BA Project in Fine Art

Statement and Thesis

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The Body Remembers

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BA Project in Fine Art – Statement
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This statement is about a 16 ECTS final project for a BA-degree in Fine Art at the Iceland Academy of the Arts. It is not allowed to copy this statement in any way without author’s consent.
Like a fungus taking shape, my work has slowly been growing for the past nine months, visually referring to human limbs and organs. It started with an interest for the nylon material, with its strong tactile connection to the body, and a fascination by how it affected me in a close to physical way. Throughout the making of the piece I was continually comparing it with my own body, as I could see resemblance between myself and the object I was making.


The title of my BA project is The Body Remembers, which developed into a sculptural installation incorporating two sculptures juxtaposed on the floor and one suspended from the ceiling to create both tension and balance. It is mainly made from multiple pantyhose in nylon with a shape and colour-palette designed for the human body with the purpose of imitating skin. By filling them with soft materials like wool and cotton, and by folding, stretching and tying them together, features like wrinkles and creases appear, referencing traits of the human physique. The work also contains hair extensions and movement through implanted motors. It was important for me that the movement would not be too static or predictable, but rather become a being on the border to be alive. The layer of surprise was significant, and I therefore chose to include three motors that I programmed to move after different movement schedules with subtle, irregular movements and pauses.
I have an interest for including objects that are used as extensions of our bodies in my art practice. In this piece I am working with objects whose original purpose are to alter and embellish the female body. By taking them into a new context, I want to highlight the absurdness of the things that we have been tricked into believing are important in regards to beauty ideals. The smooth, fake skin that the pantyhose provide, and the thick shiny hair of the hair extensions have been obscured and
twisted into tumours of limbs and hair which also gives it a layer of humour.

The act of mirroring oneself in an object is an important aspect of the work, which I have come to understand as being connected to my strong emotions towards the material. It is related to the concept of “The Uncanny”, initially set forth by Sigmund Freud in 1919 and defined as a physical experience connected to the act of remembering. The sensation it provides is related to déjà vu, an eerie feeling of having experienced something before without remembering the particulars of it. An uncanny reaction can be produced when we physically identify with an object to the extent that a confusion appears about whether it is dead or alive as in relation to a humanlike robot or a wax figure imaging a human being. I do not want the work to tip over and become solely Uncanny but am rather aiming at tickling it by using it as a layer among other layers.


For me, an important aspect of the work is what takes place within the viewers. I see it as a kind of psychological interaction and that a big part of the work is created there and then. During the exhibition at Kjarvalsstaðir, my work was often met with strong reactions. Many jumped when it started to move, and some either screamed out loud or laughed. Others, mostly children, could not resist touching it which I believe has to
do with the tactility of the work. Maybe the borders of what is socially acceptable in an exhibition context are being blurred when objects we feel that we know intimately are presented as an artwork. I believe that the movement also plays a big role in this and could be perceived as an invitation for physical interaction.


With this project I hope to establish a balance between multiple and often contrasting layers, such as eeriness, humour, sensuality and melancholy. The classic feminine is placed in contrast with the machine, traditionally seen as hard and masculine. By intertwining concepts such as The Uncanny and feminism and by investigating how a machine can become more organic, I believe that the work could start to breath by itself.
Bibliography:

Giving Breath

Lost Emotions Brought to Life Through Art

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BA Project in Fine Art – Thesis
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This paper is a 4 ECTS final thesis for a BA-degree in Fine Art at the Iceland Academy of the Arts. It is not allowed to copy this thesis without author’s consent.
Abstract

The transformation of our own bodies is the most direct proof of the passing of time. Our lifetime is the ruler from which we measure past, present and future. The human body is frequently present in my artistic practice, through references to appearances, functions and ephemeralness. The body is put in relation to objects intertwined in our daily lives and sometimes it is even hard to say where the body ends and the object begins. In this thesis I will discuss the body through a feministic approach and connect the idea of “the personal is political,” as set forth by the second wave feminists, to the political climate of today. I will look into my artistic work process with the aim of establishing a deeper understanding of ideas surrounding breath and suffocation in the context of my art. I will relate my work to artists like Sarah Lucas and Louise Bourgeois, and to concepts such as time, the life cycle concept and feminism. I will also discuss how the psychological concept of the uncanny, described by Sigmund Freud as one of the most powerful human emotions, can and has been used in the context of art. Through readings by Mike Kelley and Masahiro Mori, I find that it is a balancing act that needs to be handled carefully. With this as a starting point I will investigate how art can bring hidden recollections to the surface and help us to come in contact with our inner selves.
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Introduction

How does one make something become alive?

