

DUAL CITIZENSHIP

By

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Submitted to Institute of Social Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Sabancı University
December 2018

DUAL CITIZENSHIP

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DATE OF APPROVAL: 17.12.2018

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ABSTRACT

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DENİZ EZGİ SÜREK

M.A Thesis, December 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Hüseyin Selçuk Artut

Keywords: grotesque, body, landscape, fantastic, uncanny

This text intends to analyze the exhibition called “Dual Citizenship” and cannot be considered independently. In the first chapter, my personal reasons to create this project will be explained along with Susan Sontag’s ideas about the illness. Throughout the text, my own output will be observed within the “grotesque body” notion that was reinterpreted by Mikhail Bakhtin; given that my work consists of images of reconstructed bodies that might be called as “grotesque” in terms of incompleteness. Furthermore, the attitude on the representation of the body in contemporary art will be discussed to be able to link their approach with my output. Along with some artists, Hans Bellmer and Asger Carlsen will be indicated exclusively since their work consist photographs of reconstructed bodies which are quite similar to what I do.

While analyzing the bodies in my output, I will also clarify my intention to produce photographs that seem like paintings and the function of using landscapes in my work. There will be built associations with the landscapes of mine and Hieronymus Bosch’s the Garden of Earthly Delights in terms of their forms. The last chapter will be about the “uncanny” notion because of its relation with reconstructed bodies and fantastic places.

ÖZET

ÇİFTE VATANDAŞLIK

DENİZ EZGİ SÜREK

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Aralık 2018

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Hüseyin Selçuk Artut

Anahtar Kelimeler: grotesk, beden, manzara, fantastik, tekinsiz

Bu metin “Çifte Vatandaşlık” isimli sergiyi analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır ve sergiden bağımsız ele alınmamalıdır. İlk bölümde bu projeyi üretmekteki kişisel sebeplerim Susan Sontag’ın hastalık ile ilgili düşünceleri ile birlikte ele alınacaktır. Projemdeki imajlarda yeniden inşa edilmiş ve grotesk olarak adlandırılabilen bedenler görüldüğü için, üretimim Mikhail Bakhtin’ın grotesk beden yorumlamasıyla birlikte işlenecektir. Ek olarak, çağdaş sanatta bedenin yeniden temsiline olan yaklaşım incelenecelik, böylece çağdaş sanatçılara tavır açısından benzerlikler kurulacaktır. Bu sanatçılara ek olarak Hans Bellmer ve Asger Carlsen fotoğraflarının içeriği sebebiyle (yeniden inşa edilmiş bedenler) ayrı bir bölümde daha detaylı inceleneciktir. Projemde yer alan bedenlerin yanında, neden resimsel fotoğraflar ürettiğim ve arka plan olarak manzara kullandığım netleştirilecektir. Bununla birlikte projemdeki manzaralar ile Hieronymus Bosch’un “Garden of Earthly Delights” eseri arasında biçimsel açıdan benzerlikler inceleneciktir. Son bölümün konusu ise yeniden inşa edilmiş bedenler ve fantastik mekanlarla olan ilişkisi sebebiyle tekinsizlik kavramı üzerinedir.

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1. THE BODY

1.1. Extraordinary Bodies

“As for the exposure and rearing of children, let there be a law that no deformed child shall live.”

Aristotle, The Politics

The body as a notion is a substantial part of my output, and how the body is represented or positioned plays a part for the composition I created. Our body is one and only possession that we can really own. It is not something one can buy or exchange, it is not something can be switched. Our body is the interface with the world, the line between us and outside. The reason the body is the main subject of my work is that I spent time to think about my body and the body as a notion. It is possible to evaluate an animal to check whether it is healthy by checking its teeth or fur. If it is not healthy enough, then it is useless and worthless for people. I have the same fear of being worthless because of my flaws or incompetence that would be the reason for being alone. Since my childhood, I constantly have the same nightmare: losing my teeth or hair.

In her book, called “Illness as Metaphor”, Susan Sontag describes illness as: “Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place” (Sontag 2002).

This description of Sontag influenced me a lot, because even though people who have no disability, illness or flaw at all, will have one eventually. So, even though it is certain that every human being will be faced to be ill or disable at some point in their lives, a disabled body still is the reason for further attention or repulsion.

People may have curiosity towards others who have different visible physical conditions and this is usually not in the form of compassion. This curiosity towards “freaks” certainly does not contain a compliment. This kind of cruelty may stem from having the comfort of being complete and ordinary compared to another human being with a disability. Such a feeling may be compared to being a survivor of a natural disaster which may have killed many others. To confront a lack on somebody makes one feel complete, strong. That is why the curiosity towards extraordinary bodies can be reasonable. Being marginalized because of the damage on one’s body does not have a resemblance to racial or gender marginalization since disabled people do not have common cultural heritage or same experience (Garland-Thomson 2017). The only practice that is shared is being stigmatized. The daily experience or struggle of a deaf and blind person is completely different besides the estimation against them. Such that, the stigmatization against extraordinary bodies was encouraged by laws in the 1880s (Garland-Thomson 2017).

“Any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, or an improper person to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares, or public places in this city, shall not therein or thereon expose himself to public view, under the penalty of a fine of \$1 (about \$20 today) for each offense (Chicago City Code 1881)” (Schweik 2009).

So, it can be deduced that people cannot stand to see extraordinary bodies as equals and part of the society; but they are amazed by them in shows, books or movies as fictional characters. In other words, extraordinary bodies are acceptable on the occasion of being objects, not subjects. The exhibition called “Dual Citizenship” consists of two large landscapes that are full of extraordinary, reconstructed bodies and decontextualized objects in unreal places. I do not claim that my output is totally about extraordinary or disabled bodies. The bodies that I create in my work are a caricatured, exaggerated way of illustrating what is extraordinary. The compositions can be read as a community of flawed, ill bodies that are living in harmony in unreal places. Because of the peaceful feeling and the harmony between the items in the compositions, they are closer to a utopia compared to a dystopia.

