

Moist, mucous, membrane:
insight on painting, objects and identity

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

fuck fuck fuck bitch bitch cunt asshole asshole asshole fucktard motherfucker mother-fucker motherfucker pussy bitch bitch bitch fucker fucker fucker prick fucker loser loser loser motherfucker asshole trash trash pussy cunt asshole sucker sucker sucker fucktard sucker sucker pussy cocksucker cocksucker fucktard cocksucker bitch prick cunt asshole fucktard asshole fucker fucker fucker fucker loser loser prick prick bitch bitch bitch fucker fucker loser loser fucktard loser motherfucker asshole fucktard trash trash cunt asshole fucktard sucker sucker sucker sucker sucker fucktard pussy asshole asshole fucker fucker loser motherfucker asshole trash trash asshole asshole asshole motherfucker motherfucker fucktard cocksucker bitch cunt loser prick

Born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil, my site of origin is crucial in how I situate my art practice. Brazil's overly sexualized culture carries deep-rooted, misogynist, and colonialist undertones, leading me to explore ideas related to various forms of violence and aggression¹ with the specific focus on its implication for the body, issues of identity and sexuality. Mirian Goldenberg explores these characteristics in her essay entitled "The body as capital: Understanding Brazilian culture" recognizing that the roots of Brazilian identity derive from "the beginning of colonial times as soon as the hyper-sexed Portuguese colonizers started lusting for and interacting with the nude bodies of Indian women, or the strong and beautiful bodies of slaves." (230). She explores the effects of

¹ I will examine different types of violence. When writing about Brazil specifically, São Paulo, the emphasis will be on social and political conditions. I will then present and identify excess as violence as shown by Georges Bataille. The idea of excess is what I take into account to further understand how it is present in my work.

this today, as well as the cult of the body that has been taken up in relation to Brazilian identity.

As a white Brazilian female artist, I want to explore the “freedom” I encounter in the field of painting, a freedom that is at times denied in a broader patriarchal context, to portray power structures often hidden by or embedded in daily interactions and in mainly, white cisgender intersubjective relations. By bringing these relationships to light, and the restrictions and constraints implied, I want to expose such actions, which limit the individual’s potential for self-awareness and expression. In my work, I try to transgress by representing actions and gestures, playing with such notions in the field of art.

Concerned with the consequences of gender-based violence my intentions lie towards acknowledging a patriarchal system and resisting it through the use of painting, academia, and language. In doing so I intend to open space in which sexuality, expressiveness, and aggression are not tools of male oppression, but a way to envision possible modes of empowerment for all (within reason, and in relation to an acknowledgement of difference). Working towards revealing my own identity through a patriarchal system these concerns are how I permeate and tackle my process of intervening with such spaces.

The speech acts I undertake, in this thesis paper, are intended to disrupt academia and to invite the reader to perform with me such transgressions. To be clear, I am not addressing these words to someone in particular, but rather using them to establish a performative character for the viewer.² By asking the viewer to perform language in unexpected (even unacceptable to normative society) ways, there is potential in presenting alternative knowledge that can arise from what is often, in a male driven society, been interpreted as a exclusionary discourse. The speeches I present in this paper appear as angry but vigorous calls to radical shifts in ways of learning and knowing inviting the reader to have access to my personal and informal speeches often neglected in an academic patriarchal capitalist system but nonetheless part of my creative process and embedded knowledge which this thesis is about.

Through the various forms of speech, I explore the interplay between language, identity-construction, academic knowledge, and experiential learning. By utilizing foul language and personal, organic discourse my intention is to dilute academic conventions that I see informed by patriarchal systems of learning and thinking. This informal language and its affective energy also reflect how sexuality often is present when denigrating something or someone, and its association to violent action. With these

² See Butler, Judith. "On linguistic Vulnerability" in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. 1 edition. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

speeches, there is often laughter, a humour that goes with these bizarre yet very real statements. The use of bad language I present in my writings is all a part of my desire to make myself heard, sometimes through text, at others through colourful paintings, objects and material exploration. Throughout, I am interested in how laughter is part of how I use language to engage with the viewer³. Such modes of communication allow me to question, poke fun at, and play with issues of identity, intersubjective relations, the body and sexuality.

beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch
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 beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch
 beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch beach bitch

³ See further in Tucker, Marcia "The attack of the Giant Mutant Ninja Barbie", *Bad Girls*. 1st Edition. New York: MIT Press, 1994. Print.

2. BRAZIL

G: Oh politics have improved there if I am not mistaken.

B: Not really. After the impeachment, not only is the government incompetent but economically we are in a terrible crisis worse than in the 30's.

G: That's not true, there are very good things happening there and it's a great place to invest right now.

(said the German man to the Brazilian woman)

Brazil, like Canada, has many different cultures⁴ colliding and existing together. Briefly, my experience as a white, privileged, woman artist living in São Paulo (the 5th most densely populated city in the world) emerges in my research as the sum effect of various personal altercations and conflicts.

My experience of São Paulo can be easily described with one word: violent. This violence ever-present in daily life doesn't come as much from the possibilities of physical aggression, but from how the government's bureaucracy functions. In a way, there is a lack of process, arbitrary rules and conventions, and no clear paths for navigating hierarchies or power, and the feeling of chaos is constantly present. The weight of the city

⁴ Portuguese decedents, indigenous people, Africans and immigrants to name a few of the different cultures that now compose what is understood as the Brazilian identity.

is sensed by the amount of concrete that surrounds me, and the relentlessly intense energy felt even when getting from home to work. The density of the polluted air feels like clouds that are closing in on me. The noise is inflicted on my body, in my mind without asking for permission and making violent entries mostly when not invited. The excruciating gap between social classes and the absence of a decent approach to governing the city augments the fear of the other, the enclosed areas of condos and shopping malls, the insufficient public spaces, the favelas.

In Brazil, every hour and a half, daily, femicide⁵ occurs based on the massive misogynist culture⁶ with no regards to women's rights. Still, today, Brazilian culture reflects the colonial standards on which the country was founded. Colonial families were based in what Saffioti describes as a "patriarchal patrimony." Women were regarded as either household wives, the majority being white, or slaves, specifically black women who contributed to the labour of the productive process and relieved their master's sexual pleasures. Even after the abolition of slavery, in 1888, women had a minor role in society (whether white or black) and still obliged to comply to peripheral roles, when compared to men, in their societal duties. The fact that the majority of Brazilian families were part of the Catholic church, which helped colonize the country working hand in

⁵ See "Feminicídio No Brasil." N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Nov. 2016. <http://femicidionobrasil.com.br/>

⁶ For more, see Heleieth Saffioti, "The social position of Women," *Women in Class Society*, published in translation in 1978 by Monthly Review Press.

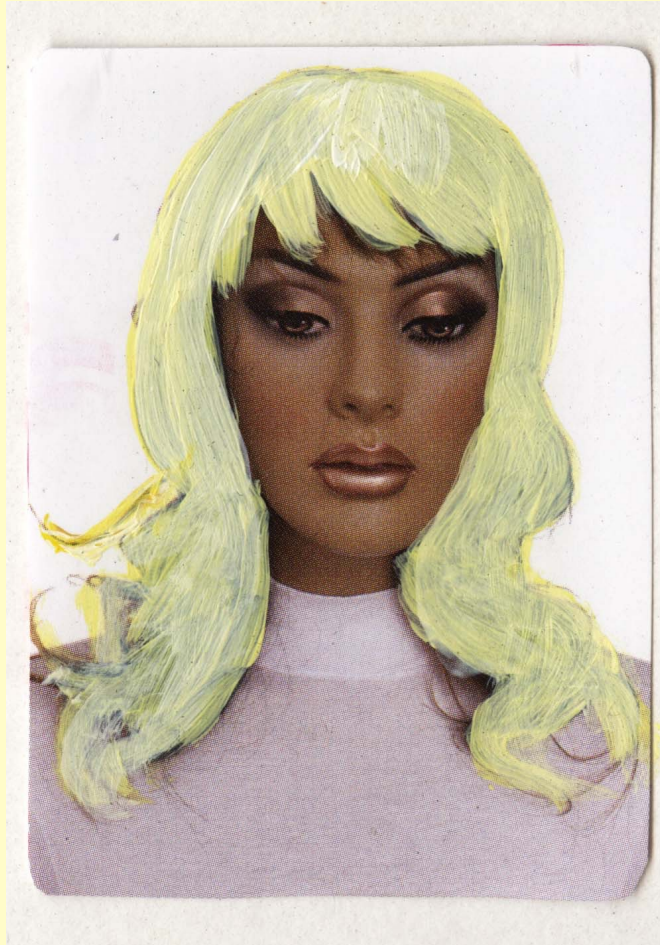


Fig. 1. Gabriela Godoi: *Discoloured*, 2015, acrylic paint on printed catalogue paper, 61 x 46 cm each.

hand with European monarchies, accentuated the overall hierarchy of genders in society. This inequality has long penetrated Brazilian identity and is still undergoing a period of transformation. But from a contemporary vantage point, it is important to remember that as recently as the 1980's, women's day to day reality in Brazil was still based on nineteenth century ideals and as more recent in March 2017 the president issued a statement on International Women's Day telling the public that women are

important when it comes to letting their husbands know about the inflated supermarket prices, contributing therefore to society and the economy⁷.

