

PAINTING AND THE PORNOGRAPHIC: MARLENE DUMAS, JENNY SAVILLE
AND PLAYS OF IDENTIFICATIONS

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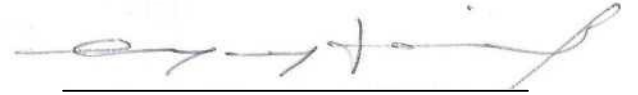
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ABSTRACT

PAINTING AND THE PORNOGRAPHIC: MARLENE DUMAS, JENNY SAVILLE AND PLAYS OF IDENTIFICATIONS

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This thesis investigates and argues for instances of the affinity between painting and the pornographic traced in plays of identifications taking place in paintings of two contemporary women painters, Marlene Dumas and Jenny Saville. In the first part, it introduces debates around pornography, the crisis of a systematically politicized issue of gender in these debates and the similarity of mentality in the elaboration of the female nude in the art/pornography opposition. In the rest of the thesis, shortcomings of thinking according to an opposition of art and pornography are argued through in relation to works of Dumas and Saville. Tracing their introduction of different ways of seeing/experiencing via identifying with their models in different ways, the discontinuities of desire in the affinity between painting and the pornographic are explored. This thesis attempts to open up the problematic of the framing of bodies in images and the limits of thinking painting in terms of the art/pornography opposition to discussion through Dumas' and Saville's plays of identifications.

Key words: Painting, pornography, art, identification, desire, play

Öz

RESİM VE PORNOGRAFIK: MARLENE DUMAS, JENNY SAVILLE VE ÖZDEŞ LEŞME OYUNLARI

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Söz konusu tez iki çağdaş, kadın ressam olan Marlene Dumas ve Jenny Saville'in resimlerinde gerçekleşen özdeşleşme oyunları vasıtasıyla izleri sürülebilecek resim ve pornografik arasındaki bağlantıları araştırmakta ve tartışmaktadır. İlk bölümde pornografi ile ilgili tartışmalar, bu tartışmalarda sistemli biçimde politize edilen cinsel kimlik ve kadın bedeninin ele alırken sanat/pornografi karşıtlığından yola çıkan düşünme biçimi ve bu politize etme sürecindeki anlayış benzerlikleri ele alınıyor. Tezin geri kalan kısmında sanat/pornografi karşıtlığında düşünmenin kısıtlamaları Dumas ve Saville'in işleri üzerinden tartışılıyor. Bu ressamaların modelleriyle farklı yollardan özdeşleşmeler kurarak aştıkları farklı görme/tecrübe etme biçimleri yoluyla resim ve pornografik arasındaki ilişkide ortaya çıkan arzu süreksizlikleri araştırılıyor. Bu tez bedenleri imgeler içine çerçeveleme sorunsalını ve resmi sanat/pornografi karşıtlığı üzerinden düşünmenin yol açtığı kısıtlamaları Dumas ve Saville'in özdeşleşme oyunları vasıtasıyla tartışmaya açmayı hedefliyor.

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INTRODUCTION

Debates around pornography have often been intense. What is and what is not pornography has been often the most crucial point. Many different groups involved in these debates heated by anti-porn feminists in the last decade of the seventies have not come to a unanimous answer. This irresolution must have urged Walter Kendrick, the liberal writer of *Secret Museum*, to offer a solution to this problem of definition :

...the concept of pornography was historically shaped, and its development as a category was always one of conflict and change. Pornography was the name for a cultural battle zone: "pornography" names an argument, not a thing."¹

In this quotation, although Kendrick attempts to arrive at something about what I want to or will call - or what has been called the spectre of pornography, he treats what he arrives at as a categorizing of a category which does violence to the arguments as to what pornography may be or become without this attempt of double categorizing. This desire for categorizing suggests a desire to stabilize and objectify arguments which would define and regulate pornography. I shall be pursuing the hypothesis that calling something pornography acts as a framing around that thing. Interestingly in respect of the conceptualization of the relation between painting and pornography, Lynda Nead argues, with regard to Kenneth Clark's elaboration on the issue of transformation of naked female body to female nude, that framing as an act of regulation takes place 'to shore up the female body - to seal orifices and to prevent the marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the

¹ Hunt, Lynn 'Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity: 1500-1800,' *Feminism and Pornography*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 358, quoting Walter Kendrick.

inside of the body from the outside, the self from the space of other.' Kendrick's argument calling pornography an argument turns out to be a similar act of regulation, trying to seal up orifices, preventing the conflicts turning around pornography from transgressing the boundary of pornography "named" as an argument.

Kendrick's approach points at a general distress of trying to define what pornography really is. Andrew Ross quotes a widely quoted statement about pornography:

'In perhaps the most infamous legal statement ever advanced about 'obscenity' or pornography, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in 1964 (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*) announced that although he could not define what pornography was: 'I know when I see it.'³

Linda Williams claims that knowing upon seeing means ' "It moves me" (whether to arousal or to outrage hardly matters), "and that is all we need to know."⁴ However she believes that there is more than that. Knowing when seeing clearly echoes Kenneth Clark's ideas about the boundaries between art and pornography: pornography as an incentive to action, to arousal as opposed to his sense of the contemplative spectator of art.

Debates around pornography often dwell upon notions of a systematic politicisation of gender. On the one hand, anti-porn feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin have fuelled public debates with the idea of pornography as a denigration and dehumanization of women since the late seventies. Often opposing itself to such arguments is the liberal side which argues that enjoying pornography is a question of individual rights and a question of liberating pleasure. Gender based arguments often turn around the issue of censorship. The feminist intellectual/activists believe that pornography as an incentive to action, to rape, to victimize women in social life should be controlled by regulations. Liberal reaction to this such as Kendrick's argues

Nead, Lynda *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) 6.

³ Ross, Andrew 'The Popularity of Pornography', *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge 1998) 229.

⁴ Williams, Linda 'Speaking Sex', *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 5.

that censorship is counterproductive because it makes a text more desirable and the 'history of pornography teaches the futility of censorship'. (Williams, 1989, 13)

The most fierce arguments against the liberal thinking which protects pornography as free speech are by Catharine MacKinnon. In her book *Only Words*, published in 1993, she argues that there is a hypocrisy of laws in United States, protecting pornography in the name of free and open exchange of ideas. She argues 'Protecting pornography means protecting sexual abuse *as* speech, at the same time both pornography and its protection have deprived women *of* speech, especially speech against sexual abuse.'⁵ For MacKinnon, the publication of pornography, the protection of pornography is a continuum of a sexist climate which victimizes women. She sees pornography in print and in video as an incentive to action, one which encourages seeing women in two dimensions:

With pornography, men masturbate to women being exposed, humiliated, violated, degraded, mutilated, dismembered, bound, gagged, tortured, and killed. In the visual materials, they experience this *being done* by watching it *being done*. What is real here is not the materials are pictures, but they are a part of sex act. The women are in two dimensions, but the men have sex with them in their three dimensional bodies, not in their minds alone. (MacKinnon, 1993, 17)

For MacKinnon, being represented in a sex act amounts to nothing or little more than a sex act itself. There is not a difference between reality and representation; representations of pornography are uncontrollable, they encourage the exertion of what is represented to women in society, that is, violation, degradation, mutilation, dismemberment and torture. 'Empirically, all pornography is made under conditions of inequality based on sex, overwhelmingly by poor, desperate, homeless and pimped women who were sexually abused as children.' (MacKinnon, 1993, 20) Pornography takes place as a part of dehumanization and it leads to dehumanization of women in a vicious cycle. MacKinnon believes that protecting the production of

⁵ MacKinnon, Catharine 'Defamation and Discrimination', *Only Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 8.

pornography under the terms of its being a freedom of speech is a hypocrisy of laws in the liberal society of United States, since it is not a form of thought, but a form of action. She emphasizes the issue of violence in sex, that pornography is not only sex, it is sex and violence. However, she claims that 'violence is inherent in the male role in "normal" sexual relations.' (Williams, 1989, 17) Thus, the conclusive argument concerning pornography is censoring it to stop violence exerted to women, which falls into the trap of a dream of constructing a haven for women safe from violence which cannot take place.

Following the same type of argumentation of MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin claims that 'Women's lives are made two dimensional and dead. We are flattened on the page or on the screen.'⁶ She emphasizes the victimization of women through pornography underlining this passive position further: 'Our vaginal lips are painted purple for the consumer to clue him in as to where to focus his attention such as it is. Our rectums are highlighted so that he knows where to push. Our mouths are used and our throats are used for deep penetration.'(Dworkin, 1993) She implies that there is no woman that can get out of this vicious cycle of objectification, from being commodities of a sector that affects the manners of men towards women, 'the others' in society. She opposes arguments in favour of pornography by insisting that pornography happens to real women, these women are forced to perform real sex and they are the commodities bought and sold with real money in this real world:

Dehumanization is real. It happens in real life; it happens to stigmatized people. It has happened to us, to women. We say that women are objectified. We hope that people will think that we are very smart when we use a long word. But being turned into an object is a real event; and the pornographic object is a particular kind of object. It is a target. You are turned into a target. And red or purple marks the spot where he's supposed to get you. (Dworkin, 1993)

Dworkin, Andrea 'Pornography Happens to Women', downloaded from the website 20th November 2004 : <http://www.svd ltd.com/sells/cpa/speeches/dworkintxt.htm>. (Talk she performed on 6th March 1993 in a conference titled "Speech, Equality and Harm: Feminist Legal Perspectives on Pornography and Hate Propaganda" at University of Chicago Law School).

Being real seems to mean being objectified in Dworkin's terms and objectification equals to dehumanisation. For her, objectification which happens is which should not happen. She sees women as the pornographic object, target/object of heterosexual men's violence. It seems as if this objectification would stop in the case of the censorship of pornographic materials. The rhetoric and the system of argumentation of MacKinnon and Dworkin on pornography is quite similar, placed upon an understanding of objectification that should not happen. However, at a certain point, one cannot be sure whether they discuss the harms of pornography as a part of sexist, violent, heterosexual men or they pursue a quest for censorship which does not necessarily protect the rights of women.

A critical example of this position which explains pornography as a part of the climate of masculine violence while redeeming some representations in pornography magazines as evidence for the source of acts of violence in society is Andrea Dworkin's testimony to Meese Commission on Pornography in 1986. Quoting this testimony, Linda Williams is quite critical of Dworkin's general attitude before the commission claiming that '...having stated to the Meese Commission that the problem is women's role as victims of male sexual abuse, anti-pornography feminists did not cease to play the role of victim but instead played it to the hilt.' (Williams, 1989, 20-21):

She alludes, on the one hand, to a series of photographs published in *Penthouse* magazine of Asian women bound and hung from trees and, on the other, to a *New York Times* article about the rape and the murder of an eight-year-old Chinese girl in North Carolina whose body was left hanging from a tree. Dworkin assumes a casual connection between the magazine photos and the crime, even though no evidence apart from the circumstance exists... Dworkin returns to these images of Asian women, only by now the focus is no longer the *Penthouse* photos or the *Times* magazine of the Asian girl, but a condensation of both into a general female victim who transcends any specific historical situation but embodies all the political victims of all the ages. (Williams, 1989, 21)

Williams suggests the blank point in these argumentations of systematic politicization of gender in the debate of pornography. Particularly, the testimony of Dworkin exemplifies that this is not a debate about pornography

any longer, but a rhetoric of violence to women. Dworkin does not discuss the harms of pornography against women or the relation of the printed and visual materials to the events of violence taking place in reality, but pursues a relentless quest for the censorship of pornography.

Williams draws our attention to the ambiguous results of the cooperation of anti-porn feminists and right wing moralists:

"Normal" sexuality, the commission implies, is never violent, not even in the imagination. The attack on violence, together with the rhetoric of harm borrowed from radical feminism - replacing an older and less effective conservative rhetoric opposed simply to immorality, "smut," or just plain bad art - allows this moral majority to assert sexual norms under the guise of protecting pornography's victims. (Williams, 1989, 19)

Williams writes that 'It seems likely that the radical feminists and commissioners struck an implicit bargain to facilitate a combined attack on pornography.' (Williams, 1989, 19) Williams' invites us to think that this combined attack is directed against an imaginary common enemy. In this report pornography is supposed to create an abnormal sexuality or enhance the effects of an abnormal sexuality. However, there is not an exact definition of pornography here apart from the repeated sequencing of the terms normal, sexuality, violent and imagination. The Commission seems to construct an opposition defining a 'good' against what is 'bad'. But it does not work, and "normal" sexuality depends on and requires the contrast to the bad.

Defining pornography as graphically depicted violence against women, MacKinnon and Dworkin may be argued to create a similar structure of argument: dehumanization, discrimination, defamation, objectification. Williams criticizes this approach in Dworkin's definition of female sexuality as the opposite of male sexuality:

If phallic sexuality is contaminated by power, this tactic seems to say, if it is essentially violent and perverse, then female sexuality shall be defined as its opposite: as non-violent and not-perverse - a pure and natural pleasure uncontaminated by power. In Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1979), women are viewed as

colonized victims of "the brutality of male history" (p. 68) who are nevertheless acted on by this history. (Williams, 1989, 20)

Such a construction of argument in oppositions allows for thinking a risk free economy of desire where women may live away from pure pornography. Following anti-pornography feminist thinking, we reach another opposition, that of pornography versus erotica. Pornography comes to mean the violent sexuality of men and eroticism comes to mean soft sexuality of women. 'Most recently, anti-pornography feminists have used this hard/soft distinction to label men's sexuality as pornographic and women's sexuality as erotic.' (Williams, 1989, 6) Williams also claims that this opposition does not work because of changes in the nature of pornographic products, in particular their authorship, such as hard-core pornography films directed by women. (Williams, 1989, 6)

Returning to the debate of pornography between anti-porn feminists and liberals, they seem to be far away from resolution. This may lead us to think that gender based arguments of pornography may not take us anywhere. Pornography as a freedom of speech in its liberating pleasure, or pornography as a text of violence in its abusive power. Stephen Heath emphasizes this dilemma, as quoted by Williams again:

This dilemma is, precisely, our "sexual fix," as critic Stephen Heath puts it. In the spirit of Foucault's criticism of the once-vaunted sexual liberation, on the grounds that the idea of liberation through increased knowledge or freedom is an illusion, Heath argues that such knowledge inevitably leads to a more complete control, conformity, and regulation, producing no "pure" pleasure but only an increasingly intensified, commodified form of sexuality: a "sexual fix." Caught in this fix, we cannot see that the two main sides in the debates about pornography - the one that sees sexuality as the source of all our problems, and the one that sees sexual liberation as the beginning of a solution - are just as much part of the compulsion to talk about an essential, self-evident sexual "truth" as is pornography itself. (Williams, 1989, 14-15)

Heath refers to the two sides which are preoccupied with the issue of censorship. The ones that politicize the issue of gender see sexuality as the

source of all problems and the others that emphasize the freedom of speech in enjoying pornography see sexuality as the starting point of the solution: both pursue a sexual truth which they think can be found in pornography. It may be pointed out that even if there are debates around pornography as an argument, as quoted from Kendrick above, then these debates do turn around this sexual fix Heath mentions.

Jill Bennett adds a more critical point to feminist arguments concerning pornography, problematizing a monolithic "male gaze" and showing what is at stake in arguing pornography to be a source of oppression for all women:

The theorization of a gendered gaze is of historical importance to this discussion. It should be noted, however, that the notion of a monolithic "male gaze" now requires some refinement. It is clearly not the case that there is a single way of looking available to all men and to no women. I would suggest that there may be "dominant" modes of vision, that are systematically gendered, but that these are by no means universal. Moreover, "gendered subjects" are not perfectly interpellated by representations. Therefore, it is not the case that a sexist system of representation empowers all men in the real world and oppresses all women.⁷

Bennett's critical point about the gendered gaze suggests not working within the oppositions that determine the arguments of MacKinnon and Dworkin by inviting us to imagine that it may not be the case that all men in the real world are empowered and all women are oppressed by what is pornographic. The machine of oppositions such as violent and perverse/non-violent and non-perverse, abnormal/normal belonging to men/women would not work. It may be further argued that these debates around pornography do not constitute it as a separate category of texts functioning to educate or to corrupt, but as something which is given as one side of the again much debated opposition art/pornography.

⁷ Bennett, Jill 'Leaving Nothing to Imagination: Obscenity and Postmodern Subjectivities', *The Rhetoric of Frame*, ed. Paul Duro, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 315.

The effectiveness of the boundaries trying to separate art and pornography has often been in question. A circuit of oppositions such as form/matter, implicit/explicit, conceal/reveal, nude/naked help to sustain the boundaries that nevertheless do not work to frame the female body. The nude as one of the institutionalized genres of high art 'is inextricably bound up with the demarcation and the definition of its "other" -the obscene, the non art depiction of the same subject.' Jill Bennett argues that the process of demarcation and definition work on both sides of the opposition, discourses of art trying to define what is pornographic. According to her, Kenneth Clark's *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* in its attempt to define the nude as a genre is significant in constructing mutually involved boundaries between art and pornography. She suggests the ineffectiveness of these boundaries may be found in the conceit of the argumentations of this book, in which arguments ambiguously support themselves with the presumption that these categories work separately and effectively:

Its premise is that the nude is not merely the representation of the naked human body (although the naked human body is the substance or "matter" of art as it is of pornography, the tradition of the nude refers to a particular kind of nakedness). The nude involves a transformation of the body into an idealized form. Clark's hierarchization of the naked and the nude effectively distinguishes art from which is not art (pornography). He does not, however, object to the sexual content of an image. Indeed, he stresses that the naked body is the point of departure for the nude, and many of the sensations the nude arouses are appropriate to the material subject. (Bennett, 1996, 245)

Concentrating on the issue of the female nude, this formal desire to control, to turn visual arts into a rational, attainable knowledge tries to create or betrays a will to create a framed ground for resistant artistic processes. Here the frame becomes a critical issue considered as a means of an authorisation of turning art into knowledge. The frame around the representation of female body secludes the knowing subject in a safe space, created and protected by it. So what is constructed as non-pornographic in the transformation of the body into

an idealized form, in fact, refers to the ability to '..."control" images, of the way the boundaries are fixed and impermeable.' (Bennett, 1996, 245)

The dream to control images presupposes a risk free economy of desire. The dream of this no risk free economy of desire in relation to what is pornographic is exemplified in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1982). (figure 1) *Videodrome* explores the dangers in a pornutopian world. The protagonist, a cable porn television channel owner Max Renn, falls prey to pornography, what is outside this promise of a safe space taken for granted by Clark, right-wing censors and anti-porn feminists, as seen above in the case of Meese Commission on Pornography. In fact what is at stake is the maintenance of the frame as Bennett argues:

... A giant close-up of the lips of Nicki Brand (Debbie Harry) invites him in, saying: "I want you Max. Come to me, come to Nicki." What is unusual about this scene is that as Max advances in response these words, or in response to the image as a whole, the TV image begins to exceed the bounds of its both diegetic and structural frames. The presence inside the televisual image starts to exert a force from within upon the TV set, literally forcing its way out of, and beyond, the TV apparatus. The sets bulges and pulsates; veins ripple along the top of the wooden cabinet, and the screen itself, which "contains" the image of the lips, protrudes. When Max moves in to touch the lips, the screen comes out to meet him. He then inserts his head into the screen, so that is literally absorbed by the image; he is unified with the object onscreen... (Bennett, 1996, 242) (figure 2)

Thus what is at stake in that dream of a safe space of a risk free economy of desire is the functioning of the frame or a number of frames. The body to be contained or not contained in the elaboration of the nude as a genre is the female body. Lynda Nead underlines the need for an analysis of the frame around the female nude, the frame that is not a controllable boundary between the viewing subject and the viewed object, the female nude. But further analysis of the female nude shows that it is not simply a matter of the actual frame around the female nude in painting that frames the female body as a nude. There is a complex web of interrelations between various elements of framing such as the limits of the pictorial figure, the play between figure and

frame of the picture, and the ways in which discourse frames this play, the play between picture and source, or between one picture and another, the circulation of imagery.

What is dangerous is what is not contained in the complex of frames. The example of *Videodrome* shows the dissolution of frame as boundary and realizes the fear of the pornographic, that it may act, degenerate and destroy the subject. On the cover of the film's former DVD edition, we find the text, 'First it controls your mind, then it destroys your body.' Bennett claims that 'Insofar as antiporn feminists or right wing censors see porn as dangerous (a la *Videodrome*) they assume the possibility of safe imagery that remains within a frame.' (Bennett, 1996, 244-45)

This assumption of safe and controllable imagery connects with the question of the frames containing the female body in the traditions of high art, and it may thus be argued that what is identified as pornography is established by means of an opposition to art. However, as *Videodrome* foresees, the illusion that frames do contain bodies is 'a conceit of high-art - art that delimits a role for the active subject within a circumscribed field - thereby producing an illusion of control and a kind of self-presence on the part of the spectator.' (Bennett, 1996, 245)

At the same time, it is the subject who needs the authorisation of a discourse such as this, by means of which it is brought into existence, a discourse that gives birth to it. Derrida suggests the existence of this position of the subject as the one who creates and who is protected by discourse: ' "I" can bring forth to light, can give birth. To what? Well, precisely to law, or more exactly, to begin with, the representatives of law, to those who wield authority...' ⁸ Thus the subject's desire to protect his or her selfhood encourages and seems to sustain the opposition of art and pornography.

The testimony Kenneth Clark gave to Longford Committee in 1972 shows how he distinguishes art from porn. It is remarkable to see how Clark's testimony supports Bennett's preliminary reading of a scenario between the viewing subject and viewed object:

Derrida Jacques, 'Law of Genre', *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, (London, New York: Routledge, 1992) 246.

To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation, and is bound by some sort of imaginative transposition. The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. This is my objection to painting with a communist program, and it would also apply to pornography. In a picture like Correggio's Danae the sexual feelings have been transformed, and although we undoubtedly enjoy it all the more because of its sensuality, we are still in the realm of contemplation. The pornographic wall-paintings in Pompeii are documentaries and have nothing to do about that. There are one or two doubtful cases- a small picture of copulation by Gericault and a Rodin bronze on the same subject. Although each of these is a true work of art, I personally feel that the subject comes between me and complete aesthetic enjoyment. It is like a too strong flavour added to a dish. There remains the extraordinary example of Rembrandt's etching of a couple on a bed, where I do not find the subject at all disturbing because it is seen in entirely human terms and is not intended to promote action. But it is, I believe, unique, and only Rembrandt could have done it.⁹

Art loses its true character when it becomes an incentive to action of the spectator, when it arouses, or when it invites spectator to touch it. This is the scenario in which the gap between the viewing subject and the viewed object is erased, when the viewing subject desires to touch, to possess what is represented. The moment when the subject matter comes between Clark and his aesthetic object is the moment of the dissolution of the frame, interpellating the viewing subject, leaving nothing to his imagination, disturbing his imagined risk free economy of desire in contemplation. This is why the works of Gericault and Rodin are in a suspicious position or positions, while pornographic paintings on the walls of Pompeii are not, since they are documentary, they are there to inform or educate, not to arouse, not to incite a desire for grasping:

...This desire, since it is for the object itself- the "real" flesh-and-blood object - cannot be satisfied by the representational. Porn thus sets in motion a procedure that produces a surplus that porn itself cannot satisfy. Instead of allowing "visual pleasure" to serve an end in itself, it redirects desire toward "the thing itself and thereby undermines art. (Bennett, 1996, 247)

⁹ *Pornography: The Longford Report*, (London: Coronet, 1972) 92-100, also quoted by Nead, *Female Nude*, 27 and in Bennett, "Leaving Nothing to Imagination", 245-246.

