate of updating online information. With the rate of information transferred, and available, across online platforms it becomes easy to simply 'click through' as many stories as one is interested in. The Internet allows users to almost continually find new things to look at.



Figure 39

Dane Knudsen. *1 of 11700000 – 8 of 11700000*. 2016. Various media. Various sizes.

In many cases these small images are due to lower resolution sizes. The negative affect of this is that many images are of a poor quality, only staying clear when viewed on common screen

sizes at the correct resolution. The result of blowing an image up beyond its resolution is that it ends up becoming pixelated. *I want a closer look, but all I see are pixels* (fig. 40) is a diptych that comments on the 'I want more' characteristic of online browsing, but the inevitable low resolution of images online. All the information we get online comes at such a great speed, which is also linked to the size of information transferred, that it can make one eventually feel as though they are not getting enough, that they aren't seeing the whole picture. Addiction to cell phone and social media usage seems like something that has maddened many parents since the growth of these industries. This work speaks about this urge to get more by painting a small image of a nude selfie on a large canvas. The scale of the work asks that the viewer goes up to the work and leans in to look at the image. The second painting is of the same image; this time it has been resized to the point of pixilation. The pixels were then exaggerated as a way to turn the image of a figure into an abstract composition of squares.

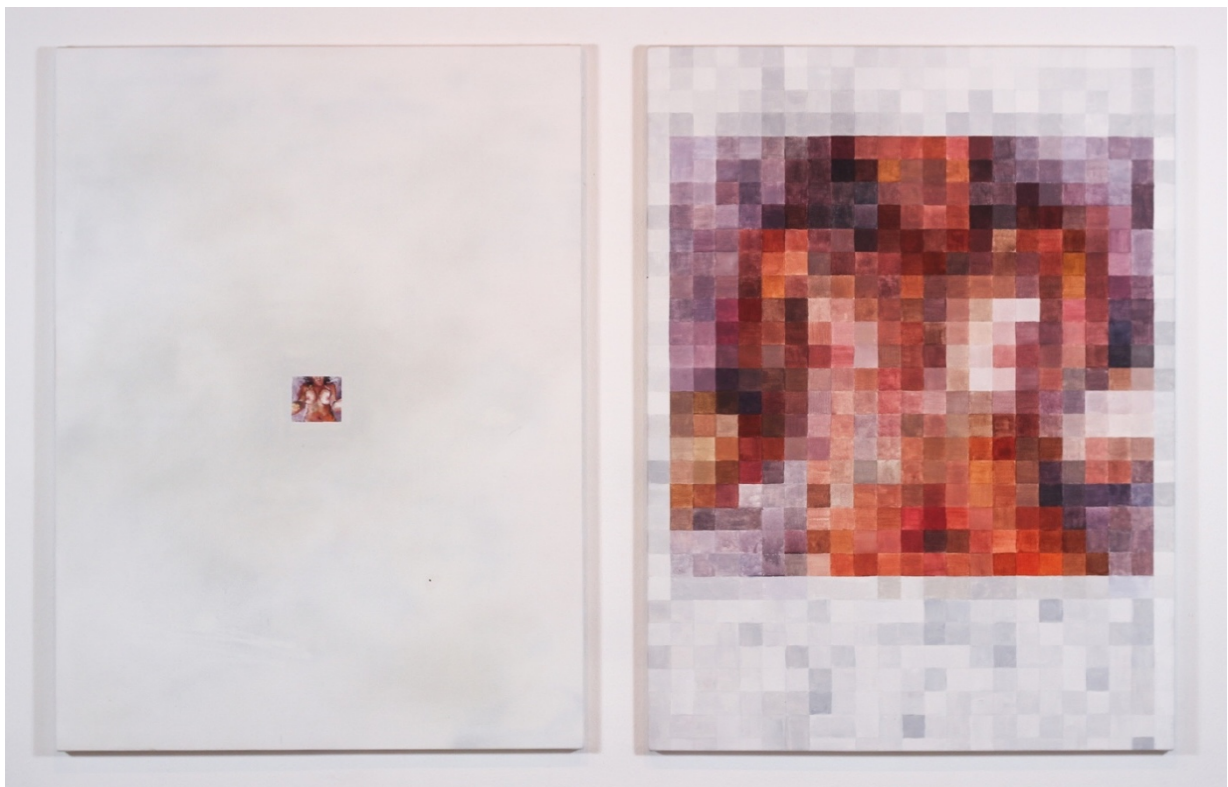


Figure 40

Dane Knudsen. *I want a closer look, but all I see are pixels* (diptych). 2016. Acrylic on canvas. 1220 x 915 cm (each). Artists collection.

