



the  
cameo project

Dieneke Jansen

The Validity of a Natural Body

5 MARCH – 10 APRIL 2005

## Stranger than fiction

Born with all of the features which make us individual, most people attempt, to varying degrees, to change themselves, removing or changing facial or physical characteristics. This is not something new and it is not restricted to one particular culture or one particular point in time. People for centuries have used make up, jewellery, body piercing, tattooing, scarification, tweezing and plucking, hair dye and other techniques to conform to the particular brand of beauty popular at the time.

Our visual media exploits the human pursuit for beauty and the creation of the perfect human. Painting and sculpture are full of examples of this. From the Ancient Greek sculpture of the *Venus de Milo* (130 – 120 BC) to Michelangelo's *David* (1501 – 4) to contemporary science fiction we can see clearly which human attributes were valued and which were not. In response Honore Daumier, who was himself not the ideal body type, made his career drawing and painting the unbeautiful, the commonplace and the genetically imperfect.



The Validity of a Natural Body, preparatory drawing, 2004

Science fiction enthusiasts will be well versed with the notion of the ultimate cyborg or genetically perfect human. Usually the narrative runs something akin to humans create cyborg, cyborg takes over and makes very human existence redundant. By the end of the narrative, the very human traits of individuality and human imperfection prevail to take the moral high-ground and assert control.

Television exploits human anxieties around appearance, as is evidenced by the glut of 'reality television' programmes engaged in body change. These focus mainly on changing women's appearance using plastic surgery techniques. However the term 'plastic surgery' is marketed in a manner which may seem more palatable. Terms like 'cosmetic surgery', 'appearance medicine' and 'make-over' are used to describe the process of plumping up lips with injections of Botox, altering non-flat tummies with tummy tucks, shaping 'atypical' nose shapes with rhinoplasty and then changing teeth with the all important 'Da Vinci veneers'.

John Berger relates publicity images to issues of personal transformation saying:

[Publicity] proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, our lives, by buying something more.

This more, it proposes, will make us in some way richer – even though we will be poorer by having spent our money.

Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable. The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour. And publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour.<sup>1</sup>

All of this discussion begs the question that Dieneke Jansen poses: 'Is there a place in contemporary society for a natural body?'

In her large scale digitally manipulated prints, Jansen, using herself as the model, stands in

poses reminiscent of classical sculpture, suggesting that the pursuit for the ideal body type is age old. The classical poses Jansen adopts, like those of Venus and David, explore the idea that today's female body has not been liberated from voyeuristic viewing and that representation of the nude lives on in the practices of body modification.

This is reinforced by the figure appearing in a state of dis-ease, self conscious and in the discomfort of someone wearing uncomfortably fitting underwear or being looked at when the attention is little wanted.

Jansen repeats the figure in a variety of poses and physical mutations. This draws attention not to an isolated form of perfection, but the physical imperfections which become more noticeable and increasingly important. The face is generic and looks manipulated or plastic, the blonde hair looks increasingly false, and upon closer inspection scars, and spider veins are apparent.

The question arises, that if feminism has had such a huge impact on the lives of women, how is it that extreme levels of body modification (i.e. surgery) are increasingly in demand? The virtues of undertaking such a process are increasingly extolled. Perhaps it is due to market forces and the role marketing and publicity play in manipulating those with spending power into purchasing.

As Berger comments:

The spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, and envy which will then justify her loving herself. One could put this another way: the publicity image steals her love of herself as she is and offers it back to her for the price of the product.<sup>2</sup>

**Rhoda Fowler**

March 2005

DIENEKE JANSEN

## Artist's statement

It has become increasingly irrelevant to concern ourselves with the concept of a natural body; the natural body has become an out-dated concept.

Biotechnology has allowed us to upgrade the properties of the human subject, to correct the pathological and also to augment the desirable. Technology has irreversibly empowered the individual to go beyond the natural. However, biotechnology can also be used as a mechanism for uniformity, normalising and idealising, which can be seen as a part of today's body tyranny.

1. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation 1972.

2. *Ibid.*



## DIENEKE JANSEN

### Qualifications

Master of Art and Design, first class honours – Auckland University of Technology, 2004

Teaching Diploma – Auckland College of Education 1987

Bachelor of Fine Arts – Elam school of Fine Arts; Auckland University, 1983

### Exhibitions

#### Solo shows

- 2005 **te tuhi – the mark**, the Cameo project, *The Validity of a Natural Body*
- 2004 Canary Gallery, *Genetically programmed for envy*
- 2003 Xspace, AUT Masters exhibition
- 2003 Pitt St window installation
- 2000 Art Station, *Sunday Painters*
- 1998 Arch Hill Gallery, *Neomania*
- 1996 Oedipus Rex Gallery, *Bad Hair Days*
- 1994 Texan Art school, Dieneke Jansen / Phil Gregory

### Group shows

- 2005 Vodafone Digital Art Awards, Disruptive Gallery, *Lilith II*
- 2004 Canary Gallery, Wallace Art Awards
- 2004 Artspace, The National Drawing Award
- 2004 Waikato National Art Award – Summer
- 2003 UrbanARTHAUS, Mazda Emerging artists
- 2002 Xspace, AUT 1st year MA group show
- 2001 Xspace, AUT 1st year MA group show
- 2000 Waikato Art awards finalist
- 1996 Outreach, ASATA members' group show
- 1996 23a Gallery, Flying Nun group show
- 1994 ASA, Tinsel Time group show
- 1994 Lopdell House, Domestic Bliss group show
- 1993 Teststrip Gallery, Blood Group Show
- 1992 ASA portrait show

### Awards

- 2003 Teachers Study Award
- 2003 Wallace Arts Trust Award: Most promising postgraduate student in Visual Arts M.A. (Art and Design)



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 Fax (09) 577 0139. [www.tetuhi-themark.org.nz](http://www.tetuhi-themark.org.nz). Director: Cam McCracken, Curator: Rhoda Fowler  
 Design: Jacinda Torrance / Verso. © te tuhi – the mark 2005. ISBN: 0-908995-45-8