A puppeteer told me that the most important aspect of his work is to learn how to give breath to a dead object. Constant movement is the most essential symbol of life; the repetitive motion of a chest, or the endless transformation that something alive goes through during its lifetime. How it passes on from one shape to another, being a part of a bigger ecological context. For me, a certain kind of magic occurs when a dead object becomes alive through art. This is a central theme in my artistic practice and something that I am continuously approaching from different angles, with various methods, medias and materials. This interest is illustrated in my fascination for making stop-motion animations. How one through this method can create the illusion of life in a dead object by creating an environment where it can move by itself. I also find it interesting to include organic, transforming and growing features in my pieces. Just as time has a crucial role for all living things, my work has parallel layers of different time aspects. Memories of a passed time, the present, and often an imagined future that comes with the awareness that the piece is transforming.

The human body often functions as a starting point and I have lately been engaged with involving myself even more by including my own experiences and memories in my works, often in connection to my body. I am putting this in relation to the second wave feminists claim that “The personal is political”¹ and will, in the essay, discuss the relevance of this in the context of today. I will also look into my artistic work process and get a deeper understanding of my intuition and ideas surrounding breath and suffocation in relation to art. I will relate my work to artists such as Sarah Lucas and Louise Bourgeois, and to concepts such as the uncanny, feminism and time. I am also investigating how art can bring hidden recollections to the surface and help us to come in contact with our inner selves.

I am like the puppeteer, attempting to breath life into my work.

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1. Giving Breath

**Infinite Body**

I am fascinated by how everything organic is a small part of a bigger whole and how it will indefinitely continue to exist in various lifecycles. As our bodies are made of organic materials, we are also parts of this endless transformation. I find this knowledge both uncomfortable and comforting at the same time, because it is both life and death simultaneously. Everything is connected and one cannot exist without the other.

I have made a series of sculptural pieces entitled *Infinite Body 2, 3 and 4* (2017), which have their starting point in these thoughts. It contains clothing made of natural, organic materials, bearing a history of a passed time, encapsulated and suspended with threads in glass boxes. Water is added and seeds are attached to the garment and will with time weave into the fabric as they germinate. By closing the glass boxes tight, independent ecosystems are created, where the glass becomes the atmosphere and the water circulates. The plants get nutrition from the clothing, and produce oxygen as the daylight reaches them. The fog on the glass gives us the idea of something breathing. The wool of the sweater in one of the sculptures once embraced a sheep, and has continued to embrace bodies until it came into my possession. Through this piece I am giving it back to the lifecycle it once was born to be a part of.

*Mother* is the title of another work revolving around existential questions connected to the lifecycle concept. The sculpture consists of light beige fishnet tights filled with soil and seeds. They are suspended with threads, and the heaviness of the soil weights the fabric down, making them stretch in two directions at the same time, both upwards and downwards. With time the sculpture changes as the seeds start to grow and find their way through the fabric. The piece was shown in my third year solo exhibition in October 2017 and was presented together with a text that said; “We are revolting against our mother, trying to become the opposite of her. She is reminding us that we will become her once more.” In the text I am referring to mother earth and how our existence is ultimately depended on the lifecycle. It is also about the man-made concept of the duality of nature and culture/humans. How we in many ways have forgotten that we are a part of the nature, and are putting ourselves in another category, above the nature and the other animals, in a made-up hierarchy.

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2 Image 1-3.
3 Image 4-5.
of all that lives on the earth. We surround ourselves with man-made objects that we have become dependent on and have created rules and structures that decide our realities.