1.2. A Discussion on Boundaries of the Body

The bodies and their representation are the main issues in my output because I have a special interest in exploring various body anomalies or disabilities. This stems from my own medical background as I was born with three kidneys and three bladders which is a relatively common medical condition. However, one of my bladders was inside another one instead of being connected to one of my kidneys, and in turn, this led to the decay of my third kidney. This was not a very common occurrence in medicine. After the necessary surgery and follow up treatments when I was an infant, I was completely healed and this medical condition does not affect my life in any way today. However; having had this kind of an unusual body anomaly makes me think about the variations of the human body and their repercussions in life. Without necessary medical intervention, my chances of survival would not be great.

In this chapter, I would like to discuss some notions that can be associated with the bodies in my work. My approach to the body as a changeable, reorganized form led me to Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque body. In his book called "Rabelais and His World", Bakhtin states that the grotesque imagery differs from the realistic images in terms of the transition of the body to the external world (Bakhtin 2009). Bakhtin explains the notion of "grotesque" from another perspective. In common, the "grotesque" means exaggerating the body and mixing human forms with animal forms such as illustrating Napoleon with a huge nose or inserting a pig's nose on the face of a human. Bakhtin believes that animalistic forms can be used for grotesque images, however, he also argues that the "grotesque" should explore what is beyond the confines of the body. "The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes, like the eyes of stutterer in the scene described earlier. It is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside" (Bakhtin 2009).

What makes Bakhtin's definition of "grotesque" distinguishing is that the body is always in transition. "it is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin 2009). According to Bakhtin, protruding eyes are an example of a body that forces its limits. In addition, acts such as eating, drinking, defecation, sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing, copulation, pregnancy,

dismemberment, and giving birth happen around the boundaries of our body (Bakhtin 2009).

The reason for embracing Bakhtin's definition of grotesque is that his definition is related to rebuilding the body and suspending the boundaries of the body. This attitude is something that associates contemporary approaches on the body such as hybridity. Another relative notion to the bodies in my project is hybrid. In biology, the meaning of hybrid is "the offspring of two plants or animals of different species or varieties, such as mule" (Oxford Dictionaries). But this notion may be used in any discipline, meaning the mixture of two different elements. Therefore, it is used for the mixture of people, cultures, traditions, languages, even tools. Hybridity is something that is not pure. Resembling Bakhtin's grotesque definition, hybridity is also about the ambiguity of the boundaries and categorization. "A "hybrid genre" is first of all an oxymoron, insofar as hybrid genres are actually anti-genres, defying categorical definition" (Kapchan & Strong 1999). The bodies in my output are mostly mixtures of different bodies. Even in the occasion of being a differently composed version of a single body, recomposing the body can be called as hybridity because of challenging the boundaries and pureness. All in all, the bodies in my output can be defined as grotesque and hybrid, because they have an impression of forcing the boundaries of the body, and they do not belong in any ordination.

While Bakhtin's grotesque definition and hybridity can be used for the past, the present and the future; some notions as cyborg cannot be related with the past. In her essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto", Donna Haraway defines cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Bell & Kennedy 2007). Cyborg is designated as a mixture of machine and organism: "Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs-creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted" (Bell & Kennedy 2007). I do not intend to associate cyborg with my output. Although it is a notion that creates ambiguity around the boundaries of the body because of the hybridity, it is also associated with machines. I would like my work to make an impression on the audience that the compositions may belong to medieval times.

Another aspect I would like to emphasize is the absence of sexual elements in my work. I do not show sexual organs or body parts posed in a sexually suggestive manner in my compositions. Sex organs are quite powerful in terms of getting one's attention, therefore,

they may alter the focus of the spectator. In turn, this may change the intended purpose of the work. Rather, I only wish to draw all the attention to the new form of the body. For the same reason, I do not wish to show their faces. The face is one of the most distinguishing parts of our body for the identification. I intend the bodies in my composition remain as anonymous. When my output meets the audience, they absolutely cannot tell whom the bodies belong to because they do not have faces. However, the audience usually seems sure about the sex of the bodies. Half of the time, they are wrong about their estimation. But, still, I cannot abjure that there are signifiers in my composition to assume the sex. It is possible to assume the sex of the bodies, that is why calling them androgynous would be assertive. My intention is just to hide their sexes to create a convenient space for estimations and fluidity between sexes.

1.3. Selected Examples of the Body in Contemporary Art

The representation of the body has evolved from being flawless to being vulnerable notably after the 1970s. While the body in art was something depicted in canvas before modernism, after post-modernism, the body itself became the canvas. Instead of depicting the body solid and strong as a rock, it became familiar to portray the body with its flaws and deficiencies. A parallelism can be drawn between identity politics and the change of representing the body in visual arts. Such that, the term “identity politics” is first used by Anspach in 1979 to refer to “activism by people with disabilities to transform both self and societal conceptions of people with disabilities” (Tully 2005). Things that had been considered as flaws in the last century (such as ethnicity or disability) become a part of identity for the last decades. Today, the term is used in social sciences to describe multiculturalism, the women’s movement, civil rights, lesbian and gay movements and so on (Tully 2005). Therefore, there has been a change in representing the body both contextually and in a stylistic manner. In this chapter, selected artists that have a contemporary attitude on the body will be touched on.