Control

Artists such as photographers Molly Soda and Evan Baden have used the current generation's fascination with social media and photo-sharing as a starting point to comment on and explore the mediated intimacy created through these platforms. Molly Soda creates work that "is about girls in their bedrooms and what you do alone in your room, and making that public, putting that out for the world to see, and how that changes the way that it's seen or contextualized" (Soda in *Narcissistic, Maybe* 2015). Many images posted online are done so willingly. The creator, who is also the publisher, of the content is in control as long as the context remains the same. As soon as the images one has uploaded or sent are reposted, shared or 'leaked' the content of the image is removed from the original context. With this idea of control verses loss of control, Soda created a digital exhibition of photographs and text titled *Should I Send This*, that served to expose herself. These images where taken and placed on the Internet as a reaction to the stories about photographs being leaked, either for the sake of revenge or hacked accounts. Soda created this body of work to exist and appear as though they were leaked messages she had sent to a partner or someone close to her. Evan Baden has used selfies found online as inspiration for staged photographs that show the environment that the images where made in. All of the images are of people, mostly girls, taking selfies whilst showing off their sexuality. This is contrasted with the 'girly' bedroom that the selfie taker is in. One can imagine that the images he sourced were leaked as 'revenge porn'. In both of the afore-mentioned examples concepts of intimacy and control are dealt with.

I have looked at issues of control in the work *DM* (Direct Message) (fig. 41), which is an image of a pregnant women taking a selfie. The drawing is executed with controlled tonal gradation. The detailed area of the drawing forms the shape of a speech bubble found in social media messaging services. The idea is that the person taking and sharing selfies is in complete control of their image, as with the images used in Erin Riley's work. This is contrasted by the natural, uncontrolled, changes that the body goes through; in this case, pregnancy. This relates to the shift of control one holds over one's image with the change of context as it enters another person's possession. Because of this, there are forms of censorship that act as protection, either against offending others in the form of blocking out 'sexually' charged body

parts or in the form of hiding one's identity. The use of a pregnant woman also speaks to the new control social networking gives us over our own image. While it goes against the social norms of a pregnant woman being sexual, the reference to direct messaging and nudity implies that the message is a 'sext'.



Figure 41

Dane Knudsen. *DM*. 2016. Pencil on paper. 19 x 22cm. Private collection.

When these photographs are looked at as a form of image making that extends beyond self-indulgence, they can be observed as a way for people to take control over their bodies and the way they are portrayed. The images are captured with their rules and as they see fit, which links to the ideas in *DM*. Because of this, there has been a rise in the view that the selfie

can be a political and feminist activity. “A forum to produce counter-images that resist erasure and misrepresentation” (Murray⁹² 2015:492). The selfie allows all types of people to be represented and show off their experiences. Lucian Freud has said that he enjoyed looking at the human as an animal, stripped of the social identity prescribed by clothing. His figures represented real people without smoothed over flaws. Borzello (2012:6) states that his “realistic male and female bodies, with their excess flesh and patchy colour, have been disturbing viewers for decades”. Selfies, nude, semi-nude and clothed, are doing similar things for contemporary culture. These photographs document the variety of body types found in society. They fight against the ideal to broaden the kind of bodies that are seen as acceptable.

Post Comment (fig. 42) is a 4m figure of a nude, pregnant woman taking a selfie. The figure was painted on the side of a Durban landmark – the KZNSA Gallery - using spray paint. This combination of medium, location and subject matter come together to speak to a number of issues relating to concepts of public and private space, as well as the body.