While one might think that my social status as an upper-middle-class woman protects me from this reality, I nonetheless experience daily harassment and brutal insults based on my gender. Verbal harassment in the streets, workplace and social situations, to physical aggression by those who you would consider peers, are a few examples I have encountered. I know that in the scope of other accounts my personal ones are quite mild. But despite my relative luck within an overly patriarchal and sexist culture, my contact with the city and its culture has me prepared for such intrusions, leaving me, like most women in Brazil, ready for battle.

The philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler in her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*⁸ gives a coherent account of how violence against sexual minorities happens far from the white privileged neoliberal world. She explains her ideas by indicating how lives that are not part of this realm are negated. Usually seen as “different” and often fighting for survival, these lives become part of what society identifies as “the Other.” Such “othering” happens, in part, because of disparate

7 Read further: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/09/americas/michel-temer-womens-day-speech/>

8 See Butler, Judith. “Chapter 2: Violence, Mourning, Politics” in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*.

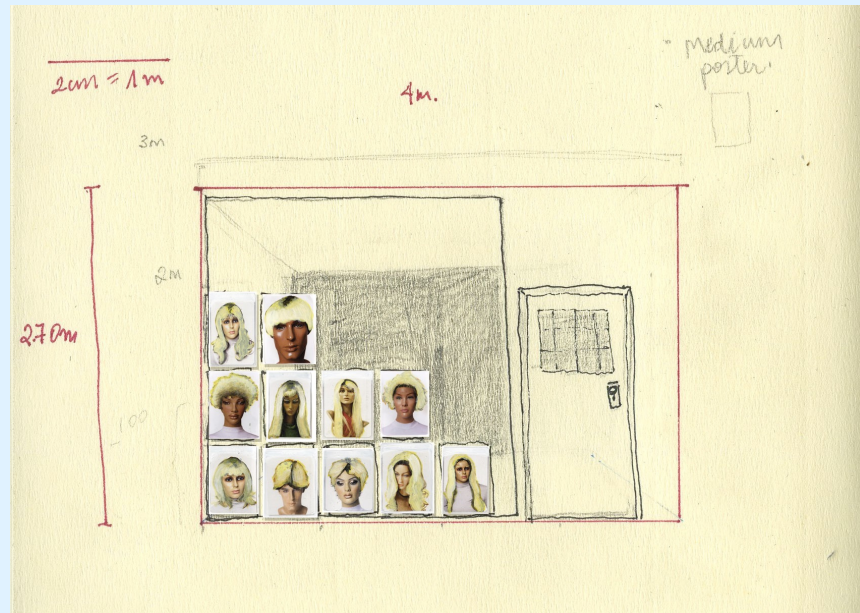


Fig. 2. Future project for *Discoloured*

social-economical conditions that enable distance between each other. The reality is, as Butler writes, that the “Other” is transformed into a mere spectrum, just an image and not a reality, that has no agency in capitalist societies (Butler, 34). By bringing such concepts in my practice, I intend to open up dialogue by inviting such “spectrums” to the world of the visual arts and share a space of potential change and consideration.

This engagement with the other, and issues of difference, is taken up in the project *Discoloured* (Fig. 1), a series of images produced as a response to the massive idealization of European beauty standards in Brazil. Research suggests that Brazil is one of the largest consumers of blonde hair bleach in the world, a condition corresponding to the fact that ideals of beauty in the country emulate a physical beauty closer to Northern countries (blonde hair, fair skin, blue eyes) than that of the tropical south. Role models

are held up by the media as standards of beauty for the whole country to imitate, regardless of one's class position or economic situation. This work is ideally meant to be presented in a window vitrine (Fig. 2) that converses with the storefronts of lowbrow hairdresser salons, in order to demonstrate the absurdity of how Brazilian identity is formulated. In other words, it renders female subjectivity in Brazil as already lacking, and largely unfixable when compared to Western models.

My interest here is not to focus on solutions or how to approach such issues on how to dismantle these ideals of Beauty or lives that are being negated by a Western society; I would rather acknowledge that the patriarchal, Western heteronormative conventions have long penetrated my being, body, and mind and I take this wherever I go. The reality is that it has become an embodied state and even an embodied form of knowledge; and as such, impacts my understanding of identity, and also my approach to practice.

3. THE DECISION TO PAINT

Moist

I am drawn to painting because it introduces me to a field of possibilities. It presents freedom and endless choice regarding what to represent, allowing me to explore my own agency as a woman painter, and address issues related to the body and the abjectness that might be interpreted from my imagery.

Art has throughout history mainly been defined by a tradition of painting, most of which has been controlled by men. To be a painter, one inherits a patriarchal tradition of painting, which is especially complicated for female artists. Several art historians and theorists have written about Westernized, male-dominant modes of education where women are usually left out and otherwise unhinged from their accomplishments in the arts. Linda Nochlin had already tackled these issues in 1989 in her essay "Why have there been no great women artists?"⁹:

"But in actuality, as we all know, things as they are and as they have been, in the arts as in a hundred other areas, are stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging to

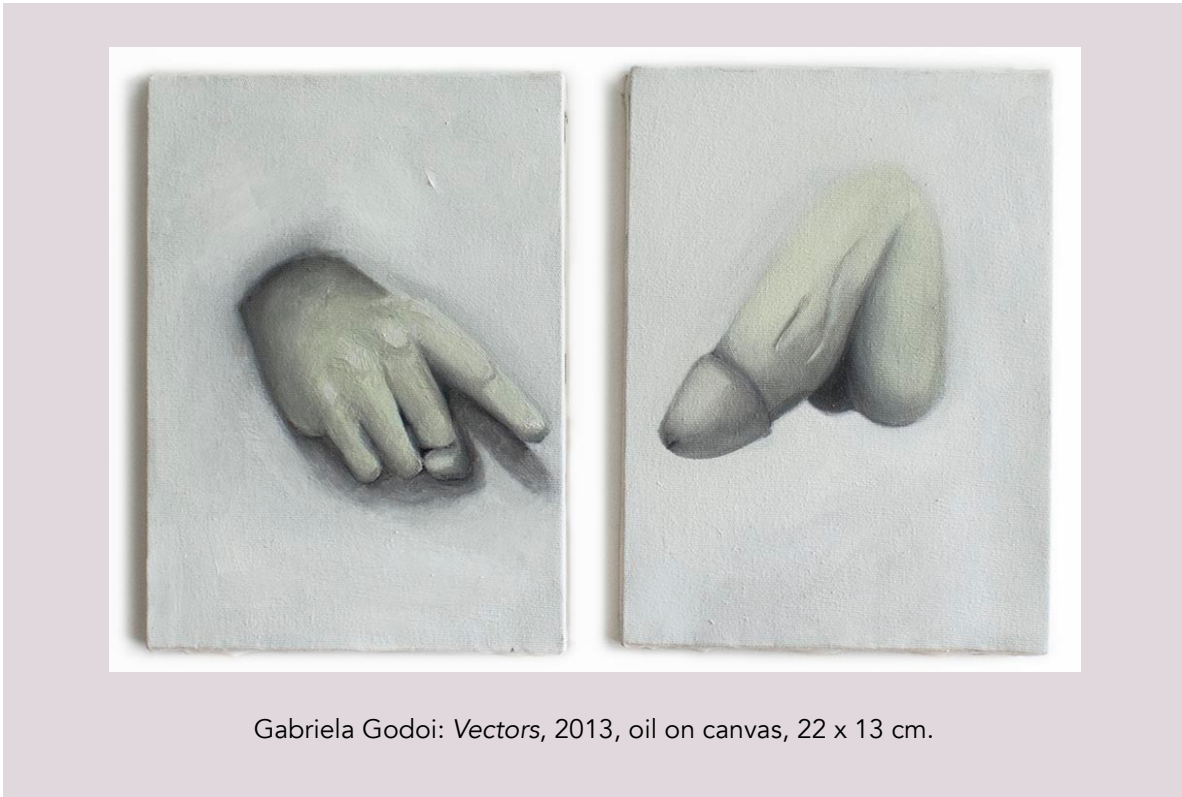
⁹Linda Nochlin extract of her book *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* called "Why have there been no great women artists?", pg 147 - 158.