The output of Rineke Dijkstra consists of the portraits of women who have recently given birth to their first child. In the frames, there are women naked, looking toward us while carrying their babies. It is possible to notice their surgical wounds or traces, also the expression on their faces. This work of Dijkstra is interpreted as capturing moments of vulnerability by authors (Cotton 2016). But how can an action that is extremely natural

and common make someone look vulnerable? Is it because revealing all dirty details and showing the pure truth? Apparently, to uncloak all hidden details and veracity makes the body look unguarded. At this point, I intend the bodies in my output seem powerful and dominant despite their flaws or extraordinary aspect.

Artists usually use their own body because it is more easy to access and morally proper to abuse their own body. One of the artists who use their own body as an object while performing is Kira O' Reilly. In 2002, she first taped herself to make grids and made small cuts into these grids. After removing the tape, there were patterned small cuts bleeding. This self-destructing action is interpreted as a metaphor for tenderness and disclosure (Oreilly 2015). From my view, the most extreme example of using the body as an object is Marina Abramovic's performance called "Rhythm 0" that is occurred in 1974 (Sapere 2017). She declared that during her performance which takes six hours, the audience is allowed to do anything they want to her body by using seventy-two objects she placed in the gallery. She labeled her as an object and took full responsibility for any harm. There were both harmless and injurious objects such as feathers, flowers, and knife, razor blades, a loaded gun. It is unbelievable how people can harm another if it is allowed to do it: During that six hours, people cut her clothes, cut her neck with a blazer and drank her blood, even make her point the loaded gun to herself (Sapere 2017). This performance of Abramovic is more like a social experiment that is too heavy and intense. The reason for my indication about this and similar works is to be able to illustrate how damaging the body in behalf of art is normalized for the 21st century.

Another example of extreme performance art is the work of Stelarc. One of the works of Stelarc called Exoskeleton consists of a machine that Stelarc used as an external organ. The machine looks like a six-legged spider and where body of spider positions, there was Stelarc, controlling the legs. The machine is particularly constructed for the work of Stelarc and it does not only move forward or backward but also squat and lift. The thing that has to be focused is that after the penetration of Stelarc and the machine, they completely unite regard to its capability of moving. It cannot be said that one of them is other one's addition. So the function of the machine is not to assist the main body; it becomes the body itself. While by this work, his work can be considered as a cyborg according to the definition of Haraway's, he also creates grotesque elements by using his own body. While "Exoskeleton" is a representation of the human-machine collaboration in the context of the hybrid body, Stelarc also has a work that is called "Ear on Arm"

which might be called a human-human combination. He had an actual ear that was grown from his own cells medically implanted into his arm. In addition to having an ear on his arm, Stelarc also wanted the ear to hear and record everything and then to share the recording on the internet. Whether his goal was accomplished or not, just implanting an ear on his body by choice was a remarkable example of using the body in performance arts. Because it is an extraordinary way to re-determine the boundaries of the body. It is way more different to have an implant for an amputated leg. Using an implant for an amputated leg or expanding the body through exercising (bodybuilding) can be considered as changing the boundaries of the body. But in such cases, a leg is still used for walking and it is located in where legs have to be in terms of biology. However, in Stelarc's case, there is a third ear in his body and it is located in his arm. This is not an example of expanding but an example of changing the rules.

Orlan's work should also be mentioned here as she relates her work to her body. The most remarkable works of Orlan were her surgical performances where she repeatedly altered her appearance. Between 1990 and 1995, she went through nine plastic surgeries to imitate powerful faces of Western art, such as Mona Lisa (Jeffries 2009). She questions the meaning of the female body in society. Even though her performances are considered to be about identity and related social issues, she manages to compare the sense of beauty between different eras by imitating their looks through having many plastic surgeries. To make irreversible interventions on one's body on behalf of the perception of beauty in art is one of the extreme examples of using the body as an object.

A contemporary artist, Patricia Piccinini's seemingly organic and monstrous sculptures also have an influence on my output. Piccinini creates sculptures of abnormal creatures and she places them next to ordinary looking human sculptures in harmony as if they belong together. She makes these creatures ordinary and even pleasant. In such an era where technology and scientific developments determine the position of humankind against nature, her output makes one think about the relationship between nature, science, and humanity. In other words, humankind has more opportunity than yesterday to be able to interfere the living beings. One of her works called "The Rookie" is related to the hybridity in contemporary life and outcomes of genetic engineering. In her statement about her work "The Rookie", she says "It reflects on the emergence into the world of new creatures such as the Chinese micropigs. For \$2000, consumers can purchase the world's first genetically customized pet" (Piccinini 2015). Chinese genetics company

BGI announced in 2015 that they would sell micropigs (Doug Bolton @DougieBolton 2015). She made a sculpture which looks like a micropig in a caricatured way. “What makes this particular organism uniquely adapted to its’ environment is its’ attractiveness to humans” (Piccinini 2015). So the continuousness of its kind depends on its cuteness and vulnerability.

Elly Strik’s work does not bear a resemblance to the other works that are indicated above. Her output does not represent the body as vulnerable or another aspect connected to an anomaly, it is more about femininity. I am passionate about her works because they reflect what is organic, primitive and shamanic effortlessly. Her work consists of pencil drawings that are representations of fur or hair. In that sense, they also remind Patricia Piccinini’s pencil drawings. In Piccinini’s drawing “Mother with hummingbirds” (Fig.1), two birds are building a nest inside of a pubic hair of a woman. In spite of femininity is not a concept of my work, anything about fur or hair will always take my attention and participate in my output.



