Breaching

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BREACHING

by
Margaux Crump

A thesis presented to the
Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
Washington University in St. Louis

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

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ABSTRACT

I make objects that behave like bodies—graceful hybrids that are effortlessly cultural and natural, masculine and feminine, plant and animal. Shifting and slipping between unfixed identities, they exist as multiplicities. When these bodies touch, power and pleasure are fluidly exchanged. However, power is not structured here as a binary and pleasure is not finite; both have the potential to flow between bodies, blurring boundaries and rendering individuality delicate.

My work is primarily rooted in the relationship between desire, intimacy, and control, with the body acting as a site of power play. This body may be plant, animal, sculpture, or material. I am especially concerned with material relationships as materials have performative agency. Their physics and chemistry must be negotiated with. Using sensual materials like sex-safe silicone, salt, and seeds, my studio practice itself is an exercise in dominance and submission.

This thesis explores how my objects, processes, and strategies of display trouble the binary and render familiar signifiers strange. It focuses on bodies placed in tension - penetrated and suspended just at the point of touch. However, it also imagines the possibility of bodies coming together through physical and psychoemotional fusion using consumption and love as moments in which the autonomous self is breached.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Abstract**  

**Contents**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Objectifying Bodies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with Power Through the Body</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplicity or Breaching the Binary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hunter, The Collector, and The Lover</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displays of Dominance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material, Process, and Pleasure</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care fully</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Tension</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penetration</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Longer Individual</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Love (Fusion) and Other Contradictions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figures**  

**Appendix**  

**Endnotes**  

**Bibliography**  

**Figure Credits**
Introduction: Objectifying Bodies

I make objects and I think of my objects as bodies. These sculptural bodies occupy a grey area, shifting, slipping, and melding into different categories. They are graceful hybrids – effortlessly cultural and natural, masculine and feminine, plant and animal. Sometimes they are comprised of actual plant and animal parts that maintain their own bodily associations. Other times, these sculptural bodies are metonyms of past bodily interactions, such as panties that nod to their previous owners. Lastly, these bodies also have a sentience—penetrating, engulfing, and interacting with their surroundings as if caught mid-performance. I think of them as acting out situational moments in time: held in tension right at the point before physical touch or release, wielding the potential for penetration, pleasure, pain, fusion, growth, and death. The viewer is often presented with a slivered moment, displayed as if paused or preserved. Though they are arrested in time, these sculptural objects exhibit the residue of the past actions that precipitated their current state. Similarly, they carry an air of potentiality—as if at any point, they would break the tension of their stillness and continue on to realize their imminent actions.

Playing with Power Through the Body

My object-based work is primarily rooted in the relationship between desire and control, with the body acting as a site of power play. Here, desire is flushed pink; it grasps for the other, vying for power and pleasure. In this relationship, the self desires to control or dominate the other, but it also desires to submit. The power exchanged between these bodies is fluid – it has the potential to ebb and flow between the self
and the other.\textsuperscript{2} This stream of power allows pleasure to be experienced both through the giving and the \textit{receiving} of power. I am defining pleasure here as satisfying physical sensation, but also as psychological enjoyment or excitement. In \textit{Powers of Desire}, queer theorists Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga discuss this idea as the pleasure gained through the knowledge that power \textit{given up} in response to the other’s need can be as profoundly powerful, pleasurable, and active as power received.\textsuperscript{3} This is similar to the pleasure experienced from caregiving – from possessing the power and the agency to provide what the other desires and needs.

In all these instances pleasure is achieved through the movement of power, both physically and psychologically. However, power is not structured here as a binary, where if one possesses it, the other lacks it. Pleasure is not finite. The idea that pleasure can be negatively correlated with the \textit{possession} of power is compelling because it expands the kinds of pleasure we may experience when bodies come together. In his \textit{History of Sexuality}, Michel Foucault insists that pleasure is experienced “in relation to itself; it is…evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul.”\textsuperscript{4} A practitioner of polymorphous pleasures himself, Foucault sought to separate normative “sex-desire” from queer “bodies and pleasures” – to transfer the locus of pleasure from the genitals to the entire body. I use this word transfer carefully, because Foucault calls for a “\textit{different} economy of bodies and pleasures (emphasis added)” at the close of \textit{The History of Sexuality}, in lieu of an \textit{expansive} economy.

In \textit{Come and Go} (Fig.1), I explore \textit{expanded} types of pleasure using elements of human body suspension and the cotton plant. Visually \textit{Come and Go} is bulbous and
sac-like, resembling testicles, ovaries, insect egg capsules, and seedpods; it is at once genital, bodily, animal, and plant. Suspended from four gold plated hooks, it is made from used nylons that were stuffed with cotton seeds and cotton fluff until they began to rip and tear. The tears spread like networks of silken spider webs across the surface of the sacs, which were then coated in sex-safe silicone.

