



Orshi Drozdik
Adventure & Appropriation
1975 - 2001



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DESIRE HIDES IN GAZE

A Retrospective of Orshi Drozdik

“Desire hides in gaze. Desire is one of our most powerful driving forces. Our way of seeing and our art are formed by that and reflect on our desire” – said Orshi Drozdik in a recent interview concerning the topic of female identity and the use of her own body as a model and subject matter.

Inevitably, she was the first Hungarian artist, who researched and introduced the female aspect in her work, and who intended to summarize the already existing but fragmented endeavours in this field, and who even edited a book (*Walking Brains*) with writings by leading authors of feminist theory.

She always regarded her artistic program as a mission, which is rooted in her Hungarian experience but obviously became more conscious and sophisticated by the knowledge she gained while living abroad.

This is the first time that we can follow Orshi Drozdik’s professional career, which began in the seventies with performances, photo series, graphic works, and continued with powerful figural paintings and installations. Even at this early stage, her obsession with the human body was evident. Later, while living in Amsterdam and New York, she began an investigation of such diverse subjects as the utopists of the French Enlightenment, the history of medicine, and the botanical taxonomic system of Carolus Linnaeus.

According to her self-confession, she started to work with the scientific representation of nature and the human body, starting with photographs about the displays of different 18th and 19th century science, medical and technological museums. This series of photographs, entitled *Dystopium Infinite*, was inspired by her visit in the Tyler Museum in Amsterdam. These she fused into a visual language, the language of the *Technos Dystopium*, after which she named her previous large solo exhibition in Budapest. Held in 1990, *Technos Dystopium* centered on the premise that to understand the world around us is an adventure. She photographed specimens and instruments displayed in the endless glass cases of natural history and medical history museums. Commenting on this, she wrote that she “did not set out to unfold scientific meanings, but simply began to take photographs in dark, empty museums, where the ‘specimens’ of different experiments collected dust in ill-lit hallways” Just as the specimens are enclosed in the cases, their meaning is locked in history, lost. They are fossils of archaic knowledge; knowledge that existed at the beginning of the modern era.

In 1986, she invented her own pseudo persona, the 18th century woman scientist Edith Simpson, and created a whole body of work around this fiction. This habit of being hidden in a virtual person – this time a Japanese beauty firm – is manifested in her most recent installation *Osbi Obashi: Young and Beautiful*, as well.

Her researches between 1983-1990 and also in the last ten years resulted in a series of installations in which she employed different sculptural techniques and materials: glass, rubber, iron, lead, plaster, porcelain along with black-and-white photographs and texts, offering a critical analysis of science’s attempt to model reality, as well as questioning gender issues within the existing structure of power.

Katalin Néray

John C. Welchman

PASSION AFTER APPROPRIATION

Anatomical Correctness: Socialism and Avant-garde

Like her numberless counterparts in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries before *glasnost*, Orshi Drozdik emerged as an artist in the mid-1970s through the stolid labyrinth of an official Socialist art academy (The Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts). Schools, curricula, libraries, bookstores were almost entirely closed to the circulation of contemporary Western avant-garde art, its theories, debates and controversies. Drozdik's art education in Budapest was founded on that sanctioned representational ordering of the body associated with the life drawing class and the nude (usually female) model, a practice that originated with the foundation of Academies themselves in the late Renaissance, but which was progressively codified in the 19th century, and than reinflected in the Realism-oriented regimens of Socialist cultural policy.

In fact, Drozdik's immersion in this founding encounter began even earlier: "I was drawing and painting naked women," she wrote, "from age thirteen to age eighteen twice a week at evening for two hours as a preparation for the Art Academy." Once she became a student, there followed "another seven years of drawing and painting naked women every day."¹ Through twelve or more years of servitude to the model, Drozdik became a maker of anatomically correct technical bodies predicated on the twin dictates of scientific notation and academic realism.



Nude
(appropriated 19th century photograph)
1976, b/w photograph, 24 x 36 cm

We need to examine a little more closely this important early experience, as Drozdik's response to the masculinist corporeal regime of the Academy, and her resourceful defections from its predicates and assumptions, anticipate several key aspects of the career she developed between four places of residence in the late 1970s and 80s: Hungary, The Netherlands, Canada, the United States. Rejection of the authoritarian etiquettes of the Academy was, of course, a crucial launching-site for many formations of avant-garde alternativism in twentieth century art. In his "Reminiscences" (1913) Wassily Kandinsky, another displaced Eastern European artist who pursued his career in the West (maintaining, until the early 1920s at least, a relation to his native Russia),

¹ Orshi Drozdik, "Being on the Border", lecture for 'Rethinking Borders' lecture series at the University of California, San Diego and Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, 1990-91; artist's ms, pp. 15-16.

gives an especially evocative account of his encounter with the anatomical body at the school of Anton Azbé, following his arrival in Munich in 1896. Taking his place in the crowded life-drawing class, he writes:

Two or three models 'sat for heads' or 'stood as nudes'. Students of both sexes and different nationalities gathered around these ill-smelling, inexpressive, mostly characterless phenomena of nature being paid 50-70 pfennig an hour, covered the paper and the canvas carefully with a gentle rustling noise, and tried to copy these people who meant nothing to them, anatomically, constructionally, characteristically. They tried to convey the connection of the muscles through overlapping of lines, to show the modelling of the nostrils, of the lips through a special treatment of surfaces or line, to construct the whole head according to the 'principle of the ball', and never thought for a moment, it seemed to me, about art. The play of lines of the nude interested me a great deal. But sometimes it was repulsive to me. Some positions of certain bodies repelled me by the effect of the lines, and I had to force myself energetically to reproduce them. I was almost always fighting with myself. Only out on the street could I breathe freely again... [Sometimes] I stayed home and tried to do a picture from memory, from study, or by imagination, that did not have all too much to do with the laws of nature.²

Kandinsky's recollection is grounded in a psychological disapprobation of the laws, visual logics and aesthetic evacuation apparent in the regimen of the 'life study'. Not only were the events he witnessed in the studio reductive and disconnected from the vitality or histories present in the subject-bodies, but the whole set-up was an uncomfortable masquerade of representational accountancy, giving rise only to forms of disembodied particularities. Kandinsky measures his own reaction to the exercise viscerally: the models smelled bad and composed themselves with a maximum of inexpressivity; he reiterates his 'repulsion' at both the spectacle of the session and the formal configurations to which it gave rise; underlines that he had to force himself to participate; and confesses to a sense of suffocation and his horror of masses (both literal crowds and bodily presentations). Against this vision of anatomical presence and the special methodologies it occasioned – "modelling of the nostrils", head construc-



Wassily Kandinsky, Sketches, 1897-1900
pencil on paper

² Wassily Kandinsky, "Reminiscences" (1913) in Robert L. Herbert, ed. *Modern Artists on Art: Ten Unabridged Essays* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 36.

tion according to “the ‘principle of the ball’”) – Kandinsky posed his own emerging pictorial method, focused through memory and imagination.

We glimpse this imaginative corporeality in a subsequent passage of the “Reminiscences” in which Kandinsky describes his relation to the anatomical lectures delivered by a certain Professor Moillet, which he took out of a sense of “duty”, and “conscientiously” attended “twice”. Once more, Kandinsky’s first reaction is olfactory, as he “smelled the air of corpses”, his second is again to register “offence” at the “direct connection” the lectures posited “between anatomy and art”, and his third is to seek for an exit

from the “doubt” and “darkness” of this experience – what he described as the “walls around art” – by turning to his inner self: “Even today I find that such doubts must be resolved alone within the soul”.³

But what Kandinsky learned from his encounter with the anatomical face and body was a lesson in the relativity of physiognomic or somatic beauty, and a counter-exercise of his own in which he scrutinized heads not in order to parse their parts and proportions, but with the kind of imaginative projection that would be matched only by Surrealists such as Giacometti in the subsequent generation:

...I soon found in those days that every head, no matter how ‘ugly’ it seems in the beginning, is a perfected beauty. The natural law of construction which is manifested in each head so completely and indisputably gave the head its stroke of beauty. I often stood before an ‘ugly’ model and said to myself: “How skillful”. And it is endless skill that shows in every detail: each nostril for example always awakens in me the same feeling of admiration as the flight of the wild duck, the joining of the leaf with the branch, the swimming of the frog, the pouch of the pelican, etc., etc.

Kandinsky learned to avoid the face and body as a locus of artistic expression, turning to spiritual internality and personal memory, which produced a more lasting ‘model’. He would remainder the figure and face of the academic tradition as examples of the “dead signs”, or instructional detours in his journey towards “the inner voice”.



Nude, 1977, performance
Fiatal Művészek Klubja
[Club of Young Artists], Budapest



Nude, 1977, performance
Fiatal Művészek Klubja
[Club of Young Artists], Budapest

³ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

Now Kandinsky's passage from lustrous exterior and anatomical structure to the abstract registration of spiritual interiority supplied by memory is clearly quite different in kind and focus from the counter-Academic strategies developed by Drozdik. If Kandinsky stages a kind of mentalist retreat from the physical presence of the model, in effect cancelling (her) out even as an object, Drozdik commences a journey of intense identification and subjective dispersal. Unable and unwilling to avoid the model, she in effect scrutinizes her to death – three kinds of death: by substitution, by historical reversal and by rearbitrating the voyeuristic desire of Master who posed and paid for her. First, then, Drozdik took on both the womanhood and femininity of the model. She acknowledged the sensuality the bodily specificity, and the surface allure of the model imposed on her by the institutional paradigm: "I have learned everything about the nude, the woman's body, how she stands, sits, her bones, muscles and skin, her moods and the light that falls on her breasts."⁴ The initial stage in Drozdik's recalibration, is, then, one of projection and surrogacy: "I thought I am the model. The model is me".⁵

With her identity thus 'lost' or placed in suspension, Drozdik commenced the first bodies of work that distanced her from official representation and denounced the status attached to her as "the token woman with 'exceptional talent'".⁶ The *Individual Mythology* series (1975-77), begun around the same time that Cindy Sherman made her first film stills in the US, commenced with a series of drawings in which Drozdik interfered with, and finally broke down, the components, protagonists, and routines of the life-drawing scene. In ironic homage to the gestures made by de Kooning, she erased drawings of her female nude model and added to the absent image lines of text: "I am not the model, the model is not me."; "I am not the model, the model is me".