all those, women among them, who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male.”(Nochlin,148)

The implications of such exclusion have continued to be explored in contemporary scholarship, including in two essays from Mira Schor's book *Wet: on painting, feminism, and art culture*.¹⁰

In the essay "The Erotics of Visuality" (1992), Schor further explores a critique of painting and how "visual pleasure" is associated with "gendered ownership." "Visual pleasure" in painting is often used to express male eroticism by enforcing a female subjectivity and therefore associated with a pleasurable imagery. Picasso, Delacroix, Cezanne, Matisse, to name a few all painted female bodies in the nude and eroticized them suggesting a femininity constructed by the male gaze. Men benefited from the pleasurable experiences evoked when looking at these images, while the female body was objectified through the process. The same characteristics found in works done by female artists are often rejected in a patriarchy, effectively marginalizing a feminist gaze. Schor's account demonstrates that this happened not only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also in our contemporary moment.

¹⁰ Schor, Mira. *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. Print.



As Schor describes, painting, as a physical and material practice can be empowering to those who are willing to oppose a misogynist perspective of female painters:

I want to engage with the language of painting, with the metaphorically expressive possibilities of the materiality of painting, trusting in the complexity of visual language in painting, in order to reinvest painting with the energy of a different politics, a politics of difference, and a different eroticism than that of the monocular penis. (Schor, 169).

Here, Schor demonstrates that painting is both a material medium and form of practice that can provide a means of resistance and liberation within a patriarchal culture.

In Schor's essay "Figure/Ground," she analyses how the fear of viscosity and organic materiality troubled the reception of many woman painters in the art world. The pliability and texture of paint itself seem to bring up an association to bodies and to fluids.

Such allusions call up the concept of the abject, which is a human reaction that manifests when there is a loss of distinction between subject and object or between self and other. It is a moment when the subject questions its boundaries. These reactions are usually felt when looking at bodily things that for whatever reason are found apart from the body such as vomit, menstruation, or spit and which may cause horror or disgust. Schor continues reminding us how in the twentieth-century painting was judged as a “thinking” practice mainly reserved to be performed by the male gender and regarded as not relevant to women. Looking at painting in the 50’s and 60’s and the influences it had from a Greenbergian¹¹ formalist perspective it was a tough time for women fighting to claim their space in the art world. In a time of a heavily male-dominated art world and academia, women were not welcome to join. Chave explores this in her essay “Outlaws: Women, Abstraction, and Painting in New York, 1967-1975”¹² and recalls “For most women, demanding freedom to become an artist meant demanding the freedom to work as they pleased. For many, abstraction stood as the epitome of aesthetic liberty” (Chave, 117). Chave and Schor both talk about how women artists, especially painters were claiming their “visual pleasure” within a feminist gaze. Schor writes

¹¹ Clement Greenberg argued for a rationale in painting which resumes as the idea where painting talks about itself, not being able to mingle with any other artistic mediums and having specificities to it regarding the surface, the medium and its shape. See more on Chapter 18 “Modernist Painting” in O’Brian, John. *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969 - Clement Greenberg the Collected Essays and Criticism*.

¹²For more see Anna C. Chave “Outlaws: Women, Abstraction, and Painting in New You, 1967-1975” in Reed, David. *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975* (pg. 115-139)



Fig.4. Gabriela Godoi
Gang, 2017
Oil on canvas
182 x 152 cm

further about the “visual pleasure” as something that emerges from the materiality used when painting and as seen by the male-art-authorities in art as something politically incorrect (Schor, 154). The potential in painting presents too many possibilities that can disrupt the male gaze that has long been in effect and that was what feminist painters were reclaiming and proudly making.

Regarding the work I produced throughout these past months, I saw myself questioning whether I was making paintings or drawings because of the “underpainting” aspects shown. But the common labels and conceptions made towards the question “what is a painting” is something I am interested in articulating in my practice. When making images by mixing oily, viscous, pigmented paint the possibilities of layering and achieving contrasting compositions have a big part in the process. In the case of *Gang* (Fig. 4.) there is a lack of working with what in painting terms is called ground. I choose to leave raw canvas not only as a compositional aspect but as a way of instigating the questions regarding what painting is. In Schor’s essay she makes notice of the modernist assumptions of how ground and figure are meant to work in a painting and because of the alliance of painting and architecture in modernism, the ground in painting is intricate with the architectural space¹³. But again, this is all too much associated with a predominant all white male conception and ideology of what painting is, disre-

¹³ See O’Doherty, Brian, and Thomas McEvilley. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded Edition. Expanded ed. edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Print.

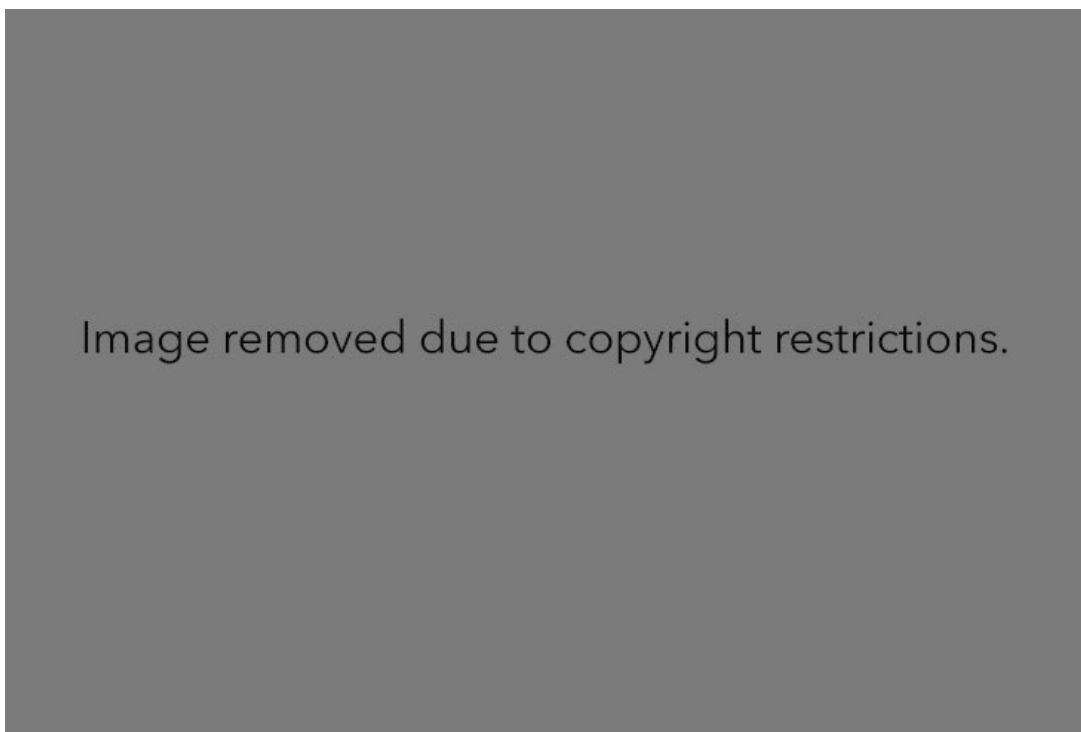


Fig. 5. Image removed due to copyright restrictions. (Rose Wylie, *Pink Skater (Will I Win, Will I Win...)*. Oil on canvas. 2015)

garding alternative gazes. I am exploring outlining and interweaving the figures attempting with it to achieve an ambiguous atmosphere in identifying them. I am interested in penetrating the traditions of painting using the traditional materials that are associated with the media and attempt to work my ideas in painting's framework rigidity having as reference other female artists that have done so successfully such as Tala Madani, Rose Wylie (Fig. 5), Adriana Varejão and Mira Schor to mention a few.