Mother was also shown in the greenhouse at the Nordic House in May 2017. The space housed multiple spiders, and after a while they started to include the fishnet tights in their own nets, expanding them in all directions. I felt that my work got accepted by the environment and its inhabitants. The spiders made me think of Louise Bourgeois and her spider sculptures entitled Maman, or Mother (1999). My work did not have a title at that time, so as an homage to Louise Bourgeois, and to Mother earth, I gave it the title Mother. In this work, I am dressing mother earth in fishnet tights, which often are considered as something sexy. Mother earth is depicted as a woman, powerful, but still objectified. I find this action comical and sad at the same time. I like to apply a humorous angle to the work, as I often deal with heavy topics. In this mixture it can become a melancholic, dark humour. I believe that a layer of humour makes the work more accessible to the viewer.

Time
The transformation of our own bodies, is the most direct proof of the passing of time. Our own lifetime is the ruler from which we measure past, present and future.

Michel Blazy often works with everyday objects in which he plants greenery, as he did at the 2017 Venice Biennale where he started cultivation in a number of old sneakers in his piece Collection de Chaussures, or Shoe Collection (2017). I visited the exhibition, and found this piece very inspiring and related to my own artistic work. In a book about his art Blazy explains his interest in using organic materials in a way I can relate to my own concerns. He states that he wants to give the visitors to his exhibitions the feeling of witnessing something happening presently, and transforming in front of their eyes; this in contrast to the conservational approach the museums usually have towards art. He calls the conventional art works fossils that are only traces of something that has already happened in the past. I on the other hand find it interesting to involve an element of a past time too, and often incorporate objects with a history in my work. I think that this adds depth, as I believe that the objects we own and surround ourselves with carry traces of us and have the potential to harbour memories. For me it is for example important that the clothing in the previously

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5 Image 7.
described *Infinite body 2, 3 and 4* have a history, because I think that it adds a layer to the pieces to know that the materials have been in the possession of others and bear traces of their past life. The first piece that I made in the *Infinite Body*-series (2017) contained an old incubator from the 1960’s in which I created an ecosystem. I added a glass plate, soil, water and sunflower seeds, and made a metal construction for it to stand on. The piece also had a plant light hanging right above it, which gave everything surrounding it a pink shade. By using an old incubator, the piece gained a context and a deeper meaning as it is so strongly affiliated with life. I also see the ecosystem as a symbol for life, but as life cannot exist without death in a lifecycle, it is also affiliated with death.

In his text *Life and Death*, Geoffrey Batchen discusses photography’s strong connection with time. How a photograph has captured a moment in the past and lets us look at it in the present. How we, while looking at it are thrown back and forth between the past and the present. He is referring to Roland Barthes, who stated that only photographs have this influence on us. I believe, though, that similar emotions can be experienced and mediated through objects with a history. My sculpture *Memory Filters* (2017) consists of a number of glasses acquired in second-hand stores, mounted together. The history of the glasses plays a crucial role in this piece, as these objects functioned as an extension to the body of their previous owners, letting them perceive their whole visual world through them. The eyeglass lenses have different strengths, breaking up the vision in various ways while looking through it and emphasising the different destinies of individuals and their perspectives of the world. The glasses are traces of another time, and they make me think about the situations experienced and seen through them, memories created while looking through these glass-filters. Where are their previous owners now? Maybe they now only exist in other peoples’ memories, and through the traces that they have left behind, like the glasses. I often find that old objects have a melancholic aura to them, which is a reason why I find it interesting to incorporate them in my art. I often approach the intangible, existential questions and emotions in my work, by using recognisable materials and objects from our everyday lives in order to translate them into something more intelligible. This method gives the works a certain context, a starting point and a reference from where I invite the viewer to enter my work. I

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7 Image 1-3.
8 Image 9.
10 Image 10.
like, for example, to incorporate glass jars, panty hoses, garments, old glasses and hair extensions. I often obscure and twist it in a certain direction to make it become something new, while still having a layer of recognition.

**Organic Machine**

*Organic Machine (2016/2017)*[^11] is an interactive installation where I have connected electronic machine parts, most of them taken from disjointed mechanical components, such as stuffed animals, along with organic materials, for example a lemon, together with cables. To make it function, someone has to attach him- or herself to it by putting their hands on two metal parts. By doing that the person becomes the last part of the machine and is closing the circle by letting the electricity flow through the body. When the *Organic Machine* is turned on, lamps are lit, some parts start to move and a sound starts to play. As soon as the person lets go of it, the machine stops.