The use of a pregnant woman is intended to add to the types of bodies presented for public consumption. From a quick scan of magazine shelves and advertising one can pick up a ‘type’ of body, which is favoured. “Beauty is always associated with the male fantasy of what the female body is” (Saville in Sylvester 1994). One of the positive aspects of selfies is that they allow the author of the photo to decide what the body looks like and how it is looked at. For those who have bodies that do not fit the ideal, magazine model figure this can be empowering. As Danielle Galvin⁹³ (in Phelan 2016) puts it, “As a plus-size woman I am consistently told by society to cover up because my body is not found attractive or sexually exciting to men... [it’s about] reclaiming my body from sexual assaults and making more body types normalized”. The popularity of sharing selfies, even if they aren’t semi or completely nude, is a combat against the double standard. According to Murray (2015:490) selfies can be seen as a way of “contending with the manner in which capitalism is enacted upon their lives”. The selfie can be a fight against the ideal. This can be seen in the promotion of selfies that have the #nomakeupselfie.

⁹² Murray is an associate professor in the Faculty of History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of California (Derek Conrad Murray 2016).

⁹³ Galvin is a body-positive activist (Phelan 2016).

While the selfie practice provides a certain level of control, uploading imagery online allows for unwarranted commentary. With this in mind a large chalkboard was painted behind the figure and a tub of chalk was installed at the edge of the wall. This use of space echoed the capabilities of social media and allowed passers-by to add to and create conversation around this figure. This aspect of the work attempted to interrogate the attitudes of visitors to the building and passers-by. This work drew on platforms that allow unsolicited commentary to be made on images and status updates on social media



Figure 42

Dane Knudsen. *Post Comment*. 2014. Spray paint & PVA. 4 x 4m.

Graffiti as My Context

Graffiti was also a major element in this body of work, for two main reasons: Firstly, because of my longstanding involvement it made sense to use the graffiti practice in combination with the work produced during this study. This was a driving force behind the early exploration done during the exhibition titled *Someone*. I applied the same approach for the final

exhibition of work for this study. Secondly, the use of medium and aesthetic with the nude helped reinforce the link between the public and private. This is due to the public nature of the graffiti art form. The property on which graffiti is painted is usually in contact with public space (Günes & Yilmaz 2006).

The medium and approach is, more importantly, conceptually fitting as it connects the body of work to the public, invasive quality of the graffiti art form. Graffiti is a somewhat selfish creative outlet. Permission is often not granted, and when it is it usually only comes from the gatekeeper of the property and not the surrounding community. In this way, the actions surrounding graffiti relate to posting online. Permission to post, and of what to share, is not given by one's friends and followers: one's images and words appear when they log on.

The public nature of graffiti, and its origins as an art form that started in connection to advertising by way of sign painting, plays with the idea of advertising but without a product. The act of tagging and painting walls is almost always in public, but the work is private, it has no built-in message; most of the time it is just the artist's name. This link between advertisements and graffiti was the reason for photographing and printing *Post Comment* on a PVC banner, which is a common substrate for outdoor advertising.

This link to advertising is also key in social media. While the images we post are often of intimate or self-indulgent moments, they are shared with the aim of garnering attention. To help with getting a broader reach of audience metadata such as hashtags are made use of. In many instances popular hashtags are used regardless of the content of an image. In reference to this, the work titled *Find me, follow me* is covered in hashtags. The work is made using only spray paint, and once the work was installed I covered a predefined area with hashtags. The allocated area placed the canvas at its center, which meant that the hashtags would be written directly over the work. In this way I was highlighting the dominant focus placed on metadata. The application of the hashtags, running directly over the painting, parallels the graffiti artist's disregard for surrounding environment when committing acts of vandalism.

Graffiti played an integral part in the final curatorship of the practical component of this research. The prominent role of graffiti in this installation relates to online sharing. The

display of (nude) selfies on public platforms could equate to the unashamed tagging and defacing of public walls. The general practice and attitude of graffiti artists attempting to 'get up' as much as possible through vandalism, which can involve painting over already painted works, is symbolic of the mass of information and images flooding social media sites. This idea of layers of information was a huge influence in the curation and installation of this exhibition.