D: He doesn't want to buy your work, he just wants to fuck you.

I detected early on the assumptions presented by Schor during my undergraduate program in fine arts. I would receive “advice” arguing I should not paint, but rather do performances, work with the body or sculptures.

R: It is not a matter of what you are trying to portray. The fact is is that you do bad paintings. One’s that are pretty bad. I think you should be better off doing performance.

(The idea of using my body to perform and to present to the public is too much...not only a vulnerable position but also a position of sexualization of my body, of me.)

M: Hmmm okay, I see.

(fuck fuck fuck fuck. I don’t know how to paint. I am a bad, bad artist)

I have always found it humorous that in Portuguese, the verb “to paint” (when used with the noun I in the present tense - i.e. I paint) can erroneously translate to “I dick.”

Pinto in Portuguese has several meanings, them being, a chick, penis and “I paint.”

The etymology of the word derives from the Latin “to paint.” It is said to have been used to identify those who are found to have spots in the skin, like chicks. I have not found in my research a reason as to why the word is used to identify the male sexual organ.

In late 2014, during a studio visit with a friend curator, she carefully managed to tell me that my paintings were bad.

P: They are not only "bad paintings." They are like, really bad. I feel that you first have to know how to paint so that you can later be a painter of "bad paintings." For example, look at Picasso he didn't paint *Les Demoiselle d'Avalon* out of the blue...

(fuck Picasso fuck Picasso fuck Picasso fuck Picasso. I am a bad painter. I don't serve the purpose for being a painter. I am a bad, bad artist.).

It was when talking to another friend, who introduced me to Marlene Dumas's exquisite piece of writing entitled "Woman and Painting,"¹⁴ that I began to think about how gendered things are in every scope of life, including in professional practice in the arts. In it, Dumas states reasons as to why she chooses to paint: " Because I am a woman / Because I am an artificial blonde woman / Because I am a country girl / Because I am a religious woman / Because I am an old-fashioned woman / Because I am a dirty woman / Because I like to be bought and sold" (79). Dumas's writing on woman and painting explores the preconceived notions that exist regarding women in the arts, making use of humour and her personal experiences to debunk or destabilized established patriarchal conventions. Her directness reflects the reality one encounters as a female artist. This piece really shifted how I look at the art world and how I position myself in my practice. It led me to realize that being loud, angry, rude, colourful, messy and bad was a radical position to take.

¹⁴ Dumas, Marlene. *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts 1982-2014*. Ed. Mariska van den Berg. Revised ed. edition. D.A.P./Walther Konig, Koln, 2015. Print.

From a historical perspective, art history only started to include and track female artists production more or less 50 years ago, together with the rise of feminism¹⁵. For perspective, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) was one artist to surge only in the late 1970's and got thoroughly researched and published in late 1989 with Mary Garrard's book¹⁶. It is important to acknowledge there was significant change to how women were addressed during that period in time onwards, especially in North America. Unfortunately, there is a big gap to how the rest of the world, specifically Brazil, adjusted to these changes in perspective.

As an art student in Brazil, I would hear about the male artists whom with their brilliance and wit defined the art world with their artistic research. When taught about the 1930s avant-garde, I first learned the names of women artists such as Meret Oppenheim and Lee Miller. It was only later on that I would find out and gain further interest for artists such as Tarsila do Amaral and Anita Malfatti who were expressively painting to articulate their social-cultural perspectives. Overall there was always a lack of acknowledging the women inhabiting the space I wanted to inhabit, the space of art and painting. When it comes to painting, this is even more significant. It is only in the late

¹⁵ See Tanner, Marcia. "Mother Laughed: the bad girls avant-garde". *Bad Girls*. 1st Edition. New York: MIT Press, 1994. Print.

¹⁶ Garrard, Mary D. *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*. Princeton University Press, 1989. Print.

80's that names such as Leda Catunda, Adriana Varejão, Beatriz Millazes and Dora Longo Bahia emerge with strength as part of the "revival of painting" that period presented. But apart from very successful stories, the voice of female artists that paint, historically, in Brazil, is scarce.

M: You know, X is looking for more female artists in São Paulo. But he thinks that most of them don't work as much as the men artists he knows. Do you know of any female artists that work a lot?

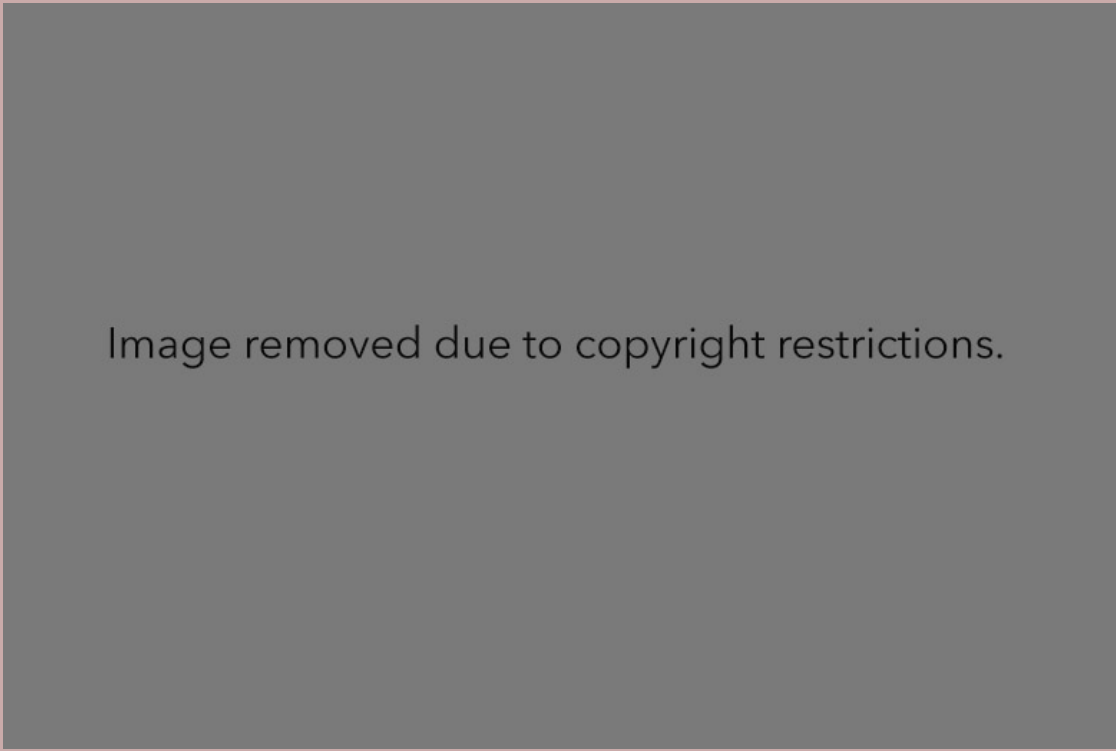


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Fig. 6. Image removed due to copyright restrictions.
(Dora Longo Bahia. *Canções de Amor no Templo do Rock (Newton e Carol)*,
2003. Acrylic on cardboard)

(Well, maybe that's because it has never been an equal place for female artists to begin with. Second, try to live for a month as a woman that has to expel a considerable amount of blood through her vagina every month for her body to continue to be healthy and functional and see how much work we do, you ballsucker.)