Fig. 1
Patricia Piccinini, *Mother with Hummingbirds*, 2007
Drawing in black pencil, 45 x 55 cm



Fig. 2
Elly Strik, *The Bride Fertilized by Herself part 6 of 8*, 2007-2008
Graphite, oil and lacquer on paper, 48x32 cm
Collection Antoine de Galbert, Paris

Jake and Dinos Chapman's works are also connected to the context of what concerns me for two reasons. One of them is their approach to the body: The series called "Zygotic Acceleration, Biogenetic, De-Sublimated Libidinal Model" consists of bodies that seem as Siamese twins. Although these bodies have a sexual aspect, such as usage of a penis instead of a nose, their hybridity draws parallelism with my output. Secondly, they create dark scenes in a glass bell that includes many three-dimensional figures. In a way, they produce their own Bosch-like landscape on a three-dimensional surface. "Unhappy Feet" (Fig. 3) is a mixed- media work which is simply a scene that shows what could happen if penguins and polar bears would live in the same land. The result is full of violence and chaos. What fascinates me in this work is the crowd and chaos in the composition. The piece is like a mini sculpture with countless figures and details, as a model of a game.

Marc Quinn, a contemporary artist has a project that is based on alterations on the body. The project contains sculptures of four androgynous bodies among others. One of the works called "Thomas Beatie" is a depiction of a masculine person who is pregnant. Another piece called "Buck& Allanah" (Fig. 4) is a sculpture of two people holding each other's hand: a masculine body with a vagina and a feminine body with a penis. As Mark Quinn states in his website, the aim of this project is to depict people who want to possess their biological identities and alter their bodies with surgeries (marcquinn.com). With "Buck& Allanah", Quinn describes two people who want to transform their sexual identity through surgery. So, the artist captures a moment from the transformation of these bodies. This project is related to my project because Marc Quinn's sculptures are about the transformation of the body. In terms of re-determining the boundaries of the body and replacing organs, there might be drawn a parallel between my output and his sculptures. The selected examples in this chapter show how it is ordinary after the 1970s to depict the human body as vulnerable, hybrid or defected and how it is reasonable to harm one's body on behalf of art. The representation of the bodies in my composition is not a unique approach, but a reflection of the era that I live in.



Fig. 3
Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Unhappy Feet*, 2010, Detail
Fibreglass, plastic, and mixed media in steel vitrine
216x 171x 171 cm



Fig. 4
Marc Quinn, *Buck & Allanah*, 2009
Sculpture, Orbital sanded and flap wheeled lacquered bronze
167x 105x 45 cm

1.4. Reconstructed Bodies in Photography: Asger Carlsen and Hans Bellmer

“The body is comparable to a sentence that invites us to disarticulate it, so that, through a series of endless anagrams, its true contents may be recomposed.”

Hans Bellmer, Anatomy of the Image

While the representation of the body in contemporary art has been discussed in the previous chapter, I would like to focus on two artists whose photographic works include re-constructed bodies. As Hans Bellmer states above, a sentence, a composition even the body can be re-composed. I chose specifically these two artists who recompose the body through photography because there are considerable similarities between their work and my work.

Asger Carlsen is an emerging artist who has been world-wide known for a couple of years. He produces mostly black and white photographs using an on-camera flash (Larsson 2011) and his images contain bizarre organic forms that evoke the human body. He takes photos of nude bodies of various models and combines them into a single body form. The bodies appear highly realistic because of his aesthetic approach and manipulating skills. In an interview in Vice magazine, he describes his works as: “I don’t want my pictures to look like diseases from the 1700s. The true challenge is finding the balance between fiction and reality to create something so subtle it almost feels real” (Larsson 2011).

As he uses on-camera flash and the locations in the images seem so random, the images do not give an impression of a staged photograph. Carlsen worked as a crime photographer for ten years and presumably, his artistic style has been affected by his previous profession. The locations he shoots in seem to be randomly and on a daily-basis selected to the extent that some of the figures are located in front of an empty wall like a sculpture. Or sometimes he places the body forms on a table or a chair as if the body is a living being. “I like it when my work looks low tech because it makes the images look more interesting or weird or real. I don’t get anything out of looking at a perfectly shot image. I’m tired of photography. There’s so much of it, it’s so exhausting. I much prefer creating images and doing what I want with the medium as Man Ray did” (Larsson 2011). While some of his works look like manipulated versions of a family album, he also has

raunchy, harsh images in his portfolio such as those in his mutual project with Roger Ballen. All in all, Carlsen's earlier works (the bodies that resemble sculptures) are the reason for me to know his output.

It is quite possible to draw a parallelism between Carlsen's and Hans Bellmer's works since they both create photographs of reconstructed bodies. Even if their time period, artistic aim and the production process are completely different, the outcome has commonalities. Hans Bellmer was most probably one of the artists who have a significant influence on Asger Carlsen.

Hans Bellmer lived in the 1930s, in Germany, where the body is considered to be solid and ideal. It may be quite a revolutionist to represent the body as Bellmer did. According to Therese Lichtenstein, Bellmer's work was a response to the rise of fascism in Germany. It was a big deal to be able to produce a work that breaks stereotypes in the 1930s Germany. "Bellmer's works are a violent attack on the stereotypes of normalcy evident in Nazi art and culture. They rebel against images of the ideal female Aryan body found in Nazi high art and mass culture" (Lichtenstein 2001).

All the re-constructed bodies in Bellmer's photographs are dolls that are female and nude. In his production process, first, he constructed his dolls by using materials such as plaster, wood and metal and glue. Then he took photographs of those dolls, instead of exhibiting them as a sculpture. This specific choice of objects points at two important concepts and issues articulated in his works, namely, gender and sexuality. It has been interpreted that his adolescent girls are related to themes such as death, mourning, nostalgia, and melancholia (Lichtenstein 2001). Some of his photographs look like a crime scene: a naked, physically exposed and re-constructed female body in a forest like a victim, an uncanny scene in every respect. The reason that Bellmer's work is interpreted to be so powerful is that it has so many layers to be read: his output is linked to subjectivity and psychoanalysis theories that were contemporary for his era (Lichtenstein 2001).