A little later she erased drawings of herself in the pose of a dancer. Then she attempted similar displacements with photography, making a photo



Individual Mythology, 1975-77
b/w photograph, 28 x 36 cm



Pornography (I Embrace Myself), 1978
b/w photograph, 9 x 13 cm



Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still # 6, 1977
b/w photograph, detail
©Metro Pictures, New York

⁴ Orshi Drozdik, "Being on the Border", op. cit., p. 16.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.



Individual Mythology #11, 1975-77
erased drawing, 50 x 70 cm

series in which she adopted the personae and played the roles of several modern female dancers, including Isadora Duncan, whom she identified with liberatory passion and rebelliousness. Using historical photographs, she represented herself in 'free dance' poses, converting the static demeanor of the model into expressive, uncoiled performative gestures. *Individual Mythology* continued with a photo offset series made from the self-portrait dance photographs, and culminated with several performative interventions in which she again presented herself as a dancer.

In one performance, titled *Individual Mythology* (1977), Drozdik converted her dancing body into a screen for the projection of a series of images (produced by the central authorities for educational propaganda in elementary schools) to celebrate the history and achievements of the Communist regime in Hungary. Her body now became a swirling, flickering vessel for the detoured display of an official history of which she herself was both product and object. For another performance and 'life sculpture', *Nude* (1977), Drozdik exhibited herself alongside her female nude model, making a drawing of her in a room separated by a door veiled with gauze. On the other side of the gauze/door a number of established male artists, critics and art historians (Miklós Erdély, László Beke, Zsigmond Károlyi, Kelemen Károly, András Halász) participated in a week-long series of 'openings', actions of 'legitimization' that ironized the masculine transfer of authenticity and quality to a woman artist (and her 'subject'), and at the same time pointed to the contradictions of her social, cultural and sexual location. The



Individual Mythology #5, 1975-77
photo-offset, 50 x 70 cm

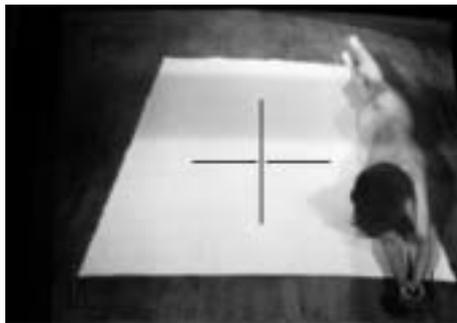
subtle form of 'drawing attention' taken on here underlies the central strategies of doubling, erasing and cross-identification, questioning the socialized individual, that characterize this phase of Drozdik's career.

Several issues emerge from Drozdik's first substantial body of work, many of which, uprooted and inflected, will pass into the projects she achieved in Europe, Canada and the US following her move from Budapest. The most obvious, perhaps, is a commitment to both seriality and mixed-media installation, often with a 'performative' component. But Drozdik also establishes in this early period a formative dialogue with gender roles and reversals; with the conceptually-oriented amalgamation of image (drawing, photograph,

film), body, object and text (inscription, title, statement, history, theory); and with the aesthetics and politics of display. The critical element of her work using the female nude was founded on several conflicts. First, she did battle with the gender specificity of the erotic gaze she inherited from academic art history and her male professors. Secondly, she took issue with the singularity of this model, but also with the universalism of its assumptions about sexuality – both enshrined in the Communist art educational system. Thirdly, she pointed to one of the many paradoxes in this system: that the same political regime that supported the emancipation of women, often vigorously, was utterly unable to come to terms with the patriarchal construction of the life model economy, the central trope of sanctioned Socialist style. How could it be, Drozdik asked, that the Marxist status quo advocated for economic, even political, liberation for women, while remaining virtually blind to the psychological and aesthetic construction of gender? Drozdik's use of non-traditional media and performance and her rejection of the antiquated style and image of female body were, however, so utterly at odds with the standards of the Academy that Drozdik knew she would have to leave Hungary if she were to continue as the artist she had now become. She moved to Amsterdam in 1978.

Biological Metaphors

One of the first gestures Drozdik made after she left Budapest was to produce a work that it would have been almost impossible to imagine in Hungary – not just because of its politics or style, but because of its activation of highly sexualized bodies, the most provocative antithesis to the coy propriety of the nude model. Her photographic series *Pornography* (1978-79) used essentially the same projective technique she had employed in the performance component of *Individual Mythology* (1977). But the images were now projected onto her naked body, and they consisted not of propaganda but pornography. A second sequence of photographs duplicated her own body-images in order to create a hybrid, self-referring sexual scene, as the artist appeared in an



Diverted Diagonal, 1980
color xerox
27,5 x 21,5 cm



I Try To Be Transparent, 1980
performance
Factory 77, Toronto



Art History and Me, 1982
diptych, oil on canvas
186 x 272 cm

erotic embrace with her multiple selves. This is one role played by what Drozdik refers to as the 'body-self' that will reappear in the persona of the *Medical Venus* (see below): a woman artist creates an image which is a self-image, but which also incorporates the patriarchal image of desire (for her). Similar ideas and motifs reappear with dramatic surplus in the performance and exhibition *I Try To Be Transparent* (Factory 77, Toronto, 1980). Drozdik presented her naked body suspended from the ceiling above pages from art history books that littered the floor. The title of the show and the rather literal props on the ground insist on the artist's declarative – and necessarily uneven – struggle to be transparent to the history of art and the precepts of Western knowledge.

Drozdik adopted another posture in the painting-based installation *I Art History* (1982-84) for which images of her body painted in silhouette on canvas were accompanied by well-known paintings from the art historical canon – details from de Chirico and Barnett Newman – as well as works by the artist herself. A subsequent series, *Biological Metaphors* (1983-85), shown in Budapest, Toronto and Amsterdam, posed the artist in a series of self-portraits as an American businessman and Russian party leader accompanied by pictures of her own organs painted in different styles – figurative, abstract, gestural. Though quite different in origin and conception, this work can be related to an alternative tradition of role-playing and gender-reversed art practiced in the US by women artists including Eleanor Antin, Judy Chicago and others.⁷ While the self-referential aspect of Drozdik's inquiry into gender roles and identity, and her reference to feminist thought, is present throughout her later work, the *Biological Metaphors* mark a threshold for her construction of what I have termed elsewhere 'critical narcissism'.⁸ In the work that follows, self-display gives way to historical incorporation, and the history of science replaces the history of art. Drozdik's increasingly complex and ambitious installations are organized by an archival imagination that offers a conjunction between machines, instruments, systems of classification and medical and other technologies of the body.

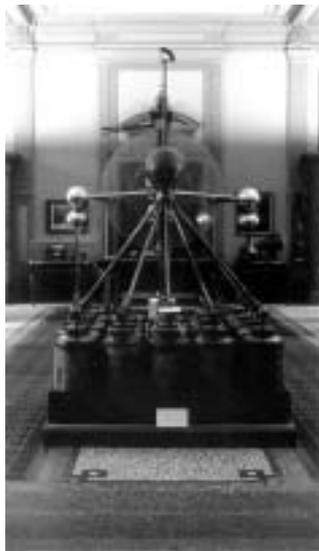
⁷For discussion of this issue, see Mike Kelley, "Cross-Gender/Cross-Genre" in John C. Welchman, ed. Mike Kelley Collected Writings Vol I: Criticism and Commentary, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming 2002): "Several women artists in the early 1970s began to experiment with shifting roles and identities in relation to issues of glamour and gender. Eleanor Antin, for example, made a work titled Representational Painting (1971), for which she sat in front of a mirror applying makeup, removing it, and applying it again in a constant state of 'pictorial' self-definition. She later adopted a series of overtly theatrical personas, including a king, a nurse, and a ballerina. This kind of play reached its zenith in Judy Chicago's feminist workshop programs in the Los Angeles area in the early 1970s. Here, women artists collectively explored their relationship to various female stereotypes in a much more critical and politically conscious environment than had previously been possible. Their performances used such stereotypes as the cheerleader, bride, waitress, beauty queen, and drag queen, as a way of exploring and destabilizing them".

⁸See John C. Welchman, "Peeping Over the Wall: Narcissism in the 1990s", chapter 6 of *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001).

ADVENTURE IN TECHNOS DYSTOPIUM

Drozdik's new sequence of thematically connected series was inaugurated by her nearly two decade-long *Adventure in Technos Dystopium* (begun in 1984, and still in progress). Each part unfolds in a counter-narrative installation as a unit among a governing set of interventions addressing the historical formation of desires, knowledges and bodies. The main components of *Adventure in Technos Dystopium*, include the *Natural Philosophy of Edith Simpson* (1986), based on the pseudo-persona of an eighteenth-century female scientist and illegitimate daughter of Benjamin Franklin who was born in a whorehouse; *Natural Philosophy* (1988); and *Morbid Conditions* (shown at the Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York, and Arch Gallery, Amsterdam, in 1989) which interrogated the historical representation and romanticisation of disease (syphilis and TB). It was in this installation that Drozdik first began to use models of her father's brain. *Morbid Conditions* was followed by *Fragmenta Naturae* (1990), posed in an ironic relation to the taxonomic formalism of Carolus Linneaus, founder of the binomial system of modern scientific classification and author of *Systema Naturae* (1735), and *Cynical Reason* (which put simulated brains on wheels, on doormats and – at the 1993 Sydney Biennial – in high heels).