Two artists I admire are Dora Longo Bahia and Lynda Benglis. Bahia is a Brazilian artist whom I had the pleasure to work with on several projects. Her work ranges from painting, photography and filmmaking to her engaged role as an arts educator. Often considering art to be a political gesture, her belief in a constant learning situation through study groups and critiques led me to believe that art could make a social, political intervention in the world. The series of paintings *Canções de Amor no Templo do Rock* (the title translates to Love Songs in the Temple of Rock) are portraits of punk rock backstage scenes that range from famous bands such as Iggy Pop, The Velvet Underground to Brazilian bands including the ones Bahia plays in as a bassist. The roughly scratched phrases are translations from famous punk songs. In Fig. 6., the phrase “Agora eu quero ser sua cadela” translates to Iggy Pop famous song “Now I wanna be your dog” but with a slight shift: cadela is the word for bitch¹⁷ in Portuguese. Here, Bahia is making use of language and shifts the notions of a male punk singer to her own feminist gaze as a women punk rocker.

¹⁷ Bitch, noun 1. A female dog, wolf, fox, or otter. 2. informal A spiteful or unpleasant woman. “Bitch - Definition of Bitch in English | Oxford Dictionaries.” Oxford Dictionaries | English. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Mar. 2017.

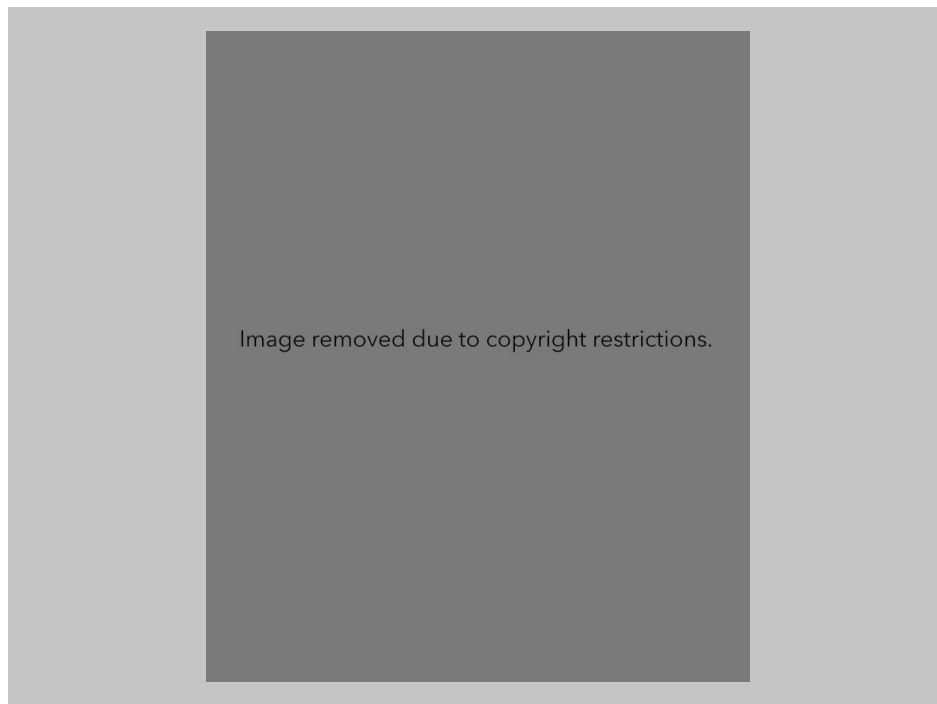


Fig.7. Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

(Lynda Benglis. *For Carl Andre*, 1970. Acrylic Foam 56 1/4 x 53 1/2 x 46 3/16 inches).

Benglis, famous for her sexually-explicit ad published in *Artforum*, explores the potential of paint as a material that interferes with the long lineage of historical male painters. Works such as *For Carl Andre* (Fig. 7.) are not only humorous as Marcia Tanner¹⁸ points out but resist an exclusiveness "of the traditional Western male "rationality", whether expressed formally in art or behaviourally, in attitudes towards gender." (73). Benglis explores, in painting, how to achieve a sense of liquidity and or-

¹⁸ Tanner, Marcia. "Mother laughed: the bad girls avant-garde" in *Bad Girls*. 1st Edition. New York: MIT Press, 1994. Print.

ganicity that were to redefine what was painting for her¹⁹ and going very much against what Minimalism represented at the time. Her pieces represent to me a perfect in-between state of painting-object that questions paintings ideals.

Overall, painting presents itself as a way of enabling me to intervene in the art world and offer my Brazilian white female voice that intends to amplify the potential of female painters. I want to insert myself in this struggle that many other artists had to navigate before me and make use of the tradition to intrude and give my loud and rude opinion as a Brazilian feminist artist. As Marcia Tucker and Marcia Tanner²⁰ reinforce in their essays, I want to be a Bad Girl and squirt and make a mess and everyone has to leave the room wet and uncomfortable. It might be important to note that even though I am having fun, it potentially means a lot of people will not view it as humorous work or research.

“C: Yeah...she’s voracious”

¹⁹ For more, see Anna C. Chave “Outlaws: Women, Abstraction, and Painting in New York, 1967-1975” in Reed, David. *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975* (pg. 115-139)

²⁰Tucker, Marcia, ed. *Bad Girls*. 1st Edition. New York: MIT Press, 1994. Print.



Fig. 8.
 Gabriela Godoi
Untitled, 2017
 oil on linen on wooden board
 dimensions variable

Humour is not necessarily found in the entirety of my material practice. Rather, it is inherent in my methodologies, approach to practice, and more specifically explicit in my writing. The piece, *Untitled* (Fig. 8) is one such example.

Bringing foul speech into painting is a way of disrupting and challenging the seriousness I encounter in the field of painting and the art market. In hopes of giving a moment of humour to the viewer, I believe it suggests questions that take into considera-

tion whether this is art or not as if art is supposed to be serious in order for it to be. I rely on humour to make art not because I am a funny person but because it is the only way I see myself approaching concepts regarding patriarchies daily encounters. As Margaret Atwood wrote "Men are afraid that women will laugh at them (...) Women are afraid that men will kill them"²¹ (Atwood, 413). Again, I believe that women use of humour as a mechanism to defeat patriarchies power to silence oppressed minorities. It is a tool to break the silence and serves for many of us to resist and construct our own particular discourse to destabilize patriarchy.

Being part of a punk band a few years ago and seeing it as a space to scream, be loud and act out my anger towards the controlled and supervised normative society I am part of, I see painting as giving me a similar space feminist punk bands once had, such as with the Riotgrrrl movement. I am in no way claiming both actions, of screaming in a punk band and painting, are equal. They have different purposes but the way I see myself as an artist having a political engagement compares to how I believe in the principles of the Riotgrrrl movement²² of reclaiming the spaces for feminist voices to be heard in a male-dominated art world (which in the case of the Riotgrrrls was the male-dominated music industry).

²¹Atwood, Margaret. *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose, 1960-1982*. House of Anansi, 2000. Print.

²² Schilt, Kristen. "The History of Riot Grrls - The Feminist eZine." *Feministezine*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

Membrane

Flesh is a direct link to paint. In her essay entitled "Liquid Gazes,"²³ Susanne Leeb presents painting as a medium being appropriated by feminism. She approaches the paint as the perfect medium to be used when representing that which is slimy, liquid, material, sloppy, again that which may call up the abject.

"With these unshapely bodies, flesh is that which threatens to dissolve the contour, the identity. It is not a substance, not a "subject matter" of painting, but a question of boundary and touch: flesh is not the body but exactly that which exceeds it, that which comes upon limits" (pg. 183).

I am interested in the duality of how I perceive flesh, as the membrane dividing that which is outside and interacting with what is inside which consists of the body's structure. "It is revealing and concealing all at the same time" (pg 190). Therefore, flesh symbolizes limits, borders, boundaries.

Exploring the ideas of the abject, and the excess which cannot be stopped or controlled by the limits of the body or the boundary of the flesh, allows me to consider the

²³ See Part 3 in Ensslin, Felix, and Charlotte Klink, eds. *Aesthetics of the Flesh*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014. Print.

limitations imposed by such binaries, between self and other, or the subject and the object.