The desire to grasp, then, disturbs the known territories of transformed body in the frame(s) to the unknown ones. Through his concern about subject coming between him and aesthetic object and disturbing his contemplation into arousal, 'Clark affirms the fundamental power of all images of nakedness to arouse - to act in the real world, on the body, unless they are "transformed."' (Bennett, 1996, 247) If it is not transformed into a work of art, into a nude, a painting or a sculpture of a female body threatens to become pornographic, '...art...potentially always porn if its capacity to arouse goes unchecked.' (Bennett, 1996, 247)

Suspecting the role(s) of the frame(s) as an effective boundary between art and pornography, Bennett also suggests that other oppositions such as conceal/reveal, implicit/explicit supporting art/pornography do not work. Frames do not contain bodies which are perfectly separable from real bodies outside, which is a provocation, disappointment and fear for people who suppose the boundaries between subject and object are fixed and impermeable. Bennett criticizes Linda Williams about falling into the trap elaborated by Clark by trying to define hard-core in terms of concealing/revealing:

Correspondingly, Linda Williams' analysis of the conventions of the hard-core feature films situate porn much where Clark assumes it to be. Hard-core, Williams argues, seeks to fully expose, and hence reveal the truth about, bodies. It is organized on the principle of maximum visibility, rather than withholding: "Hard-core does not play a peek-a-boo with its bodies; it obsessively seeks knowledge of the 'thing' itself." (Bennett, 1996, 247)

This is a significant criticism not only of Williams but of much other about writing on pornography. Bennett suggests that Williams supposes that images of the body in porn reveal truths about those bodies. The rules of the genre of "hard-core" would then seem to produce controlling images of bodies. Bennett counters this by arguing that 'Art is thus implicated not in the cover up, in the objectification and transformation into art of the body; art is implicated in the production of corporeal reality.'(Bennett, 1996, 254) Pornography is also implicated in a production of corporeal reality, as the account by Linda

Williams of hard-core films suggests. As Bennett continues, '*there is no real body prior to its framing.*' (Bennett, 1996, 254)

Bennett's remarkable reading supports an approach to pictorial and other texts as im/pure art/pornography. Texts which are both art and pornography are 'not a turn to porn but a "pornographic art"' which brings crucial openings to experiences of viewing and thinking painting. (Bennett, 1996, 254) Discussing the regulation of genre, Derrida also suggests an odd couple, which may be modified for our hypothesization of im/pure art/pornography:

...neither separable nor inseparable, form an odd couple of one without the other in which each evenly serves the other as a citation to appear in the figure of the other, simultaneously and indiscernibly saying "I" and "we", me the genre, we genres, without it being possible to think that the "I" is a species of "we." (Derrida, 1992, 224)

We shall pursue the pornographic in art and even the art in the pornographic, an odd couple for zones where the appearance of the female nude is repeated differently. The law of the genre foresees a possibility for a counterlaw, a system of closure and a system of non-closure at the same time. This possibility of a counterlaw suggests a possibility of 'impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation or degenerescence,' from which 'disruptive 'anomalies' are engendered- and this is their common law, the lot or site they share- by *repetition.*' (Derrida, 1996, 226) Then, through the pleasure of repetition, the law of the law of the genre fakes the stability of the regulation of the genre. It classifies, engenders the odd couple who have contaminated any supposed purity of genre from the very beginning. All is anomaly 'by its nature', contaminated, deformed, cancerized, degenerated. Thus, we may hypothesize that the pornographic may recur in art as remarkable anomaly, bringing us back to the play of an im/pure art/pornography.

Bennett takes the case of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled, 1992* discussing the fakeness of the moment of revelation - of the pornographic - indicating that without the transparency of the medium, the revelatory claims of both

traditional porn and traditional art are unfounded.' (Bennett, 1996, 254) (figure 3) Sherman's work engages us in an experience of the photographic as something other than transparent medium. In this thesis I will consider the relation between, the odd coupling of, painting and the pornographic. I shall consider recent work by Marlene Dumas and Jenny Saville, both female painters whose work opens up a monolithic painter's gaze, the guarantee of transparency of the painted surface as evidence for and the bearer of the meaning of the painter's internal experiences. Contrary to this, both Dumas and Saville problematise the issue of identity of the painter communicating a play of identifications in and across painting.

Citation in paintings plays an important role for this plurality of viewing and experiencing. Dumas and Saville both work from the photographic images, citing a variety of images from surgical websites to heterosexual porn magazines. I shall be proposing ways of considering their work as citation and, in so doing, I shall be reapproaching the question of the relation between, or the odd coupling of, art and pornography.

CHAPTER I

Marlene Dumas' Private Views

In Marlene Dumas' series *Strong Works*, dated 1990, there is a small watercolour showing a woman performing fellatio.(figure 4) This is remarkable, since the scene is captioned above "*female artist thinking about art*" in lower case letters. The caption is not placed below the image as is more usually done. If we look closer, we notice in small letters, between 'female' and 'art', the word 'abstract'. The caption touches the pink surface of paint with which part of the scene is painted. The tail of 'g' in thinking and lower short tail of 't' in art almost involve themselves in the scene. The text "female artist thinking about (abstract) art" works in an uncanny place between anchorage and relay. It enables the viewer 'to choose *the correct level of perception*¹ in one way, and stands in a complementary relationship with the image as if in a comic strip in another.¹ That 'correct' level of perception invites the viewer to identify the woman performing fellatio with the female artist, thinking about (abstract) art and performing fellatio at the same time. On the other hand, the viewer is also encouraged to think about the scene of the performance of fellatio as s/he has never done before, to think about the possibility that "female artist thinking about (abstract) art" may be the true meaning of the painting, the one outside the scene to which we are relayed.

It may be hypothesized that this painting involves many problematics about Marlene Dumas' work, reflected in her interwoven projects of paintings and paintings in series, her view of painting and her gesture of painting as a female artist. The woman performing fellatio seems to be doing it in a state of reflective thoughtfulness. Dominic van den Boogerd writes 'The fellatio in *Female Artist Thinking About (Abstract) Art* (1990) cannot, as is evident from

¹ Barthes, Roland 'Rhetoric of the Image', *Visual Culture: A Reader*, eds. Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans (London: Sage Publishing, 1999) 37.

the title, distract the artist from her thoughts...'² Her eyes looking like two black holes resist being read as ecstatic, rather they seem to be two holes for penetration. Perhaps they are closed, perhaps they are looking at the viewer, two black, almost devilish holes: for Dumas, it is probably both. The pink surface, that seems to have been painted after the drawing, gives us the impression that this is not an act that has been forced on the woman in the picture, the female artist. She seems to be able to gratify the man, whom we might read as another pornographic performer, of whom we see only his erect penis. However, this act of fellatio also seems to be always beginning from the start without reaching an end, with the woman in a state of reflective thoughtfulness, going on and on without full satisfaction.

The phrase "female artist thinking about (abstract) art" seems like the caption explaining a figure which is sometimes placed above it. This pose may be taken from a pornographic magazine or a pornographic film. She implies her source material when she writes, in 1987, about the tendency of modern artists to abstain from cheap effects as much as possible. She says "Women in particular have to watch out not to be cheap. Easy effects can fade just as easily. Thus painting steers clear of readily recognizable images, leaving politics and eroticism to hetero and homo sex magazines, fashion magazines, World Press competitions, TV or the Third World."³ In the same paragraph before she speaks of cheapness, she suggests her inclination to oppose this position and use recognizable images and disturb this labeling 'cheap' as a woman artist. "But to return to my years at the academy and my attempts to become a modern artist who knows how to veil the origins of her work in such an ingenious way that all that remains are suggestions and vague suspicions extraneous to the work that no one could possibly label as cheap." (Dumas, 1998a, 41) In fact, the issue of cheapness is related to thinking of painting in origins which will be further developed below. Dumas opposes to such tendencies of the modern artist, she chooses to display her exposure to such sources, opening up her various origins. Thus, she suggests that she quotes the politics and eroticism left to sex magazines, fashion magazines and World

van den Boogerd, Dominic 'Survey', *Marlene Dumas* (London: Phaidon, 1999) 77.

³ Dumas, Marlene 'Blind Spots', *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, ed. Mariska van den Berg, (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse/Uitgeverij DeBalie, 1998) 41.

Press competitions. Returning to the painting discussed, it is not impossible, given her procedures, that she has borrowed from a picture in a hetero sex magazine in developing the painting, citing something of the composition if not the lighting of such figures. If not this, then, given that she does not hide her exposure to such sources, both in what she has said, and in what has been evidenced and represented of her studio procedures, her memory of such images may be understood to be in play. At least, that is what I shall attempt to demonstrate below. However, placing the text, caption, reinscribed title, or even strange participant in the scene, or its recollection, above the scene affects our reading of the scene, suggesting an involvement in the dynamics of image/painting and discourse. This is not a mere repetition of a scene of fellatio from a pornographic magazine. It is a scene in which a female artist may be seen thinking about art and abstract art. Or, it is a space across which a female artist, Dumas for one, problematises viewing such thinking, if also thinking about art and abstract art. What may we infer? That, for Dumas, abstract art and fellatio come close to each other?

Thinking about art as sensual, a wet, yet hesitant touch that does not result in satisfaction may seem quite a provocative way of hypothesizing about Dumas' work. Dumas, as a female painter, knows, that that with which she deals is a man's world, that she is in what is often taken to be a phallic activity. The penis in view becomes the phallus as a part object. Can she become one with the phallus? Can the phallus be satisfied? Can she be satisfied by satisfying the phallus? We may infer, from *Female artist thinking about (abstract) art*, as well as from the remainder of Dumas work, that the phallus cannot be satisfied, but nor can the female artist, Dumas, be satisfied by satisfying the phallus. Yet, the process of satisfying seems to be more important than its result. The process of satisfying is the touch, the hand and the lick of the tongue on the skin of the penis, the touch of painter that makes, has made the painting. Touch as gesture can be read as the im/possibility of merging, becoming one. On the other hand, this process of satisfying which is represented in the lick of the tongue and the grasp of the hand and the erection of the penis may be read as a scene of masculine identification. Representing a woman licking and grasping a penis as a part object, Dumas may be hypothesized to imply the masculine scenario of the relation between the

female artist and art within masculinist discourse on art in those cultures where woman is related to man in an act of passion, where woman is thought to desire to become one with the phallus.

i) Painter in Exile

Yet Dumas enjoys this game of coming together and separation in the game of desire. She is a female painter painting women.

I have painted more women
then men
I paint women for men
I paint women for women
I paint the women of my men.⁴

This scenario of feminine gesture and masculine identification coming out of their overdetermination in the rhetoric of desire takes us through the key issues explored by Dumas in her painting. She believes that what is painted is desire and its deficiency is central to painting.⁵ Her projects of portraits, naked bodies and marginal beings all turn around this fundamental question of the instrumentalisation of this deficiency as a play. Since the nineties, Dumas has concentrated on painting naked bodies of mostly women and men, taken from pornographic magazines. The instrumentalisation of this deficiency over the re-representation of naked women and men necessitates a different account of Dumas, such as the reading given above. Nearly all accounts of Dumas puts her in categories, trying to define her art via her relation with Apartheid, orientaling her position as an outsider of Western culture. Jean Christophe Amman, for example, in his article "Tender, loathsome, shrewd and ecstatic" for the catalogue of her watercolours, defines her relation to the eroticism of watercolour as belonging to the water culture of Hinduism. He places her way

⁴ Dumas, Marlene 'Women', *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, ed. Mariska van den Berg, (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse/Uitgeverij DeBalie, 1998) 117.

Dumas, Marlene 'The Eyes of the Night Creatures', *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, ed. Mariska van den Berg, (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse/Uitgeverij DeBalie, 1998) 25.

of dealing with the sensuality of touch within a kind of orientalist, Eastern phantasy, though he tries to escape that at the same time:

Marlene Dumas could have grown up with the *Kamasutra*, a book about love and the art of love. However, while in the West frequently only the second chapter - a catalogue of love making positions- is taken note of, this Hindu book, which originated in the mid-third century in northern India, is much, much more, namely an "encyclopedia on the art of life." The reason I mention this work is because Christian theology denied occidental art eroticism. While magnificent erotic art emerged in the mid Orient, in Asia and Africa, in the West only inferior illustrators dealt with this subject from the eighteenth century and onwards.

Is this really why Dumas is liberating in her problematisation of the positions of naked bodies? Her being part of the outsider marginal and erotic African culture naturally makes her a reader of the *Kamasutra*. It seems that the feminine gesture in watercolour, with water, being a part of the flux, is a problem imported to the West through the East, and Dumas is the medium of it. However, her being a South African, and thus being from the margins of European society, seems to be over emphasized in Amman's position. Eroticism is associated by Amman with a kind of Oriental pattern disregarding a certain eroticism in European art as well. Eroticism may have been resisted by the Christian Church. However, it may be argued that Botticelli's graceful figures done before his involvement in religious controversy in the 1490s or Leonardo's very subtly eroticized St. John escape this resistance. Furthermore, it may also be claimed that Venetian painters Bellini, with his students Giorgione and Titian escape it, too. Giorgione's well known *Tempest* (1505-10), *Fete Champetre* (c. 1510), and his *Sleeping Venus* (c.1510) finished by Titian have a gentle but distinct aura of erotic tension. Titian's paintings mingle eroticism and lust with a sense of joy in nature, such as *Sacred and Profane Love* (1515), *Bacchanal of the Andrians* (c.1520) and *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1522-23). Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* opens the way for variations on the representation of Venus by Titian such as the famous, titillating *Venus*

Amman, Jean-Christopher 'Tender, Loathsome, Shrewd and Ecstatic', in cat. *Marlene Dumas. Wet Dreams. Watercolours*, Stadtischen Galerie Ravensburg, ed. Thomas Knuben and Tilman Osterwold (Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003) 114.

of Urbino (1538). The works of Caravaggio, Rubens and Rembrandt may be considered as examples of such escapes from the resistance of the Church to eroticism, too,

Marlene Dumas was commissioned by Museum Het Rembrandthuis in Amsterdam to select a print from Rembrandt's oeuvre to paint a version of it. She chose the etching *Het pissende vrouwtje (Woman Pissing, 1631)* (figure 5):

The one she selected in the end was a full-face representation of a completely nude young woman, head shaven, looking directly at the beholder. In another version, the "pissing woman" is wearing a very low-cut dress which she lifts to avoid dirtying- or else, perhaps, to give us a better look. The closest version to Rembrandt's rendering of the young woman, who is not only urinating and who is looking fearfully behind her to see if she's being watched, is *Peeing with a Blue Dress On, 1996*. In Marlene Dumas' version, the woman in the blue dress is slightly turning her head but more out of coquetry than out of fear.⁷ (figure 5)

This watercolour version of Rembrandt's etching shows us how Dumas passes across the opposition of art and pornography. She may be suggested to explore and open up a certain tension of the escape from the resistance of the Church to eroticism. However, it must also be mentioned that our aim here is not to reach a definitive conclusion about the relation of Western art to eroticism, but exploring tensions created around the opposition of art and pornography. By painting a woman pissing, already involved in the process of peeping, as if on a stage, Dumas opens up blocked up scenarios of desire turning around the opposition of art and pornography. Defining the movement of the woman as out of coquetry, Storsve seems to be trapped within the guilt generated by the resistance of the Church towards eroticism, suggested by Dumas as "old sins" and "useless guilt":

I am against:
general ideas
the nude
the appropriation of images

⁷ Storsve, Jonas 'Good Lady, you that have your pleasure in exile', trans. by Gila Walker, in. cat. *Marlene Dumas: Nom de Personne/Name no Names*, Centre Pompidou/ New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York/De Pont, Netherlands, (Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2001) 26.

the mystification of the untitled the
glorification of artistic doubt the
fuzzy edges of sensitivity old sins
and useless guilt.⁸

Cranach and Diirer in the North, and beautiful nudes ostensibly representing Suzannah, Bathesheba, Leda and Venus painted by 16th and 17th century artists in the South, apparently discouraged by the letter of Christian theology, and yet even encouraged by the movement of the Counter-Reformation, with its interest in involving representations of passion, may be cited to demonstrate the exoticizing bias of Amman with regard to eroticism. Perhaps, he still feels the guilt imposed in Christian theology regarding body, sexuality and eroticism as Bosch portrays lust, guilt and delight in his triptychs *Garden of Earthly Delights*. However, as suggested above, Dumas opposes these "old sins" and "useless guilt" that Amman also still suggests.

Another interesting remark about Marlene Dumas' South African origins is in the same catalogue, in an article by Tilman Osterwold, titled "Water-colours as Physionomies". Osterwold indirectly places Dumas as being from 'non- European' circles, perhaps without realizing what he means himself. As he tries to underline Dumas' position to disturb the settled beliefs about images, he relates Dumas' sentence 'The painter kills the living' with the belief of "people in non-European cultural circles" fear of being robbed of their personality when pictured. Thus, he interprets this sentence in a typical opposition such as 'the painter' 'we', 'westerners' and 'the living' as 'the other', 'the authentic non-European people', providing a strange position for Dumas as painter:

If we are accustomed to perceiving pre-formulated reality through the 'glasses' of the media, then we are continuing a tradition of perception dependent on or led astray by the media that is based in art and cultural history- over centuries: to feel feelings, thoughts, and patterns of behavior and taste manipulated by a 'belief in images. Authentic positions are infiltrated or eliminated by this process. (We know that

Dumas, Marlene 'The Private versus the Public', *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, ed. Mariska van den Berg, (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse/Uitgeverij DeBalie, 1998) 36.

there are people in non-European circles afraid of being portrayed because they fear that 'foreign' portrayals can take their personal identity, gain power over and endanger them. Ethnographic photographers have had this experience; in his biography, the painter Emil Nolde described the dangerous origin of a watercolor during a journey to New Guinea, where- with armed protection- he painted a portrait of a Manu man. The man whose portrait was being painted felt that art was hostile.)⁹

In this rather long quotation, there is a frustration, something that discomforts us. There is 'we' and 'non-European' other, 'we' trained by a visual culture, by the manipulation of a visual culture, 'non-European' other authentic, not under manipulation, pure and still afraid of images. 'We' rules over a 'non-European' other in parenthesis. Anyone may think that these authentic people live without art, without visual material around them, though we know that it is not so. Osterwold relates that the 'painter kills the living' with this 'we' and 'non-European' other, with the other's authentic belief. Putting this opposition in analogy with regard to 'painter kills the living', the painter is 'we' and the living is the 'non-European' other. Then he says, with regards to Dumas, 'The living becomes the background of her artistic autonomy and is taken by the power of artistic ego.' (Osterwold, 2003, 24) Thus, roughly, he suggests that Marlene Dumas is a part of that 'living' and taken by 'we', because she wants to be a painter. Is 'the living' taken by artistic ego, or a Westerner ego? As she is both the other and the painter at the same time, she takes a shamanistic position to work on already killed bodies, the reproductions '(which had already killed the living in a 'different' way).' (Osterwold, 2003, 24) Does she work with reference to reproductions to resurrect them? Or does she kill them once again having already killed herself as the 'other' choosing to be the painter, choosing the artistic, or the Westerner ego? All of these questions signify an implied bias, very indirectly, but in a very problematic way as well. Following up on the suggestions in his text, Osterwold completes the paragraph in an awkward way, claiming that Dumas' watercolors are based on photographs and illustrated material, as if to complete this painter and living

⁹ Osterwold, Tilman 'Water-colors as Physiognomies', in. catalogue *Marlene Dumas. Wet Dreams. Watercolours*, Stadtischen Galerie Ravensburg, ed. Thomas Knuben and Tilman Osterwold, (Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003) 23-24.

opposition. As he tries to open up our and his understanding of Dumas' making of strange bodies, he cannot help falling into the trap of thinking in oppositional schema.

Dumas' watercolour version of Rembrandt's *Pissing Woman* cuts across this oppositional schema of painter and living, disrupts Osterwold's definition of Marlene Dumas as an artist taking her autonomy from her connection with a native other as a white South African. First, she shows that she has a variety of inclinations not to be simplified with her South African origin. Secondly, she does not resurrect *Pissing Woman*; by giving a rather self confident and exhibitionist look to her face, she invites us to think about the tension of European art around old sins and useless guilts and of the prejudices against the other shaped around these old sins.

Thinking Dumas as the painter coming from the outside of Western culture always adds an exotic flavour to her identity as a woman painter. An effective example comes from another catalogue article by Jonas Storsve. Storsve, the conservator of Cabinet d'art graphique, in Centre Pompidou in Paris, gives an account of an old photograph of Dumas, printed in the catalogue of *The Eyes of Night Creatures* exhibition. In this photograph, Dumas stands in front of a sign 'Garden of Eden' in a forest, directly looking at the camera with an almost expressionless face in her two piece swimming suit and short sleeve shirt. The sign may be a sign for a camping area near or in a forest of very tall trees in South Africa. Dumas poses for the person taking the photograph. However, she may also be posing for the ones who would like to read it like Storsve. Storsve writes of the artist as an outsider, exotic and dangerous, standing just on the boundary between Garden of Eden and Garden of Knowledge. Storsve underlines the boundary between the Garden of Eden and Garden of Knowledge, sees Dumas standing in between, a dangerous woman. Dumas is an exotic fruit not belonging to that Garden of Eden anymore, as an outsider in Europe, just like the homosexual writers he mentions in the footnote. However, he is so willing to see Dumas as part of the Garden of Knowledge:

We can see Marlene Dumas as a brunette in a photo taken in South Africa in the summer of 1979: she is squatting in a two piece swimming

suit and a short-sleeve shirt by a sign indicating the entrance to the Garden of Eden! But on which side of the boundary is she? If she's still *inside* the garden, she certainly won't be for long; she has obviously tasted the fruit of knowledge - this we can see from clothing - and she seems to boast a certain taste for outsiders. When the photo was taken, Marlene Dumas first one-woman exhibition had just opened in a Paris gallery and the artist was back in South Africa visiting her family. She was merely passing through the Garden of Eden. (Storsve, 2001, 18)

This quotation suggests many problematics. First of all, with an exclamation point at the end of the sentence of the description of the photograph, what does the writer suggest? Because she stands as an exotic but dangerous beauty out of Eden with her swimming suit? He talks about Dumas being on the side of the boundary. Why does that matter so much? Is it because that she is a South African woman painter already living in Europe? What can we see from her clothing? We can understand that she has tasted the fruit of knowledge because she is in a civilized two-piece swimming suit? Or because she is already a tourist in her native land? Is it because she has already adopted the manner of dressing of the tasters of knowledge in the Garden of Eden? It is disturbingly ambiguous. It implies a signified exoticism, a South African woman, living already in Europe, having already tasted the fruit of knowledge, coming to her native land to visit her parents, appearing there as an outsider exotic, enjoying the exotic, in her swimming suit in front of the boundary of Garden of Eden. How can Storsve read the picture as one of a self-satisfied performance of being an outsider? He gives an explanation in the ninth footnote in the same page:

When Marlene Dumas chose two texts by two authors for a book on her book published by Phaidon in 1999, instead of opting for at least one politically correct South African author, known for his or her anti-apartheid stance, such as Nadine Gordimer or Breyten Breytenbach, or else a feminist writer, such as Simone de Beauvoir, she selected the Irish Oscar Wilde and the French Jean Genet- two notorious homosexuals. (Storsve, 2001, 18)

Things become rather complicated in this footnote at the end of the previous quote. She loves being the outsider, being the exotic fruit, just as

Wilde and Genet are outsiders in their societies because of their homosexual identity. Perhaps the writer wants to draw our attention to her different sources as a woman painter. However, the tone he uses when he writes about these sources gives us a rather categorical account. Marlene Dumas stands in bikinis in front of the sign, Garden of Eden, in her native land, she is in front of the sign, she is the outsider for both South Africa and Europe. She is the tourist in South Africa and the exotic fruit in Europe at the same time. Thus, she has a taste for outsiders just like herself, for Wilde and Genet. We may suggest that Storsve thinks her origins fit the marginal sexual choice of two writers. What is not dubious is that she disturbs the categories of Storsve, thinking of Garden of Eden and Garden of Knowledge.