Adventure in Technos Dystopium continues Drozdik's almost compulsive investigation of metaphors, crossing it now with a corrosive skepticism about the assumptions and truth-values of early science. But with the partial exception of the Edith Simpson project, her scrutiny here turns away from the self and the body towards systems, apparatuses and structures. The initiative for this shift arrived with a large series of photographs Drozdik took (in the Ssemelweis Museum Budapest; Tyler Museum,



Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Dystopia Infinite #0009
1984
b/w photograph
50 x 60 cm



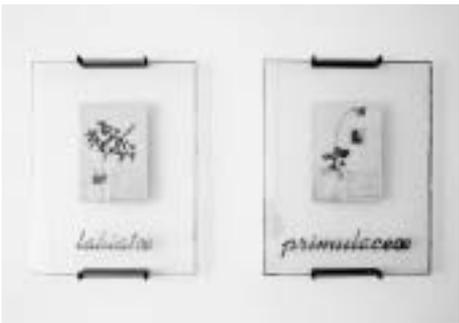
Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Dystopia Infinite #0086
b/w photograph
50 x 60 cm



Morbid Conditions, 1989
installation view,
MIT List Visual Arts Center,
Cambridge, Mass., 1992



Popular Natural Philosophy, 1988
glass cases with 'similia'
installation view
Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York, 1988



Fragmenta Naturae: Herbarium, 1990
dried plants, glass, silver

Harlem; Boerhaave Museum, Leyden; the old Vrolic Museum, Amsterdam; La Specola, Florence; and the Josephinum Collection, Vienna – among others) “in the dark, empty museums where the ‘specimens’ of different experiments collected dust in ill-lit hallways”.⁹ Trawling in physical and intellectual obscurity, the artist inaugurated a quest for archaic, fossilized instruments, and the dim paradigms that supported them. Drozdik’s appropriated explanatory narratives (etched glass texts citing arcane scientific theories) are met by the simulated obsolescence of cabinets and vitrines that shelter improbably confected machines, or what she terms ‘similia’. Her chosen materials – glass, iron, lead, plaster, and porcelain – were reiterations of the hard elements she encountered in the scientific museums. Alongside and in addition to the series of installations, Drozdik also produced a series of black and white photographs, called *Dystopia Infinite*, which she numbered individually, and grouped into subject categories – technology; the body/anatomy; pathology; nature etc.

Yet even here, where bodies are the almost invisible, abstract objects of emergent scientific ‘fact’ and showcases for the *Morbid Conditions* of disease, Drozdik returns to the primal scene of seduction. The emotionally charged nature of her personal involvement with the museums and their contents led to several expressions of this affective impact. Most notable was a series of love letters – to the Leyden Jar (using an amorous ready-made text borrowed from Virginia Woolf’s Orlando) and other outmoded objects – which turns the tables on the positivism of early technology by consuming its formal decay and desiring its lacunae and defaults – its very failure to control the future. The erotics of this encounter soon becomes explicit, as Drozdik reconvenes a surrogate self to stage a gender-specific response to the intrusions and constructions of medical and scientific authority – the *Medical Venus*.

⁹ Orshi Drozdik, statement for *Adventure in Technos Dystopia: Popular Natural Philosophy*, November 1988, np.

The Medical Venus

She never undertook to know
 What death with love should have to do,
 Nor has she e'er yet understood
 Why to show love, she should shed blood
 Yet though she cannot tell you why,
 She can love, and she can die.
 (Richard Crashaw)¹⁰

Here is the rubber figure of a woman, a surrogate raised on a steel support. Here, plates in silver with love letters engraved on their palms. There is a knife, and, over there, a pearl necklace. They are watched by a frieze of anatomical photographs, purloined throughout a decade of observation in European medical and natural history museums in Vienna, Florence and Budapest. The photographs were made among the vitrines, as the photographer poured over the dim lineaments of a thousand inconsolable isolates.

Imagine first cutting into the body, then demonstrating the power and knowledge of the cut, the wound of science. Imagine a model of the body-self prone for observation – for looking, but also for taking, for wounding, and for knowing – a body always conscious of the invisibility of its interiors. Imagine stretching out and tensing into the history of the anatomical body; having oneself operated upon by this history.

Imagine being watched from the gallery by a row of anointed organs, and, like the model here, raising your knee. This body-self is not simply trussed up in a 'technology of gender', it also imagines its own bondage.¹¹ The environment around it is an extension of the models imaginary, with the body as a surrogate subject and history as its simulated skin. Instruments are gathered near to the model: a precious adornment, a cutting machine (for better and for worse), and flat utilities that are also images and writings. Flesh is rubber, gesture is frozen, the knife is available, the necklace is cold, the letters are metallic, and the body parts a congregation.



Medical Erotic #0152, 1986
 b/w photograph
 50 x 60 cm

¹⁰ Richard Crashaw, "A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa: In memory of the virtuous and learned lady Madre de Teresa that sought an early martyrdom", (1624), lines 19-24.

¹¹ The allusion here is to Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). De Lauretis borrows the idea of gendered technology from Michel Foucault's discussion of the technology of sex in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*. I want to suggest that Drozdik's scientifically aware installations offer sites of resistance to the discursive implants of sexual practices and behaviours by post-Enlightenment institutions and disciplines; see *Technologies of Gender*, pp. 12-13.



Manufacturing the Self: Medical Erotic installation view
photographs, sculpture, silver plates
Anderson Gallery, Richmond, Virginia, 1993



Manufacturing the Self: Medical Erotic installation view,
photographs, sculpture, silver plates
Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York, 1993



Manufacturing the Self: Medical Erotic installation view (detail),
Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York, 1994

Drozdik has created the concourse of a detective story. We are drawn around the corpse and invited to speculate about the motives and causes of its revelatory death.

We are looking at moments from *Manufacturing the Self*, a series of installation projects Drozdik began in 1991. So far, five selves have emerged: *The Body Self* (Peter Kilchmann Galerie, Zurich, 1994; Hans Knoll Gallery, Vienna; Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary Art; Art Galley of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia); *Medical Erotic* (Galerie d'Art Contemporain, Herblay, 1993; Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York; Anderson Gallery, Virginia, 1994); *The 19th Century Self* (Tyne International, Newcastle, UK, 1993); *The Non/Nun-Self or Convent* (installed in 1993 at the Centre d'Art d'Herblay, Abbaye de Maubuisson, near Paris – a cloister for women destroyed in the French Revolution); and the *The Virgin-Self* or *The Hairy Virgin* (at the 1994 São Paulo Biennial).

Did Drozdik offer a seduction here? Or will she? Is there an 'uncanny lure' of death – such as Bataille imagined for Manet's Olympia, a body blown up, as a contemporary critic remarked, like "a grotesque in India rubber". Is her Venus an exquisite corpse or a 'cadaver fantasy'¹², a locus of allegorical knowledge or an embodiment of chance and desire? One thing is clear: there is no masquerade under the skin, no artful decoding of the violence of the male gaze. One cannot imagine here, as has been imagined of Olympia, that the scene exposes the construction of woman as a fetish object for capitalist consumption.¹³ There is no lesson. There is no aggregation of artifice and cross-gender misrecognition (as promised by Baudrillard).¹⁴ But there was a seduction here.

Of course, the parts of the installation also belong to a case. They are traces: evidence, weapons, witnesses. So, the viewer may be a detective or a criminal or a jury. The environment is re-lined as

¹² See Georges Bataille, Manet: Etude bibliographique et critique (first published in 1932). The two citations occur in Charles Bernheimer, "The Uncanny Lure of Manet's Olympia", in Dianne Hunter, ed. *Seduction and Theory: Readings of Gender, Representation, and Rhetoric* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 13-27.

¹³ See *ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *De la Séduction* (Paris: Galilée, 1979).

a drawing room, a gathering place for the items and the body, which are already there, and the suspects, who are not. We are chasing, or avoiding, the truth of an action. Perhaps this is the truth of the first cut.

The history and consequences of the scientific incision into the body are crucial to Drozdik's project. She filtered her experience of model-based art practice (explicitly in the drawing series, *Dissection of Artaud, Foucault and Vesalius*, 1983-84) through the legacy of Andreas Vesalius, author of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), and, by virtue of his collaboration with a notable printmaker, perhaps the chief conduit for the conjunction of art with anatomy. The title page of Vesalius' enormously influential and much-copied study points to a specific conjunction between the dissectional probing of the body and the gender concerns of Drozdik. For not only is the cut-up body that of a woman, but "this image is one of only two in 'Vesalius' in which the body is recumbent and thus probably drawn directly from the cadaver."¹⁵



Dissection of Artaud,
Foucault and Vesalius #13, 1983-84
drawing, silver ink on paper
48,5 x 62,5 cm

I want to return to Galen, the first person to think seriously about dissection. In addition to his lectures, written to accompany demonstrations on anatomy and physiology (delivered in Greek in Rome, 177 AD, and not improved on until the publication of William Harvey's *On the Movement of the Heart and Blood in Animals* in 1628), Galen made a note on the 'the particular uses of dissections':

...Anatomical study has one application for the man of science who loves knowledge for its own sake, another for him who values it only to demonstrate that Nature does nought in vain, a third for one who provides himself from anatomy with data for the investigation of a function, physical or mental, and yet another for the practitioner who has to remove splinters and missiles efficiently, to excise parts properly, or to treat ulcers, fistulae, and abscesses...¹⁶

According to Galen, there were several uses for dissection: it functioned as pure knowledge, Natural Law, empirical enquiry and as an occasion for the extraction of missiles. Michel Foucault would seem to concur, at least with the first of these propositions.

¹⁵ Diane R. Karp, catalogue entry for woodcut illustrations, possibly by Jan Stevensz. van Cacar (Flemish c. 1499-1550) to Andreas Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1543) in *Ars Medica: Art, Medicine and the Human Condition*, exh. cat. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Oct. to Dec., 1985, p. 160. Karp also notes that "female cadavers were hard to come by, and according to Vesalius's own account, this particular dissection necessitated a rather lurid adventure in grave robbing" (ibid.).