I connect the functions of the *Organic Machine* to the functions of the human body. Referring to how everything we do, both deliberately and instinctively, is enabled by electrical signals from our brains to our nervous system. When people connect themselves to the *Organic Machine*, a stream of energy, or electricity, starts to flow through all parts of the machine. I think that this makes it alive in a way. As the time goes by, the organic parts slowly begin to decay. They will start to mould and later begin to dry out, making it harder for the electricity to go through it. The organic materials are in that way affecting the function of the machine. Even though we have come a long way with the technology and science, our bodies will change and age through time, like all organic materials. This is something that the performance artist Stelarc is trying to find a way around. He is of the opinion that the human body is obsolete and with his art he is trying to achieve a (post-)human with extended capabilities by integrating modern technology with his body. He, for example, attached a third, robotic arm to his body which he controlled through electrical signals from his muscles.[^12] He even claims that we are in a “post evolutionary phase” in which birth and death does not have to be the beginning and end to our existence.[^13]

I made *Organic Machine* first during the fall semester of 2016, and made it again as a part of my solo exhibition in October 2017, for which I made a few corrections and

[^12]: Image 8.
worked even more on the sculptural aspects. In the first version I used white pedestals to exhibit the work on, but built my own structures, more in line with the work, for it to be placed on in the second version. I wanted it to become a part of the piece, rather than the pedestals which were only used as an easy solution. I also decided to change the sound, having used an abstract noise in the first version, I instead used the original sound of the stuffed mechanical animal in the newer version, which was Kool & The Gang’s song *Celebration*. I found that this layer of recognition gave a clearer perception of the changes the machine went through in connection to the transforming organic materials. I also found that it added a comical layer to the work, making it even more accessible for the persons connecting themselves to it, as many people have heard this disco-song before. I also connected one of the moving pieces of the machine to a sculptural piece made of a nylon stocking and wool. I decided to leave it on the floor and during the exhibition it received strong reactions, as people found it funny that it was dancing to the music. I also found it a bit melancholic, as it appeared as if it had fallen down from the structure and was trying to climb up to the rest of the machine without succeeding.

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14 Image 13-14.

2. The Uncanny

The Uncanny is a psychological experience described by Sigmund Freud in 1919, in his essay of the same name, as “A hidden familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it.” It originates in an eerie feeling of recognition linked to the childhood and is, according to him, one of the most powerful human emotions.

The LA-based artist Mike Kelley curated an exhibition with the title The Uncanny which centred around Freud’s ideas. In the exhibition catalogue the uncanny is described as something being experienced as a physical sensation strongly connected to the act of remembering. Kelley claims that it is linked to strong aesthetic childhood experiences and can be related to déjà vu, which is a feeling of having experienced something before without remembering the particulars of it. The only thing that is left from it is an eerie and creepy atmosphere. He describes the physical feelings the uncanny awakens as spine-tingling and giving goose-bumps. In the exhibition he investigated the uncanny primarily through realist figurative sculptures by various artists like Sarah Lucas and Paul McCarthy, juxtaposed with non-art objects like dolls, medical models, taxidermy, life masks etc. An uncanny reaction can, according to him, be produced by the confusion about whether something is dead or alive, as for example in relation to an artificial doll, objects made of wax and robots. He says that these feelings are provoked by a dead object that has a life of its own which is depended on you, as it is awakened to life by hidden recollections from your childhood.

While reading about the uncanny, I feel more and more strongly that this is of big importance to me in my artistic practice. It pinpoints something of relevance and puts into words the strong feelings that I have towards my art and what want to mediate with it. Subconsciously and repeatedly I have been approaching the emotions and physical sensations revolving the uncanny and this has led me towards taking certain decisions in my artistic processes. As a core of my artistic interest is the aim of breathing life into dead objects, Kelley’s claim that an object can become alive through an interaction with someone, is significant to me.