Besides photographs, Bellmer's output also consists gouache drawings of adolescent girls in various compositions. On the contrary of what I would like to achieve in my project, Bellmer's work is obsessively sexual. His pencil drawing, "Hands of a Budding Minx" is completely about "the pleasures of masturbation and clitoral stimulation" (Webb & Short 1985). His dolls are also being related to Freud's "Castration anxiety" (Freud 1919) as we can deduct from the many amputations in his images. The images of dolls that are amputated and naked are surrounded by fetish objects such as high heel shoes. Such that, the images cause a provocative gaze of viewers.

One of the things I admire in both of these artists' works is that they use hybrid forms grandiosely. For Bellmer's work, maybe it would not be correct to attribute a wooden leg that is attached to an organic body as a hybrid form. But for Carlsen's work, it is possible to see creatures that are a mixture of human and animal. While sexuality is a major part of Bellmer's dolls, Carlsen's output does not have a sexual aspect, even if it is possible to see genital organs in it. For me, the mutual aspects between Bellmer's and Carlsen's works are that both their reconstructed bodies resemble sculptures. Also, some of the interior locations they choose bear a resemblance.

In my output, both the bodies and the locations are extraordinary or unreal, so that the fauna and the flora are coherent. I consciously abstained from locating the bodies in my photographs in a human-made place. Because that way, the bodies would seem like another human-made object, as a sculpture. Since I try not to marginalize these bodies, I did not include any ordinary human body in my frames.



Fig. 5
Hans Bellmer, *La Poupee*, 1935

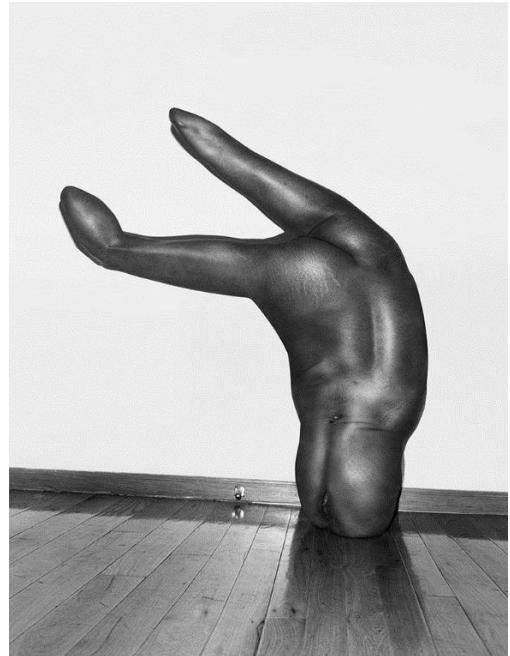


Fig. 6
Asger Carlsen

2. THE LANDSCAPE

2.1. A Photograph as a Painting

“In a strict sense photography can never be abstract, for the camera is incapable of synthetic integration”

Ansel Adams

One of the issues that ought to be discussed my output is that the compositions in my project remind of paintings. In this chapter, I focus on why I make painterly photographs instead of produce paintings. The debate between painting and photography has been an issue since the beginning of photography but is a less discussed subject nowadays. However, it would be appropriate to argue it here to clarify my intention. My simplistic wish is to create photographic scenes that look like paintings; thus, the audience may need more time to observe the details in the composition. Either because the production process of photography is shorter than painting today or producing photograph is more achievable, the number of photographs we are faced with every day is much more than paintings. That of and the role of the advertising sector in producing countless photographs is undeniable, surely. For that reason, it is reasonable not to spend more time than a second per photograph to be able to see more of them.

My aim is to produce an output that cannot be switched in seconds. Both the composition itself and the exhibition order serve this aim. By printing the work on a lightbox in a dark room, and printing it on large scale, I wish to draw the entire attention of the audience to the work alone. Also, the production process took remarkable time like a painting, since all the photographs in the collage have been taken by me in different places. I cannot claim that I used photography instead of painting for an artistic reason. I use it because it is the only medium that I use comfortably.

It has been observed more than once that photography has been embraced by art galleries as an equal to painting and sculpture. However, it would be appropriate to recognize its growth and gain of its own aura, in this section. There are photographs that resemble paintings as well as paintings that are hyper-realistic. While photography has managed to

gain an artistic aspect besides its documenting function, painting has managed to accomplish the most important thing that pertains to photography: extremely realistic images.

In his article called “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Walter Benjamin describes a term, “aura”, to depict the uniqueness of an art piece (Benjamin 2009). According to Benjamin, works of art have always been reproduced. If one can create something, someone else can produce it. To be more clear, a copy of a painting can be produced by another person. But it was a breakthrough in the 1900s to be able to reproduce countless copies of a work with the feasibility of photography. The deficiency of this production process is a lack of uniqueness. In other words, the authenticity of the original is built upon presence and witness. By “presence”, it is implied that if one wanted to see a Caravaggio painting, then it had to be seen at a significant place, such as a church, not anywhere else. The work of art did not come to one’s house and that was one of the reasons that build the aura. What I deduced from “witnessing the history” is the marks on the work that cannot be imitated. Architectural works are more convenient to explain the idea. For instance, because of the usage of the horse-drawn vehicle for years, the marble stones became worn down at the entrance door of Hagia Sophia. Even if an exact replica of Hagia Sophia is built, these hollows would not be the same because of the experience factor.

Considering aura via “presence” and “witnessing”, photography has disadvantages because of its nature. It is possible to create countless photographs that are exactly the same today. In this case, there has to be a disparate kind of originality. This is the reason for setting a number for copies while selling it so as not to reduce the value of the work. Setting a number of edition is a solution that makes the piece valuable for collectors. Even though my output resembles a painting in its manner, it will not be unique unless I interfere in the print, such as painting above it. This is why I do not pretend that my output has an aura as a painting. Still, I aim to create an atmosphere for the exhibition to be able to gain a different kind of aura.