¹⁶ Galen on Anatomical Procedures, trans. Charles Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956) [for the Welcome Historical Medical Museum], p. 34.



Dissection of Artaud,
Foucault and Vesalius #14, 1983-84
drawing, silver ink on paper
48,5 x 62,5 cm

“Pathological anatomy”, he writes, “was given the curious privilege of bringing to knowledge, at its final stage, the first principles of its positivity, and the corpse became the brightest moment in the figures of truth”.¹⁷ Unlike the landscape, however, the body never had its Romantic epiphany. Its sublime was choked by the probe of a double technology, the machines dedicated to the interior (dissection, the X-ray), and to the outside (photography). Drozdik reinscribes the body-corpse with its lost dignity, laying it to rest in something like its virtual sublime.¹⁸

Let us move through the genealogies of the rubber figure, the key appropriative contexts dreamed of by the recumbent artist’s surrogate self. The first is historical, and can be summoned up in Clemente Susini’s anatomical wax sculptures, which originated as dummies for medical instruction made for the Cabinet of Physics and Natural History in the Pitti Palace, the Grand Duke of Tuscany’s “gigantic encyclopedia of organic facsimiles”.¹⁹ These ceroplastics focus the displaced desire, the simulated cadavers, the ecstatic self-identifications, and the contrapuntal violence of Drozdik’s installation. The second, and most extensive, genealogy is caught up in the representational history of Venus herself. For inside the *Medical Venus* (as Drozdik termed the Medical model), packed into her organs and parts, is the remembered knowledge of all the Venuses ever made. I will introduce the Venuses, that unnervingly seductive brigade of reclining women who have waited, prone and poised. Their recumbency joins with the violence and subjugation of all figures that lie. But how beautiful and terrifying they are as selves.

When she was called Aphrodite, Venus mainly stood. She was veiled. Then she was undressed and a Greek deity became a woman with allure and charm. Her sexuality is defended by the *pudica* gesture. When she crouched to tie her sandal, the stoop or squat was immediately caught up in representation. Distant from the gods, she is henceforth associated with water, with bathing,

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1973), chapter 8, “Open Up a Few Corpses”, pp. 124-25.

¹⁸ Barbara Stafford argues that the discourse of anatomical intrusion and the proto-Romantic cult of ruins, especially in Piranesi, are in fact predicated on similar theories of mediated interiority: “The model’s sequentially removable nesting organs, the constant dialectic between somatic interior and exterior, the doubling overlay of immediate and remote structure, and the contrived cavities [of the scientific exhibition of automata], all operated like Piranesi’s masonry apertures”, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 1991), p. 67.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64. Stafford writes that “the fame of these lifelike models, not decayed by the customary preservation in alcohol, transcended the frontiers of Florence and Bologna. Examples found their way into collections in Vienna, Montpellier, Pavia, Paris and London”. We might add Budapest to the list, for it was here, in her home town, that Drozdik encountered the first ‘sculpture’ that motivated her decade-long fascination with the *Medical Venus* and scientific-medical imaging – though it was in Vienna that the artist’s transfiguration occurred.

with a centuries-long torsion of the body whose classical finesse will issue in the savage spectacularisation of Picasso's dislocated Cubist figures.

Binding her sandal, playing with her hair – the last is Venus Anadyomene, literally 'rising from the sea' – she becomes a Venus of balance and privacy. She becomes 'natural', charged with 'turgid emotionalism' and 'gentle divinity', witnesses both to the triumph of charm over religion. If there were anything like a Hellenistic Rococo, whose figures were written through with gaiety, irresponsibility, technical facility, decoration, then it was manifested in the Venuses. And here too is "that kind of charm called genre".²⁰



Manufacturing the Self:
The Body Self, 1993
plaster cast sculpture of the artist's body
(detail)

Botticelli's Venus still stands, in a shell, on the water (The Birth of Venus, c. 1482). She is Eve and John the Baptist imagined under the influence of Plato. Titian's (so-called) Venus, on the other hand, reclines (Urbino Venus, 1538), in an epiphany of sensuous control, fleshly beauty and pictorial abandon. But look at Marat (Jacques-Louis David, The Death of Marat, 1793). Look at the long new table knife to the left, at the bottom. Look at the quill and the death letter. Propped in a medicinal bath, swathed in sheets and a turban, Marat is an adulterated Venus with a tiny incision-like wound. The body is flat and closed up. The wound is Marat's necklace. Could he be the transsexual Venus of the Revolution?

For the nineteenth century, Venus becomes the preferred icon of sanctioned dissipation of the flesh (Alexandre Cabanel, The Birth of Venus, 1863). The world of pictures swirls with lying Venuses. The Odalisques emerge rubbing their rubbery, ivory whiteness against the luxurious tassels and pleats of the Orient (Ingres, Odalisque with Slave, 1839-40). Then the Courtesans arrive. Manet's Olympia (1863) is nicknamed 'Venus with a Cat'. In the Salon of 1863 there were three versions of the Birth of Venus, including Cabanel's.²¹ The Venuses splinter and take off: the Whore, the Virgin and the Hysteric. Gauguin puts down Tahitian Venuses – Manao Tupapao: Spirit of the Dead Watching (1892) lies on her stomach with her feet crossed. Cézanne makes almost all his bathers un-Venus-like. Matisse twists out a blue Venus (Blue Nude: Souvenir of Biskra, 1907). Picasso startles with the edge-long, pseudo-reclining figures of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (formerly The Philosophical Brothel, 1907). Modigliani pampers his nudes with smooth creases.

²⁰ See Derickson Morgan Brinkerhoff, *Hellenistic Statues of Aphrodite: Studies in the History of their Stylistic Development* (New York: Garland, 1978), p. 126.

²¹ See Theodore Reff, *Manet: Olympia [Art in Context]* (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 52-53.



Medical Erotic: Medical Venus, 1984
b/w photograph
50 x 70 cm



Medical Erotic: Medical Venus, 1984
b/w photograph
50 x 70 cm



Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self, 1993
color photograph
50 x 60 cm

In 1926, André Kertész photographs a Satiric Dancer in Paris. A statue sits on the table, and a painting or a photograph of a standing figure hangs on the opposite wall. The standing and prone Venus figures reach us in a vertiginous splay of postures. The photographer games with the order and perspective of the arms and legs. Decorum is untrussed, as all four limbs are skewed in contrapuntal directions. There is no simple availability here: the codes of recumbency are electrified by over-action.

When the Surrealists (Man Ray, for example, or Raoul Ubac) photographed the nude, they retreated to the rapturous closed-eye female, or to the *nue debout* surrounded by a giddy entourage of male Surrealists. Alberto Giacometti shatters the Venus into a bronze flytrap, and lays her out on the floor, where she is opened up again – though this time at the neck (Woman with her Throat Cut, 1932).

We are closer to the perpetual recumbencies of Henry Moore and the late Matisse; the material scatology of Jean Dubuffet's Olympia (Corps de Dame), 1950; the painterly sensorium of de Kooning (Woman I, 1950-52); the American Dream Venuses of Tom Wesselman. But, where are the Venuses of our age? The man-made, loafing Venuses of Eric Fishl and David Salle are caught, awkwardly, surreptitiously, in post-traditional poses. But with Cindy Sherman's prosthetic self-Venuses, it is clear that the Venuses are wounded and that they will come home to die. Hannah Wilke photographs herself as an 'Intra-Venus', a lymphonal body invaded by the tubes of medical science, scarred with bone-marrow harvesting. Here the tactile, dying Venus disputes the 'aesthetic distance' of Cindy Sherman's "made-for-the-camera grotesqueries or Andres Serrano's morgue pictures".²² From now on, the Venus has

no choice but to surrender her normative allure and recultivate it against the grain of her gender. We reach the cross-dressed Venus Xtravaganza, a black Femme Queen featured in Jennie Livingston's documentary Paris is Burning (1990), who fantasises for herself the

²² Photographs by/of Hannah Wilke made during the last two years of her life were shown at the Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York, and reviewed by Roberta Smith in the New York Times, Sunday 30 January 1994.

real whiteness of “a spoiled, rich, white girl living in the suburbs”.²³ The coquette, the caryatid, the Madonna and the drag queen: these are the final poses struck by the terrible atrophy of a post-Expressionist narcissism.

The third genealogy of Drozdik’s rubber figure is formed from the self. Drozdik poeticises her experience of woman-to-woman fictive reality, confessing her love in a letter to a ‘she-object’ that stands ready to be dissected by medical authority. The letter, etched on a plate, we imagine, by the very knife that cuts, also prepares the audience to witness the different elements and withheld events of the installation.²⁴ I read the letter as an allegory of the intersection between biology and fantasy we call love; as a parable of that cut-out place between the love of the self, self-love, and love of the other. For the artist it is the place between Pygmalion and Narcissus.

The silvered letters are a means of breaking silence that precipitate a revivification of the cadaver as it talks back to the medical institution that created it in effigy. They also reveal a relay of subject positions that connects Drozdik (the artist) with Drozdik (the model) and both with their demise. And their erotically laced words serve as a lure for the gaze of the male dissector.

The scene is imagined in Vienna, in the autumn, in cool sunshine and under slatted light. A recumbent body is centered in the room. The encounter gives rise to a “shattering ... shivering ... embarrassment”. There is unbearable ecstasy, spectacle and seduction. In the encounter, the looking self, who is also a photographing subject, gazes onto a scene of self-identification whose thickness is the medical sensation of the body.

²³ Cited in Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 6. Halberstam and Livingston consider Venus Xtravaganza, tragically murdered before Livingston’s film was completed, as an exemplary postmodern body.

²⁴ The letter is written by Drozdik, and etched onto silver plates in her installation. In the interpretation that follows I use her text *Lettre d’Amour à la Vénus Médicale* (‘Love Letter to the Medical Venus’), 3 March 1993, in Orshi Drozdik, *Manufacturing the Self* (Les Cahiers des Regards, Cahiers de Maubuisson, Abbaye de Maubuisson, Centre d’Art d’Herblay, 1993).