Against Storsve's reading, I would propose that Dumas has set the trap of cliché to let writers and critics fall into it. Storsve can't help thinking of the artist as the expressionistic subject of her background, her origins. Dumas' expressionless face in the photograph negates this reading. He implies that she should have chosen Godimer or Breythenbach as her source writers, because she is a painter coming from South Africa. Her choosing Wilde and Genet disturbs him. It may be claimed, then, that Dumas' origins, and the desire to understand painting as a matter of origins, produce a categorical bias in viewers and critics such as Amman, Osterwold and Storsve. To fit the complex of backgrounds of and ideas generated by her works into already constructed patterns, they cannot help feeling and following the desire to draw the boundary between her and Europe.

ii) Feeding People With Cliches

Dumas also reacts towards the categorical readings stemming from these biases though she blames herself for giving people that impression. "I must admit that sometimes it's partially my own fault, feeding people with clichés."¹⁰ In an interview she gives to Simona Vendrame for the magazine *Tema Celeste* in 2001, she talks in reference to what was then a recent show,

¹⁰ Bloom, Barbara 'In Conversation with Marlene Dumas', *Marlene Dumas*, (London:Phaidon, 1999) 14.

titled *All is Fair in Love and War*, opened in the Jack Tilton/Anna Kustera Gallery in New York, and says with regard to a question about her South African origin that:

I've often come up against this leitmotif in reference to my background - even recently at my last solo show in New York someone thought I was a black, gay, male artist! I don't want to deny that all that took place in South Africa has influenced my formation as an artist; it is a reality that leaves its traces, above all on who lived so close to it. Yet out of all the issues to confront, countering racism is not my only obligation. Diverse associations between ideas, feelings, and emotions intersect in my work; the end result cannot be reduced to a single element.¹¹

This quotation of hers supports the reading hypothesized above. Her paintings of naked men such as *Morning Glory* (1998-2001) (figure 7) and *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* (2001) (figure 8), one showing an erection and the other showing the buttocks of a reclining figure, with opened legs showing his penis, sustains a stereotypical reading that the painter is male and gay. It was mentioned before that Marlene Dumas uses recognizable images deriving from hetero and homo sex magazines: 'Thus painting steers clear of readily recognizable images, leaving politics and eroticism to hetero and homo sex magazines, fashion magazines, World Press competitions, TV or the Third World.' (Dumas, 1998a, 41) The particular derivation of these pictures may lead a viewer to think that she is male, black and gay. However, as we see from Dumas' writings, she desires to include politics and eroticism of these sources into painting and she is not stuck on the belonging or non-belonging of pictures to various points of origin, such as author, culture and genre. We should remember here the biases of the three writers above. Their fixation of thinking painting according to origins feeds their biases. This act of reading in this case may be thought of as a similar case. Dumas complains that people are fixated upon certain origins, black, South African, man, woman, gay or heterosexual. These patterns of origins do not, this machine does not work. This constructed frame does not fit the picture. Thinking about art works as cases of belonging to author, culture and genre is being drawn into what

¹¹ Vendrame, Simona, 'Marlene Dumas', *Tema Celeste*, ed. 81/2001, 46.

Derrida calls 'restitution', as if painting ought to be given back from whom or whence it comes, perhaps because it has not been, or cannot be, received. This is a quest for truth which is stabilized, designed for expectations that desires to acknowledge it within a certain fixed space, not floating across sources and spaces as Marlene Dumas does.

In Dumas' paintings, it may be claimed that this reading of a female artist as male and gay gives hints towards an unacknowledged categorizing of art and pornography. The depicted explicit, pornographic scene which invites a possible fulfillment of desire to possess a man may be read as a kind of identifier of her 'successful' masculine identification. The way she depicts male bodies as objects of desire suggests a masculine, homosexual desiring position. As sites of feminine gestures of desire, this suggests a play of such a position within what might be simplified as heterosexual feminine desire. Furthermore, her painting of black bodies in the exhibition is misread as an expression of identity as if it is only black people who paint black people. It may be suggested, then, that Dumas paints the men of her men and the men of her women as well as the women of her women and the women of her men.

She paints them as desired bodies, herself in the position of desiring them and being desired by them as a woman. Thus, she enacts her models' position in front of her as well as grasping the brush and marking the surface as if in the phallic and masculinist manner. Her slide across such identifications enables her to enjoy herself as the desired and the desiring with a guilty pleasure. This critical issue of plural positioning will be developed later.

Returning to the biases of criticism preoccupied with identity, Dumas' paintings and specific series of paintings prove to be a hard case for stable and categorical critical orientations. She may come from South Africa, she may be a white woman painter in a kind of exile. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that her 'diverse associations' may be flattened: 'Diverse associations between ideas, feelings, and emotions intersect in my work; the end result cannot be reduced to a single element.' (Vendrame, 2001, 46) And she

¹² Derrida, Jacques 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*pointure*Y*The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press) 256-382.

continues to answer this in replying to another question of the interview quoted from above with Simona Vendrame for the magazine *Tema Celeste* in 2001: 'When I paint I am pushed in different directions by a variety of frustrations. There is never a single goal. I am aware that this ambiguity can be unsettling because it does not reassure; it does not provide a definitive solution.' She finishes her reply by saying, 'When the Fauves painted blue faces, they did not mean to represent reality but rather but to challenge current modes of representation through painting, which is what interests me.' (Vendrame, 2001, 49-50) She turns towards a different point in the last part of the interview. However, we must take notice of her underlining of challenging current modes of representation through painting. That seems to be a critical goal that she aims towards challenging current modes of representation through painting an unsettling ambiguity of her variety of frustrations.

Just before underlining this point, Dumas responds to Vendrame's question by claiming that 'In my exhibition I like each painting to be part of the entire context of the show, but at the same time I want each individual work to take on its own meaning independent of others.'(Vendrame, 2001, 49) Not only is Dumas' work the consequence of a series of diverse identifications, it is also a series of a diversity of possible events. Each painting, not lacking meaning but gathering differing meanings in their various contexts, is an event of an experience of vision and an event of the events - exhibitions, if not of the contexts of its reproduction too- of which it is a part. One of the examples that may be understood in these ways is *Josephine* (1997). (figure 9)

George Hoyningen-Huene's photograph of Josephine Baker in 1929, which portrays her as a Parisian icon of glamour and the ultimate goddess of the phallic phantasm, eligible to become one with phallus, is turned into a different visual experience by Dumas.(figure 10) The piece of white cloth with which she covers her breasts and pubic area in the photograph contrasts with her black skin shining in beauty. And there she stands welcoming the voyeuristic gaze, almost as an ancient statuette of a goddess. The white piece of cloth is in suspense, just about to fall and fulfill, dubiously, the wish of the phallic gaze.

In Dumas' portrait of Josephine in ink wash, the white piece of cloth becomes transparent, betraying the phantasm. Malek Alloula writes about the

phantasm of possession of Oriental woman through the transparency of the spaces created within the postcards "where bodies are taken without any possibility of refusal."¹³ Josephine's gesture of covering her breasts seems to be emphasized by this transparency. This may be read as a gesture of withdrawal. Josephine's face is played on, the surface is disturbed, it almost seems to be a mask. The surface is an emphasized area of gesture, where the gesture of Dumas multiplies the feminine gesture of the figure of Josephine. Her Josephine responds rather differently to being visible. This model seems to respond to the process of being and becoming visible, of appearing. Do we think this way because gesture is legible in and as the physiognomy of the body in painting? Yet Dumas is right, it is 'secondhand images and firsthand experiences'.¹⁴ The gesture of covering the breasts and the face may be read as a response to the violence of appearing. Is the portrayal of Josephine in the photograph a kind of mask, a mask hiding being disturbed by desire, a mask of sublimation? Modeling the model in her gesture, Dumas reveals the tension of the disturbance by desire. In the de-sublimation of viewing encouraged by Dumas, we are discouraged from imagining an encounter with the woman because of the marked surface of the face. This marked surface is where we lose the eyes, the look. And this absence of encounter is the negation of possessiveness in the field of vision.

Marlene Dumas may be claimed to play on the deficiency of the possessive desire in the crossing of her gestures and those of Josephine on the surface. She might say, 'Do you think that you will merge with that black shiny body when the white cloth falls and your gaze catches up what it wishes for? Or isn't it that deficiency you'd like to encounter when you look at Josephine?' 'Well,' she might add, 'you come to the right place of encounter, this is where you encounter the deficiency of your desire. Enjoy it.' Thus, as hypothesized in this imaginary conversation, we experience *Josephine* in our field of vision as the negation of our phallic and desperate possessiveness, opening up the tension of the constructed oriental icon of glamour in popular culture.

^B Alloula, Malek 'The Colonial Harem: Images of a Suberoticism', *Feminism and Pornography*, ed. Drucilla Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 399.

^H Dumas, Marlene 'Blind Dates and Drawn Curtains', *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, ed. Mariska van den Berg, (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriessse/Uitgeverij DeBalie, 1998) 78.

The overdetermination of gesture as a de-sublimated escape, a withdrawal from encounter, interrupts these previous relations with images of Josephine Baker. The overdetermination of gesture here may be read as the deficiency in display in the photograph where Josephine seems to welcome becoming one with the phallic gaze. And a significant tension in Dumas' painting as an event of an experience of vision is created by identifying herself with that gaze, by not negating or subverting Josephine Baker as a site of masculine desire, but by seeing Baker as a site of masculine desire and by opening up the discontinuities of that desire in the marking of the surface of canvas.

We may ask, which Josephine comes first? Josephine Baker in the photograph, or Josephine painted as a gesture of withdrawal by Dumas? Which one is the original? The problem of initiality becomes more complex, as we remark the general project or interwoven projects of paintings in series by Dumas. Each painting is a part of a series of actual or possible exhibitions, and usually part of a large series not painted in a time of linear progress, but rather painted at this time and at that time, discontinuously. *Josephine* may thus be seen as part of several series at the same time. The painting was installed 'alongside her other typologies of cultural icons in her work for the exhibition 'A Noir', dedicated to the colour black as perceived through art, fashion, photography and design.'¹⁵ And at the same time, it may be seen together with her large installation *Models*, portraits of women as models of or for something, such as Anita Ekberg, Brigitte Bardot, Claudia Schiffer, Pina Bausch, Billie Holiday, Simone de Beauvoir, Rembrandt's *Bathsheba*, Vermeer's *Woman with the Pearls*, (figure 11) It may also be seen as a part of project of investigation of eroticism and seduction like the series *Magdalenas* and *Pin Ups*. Apart from that, it may also be seen as predecessor of her painting *Naomi* (1995) portraying Naomi Campbell, (figure 12) Mariucca Casado, writing on *Josephine* in a recent book claims that the painting:

...interprets a contemporary notion of glamour that we discern in both Josephine Baker and Naomi Campbell. The pairing has been determined both deliberately and randomly. It creates a historical perspective on the

¹⁵ Casado, Mariuccia 'Focus: Josephine', *Marlene Dumas*, (London: Phaidon, 1999) 92.

current hegemony of black women in fashion and style, exploring the associations of *Josephine* as a prototype of seduction. (Casado, 1999, 92)

This reading serves as an example of an intense web of interconnections tends to be in play when we read Dumas' paintings. The series of paintings concerning eroticism, seduction, blackness, style, fashion, modeling invite us to cross and re-cross a complex pattern of motivations for mark-making. *Josephine* is not only an event of the experience of vision, but also an event of the works of which it is a part. Is it possible to see *Josephine* as a precursor of *Naomil* Or to see Josephine Baker as the original model for *Josephine* and *Naomi*? Isn't there a possibility for them each to be a painting without example on the problematics of Dumas? Or may not we hypothesize that each exhausts themselves in the series, but do not exhaust the paradigm, as Derrida suggests is possible when he writes of the relationship of 127 drawings and their one model, the pocket size tlingit coffin of Titus-Carmel?¹⁶

In his text "Cartouches" Derrida deals with Gerard Titus-Carmel's work *The Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin* and its 127 drawings, he thinks about the problem of initiality in Western thinking, always thinking in model and copies. He thinks Titus Carmel 'cadaverizes the paradigm' by putting his model coffin both in and outside of the series. (Derrida, 1987, 198) 'Hounding its effigy, feigning the feigning of it in a series of simulated reproductions, he reduces it, he transforms it into a tiny piece of waste, outside the series in the series, and henceforth no longer in use,' writes Derrida. (Derrida, 1987, 198) His method of thinking about the original and the copy may help us in understanding Marlene Dumas' series. Returning to Casado's reading, we may consider the critical sentence "The pairing has been determined both deliberately and randomly." We can understand why this pairing is deliberate according to the historical perspective Casado mentions. If we turn to why it is random, then we must question the 'remainder' Derrida talks about, 'the monumental waste product of the series which is already at the articulation of each article.' (Derrida, 1978, 201) The remainder after the randomly chosen article is at the

¹⁶ Derrida, Jacques 'Cartouches', *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 195.

articulation of each article. The remainder is what allows the article to become an event of the series. We may wonder what remains after the random pairing of *Josephine* and *Naomi*. Yet what remains is in the articulation of each of them. Each article, in this case, each painting holds with itself, the various potentialities of Dumas' problematics of fashion, blackness and seduction, thereby exhausting themselves and sustaining themselves at the same time. Yet, at the intersection of a number of series, a series of series, *Josephine* is the scene of the remainder of the whole(s), as any painting of Marlene Dumas might be. In this web of 'wholes', series, the original, the principal model for *Josephine* appears only as a constructed referent. The unsuspected merging of the model and its copy is not as it may at first seem tending to confirm the sense of the deficiency in play in Dumas' painting mentioned earlier.

The analysis may be worked through over the question asked in the previous paragraph. May the photograph of Josephine Baker be the model for *Josephine*? Especially when the im/possible merging of the model and the copy is in question. This question becomes more critical when we don't only focus on *Josephine* and see the work of Dumas as a series created from a tension between the copy and the original. In an ink-washed picture titled *Just Good Friends* (1990), she problematizes this tension, (figure 13) A nude, a figure of a naked woman, perhaps bathing, is repeated in the work, as if the paper has been folded and pressed so that the first figure leaves an imprint of itself on the other side of the paper. The darker figure is captioned 'the original' and the less dark figure is captioned 'the copy'. In between the two figures, it is written 'after the copy' upwards, and beneath the two figures 'Just Good Friends'. It is easy to understand that each of the figures is painted, especially in the outlines and in certain marks of the figure on the left. The work is critical of the common idea of the relationship between the original and the copy, that one precedes the other. We may think about the idea of their togetherness in the cliché 'Just Good Friends'. They may be thought together, yet their intimacy is almost staged, we may never witness their coming-together. Each might be thought as a work on its own. Their relation is a matter of something which is not fully public, something private or reserved, something which cannot be shown - if you print a second figure from a first, you cannot see the moment of its printing, when one generates another, or divides into two. Then 'Just Good

Friends' appears not as a metaphor of merging, rather as an impossible staging. The feminine gestures of painting open up textures in and of the figure which enables us to imagine that the figure allows more than what we see. Dumas' gesture leads us to think of the relationship between figure as the original and figure as the copy. In doing that, Dumas leaves some traces legible in that we understand the impossibility of the settled pattern. This gesture can be read as the im/possibility of merging, becoming one, again. However, it is not that legible at the same time, opening different spaces within the figure that exceeds its boundaries. Putting the original and the copy in sequence leads one to focus on the original, the model. So even if a copy exists, it is thought in relation to the original. This painting may be suggested to problematize the tension between 'natural' model and 'artificial paradigm' Derrida mentions when he compares Gerard Titus-Carmel's *The Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin* and its 127 drawings with *Great Cultural Banana Plantation* where the artist displays an original, natural banana with 59 artificially made copies. He writes 'As "natural" model, the presumptively paternal banana has not been "produced" in the "technical" sense of the term. It decomposes "naturally."' (Derrida, 1987, 218) He continues:

As for the "artificial" paradigm, the genitor or generator coffin will have been "produced," apparently at least, and it lasts as long as its simulacra. Marking the place of "natural" decomposition, supposed to give it a place in itself (remains in it), it does not decompose. All its drawn perspectivizations (partial ones, unlike the bananas) do perhaps decompose it in(to) part(s), but it is made so as not to decompose, to exceed analysis in its prime number. (Derrida, 1987, 218)

"The Original" in *Just Good Friends* seems to be made not to decompose, while "The Copy" seems to be a decomposition from the remainder of possible decompositions just as the relation between her original source and her copies in and out of series. Then, he poses an urgent question 'How do we know that the model precedes the copies?' This is the point where narrativization comes into play, questioning the fictitiousness of the issue of decomposition that Dumas puts into the play within *Just Good Friends*:

...we have to *believe* what the presumed author, Titus-Carmel, *says about it*. Only the story he tells us attests to it, and this narration, put forward the cartouche I was talking about above, in I.I, i.e., that is the little wooden case which comes first in production and thus serves as a "model" (I.I Under the generic title *The Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin* are gathered quite a large number of drawings (one hundred and seventy precisely) relating to [*ayant trait a*] the same model a mahogany box...). (Derrida, 1987, 218)

With what Dumas paints beneath, 'the original' and 'the copy', we may think of the figures in hierarchy. It may be hypothesized that she suggests we have to believe what she says as the author. It may be never known which comes first. The copy might have been painted as decomposed playing with the narrativization of initiality, of hierarchy between the model and the copy. Dumas says, perhaps rather confusingly, 'I like the word hierarchy, or rather, I don't *like* the word hierarchy.' (Bloom, 1999, 13) In an interview she gave to the artist Barbara Bloom, she underlines a critical point about the repeated play between original, and copy in her work:

There was a time when I made a point of only doing something once, and never repeating it, but now I recognize how many things keep coming back. This reminds me of some cultures in Africa. Here in Europe the uniqueness of a work is so prized. In Africa, if I painted a beautiful painting of you, and someone else liked it and wanted that one too, they would pay me to make another one just like the first, and the closer the copy, the more they'd pay for it. (Bloom, 1999, 14)

The problem of initiality is underlined as a key problem for Dumas in relation to western discourse on art, the western art market, if not western metaphysics as a whole. What is initial, original and unique do not bear the same kind of importance to people outside this system of thinking. However, in what she says, we may once again understand this issue of the merging of the model and the copy. The closer the copy gets towards the model, the better it pays. We may hypothesize that she problematizes it in 'Just Good Friends' and she problematizes it in her series. She lets us forget and remember the trace of the original, what Derrida refers to as the paradigm, referring to the principal

model of Titus-Carmel. She borrows poses from certain photographs, which appear as the gestures of her models in her paintings. She repeats them in a series of paintings again and again, just as Titus-Carmel did 127 drawings for or of his model coffin. She does not put away her source photographs and works from them again, to add to one of her series. But she doesn't exhibit these photographs, as if her paintings were events of 'firsthand experiences'. One may acknowledge this strategy when one experiences her studio, seeing a collection of images from cut-outs, family photographs, snap-shots, posters from pornographic magazines in files, listening to the stories of how she has changed those images when she has painted them. The images in collection seem to be waiting to be picked out for a possible series.

Her using a certain pose over and over again turns each of such works into a scene of a remainder and corruption of the idea of the original. For example, in *The Blonde, the Brunette and the Black Woman* (1992) we see the same pose repeated for each of the three paintings, which do not appear in the same order as mentioned in the title, (figure 14) The Brunette comes first, not second. The same pose of the breasts, the right one leaning over because of the weight, the arms open and reclining, the head resting on the right side, three times 'multiplied, described, serialized'.(Derrida, 1987, 195) The pose as original remains in three paintings. In Derrida's words, the paradigmatic pose 'will have been there *as if* since always, *posed* (a theme, then, a thesis), exposed, deposed then 'reproduced' (but we must also say *withdrawn*, to one side, subtracted, in the shelter of its withdrawal).' (Derrida, 1987, 195) The original pose is both sustained and withdrawn. Dumas writes 'The blonde, the brunette and the black woman all share the snapshot of myself as source material, although this does not imply selfportraiture.'¹⁷ Perhaps we can say that there is no pure position for either. This creates another source of tension in Dumas' painting. In this particular series, the repeating of the original erotic pose three times serves to enable a criticizing of the racial segregation of black and white.¹⁸ We may simply say that either blonde, brunette or black, a woman

¹⁷ Dumas, Marlene 'The Blonde, the Brunette and the black Woman', *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, ed. Mariska van den Berg, (Amsterdam: Galerie Paul Andriess/Uitgeverij DeBalie, 1998) 72

¹⁸ "I don't want to simply sound like Michael Jackson saying

may appear in and as this seducing pose, inviting the viewer and the painter to join in. This pose, as quoted from Dumas above, may come back again, again and again as a sequence of blonde, brunette and black. The seduction may remain, be the remainder and the sequence may be changed, brunette, blonde and black. The pose, repeated in this implied sequence in the title but not realized in series, becomes "an artifact, a referent constructed,...instructed, a fabricated structure" (Derrida, 1987, 194) and its being the original pose, at the end, has "the effect of chiefing [*chefferie*] as remainder, of a putting-to-work, in other words, a putting-into-series, without model, without precedent." (Derrida, 1987, 223) Each of the series is a scene of remainder of the not-yet-done paintings of the pose, without precedent. It is seduction that remains.

iii) Painting 'Strippinggirls'

The point of seduction implies a dynamics of voyeurism in Dumas' paintings. We, as the viewers looking at the paintings, are the last in a circle of the peeping that takes place. For Dumas 'Voyeurism is not an exclusively male act, women like to watch, too; my viewers are both male and female.' (Vendrame, 2001, 49) She only mentions the last part of the circle, though she escapes talking of herself as a voyeur. However, we may strongly suggest that it is she who starts the circle:

I have painted more women
then men
I paint women for men
I paint women for women
I paint the women of my men. (Dumas, 1998b, 117)

'It don't matter if you're black or white',
because that is, like the issues concerning male and
female, unfortunately still burning bright!
This is a sensitive area for almost everybody.
Yet it is not political correctness that inspired these
images, but the loss of integrity and shifts of identity
that affects everything and most of us, everywhere." *ibid.*

She has painted both women and men, though she has painted more women. Being a voyeur herself, she first peeps over her source images, selecting them. As she paints them, she keeps on peeping at both source images and the paintings she is painting. Some details tend to give us a hint of a certain period of time she spends peeping, details characteristic of fetishistic desire. But they are not details that are to be viewed in a long gaze, but in the limited but heightened duration of peeping. These fetishistic details help to create a dynamics of voyeurism not only of the picture, but of the scene. A good example is *Shiny Balls* (2001) included in the *Strippinggirls* series, (figure 15) The pose of the stripping girl appears in another painting, in and out of this series (*On Stage*). For this series, Marlene Dumas worked over the snapshot photographs of the girls who posed for her and collaborator Anton Corbijn, not during the show-time but as if rehearsing their shows, as Marlene Dumas claimed in our private session with her in her studio. She said that as taking photographs in and of Red Light District is strictly prohibited, recording the stripping in any strip club is prohibited as well. She added that these girls posed specially for them in daytime.¹⁹ Seeing the intimate snapshots of Marlene Dumas with some of the girls, smiling to camera in *Strippinggirls* catalogue, we can infer that they might have spent lots of time together.