The form’s membranous skin points more deeply to bodily pleasure as this silicone is the same material used to make sex-toys, but the cotton plant and the activity of body suspension trouble our understanding of pleasure because they also cause bodily pain. The practice of suspension seeks out ecstasy by forcing the body into a pain-induced state of shock. This is achieved by hanging the human body from hooks pierced through the flesh. In *Come and Go*, the hardware that puncture and support the sacs are the same as those used in body suspension, but here they are delicate in size and altered in material. This change in scale and transformation from sterile stainless steel to warm gold aestheticizes the hardware. It produces an effect that is precious, pulling the viewer in even as the rips, tears, and puncture marks are unsettling.

Like suspension, the cotton plant produces contradictory effects in the human body as its bark and root cortex can be ingested respectively as an aphrodisiac and an abortifacient. In other words, it carries the potential for heightened sexual pleasure and painful muscle contractions that can lead to an early labor. *Come and Go* teases pleasure farther from the parameters of the genitals as the sculptural body is neither plant nor human, but an amalgamation of both in terms of form and material.
Multiplicity or Breaching the Binary

I am not however interested in continuing to build upon Foucault’s division of “sex-desire” and “bodies and pleasures.” I desire to breach the binary, to disrupt the dualism present in Cartesian culture and foundationalist feminism. My practice is concerned with fluidity and movement, in blurring distinctions. Even when two objects hover apart, tense with distance, they are tenuously insecure in their difference. Their individuality is delicate. They do not move in opposing systems, but rather operate in a Deleuzian rhizomatic network. “Sex-desire” and “bodies and pleasures” exist on the same plateau operating simultaneously – separately – but in concert; perhaps even at times moving close; caressing at their borders; penetrating each other’s distinctions and boundaries.

Though Gilles Deleuze dislikes the term pleasure as much as Foucault detests desire, it is Deleuze’s erect stance against the binary, against dualism, that is stimulating. After declaring “The only enemy is two,” he clarifies that “the source of dualism is precisely the opposition between something that can be affirmed as one, and something that can be affirmed as multiple… the moment the one and the multiple cease to be adjectives and give way to the substantive: there are only multiplicities.”

Drawing from Taoist sexual thought, Deleuze binds desire to multiplicity through fluidity:

One borrows a flow, one absorbs a flow, one defines a pure field of immanence of desire, in relation to which pleasure, orgasm, jouissance are defined as veritable suspensions or interruptions. That is, not as the satisfaction of desire, but as the contrary: an exasperation of the process that makes desire come out of its own immanence…[T]hat means a multiplicity in which, effectively, any
splitting of the subject into a subject of enunciation and a subject of the statement becomes strictly impossible.¹⁰

My sculptural bodies move with this fluidity. Instead of negotiating between two determined opposites, my objects are not masculine or feminine, but rather masculine and feminine, plant and animal, cultural and natural. They simultaneously embody both ends of the spectrum and everything in between, shifting, slipping, and oscillating in their indefinite identities. Sometimes more feminine, other times queer, butch, masculine, nurturing, dominant; the works maintain a multiplicity in their visual forms, behaviors, and activities. They are sovereign and individual, distinctly self and other, yet they slip in and out between meanings and allow for difference. This emphasis on multiplicity troubles the binary—it troubles our normative understanding of pleasure, power, and the desire that drives it all.

I refer to this emphasis on sculptural multiplicity as maintaining an expanded association of form. Louise Bourgeois uses surreal hybridity in her works to communicate this type of multiplicity. This is evident in Janus Fleuri (Fig.2), The Maternal Man (Fig.3), and Soft Landscape II (Fig.4) where forms that at first appear phallic, actually combine to expose male and female elements. This tactic denies the binary, allowing both masculine and feminine vulnerability to be explored. In a discussion on her iconic sculpture Fillette (Little Girl) (Fig.5), Bourgeois reveals that “[f]rom a sexual point of view I consider the masculine attributes to be extremely delicate; they’re objects that the woman, thus myself, must protect…”¹¹ Rosalind Krauss elaborates on this, claiming that “Fillette is also informe as Georges Bataille had defined it in the 1920s, meaning a collapse of the difference between those categorical
oppositions on which meaning depends. Male versus female is the standard of such an opposition—perhaps the primary one. Fillette acts to blur this distinction as the vaginal opening at the foot of the shaft and between the two testicles forces male and female to merge.”