To capture a moment is the nature of photography either the moment is staged or not. Whether the photography represents truth is another topic that has been discussed through years. Even if photographs do not mirror the authenticity, every image can be used for perceiving the attitude of an era. In Peter Burke’s book “Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence”, the main concern is to consider images as historical evidence accompanied the written history (Burke 2001). While some images as

illustrations of daily life can be reliable evidence, even misrepresentations may explain the concept of the period. “...the process of distortion is itself evidence of phenomena that many historians want to study: mentalities, ideologies, and identities” (Burke 2001). Even the form and color of the photograph can affect the impression about the reality: Sarah Graham-Brown exemplifies as while soft sepia tones of print can create a calm aura that represents the nostalgic past, contrast black and white prints can build the sense of pure reality (Burke 2001).

It is known that even the photographs which have the mission to reflect the pure truth – as a documentary- may be staged. To take an example, a photograph of Alexander Gardner “A Harvest of Death” reflects the American Civil War and even it seems like a document, it is completely staged by living soldiers pretended to be dead for the camera (Burke 2001). It is less likely to present such a scene as a documentary today, but there are still altered photographs as a documentary. Some of the documentary photographs that stamped as altered have just stylistic manipulations which are acceptable for me. For instance, the photograph that Paul Hansen took at 2012 in Gaza City won the most prestigious photojournalism award, World Press Photo in 2013. After that, Hansen was accused of manipulation. What Hansen did was to change the light and color to create a better frame and World Press Photo confirmed the integrity of the image file (2013). To quote my viewpoint, there is nothing wrong with creating a beautiful, aesthetically fulfilled photograph and it should not be accused of manipulation since the change he made did not affect the context. But, on the other hand, it feels uncomfortable to look at a beautiful image that is full of pain and dead bodies and it is challenging to assume where manipulation starts and ends. I am aware that when the camera pointed to someone, from then on that person is an object for the photographer. But objectification becomes disturbing when it comes to harsh images.

Going back to my output, it consists of staged studio shooting and superimposition of many altered studio photographs into a collage for a specific goal. My intention is to create an aesthetically convincing composition that reflects my phantasy. Creating realistic images or reflecting reality is not an issue for my project.

2.2. The Function of the Landscape

The landscape renderings (photography or painting) can be defined as an art of depicting earth. In history, the act of depicting a landscape may be based on various reasons such as military aims, map making, geographical studies, providing evidence of ownership or creating the perception of depth. However, in my work, using landscapes serve a different function for two reasons. Before this project, I used to create images that contain a reconstructed body in a natural view. My aim was to show the harmony and the conflict between the flawed body and nature. However, I realized that when there is only a single figure in the frame, this figure stands alone as if it does not belong anywhere, looking like a human-made sculpture. I decided that bodies need to be linked to other bodies or objects in order to be perceptible. This choice is made to emphasize the vital importance of being a herd instead of being a lone wolf.

With this project, I intend to challenge my previous perception which regarded the bodies as sculptures on their own with no connection to each other and build a community of flawed bodies in their own order. I try to create scenes in which being extraordinary turns into something ordinary. The usage of a natural, empty landscape offers the optimum solution to be able to display order, a settled life, a community. Besides, when the audience confronts the output in the exhibition hall, the audience (the ordinary people) will be the minority. Through this meeting, I intend to create a space in which the ordinary audience would turn into the extraordinary bodies in the presence of the community made up of reconstructed bodies. In this way, what is extraordinary transforms to something that is ordinary.

The other substantial function of the natural landscape for this project is that it does not imply any time period or a particular place, it just refers to space. That captured moment can belong to the past, the present or the future. Since the perception of the body has changed today, it is more common in this era to represent the body as I do, as it is discussed in the previous chapters. So I intend to give the impression that the reconstructed bodies do not have to belong to the present or the future. They could also belong to the past. The idea that “they existed before and they will exist hereafter” make the bodies stronger, acceptable and even ordinary. If this image had contained human-made elements as buildings or clothes, then it would be possible to infer the time period. The only clue is the sunrise and the weather conditions from which the time of the day

and the season of the year may be deduced. But this sunrise view could have been captured two hundred years ago or yesterday. After all, the sun rises every day.



Fig. 7 Habitat, 2017

Lightbox, 300x109 cm

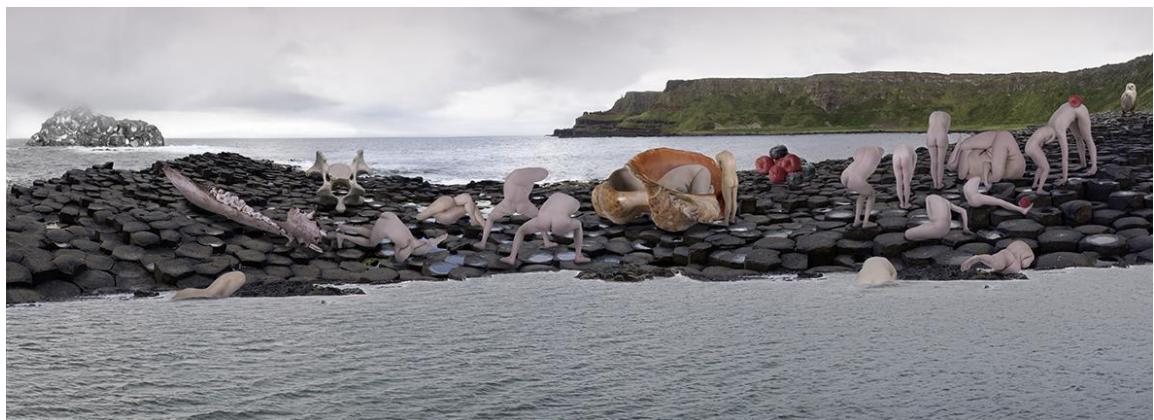


Fig. 8 Landing, 2018

Lightbox, 300x109 cm

The items that I used in the landscapes are decontextualized in such a way that they resemble fantastic paintings. During the production process, I did not consider the symbolic meanings of the objects that I used. I chose the objects mostly according to their forms. The aim was to create a seemingly organic habitat. However, the meanings of some objects, such as the tooth and the hair, are idiosyncratic, in the sense that they have special meanings for me. I used my own hair and my pulled tooth, dedicating them to the nightmares I mentioned in the first chapter. Another reason concerns the fact that hair and teeth are fragments of bodies which remain for many years after the body is buried and decayed. Bones, teeth, and hair are the only parts of the bodies that I remember from the