The title of the painting with the painting that it refers to takes us through a complex of intentions again. *Shiny Balls* makes us think about the crotches of men. The painting is not indirectly related with crotches though. However, the painting *Shiny Balls* represents a pair of buttocks of a stripper who seems to be touching something descending underneath. But we cannot understand whether she is pulling out something from her vagina, or just playing with a long descending necklace. In either way, Dumas makes her viewer focus on what is taking place underneath these shiny balls. We imagine the trace of a g-string in between her buttocks. It may be a part of a g-string or light played with by Dumas, an ambiguity which suggests this as the trace of a previously worn g-string, something that may just have been slipped off during the show. We may also hypothesize that remembering that these poses are not what has been represented during the show, but poses for the artist, this may be

¹⁹ Private session with Dumas in her studio, 2nd of February 2004. [See Appendix B]

the trace of a g-string this girl wears daily. The descending thing she pulls out, or part of the necklace she is playing with follows the trace of the g-string, working its phallic way across the picture. It might even be imagined as the head of a snake as well. Thinking of the necklace-like thing as a phallic object, we may interpret *Shiny Balls* as crotches. These fetishistic details of the trace of the g-string as a triangle zone over and between the buttocks, the closing line of that triangle completed by a phallic necklace-like thing, leads us to think of the dynamics of voyeurism in this painting, not only of the picture, or the pose itself, but of the scene.

The painting invites us to imagine scenes of such pornographic/erotic performances. So, the paintings (re)construct their viewings as scenes only when they are imagined like this. When we imagine *Shiny Balls* inviting us to imagine scenes of such pornographic/erotic performances, it (re)constructs its viewing as scenes. This scene in *Shiny Balls* suggests certain readings, none of them to be decided upon as providing a definitive solution for the audience. We are returned as if to a state of deficiency. A sense of deficiency seduces the painter and the viewer into peeping, as if to satisfy the lack. It is not possible, Dumas may say, so why not enjoy it? Enjoying the deficiency of desire includes peeping at the picture itself, but also as if into the scene, seduced by Dumas' delicate and provocative gestures across scenarios of the scene, the details of fetishistic desire. Imagining and peeping over what is imagined intensifies the desire of the phallic to become one. In this case, we may interpret the scene as the stripping dancer pulling a long thing out of her vagina, or the stripping dancer playing with her necklace as a stripping accessory. Both interpretations of the scene are left open by the incomplete touch of Dumas in representing the hand of the girl touching that thing. The fingers of the right hand of the girl seem as if sketched and left incomplete deliberately. Deliberately, because intensifying a certain drama of the ambiguity, Dumas wants us to be in play as viewers, just like herself, reminding us that it is not possible to complete our viewing and turn around satisfied.

Shiny Balls refers to a kind of instrumentalisation of phallic desire, which generally fails and which is shown to fail in some of Dumas' paintings. There are no crotches in view, however a rather intense and bizarre

interpretation of it, that does not satisfy the desire, since there is this ambiguity of an in/complete female touching of the phallic object. A desirable pair of buttocks painted in such a desiring way fails to fulfill the desire for a part of an untouched phallic object. A girl that appears as a fulfiller of phallic desire confronts her viewer as being the unsatisfied phallus itself. In this framework, this case may be also interpreted as phallic gaze trying to complete itself with its act of desire. The one that is looked for is there, but the desire won't be fulfilled in any case, because it is there. The feminine touch will also fail to be possessed as expected, while touching the act of desire, with hands or with tongue. Thus, it may be argued that Marlene Dumas' masculine identification is a part of this dynamics of voyeurism occurring in her paintings, but it is also not just that. She becomes the male and the female voyeur. Her masculine identification with her models, as we have seen in the case of *Shiny Balls*, upsets assigning her authorship to either or even just to both. Disturbing settled codes, she passes across these apparent limits of identification.

These settled codes are not that settled. When we read the poem by Michael Salcman on the story of Velazquez's well known *Rokeby Venus*, we notice a certain admitting of this failure from the beginning. *Rokeby Venus*, which depicts a gorgeous naked woman's body from behind provides a dynamics of voyeurism of the scene. Salcman's little tips intensify this dynamics.(figure 16) The woman, whose face is blurred in the mirror held by a cherub was the mistress of marquis, Gaspar de Hero and was known by Velazquez. Her being known by Velazquez becomes interesting if we think that painting is not simply a consequence of a transcription of a posing for the artist. And Salcman writes about this allegorical portrayal that was placed on the ceiling of a secret room in his house in Madrid. Her face is blurred, the marquis' wife would not have been able to recognize her. Thus, this Venus represents the secret desires of the marquis. The painting enabled the marquis to return to and feed his desire, when the real object of desire is away. Placed on the ceiling, it cannot be reached and touched. He looked over his mistress' body in secret, the one completing her face in the mirror, phantasizing about merging with, becoming one with his mistress. The marquis could come back to the scene again and again. His desire is not satisfied though, when his lover is away. But what has Velazquez felt when he has painted her? It is his gaze

that places her on that canvas in an always-to-be-desired way. Salcman puts this openly:

Why also turn away?
Was it shame or a debt she felt
the old man was owed or had she guessed
what held the gaze of her painter?

Like him, I almost can't bear to breathe
before this great medallion of creamy flesh,
before this woman who called to him even
as he nailed her to the canvas.

Did he rationalize what he couldn't deny
and that is why he painted her
from behind, turning her back just in time
as if to say goodbye?²⁰

It is the painter whose voyeuristic look has preceded ours and through this look we peep in as the last part of the circle. Admitting from the beginning that the phallic gaze that desires to become one with the desired object cannot succeed, we may understand that the traces of lookings construct that scene with the knowledge of the desire that cannot be fulfilled. Velazquez has painted her from behind to keep on peeping while painting. It may be claimed that this how Dumas sometimes peeps at her selected sources, as if from behind, phantasizing, tending to play with that knowledge of desire that cannot be fulfilled. She initiates the circle of voyeurism under different terms, just as Velazquez did by enabling us to peep from behind at a beautiful body, which involves not only the picture, but the scene. Velazquez's Venus verifies this knowledge of desire. Returning to Dumas, we may suggest that she verifies and in a way creates an alternative of that knowledge that twists it further through her plural identifications with and beyond the model.

That twist created by Dumas' plural identifications can be developed as an approach to Dumas' citations of pornographic imagery to suggest a position which relates eroticism and politics. Her citations both bring forward the issue of voyeurism and problematise pornographic repetitions. There is a painting,

²⁰ Salcman, Michael 'The Rokeby Venus', downloaded from the website on 20th November 2004: www.ashevillereview.com.

earlier than *Shiny Balls*, which quotes the same pose and which appears in and out of series *On Stage* (1999). (figure 17) The sameness of the source material may be understood from the position of the opened legs, buttocks in the center and the same descending of the hair of the dancer's towards the right. *On Stage* is an interesting case, because it is done in the process of Corbijn's and Dumas' collaboration on *Stripping girls*, but it is not in the series.²¹ Yet, let us remember that each of Dumas painting may be the remainder of the not-yet-done paintings of the pose, without precedent. The pose is quoted and repeated, from seduction as remainder. When the pose is quoted again, then the source picture may be the same, however the scene depicted may differ. In *On Stage*, the descending right arm is seen within the space of wide opened legs. And this stripper does not seem to pull anything, the hand is only descending, so our attention is drawn to the posture of the body kneeling on wide opened legs with high heel boots, seen from behind. The changing light is painted with large spots of colour. This bright, almost artificial light seen as spots across the buttocks catches our attention. The shadow of the opened legs, painted in black in the background emphasizes the light across the buttocks and suggests an area of penetration. Yet the scene is very different now, as if seen from afar, not in details as in *Shiny Balls*. It is as if Dumas imagines the same pose seen from afar in the dark, as if she were in a peep show. But again, the buttocks are emphasized as the desired part object. Here, we might suggest that for Dumas each pose has an indefinite potential to be turned into various scenes with intensified scenarios of desire.

This reading leads us to see citation of poses as a way of problematising pornographic repetitions. Dumas explores knowledge(s) of desire in painting by repeating the same pose, suggesting plurality in knowledge(s) and identifications in her repetitions with different scenarios of desire. Poses of the pornographic which are repeated over and over again, in a similar manner are turned into different scenarios of desire sourced in the deficiency of desire.

The cited pose of *Shiny Balls* and *On Stage* is from Anton Corbijn's photograph titled *Big Pull*, which is reproduced in the catalogue of the cooperative project of Corbijn and Dumas, *Stripping girls*. The cooperation of

²¹ Corbijn writes that they start working together in October 1998 in the introduction. Dumas' *Stripping girls* paintings are dated 2000.

the painter and the photographer, female painter and male photographer in a project titled as such is interesting, reminding us that categorizations of photography as art and pornography are not uncommon. And it becomes more interesting to see Dumas' paintings which cite some poses out of the photographs of Corbijn, drawing on that which is not included in the regulations of that machine of opposition. The project plays with such categorizations, signing areas of passage between the opposition of art and pornography.

The Big Pull appears to be a part of a five photograph series in similar frames, 33 cm in both height and width, (figure 18) They are all titled in a way that intensifies a referring to a possessive phallic desire to penetrate. *The Sliding Pole, From Behind, U-Turn, Pussy Pussy* are the titles of one of the three series of photographs included in the *Strippinggirls* that display a kind of selection of uncensored poses of stripping dance. They sound like inviting the viewer to be part of the pornographic scenario of desire they imply. However, the way they are framed in thick, arty, ornamented golden frames disturbs the presentation of the photographs as pornographic and cheap. The frame looks like household frames used for paintings. But the photographs are small and square, imitating framing of peepshows. Thus these big, heavy frames already look unusual, framing a peepshow-like, voyeuristic and pornographic scene.

A reading of this ambiguity created by putting such photographs in such frames returns to the issue of the relation between the photographic and the pornographic. The photograph, used in mass-media has often be thought to fit - or even establish - the pornographic This tends to be associated with the argument that high, contemplative art displays itself in unique examples of one painter, while the mechanical pleasure of the pornographic is produced by the mechanical actions of the camera. Lynda Nead tries to read this tendency using Bourdieu's model of cultural taste and social classification, which is "based on the separation of the aesthetic ('pleasure purified of pleasure') and the venal ('pleasure reduced to the pleasure of the senses')"²². She argues that in the cultural register, at the either end, we have notions of high art and pornography:

²² Nead, Lynda *Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 84.

There is the fine-art female nude as a symbol of the pure, disinterested, functionless gaze... and, on the other hand, we have images of pornography, the realm of the profane and mass culture where sensual desires are stimulated and gratified. (Nead, 1992, 84)

She supports her argument by quoting Steven Marcus claiming that 'pornography's success is pure, physical, measurable and quantifiable,' and it 'falls into the same category as much simpler forms of literary utterance as propaganda and advertising.' (Nead, 1992, 89) It is interesting that the mass print media use photography, perhaps because of its ease of - if not its essence as - replication. Nead stresses that 'the difficult or borderline cases will be those that blur the distinguishing characteristics of art and pornography, those that confuse the media, locations and audiences associated with these cultural categories.' (Nead, 1992, 94) By presenting such pornographic photographs in high taste frames, Corbijn's work suggests a problematisation of this sense of the belonging of photography to the pornographic, and vice versa, that which is decided on according to the separation of the aesthetic and the venal. The ambiguity occurring in Corbijn and Dumas' project may be taken as one of these difficult and borderline cases.

Writing a kind of prologue for the catalogue of the exhibition of *Strippinggirls* project, Corbijn refers to above mentioned photographs *The Big Pull*, *The Sliding Pole*, *From Behind*, *U-Turn*, *Pussy Pussy* and claims 'I ended up using computer manipulation - making tiny changes so that you really have to look for them, close-up like a peepshow.'²³ Dumas uses two of these photographs as source imagery, *The Big Pull* for *Shiny Balls* and *On Stage*, and *From Behind* for *High Heeled Shoes*. Putting the viewer in the place of peepshow viewer, *The Big Pull* works over voyeuristic inclinations creating an illusion for the viewer, manipulating an effect of depth, an effect of trying really hard to see. It may be suggested that Corbijn has titled the photograph with a cliché of peepshow inviting the viewer to join in a 'real big pull' and satisfy phallic desire. The title may be imagined to refer to the push and the pull of intercourse.

²³ Corbijn, Anton 'Strippinggirls', in catalogue *Strippinggirls*, Theaternuseum Amsterdam/S.M.A.K Gent (Amsterdam: Stichting Actuele Kunstdocumentatie 2000).

The same dancer in Dumas' painting seems to fulfill the phallic desire by touching that phallic object. The dancer's pose suggests the opening of the vaginal orifice, ready for penetration. This peeping scenario of masculine orientation is supported with the background of the scene of the dance. There is a representation of a woman who has kneeled down with her hands tied at her back. She is looking at someone who is mostly out of the frame. Manipulating the image he shot, Corbijn may be argued to have created an illusion of touch in framing, the right knee of the dancer touches the buttocks of the woman represented forming a scene which suggests a masculine fantasy of women making love. This pornographic scenario is repeated in many magazines and porn films. It looks cheap, plays with pornographic clichés.

The illusion of completion of the touch in the dancer's hand pulling the phallic object and the two women's touching each other questions certain spaces of identifications created by Dumas. The pornographic image has been defined as flat, however Dumas' complex of identifications works against this flatness. And in the framework of two instances where feminine touch seems to be completed, Dumas works over a scenario of desire. Ernst van Alphen writing on Dumas' *Models* for the exhibition that took place in Salzburg, Frankfurt and Berlin, suggests that 'In pornography and voyeurism the body is kept at a distance, reduced to surface and kept closed.'²⁴ Is the body really reduced to surface and kept closed in voyeurism and pornography? The problematics of identification should be taken into consideration here. As suggested above, identification is an important concept for this argument, both about what is at work in Dumas as artist and in Dumas' work. We may hypothesize that the argument for the flatness of pornographic and voyeuristic bodies is not supported by Dumas' work. She paints bodies that she identifies with, she paints them identifying herself with the masculine. Her above mentioned quotation "voyeurism is not an exclusively male act" supports this reading suggesting a female identification with the masculine voyeur. This disrupts the argument of flatness, because these identifications work over the corporeality of the body within the image. In this framework, we may suggest

²⁴ van Alphen, Ernst, 'Facing Defacement, "Models" and Marlene Dumas' Intervention in Western Art', in catalogue Marlene Dumas.Models, Salzburger Kuntsverein/Portikus Frankfurt/NGBK Berlin (Stuttgart: Oktagon Verlag, 1995) 70.

that Corbijn works over that issue of masculine identification in his photograph *The Big Pull*. By photographing the touch that is complete on the phallic object and the touch of the knee of the dancer and the buttocks of the represented woman slave, he exposes the desire that wants to imagine and possess the feminine touch, acting as if it already possesses the feminine touch portrayed in the photograph. But we shouldn't forget that he manipulated those images to create an effect of depth, something that tends to confirm that sense of the flatness of the pornographic image. However, the involvement of the phallic fetishistic object in the scene implies that the fulfillment of this desire is impossible. The exaggerating title *The Big Pull* suggests the desire for the feminine touch to be completely possessed. Here, we may suggest that Dumas chooses to open this scenario in painting this photograph, because she is identified with the masculine which constructs it. Furthermore, she also identifies with the woman she paints as her other. Thus she paints out of a complex scenario of identifications, her feminine gesture projected onto her other disrupting the image of the desired object, and the scenario of possession that already fails from the beginning in this site.

In *From Behind* we peep over the back of the woman in an inviting pose, putting her knees on a couch, pushing herself backwards with her hands on the walls to invite the phallic gaze over her buttocks, (figure 19) The title implies penetration again, the dancer's body is ready to be penetrated from behind. Corbijn takes a photograph of such a scene, the woman in high heel shoes, putting her knees on a red piece of cloth, among shiny curtains, posing and exposing herself. The frame around the photograph creates a certain depth and the vaginal orifice is the central point of this depth. The body exposed invites penetration for the phallic gaze, but the possibility of fulfillment of this penetration is left open in this photograph. This possibility is re-explored in Dumas' painting. *High Heeled Shoes* specifies a fetishistic object in the title, (figure 20) Dumas quotes the pose in a close up, drawing us close to the buttocks, emphasizing them in an artificial pale light. We may suggest that she paints the part object, disregarding the created scene around the model's buttocks to create tension. It may be suggested that Dumas gives the painting a title to imply the im/possibility of the desire of penetration. The fetishistic object refers to the deficiency of this act, a kind of supplementary instrument of

the completion of penetrative desire that paradoxically signals that it is not to be completed as itself. In the photograph, the heels of the shoes and the buttocks are not that close. Dumas paints the heels close to the buttocks as if they might penetrate the vagina. We may imply that what she looks in on in that photograph is that relation between the heels and the buttocks, the fetishistic detail around which Corbijn's photograph is constructed. Thus, Dumas paints the phantasm. She paints a black outline over this site of desire. And the involvement of the instrumentalisation of the lack in this phantasm suggests the failure of phallic desire. Dumas peeps in on the scene, identifies herself with the model, imagines herself in the same pose, and emphasizes the gesture of pushing the heels back towards the buttocks. The gesture of the model pushing back the heels to the buttocks as if to point towards the vaginal entrance turns the model into a participant seer. The site of the part object is marked out with black lines, and the buttocks are so close to the viewer, so close that the viewer can see the vaginal lips, emphasizing that penetration remains only im/possible. The gesture of pushing the heels back to buttocks may be read as an act of withdrawal or an act of threat of the desired body, if we suggest that the heels may act as castrators.²⁵ Identifying with masculine gaze, and identifying with the female model as the other of this gaze create different spaces of passage between identifications, Marlene Dumas defies the flatness of the pornographic body.

iv) Cover Girl

The differences between source imagery and paintings open up the issue of feminine gesture in Dumas' paintings. She cites poses from photographs in *Strippinggirls* as she does in many of her other paintings. She works over images of women, her gestures of painting spreading the figures out before us as chiasmuses, sites varying sight and touch. Her gestures open up the scenarios of identification reiterated in the pictures, drawing attention to

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Andrea Dworkin suggests this potential of the heels as castrators: 'Called variously "amazon" and "liberated woman," she says "You male chauvinist pig" as she grinds her spiked heels into his balls. She is as dangerous as anyone can be, her malice directed at the genitals of the male, which she threatens to tear off with her bare hands.'

Pornography: Men Possessing Women, (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1991) 30.

sites and objects of fetishization . One such example is *Miss January*(1997), a painting from before the *Strippinggirls* series which also involves Dumas' strategy of creating chiasmuses of masculine identification of painting, complex identifications of peeping and feminine touch on fetishistic details so characteristic of that *Strippinggirls* series, (figure 21)

A detail of *Miss January* is used on the cover of a recent book published on Dumas, and her reaction to this use of detail of the upper part of the body provides us with an opportunity to understand Dumas' interest in the construction of the scene offered by her paintings. In our private session, in her gallery, looking at the source image for this painting, Dumas said that she disagreed with the publisher's use of the photograph, because using the upper part of Miss January as detail on the cover of the book may evoke misreadings about her paintings, because the painting works as a whole, that pink sock on one foot is important.²⁶ *Miss January*, then, (re)constructs its viewing as a scene of pornographic/erotic performance. The source image of *Miss January* is a poster from a soft porn magazine, yet it is quite different from its source image. Dumas cites the pose of the woman in question, standing, her hands on her belly. She paints a black outfit on the upper part of her body, which seems to have been done in small strokes of the brush after the breasts and the belly part are painted. Her objection to the use of such a detail of the painting as a cover image for a book about her work may be understood when we consider the lower part of the painting. Taking the lower portion into account initiates a rather different reading than the one suggested by the upper portion. Though the pubic area seems to be in view of the voyeur, we can see the vaginal lips, however they also seem to be painted over like the upper part of the body. All we can see in fact is the shade of the vaginal lips covered in a black triangle. We may suggest that this is a rather unusual situation, for Miss Januaries like her generally have shaved and clean pubic area. The legs are painted as if in artificial light and in pink outlines. Perhaps the most effective element in *Miss January* is the pink sock left on one foot and the pink spot of paint below the other foot, suggesting that one sock has been taken off and one stays on. The pink sock implies a moment of tension in between nakedness and being

²⁶ From private session with Marlene Dumas, 2nd February 2004

clothed. It stays on and distracts our attention, signifies an unfulfilled gesture just as the gesture of the hands on the belly are in between exposing or covering the pubic area. The sock also acts as a fetishistic object, inviting the viewer to take it off or to imagine the moment of its being taken off or to let it stay on while imagining the scene when it is taken off. This last scenario of the scene would complete the moment of exposure, as if the gesture is dedicated to exposure of the body and the body is to be exposed for the phallic. Yet the incomplete gesture of the hands on the belly and the pink sock create an ambiguity. We cannot be sure that these ambiguous gestures take on a definitive meaning. The pinkness of the sock is overdetermined in rhetorics of desire. Pink is used to connote femininity, often 'girliness' - as in 'blue' for boys and 'pink' for girls'. Yet it is also the colour of figures used to signify male and (if less often) female homosexuality. The gesture the woman makes on her belly is also overdetermined and the overdetermination of both implies the im/possibility of the object of desire's becoming one with the viewer. Such gestures of Dumas imply that painting that woman according to a masculine identification, she also identifies herself with that woman portrayed in the image thereby turning the figure into participant seer and breaking through those codings regarding the position of woman as the passive object of desire in pornographic exposure.