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16 Mike Kelley, The Uncanny / By Mike Kelley, (Köln; London: Walther König, 2004), 7.
17 Kelley, The Uncanny, 9.
19 Kelley, The Uncanny, 9.
20 Kelley, The Uncanny, 26.
The Uncanny Valley

A few years ago, when I tried the stop-motion animation technique for the first time, I got hooked on it straight away. For me it felt like magic. It was as if a dream from my childhood had come true, when my toys became alive and started to move on their own. Through this technique I could create worlds of my own and let the characters become alive.

In 2014/2015 I made a stop motion animation in mixed media with the title *Midvinterblot*, in collaboration with my friend Julia Donka Thormann. The video is about four older white men who are attending a Christmas dinner hosted by two women. The men start to eat and after a while begin to transform into pigs. When they are fully changed, they are led into another room where a machine awaits them. One by one they disappear into the machine, which turns them into similar Christmas food as they had been eating during the dinner. The video ends with the food, placed on the same tray cart as the video had started with, being pushed into the dining room again. Set forth as a fragment of a cycle, something that is happening over and over again, our intention was to mediate a dark humorous story with a political undertone connected to feminism and animal rights. We got inspired by Nathalie Djurberg, who is a Swedish artist working with stop-motion animation, and her way of mediating heavy topics such as sex and violence in a rough, almost grotesque, and yet playful way. We were also inspired by various movies, like the scene in *Spirited Away* (2001), where humans transform into pigs while feasting, a scene in *Chicken Run* (2000) where living hens are forced into a machine and come out on the other side as prepared pies, and a scene in Astrid Lindgren’s *Emil I Lönneberga* (1971), where the food on a traditional Swedish Christmas table, practically only consisting of various pork dishes, is being described in an almost decadent way.

I like the aesthetics of stop-motion animations, as they are often a bit rough in their expression. Computer animations can on the other hand often be very smooth, realistic and almost clinical. When humans are depicted in this method, I sometimes have a feeling of dislike towards them. This phenomenon is discussed by the Japanese robotics professor Masahiro Mori in an essay he wrote for the journal *Energy* in 1970 which in many ways is based on Freud’s theories about the uncanny. In the text, Mori hypothesized the reaction a

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21 Image 15-16.
22 Image 17.
human would have towards a humanlike robot, and explained that the response would be an abrupt change. From firstly, having a feeling of empathy towards it to suddenly having a feeling of repulsion the moment it fails to maintain an authentic, lifelike, appearance. He calls this phenomenon the “Uncanny Valley”, which is used to explain this eerie feeling that can occur in the sudden shift of emotions created in relation to, for example, robots, computer animations and puppetry. Mori also exemplifies prosthetics in the text, taking as an example a modern prosthetic hand that can appear real at first, but then while shaking it we realize that it is fake through our sense of touch. This makes us lose our original feeling of affinity towards the prosthetic, and it becomes an uncanny object. Mori suggests that as a way of avoiding the Uncanny Valley, designers that create things in these areas should instead of aiming at making something as realistic and lifelike as possible, seek to make the design more nonhuman. I believe that, when making animations, it is important to place trust in the viewer, and to leave gaps for them to fill in with their own imagination. I think that this creates a feeling of empathy towards the characters, because the viewers are in that way invited to be their co-creators. As the uncanny is related to strong human emotions, I believe that it can successfully be used in art to make the works more interesting. I also think, in line with what Mori says, that it is a balancing act which can tip over when not handled carefully.

**The Five Magic Words**

Louise Bourgeois made a work with the title *The five Magic Words* (2002), which consists of a text on paper that says:

The five magic words begin with the letter W  
They are the keys to finding the right answers.  
WHO MADE THE DAY AND THE NIGHT?  
WHERE DO WE COME FROM?  
WHEN WILL I KNOW WHERE I´M GOING?  
WHY DOES THE TOUCH OF MY FRIEND´S SKIN FEEL SO NICE?  
WHAT ARE WE HERE FOR?  

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27 Image 18.
The work is described in an exhibition catalogue as the sort of existential questions children ask about the world and their existence, that do not have any answers. These questions are something that we, when growing up, have to accept never to find the answers to. I believe that this means that we stop asking them as they are too uncomfortable, and that we in that way repress them. As Freud and Kelley described, the uncanny is connected to repressed emotions from our childhood which gives us an uneasy déjà vu-related feeling. I therefore relate existential questions to the uncanny.