Love Letters on 12 Silver Plates
#04-#07, 1993
engraved on silverplated alpaca plates
(detail)
30 cm each



The observant spine, Drozdik suggests, doesn't 'tingle' (in the way of spines that are imaged in writing), instead it is transformed into the palpability of a 'stick'.



In a vertigo of reflections, the observer spins out of visual contact, only to return to the *Medical Venus* as a mesmeric voluptuary, perhaps as a slave. The body of the *Medical Venus* is open to the transport of adoration and pining. In the openness are beehive lungs, an arterial heart and a womb with a foetus. The nipple hangs over the arm, arrested only by a sliver of uncut muscle. The studied gaze of the photographer-observer fixes on the interior body and then images it in black and white, shooting round the body.



The body of the *Medical Venus* is transformed into the exaltation of a sensual memory that transcends eroticism. Such memory is not suggestive, but enforcing. It squeezes out a metamorphosis, a projection and internalisation of the body of the *Medical Venus* into the self-body. The sensation of the spine-stick becomes an incarnation. Cells and organs are inseparably relocated, and a pearl necklace strung up around a different neck.



Years are months in the gestation of the photographer-foetus-self. Her ecstasy is different from the passion of Venus. The pain of that difference is the pain of the non-medical world in all its horrifying blankness and debauchery. The photographer becomes the sculptor of a smile and the architect of self-confusion, erasing the distinction between the 'not you' and the 'me'. Is it Pygmalion or Narcissus? How can the wound of the *Medical Venus* be healed? Why does she smile as the knife rips her open?

Medical Erotic: Medical Venus
#024, #026, #027, #028
1984
b/w photographs, 50 x 70 cm each

Drozdik's allegory of love looks for a momentary redemption of the erotic, severing it, just for an instant, from the masculine point of view. She mourns, somehow playfully, for the loss of innocence as the female object of the medical gaze acknowledges exactly what she is and has become, but in empathetic terms that pervert her entrapment. The result is a tableau of purloined sexuality untethered by its questioning and passion from the authoritarian anchorage it overlooks.

Here are conjugated the self-other of death, a screen memory of transrational inner being, and the disabled parts of a body-of-organs looking down (with pity) onto the body-without-organs. This is the threshold of a fable about the auto-production of the self, a female self formed by patriarchal history but critically transformed by means of her love letters. It's a feminist story about how the photographer-self was aborted into selfhood from the open body of the *Medical Venus*.

One can think of it like the ecstasy of Santa Teresa, whose passionate excess first caught Drozdik's attention in 1976 while she was working on her project *Individual Mythology* in the Semmelweis Museum in Budapest. Drozdik substitutes for the sensual-devotional pre-Enlightenment body of the Christ-adoring saint, the post-Enlightenment medicalised body of the self-imagination. The transfiguration of the beatified Catholic becomes the dislocated scientific affect of the Eastern European subject. The internal sections of the *Medical Venus* are transportations of the secreted flows of devotional ecstasy, the tears and moistures of holy rapture. Richard Crashaw's prohibition against the unrapturous death of the ecstatic saint is transformed a hundred years later into its mirror image, as the spectacle of the ripped anatomical cadaver becomes the love-object of secular self-identification. The ghosts that protect Santa Teresa against the deprivations of the cut are exorcised in the laying bare of its device – the process of its becoming surgery – that attends the scientific revolution. Drozdik relives the space between these moments, and renders it intense:

Blest pow'rs forbid thy tender life
Should bleed upon a barb'rous knife;
Or some base hand have pow'r to race*
Thy breast's chaste cabinet, and uncase
A soul kept there so sweet...²⁵



Medical Erotic: St. Teresa, 1987
b/w photograph
50 x 70 cm

Objects/Faces/Surfaces

In the later 1990s Drozdik's work and her personal geography shifted once again. She started to spend more time in Europe (Italy, Hungary and Austria), and her art-making turned to a series of specific scrutinies. Beginning in 1996, she collected and photographed numerous decorative porcelain figurines, which she exhibited in an installation called *Objects* at the Hans Knoll Galleries in Vienna and Budapest in 2001. Abstracted from their social contexts, these found or 'ready-made' objects are subtly recontextualized by their new location, mutual proximity, and giddy, prismatic cross-reference.

* 'slash' or 'slit'

²⁵ Crashaw, op. cit., lines 69-73.

The suffocating aura of their 'philistine' sentimentality and the gaudy excess of Biedemeier and neo-Rococo style are deflated by the posture and doubling of the figures. Using a refined variant of the postmodernist object appropriation most intriguingly developed by Haim Steinbach, Drozdik inscribes her found material not so much within the abstract, binary oppositions favored in the 1980s (fine art vs. kitsch; commodity vs. aesthetic value, etc.), but within a kind of double autobiography – her own, as the agent of quest and collection; and an unknown and unknowable set of possessing selves caught up in the invisible labyrinth delineated by the ownership history of the individual pieces. The trace of these histories across the objects in the exhibition combines with their compact polychromy to furnish what the artist – in a written statement for the exhibitions – calls their state of 'grace'.

Drozdik's configuration of specific objects produces one mode of focus in her recent work. Another arrived in 1997 with the exhibition *Oshi Ohashi: Young and Beautiful; Confident Cosmetic Line*, curated by Edit András at the Goethe Institute in Budapest. Part of another open (and continuing) series of shows and projects under the general title *Young and Beautiful*, this installation established a critical dialogue with the fashion and beauty industries

by attending to the ritual power of cosmetics. Typically, however, Drozdik does not simply deconstruct the addictive, false seduction of perfumes and facial potions proffered in the department store and mall. Instead, one of her key points of departure was an almost Proustian personal memory of scents and creams on the comforting maternal body that helped take her into confident young womanhood. In a sense, the exhibition sets out to reclaim the strength of this early experience, which was lost or distorted as she was socialized in the masculinist culture of Marxist-Leninist Budapest.



Oshi Ohashi: *Young and Beautiful*, 1997
still from the video

The *Confident Cosmetic Line* at the Goethe Institute emerged from another of Drozdik's desires, the product of her alter personae, Oshi Ohashi, a twenty-five year old New York-based, Japanese artist (and former model). The exhibition consists of product displays of items made by her company, OSHIDO: New York, Paris, Budapest, Tokyo – anti-wrinkle creams, and perfumes, each wrapped or packaged in materials with text and graphics by the artist and offered for sale at 'fair market price' from a simulated cosmetics vending counter. The motto of the exhibition comes from Stendhal: "Beauty is nothing else but a promise of happiness".

Drozdik's meditation on the discourse of beauty in which, as she suggests, all western women are somehow entangled, returns us to the abiding interest in the female model that organized her earliest work. In fact, Drozdik's investigation of women as models of the model, molded by authority, erotic capitulation, inhuman desires, maternal instinct, and critical resistance, has emerged as the central trope in her work to date. Figures of the model become the artist's surrogates, striving, perhaps in vain, to stand-in for her multiple selves: "I have so many woman in me, no harem could contain them all. Desire them, and they will exist."

New Body-Spaces

Drozdik's photo-based installations are significant in the production of new body-spaces in the art of the later 1980s and 1990s, a project that is joined, for example, by the video-projection installations of Tony Oursler. The *Medical Erotic* of Drozdik, like what I have termed elsewhere the 'techno-grotesque' of Oursler,²⁶ offers to re-examine the more programmed and dogmatic bodies lined up by the art world in the 1980s. The pleasures, risks and irascibilities of these projects, their elaborate histories and their willful futures, return scenes of the body that are at once more somatic and more virtual than the allusions, simulations and masquerades that filled the bodily templates of the previous decade.



Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self, 1993
rubber cast sculpture of the artist's body

In a 1994 exhibition at Metro Pictures,²⁷ Tony Oursler balanced his flopping bodies on distressed needles of perfect projection. Little machines backed by tiny causeways of wire threw up a congregation of vivid, hyper-real face-surfaces onto the dummies, flowers, altars, clouds and organs that titled the show. These zones of reception line up as the inverse co-ordinates of Drozdik's edgy clinical drama. Soft, improvised mannequins blur the solid outlines of the life cast that centres the *Medical Erotic*; projection replaces incision; while the encountered scene is not a detective story presided over by historical enigma, but a mischievous round of garrulous monologues locked up in a video-tape loop. Everyday declamation substitutes for poetic symbols, compulsive verbalisation for the accretions of history, and fractious improvisation eclipses the tumultuous layering of genealogy.

²⁶ This term, and much of the preceding section were first elaborated in "New Bodies: The Medical Venus and the Techno-grotesque" (1993-1994), chapter 3 of *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001).

²⁷ Tony Oursler, *Dummies, flowers, altars, clouds, and organs*, Metro Pictures Gallery, New York, November 1994

Yet the bodies of Drozdik and Oursler share a number of commitments that set them against the dominant forms and assumptions of the New York school of visual postmodernism, and the traditions it inherited, refuted and recast. They are not naturally expressive or overtly sexualised in the manner of performative traditions inherited from the 1960s and 1970s. They owe little, again, to the allegorically recoded figures of pictorial Neo-Expressionism, or to the aggressively gendered or politicized recitations of the 1980s. On the other hand, both Drozdik and Oursler resist that 'eclipse' of the body 'by our own technology', or "ceding our outdated flesh, blood and neural tissue to integrated circuits and the mechanistic progeny"²⁸ eagerly anticipated in recent accounts of robotic surrogacy or pure virtuality. Nor are they associated with the apocalyptic envisaging of inexorably posthuman bodies whose corporeality is collapsed into mutant monstrosity or the uncanny fade-out of neo-hyper-realism. Seen, heard and performed as melodramatic, eerie, anxious, compassionate, tender and hermetic, Oursler's bodies are hybrid subjects alternately caught and launched "in choric stages of technopsychosis".²⁹ While Drozdik's body-selves, begin with a narcissistic appropriation of the artist's own surfaces and end with their relocation in multiple scenes of production, analysis and desire. We catch her negotiating with history in a series of gestures that form a singular relation to the emerging logic of post-appropriation. In this work, historical forms of science and body-production are projected onto her surrogate self, and incorporated within it, so that she bears the marks of their presence – and passage – like



Tony Oursler, *Switched*, 1996
video installation, installation view
Műcsarnok, Budapest, 2001

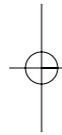
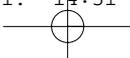
stigmata. Moving from plural represented selves to a dialogue with early scientific knowledge that is both subtle and ironic, the technique of appropriation is folded over and over again, finally emerging as a flipbook of corporeal production.