The reading Ernst van Alphen makes of Dumas' work suffers from a deficiency regarding Dumas' relationship with the other's body. This reading disregards an Irigarayan look which experiences the other as a locus of/created by touch:

Dumas' work can be seen as an exploration of the tension between the body as spectacle seen from a distance and the body as lived reality, that is between the ideal and the grotesque. There is such a tension because the experience of our own body and the sight of the body of somebody else can never be reconciled. In fact, this tension is already present in the body as such, because the body is at once a container and that which it contains, (van Alphen, 1995, 70)

Alphen's claims not only imply a pure separation between me and a body neither me or mine, but also deny a corporeality which would exceed the

contained body. As chiasmuses of sight and touch working out of an overdetermination of a complex of plural identifications and the feminine gesture, Dumas paintings explore the desires for such a reconciliation, rather than just insisting on the tension of an impossibility of such a reconciliation. It may be argued that the im/possibility overdetermined in Dumas' paintings is the penetration desired by the phallic gaze. She paints the deficiency of desire central to painting by drawing us towards an understanding of the deficiency which is rejected by that desire but which returns in its discontinuities , and reminding us of the deficiency of those methodologies which disregard the deficiency of desire. She may be hypothesized to do so by proposing such a reconciliation between the experience of our own body and the sight of the body of somebody else. She writes:

The aim of my work, I have come to believe, has always been to arouse in my audience (as well as myself) an experience of empathy with my subject matter (be it a scribble, a sentence, or a face...) Sympathy suggests an agreement of temperament, and an emotional identification with a person. Empathy doesn't necessarily demand that. The contemplation of the work (when it 'works') gives a physical sensation similar to that suggested by the work. (Dumas, 1998c, 25)

Dumas' suggestion of arousing an experience of empathy in her audience as well as herself supports our hypothesis of identification. Talking about the contemplation of the work giving a physical sensation similar to that suggested by the work, she suggests a complex relationship between the work and the viewer based on a complex of sensations. The solution that van Alphen offers for an experience of the body of the other as one's own is "embrace" which shatters and disorders our relation with the grotesque other. The concept of embrace suggests an emotional temperament, not sourced in empathy, and implying a me and the other separated in either case. It may be argued that without mentioning the conjunction of gesture and corporeality in Dumas' work, the "embrace" cannot work as van Alphen suggests it does. Separating me and the other, disregarding the corporeality suggested in Dumas' paintings of the other, "embrace" just suggests a moment of touching that may soon

dissolve, a moment of emotional agreement. Writing about another of Dumas' series, a series of portraits, *Rejects*, he claims:

These works betray the knowledge of a bodily experience which shatters, distorts, and is in constant flux. It is an experience that refuses closure. The lived experience of sexuality is emblematic for this grotesque knowledge of the body in pieces and parts. The only situation in which the body of the other is experienced, that is in parts, is in the embrace, (van Alphen, 1995, 70)

The embrace is not enough for an enactment of the other in the image, given through the ambiguous moments of gesture of these other women, gestures in a state of flux between holding and not holding, covering and exposing, exemplified in *Shiny Balls* and *Miss January*, paintings which communicate a corporeality that is not simply contained in painting. As suggested before, Dumas explores knowledge(s) of desire, and her exploration as such puts the knowledge and participation at stake here. It is not just the gesture of the model, but the gesture of the painter interwoven with it. Reading the painting *Miss January*, we have mentioned the small splashes of black paint that act like the transparent dress, the dress over which the hands of Miss January move ambiguously to cover or expose her genital area. Dumas paints those hands within an orange texture implying something not contained in the body. The gesture of the artist permeates into the gesture of the other and we may suggest that the gesture of painting loses and finds itself as it traces and re-traces the gesture. As we exemplify above, this tracing and re-tracing allows for possible identification(s) which work against the flatness of the pornographic body. Van Alphen says 'In pornography and voyeurism the body is kept at a distance, reduced to surface and kept closed.' (van Alphen, 1995, 70) Andrea Dworkin claims that 'Women's lives are made two dimensional and dead. We are flattened on the page or on the screen.'²⁷ However, Dumas'

²⁷ Dworkin, Andrea 'Pornography Happens to Women', downloaded from the website 20th November 2004 : <http://www.svdLtd.com/sells/cpa/speeches/dworkintxt.htm>. (Talk she performed on 6th March 1993 in a conference titled "Speech, Equality and Harm: Feminist Legal Perspectives on Pornography and Hate Propaganda" at University of Chicago Law School).

paintings of pornographic bodies, bodies of desire escape this sense of flatness that separates the body of the other as the body of the other. Enacting the poser as the participant and putting the issues of knowledge and participation at stake, we may hypothesize that Dumas counteracts the sense of the powerless, disabled woman as a pornographic poser.

Dworkin underlines this passive position further: 'Our vaginal lips are painted purple for the consumer to clue him in as to where to focus his attention such as it is. Our rectums are highlighted so that he knows where to push. Our mouths are used and our throats are used for deep penetration.'(Dworkin, 1993) She implies that there is no woman that can get out of this vicious cycle of objectification, from being commodities of a sector that affects the manners of men towards women, 'the others' in society. She opposes arguments in favour of pornography by insisting that pornography happens to real women, these women are forced to perform real sex and they are the commodities bought and sold with real money in this real world:

Dehumanization is real. It happens in real life; it happens to stigmatized people. It has happened to us, to women. We say that women are objectified. We hope that people will think that we are very smart when we use a long word. But being turned into an object is a real event; and the pornographic object is a particular kind of object. It is a target. You are turned into a target. And red or purple marks the spot where he's supposed to get you. (Dworkin, 1993)

Being real seems to mean being objectified in Dworkin's terms. She puts forward the moral as the social. Though she has been one of the women who experienced that industry, she seems to imprison all the working women in the industry in the flattened image, disregarding the im/possibilities of the body in image, disregarding the issue of corporeality. This disregarding may be suggested to work close to van Alphen's proposition of the embrace, that supports a bond of sympathy with the contained body. Van Alphen's reading of Dumas' paintings such as *Porno Blues* (1993) (figure 22) and *Porno as Collage* (1993) (figure 23) suggests the grotesque body is the real body, and

the realness shatters the view of the pornographer through the gesture of the artist using ink wash for these series of scenes:

The flowing ink has created an image that frustrates the focused and distanced view of the pornographer. Our view is opaque, we see shattered limbs and get lost in poses which entangle the two bodies. Watching these sexual acts we are not in the external, safe position of the voyeur, but rather in the shattering and disordering situations of the embrace. The pornographic spectacle of sex is turned into something anti-spectacular. We see it from inside, (van Alphen, 1995, 71)

Remembering the suggestion of Dumas about the physical sensation of the work, this argument may seem to work. However, let us also underline that it is Dumas who initiates the circle of peeping in from out of a complex of identifications. Especially by identifying herself with the model and the seer at the same time, she forms a bond of empathy with both sides, implying that she is not external to the scene, Dumas does not try to maintain a relationship with an 'object' of desire from the safety of a purely external viewing position. Van Alphen suggests that Dumas' initiation of embrace puts us inside, seeing the real, the other, the grotesque bodies. Being real, then, becomes a feature of grotesque, or vice versa. We may suggest that this reading works only by ignoring Dumas' complex of identifications which disturb the definitions of the external and the internal at work in van Alphen argument. Her disturbing of these codes generates ambiguous areas of sight and touch, sites of reterritorialization after the deterritorialization of desire as such. Simona Vendrame's question to Dumas about *Porno as Collage* implies such an ambiguous area:

In particular I am referring to your watercolor work *Porno as Collage* (1993). You depict several erotic scenes between women, and in one case two women and a man. Are the women exhibiting themselves as sexual objects before a voyeur that they observe in return, or are they simply having sex because they want to, or is something else going on? (Vendrame, 2001, 49)

Vendrame suggests something else that is going on. Following our hypothesis of a complex of identifications, this something else going on is particularly about the women participating in the scene, doing more than observing it. Dumas enacts a transgression of the external/internal and subject/object oppositions, woman as disabled poser and man as viewer provoked to act by the pose of the model. Marlene Dumas' reply partly quoted above gives the answer to that something else:

Voyeurism is not an exclusively male act, women like to watch, too; my viewers are both male and female. The title of the work refers to the use of collage in art, as a pornographic technique, in the sense that unrelated figures or images are glued together to create a false union. (Vendrame, 2001, 49)

This may be read as Dumas' problematizing of pornographic repetitions, particularly in so far as these repeated scenes are repeated with unrelated figures, and what is repeated is the pose or poses. From this, we can go back to Derrida's account, the paradigmatic pose that is repeated in the site of the pornographic, repeated in Dumas' paintings that 'will have been there *as if* since always, *posed* (a theme, then, a thesis), exposed, deposited then 'reproduced' (but we must also say *withdrawn*, to one side, subtracted, in the shelter of its withdrawal).' (Derrida, 1987, 195) So we lose our trace in following the original and the repetitions. However, the gesture of Dumas loses and finds itself in this vague area, by tracing and re-tracing the gesture of others. In these fluid ink washes, this process becomes more open to observation, if there is observation without participation. Dumas' work may be taken to suggest the problematics of citation, therefore the origins of the pose. There may be no real citation.

Another part of Dumas' remark to note here is the use of collage in art as a pornographic technique in gluing unrelated images to each other. Here, Dumas problematizes the thinking of painting as a matter of origins. Doing so and claiming that collage is a pornographic technique, she suggests the togetherness of an odd couple of art and pornography existing in a site of law and counter law, counter law which suggests a possibility of 'impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even

cancerization, generous proliferation or degenerescence,' which is 'disruptive' and from which 'anomalies' are engendered - and this is their common law, the lot or site they share - by *repetition*.'²⁸ This may be taken as a resistance to claims of art being art and pornography being pornography, neither one of them is purely this or that. From these ambiguities, the desire of deficiency that motivates painting deterritorializes 'objects' of desire and then restages the scenes and those 'objects' as sites in which we can trace and retrace the artist's gesture passing in and out of the gesture of others. This re-staging involves dynamics of identification(s), physical sensations and corporeality.

²⁸ Derrida, Jacques 'Law of Genre', *Acts of Literature*, trans. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge 1992) 226.

CHAPTER II

Jenny Saville's Women

Jenny Saville poses in front of her well known painting, the often referred to *Plan* (1993). (figure 24) She just about covers the genital area of the woman she has painted on the almost three meters high canvas behind her. Bending towards her right knee, she seems to repeat the posture of the legs of the figure in the painting, left to the front and the right to the back, negating the movement of the head of the figure in the painting behind her, of which we can see two thirds, bent towards the left.

This posing of Saville in front of *Plan* suggests many issues that are important for understanding her work. Perhaps, she imagines herself as her signature in the painting. Perhaps she poses for the same gaze for which this represented woman poses, opening herself to it to understand such a desire that makes a woman expose her body to such a gaze. Perhaps she substitutes herself for the role of the prick. Her pose may open up speculations about her sexual identity when it is read as playing the part of that which might mimic the other woman and play the part of the phallus for her. According to this reading of that photograph, it may be imagined that she would want to disappear into the body of the other woman. And yet perhaps she becomes the "cunt" herself by being the one who sees.¹

This may be a trap, for she has already placed her painting to enable the viewer to confront the cunt. The picture is hung on the wall so that our eyes are guided towards to meet the pubic area. The spectator is invited to look up the figure, as if up towards her face, however encountering the pubic area. The face of the figure disappears from view as if beyond the upper limit of the

¹ Lyotard 'Con celui qui voit' (The one who sees is a cunt) Lyotard uses this phrase in his essay on Marcel Duchamp's *Etants Donees*, quoted by Rosalind Krauss in *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 110,

canvas is painted as separate from two thirds of it, at the other end of the three meters high canvas. The genital area of the figure is as if 'given face' by the figure standing in front of it looking out towards us, a sort of representation of the labial cunt by the coated figure. The process of facialization taking place interrupts the imagined experience of viewing that body. According to these multiple readings, it may be remarked that Saville is both possible model and viewer, as well as proud painter. Looking closely at the faces, of Saville's and of the woman represented in *Plan*, we can remark some similarities that would suggest she has been a model for this figure in this painting, wholly or in part. Perhaps she has just painted her face. This issue will be further explored below around her possible desire to disappear into the other woman. She sets a sort of trap for the viewer, but that viewer has also been her. Like Dumas, Saville seems not to want to hide her activities of viewing, letting them emerge from the 'traps' of vision that she paints, showing herself as if caught up in them.

i) Artist and Her Models

In what sense, then, does Saville's work implicate a pornographic gaze? Involved in this process of looking by setting that specific trap, Saville's work proposes various painter's gazes that may be retraced as we view the figures representing the bodies of the women she has painted. Any ideal painter's gaze is de-sublimated from the beginning then, opening up towards a possible pornographic gaze. To explore this possible opening, however, I want to consider Saville's use of sources, as it is this which recalls us to an im/possibility of the desire to make vision into the cunt and the cunt into vision. Helena Reckitt notes that 'Saville originally began making her large scale paintings of female nudes by using photographs of her own body to explore the role of the model and the artist at the same time. Both seductive and disturbing.'² Reading her work as self-portrait, we may start to look for similarities. By putting this explanation just opposite a full page illustration of *Plan* (1993) (figure 25), it may be suspected that Reckitt wants us to participate

Reckitt, Helena in *Art and Feminism*, (London: Phaidon, 2001) 187.

in the painting in this way, or perhaps she has fallen in this trap of searching for an identity between the parts of Saville's body and those of the model.

Exposing herself to a medical gaze, the woman has already been drawn on, the site of a plan for remodelling to correct this body according to norms of desirability of female bodies. The strange kind of light around and across the figure of the woman in *Plan* suggests a site somewhere in a hospital perhaps a room waiting if not ready to be operated on. Such a reading would be supported by what Saville has been reported to say about operating theaters. In a text by Katherine Dunn written for *Closed Contact*, a collaboration with fashion photographer Glenn Luchford, in which Luchford took carefully lit photographs of Saville, Dunn quotes Saville: "I wanted to create the same sort of feeling that you get about surgery operations," she says. "There's something about the lighting that you get inside an operating theater."³ Saville appears to have observed operations before, or at least knows something of such spaces. *Plan* suggests such a space, but also such an object of attention in that space, drawing us into an identification with a surgical, but also with a diagnostic, even "forensic gaze"⁴, a gaze which would seek to isolate what has gone wrong in what can be observed. Surgery would put right what the forensic gaze could isolate as disturbance of norms. Across Saville's paintings of bodies, traces of different lookings may be retraced, different gazes, surgical, forensic, pornographic, opening up a play of identifications comparable to that play brought about by Marlene Dumas' work. Saville's representations of female bodies are sites of the crossing of these gazes, sometimes neurotic, sometimes perverse, mostly violent.

In *Plan*, Saville explores the female body as a topos, as a landscape of flesh. She 'combines the image of a female subject's body with the suggestion of landscape. The lines painted on the body's surface resemble contour markings on maps, while also suggesting areas of the body's topography indicated for liposuction.' (Reckitt, 2001,187) The similarity pointed out between map of landscape and map of surgery is remarkable. The idea of map supposes the full visibility of the object, definable and controllable. A map of

³ Dunn, Katherine , in catalogue *Closed Contact*, (Los Angeles: Gagosian Gallery, 2002).

⁴ I thank Lewis Johnson for proposing this.

landscape is supposed to define the piece of land as wholly known and safe. A map of liposuction is supposed to define the body according to norms of desirability of female bodies. Both work as maps of vision. Both fail. By inviting us to retrace the lookings across, following the markings of a surgical and a forensic gaze in the image of the body, Saville suggests the resistance of the female body to such false, artificial boundaries both as object and subject. The female body she depicted exceeds the space given in so far as the body is a map of another body. It resists the 'normal' stabilized female nude's being the object of desire; disturbs the relation between body and a territorializing gaze - one for instance that makes of the body a site for a look and an operation, upsets the known territories through unknown, dangerous ones. As Jill Bennett stresses in italics *'there is no real body prior to its framing.'*

Bennett criticises Kenneth Clark's approach to the representation of the naked body which tries to elaborate 'the transformation of the body into an idealized form'. (Bennett, 1996, 245) For Clark, the idealized form of the body is the promise of the genre of "Nude" to the spectators. Bennett's claim that *"there is no real body prior to its framing"* might be followed to open up Lynda Nead's argument which claims that the transformation of the female body into the female nude is an act of regulation of the female body, because of the outlines, frames, margins and boundaries that are working in this act of containment. She argues that this act of regulation takes place 'to shore up the female body - to seal orifices and to prevent the marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body from the outside, the self from the space of other.'⁶ She underlines the need for the analysis of the frame around the female nude. But further analysis of the female nude shows that it is not simply a matter of the actual frame around the female nude in painting that frames the female body as a nude. There is a complex web of interrelations between various elements of framing such as the limits of the pictorial figure, the play between figure and frame of the picture, and the ways in which discourse frames this play, the play between picture and source, or

⁵ Bennett, Jill 'Leaving Nothing to Imagination: Obscenity and Postmodern Subjectivities', *The Rhetoric of Frame*, ed. Paul Duro, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 254.

⁶ Nead, Lynda *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*(London: Routledge, 1992) 6.

between one picture and another, the circulation of imagery all of which are worked over by Saville in *Plan* by mapping the body in the ways mentioned above.

Saville explores the im/possibility of the desire to make vision into the cunt and the cunt into vision by invoking a play of identifications which brings up the issue that neither the boundaries around the image, nor the boundaries around the human subject are 'fixed and impermeable'. (Bennett, 1996, 245) The way she cites her source images in her paintings is the main strategy that threatens the supposedly fixed and permeable boundaries. She generally works from photographic models. As mentioned above, her own photographs are among her sources:

Saville herself has said that she dislikes painting from life and prefers photographic models. All of her monumental subjects are based on photographic precedent, but not in any simple way. She collects illustrations from pathology textbooks, full-color photographs of horrific burns, bruises and injuries, as well as books of reproductions of the work of Velasquez, Sargent and De Kooning. The beautiful, the grotesque, high art and pages from the website *Vaginoplasty/Transsexual Women's Resources*, the imagery of pain and deformity and that of its substantive recuperation in the brush work of Titian or Rubens, are co-mingled, scattered across her studio floor, piled helter-skelter on chairs and tables.⁷

What Linda Nochlin means by 'not in any simple way' can be opened up here. She does not elaborate much on the ramifications of Saville's using herself as a model in her paintings and what kind of experiences of spectatorship may be brought in through this. Saville assumes the role of the object and the subject at the same time in a way that cannot be reduced to self-portraiture. She questions her authorship and her subjecthood as a viewer of the images she picks up for her paintings. Painting for Saville may be understood as a process in which her body disappears into a figure of the body of the other woman. Picking up the photographs indeed may be imagined as a scenario of desire inspired by David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*.

⁷ Nochlin, Linda 'Jenny Saville: Migrants', in catalogue *Migrants* Gagosian Gallery/New York, 2003.

Bennett discusses the key scene of *Videodrome*, in the opening of her article "Leaving Nothing to Imagination: Obscenity and Postmodern Subjectivities", in which the protagonist Max Renn accepts the invitation of the videodrome image, the close-up of the lips on the screen, touches them and is absorbed by the image that expands out of the screen:

This scene dissolves the ontological difference between representation and reality; the image, no longer "framed" as a distinct representational space, becomes coextensive with reality, with Max's own body space. It is no longer possible for the viewing subject (Max) to distinguish himself from the object onscreen. The dissolution of the frame erodes the gap between subject and object (*viewing* subject and *viewed* object), the gap necessary for subject and object to exist as separable entities and to manifest and know their own boundaries. In effect, the loss of the frame around the image calls into question the boundaries of the subject's own identity, the subject's "corporeal frame" - the edges of his body as they demarcate the boundaries of the self and distinguish self from the other. (Bennett, 1996, 242)

If this scenario of desire between the viewing subject and viewed object is modified for Saville, a remarkable reading about her process of picking up certain images and painting them offers itself. Disappearing into the figure of the other woman in painting, Saville erodes the gap between herself as the viewing subject and the image of the other woman as the viewed object of desire. They are not separable anymore. Following Bennett's remark and modifying it for Saville's situation, the loss of frame around the image of the other in illustrations from pathology textbooks, full-color photographs of horrific burns, bruises and injuries, from the images downloaded from the website *Vaginoplasty/Transsexual Women's Resources*, questions the boundaries of her identity, her corporeal frame, (figure 26)

There are two issues here that need to be drawn attention to. The first one is that images of grotesque female bodies replace the gigantic close-up of female lips as viewed objects, objects of desire and invoke the role of the pornographic. These images as viewed objects suggest the desire of a medical, sometimes a surgical gaze that inspects, photographs and exhibits the bruises, burns, injuries, the irregularities of human body, the traces of physical violence

or trauma on human bodies. Such an exposure of the irregularities and the traces of physical violence or trauma brings up a different sense of the pornographic.

These dissolutions of the ontological difference - since it is repeated over and over- between representation and reality turn in further twists when Saville paints variations of these dissolutions into other representations. Most obviously she disrupts the relationship between male painter and female model in the traditional genre of nude painting, that Clark tried to delineate in *The Nude*. Fran Lloyd draws attention to her background in this respect:

Saville studied at Glasgow School of Art, famous for its continuous tradition of drawing, its 1980s 'new image' painting and its output of high profile male painters. Within this masculinist climate, Saville focused on the painted nude female - well aware that she was making an issue of the institution of "the Nude" - a territory traditionally occupied by male artists and female models: the assessor and the assessed.⁸

And Linda Nochlin elaborates on this disruption of the tradition of the female nude when she refers to the issue of assuming the roles of subject and object:

But the personal presence is meaningful, infusing this image with a power both emotional and political. As such, it constitutes a challenge, not just to the whole history of the nude in high art, not just to Picasso's cubist and post-cubist versions of the nude, or Matisse's decorative distortions of the female body, but to the very way we think of the nude woman in a painting: inevitably as the object of delectation or desecration for a male subject who is entitled to bend the pliant female model to his will. Saville turns the tables on this cherished scenario by assuming the role of both subject and object at once. (Nochlin, 2003)

Nochlin points to the artist's turning the tables on this cherished scenario, however, she does not proceed further with regard to this issue. Although the tables are turned, the basic scenario of desire between the viewing subject and viewed object is not according to Nochlin erased. Imagining her desire to

Lloyd, Fran 'Painting', *Feminist Visual Culture*, ed. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajackovska, (London: Routledge, 2001) 46.

disappear into the figure of the other women she views, Saville suggests the refinements to the question of the gendered gaze in this cherished scenario. Placing herself in the position of the viewing subject in the process of picking up images, she, who views other women as subject of her act of viewing, invites speculations about her sexual identity, creating a space where the reading of the gendered gaze as male does not work. She views and desires the other women through representations of cuts, bruises or burns.

How may we understand this? Bennett suggests the need for refinements in the theorization of male gaze:

Feminist theory has done a comprehensive job in identifying "the subject" as implicitly gendered, as the preserve of the proverbial white male. In terms of spectatorship it theorized a "male gaze" acting upon the feminine object. (Bennett, 1996, 251)

Nochlin's criticism rests here as if reversing the roles of subject and object would be an adequate explanation of Saville's work. Bennett adds a more critical footnote to her critical remark:

The theorization of a gendered gaze is of historical importance to this discussion. It should be noted, however, that the notion of a monolithic "male gaze" now requires some refinement. It is clearly not the case that there is a single way of looking available to all men and to no women. I would suggest that there may be "dominant" modes of vision, that are systematically gendered, but that these are by no means universal... (Bennett, 1996,315)

Thus, Bennett leaves space in her footnote for the process that goes on in Saville's paintings. The theorization of male gaze is, of course, important to our discussion, too, especially with regard to Saville's background in the Glasgow School of Arts and 'to that pictorial past she so often and so knowingly engages with.' (Nochlin, 2003) Bennett suggests a scenario of desire between the viewing subject and the viewed object that may be shaped in plural ways of looking, also available to women. These plural ways of looking, for example of different orientations of medical, surgical and forensic

lookings - redirecting us to the pornographic in a different way - may be retraced in Saville who lets them emerge from the 'traps' of vision that she paints, showing herself as if caught up in them.