Similarly, my project Coming Together (Fig.6) is comprised of many sex-safe silicone protrusions, nubs, or more affectionately, what I like to call “little dicklettes.” Cast from roots and fruit such as carrots, kumquats, cucumbers, and daikon, these soft pink forms are at once phallic, clitoral, and teat-like. Appearing neither human nor vegetal, they operate like a rhizomatic plant where the protruding objects are part of a single whole plant body that is partially concealed beneath the floor or wall. Performing their title, the protrusions grow into the space of other works, bringing them into the same visual plane, allowing them to come together. In contrast to Bourgeois who has stated “the medium is secondary…the wish to say something antedates the material,” the fact that these forms are cast in sex-safe silicone is crucial. This material points to the double entendre that is Coming Together—a flirtation with words in which two works physically meet and two bodies achieve simultaneous orgasm.

Unlike many of my other sculptural bodies, Coming Together has a variable installation and displayed as if in motion through time. This shift is especially heightened when it is presented penetrating the boundaries of works that occupy a different sense of time, such as the preserved or paused moment. By changing speed and duration, object bodies demonstrate their ability to behave, perform, and engage in activities.
The Hunter, The Collector, and The Lover

How can objectified sculptural bodies experience desire? How can they grow, hover, dominate, and submit? In my practice they are activated by three different versions of the self: the hunter, the collector, and the lover.

The hunter is primal. She is seductive, dangerous, and closer to Sade than Masoch. She feels alive when she is predatory. She desires control and domination. She lures, hooks, and catches. The hunter loves the chase, while the collector loves the conquest.

The collector is careful. She is meticulous, sterile, and orderly. She is an archivist; a preserver of moments, bodies, and feelings. She is rational and logical, concerned with display and aesthetics. She fights against her tendency to organize arborally, working to cultivate a rhizomatic system instead.

The lover is corporeal. She seeks domestic and sexual intimacy. She is a caregiver; tending to the other - be it plant, animal, or object - with an amorous ardor. She values constancy and reciprocity in herself and in the other.

The hunter, the collector, and the lover are all pleasured by their activities. As they are distinct aspects of a greater whole, they operate without boundaries, bleeding into each other’s desires and psychological territories. While they each play with power differently, I am particularly enamored with their respective relationships to the chase because it demonstrates their behavioral fluidity. In my work, the chase is the hunt. It is violent, ultimately annihilating, and characterized by predator and prey. Yet the chase is also sexual. In this sense, it implies seduction and conquest, both physical and
emotional. When the self and the other have agency and give into desires, the chase has the potential to provide an expanded experience of power. For the hunter, the collector, and the lover, the chase and the conquest involve a rush of pleasurable endorphins that lead to a climax of preservation: moments captured in memory, names in little black books, heads mounted on walls.

Displays of Dominance

I am constantly cataloguing how information is preserved and ordered. Especially how we index, catalog, name and display the body – in natural history museums, on hunting trophy walls, through bodily adornment like lingerie or prosthetics. As such, my works often function as displays. Assertive, meticulous, and intentional, their strategies based on their cultural associations. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses utilizing order as a tool of dominance:

The first of the great operations of discipline is, therefore, the constitution of *‘tableaux vivants’*, which transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities. The drawing up of ‘tables’ was one of the great problems of the scientific, political and economic technology of the eighteenth century: how one was to arrange botanical and zoological gardens, and construct at the same time rational classifications of living beings... the table was both a technique of power and a procedure of knowledge.¹⁵

The display however, is not only an ordering and organizational technique, but also a behavioral one. It is applied to displays of power, sexuality, and desire—how we publically enact order and power through the body. On displays of gender, Judith Butler has said, “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity,
instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.”\textsuperscript{16} Or as Simone de Beauvoir infamously theorized, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”\textsuperscript{17} This becoming is often established through displaying gendered social behaviors such as docility, aggression, or the compliance with normative gender roles.

As an engagement with power and control, the act of displaying is an extension of my studio practice. A strict sense of control provides a structure for me to both work within and to push against. \textit{Preserving My Desire} (Fig.7) is an exercise in displaying and enacting control. Visually, it is a collection of eleven panties that I sewed by hand and preserved in salt, like cured meat. The act of sewing and preserving my own lingerie not only gives me aesthetic control over how I present my body, but it also attempts to preserve moments in time – to preserve pleasure. Visually, the panties are impaled on steel spikes and splayed on the wall like drying hides, hunting trophies, or a butterfly collection. This display uses control and organization as a strict formal device and enters a point where formalism operates as dominance.