Figure 43

Dane Knudsen. NSFW Exhibition Installation. 2016.

In both *Someone* and the final display of work, *NSFW*, the techniques and materials used in making many of the paintings and installations were drawn directly from graffiti. Not only was spray paint a prominent medium, but the walls of the gallery were also used as a substrate. This meant that at the end of the given timeframe the work would be lost under coats of white paint, the exhibition was therefore as ephemeral as graffiti. This element of ephemerality speaks to the nature of online information. While the data uploaded is stored somewhat permanently in cyberspace, the amount of new information uploaded continuously takes preference over the old. This is particularly true to social media sites; whereby old posts continuously move further down one's feed as new posts are made. This 'ephemeral' quality of online activity creates an environment that only exists at a particular time, one either sees it, or misses it. This can be the case with many graffiti tags and murals. Walls are continuously repainted and work is lost beneath new artworks or cleaned away. The ephemeral aspect of this show, of painting directly on the wall is symbolic of the speed and transient nature in which we experience digital information.



Figure 44

Dane Knudsen. NSFW Exhibition Installation. 2016.

In some instances, the element of graffiti is used to create a relationship between online activity and the vandalism aspect of the subculture. This is the case with the installation of the artwork titled *You have upset your community*. Before hanging the canvas, the wall was painted with layers of spray painted textures found in graffiti, which included tags and lettering. The idea behind this is to speak to the ‘in-your-face’ quality of traditional graffiti, which relates to the uploading of nude selfies, both of which are removed if upsetting to the community they are placed in (fig. 45).

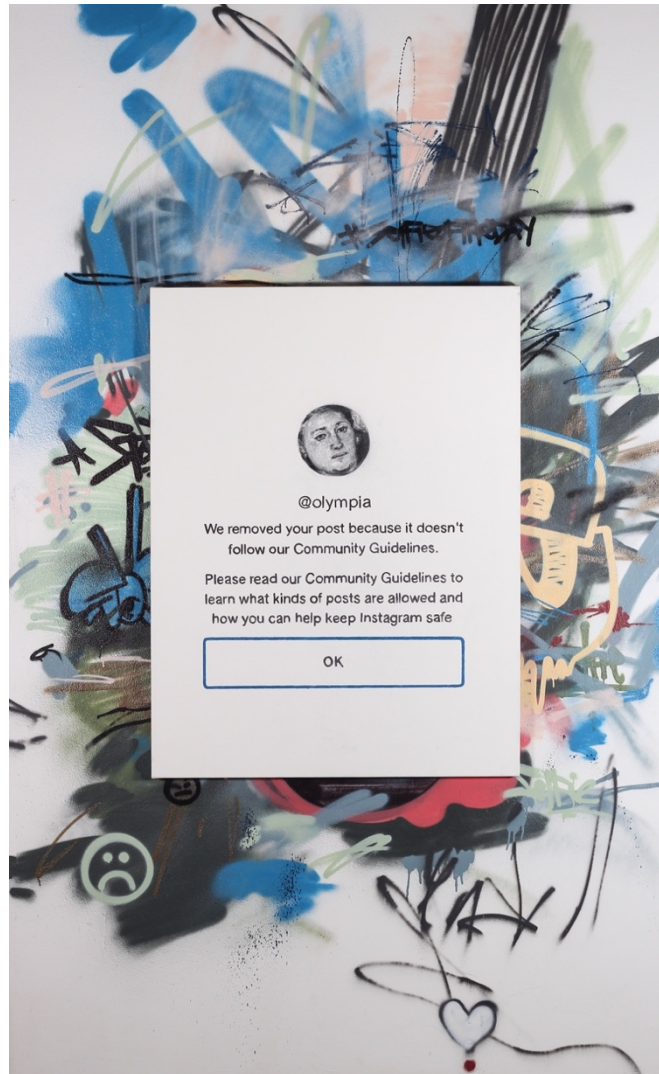


Figure 45

Dane Knudsen. *You have upset the community*. 2016. Acrylic and charcoal on canvas. 1220 x 915 cm. (NSFW Exhibition Installation).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the influence of social media and other online services on my practice. By looking at these contextual factors I have attempted to examine the overlap between public and private spaces. This was achieved by referencing social networking services and associated behaviour. I have shown that social networks encourage users to share more private moments, in turn publicizing the private happenings of one's life. The nude therefore becomes a symbol for exposure when paired with elements that relate to