In 2016 I made a multimedia piece entitled *HÆR*, which was a room installation containing a stop motion animation of the earth seen from outer space with a blue field revealing my location. It was made from images in a map-app on my smartphone, and projected on one of the walls. A spinning, lit up, disco ball cast lights in the room and created an ominous shadow on the floor. The disco ball was tilting like the earth, and the two spheres were spinning at the same speed. The stars in the video melted together with the lights from the disco ball, filling up the walls in the room. The installation also had a sound piece, a remix of ABBA’s song *Dancing Queen* that I had slowed down and added a lot of reverberation to because I wanted to create the feeling of hearing something from a far distance. The piece evolved from a sensation that I had one day when I went into the map-app, as one of my friends, who still was in my hometown of Stockholm, told me that she was going to move. The map showed me her new street, and after a while I started to zoom out. Suddenly I saw the Atlantic Ocean, and then I saw Iceland where the blue dot was located as I was now living there. I did not stop zooming out though, and soon I could see the whole earth and the stars surrounding it, like I was soaring around in outer space. Just as the moon, I could go around the earth in a circle, seeing it from different perspectives. I was not prepared for the map to end this far away, and it gave me a strong feeling of illusiveness, the feeling that hits you when you start thinking about your smallness in contrast to the indefinite universe surrounding you. I let the loneliness of an empty disco floor mediate the solitude in space, which was my way of expressing a feeling of longing and isolation. I now see this moment, when the reality about your existence in relation to the universe hits you and it feels like your heart turns to ice for a moment, as an experience of the uncanny.

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29 *I Have Been to Hell and Back*, 161.
30 Image 19-20.
**Body Works**

As I have established through previous descriptions of several of my art works, they are often connected to the human body through references to appearance, functions or ephemeralness. Lately I have been working with panty hoses and skin coloured nylon stockings. By filling them with soft materials, like for example wool and pillow stopping, and bending them in different ways, features like wrinkles and folds appear that resemble the human body. I find working with this material interesting, because it is so multi-layered in the way it is both funny, awkward, creepy, beautiful, melancholic, smooth, wrinkly and a bit gross at the same time.

The sculpture *Body - Fungus - Hybrid / The Body Remembers (2017)* 32 slowly developed and took on a shape through explorations of this material. It consists of multiple nylon tights in various skin colours tied together with a thread, creating a sculpture that refers to human limbs and organs. The *Ballerina* pieces (2017) 33 are also made with this method and shaped as legs in poses resembling ballerinas with their feet pressed into socks from a net material. I find it interesting to involve qualities related to the human body in my work, but would rather tickle the uncanny feeling than creating an emotional abyss like in the uncanny valley theory. I therefore work with features and symbols which lead us into thinking of a body rather than aiming at making a very realistic representation of it.

Many people have connected my art to the works of Ernesto Neto, who also uses similar materials in his art. 34 He often makes big sculptural installations, filling up whole rooms, carrying connotations of being inside a womb. According to a book about him, this choice suggests that he wants to raise the awareness of our connection to and impact on the environment surrounding us. 35 Although I find much of his work inspiring I feel more related to the panty hose works by Sarah Lucas, for example the sculptural series *Bunny Gets Snookered* that she made in 1997. 36 They consist of filled skin coloured tights with transparent stockings on top, placed like legs spreading on a chair. They also have bunny ears in the same material, and everything is put in place with a rough clamp of the kind often used in wood works. Lucas relates her sculptures to the body in a different way than Neto, who works with the body more as a landscape. Mike Kelley lists a few things that are of

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32 Image 21-22.
34 Image 25.
36 Image 26.
importance for objects to produce an uncanny feeling. He says that for this to happen we need to identify with the object and in that way mirror ourselves in it. He says that it is of importance that it has a human skin colour and that it is of the same scale as our own bodies.\textsuperscript{37} This is something that Lucas does more, and a reason why I feel more artistically related to her works. I also relate to the feministic aspects in her work, and how she addresses humour to help the viewer approach the big questions she is dealing with in her art, like gender identity, sex, melancholy and death.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Kelley, \textit{The Uncanny}, 27.