Another work that plays with power in the display is \textit{Desiring Sterilizing Desiring} (Fig.8). In this work I collected seeds from ten different plant species that are consumed for their aphrodisiac properties. The seeds are sorted into silicone sacs and hung meticulously in a row from small steel spikes above a thin white shelf. This shelf emits a cool blue UV-C light, which is a short-wavelength ultraviolet radiation used to sterilize controlled environments. On a cellular level, this light disrupts DNA, rendering organisms unable to perform vital cellular functions. In this case, as \textit{Desiring Sterilizing Desiring} is displayed over time, the light has the potential to render the dangling seeds infertile and thus unable to grow and produce amorous feelings in the human body.
I am very careful with material specificity when presenting works. For instance, in *Desiring Sterilizing Desiring*, seeds need to be real seeds because they have the potential for real growth. When we don’t know whether they will germinate, they are held in the same kind of tension that I often place my physical objects – hanging, unsure, and vulnerable. I am also particular about the installation hardware I craft and source. Hooks, pulleys, ropes, and ribbons are all selected to maintain their utilitarian purpose and point to a specific activity such as sex or hunting, but I alter them in surface, material, and scale to disrupt normativity. So fishing hooks and specimen pins are plated gold, while steel nails and spikes are made longer and thinner than required for their tasks. By engaging in this type of material manipulation, I have greater control over aesthetic appearances and can more finely articulate and trouble visual signifiers.

**Material, Process, and Pleasure**

Materials excite me. Soft, sticky, heavy, hard: my studio practice is decidedly sensual. Like lovers, some materials leave a lasting impression on my practice, while others are dalliances. I actively catalogue my material relationships, researching and archiving their cultural uses, how they respond to time, my body, and other substances.

Choosing a material for a project is extremely physical. Touch comes first. How a material feels and how it behaves in relation to other materials dictates its use. In addition to considering physical and aesthetic qualities, I assess a material’s cultural relevance and potential for subversion. I choose materials that are seductive—those that draw the viewer in before they realize that familiar signifiers have become strange.
Materials have the same potentiality as bodies and learning how another body works is full of fumbling and slipping. It’s an awkward coming together, but I try to find pleasure in relinquishing control. In this sense, my process is performative – through it I am able to enact the very power play that I investigate between sculptural bodies, materials, and myself. For instance, when I grow salt crystals, I can only set the parameters of the growing environment. I can control the temperature of the water and the time allotted for evaporation, but regardless, the crystal structure will be cubic and they will grow randomly into the surfaces I submerge.

In this sense, my studio practice is a constant exercise in dominance and submission. In these relationships, agency is important. I maintain agency by choosing and interacting with materials as a way to claim power. In turn, the physics and chemistry of materials like salt, silicone, and light create their own sense of agency. Ernesto Neto engages with physics in a similar way to create his soft sensory sculptures (Fig.9). Sewn from gossamer fabric and filled with lead, sand, spices, or Styrofoam, Neto’s biomorphic forms respond to gravity and balance. When asked about his materials, he has explained, “… you let each thing have its own nature. You don’t want to control: ‘Oh, no. This should be like this.’ The work doesn’t want to be like this. It’s a dialogue with the work, itself … and ‘material’ means a lot of things. It means the material, the dimension, the situation. Material is a question. It’s dependent on relationship.” Growing, changing, sagging, decaying: material bodies have natural behaviors that must be negotiated with.
Carefully

Be it plant, animal, human, or material, a relationship with another body necessitates care. In my practice, care operates as both a means of precision and as an act of nurturing. For instance, I tend to plants and animals, carefully craft and display objects, and more recently maintain an ongoing archive. Coupled with care, my interest in control and power has led to using my own romantic relationship directly in my work. In a project entitled *Masturbatory Exercises: Archiving Our Intimacies* (Fig.10), my partner and I write down intimate moments we’ve shared onto sheets of paper that we made by hand together. The writings are coated with sex-safe silicone to match our skin tones, folded in on themselves to maintain a sense of privacy, stacked atop one another like skin on skin, and placed in a protective glass and silicone cloche.

While archiving is an act of preservation, it is also an act of presentation. We chose the title *Masturbatory Exercises* because the very thought of creating a public work based on our relationship felt deeply masturbatory. The phrase “stroking the ego” comes to mind as well as Sedgwick’s description of writing as “mental masturbation” in *The Masturbating Girl*. Here though, careful presentation is also an assertion of power wherein we curated, protected, and preserved specific memories. However, through the private aspects of this process, we also care for and maintain our relationship as a whole.

In researching other artists’ strategies of care, Sophie Calle’s archival projects became important points of reference. In *Take Care of Yourself* (Fig.11), Calle documents female interpretations of a break up letter she was sent via email. The
work’s context is provided in the preface of the exhibition’s accompanying book where

she informs the reader:

I received an email telling me it was over.
I didn't know how to respond.
It was almost as if it hadn't been meant for me.
It ended with the words, "Take care of yourself."
And so I did.
I asked 107 women (including two made from wood and one with feathers), chosen for their profession or skills, to interpret this letter.
To analyze it, comment on it, dance it, sing it.
Dissect it. Exhaust it. Understand it for me.
Answer for me.
It was a way of taking the time to break up.
A way of taking care of myself.