Los Angeles, 2001

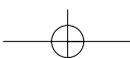
²⁸ Colin McGin, "Hello, Hal", *New York Times*, Book Review, January 3 1999, p. 11 (reviewing Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, New York: Viking, 1998; Hans Moravec, *Robot: Mere Machines to Transcendent Mind*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998; and Neil Gershenfeld *When Things Start to Think*, New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

²⁹ Martha Schwendener, "Tony Oursler: dummies, flowers, altars, clouds and organs", *Art Papers*, vol. 19, January/February 1995, p. 59.





INDIVIDUAL MYTHOLOGY



MANIFESTO OF INDIVIDUAL MYTHOLOGY

Individualism was formed in the past, and it still raises important issues in the present.

The cultural tradition maps out the history of individualism,
and at the same time determines it.

The discourse of art – which is built on the Greek-Renaissance tradition, on realism, impressionism,
expressionism, on the “new forms of realism”,
on modernism – defines individualism.

* * *

To answer the fundamental question “What is art?”, I started to contradict heritage by readdressing
the problematics of individual mythology.

(By the use of non-traditional media – photography, slide projections, photo-offset series, and my
bodily presence, my movements – I expressed my desire to break away
from tradition and get closer to my personal experience.)

The visual presentation of the individual creates the image.

(The body, the face, movements, clothing are constitutive elements
of the image of the individual.)

* * *

The image is consciously organized.

Consciousness organizes the image.

The image is organized consciousness.

The image of the individual expresses its situation.

The physical and visual presence of the artist (of the individual) reflects the artist's social position,
psychology, physical state, their relation to the viewer,
the idea that they wish to represent, and also the culture
from which they created the idea, and the alternatives from
which they can choose for themselves the (life)style-models at their disposal.

The aura of culture casts shadows on the image.

The individual is manifested in the image.

The image organizes the representation of the individual.

The nature of individualism is questionable.

There are ready-made panels, patterns and models for the image
and for the existence of the existing.

Budapest, 1977



Individual Mythology,
#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, 1975-77
photo-offset
50 x 70 cm each





Dance

Dance is perpetually floating between the body and the intellect.

The bodily appearance of intellectual soaring.

The separation from carnal gravitation.

Budapest, 1977

Individual Mythology, 1975-77
#1, #3, #5, #6
photo-offset
50 x 70 cm each



Disco, Dance, Slide Projection

(I do not form my individual mythology with traditional visual techniques,
but with my bodily presence and with the movements of the self,
using the ready-made framework of a genre.)

I use disco as a ready-made framework. Projecting slides in the disco is a medium
by which to declare individual mythology.

Projection of slides:

(slide series officially created for the celebration of 30 years of freedom
and the victory of the Communist regime*)

marchers
parade with banners
gymnastics for celebration
workers
walkers
shoppers
landscape

Among the slides reflecting the Communist victory in the socialist state I insert slides showing my
dancing movements. The slides are projected onto a 10 x 5 meter screen,
and meanwhile I, too, dance in the crowd among the disco dancers.
The slides are projected onto me, onto the dancers and onto the wall.

(* In 1977 it was important for me to manifest my individual experience and to address issues in Communist doctrine
and in the canon of artistic tradition by questioning individualism.)

Budapest, 1977

Individual Mythology
performance with
slide-projection on the body of the artist
Ganz-Mávág Culture House, Budapest, 1977



Boat Excursion

Be happy until 10 p.m.!

I have exhibited a boat excursion as a ready-made experience.

(The boat excursion is the medium itself.)

Budapest, 1977

Boat Excursion, 1977
photographs of the event

(Idea for a Sculpture)

An ironing board on a morello-red base.
An iron hanging from the ceiling.
Transformers and hair-dryers on the floor.

(Idea for an Installation)

I place a tray in the corner.
I fill it up with sand and pebbles.
I fill up three corners of the gallery.

Budapest, 1977

(Ideas/Sketches for Events in Rózsa Presszó)

- I wall up the windows, and I exhibit them.
- I paint the shadow of the light on the floor.
- I wall up the window and stick tiny pictures in its place.
- I stick photographs of the same view upon the window, or else, photographs taken from some other window (maybe from the window at the club).
- I feed everybody with a red star.
- I lie on the pictures of famous men, and make love to them.
- I place knives, frames and papers in plexiglass boxes.
- I crunch light bulbs.

Budapest, 1977

(Video-Sketch)

Action:

1. I drink water.
2. I eat bread.
3. I roll a red star in my mouth.

Description of the Environment:

A table set with white tablecloth, light at the other end.

A contour of a dark figure seen, along with the white table, and an extremely bright window in the background. People are sitting at the end of the table. They place their hands on the table.

Action:

1. I eat bread, slowly, chewing away at each crumb.
2. I drink water slowly, gulp by gulp.
3. I get a star on a plate.
4. I take it on my tongue, and roll in my mouth.
5. I hold it between my lips, I show it.
6. I pin it on to the tablecloth.

The camera moves back, there is nothing on the table except the star. White tablecloth and red star.

7. The camera is focusing on the star lying on the table.
8. I place my hand over it, only my hand is visible.
9. I take the star away.

Budapest, 1977 - Vancouver, 1979



Symbols of Commonplaces, 1976-77
photo-offset, 4 from a series of 6:

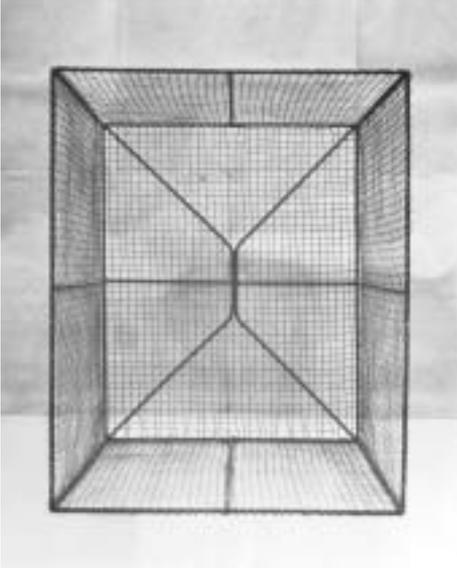
#01 Window

#05 Flag on the Reichstag in Berlin

#06 Cage

#07 Individual Mythology: Cage with the Artist









Blink of the Eye and Sigh, 1977
photo-offset
50 x 70 cm



ON MY BEAUTY

My beauty has been worn away. I bear my face on the stage-set of stormy affairs like a nostalgic portrait of the blonde stars disappeared into the distant past. My beauty fills the movie screen, and descends languid into the arms of successful and unsuccessful men, flashing a chance of love in the flirtatious, urban scenery of coffee shops. My bottom was worshiped as a part of their idol by all women. My hair invoked the love of the woman-child in everybody. My entry is the first appearance of the heroine in the third scene of the film that had been terribly abused even before I was able to raise a protest. Those who look at me are reminded of them, the heroines of the movie screen, the heroines whose actions show that they are drunk on love.

There is nothing in my beauty that has not been used by the commercial magnates of sex and love –production. The debased abused me even before I was born. You can not see anything on me that was not born in the imagination of men with the express purpose of turning them on.

The debased bastards will not let you see me!

They had done away with my beauty even before I could protest. I did not have a chance to raise my voice, to stop their scheming.

I would like to take possession of my own beauty, so that its past causes no disturbance in my consciousness or of those around me. I would like to understand my beauty, without becoming the object of desire. Until I do not exist as an 'independent likeness', I will always be a 'look-alike'. Till then, every step I take will be half-hearted, an experiment lacking independence, just a note on what already exists.

I do not want to be the object of pleasure. I want to keep my beauty under my power. I do not want to be a reminiscence of beauties worn away on stage, I myself want to be the 'original'.

Why are you not able to see me? Why can I not meet myself?

I can only take possession of my 'presence' if and when I have cleansed myself of my preconceptions. Why did I begin in them? They shaped me, I was only born, the casting mould of beauty was already there.

You can see my past on my features; I was burned, buried as a teacher in a small provincial town, I committed suicide as an acclaimed actress, I was raped, tortured Kierkegaard to death with my beauty, so he will remain faithful to love forever, I charmed your hearts, so you would never love a mortal woman, only one that is similar to my picture, and through it (the sorrowful sacrifice) you adore only me. As a suffragette, I invented the self-consciousness of my sex. I smile on the labels of old boxes of sweets, I glanced at you from behind the counter, and I am all that beauty which was salvaged by film and advertisement.

Allow me to reclaim my beauty!

Amsterdam, 1979



Pornography (I Embrace Myself), 1978-79
double image, b/w photographs
28 x 36 cm each



MALE-FEMALE

I am male and female.

In my language, if someone speaks of me in the third person singular, I am "ő" (s/he). We only know from the name if "ő" is a man or a woman, if for some reason the narrator makes a specific reference to this. It can be assumed from the description of the image, from the traits of the hair, the skin, the clothes, the smile (the behavior?), but the gender, which refers to either man or woman, can only be recognized from the image referring specifically to sex. If you hear something about me, you don't know, until you haven't seen my skin, my hair, my breasts, my bottom, my clothes and my smile, that I am a woman. If you speak to me you can never forget that I am a woman, my image constantly indicates a woman for you.