mummies in the museums. So, I placed these remains in such a way that they would be homes for their new inhabitants, and thus pointed at a cycle of life.

Since unrealism is one of the major issues touched upon by my work, it is necessary to discuss the notion, fantastic, in this chapter. According to Gerald Eager, there are two ways to describe the word fantastic in art criticism (Eager 1971). In his article “The Fantastic in Art”, he compares the definitions provided by two people, namely, A. H. Barr and Kenneth Clark. Eager interprets Barr’s definition of fantastic as something based on an irrational unreality of the images. For instance, according to Barr, Bosch’s Hell depiction is fantastic because of the presence of hybrid monsters. But Clark has a different approach. For Clark, what makes an image fantastic is the creation of contrasts to reality. Eager, drawing on Kenneth Clark, states that “for Clark, they are fantastic because of the emotive effect of the sharp contrasts of flaming light and the jagged forms of actual flames” (qtd. In Eager 1971).

Another distinguishing approach between Barr and Clark is their attribution to the viewer. While Barr states that the artist creates the fantasy; according to Clark, the viewer is the participant of the creation (Eager 1971). According to Barr’s definition, the presence of unreal or freakish images is so obvious that it is not disputable for the viewer. But Clark’s definition is more wide-ranging so that it includes the paintings can be considered as expressionistic. This is the reason they mention different artists as an example for their discussions (Eager 1971). From these descriptions, I deduce that my output fits Barr’s definition because of all the obvious unreal items in the composition. Both the bodies, places and the usage of objects are peremptorily fantastic, and the fantasy does not depend on the viewer’s attribution.

When it comes to fantastic landscapes, Hieronymus Bosch is the most inspirational name, surely. Such that his famous painting “The Garden of Earthly Delights” (Fig. 9) is the first reason that I decided to use landscapes as a background. This work of Bosch has been so inspiring not only for me but also many people, so that, it is reproduced almost as much as “Mona Lisa” and “Night Watch” (Fischer 2013). Though I call myself as a non-religious person, this triptych that is based on Biblical scenes meant a lot to me about life and civilization. From my view, one of the reasons that the piece is so impressive is that Bosch achieved to be able to depict dilemmas of humankind, the nature and the chaos in a single piece. Despite the piece is didactic, it is captivating because of the fascinating world that Bosch created. Being didactic and captivating does not only pertain to Bosch.

The dual aims which are to instruct and to delight were a common formula for Middle Ages and early Renaissance (Fischer 2013).

The piece is a triptych that has inner and exterior panels. When the wings are closed, two exterior panels depict The Creation of the World up to the Third Day. There are three inner panels. In the left wing, Paradise and the Creation of Eve are seen. In the central panel, there is Humankind Before the Flood and the right wing is Hell. According to Baldass, the Garden of Earthly Delights represents a “didactic, moralizing vanitas world picture” (Fischer 2013).

The composition is full of Biblical scenes and symbols that coincide with the form. For instance, in the left panel, a dragon tree that symbolizes the tree of life is next to Adam and Eve while the creator is between them. The representation of creation is supported by the fountain of life and animals that are attributes for fertility. All symbolic items complete God’s blessing upon Adam and Eve’s marriage: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have domination over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Fischer 2013).

Every item in the piece is interpreted according to the Biblical and symbolic meanings that are relevant. Since the context of my output is entirely different, it would be better to indicate only the elements that are influential for me in Bosch painting. In other words, Bosch influenced me in terms of stylistic attitude, not contextually. One of the things that make the Garden of Earthly Delight fantastic is hybrid architectural forms that seem to be organic. While architectural items are supposed to be human-made; in the left and central panel of the piece, the structures seem like they have been a part of the cycle from the early years of life, such as an animal or a fruit. The reason for this comment about architectural items is that they remind a mixture of plants and fruits because of their shape and color. This something I need in my project, so I used fruits, bones, plants, hair, fur, and shells to represent non-human made architectural structures.

Another attribution to Bosch paintings are the fruits, especially berries in my composition. In his paper "The Strawberries of Hieronymus Bosch", Walter S. Gibson states that the strawberry was a commonly used decorative motif in later Middle Ages and Renaissance (Gibson 2003). In the same paper, he quotes from Sigüenza that strawberry is a powerful symbol of the short-lived nature of earthly pleasures and ambitions. Besides strawberries, there are other fruits in Bosch’s garden such as

blackberries, grapes, and cherries and each of these fruits had different connotations in the Middle Ages. In my both landscapes, I used berries for symbolizing fruitfulness. Also, like other items in my composition, I depicted the fruits bigger than their actual sizes. That is another remarkable thing in Bosch's painting. In the Garden of Earthly Delights (Fig.10), most of the fruits, especially strawberries are bigger than human size. This attitude is associated with the hierarchical composition principle, where size means importance (Fischer 2013). Since the central panel is about seduction and earthly desires, it would be logical to emphasize a fruit that goes along with the context. In my composition, I have a similar reason for using some items bigger than the bodies. It is a way to narrate that every item and living being has equal importance to be able to live in harmony in nature.