As an investigator of relationships, *Take Care of Yourself* is Calle’s attempt to understand her lover’s words by extending their written exchange beyond the boundaries of their intimacy. The responses she received are presented as corrected texts, a clairvoyant premonition, portrait photographs, a dance, a theater performance, even a crossword puzzle. Though expansive, Calle’s process of organizing the large conversation is precise. She reveals, “The rules of the game are always very strict. In *Take Care of Yourself* I asked the participants to answer professionally... The parameters were fixed.” In the context of an archive, Calle’s multimedia exhibition and book are presented very carefully with an emphasis on communication including non-verbal and braille translations. In an effort to take care of herself, Calle tends to an expanded dialogue and all its accouterments.

Like power and control, care is neither yes nor no. It functions in shades of grey and oscillates between more and less, self and other, productive and destructive. In my
practice, I’ve expended a great deal of care nurturing plants and crafting objects, only to undermine my actions by carefully orchestrating destructive displays in which they are devoured and destroyed.

The Importance of Tension

When objects are displayed, they respond to the physics of other forces. As they reveal their heaviness, density, and vulnerability, they are activated and enter into a bodily conversation. In this moment before touch or penetration, bodies vibrate in physical and psychological tension. Their contact is a potentiality; it exists on the horizon of what can be and what is presently experienced. There is tension in the unknown – tension in the time before release or collapse. Salt Lick (Fig.12) performs this relationship. It consists of two long, pointed, white shafts suspended just above two pink silicone protrusions, which emerge from crystalline mounds of salt that reference the salt blocks used by hunters to lure deer. As the shafts sway atop the surface of the silicone, their relationship feels dangerous, as if a wound or total annihilation is inevitable. But in the slow swinging, there is also a gentleness that suggests something symbiotic about the forms. The holes the protrusions poke out from are the exact same width of the shafts that hang above them, as if each component—positive and negative—is meant to fit together, to be entered. Suddenly, the tension between the sharp white points and the soft pink tips communicates a pause in the natural cycle of things.

I am interested in this interstitial space between sculptural forms – the psychological and physical space where they have the potential to overlap, to breach
each other. This is an empty space void of objects, but full of possibility. It is fruitful, fecund even. In my practice, this space is also where the interior body and the exterior world meet; it is the inner flesh of the mouth, vagina, and rectum. Like the space between sculptural objects, these orifices are full with potential connection. As such, the color in my work comes from these transitional areas of the body. Rosy, rougy, fleshy, muscly: the silicone protrusions, the silk panties, and the seed sacs are all rendered in these shades of pink. In addition to referencing the physiological colors of body thresholds, these hues are also associated with bodily behaviors such as arousal, blushing, and flushing. Like the pink protrusions poking out of their holes in Salt Lick, transitional areas of the body have an open ovular shape that wants to be filled by a call and response, a conversation of one form entering in and out of another.

Penetration

The hunter, the collector, and the lover all perform a common theme in my work: penetration. While penetration connotes sexual intercourse, it can also be thought of as any rupture of a bodily membrane. As such, the lover penetrates by kissing, inserting, and caressing, but the collector and the hunter are different. They penetrate the other by pinning, nailing, and skinning, by spearing, hooking, and impaling. In Are the Lips a Grave? Lynne Huffer describes Foucauldian sex as “a ‘dense transfer point of power’ which includes within its domain, at the very least, sex as organs, sex as biological reproduction, sex as individual gender roles, sex as gendered group affiliation, sex as erotic acts, and sex as lust.” According to Berlant and Edelman, Eve Sedgwick pushes this definition and goes so far as to find sex “in anything that can
stand as a syncopated relation.” While I define sex in the Foucauldian sense, my objects penetrate in a manner more in line with Sedgwick’s abstraction of sex because the visual representation of their relations is pushed beyond the recognizable human body.

For instance, in *Preserving My Desire*, panties are double penetrated by salt crystals that grow into their fibers and steel spikes that splay each panty across a wall. In *Desiring Sterilizing Desiring*, UV-C light penetrates seeds to corrupt their cellular DNA. In *Coming Together*, penetration is deepened by literally blurring the boundaries and distinctions between individual sculptures by displaying them physically intersecting one another.

Tracey Emin is more overt with her penetration. Following a Foucauldian model of sex, Emin’s self-portrait drawings and embroideries are corporeal and at times crude. She lays the potential for penetration wide open. In the cream on cream embroidery *A Hole is a Hole* (Fig.13), Emin depicts a female body with legs spread above the text “A Holes A Hole – And Don’t Forget That.” Here, the body is reduced to an orifice. Penetrated again and again, like the needle and thread in Emin’s hand, puncturing the fabric, moving in and out, filling hole after hole.