This citation of surgical and forensic looking with the pornographic returning traces a circuit, going across the image. It points to a pluralization of the experience of the spectatorship of the painting. Saville participates in a play of identification with the figure of the other as well as with a surgical gaze and a forensic gaze. Playing with a desire to disappear, to merge with the other woman, she also separates from the other, the other who looks like her, as if from herself. This violent and masochistic kind of identification nevertheless leaves open its pathways to be retraced by the spectator as if s/he were the surgeon-artist who draws the markings for the operation on the woman's body . As the spectator retraces the traces of these different lookings, s/he is drawn into the ins and outs of the painting, adopting different modes of participation. Thus, any supposedly fixed boundaries of subjectivity are interrupted. Bennett claims that 'As soon as an image gets pornographic this is what happens: the purity of gaze is compromised and another way of seeing/experiencing is implied.' (Bennett, 1996, 251) The spectator is introduced into a plurality of seeing/experiencing the image in Saville's painting, none of them is pure and decided. The represented body appearing as a site of crossing of gazes, then, becomes pornographic.

ii) Operations on Models

Saville's selection of subject matter works in relation to this to overturn the idea of arousal, invoking a phantasm of possession that is part of the genre of the nude. Thereby, she overturns what confirms the representation of the female body as the nude. The spectator is invited to experience a body in the image that is never complete. Overlapping layers of figures of bodies onto each other, Saville's spectator loses the coincidence of painting and what is represented. A new flesh which digresses from the flesh that we want to know is created in the texture of painting. A striking example is *Hybrid* (1997) (figure 27) in which parts from the images of torsos of five women are brought together into one torso. These images of torsos of women might have been

photographed as exemplifying some particular types of body, some sorts of illness or operations. *Hybrid* is a hybrid of the images of the aged woman and the young woman, the single woman and the married woman, the fat woman and the relevantly slim woman. The operation performed by Saville in bringing these five different parts into a general form of woman-torso. The painting may be read as an allegorical portrayal of the failing of the surgical operation. Either of these bodies or this hybrid body are to be contained within the representation of this form of torso. The surgical gaze which defines this image as a coming together of five images of women is also interrupted by the incomplete line of separation to our right hand side. Apart from that marking, each marking of separation is defined by the emphasis of the lines, changes of photographic light across the different parts. However, to our right hand side, the hand of the married woman who wears her ring while portrayed naked, seems to intervene, move over to the section of the other, younger, thinner body. Neither the contour of light changes, nor the separation line is completed. Though fragmentation is welcomed, an ideal separation of such images classifying bodies of women is resisted. This trick by Saville may also be read as a resistance to an elaboration of female nude as 'the transformation of the body into an idealized form' in the texture of new flesh in paint, supporting Bennett's claim "*there is no real body prior to its framing.*" "

Another supporting example of painting is *Knead* (1999) which offers us a close-up of a face which has been operated on. (figure 28) From the traces of surgical sewing by the left ear, we may imagine that what has taken place might have been a face lifting operation. She is a mouth fed by serums. Her face looks swollen. She seems to be in pain. Saville works over the traces of blood in it, in bold strokes, especially around the left corner of the left eye and the left ear and on the white sheet where the trace of blood has almost merged with the shadow of the left ear. The traces of cuts on the eye lids suggest an eyelid lifting done. The patches of yellow paint floating particularly across the left cheek and the nose may be read as a moment of inspection by the doctor, checking the patient's condition with a hand torch. The contrast between the yellow patches and the whitish area suggests another 'patching' operation performed by Saville. She might have used a classic before-and-after the operation illustration as source for this painting. It seems that the skin of the

face before the operation and after the operation pass into each other, two different layers overlapping onto each other. The passage from one to other becomes more subtle in this painting. The overlapping layers suggest a new texture of painted flesh. They get lost into each other, irritating a forensic gaze which seeks to isolate what has gone wrong and desires to reform the flesh as flesh. Textured in a new flesh of paint losing the connection between before and after phases, the represented face paints an escape from being an illustration for a surgical gaze and from the desire for reformation of the flesh as flesh.

Thus, it may be claimed that Saville's operation of participating in a play of identifications is supported by her painterly markings. A project of exceeding various framings is interwoven and at work in Saville's paintings. While retracing this crossing of a surgical gaze exposing the before and the after of an operated on face with a forensic gaze that wants to correct it in *Knead*, one keeps becoming a voyeur looking across the bruises of the represented woman who seems half awake. Following the reading of Saville's disappearing into the images of women she paints, one experiences a sort of masochistic identification of - but also with - Saville who perversely desires her body to be exposed while cut into pieces. This reading is supported by a quotation about a scene that she is obsessed with:

One persistent picture in her mind came from a series of photographs taken in China at the beginning of the twentieth century and published in George Bataille's book "The Tears of Eros." The photos show a Chinese man being executed by being cut into a hundred pieces. "He's administered opium to keep him alive longer," says Saville. "I've had this image for years, and thought my god, this is just an amazing image because he's got this look of ecstasy on his face while his body is being cut apart and all this crowd of people around him are watching. (Dunn, 2002) (figure 29)

What Saville suggests about this image may be a kind of limit experience. More importantly, this text about an image allows us to retrace the 'sources' of her identifications in play. The look of ecstasy on the man's face while being cut into pieces suggests a masochistic pleasure in experiencing the

pain of dissection in a half numb body. Saville's work involves us in a play of identifying with such sadistic and masochistic pleasures by showing the body exposed to a surgical gaze in her paintings, a showing which invites us into a perverse identification with exhibitionist pleasure. She mentions the crowd of people watching this public dissection, not involved with the act itself but involved in a kind of surgical gaze. They are clearly enough involved in a forensic gaze, inspecting what is going on and what goes wrong in that place, with that man. And they are also and by that fact involved in a pornographic gaze, watching for the exposure of violence to that body, which usurps their imagination as spectators. The man being dissected in the centre also suggests a state of ecstasy playing the viewed object in such a spectacle. Jenny Saville's fascination with that image is that very ambiguous expression of ecstasy on the man's face, as if that expression were the result of opium or a masochistic pleasure he takes in being dissected or an exhibitionistic pleasure he takes in being watched, or an unknown combination of all of them. Saville imagines herself becoming one of the spectators watching this act of torture and the man who is tortured. Her imagined experiences of viewing this photograph supports Bennett's suggestion of viewing experiences in which neither the viewed object and the viewing subject are within fixed and impermeable boundaries. On the other hand, this reading exemplifies what Bennett suggests with regard to "gendered" gaze: 'It is clearly not the case that there is a single way of looking available to all men and to no women.' (Bennett, 1996, 315)

This plurality of viewing taking place in Saville's paintings, as in a painting done in 1999 titled *Matrix* (figure 30), exhibited in her solo exhibition *Territories* in the Gagosian Gallery, New York in 1999. This painting complicates the question of the gendered gaze as Saville refines her play of identifications. She changes her usual practice, working from photographic models. For *Matrix*, the model is Del LaGrace Volcano, 'the female to male gendered photographer formerly known as Delia Grace'.⁹ The interview Del LaGrace gives about the modelling experience for Saville is published as a part of the exhibition's catalogue.¹⁰ Peggy Phelan quotes from that interview:

⁹ Phelan, Peggy 'Survey', *Art and Feminism*, (London: Phaidon, 2000) 46. ¹⁰Del LaGrace, Volcano 'On Being a Jenny Saville Painting', in catalogue *Jenny Saville: Territories* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 1999).

'Jenny Saville paints women. I no longer identify as "woman" and feel uncomfortable being read as female...'. (Phelan, 2001, 46) Del LaGrace's concern voices a common reading of Saville's practice which nevertheless ought not to remain simplified as that. At this point, the stereotypical reading of Dumas as a black, male and gay artist may be recalled. The common and stereotypical reading "Jenny Saville paints women." points to the tendency of considering painting in terms of belonging or non-belonging to various points of origin, such as author, culture and genre. The reading that is constructed in this work of her pluralization of the viewing of painting through a play of identifications overcomes such a trap of reading.

Saville adds a new point to the play she participates in by involving herself in the issue of the identification of someone who has '...decided no longer to 'identify' as 'only female' which is not the same thing as having chosen to identify as a man...'. (Phelan, 2001, 46) Phelan's claim about the concern of Del LaGrace suggests another fixation of reading about Saville:

Saville's paintings inscribe her models into an economy we can call 'Saville's women' (quite often her models are her sisters or herself). But Saville's work is framed by the history of high art; her paintings refer to the gestures of the figure undertaken by artists from Gustave Courbet to Lucien Freud. As Johanna Burton has pointed out, the intertext of Saville's painting is Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*, 1886)...As Saville makes her bid to enter the pantheon of great figurative painters, she returns to Courbet's *Origin* and paints it again. But Saville, unlike Courbet, includes her model's face, and the catalogue of the show contains an interview about the model's experience of her performance. Saville's model, in short, is not art history's nude woman, but contemporary art's former woman. (Phelan, 2001, 46) (figure 31)

Saville may seem to inscribe her models into an economy called 'Saville's women'. However, her participation in a play of identifications retraced by the spectator in her paintings makes this economy less stable than 'Saville's women' sounds. Her work is framed by the history of high art, however reopenings in this framing and other framing(s) need to be taken into account. Phelan suggests a bit of this turn in the second part of the quotation. The inclusion of the model's face to the painting, unlike Courbet, and publishing a

catalogue in which her model discusses her experience suggests Saville's questioning approach to the institutionalized model and painter relationship in the history of nude painting. In *Matrix* Saville paints not only Del LaGrace's face and breaks a stabilized reading of the representation of cunt but also the line between the buttocks which informs us about a continuing gender transformation in body. Her quoted account suggests that s/he does not use her former name Delia Grace by the time s/he modelled for Saville. The line between the buttocks plays a critical role in *Matrix*. The placing and the posing of the figure seems to be arranged to enable the exposure of the line between the buttocks beyond the vaginal orifice rather than the vaginal orifice solely. This line which does not fit into the anatomy of female body shows the transformation of body which is in between. The model in so far as s/he is becoming a man is an unstable object of reference. This trick by Saville suggests that she passes beyond the categorization "Jenny Saville paints women." Phelan mentions this subtly in her reading as writing about the issue of 'contemporary art's former woman'. She wants to draw our attention to 'the gap between what is conceptually and technologically possible in regard to gender transformation.' (Phelan, 2001, 46) by giving an account of Del LaGrace's concerns. Saville goes beyond that categorization by painting the anatomically male line between the buttock in transformation, however her model is concerned by being painted by painter of women.

Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnees* may be taken as another possible intertext of *Matrix*, (figure 32) Like Duchamp, by placing the vaginal orifice in the foreground of the painting, Saville is interrupting the voyeuristic gaze through the "cunt", disappointing the monolithic male gaze Bennett mentions.

Another exposing portrayal of "cunt" appears in one of Saville's latest paintings exhibited in her recent solo show in the Gagosian Gallery, New York, *Migrants* in 2004, *Reflective Flesh* (2003). (figure 33) Linda Nochlin writes of this painting:

Here, through the magic of mirrors and multiplying of photographic images, the artist has created a nude that is at once aggressively sexual and physical, yet at the same time, unabashedly abstract. With its legs painfully splayed apart, the breasts and the gaping cunt front and center,

the head veiled in shadow, the great nude creates a powerful emotional and pictorial presence. (Nochlin, 2003)

Indeed this is a powerful painting. Reflecting mirrors make us lose the coincidence of painting with what is represented. Saville brings reflection close to figure painting them with similar degrees of finish encouraging us to forget where the reflection starts and where the flesh begins. Perhaps, there exists no flesh apart from the flesh of the texture between body and its apparent representation. *Reflective Flesh* points to the excess of the body in the image beyond its presumed boundaries, that interrupts the idea of arousal at taking possession of the real flesh, invoking the phantasm of possession that sustains the instituting of the nude as a genre. The issue of the excess of the body is strengthened with the pluralized viewing experience across the planes of reflections. Nochlin also points out that: 'The multiple reflections both add to the sexual impact, yet at the same time, fracture it, spread it out, splinter the initial sensual shock into multiple shards of visual experience.' (Nochlin, 2003) At the centre of the painting, it seems as if the model leans on and back from a mirror angled towards us. The appearance of the cunt is doubled, and an image which looks like the cunt in the picture mimicks the appearing of the cunt, exceeding the cunt as object or subject of vision and suggesting the im/possibility of the desire to make vision coincide with and become one with a cunt or to let vision be a cunt, absorbing everything into itself. The doubling of the cunts in the canvas distracts the voyeuristic looking oriented to the representation of the cunt. On the other hand, it may be also argued that this close doubling exposes the lesbian love making cliché of heterosexual porn.

Nochlin also indicates that Saville posed for the painting: 'Saville herself posed for the preliminary photographs for the painting. "What model would do it?" she asked half jokingly.' (Nochlin, 2003) Thus, in *Reflective Flesh*, it may be argued that an inevitable scenario of desire between the viewing subject and the viewed object that is shaped by plural ways of looking, making these available to women, orients itself in the complex of tendencies revolving around the subversion of object and subject, dispersing itself into fragmented reflections or orientations that may be read as traces of Saville's

play of identifications. Nochlin suggests that the cunt exposed in the painting is not hers but collected from *Vaginoplasty/Transexual Women's Resources* website:

Saville's brush dwells lovingly on the model's sex, which is richly slathered with subtly variegated pigments: velvety red, deep wine, paler moss rose color. One thinks of the inspiration provided by the colorful, detailed repertory of newly-constructed female sex-organs made available by the online *Vaginoplasty/Transexual Women's Resources* print-outs in the artist's collection. (Nochlin, 2003)

Her suggestion makes us think about the surgical gaze exhibiting newly constructed female sex organs invoked by Saville. On the other hand, the possible overlapping of Saville's posing body with the newly constructed sex organs is another critical case of Saville's disappearing into the figure of other woman. In *Reflective Flesh*, one of the points of overlapping retraced is the cunt, the organ of female sexuality, the organ of penetration and reproduction. Disappearing into the figure of the other woman in painting, Saville erodes the gap between herself as the viewing subject and the image of the other woman as the viewed object of desire. Dis/appearing into newly constructed female organs, Saville again creates a space where the reading of the gendered gaze as male does not work. This may be the suggestion of a pluralized female sexuality, or of an intensified desire for female sexuality. Nochlin remarks this when she writes 'Saville's brush dwells lovingly on the model's sex, which is richly slathered with subtly variegated pigments: velvety red, deep wine, paler moss rose color.'

Reflective Flesh relates itself to the pornographic in the different ways suggested above. However, Nochlin escapes from reading this painting in relation to pornography. 'It is Cezanne's bathers one thinks of in the presence of this image, not pornography.' (Nochlin, 2003) She seems to feel the need to state this before pointing out how Saville's brush's dwells lovingly on the model's sex. Here, Nochlin is trapped by a reading of pornography that sees it as the oppression of women. Bennett points to the limitations of this reading:

...Moreover, "gendered subjects" are not perfectly interpellated by representations. Therefore, it is not the case that a sexist system of representation empowers all men in the real world and oppresses all women. (Bennett, 1996, 315)

Saville too passes beyond those discussions around pornography. Exceeding a complex web of frames around female bodies, threatening the fixed boundaries between the viewing subject and viewed object of desire in a play of identifications, Saville's practice, her authorship, reopens the pornographic in various ways. She works on source images of herself and other women, of pain and violence. She dis/appears in those images through the opening up of a play of identifications between a surgical gaze, and a forensic gaze, returning us to a sense of the pornographic as that which would have everything revealed or remade for it. Between these, however, the pornographic is exposed as a certain fiction of possibility, as if the field of vision could be remade for it. She doesn't address a pornographic gaze above all others, as if it were the only issue in the representation of women. Rather she puts into play a de-sublimation of various painter's gazes, opening itself to a pornographic gaze as one among others. Saville does not want to hide her activities of viewing, letting them emerge from the 'traps' of vision that she paints, showing herself as if caught up in them. She seems to set those specific traps for the spectator, proposing a plurality of experiencing the paintings passing into each other. In her paintings, the machinery of frames does not work. She shows that "*there is no real body prior to its framing*" suggesting thus that:

'Art is thus implicated not in the cover-up, in the objectification and transformation into art of the body; art is implicated in the production of corporeal reality...'. (Bennett, 1996, 254)

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to explore a play of identifications at work in and across paintings by Marlene Dumas and Jenny Saville, where a play of identifications at work offers a plurality in experiencing painting.

Jill Bennett's account of art as a production of corporeal reality may better be thought as a generation of corporeal realities. Art generates corporeal realities across a problematization of a complex web of interrelations between various elements of framing. Dissolution of frame(s) between subject and object allow for generative readings.

The pluralization of corporeal realities suggests both a plurality of modes of participation for artists and a plurality of modes of participation for spectators in retracing these modes of participation across works of art. This idea of generation works against expressionistic models of art which understand a play of identifications offered by a picture as only an expression of a play of identifications that is taking place in or as an artist's psyche. However, this play is not just an expression of that psyche but an exploration, by means of the work of painting, that moves around colour and line, works with and against source images, of various kinds, including sometimes other paintings. The materials of painting, in this case, should be understood as being greater than paint and support, taking into consideration other images, various photographic and illustrative images as well as images picked up across a not yet closed history of art. This exploration takes place in a plurality of modes of participation of the artist and regenerates itself because there is not an expressivist relation between painting and psyche - rather the work of painting is to explore what may occur when the materials of painting are varied, working with and against each other.

Expressionistic models of art turn around the painter as the whole and integrated subject of his or her art and work and as a reaffirmation of the sublimation of the painter's gazes if read as an expression of artist's psyche. Particularly in the cases of Marlene Dumas and Jenny Saville, however, by

participating in a play of identifications the artist already de-sublimates any single gaze of the painter opening themselves to a variety of modes of looking including voyeuristic, surgical and forensic gazes and tending to expose the viewing of images cited by means of playing at being trapped in those gazes in their paintings. These allow spectators to retrace such a play of identification. Such a process of retracing encourages a plurality of experiencing the picture, finds its way across our viewing.

Marlene Dumas cites a variety of sources in her paintings that encourages a plurality in the experiencing of painting. For example, she chooses a pose from this variety of images and paints different paintings of that pose in a non-linear way, from painting to painting and from different serial existences of those paintings. She enables spectators to read that pose according to different scenarios of pornographic/erotic performance in each different painting. Dumas resists being read across discourses of belonging to and not belonging to. We can read her approach against being reduced to single terms of identity in a web of her diverse associations, her diverse 'bank' of images involving newspaper photographs, family photographs, photographs from hetero and homo sex magazines in favour of art as a generative event.

For Jenny Saville, this exploration finds its way in her subversion of subject and object, a sense of her disappearing in figures of other women across the surgical and the forensic and a pornographic gaze which is implicated in the play between the surgical and the forensic. She paints a new flesh resisting the desires of these gazes which want to see their object of desire in flesh as flesh there in pictorial space. Loss of connections among passages of her paintings encourages a generation of corporeal realities in such a reading of a play of identifications invoked in her paintings.

The affinity between painting and the pornographic has been read as a play of identifications, because in such an exploration by the artists of the materials of painting the moment of revelation which is soon understood to be fake is diversified in other directions. The idea of revelation suggests an ocular desire for the pornographic. However, the way the painters play with the pornographic in their paintings enable spectators to pass beyond a fixation of ocular desire for the pornographic as a dispersal of their fixation in a mode of pluralized participation with painting.