3. The Personal is Political

In my earlier works I was mostly focused on myself as a human being, but lately I have been engaged with explorations of my perspective as a woman, involving my own experiences and memories in the artistic process. I relate strongly to the theory, “the personal is political,” claimed by the second wave feminists during the 1960’s and 70’s. Their view was that our private experiences can be seen in a bigger perspective and put in relation to other people and society as a whole. That our experiences are not unique, and have been experienced by others too, and are connected to power structures in the patriarchal society where the woman is subordinate in relation to the man.39

I have been thinking about my childhood, and how I, in many ways have been shaped and affected by growing up as a girl in a society where women are being oppressed. I have constantly fought both inner and outer constraints to break free from invisible limits that are placed in front of me because I am a girl; for example, not being allowed to take up too much space. I now understand that these borders are the product of bigger social structures. When I grew up, time and time again I was put against other girls in made-up contests related to achievements and appearances, that ultimately no one could win. There was a pressure connected to expectations that were put on me as a girl, such as to be quiet in the classroom while the boys were allowed to be more free and loud. For me, the ballerina is the ultimate symbol of the pressure put on girls and women, not in the least in relation to the body. I took ballet lessons as a child, and once, when I was nine years old I was put together with about thirty other girls to dance in front of a Jury, whose roll was to decide who would get in to the Royal Ballet School in Sweden. They did not choose me, which made me feel like my body had failed me. My Ballerina-works40 have their starting point in this experience, and the feelings surrounding this pressure.

As a woman your body is a constant awareness, to a greater or lesser degree. This is connected to how we learn early on that our worth is imbedded in our appearance. We constantly get fed by objectifying images and representations of women through media and pop culture. Famous women, like politicians and actors, perpetually get judged by their bodies and looks, while the men in the same fields are being looked upon in relation to their thoughts

39 J. Kelly, "The personal is political".
40 Image 18-19.
and actions. This is what I am referring to in the sculpture *Mother (2017)*, where mother earth is depicted in fish-net tights. She is the most powerful woman existing, but still gets objectified. How tragicomical! The way the media depicts women and men differently is of course affecting the people consuming it, which is basically everyone as we all get exposed to it from many directions every day, through advertisement, magazines, television and music videos. I think that this leads us into believing that this is “the norm,” and makes us reproduce this behaviour in our own lives. As the female body never gets to be neutral and has such a limited latitude in what it is allowed to be, I find it very liberating to work with the nylon material. I am mirroring myself in the bodily sculptures, and I am allowing them to be multiple things at the same time, just like the body is in reality.

In her book, *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf claims that female beauty ideals are structurally used by men to keep women from gaining more power in society. She calls the images of what is considered female beauty a political weapon that is used violently against women. She also describes how a lot of successful, working women in the western world have an underlying self-hatred and physical obsessions connected to ideas of beauty, that is poisoning their freedom. Wolf argues that “the beauty myth” as she calls it, does not fundamentally have to do with women, but is rather about men’s power and institutions that are trying to keep women from gaining more power. She states that beauty ideals are connected to women’s behaviour rather than to women’s appearance, and describes how ideas of female beauty in different periods of time have had strong ties to the female behaviour that the society during that time considered desirable.

The structures regarding female oppression in our society, are so deeply ingrained in us that we almost cannot see them as they are constantly getting reproduced. It has for a long time been a silent suppression of a normalised abuse of power performed by men. The current #MeToo revolution finally confronts these structures, as women have united and together attest experiences of the oppression we are confronted with on a daily basis in every part of the society. The claim that “the personal is political” has a central role in #MeToo as it is from the beginning built on shared personal experiences reflecting the structures of the society in a larger context. #MeToo can be experienced as a trigger reminding us of the repressed occurrences in our lives and the emotions we women are harbouring in

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41 Image 4-5
connection to limiting, objectifying and abusive patriarchal structures. To me, the shared stories produce uneasy déjà vu-related feelings as suppressed experiences are brought to the surface. In that way it can be connected to the uncanny in its definition of being; “A hidden familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it.” Above all, this revolution gives me a strong feeling of hope. I believe that this is a starting point that will provide big societal changes. We have finally opened up our eyes, and we will not be able to close them again. I hope that the effects of this will be a society of equality.