Fig. 9
 Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, c.1503
 Oil on panel, 220x 389 cm
 Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado



Fig. 10
 Detail from: *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, c.1503

3. THE UNCANNY AS A TEMPTING ATTRIBUTE

Before Freud defined “uncanny”, there were many paintings created that can be considered “uncanny” today. The goal of these “uncanny” images was to describe Hell. The recurring theme in most paintings created before Freud was strictly religious. These paintings helped describe Hell using supernatural, strange creatures, in turn, evoked uncanny feelings in sinful masses. They, on the other hand, have a certain degree of appeal for today's audiences.

According to Freud (1919), uncanny feelings have such power because they bring out childhood complexes and primitive fears in people. He describes the meaning of the word “unheimlich” in terms of aesthetics. In contrast, Jentsch discussed the psychological effects of uncanny in an essay called “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” in 1906. He believes that intellectual uncertainty causes uncanny feelings while Freud believes that is not possible.

Freud explores the etymological meaning of “Heimlich” in various languages. In German, it means “belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, comfortable and homely.” Freud argues that several things may trigger uncanny feelings to be considered “uncanny” rather than “fearful”, such as animism, magic and witchcraft, the omnipotence of thoughts, perception of death, involuntary repetition, and the castration complex. For something to be called “uncanny”, a connection between the subject and the background, experiences, and childhood complexes of the receiver should be recognized. Freud uses an example from “Fantastic Tale, the Sandman” to explain the connection between “uncanny” and the castration complex. He concludes that in those circumstances, losing an eye, among all other organs, is more terrifying, therefore, he associates the loss of an eye with the fear of castration, meaning the loss of testicles. This association reminds us the anxiety created in the opening scene of the film “Un Chien Andalou” by Salvador Dali and Buñuel, where a woman’s eye is about to be cut in the middle.

Freud says that even if people are aware of their mortality, the primitive fear of death is still strong and the potential of it to the surface is predictable. Freud borrowed the term “omnipotence of thoughts” from one of his patients. It refers to superstitious thoughts that make people believe in the “Evil Eye”, which is the fear of others’ thoughts and animosities that may be harmful to the receiver.

So far it has been outlined that which components and conditions create the uncanny feeling according to Freud. I especially wish to link the discipline, psychoanalysis, to my output. My starting point to this project was based on the fear of losing an organ which is connected to Freud's castration complex. Also, my output consists of bodies and places that can be considered uncanny because they are unfamiliar. This is why all fantastic or surreal images can be analyzed in the light of psychoanalysis and there may be found a connection between the images and the uncanny. I used to label my output as uncanny because of all unfamiliar items in them but now I find this reading arguable. Discussing the notion in terms of psychoanalytical basis is neither my area nor the interest of this text. But if I speak on behalf of the usage of uncanny feeling in visual areas, it might be said that the audience is getting used to seeing uncanny scenes. If it is exemplified works on the body, as it is discussed on previous chapters, seeing the body, not as it has to be is getting more common for the last decades. Putting this simply, to see an image of an ear on arm (in Stelarc's performance) may not be as uncanny as it was before, because people encounter similar cases frequently these days and it would be another example of manipulation. Is it correct to label something that is so common and normalized as uncanny? I must emphasize that the action itself is still uncanny, even terrifying. However, the representation of it may not be uncanny as much as the performance because it is now an acceptable approach to visual arts and industry. For instance, the fashion industry takes advantage of the notions as the uncanny and post-humanism. A fashion brand, Gucci prepared a show for its Fall Winter 2018 collection. The show occurred in a room looked exactly like an operation room with pieces of equipment and the use of color. And the models were carrying a slashed head which was identical to their own head (Fig. 11). Gucci declared that the show is influenced by Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (Gucci 2018). As Freud states, there are various factors that evoke uncanny feeling. But as in the meaning of the word, what is unfamiliar can be uncanny. By confronting unfamiliar images ever so often, the unfamiliar turns into something familiar.

To conclude, even if the audience is getting used to seeing uncanny scenes or deformed bodies every day, they see this through being aware that the images are just representations. Humankind is still aware that they are not supposed to have an ear on their arms. So, even if the photograph of Stelarc with his ear on his arm would not seem

uncanny for one, meeting him in person would build a different kind of reaction. The uncanny is a powerful feeling and the attribution is so tempting for a work of art. However, since the figures in my output are just a representation and it is so obvious that they are caricatured versions of the body, and it is getting popular to produce uncanny images, I abstain from calling them uncanny.



Fig. 11
Gucci, Fall Winter 2018 Show

4. CONCLUSION

If a piece could be considered as in two categories alone which are pleasure or displeasure, I would prefer my work to belong to “pleasure” category. With my graduation exhibition, “Dual Citizenship”, I create an atmosphere that is full of extraordinary items and I aim the composition to leave a positive impression on the audience as if the bodies and the places are familiar. I do not think that my output is a representation or related to the various issues of disabled or extraordinary bodies that exist in the society. This would be an incomplete, insincere and literal attribution. My own curiosity about extraordinary bodies was my starting point, not a topic for a didactic aim. What I make with the project was to gather fragments of my thoughts and scenes that I dream of. The production process was totally intuitional, but not coincidental. I create timeless and placeless landscapes to strengthen the idea that the bodies in my composition may exist since the beginning of the time. With this text, I intend to analyze my output with some notions that are consistent with my thoughts on the boundaries of the body, what is fantastic and uncanny. While Susan Sontag draws a comparison between illness and citizenship, she illustrates that there are not certain boundaries between health and illness. In the light of this comment, the exhibition name, “Dual Citizenship” serve for the perception that there are ambiguous distinctions between what is ordinary and what is extraordinary. By this project, I represent what is extraordinary and uncanny as something ordinary and familiar.

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