social media and the Internet. By using contemporary society as a contextual influence on my exploration of the nude I have attempted to keep the historic subject matter relevant.

Social media, while creating a democratized platform for image sharing has also turned the individual into an author of a controlled narrative. When the body is placed into this narrative it is commonly represented in the best way possible. "The representation of the nude in art is a victory of fiction over fact" (Borzello 2012:06). In this way the use of social media maintains the representative qualities of the ideal nude.

Log Out (Conclusion)

Even in this short survey of the nude it is evident that it is a broad field of study. The nude as subject matter has been used since early civilizations. Molded as a symbol of fertility before becoming the identifiable ideal created by the ancient Greeks, it has since been the central focus for many artists throughout history, and continues to be so today.

This study of how context influences the artistic exploration of the nude figure was achieved by exploring various contexts, relating to society, language and technological advances, and how these contextual elements effected artistic practice. This was achieved by covering three main lines of enquiry; how has context influenced the multiple avenues of exploration of the nude figure through history, how are contemporary artists influenced by context, and lastly, how is my practice influenced by context?

Through this research, I have come to the conclusion that artists are, as they have been throughout history, directly influenced by context. This directly effects the artistic exploration of their selected subject matter, which, in the case of this study, is the nude figure.

This study explored historic social developments in relation to changes in artistic practice. This included a brief look at the discussions surrounding language and the way in which words affect the understanding of the unclothed body. This section focused on the relation between the terms 'naked' and 'nude'. The differentiation in language used showed that it played a part in creating a particular context for art to be understood. Each term prompted a slightly alternate understanding of the body; the nude referred to the figure created for public display; it is fictional, flawless, poised to represent an ideal depiction of beauty. These bodies were a product of the social construction of the body. The naked refers to the real body, with imperfections and oddities. John Berger (1972:54) refers to the naked as 'to be oneself'; further stating that objectification translates the naked into nude. The idea of the nude was that it was an improved version of life and therefore superior. From the social and historical context that Kenneth Clark was working in when he wrote *The Nude* (1954) to the current view proffered by Borzello in the *Naked Nude* (2012) and the frameworks in Eck's (2001)

Nudity and Framing, it is clear that formal and contextual factors play a determining role in the way the body is viewed.

From this I examined the effects of sociocultural trends and developments on the arts through history. This was to show that artists have continuously been influenced by their surrounding environment. I began with a look at the Grecian development of the nude; Kenneth Clark (1956) states that the ideal nude was invented by artists in Ancient Greece. Here the body was idealized, proportion was designed around mathematical analysis. The Greek artists also pushed their sculptural representation of the figure toward being naturalistic. These advancements in artistic representation of the nude were abandoned with the rise of Christianity. It was believed that the ideal body was a lure toward sinful thought and action. The body in art became clothed and stylistic. Christian belief applied shame to the semiotics of nakedness. But as time progressed the developments of Grecian figurative art were rediscovered and spurred on the Renaissance. To add to the understanding of the nude, artists during this period also studied the figure through scientific enquiry. Corpses were dissected and drawn. This furthering of knowledge allowed Renaissance artists to idealize the figure with greater understanding and naturalistic flair. This standard in representation would continue for centuries before being transformed by the developments and context of modernism.