Though more abstract, my work has also explored how objects penetrate the living human body. In a series of intimate recorded performances, I use my mouth as a threshold to be entered by a variety of foreign objects including moth wings, roses, and daisies. As in Emin’s work, the specificity of the hole is troubled, allowing the mouth to function as a variety of fleshy orifices simultaneously.
Likewise, Annette Messager’s *Pénétration* (Fig. 14) goes beyond the rupturing of surface and takes the viewer inside the human body, all the way to the organs. Hung from the ceiling as if by wooly umbilical cords, soft sculpture anatomical models fill the space like cuts of meat in a butcher shop. Crudely sewn from brightly colored fabrics, Messager includes organs that are common to both sexes, as well as specific reproductive body parts. Rather than asking the viewer to imagine the sculptural objects performing the penetration, Messager refers to the action of the viewer’s eyes. *Pénétration* forces the viewer to undress the human body with their gaze, penetrating past the flesh, fatty tissue, and muscle to emphasize the act of seeing rather than the actuality of the organs. Implicating the audience in an objectification of the body, Messager requires the viewer to perform in the same manner that I require of my objects.

**No Longer Individual**

While I make objects that have the potential for touch, connection, or penetration, my sculptural bodies are held in a state of individuality. Both in tension and after release, the self and the other remain sovereign. This is not only the idea that our repelling electrons keep us from ever physically touching anything, but it is also a recognition that even when the body is penetrated, the psychoemotional self remains whole and individual.

However, my work has recently begun to probe how the individuality of bodies can become unsure. In several soundless film works, I use eating as a way to physically connect to the desired; to penetrate and dissolve into the other – to literally
become one. I believe that when speech isn’t the primary function of the mouth, it can be used to claim power through the consumption of other bodies or the refusal to consume other bodies—both sexually and as nourishment. Examples would be hunger strikes, anorexia, oral sex, and love biting.

Though it is full of teeth that gnash and saliva that dissolves, the mouth also possesses the lips and the tongue which are soft and can be used to navigate the body of another, potentially bringing the bodies of both the self and the other pleasure. I am specifically thinking of the colloquial term “eating out” used for oral sex performed on a female whereby the idea of consumption is implicit in a sex act. For Kyla Wazana Tompkins, the act of eating creates a direct moment of destructive intimacy between self and other, “blurring the line between subject and object as food turn[s] into tissue, muscle, and nerve and then provide[s] the energy that drives them all.”

In Devour (Fig.15), I explore this consumption of the body and the dissolution of the self and the other as distinct subjects. The meat of this piece is a private performance in which I picked roses from bushes I tended, causing my fingers to bleed on contact with the thorns. I then filmed myself eating the blooms and licking the residual blood from my hands. The final display of Devour is undecided, but the act of caring for the plants and then consuming them, embodies the idea of becoming one with what you desire; what you find beautiful; what you have loved and cared for. On the eating of flowers, an elderly woman in a short story by Enchi Fumiko, explains that “It’s natural: you see a flower you consider especially lovely, and you want to get as close to it as possible. But after awhile, looking is not enough—you want to touch it with your hands, pluck it off, crush it, force it open. Finally, you become
so consumed with desire, you want to fuse with it, make it part of you. That’s when you end up cramming it into your mouth.”

This stuffing, masticating, and swallowing destroy the flower. The very moment it enters the mouth and passes the threshold of the interior body, saliva begins to break it down, literally dissolving the plant’s sex organ into the tongue. Thinking of Sedgwick’s expanded definition of intercourse as syncopation, the performance of eating a rose becomes an oral sex act that questions proper objects of desire and expands the potential for pleasure to new sites in the body.

When dissolving the boundary between self and other by eating, there is no way around maiming or completely annihilating the object of desire. But the mouth can also be a more productive space. In Lust Lost (Fig.16), I filled my mouth with the moth wings, but rather than swallow them, I pulled them back out, dripping in spit like a newborn’s vernix. By cropping the footage to only reveal lips and the surrounding flesh, the mouth becomes a new orifice - a space for birth, rather than a space for destruction.

Viewing consumption in a more metaphysical way, Tompkins suggests that the simple recognition that our bodies are “vulnerable to each other in ways that are terrible—that is, full of terror…” demonstrates how eating troubles “the foundational fantasy of a contained autonomous self...because, as a function of its basic mechanics, eating transcend[s] the gap between self and other.” What is interesting about Tompkins’ approach in this instance is the idea of energy as a place of commonality, where self and other exist in a sort of oneness. This consumptive fusion is similar to the visual tactic of multiplicity, where objects are no longer one and no
longer multiple, but here I am concerned that the consumed other loses agency. Thinking of a bird ensnared by a snake, Louise Bourgeois once countered that, “Nobody has ever proved that the bird suffers from his fear. Who says the bird doesn’t enjoy it, that there’s not a sexual thrill? That there’s no ecstasy in death? That the bird dies fulfilled, as he’s gobbled up.”