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APPENDIX A
FIGURES

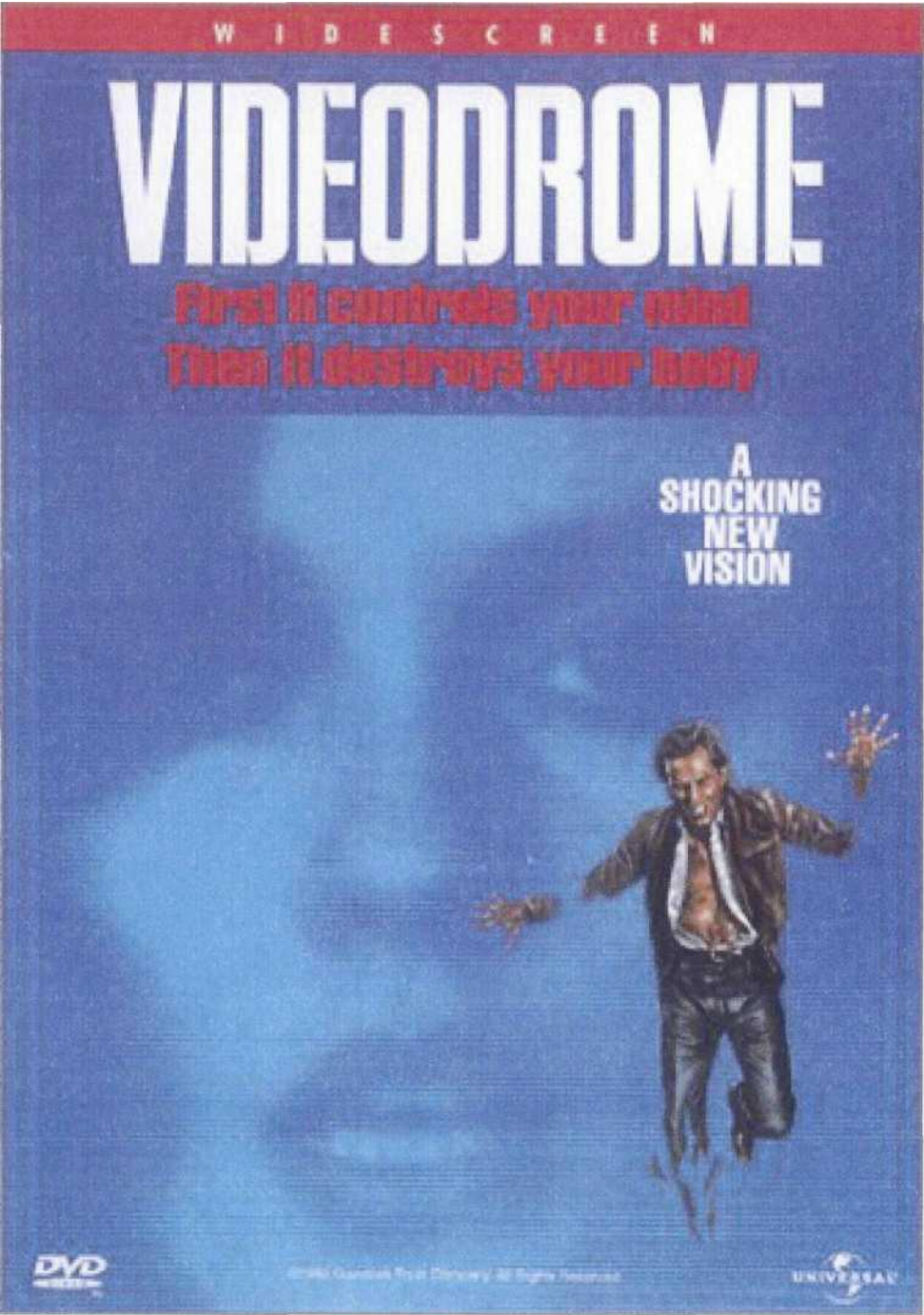


figure 1

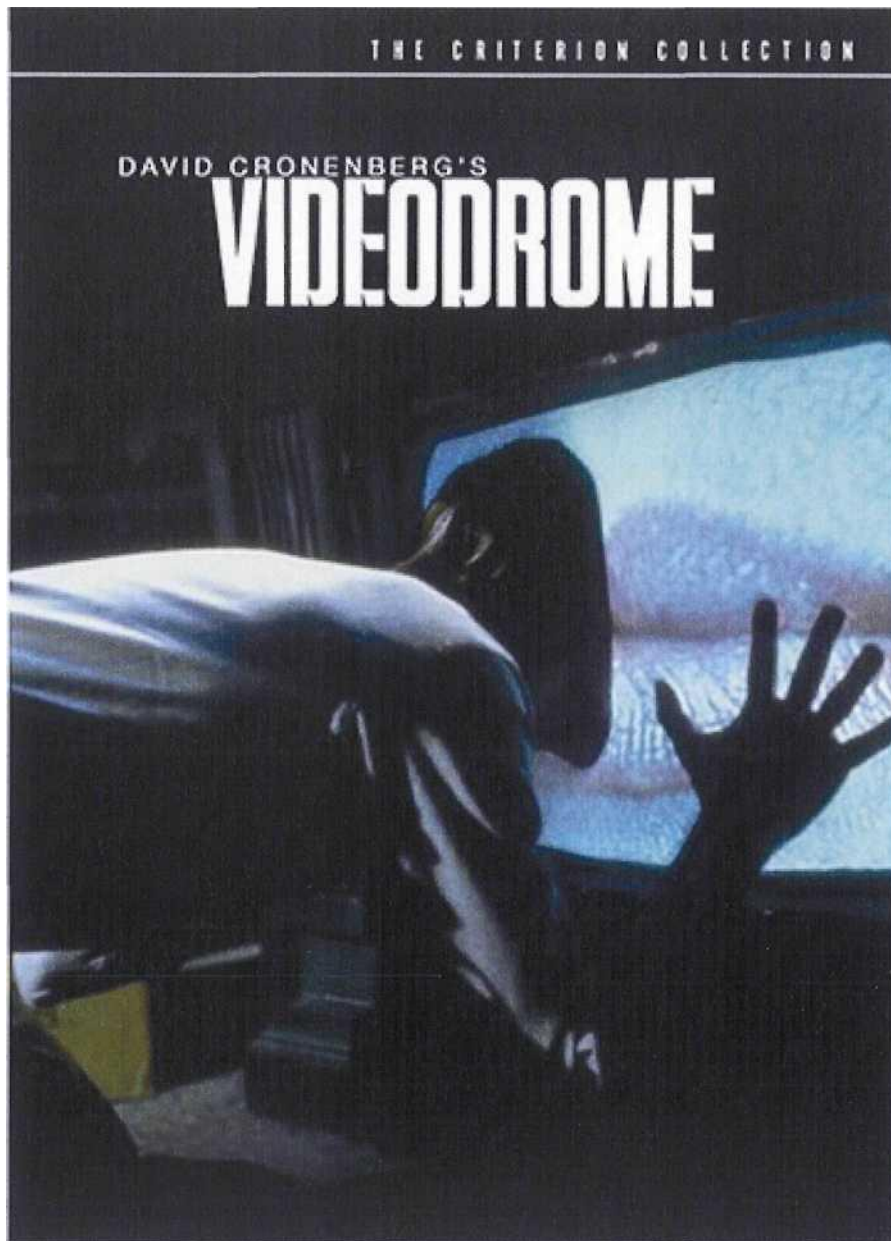


figure 2

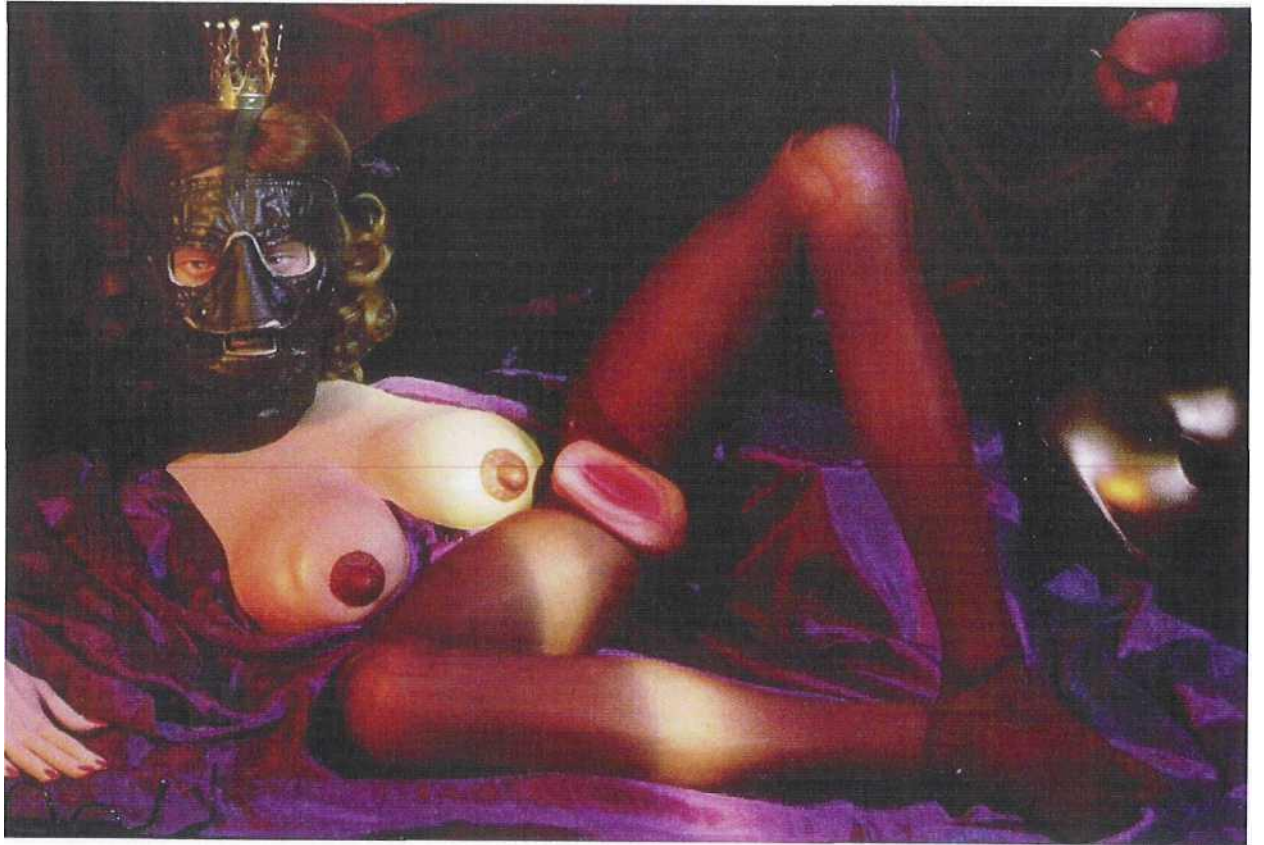


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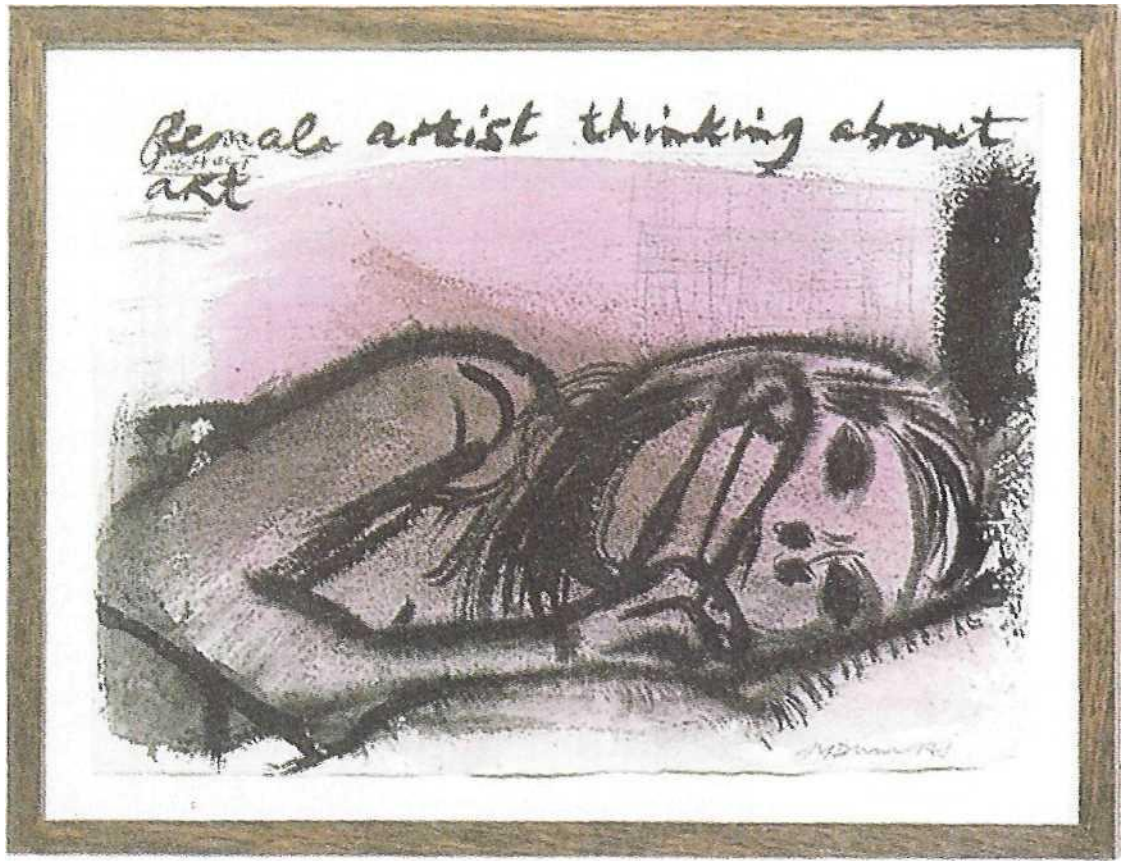


figure 4



figure 5



figure 6



figure 7



Marlene Dumas *Dont Ask.
Dont Tell*, 2001 Oil on
canvas 80 x 70 cm (31.5 x
27.56 in)

figure 8



figure 9



figure 10

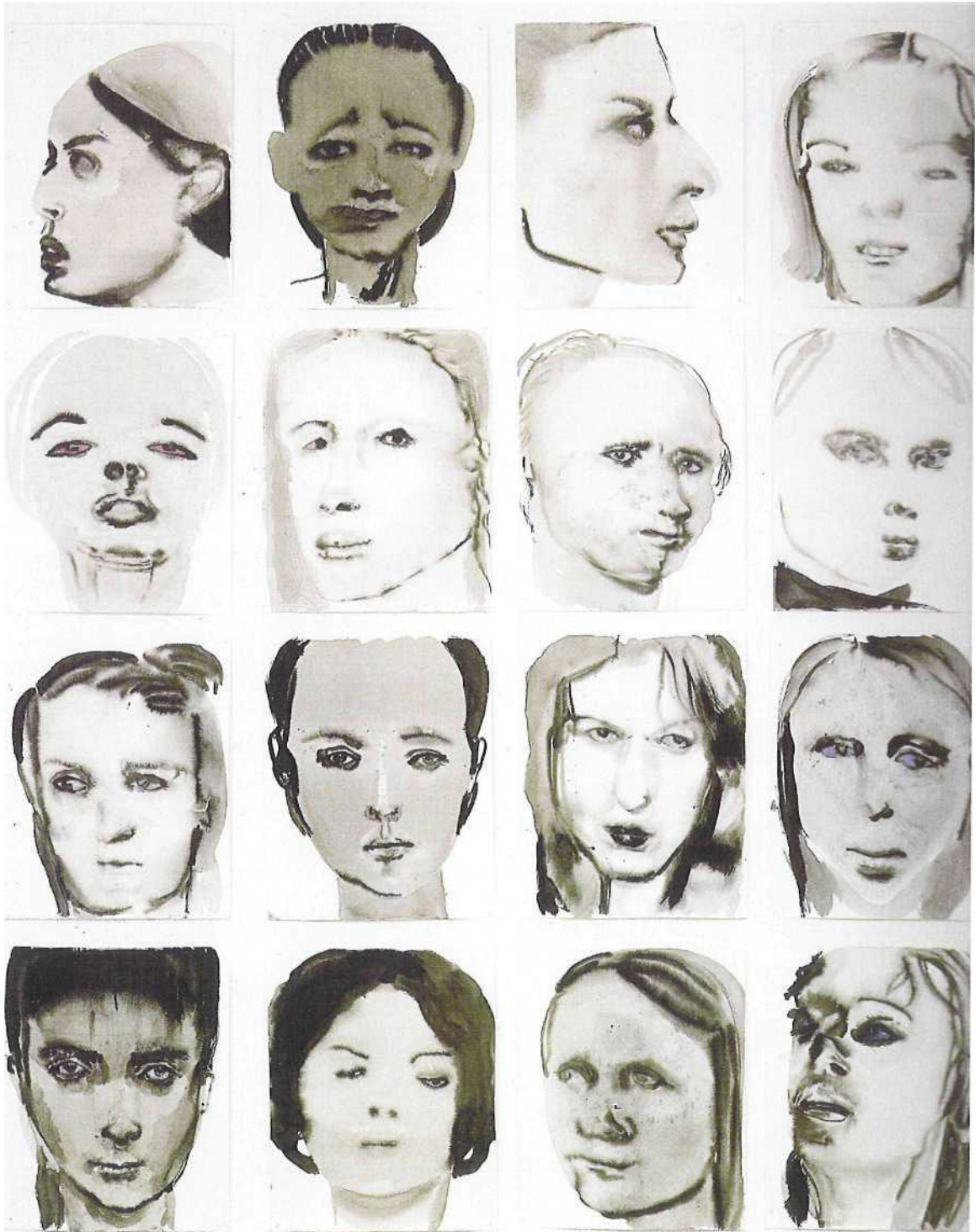


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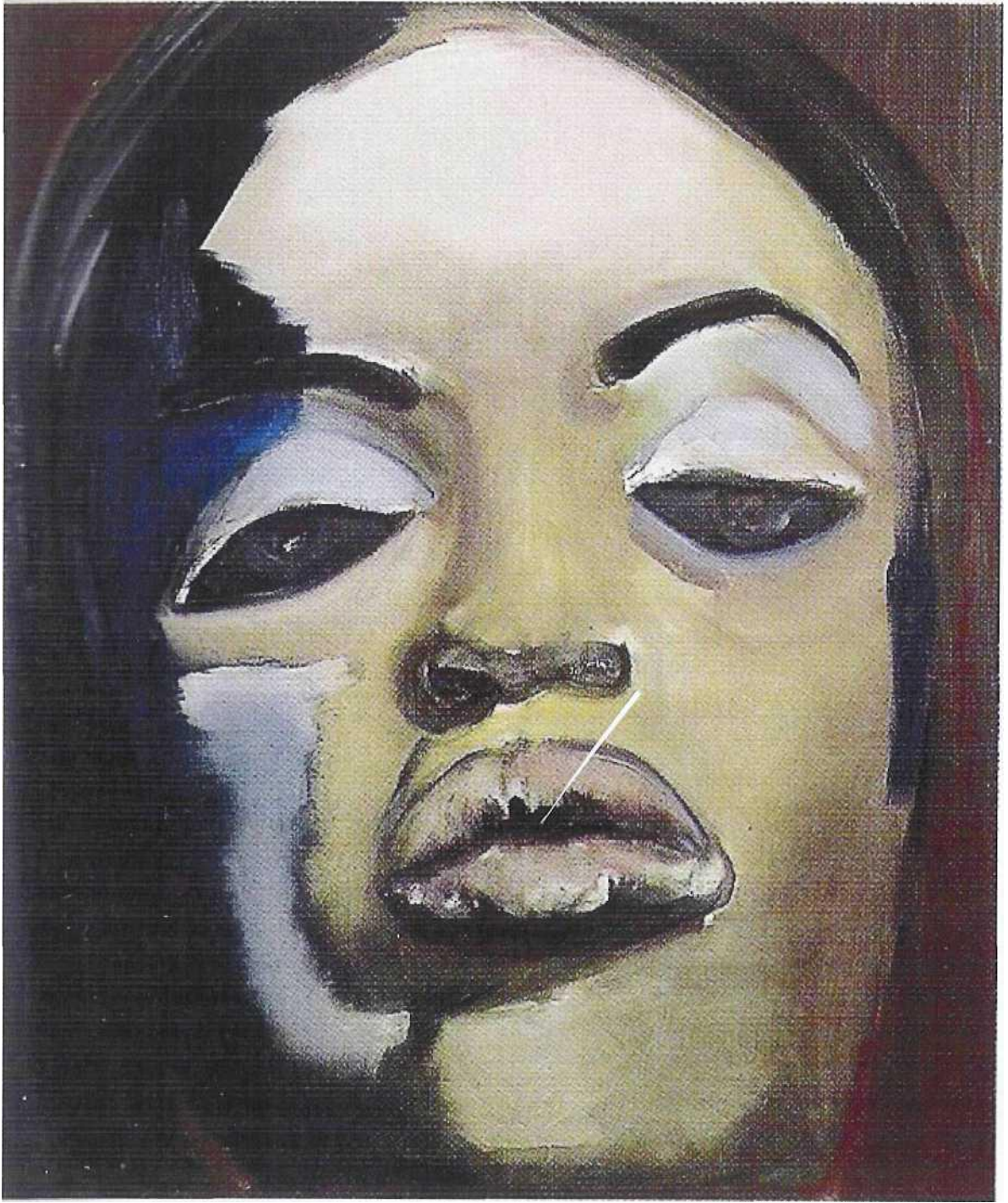