I am male and female.

My sensibility, the way I experience the world, is female, you always think of me as you perceive me: female. I always behave so that you can never forget that I am female. You never think about me as male. You never forget your fear of femininity when I'm around. You are filled with anxiety and despair, you want me and loathe me, you become sadistic and masochistic, you flare up and you are extinguished, you are stuck and you gain momentum. You don't forget your fear of a woman when I am there.

I am male and female.

I am deeply aware that I am a woman when you are there, and you show me your fear and your desire. I can use every means available to create a female image. My smile, my hair, my hands, my movements, my perfume, my clothes, my earrings.

At the same time when I write, draw, pass my time, work, eat, I don't have a gender. I think about myself as "ő", without sex.

he	
she reads	ő olvas
it	
he	
she walks	ő sétál
it	
he	
she draws	ő rajzol
it	

Toronto, 1979-80



Pomography (I Project on Myself), 1979
b/w photograph
28 x 36 cm



Dialogue Sculpture

- 1.1 The dialogue describes the visible.
- 1.2 The dialogue is part of the dialogue sculpture.
- 1.3 The dialogue sculpture is arranged symmetrically.
- 1.4 The dialogue sculpture contains small movements.
- 1.5 These movements disturb the symmetry, but the dialogue attempts to restore it.
- 1.6 The small movements are perceptible in the present moment and expressed in the next moment.
- 1.7 The dialogue sculpture is created in time.
- 1.8 The dialogue sculpture creates a time which extends every movement through the expression until the next movement.
- 1.9 It is a time sculpture which destroys itself when the verbalisation of visible movement ends.
- 1.10 Our visual existence goes on changing until the end of our lifetime.
- 1.11 The dialogue sculpture creates its own aura.
- 1.12 The dialogue sculpture is part of one's life-aura.
- 1.13 An aura is created by each small movement, which changes every moment.
- 2.1 The dialogue sculpture is part of the symmetry of the installation.
- 2.2 The installation has symmetry.
- 2.3 Symmetry is ideal balance.
- 2.4 Symmetry is an element of conceptual and theoretical knowledge.

Text for the Performance Diavision

1. You lower your hand.
2. You turn your head.
3. You lower your eyelids.
4. Close your mouth.
5. There is a shadow round your neck.
6. You put your heels together.
7. You are picking your nails.
8. You put your chip in your palm.
9. EYEBROWS
EYELASHES
EYE-LIDS
10. Your moustache is black. Your moustache darkens your skin.
11. You are excited.
12. Your legs are crossed.
13. With your trousers.
14. You are pushing your hand through your hair.
15. Drawing your fingers.
16. A collar makes a shadow on your neck.
17. You are brushing the dust off your trousers.
18. You are swallowing your saliva.
19. You lick your lips.
20. You are sitting back in your chair.
21. You are sitting forward in your chair.
22. Folds are in your shirt, buttons...
23. Your teeth are yellow, pupil, iris...

We are framed by the square projected from a slide-projector behind the column. The microphone transmits the words very softly. Short sentences: subjective, predicate.

A cupboard with two doors, two bed-tables, double bed, a red line is the axis.

Toronto, 1979-1980

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I Try To Be Transparent, 1980
performance
Factory 77, Toronto



In Someone's Shadow I Positioned Myself in their Place

Script for an exhibition and performance

Objects:

- fixer in a developer's tray
- developer in the tray of the fixer

Photographs:

- I rearrange messy piles of garbage, I take photographs before and afterwards, and develop the pictures during the exhibition.

Objects:

- I make a big plaster frame.
- I project the following words along with photographs of the objects collected.

DAN FLAVIN	mono-construction
SOL LEWITT	cross-lines, the block structures of the 'neo-avant-garde'
CARL ANDRE	wooden sculpture out of street litter
ROBERT MORRIS	felt, cube, triangle, projected square
ROBERT SMITHSON	'spiral jetty', a circle and a square built on the ground,
KEITH SONNIER	video installation, objects lighted by neon
BRUCE NAUMAN	constructed forms out of elements built on the ground and wood 2 x 4
MARIO MERZ	long corridor – a photograph of trashed glass
WALTER DE MARIA	a photograph of friends
MICHAEL HEIZER	spiraling land-art, I build a spiral out of earth

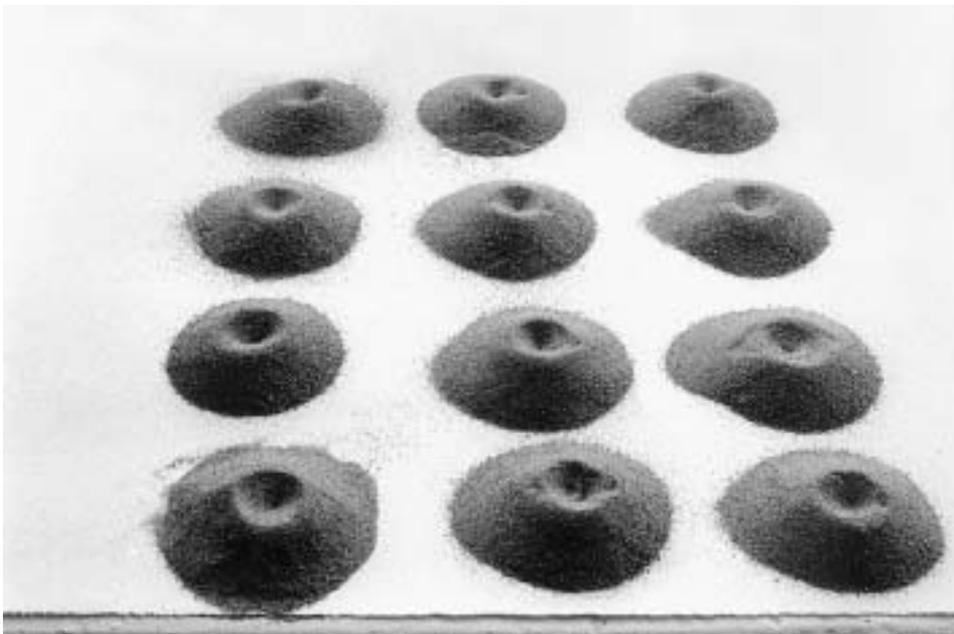
In the shadow of a thing, which cannot be seen, it is of no value but valuable

Toronto, 1979-80



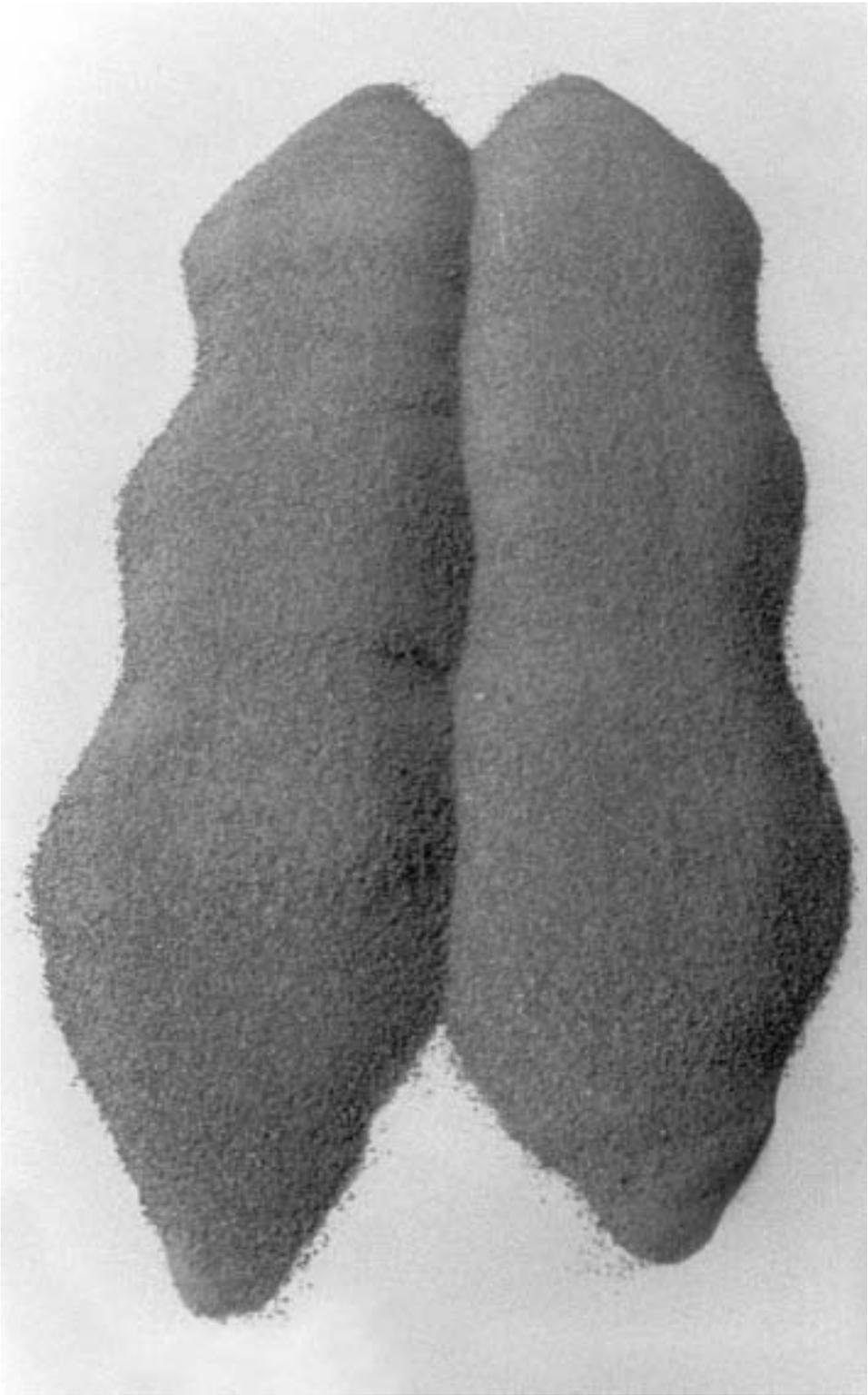
In Someone's Shadow
I Positioned Myself in their Place, 1979-80
installation