**Conclusion: Love (Fusion) and Other Contradictions**

Blurring, penetrating, and fusing: my work plays with how bodies move close and come together. I explore how they operate as multiplicities - growing into one another to become at once masculine and feminine, plant and animal, cultural and natural. When these bodies touch, power, control, and pleasure are fluidly exchanged. At this point of contact bodies are in flux. They oscillate and dissolve between unfixed identities. But is there a moment in which their slipping and shifting ceases and they become more than just unsure? Is there a type of fusion wherein bodies potentially lose their psychoemotional wholeness?

In *Tales of Love*, Julia Kristeva describes this loss of individuality as an effect of being in love. She states, “Love is the time and space in which ‘I’ assumes the right to be extraordinarily sovereign, yet not individual. Divisible, lost, annihilated; but also through imaginary fusion with the loved one, equal to an infinite space of superhuman psychism.” Unlike consumption, this fusion is not physical. The body remains whole, yet the self flickers as psychoemotional boundaries are penetrated.

But is love fusion annihilating? Is dissolving the self into the other a type of terror or horror or death? Is it like the bird ensnared by the snake? There is certainly the
potential for pleasure in becoming one with the beloved, but the pleasure is found through a fundamental loss of self. However, is this loss a lacking or a transformation? Is the desire to remain whole not unlike the desire to organize arborally and relate through binaries? Can fusion produce a new more fluid self?

As my practice moves forward, these are the questions I am asking of bodies that play with power and pleasure. For now, the potential for love fusion resides in a space outside objects, beyond the body. I am locating this in the process of writing, archiving, and the care it requires. In this sense, a discussion of love in my work seems to be a contradiction, but contradiction is inherent in the multiplicity I work towards.
Fig. 1

Margaux Crump
*Come and Go*
2014
Cotton seeds, cotton fluff, sex-safe silicone, used hosiery, leather rope, gold plated hooks
60 x 8 x 8 in
Fig. 2

Louise Bourgeois

*Janus Fleuri*

1968

Bronze with gold patina

25.7 x 31.8 x 21.3 cm
Fig. 3

Louise Bourgeois
*The Maternal Man*
2008
Archival dyes printed on cloth
10.5 x 8 in
Fig. 4

Louise Bourgeois
Soft Landscape II
1967
Alabaster
17.8 x 37.1 x 24.4 cm
Fig. 5

Louise Bourgeois
*Fillette (Little Girl)*
1968
Latex over plaster
59.5 x 26.5 19.5 cm
Fig. 6

Margaux Crump
Coming Together
2015
Sex-safe silicone, wood
Dimensions variable
Fig. 7

Margaux Crump
_Preserving My Desire_
2014
Handmade panties, salt, steel
80 x 110 x 7 in
Fig. 8

Margaux Crump
Desiring Sterilizing Desiring
2014
Sex-safe silicone, nylon, aphrodisiac plant seeds, cotton, steel, wood, paint, plexiglas, UVC light
25 x 60 x 5 in
Fig. 9

Ernesto Neto

Simple and light as a dream...the gravity don’t lie...just loves the time
2006
Polyamide textile, nylon stockings, glass beads, Styrofoam
15 x 24 x 18 ft
Fig. 10

Margaux Crump and Jake Eshelman
*Masturbatory Exercises: Archiving Our Intimacies*
2014
Sex-safe silicone, handmade paper, silk, wood, velvet, paint, ink
45 x 12 x 12 in
Fig. 11

Sophie Calle

*Take care of yourself / Prenez soin de vous*

2007

7 films, 33 films and prints, 57 prints and texts, 6 wide paper texts, 5 small films and prints

Variable dimensions

Edition of 3

View of the French Pavilion of the 52nd Venice Biennale, 2007
Fig. 12

Margaux Crump
Salt Lick
2015
Salt, sex-safe silicone, wood, silk ribbons
96 x 30 x 12 in
Fig. 13

Tracey Emin
A Hole is a Hole
2005
Embroidery on fabric
19 x 24 cm
Fig. 14

Annette Messager
_Pénétration_
1993-94
Cotton stuffed with polyester, angora wool, nylon, electric lights
Installation variable 500 x 500 x 1100 cm
Fig. 15