W: I know a lot of Brazilians, most of them are girls. (grin)

(Creepy motherfucker I didn't even ask. Go penetrate yourself.)

4. OBJECTS AND MATERIAL

S: Like you, who is interested in pre-cum. After all, your work denotes shapes and forms of phalluses.

(Yes of course, who wouldn't be interested in the male pre-ejaculation)

My interests lie in the potential of the materiality, and pictorial aspects I apply to the objects I make and the way in which I relate to them. There is a natural instinct that speaks to the desire to touch and experience something through the body, to think about the attachment of meaning to an object by interpreting its shape and material, as is done with amulets. It is this potential that drives me to view objects as central, and able to inform my broader artistic practice including my paintings.

When looking further into the principles of the object in art history, Briony Fer in her essay "The Scatter: Sculpture as Leftover" introduces Gabriel Orozco's *Working Tables*, accumulations of found objects, sketches, extra material, and unfinished artworks.

These works provide an intimate view into the artistic process of the artist, from the initial idea to experimentation with materials, and through to fruition, providing insight on the recurring narrative found in Orozco's work. Fer states that "Thinking occurs through things, where material things are a necessary condition of thought." (Fer, 224). In her



Fig. 9. Gabriela Godoi: *Amulets*, 2016, air dry clay, plastalina, plaster, acrylic paint, gesso, oil paint



Fig. 10. Gabriela Godoi: *Amulets*, detail.

interpretation of Orozco's piece, she mentions the objects as leftover: "a piece of something (...) that has become detached." Therefore they are carriers of history, of meaning and relate to one's identity. In another essay entitled "Objects beyond objecthood", Fer reviews closely the group of artists that were brought together in the exhibition "Eccentric Abstractions" in 1966 in New York City by analyzing Lucy Lippard's critique about the exhibition. This particular statement resonates to what I seek to accomplish when making objects:

" 'Organic', 'erotic', 'sensuous': these were the words Lippard used to describe the work in this idiom and the 'near-visceral' identification with form' that has the capacity to activate the most powerful physical sensations." (26)

Here lies an account of physical sensation manifested in one's body by merely looking. How does this play into one's desires or revulsions? Can the mere image of an object of art, produce such drive?

Mucous

Amulets (Fig. 9.) are objects formed by compressing, pinching, pulling, crumpling gestures made with a range of materials from air-dry clay, plaster and acrylic paint. These gestures are chosen consciously to reflect actions made when two bodies come together, either sexually or violently. Colour and scale bring a sense of playfulness to the objects. Mainly produced out of air-dry clay (Fig. 10.), material that has the sole purpose of crafting fake food, fake flowers and cosplay accessories, my intentions was not to bring a mimetic realness to the objects. Rather, the point was to make visible a gesture, an action, or some embodied intention. The ambiguity of interpretation inherent in viewing these objects brought up associations with the body or body parts, adding a quality of the abject to the artwork. These sculptures as body parts create a desire on the part of the viewer, to hold, organize, touch these expressive forms. At the same time, these objects draw forth a connection to the fetish, in the most literal ways.

The word fetish derives from "early 17th century (originally denoting an object used by the peoples of West Africa as an amulet or charm): from French *fétiche*, from Portuguese *feitiço* charm, sorcery (originally an adjective meaning made by art), from Latin *facticus* (see *factitious*)."²⁴ This is the definition I would apply to the objects I make.

²⁴ "Fetish - Definition of Fetish in English | Oxford Dictionaries." Oxford Dictionaries | English. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Jan. 2017.




Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig.11. Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

(Eva Hesse: *Several*, 1965, acrylic paint and paper machè
over seven balloons with rubber cord 84 x 117 in).

The intention of creating a relationship where the audience has an urge to experience the objects materiality– to touch, hold, caress, feel– creating a bond between the object and the viewer. I believe this relationship derives from a sensation associated with the desire to touch, endowing the objects made with a certain kind of power. In the case of *Amulets*, there is no invitation for the viewer to touch as they are inserted in an

enclosed vitrine, thwarting this desire but provoking longing and affect. The choice of placing them on this enclosed vitrine derived from the intentions of enhancing this teasing affect towards the viewer but further reflection on the work brought me to another conclusion. This framed, obedient, proper place is determining a frame to these objects, a boundary. The boundaries that society imposes when it comes to becoming and being. I am constantly being reminded to place myself in a position, delimited by a patriarchal society, which deems women to be proper, not loud and beautiful.

Intrigued with materials that are able to mimic skin due to their organic nature, the objects I produce are often perceived as an extension of one's body. The mimicking of a peeled skin or the organic nature of the material connects to the abject²⁵. The abject is an in-between state, something that has quite not yet found its identity, but is clearly part of the human body or was once attached to it. From a lacerated hand to spit or vaginal discharge, the abject is something present in our daily lives, but which is often hidden, ignored, cast aside. According to Deborah Caslav Covino,²⁶ "the abject body repeatedly violates its own border, and disrupts the wish for physical self-control and social property." (Covino, 17). This idea of the body violating its own borders approxi-

²⁵ For further understanding of the abject see Felluga, Dino. "Introduction to Julia Kristeva, Module on the Abject." Purdue U. Introduction Guide to Critical Theory. N.p., 31 Jan. 2011. Web. 1 Mar. 2016. <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/kristevaabject.html>

²⁶ See chapter one of Covino, Deborah Caslav. *Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2004. Print.

mates my interest in the viscosity, the slime, the messiness I find when working with materials such as plaster, latex, nail polish, oil paint, and clay. Julia Kristeva in her book *Powers of Horror*²⁷, explains in further detail what the abject is. In her “Introduction” chapter, she recounts how the abject is embedded in how one feels towards that which seems to be detached from one’s body. In that sense, it can be either a chopped out head or as mundane and simple as a vaginal discharge or excrement. It is a feeling that connects to our perception that there exists a cycle humans go through and it is as simple as life and death. Once there is a detachment from the body or the perception of this, there is a sense of a dirty, violated body that sits in opposition to a clean and proper one. Even though there is a common understanding that for a body to function properly it must expel fluids, there is also the idea that no one can control these or for that matter see them. So then, how to recognize that they have leaked their borders? The abject then is connected to our understanding and the constant struggle between notions of self and other.

(WET WILL MUCUS WASH WIT MOIST WATER WOMB WAVE WETTISH MUGGY)

Such interest in the object, and with its material possibilities, is clearly articulated in the work of both Eva Hesse and Lygia Clark. Both artists who worked primarily in sculpture

²⁷ Kristeva, Julia, and Leon S Roudiez. *Powers of horror: an essay on abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.

began in painting. Hesse working during the 1960's in New York City during the "Abstract Expressionism boom," made gesture, formlessness, expressive content, and embodied experience central to her practice. Hesse's work (Fig. 11.) recognizes bodies in the forms and materials she produces. The objects she creates are familiar and seem to imply an intimacy and an awareness of the body. Her objects are all sagging, hanging and identified as flesh. Susan Best²⁸ speaks further to Hesse's imaginary shapes: "it is anthropomorphic but also resolutely abstract (...) Hesse's sculptures make contradictory 'overtures' to the viewer: soliciting them and yet also refusing them access." (Best, 69). This contradiction is what makes her work so compelling and is repeatedly something I search to achieve in my own work.

Lygia Clark is a Brazilian artist mostly associated with the Tropicália movement that happened in Rio de Janeiro in the late 60's. Like Hesse, Clark started as a painter and progressed to making objects, specifically to address more thoroughly the body and the interpersonal relations bodies have with things. Clark's series of works entitled *Propositions (Air and Stone)* (Fig. 12) intended to defy preconceived notions of perception. In her studies, Clark is interested in subverting the binomial artist-artwork and spectator-artwork and replacing it instead with a field of artistic perception that anyone can participate in. This line of thinking is aligned with Merleau-Ponty's theories of phe-

²⁸ For further references on Hesse and Clark's work, see Best, Susan. *Visualizing Feeling: Affect and the Feminine Avant-Garde*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011. Print.

nomenology which influenced Clark's artistic production. The parallel between Merleau-Ponty and Clark here is how both thought of connecting subject and object by breaking with the notion of an outside and/or inside world rather thinking of things as a whole which is associated with a phenomenological process²⁹.