figure 12

figure 14



figure 13





figure 15



figure 16

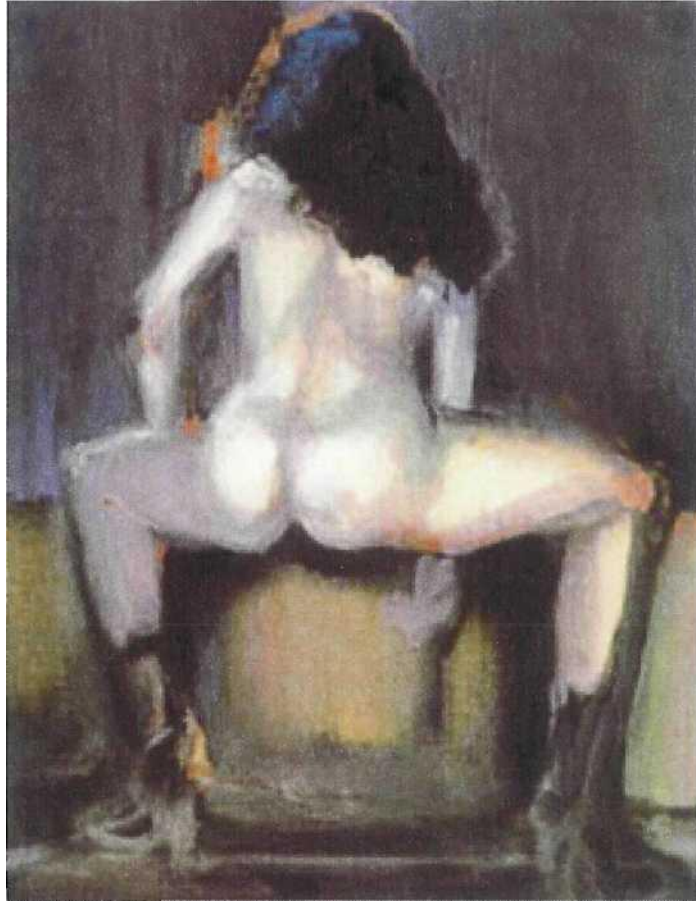


figure 17



figure 18



figure 19



figure 20



figure 21

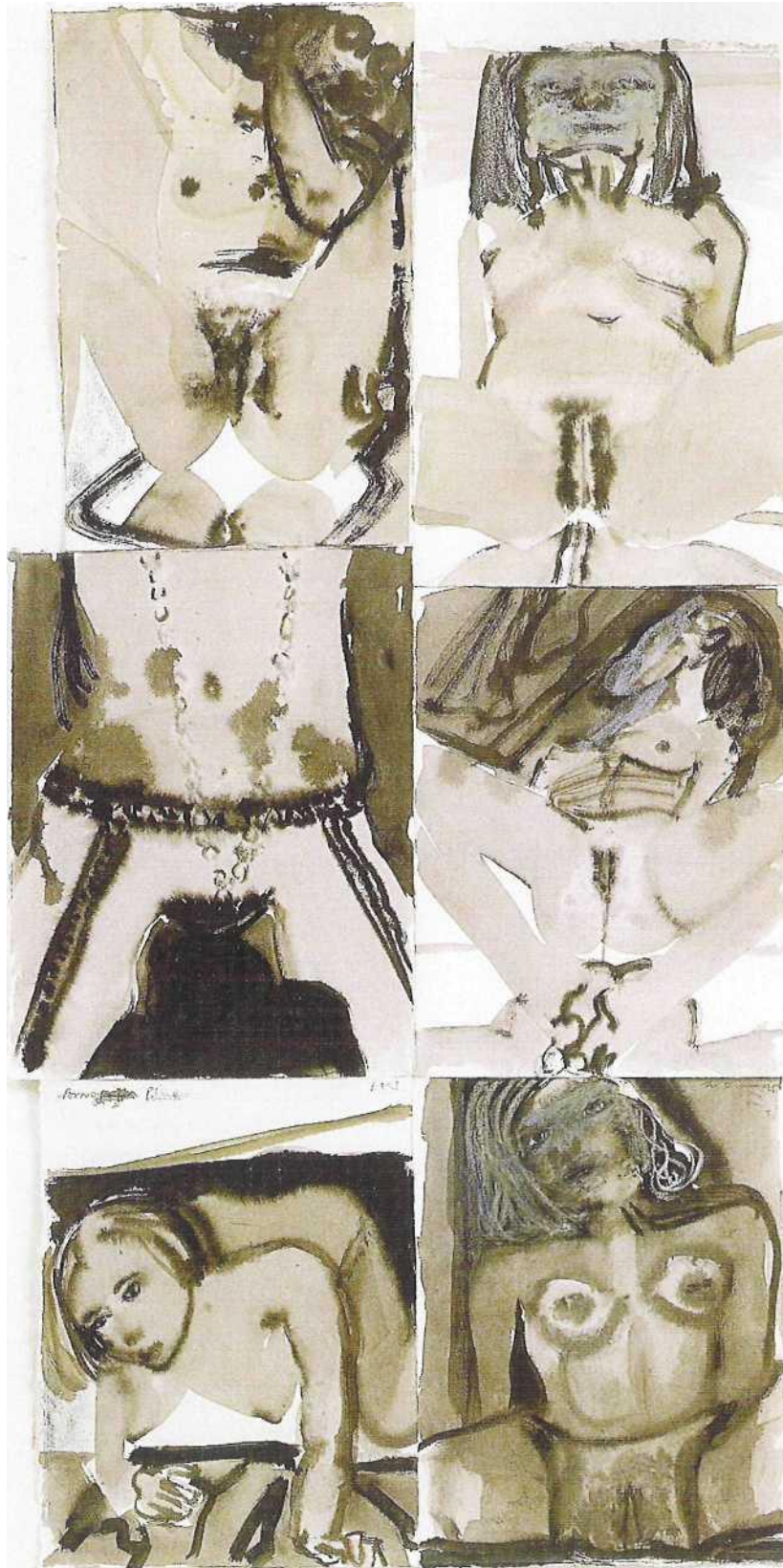


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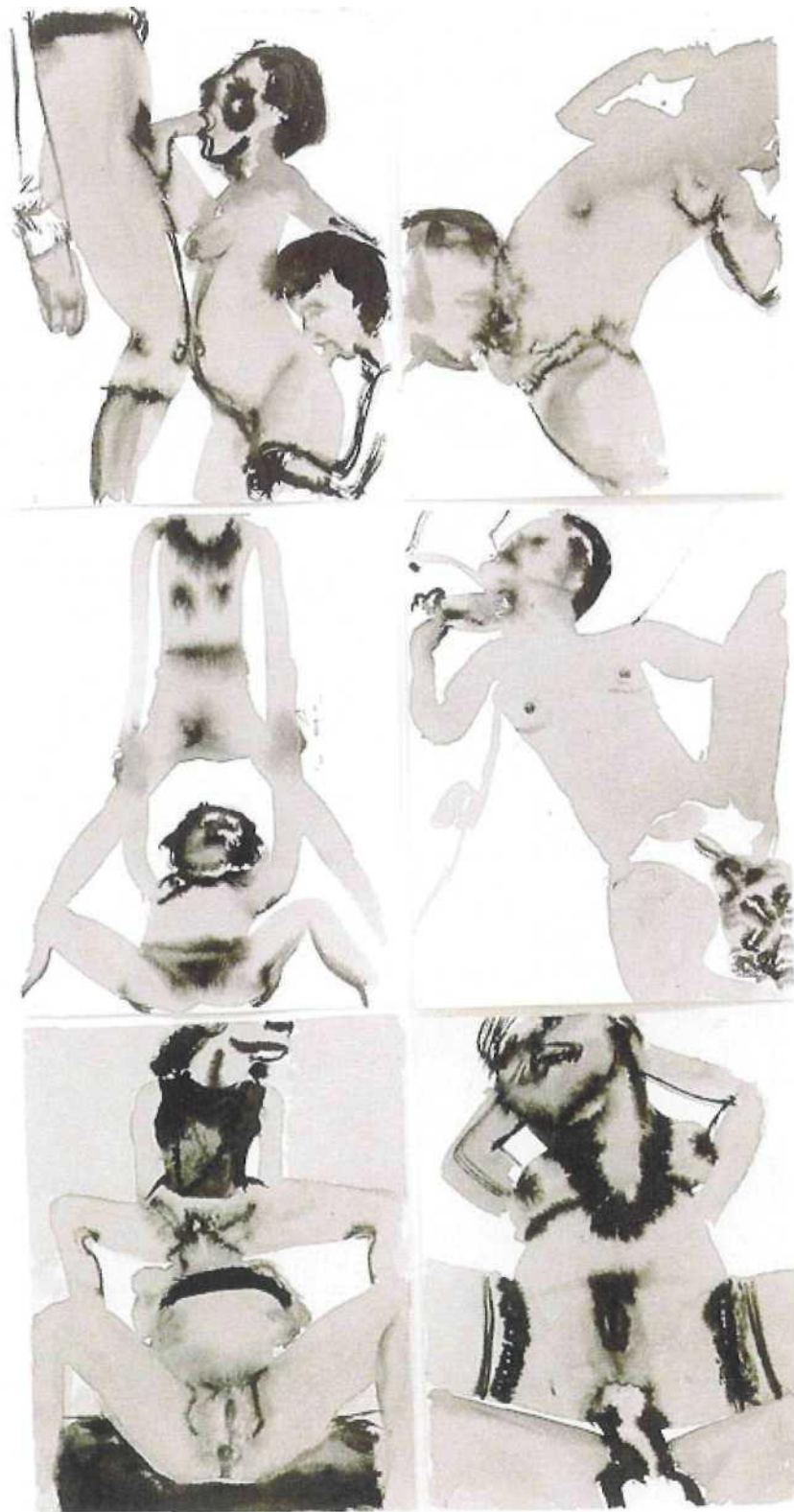


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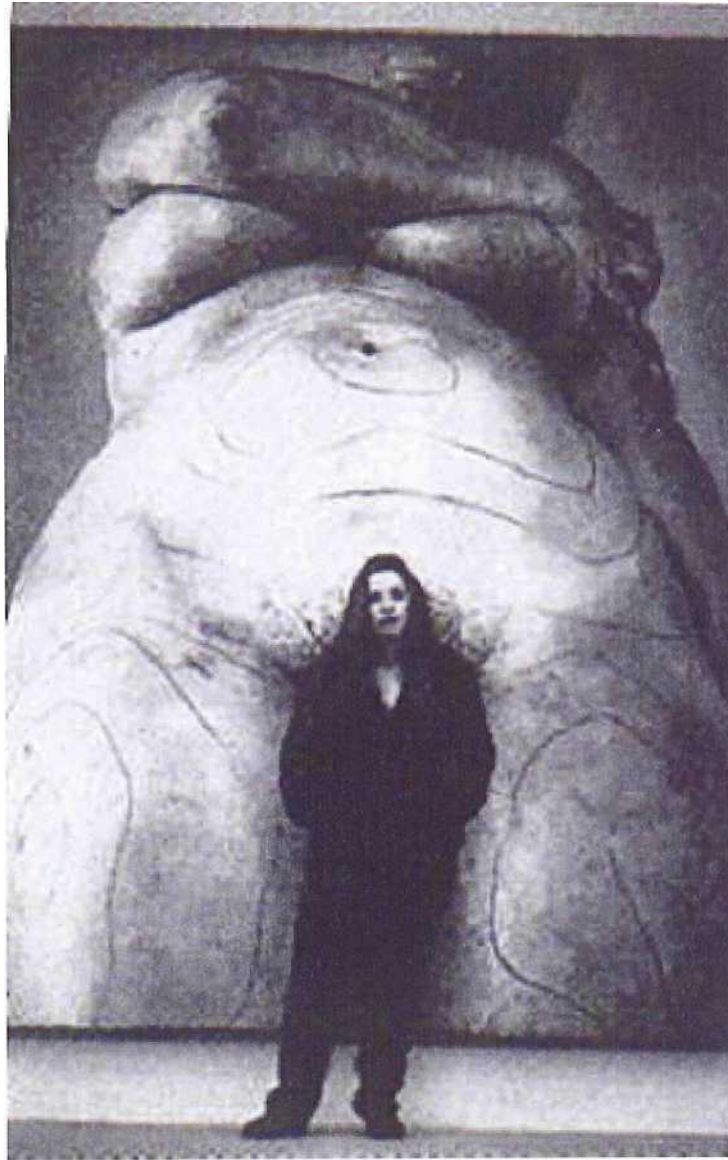


figure 24

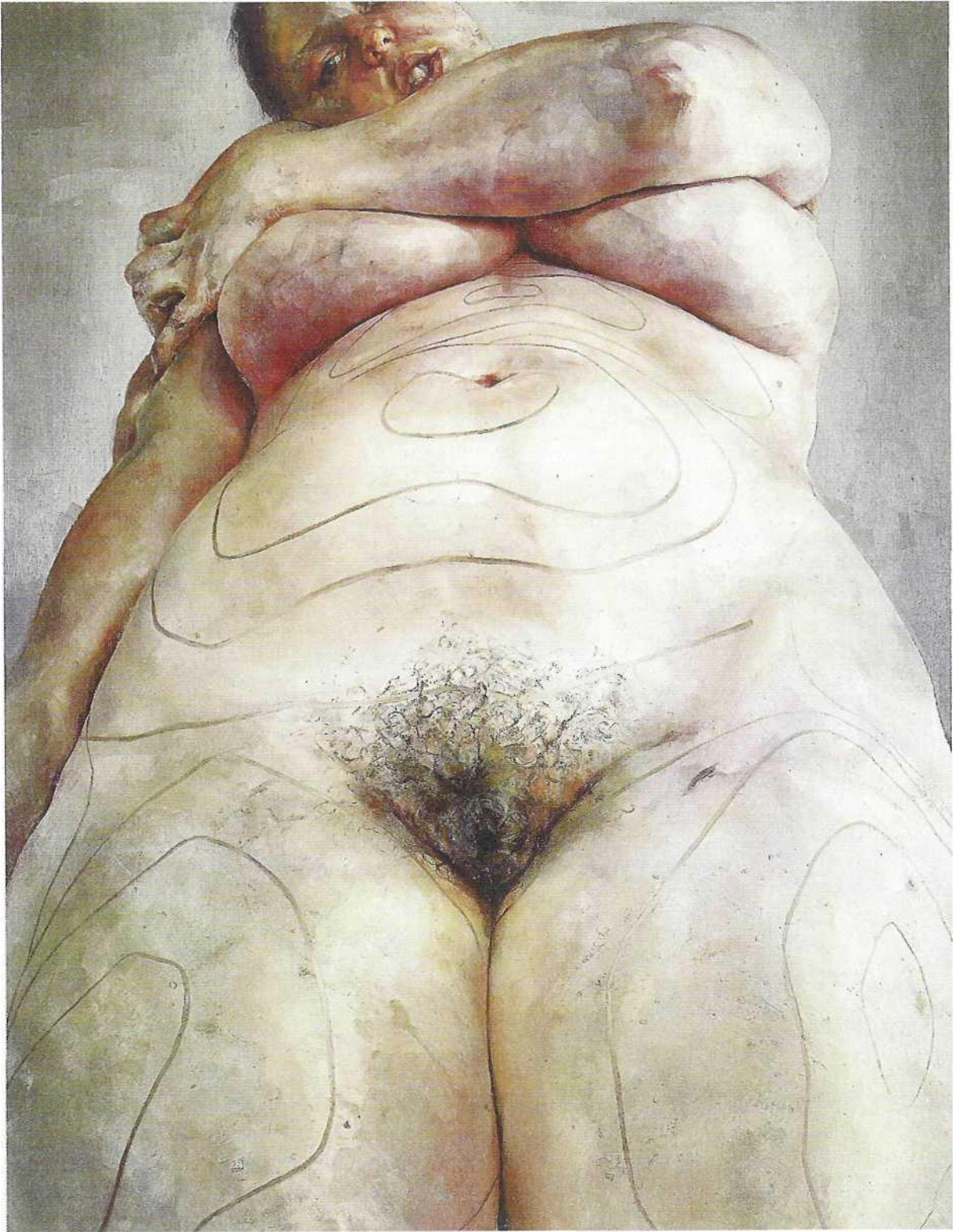


figure 25



figure 26

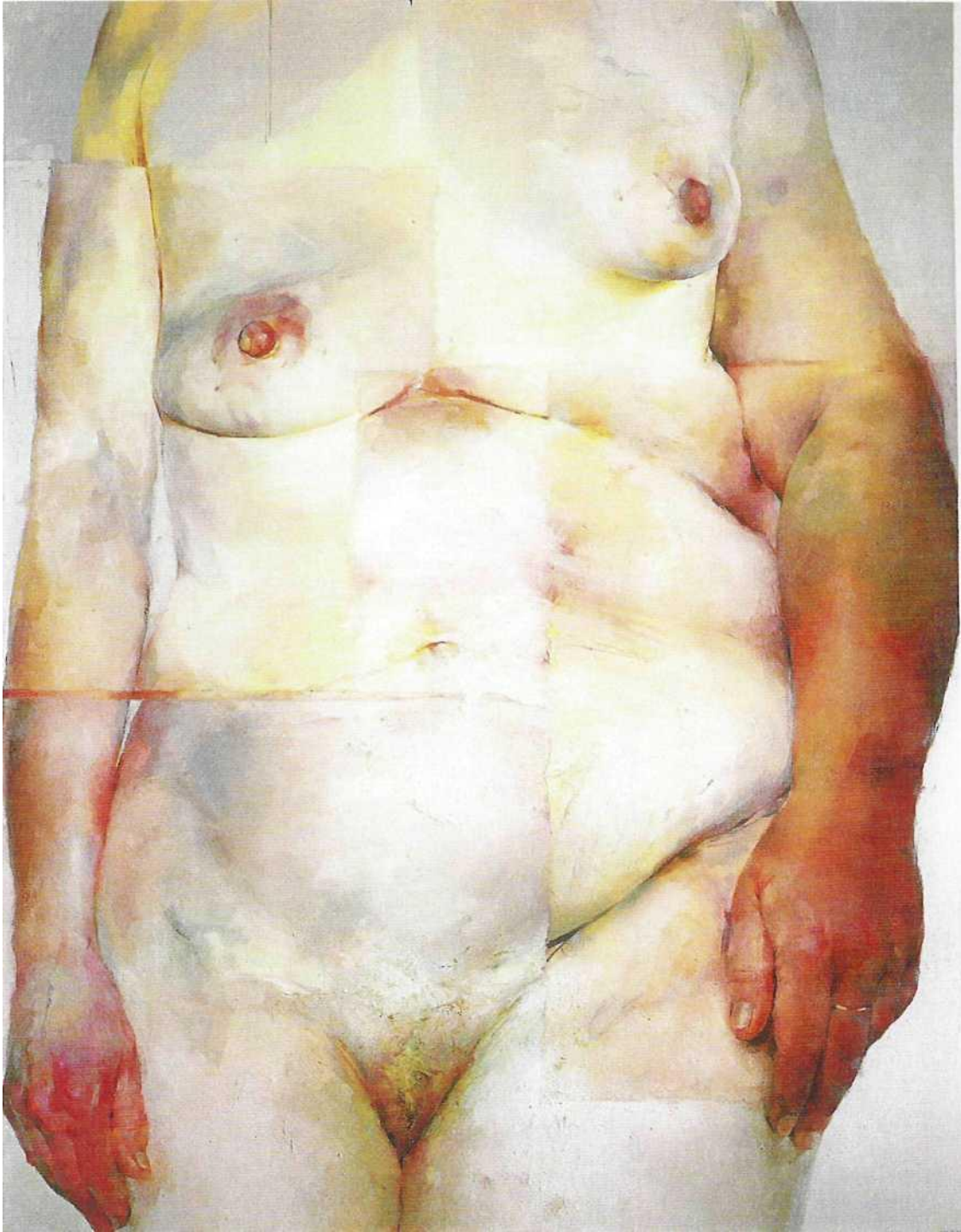


figure 27



figure 28



figure 29



JENNY SAVILLE *Matrix*, 1999 Oil on canvas, 84 x 120 in (213.4 x 304.8 cm)

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

figure 30

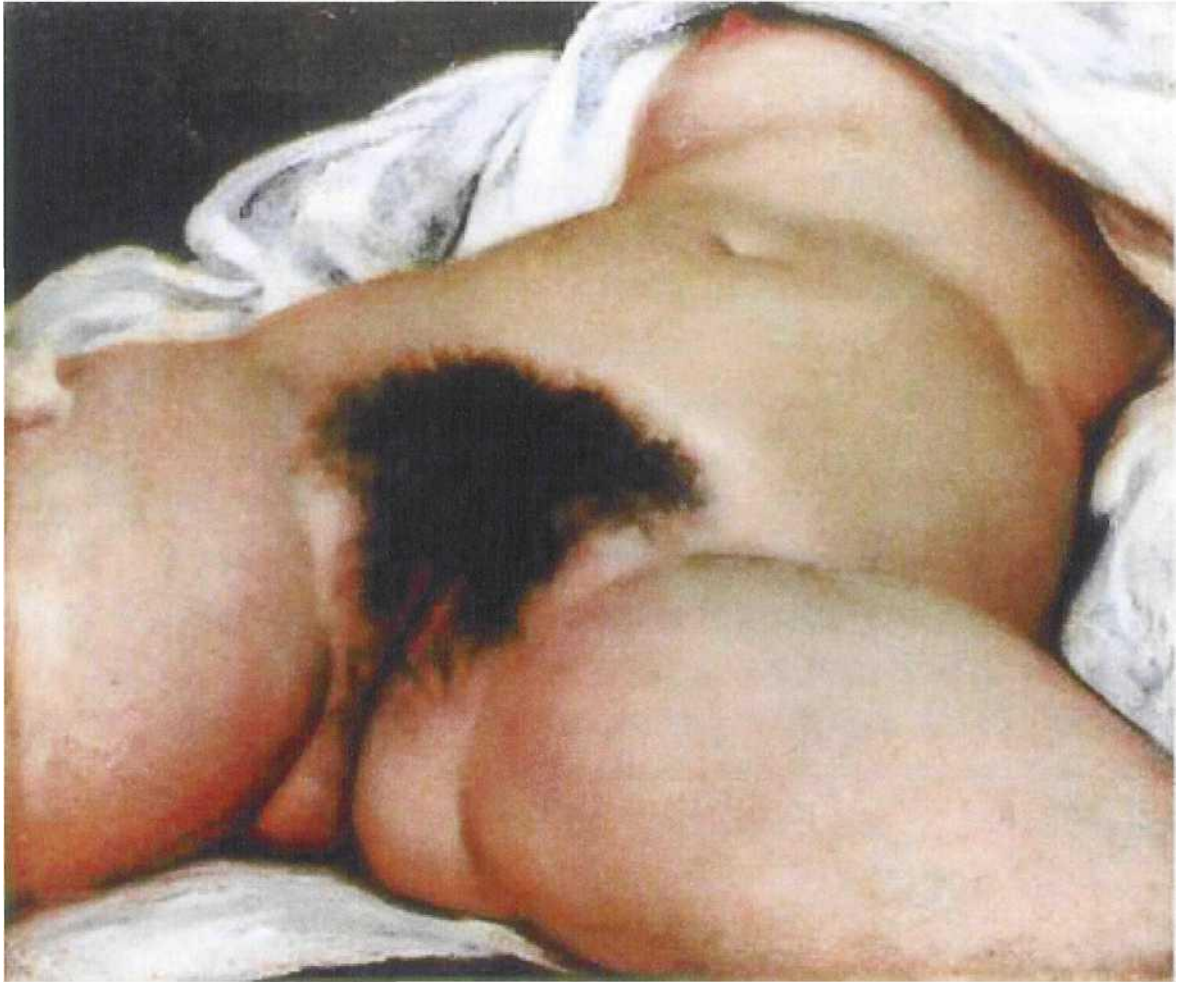
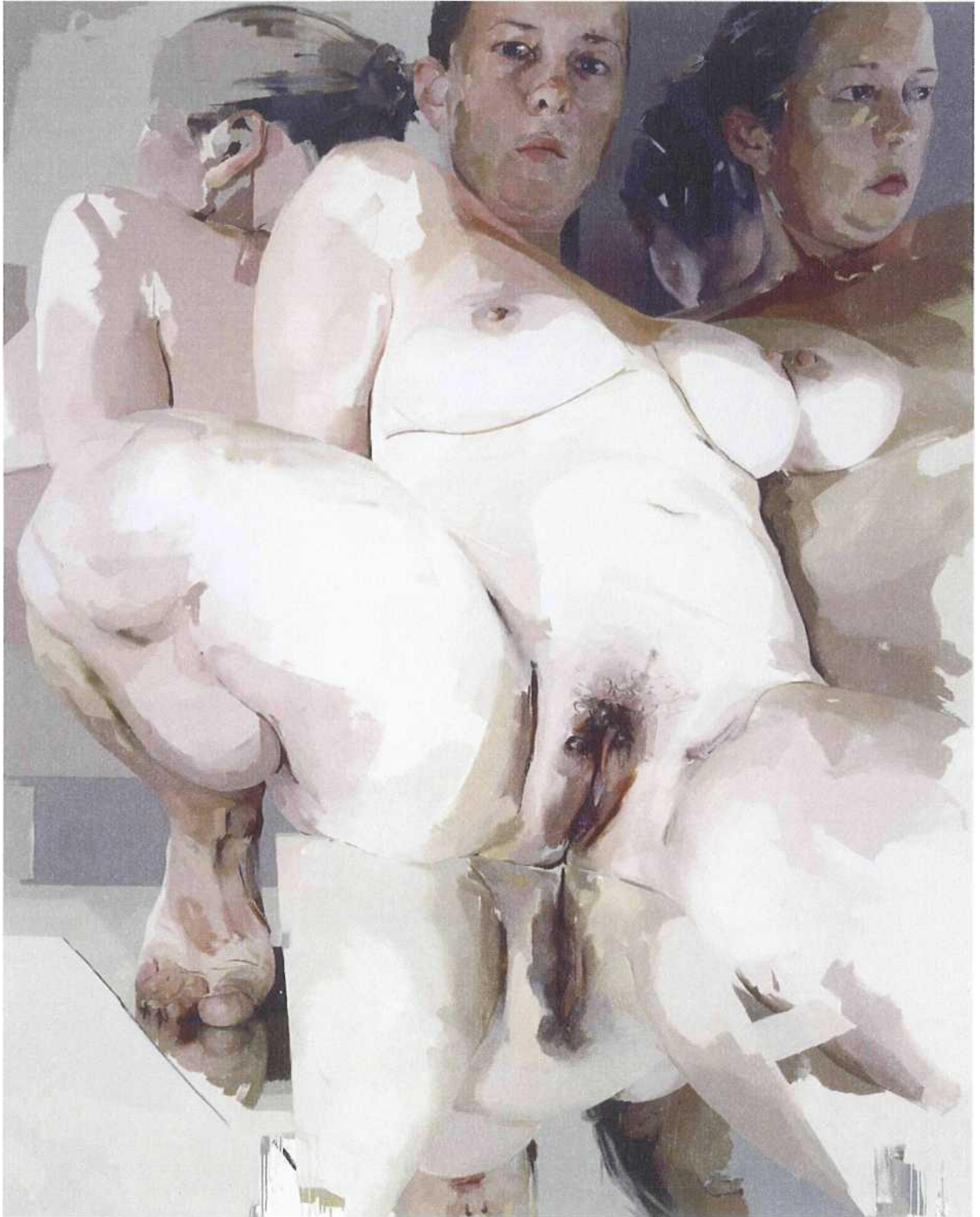


figure 31



figure 32



JENNY SAVILLE *Reflective Flesh*, 2002-3 Oil on canvas 120
1/8 x 96 1/16 x 3 6/8 in (305.2 x 244.2 x 9.6 cm) SAVIL 2003.0005

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

figure 33