Margaux Crump
Devour
2014
Video Stills
Unfinished work
Fig. 16

Margaux Crump

*Lust Lost*

Wood, Plexiglas, glass bottles, insect wings, UVB light, iPod

8 x 72 x 5 in

2012
APPENDIX

A.1

Detail of the human body suspended from hooks

Stelarc

*Ear On Arm Suspension*

Performance, 8 March
Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne, Australia
Photographed by Andreas Lustig
A.2

Gian Lorenzo Bernini
*Ecstasy of St. Teresa*
1645-1652
Marble
11 ft 6 in
A.3

An example of a hunting trophy wall at Villa Maasdijk - Maasdijk, Belgium

Photograph by Christian van der Kooy
A.4

Pinned butterfly specimens in the Penn State Frost Entomological Collection

Photograph by Tom Klimek
A.5

Pinned, preserved, and catalogued study skins

Photograph by Bryce W. Robinson
A comparison of tree and rhizome root structures. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari call for a switch from the tree model to a web model, stating that “to be rhizomorphous is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses.” (See note 7)
Examples of sex-safe silicone protrusions from *Coming Together* (fig. 6) along with the carrots, daikon radishes, and kumquats used in their casting process.
NOTES

1 The term body can be understood as plant, animal, human, or sculptural object.

2 I am defining ‘the other’ is anything that is not ‘the self,’ thus revealing difference.


5 In her autobiography, St. Theresa describes the ecstatic pain she experienced during a vision of an angel:
   I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. (See A.2)

6 Rather than perpetuating dominant feminism that relies on the gender binary, I choose to align my work with antifoundationalist queer feminist theory. Thinkers in this vein include but are not limited to: Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Lynne Huffer, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze.

7 In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari call for a switch from the tree model to a web model, stating that “to be rhizomorphous is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses.” They posit that becoming-animal is a broad destabilization of the modern boundaries established between humanity and the animal by way of altering classification. This ‘becoming’ has the potential to erode our current taxonomical system, leading to an ever-shifting state in which categories are no longer fixed and discrete. This allows for an exchange between the previous static constructs of culture/nature, human/animal, and by extension masculine/feminine. (See A.6)

8 Gilles Deleuze, Desire and Pleasure: Note G
The last time we saw each other, Michel says to me, with much kindness and affection, something like: I cannot bear the word desire; even if you use it in another way, I can't stop thinking or living that desire = lack, or that desire is the repressed. Michel adds: As for me, what I call "pleasure" is perhaps what you call "desire"; but in any case I need another word than desire. Evidently it is again something other than a question of words. Since as for myself I can hardly bear the word "pleasure".

Gilles Deleuze, "Desire and pleasure (Désir et plaisir)." trans. Melissa McMahon, 


10 Ibid, 97-98.


12 Ibid, 48.

13 Ibid, 38.

14 For further reading on object-love, see Peter Coviello’s analysis of Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in *Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth century America* (NYU Press, 2013) 86-87.


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FIGURE CREDITS

Fig.1 Crump, Margaux. *Come and Go*, 2014. Cotton seeds, cotton fluff, sex-safe silicone, used hosiery, leather rope, gold plated hooks, 60 x 8 x 8 in.


Fig.6 Crump, Margaux. *Coming Together*, 2015. Sex-safe silicone, wood, Dimensions variable.

Fig.7 Crump, Margaux. *Preserving My Desire*, 2014. Handmade panties, salt, steel, 80 x 110 x 7 in.

Fig.8 Crump, Margaux. *Desiring Sterilizing Desiring*, 2014. Sex-safe silicone, nylon, aphrodisiac plant seeds, cotton, steel, wood, paint, plexiglas, UVC light, 25 x 60 x 5 in.

Fig.9 Neto, Ernesto. *Simple and light as a dream...the gravity don’t lie...just loves the time*, 2006. Polyamide textile, nylon stockings, glass beads, Styrofoam, 15 x 24 x 18 ft. http://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/artists/ernesto-neto/series (accessed on April 14, 2015).

Fig.10 Crump, Margaux and Jake Eshelman. *Masturbatory Exercises: Archiving Our Intimacies*, 2014. Sex-safe silicone, handmade paper, silk, wood, velvet, paint, ink, 45 x 12 x 12 in.

Fig. 12 Crump, Margaux. *Salt Lick*, 2015. Salt, sex-safe silicone, wood, silk ribbons, 96 x 30 x 12 in.


Fig. 15 Crump, Margaux. *Devour*, 2014. Video Stills, Unfinished work.

Fig. 16 Crump, Margaux. *Lust Lost*, 2012. Wood, Plexiglas, glass bottles, insect wings, UVB light, iPod, 8 x 72 x 5 in.


A.7 Crump, Margaux. Protrusions from *Coming Together* with roots and fruits, 2015.