²⁹ Sperling, David. *Corpo + Arte = Arquitetura. As Proposições de Hélio Oiticica E Lygia Clark*. Página. Fórum Permanente. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

F: Oh Sorry, I feel like a 14-year-old boy. This never happens to me.

M: Hey it's fine, really just chill. No stress here.

F: Yeah...no, but seriously, this never happens to me...



Fig. 13.
Gabriela Godoi
Them
Oil on canvas
152 x 182 cm

5. EXCESS

M: Why are you laughing?

S: Because I don't know who is more perverted, you or me.

I perceive violence as a form of overflow and excess which are important aspects of my work. There are many definitions and explanations as to what violence means, but I am particularly interested in how Georges Bataille introduces violence. In his book *Erotism: Death and Sexuality*,³⁰ Bataille explores the origins of taboo and writes on transgression as actions that surpass norms and morals created by a heteronormative social order as a means of maintaining control. Taboos exist to regulate excessive behaviour that would generate crisis and chaos. Writing about sex, he describes it is a movement between bodies, a coming and going, that leads to superabundance and the *petit mort* ("little death"), the orgasm (100). It is not so much the "end game" that I am interested in, but the process that will bring about actions and physical experiences that.

Perceiving the orgasm as friction culminating in a spillage of sensations, liquids, vibration, excess, that which is about to overflow, demonstrates an action that rises to the surface and expands over borders. The boundary, in this case, is the flesh that consti-

³⁰ Bataille, Georges. *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986. Print.

tutes one's body. It is the limit where the inside meets the outside, where one ends, and the other begins. This friction, this excess, this violence present is something that cannot be contained because it pertains to human nature. Therefore there will be constant tension that exists in this in-between.



Fig.14. Gabriela Godoi
Detail Amulets (Tongue), 2017
Air-dry clay, nail polish, gloss spray.

Bataille's accounts of excess are taken up in my work when painting figurative images, specifically bodies (Fig. 13.) that interlock and embrace. More specifically, I examine the areas in which there is no understanding where one body ends and the next begins. The aggressive gestures that I undertake when manipulating the brush and the amount of colour and materials used in the objects (Fig. 14.), such as the glossiness of

the nail polish which seemingly renders the object as slimy or tacky, adds an element of viscosity and tactility.

In the piece *Carnaval* (Fig.15.), I attempt to play with firm frameworks of traditional painting methods and explore compositional concepts, such as the grid³¹, by bringing to the forefront the representation of bodies tackling one another, and embracing each other. The title of the piece places the tone as it is named after a festival that is globally related to transgression, the body, pleasure and flesh. Costumes, excessive makeup, eating, drinking and dancing but most of all it's about freeing the repressed self, which is not allowed as a norm in society. Therefore, I attempt to apply the ideas I am researching into the paintings in a way to embrace form and content into my practice.

Nonetheless, there are contradictions when it comes to my attempts in crossing limits and boundaries in the entirety of my practice. These are related with the constraints I find in going about a patriarchal society that is still regulating how women should go about in their freedom of being. There is no freedom but coercion of all sorts on how women should be. There are attempts in creating an affect towards excess in my practice that is not necessarily taken up by making work that is in itself formless, slimy and

³¹ As Rosalind Krauss's writes about the grid as a modernist structural ambition that was taken up by modern art as a way to function spatially as a way to flatten, order and call for symmetry as a purely aesthetic choice of compositing an image. See Krauss, Rosalind. "Grids." *October* 9 (1979): 51–64. JSTOR. Web. 15 Sept. 2016.

overabundant. I am interested in penetrating the formalities of traditional art forms as a way of showing my resistance to the ideals so often associated with a male-dominated labour. The choice to restrict and place boundaries when working on stretched canvas or of placing objects in an enclosed vitrine display is reflective of these issues. Both of them indicate rectangular traditional structures bound by four sides constraining the image and the objects. There is no organicity to them or fluidity. I understand these to be indicative of ways in which order in society is believed to be structured. By placing the formless and hand-size objects and the seemingly disorderly paintings within these structures, I intend to push against stable institutional frameworks constructed for order in society.

M: No

I: Oh this is so good

M: I don't think I want to do this anymore

I: Just relax, everything is alright.

M: Can we please stop?

I: Don't stress

M: I said, no.

(I want to cut your dick off and make you eat it)



Fig. 15. Gabriela Godoi
Carnaval, 2017
Oil on canvas
182 x 152 cm

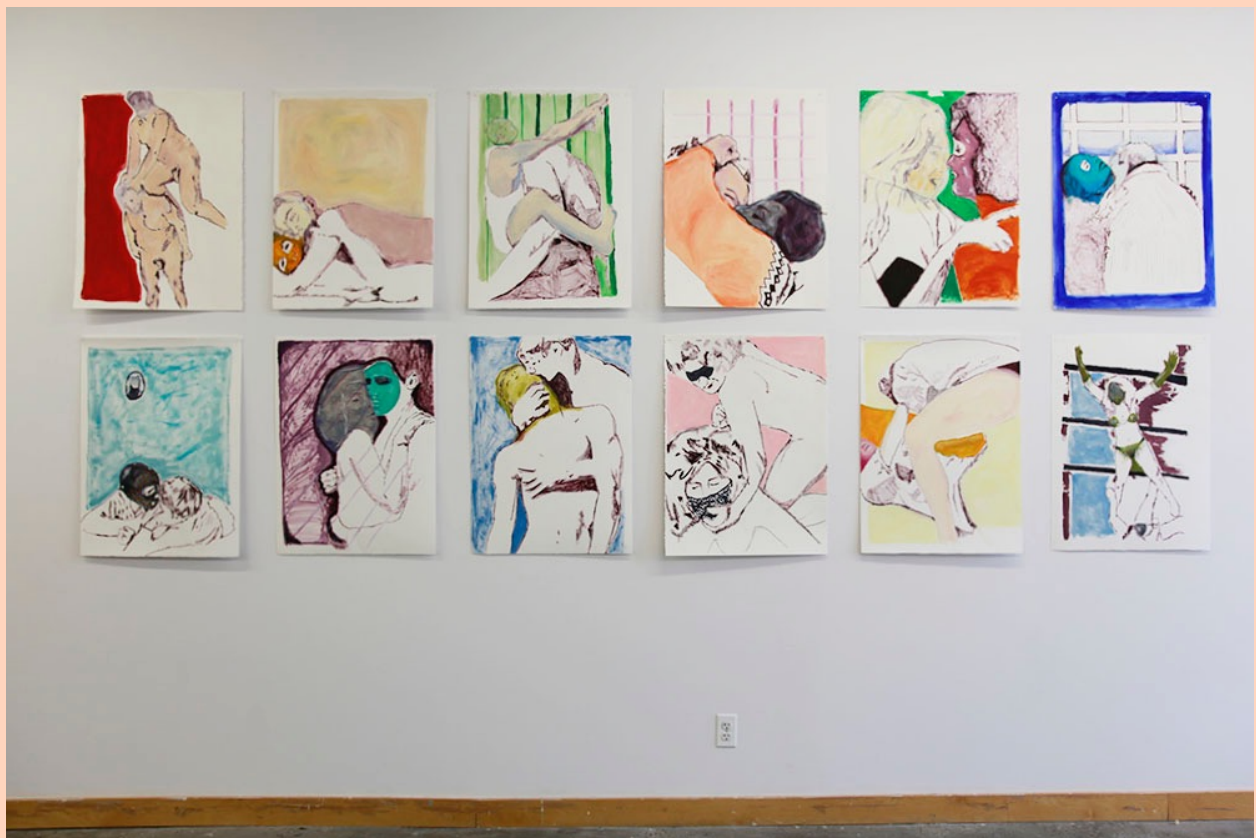


Fig. 16. Gabriela Godoi: *Couples*, 2016. Oil on watercolour paper, 56 x 76



Fig. 17. Gabriela Godoi: *Couples*, detail.

7. COUPLES

L: I need to leave, but we could do a *quicky*...just five minutes.