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Conclusion

Often when I attempt to describe my art, and explain the choices I have made in the execution of a particular piece, I say that it is to avoid suffocation. It is a way to describe for others why I find something interesting and when something awakens inside of me that I feel the need to express in my work. I believe that I am trying to understand and mediate how my intuition works. By recently acquiring the concept of giving breath in my vocabulary, in the context of my art practice, I have developed my understanding of the concept of suffocation as its opposite.

I have gotten more familiar with the uncanny concept, which I have come to see as an important component of my art practice and approach. As this is connected to strong human emotions, it needs to be handled carefully as to not tip over and create feelings of repulsion like in Mori’s “Uncanny Valley” theory. I believe that by carefully touching the uncanny, art can help us to come in contact with our inner selves. It is experienced as a physical sensation related to déjà vu, and is produced when we are exposed to different triggers; for example humanlike objects that we can mirror ourselves in, such as robots and sculptures. I also see existential questions and the #Metoo revolution as triggers for my art practice, as they have the ability to bring repressed emotions and experiences to light and make us face them. I use the uncanny as a layer among other layers in the making of my art, and find that melancholy, humour, the conceptual and the visual aspects are equally important.

I believe that the work needs to pull the viewer in multiple directions at the same time to prevent suffocation. That they need to exist in a borderland to be alive, and have more than one side of approach. For example, by including contrasts and making something beautiful and gross at the same time, comical and scary, detailed and rough, or soft and brutal. By providing the work with layers of transformation and openings, such as reconnections with repressed childhood emotions, different time aspects by suggesting past, present and future all at once, and the use of recognisable objects loaded with a historical aspect, I believe that the work can start to breath by itself.
Images:


**Size:** 75 cm x 33 cm x 33 cm / 40 cm x 20,5 cm x 20,5 cm / 26 cm x 21 cm x 21 cm.

**Material:** Glass, transparent fishing thread, wool sweater, fur hat, fishnet tights, soil, water, plant light bulb, day light, beans and seeds.

Documentation images from exhibition *Above / Below Horizon*, 2017.05, The Nordic House, Reykjavik.

Size: Approximately 230 cm high.

Material: Fishnet tights, transparent fishing line, soil, water, daylight, seeds and beans.


Size: 145 cm x 82 cm x 49 cm.

Material: Metal, plastic, glass, soil, seeds, water, plant light bulb, glue.


Size: 56.5 cm x 44 cm.

Material: Glass, metal, transparent fishing thread, metal wire.

Documentation from exhibition *Roundabout*, 2016.12, Algera Studio, Reykjavik.

Size: Approximately 120 cm x 180 cm x 180 cm.

Material: Metal, glass, fur, nylon, pillow stopping, various machine parts, lemon, egg, soil, salmon, butternut squash, wool, lamp, loudspeaker and stuffed mechanical animals.


**Size:** Approximately 78 cm x 120 cm x 120 cm.

**Material:** Metal, glass, fur, nylon, pillow stopping, various machine parts, lemon, wool, lamp, loudspeaker, stuffed mechanical animals, fishnet sock.

Still images from video.
Length: 03:32 min.
Material: Clay, wood, paper, fabric, metal, acrylic paint, hair extensions, metal thread.


Documentation from installation to the left and still image from video work to the right. 2016.05, Iceland Academy of the Arts, Reykjavík.

Size: Room approximately 250 cm x 300 cm x 250 cm.

Material: Disco-ball, motor, flashlight, stop motion animation, projector, media-player, black curtain, loudspeakers, music.


Size: 100 cm x 70 cm x 60 cm.

Material: Various nylon stockings and tights, net stocking, hemp thread, pillow stopping, transparent plastic bag, wool, cotton.


**Size:** 117 cm x 26 cm x 20 cm / 75 cm x 25 cm x 15 cm.

**Material:** Nylon tights, pillow stopping, hemp thread, transparent fishing line, wooden clothespin, net-socks.

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