The new technology brought about with the industrial revolution, the camera in particular, would add to the way artists could see and therefore what they could achieve in the way of realism. Artists used photographic reference to achieve greater detail and accuracy. But, the camera also allowed laymen to capture images. Realistic reproductions of the figure could be made in moments, which made the ideal nude redundant. In the spirit of Modernism, artists turned away from the tradition of the nude. This resulted in art that was free from the constraints of anatomy and proportion. Modernism created a context that resulted in the “death of the ideal nude” (Borzello 2012:20). This ‘death’ was aided by the developments of new artistic movements such as Impressionism, Cubism, Minimalism and Abstract Art. This new context was an age of reform and this was evident in the way artists explored the nude as subject matter. At a similar time, feminism was winning rights for women. Amongst these was the right to education for female artists. This now enabled women artists to explore much

of the same subject matter as the male artists of the past. Women in the arts, created a context that allowed the application of feminine experience to subject matter that had been dominated by men, such as the female nude. This new context influenced an enquiry into the social constructs of gender.

I then moved onto a survey of selected contemporary artists. These artists have applied meaning to the figure in ways that speak to many of the modern influences and issues regarding body image. Further adding to the argument that sociocultural/political contexts affect artistic perceptions and practice. The artists I looked at were Jenny Saville, Erin M. Riley and Vinz. Saville's work uses 'real' bodies that speak to feminist ideas. She often makes use of her own body as reference and thereby incorporating the experience she has lived through, such as childbirth. In Saville's work femininity is fore fronted, as opposed to sexuality presented by the male gaze. Her work explores concepts of beauty in response to the standards set in fashion magazines. She also references the contemporary ability to alter and mold one's body through cosmetic surgery; which is a phenomenon of contemporary society. Saville's work is a result of a sociocultural context that places emphasis on body image.

Erin M. Riley makes work that is a result of the interactions made possible because of modern technologies. She focuses on the way women represent themselves through image sharing; many of her images are sourced online and speak to modern sexuality and the resultant exploration – selfies as sexts. Riley also interrogates the influence of pornography on the way women are pressured to sexualize themselves (Skidmore 2013). Riley's work is a visual rhetoric based on the modern freedoms of feminine sexuality and views on modesty.

Vinz, is a street artist whose work is influenced by living in a policed of society. In Vinz's work, the nude becomes symbolic of freedom; this is coupled with various animal heads based on symbolism from ancient religious texts. Vinz's work is a "critique of the current global policies, which strive to artificially establish order in civil societies, but at the very high cost of personal freedom" (Braun 2016). This context influences Vinz to create images of conflict between those who are free and the police. Vinz also makes use of the visual language of graphic design and advertising, which is ubiquitous in modern society, to comment on consumerism as a device that moulds the social idea of happiness, beauty and success. Before moving onto a

discussion of my artistic practice, I briefly looked at various contemporary artists to show the breadth of contextual influence on artistic exploration of the nude.

In the final chapter I reviewed the art made during the course of this study, which is made up of a body of work that explores the overlap between the public and private. This overlap is a result of modern technologies such as the Internet and associated devices and platforms, which I found were dominant influences in today's sociocultural environment. I interrogated the way one communicates and expresses oneself via social media, using the nude as a symbol for exposure by pairing it with elements taken from social media and the Internet. Once a contemporary context had been established, it was interrogated through themes relating to selfies, intimacy, censorship, the everyday, image quality and control. Through this analysis, it became clear that one becomes the author of a personal narrative in which one represents oneself in the best way possible. Social media, therefore, allows each person to create an idealized version of themselves, which relates back to the construction of 'the nude' and the history of representations of the unclothed body.

This post-graduate research has lead me on a winding journey; aside from the struggles in conducting research and creating a body of work, what required the most effort during this study was keeping momentum. The lengthy, two years, delay in getting the nude as a focus area approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee made the overall time spent on this study exhausting. But through the struggle I have grown as an academic and an artist. Exploring a context that allows multiple layers of existence lent itself to applying my work to various materials to create layers or meaning, as we do online; from traditional fine art substrate and materials to graphic design media, such as banners. The research not only helped guide my practice, but aided in situating my work within the contemporary art context.

Areas of future research suggested by this exploration include an analysis of the nude/partially nude figure in graphic design and advertising media, and the influence of post processing software on directing artistic perceptions of the unclothed body.

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