M: Yeah, I don't think it works that way...

(I hope your balls fall off)

My interest on images representing couples arose in 2014 after ending a relationship that endured for almost 8 years. To have intimacy, was something that I still longed for and I found myself often wondering what was the definition of being in an intimate relationship and the politics of such. There is a societal norm concerning couples and the way that this "institution" should function that has always bothered me and made me question my "status". Not only heteronormativity but the prescribed roles that are implied in couples such as monogamy, marriage, cohabitation, and reproduction. As a single woman, I was interested in exploring the meanings of intimacy and touch and how these acts could become such banal gestures that one doesn't acknowledge them as intense connections in a relationship.

As I collected images from various sources throughout the internet I noticed that there wasn't necessarily a clear understanding of what was taking place in the pictures I was interested in. The material ranged from images of figures in porn or athlete's wrestling, that would be representing two people engaging in touch. I started questioning if

these were loving gestures or was there a different story to them. And to also analyze how these same boundaries can be conflicting when being intimate with someone else.

D: Why are you usually attracted to guy's that look like girls?

(Is this an actual question?)

I viewed the impact of the bodies as an indicative of an intimate gesture or a violent gesture. Believing that everyone struggles with the identity of the self and the other, especially in a relationship, I wanted to further explore the narratives that one can find when borders and limits are crossed, with or without consent. There was also a desire to insert my own narrative and perspective into what these potential interpersonal connections could mean. Again, bringing up São Paulo, a city composed of 12 million people you constantly find yourself in gatherings in a multitude of people and nowhere to flee. Also, part of the culture is about touching as an affectionate gesture, exposing the body, bumping in and rubbing against skin. The tropics are not a place for much clothes. In my point of view, such touching and manipulation of other's boundaries invade the personal space of others. Sometimes the lack of consent or choice I have in skin to skin exchanges is disconcerting. Greeting people by kissing them one time, two times or three times in the cheeks depending on the region. I respect and am part of this culture, but there have been situations in which I was uncomfortable in doing so because of the sense of not being able to have a choice. I believe the fact is, I've en-



Fig. 18. Detail of the outlines made with purple paint.

countered too many people (men and women included) that are so embedded in a sexist way of being that have made these encounters end up being more uncomfortable than celebratory.

A series of oil paintings made in 2015, *Couples*, further explores the concepts of excess, boundaries and borders and intersubjective relations. Throughout the images that make up *Couples* (Fig. 16 and 17), there is an ambiguity inherent in how the bodies are interacting, obscuring the connection between the figures. The way in which the bodies come together can be either indicative of a violent action or a caring bond. I find myself moving through the margins of these bodies manipulating them to collide and

interlock. Masks, transparencies, veiling techniques, layering, are all part of this play of revealing, concealing, and imitating flesh. The strange or often unexpected pairings or colour compositions present the viewer with a “visual pleasure” that requests attention.

H: Baby, stop sucking my dick.

G: Why? Is it not good?

H: I think you are in an uncomfortable position and you are hurting yourself. C'mon lets change positions.

(XOXO. Thanks for always assuming and making decision for me babe)

The fact that in *Couples* (Fig. 18.) I am delimiting bodies, outlining them roughly using purple paint, highlights my interest in how these bodies collide and rub against each other. The colour purple is referencing the undertone of flesh, the colour bruised parts of the body get when there is violence inflicted upon them. I use purple to navigate the bodies colliding and touching each other as a way to not miss anything that is going on. It is where the figures are coming together but are also overlapping and become blurred. The lack of rendering and aggressiveness in these outlines is how I believe the figures come together in a rush, in the heat of the moment forgetting about the self and the other.

8. CONCLUSION

My thesis is about my embedded experiences as a white female Brazilian artist and how they encompass my practice. It is in acknowledging patriarchy's general effects and how it impacts the art world, which urges me to comprehend my intentions as an artist. I have inherited the struggle from female feminist artists, and I intend to explore them in my practice and continue the lineage of women that will shout out injustices that are presented in their way. Throughout the program and the extensive research done, I've been exposed to a vast majority of women theorists and artists. Going forward my intention is to dig further in acknowledging them and their work and to expand a feminist perspective in the arts. By bringing this forward into my practice, I gain further hope in believing that art has a revolutionary potential.

The three highlighted topics outlined in this thesis aim to present ideas regarding painting, objects and the body. The first topic is entitled *moist* regarding painting, its history and how I intend to address it. Secondly, comes *mucous* and how I am relating this thin tissue with making objects and the history of how the abject and its affect are embedded in them. Lastly comes membrane, "a pliable sheetlike structure acting as a boundary or lining" (Oxford) which I am associating it to the body and connecting it to paint, the object and my identity. Throughout this process, I was able to come to terms

with these ideas and translate them formally into my material practice. Embodied experiences of colliding and crashing into others via interpersonal relations become a metaphor of my own struggle in situating myself as a female Brazilian artist.

By using bad language, allowing humour to be present, calling up the abject as a dirty and un-proper/unwanted feeling and exposing my personal experiences are means of empowerment and resisting a patriarchal Western European history that has informed me and restricted my practice and my identity. This leads me to believe that using these artifices in my practice allow me to be heard and will help me solidify my identity as a female artist that is interested in exposing the conditions that bind me.

The ways in which I use of humour are part of a feminist strategy. The humour I introduce in written form in the thesis has two sides to it. The first one is directed to cis-white-normative male statements that appear so naturally in conversations and intimate interactions. Once written down they become surreal and uncanny and somewhat humorous when analyzing the intentions and roots of this type of thinking. The other type of humour I identify in the thesis are what I consider to be lyrics and internal discourses put together using foul language. The intention with these is to reveal and express, in a somewhat subversive way, how my internal monologues function. Through this, I am inviting the reader to engage with the written pieces in a performative and quite subversive way permitting this type of language to be read and performed in an academic

environment. Additionally, I want to engage further and make use of humour in my paintings and objects as a way of allowing these subversions to exist in institutions and establishments in the actual art pieces I produce.

Wanting to approach making art and the ideas that lead me to continue to produce and engage within the context of contemporary art, have to do with an active belief in feminism and its potential to change a predominant patriarchal world. In no way do I believe what I am doing is "new" or "original" or that I am breaking with societal boundaries. The way in which I see myself permeating the world and making art have to do with bumping into boundaries and attempting to push them further, teasing them until a threshold is found and poked.

Regarding my practice when it comes to painting and objects I intend to continue exploring scale and materials, addressing further humour, excess and sexuality in the pieces. I visualize the objects gaining a bodily scale, therefore incrementing the abject affect they are intended to have. In respect to the paintings, I continue to explore layering and colour and moving towards achieving ambiguity in the figures and possibly incorporating text as a way of exposing the internal monologues and statements collected and written in my thesis. Compositionally, I see endless possibilities to incorporate

objects into the paintings as ways of addressing excess and sexuality further without the use of a literal representation and potential narrative.

Furthermore, I am revisiting the structures I am painting on and ones I use to house the objects. I feel like building my own structures and thinking about the organicity I can bring to them are also ways of re-assessing traditional structures I am bound to in a patriarchal context and that continue to assert this type of thinking which is not what I believe in. In order to push further the structural boundaries related to this societal system that I am going against, I want to challenge my way of making and my process.

Identifying myself as an artist, I believe that the media I chose to work with will inform directly my concepts and ideas. I don't see myself as a painter, or a sculptor, or a video-maker. I see myself as an artist that experiments with any media that extends the parameters of my practice. Overall, painting and sculpture are not the only ways in which I can situate myself as an artist. Learning in different capacities ways in which to address my methodologies have shifted my perspective of how I engage with my ways of knowing and my process and production. And now more than ever before, I believe in processes that derive from a feminist perspective in an artistic extent where I am able to attempt to subvert and destabilize patriarchy in my artistic practice, whether it be painting, object making, performance, video, sound or photography. I maintain my

stance as a feminist artist that wants to continue exploring humour and text, painting and drawing, object and materiality in hopes that together with this I will allow my ways of knowing to be empowered and heard.

E: Nice to meet you, my name is Y.

T: Oh you are X's girlfriend!

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