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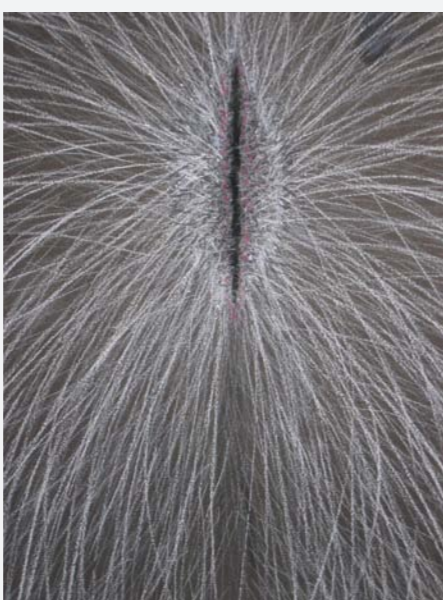
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# THE BODY

**"I thought of how babies are close to their mother's skin almost the whole time. A body is the child's first playground and his first experiences are sensual. It doesn't take long for children to learn that you can get things from other bodies: milk, kisses, bottles, caresses, slaps. People's hands are useful for this, as they are for exploring the numerous holes bodies have, out of which leaks different stuff, whether you like it or not: sweat, shit, semen, pus, breath, blood, saliva, words..."<sup>1</sup>**

## Hanif Kureishi, The Body

Jerry Seinfeld once joked that the human body was so maintenance-intensive, if it was a car you wouldn't buy it. In spite of that daily tedium, the body is a theme that is never exhausted in visual art. From the first body decorations to the latest virtual worlds, a central concern of artists has been how we feel about our body – its power, its health and its identity. Urgency has been added to this subject in recent decades by the onset of genetic engineering, new body-imaging technologies, cyber-extensions, transgenic viruses, new ways of viewing gender and media-fuelled body anxiety. In this exhibition 16 local, Melbourne and international artists associated with Gippsland Centre for Art and Design give a snapshot of a range of contemporary visual ways of interrogating these issues.

Megan Bye is interested in the messiness and abjectness of our body and the way it challenges its boundaries. We can see into private

places and her bodies also invade our space both visually and literally, with spreading fluids and organs bulging to bursting point. Jessica Dalrymple muses on the rhyme between garment and skin and the real meaning of our stealing of other animals' coats. Also hijacking animals' skins is Melbourne printmaker Rona Green. Her feisty anthropomorphic animals have hides that tell stories about identity, transgression and transformation. They allow us to trial a range of animal, gender and moral suits.

For Carla Edgerton, clothes are also a fascination. She tries on fashions and personas and speculates about the fabulousness of the clothed body. Amy Christensen's dreamy fantasies also sample fabulousness and cuteness and make costumes of environments. When male artists muse on the body it can often be to fetishize others' bodies or express anxieties about the adequacy of their own. *Little man (shown actual size)*, looks at the issue of size as a preoccupation of male body awareness while Neale Stratford's digital print satirizes/indulges male longings for an unattainably Olympian and ever-available 'ideal' female.

South African filmmaker Nathani Lüneberg's stop-motion video *If I did(n't)* addresses the influences of technology on the body in an increasingly post human era. Samara Luxford's work follows the trail of marks our bodies leave and resituates fingerprints and waste makeup as intentional writings. Also sifting the evidence our bodies leave, South Gippsland artist Kim McDonald takes a more invasive view of corporeality. She peers into hair-clogged plugholes, orifices and wounds to question what belongs where. Tony Hanning's life drawing displays the meditative aspect of a long pose. A compassion for the model's humanity and vulnerability is revealed as well as a poignant record of his engagement with the figure.

Photographer Shelley McDermott's work unwraps relationship and community, in this case pregnancy, which blurs the boundary between the other and the self, challenging both boundaries and identity. Adele Oldfield wants to know why we have such a narrow view of what women 'should' look like – Aren't allsorts more interesting than jellybabies? Like many of the artists in the exhibition, she examines the tensions and nuances of looking and being looked at.

Ben Teuben's drawings and paintings seem to explore outsidership – the insides and outsides of his characters become interchangeable. His incisive visions picture a combination of humour and unease; orifices erupt in unexpected places and text leaks from his bodies. Salote Tawale's video *Looking for Loofah* turns her shower handle into a microphone and her shower screen into a TV screen to conflate privacy and celebrity. Michael Gallop's creatures reflect on the vulnerability of maleness. He uses the poignantly inadequate protection of carapaced animals as metaphors for male emotional armour – his critters floundering in vulnerable or powerless predicaments.

The British art critic Peter Fuller lamented in 1980 that contemporary art had abandoned the body.<sup>2</sup> However this bodilessness was short-lived. Since the early eighties it has been a key stream in contemporary imagemaking. With all its imperfections, the human body is the most perfectly flawed machine ever made and we can't resist depicting it.

## Rodney Forbes, Churchill 2009

<sup>1</sup> Hanif Kureishi; *The Body*, Faber & Faber, London 2002, p32

<sup>2</sup> Fuller, Peter; *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, Writers and readers Publishing Cooperative Society, New York, 1980, p63

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## Gippsland Centre for Art and Design

Since its early days as an alternative art school, the centre has had a strong culture of community, cross disciplinary practice and rigorous discourse. Students at GCAD learn to take risks, collaborate and be accountable for their ideas. The centre offers programs at Bachelors, Honours, Masters and PhD level. Innovative approaches include off-campus modes in postgraduate study, mentor group and team-teaching and the new Digital Media Stream of the Bachelor of Visual and Media Arts as well as a range of alternative entry paths.

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