Temporary Coherence, 1979
sand-installation
Toronto, the artist's studio

page 49
Temporary Coherence, 1979
b/w photograph
28 x 36 cm



FICTIVE RÉSUMÉ/AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1945

- "United ununitable" (installation)
- "Concentration of force for survival" (performance)

1946

- "The celebration of peace" (happening)
- "There is no greater power than trust in the future" (installation)
- "To trust in the future is power" (banner series)
- "There is no sugar and meat for the child" (painting)
- "Meat is a highly-valued asset" (drawings)
- "Gold is of equal value in weight as meat" (ready made)
- "Faith is still everything" (conceptual installation)
- "The rebirth of the gods and the Oedipus complex" (installation)

1952

- "Work is merit and honor"* (conceptual series of exhibitions in streets, cafés and factories)
- "Have you still got your Oedipus complex?" (badges)

1953

- "First of May parades in every street, in every settlement" (happening with several million participants and viewers)
- "The whole world is celebrating on the street" (happening)
- "A glass of water on a red tablecloth" (installation)

1954

- "Personality cult" (land art)
- "Liberation" (happening)

1955

- "Book exhibition – censorship as a general concept" (installation)
- "What we can do with culture:
 - a) deconstruct
 - b) incorporate
 - c) construct" (ready-made)
- "Culture is superstructure itself" (live statue)

1956

- "God is dead" (catastrophic event)
- "Burial rite" (event)
- "The questionable nature of the Oedipus complex" (statement series)
- "Yellow silk dress with black velvet ribbon" (performance)

1957

- "Wrapped to each other" (doubtless action)
- "We belong to each other forever" (performance)
- "The semiological series of understanding" (creative practice)

*This used to be a slogan in the Communist ideology.

1958

“Semiological series” (creative practices)
“The interpretation of symbols” (body art)

1959

“Visible and invisible transparency” (conceptual model series)

1960

“Education and resistance” (painting, drawing)
“Resistance to totalitarian education” (painting, drawing)
“Theoretical desire for freedom” (painting, drawing)

1961

“Poetry is a possibility for freedom” (novel, photo series)

1962

“Self-analysis studies” (concept, performance, drawing, painting)

1963

“Creative situationist exercises” (cartoon, photo)
“Meditation on nature” (land art)
“Exhibition on the power of desire and knowledge” (drawing, performance, statue, installation)
“The symbolic breaking of the image of the chair” (action)

1964

“How can the total autonomy of the individual be realized” (photo-offset series)

1965

“Free and independent personality as the only way for optimism” (film series)

1966

“Creative exercises for the unpronounceable, for the unspeakable” (erased drawings)

1967

“Redemption, the redeemer” (prophetic exercises)
“The prophet” (performance, presentation)
“Schoolteacher” (performance, presentation)
“The creed of the prophet” (performance, presentation)

1968

“The analysis of the theoretical and practical works of the prophet” (presentation, performance, statue, drawing, painting)
“Nature and meditation” (painting)
“The aura of the individual” (performance)
“Poetry and meditation” (critical writings)
“Experiments against personal freedom” (critical writings)
“Is there a party that is able to represent democratic rights and the freedom of the individual?” (parade banners)
“The possibility for propaganda in society” (action)
“The evolution of developed, conscious and critical individuals” (action)

1969

- "Dust" (installation, land art)
- "Ash" (installation, land art)
- "Sand" (installation, land art)
- "Pebble" (installation, land art)
- "Stone" (installation, land art)

1970

- "Fetishes and phenomena" (*objet trouvé*)
- "Idolized object and symptom:
Conversation with
 - a) 1 friend
 - b) 2 friends
 - c) 4 friends
 - d) 2 enemies" (video, performance, series of drawings)
- "Conversation with many strangers:
Conversation with
 - a) 1 stranger
 - b) 2 strangers
 - c) 3 strangers" (video, performance, series of drawings)
- "Conversation with an indulgent person" (video, performance, series of drawings)
- "Conversation with an understanding person" (video, performance, series of drawings)
- "Conversation with an uncomprehending person" (video, performance, series of drawings)
- "Scene without conversation" (video, performance, series of drawings)
- "Big, general meal" (live statue)
- "Food statue" (performance)
- "Speech statue" (performance)
- "Silence statue" (performance)
- "Drawing as behavior" (performance)
- "Me and you" (performance, live statue, drawing)
- "Me and nothing" (performance, live statue, drawing)
- "Me and nobody" (performance, live statue, drawing)

1971

- "Pastry and coffee" (quality installation)
- "Sweet, bitter, savoury, neutral" (installation)

1972

- "Catharsis" (photo series)
- "Tragic" (drawing series)
- "Ephemeral" (painting series)
- "Encounter with death" (photo offset)
- "Transience – death symbol" (offset poster)
- "Pain, pleasure" (painting series)
- "The limits of the ineffable" (performance)

1973

- “The ineffable” (painting)
- “Environment: acid and alkali” (short story and description)
- “Paper, light, line” (laser painting)
- “Fettered to the retained and fossilized remnants of local art” (copperplate series)
- “The torture of official, institutionalized art” (happening)
- “Administrative labyrinth” (drawing, photo series)
- “Lost point of view” (drawing, photo series)
- “I allowed something to happen to me” (drawing, photo series)
- “Defenseless condition” (drawing, photo series)
- “There is no other way outside the legal one” (drawing, photo series)
- “No resistance” (drawing, photo series)
- “The weakness is undemonstratable”

1974

- “Viennese joint exhibition” (drawing series, feminist action)

1975

- “Hope” (film)
- “Crushing mill” (statue)
- “Meat-grinder” (statue)
- “Freedom-grinder” (statement)
- “Art-making machine” (institution-founding action)
- “Mechanized institution” (machine)
- “Freedom-grinding machine institution” (statue)

Amsterdam, 1978

(Prepared for the publication Words and Works)

RÉSUMÉ EXTENSION

During the first years I spent at the academy, I studied live figures, the nude, portraiture, still-life, landscape, composition, and the techniques of oil painting, tempera and watercolor. Later, I worked with printing techniques – etching, lithography, monotype and offset. The first four years were taken up with the hard work of studying technical visual problems; I learned how to make life drawings and paintings, and how to compose abstract images, as in any traditional academy.

After these years of study I started to develop questions about art: how art relates to life and how art relates to the artist, and how art relates to culture. I analyzed the elements of art. Where life ends and art begins. Where the individual artist's existence ends and art begins. What sort of abstraction is necessary to create art from life? Art is created from art, and has no connection with life. How could I relate myself as an artist to art?

I set up a *Sameness Equation* (the title of a series of works) between the elements of art. It threw up many questions of identity. Identity between me and art, my being and my art, me and my model, and so forth. I tried to bring art as close as possible to my being, to identify myself with art – and also to separate them as much as possible. I also tried to find the connections between verbal and visual images and between verbal and visual abstractions. These thoughts were expressed in the drawings with text and the photo-offsets with text in that series. In those days I painted little; I used no color, only black-and-white.

I began to work with self-image. I created an 'individual mythology': this is the title I gave to a series of drawings and offsets. (I made three series in this period: *Sameness Equation*; *Individual Mythology*; and *Situations*.)

I identified artists as mythological figures from art history, and saw their lives, and my own life, as part of mythology. I also considered the creation of a myth to be a basic element of the artist-star image, which is the contemporary way to look at the artist, as realized in Picasso's career. Art history seemed to me to be mythology, with the artist as its hero.

On the other hand, I also saw the artist as the basic tool for the expression of ideas. In those days I didn't want to use any intermediary medium between the artist and art. I began to do performances. I saw every moment of my life as a performance. Performance and body art brought me close to the understanding of the boundary between art and life. I performed in galleries, but not exclusively; I performed anywhere I felt like it. I made drawings, photo series, and offsets, as well as performance. The performances I did only once; I never repeated them, as I did not want to create a theatrical effect. I wanted the basic knowledge of 'identity' without redundancy.

The major influences on me at that time were Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, Wittgenstein, and German and French existentialism. When I analyzed the artist in *Individual mythology* I associated myself with a new idea, the idea that there was no artist (in the sense of an individual, an independent, isolated being) – that the individual as artist was a cultural product. Marshall McLuhan and my Marxist educational background gave me the obvious stimulus to make 'situations', in which to express the notion that any product of a culture is identical to the culture that created it. Artists, ideas and objects are the same as the culture in which they are born. The artist (as an individual), like ideas and art itself, does not exist independently of his or her culture.

I never expressed this mechanically. I started to exhibit things with nothing superfluous. I used ready-made objects and situations, such as opening nights, an entry into a café or club, famous artists, my friends, conversation, the gallery, chairs, my clothes. I saw society as an institution into which the individual enters to emerge as a product of that society. I saw art as an institution into which artists enter and which has been formed by culture. The individual enters, is coordinated by the given rules and laws, and is transformed, because the rules are stronger.

I exhibited, as installations, the settings of my everyday life – the café, the studio, the club, the gallery, the museum. A piece of furniture – a chair, a lamp, a table. The intention was for them to express a particular time and their connection to me. *Situations* soon became political because I had to analyze the political conditions of cultural life – the cultural rules in the 'socialist-bureaucratic' society.

In the end, I was able to relate my *Individual Mythology* and *Situations* series. It was at this time that I began to use multimedia. This work was often shown in large spaces for mass entertainment, originally not related to the visual arts. I exhibited the opening night, the boat trip, and the dance party, all as forms of 'situations'.

Later, I became interested in symbols and signs, in symbolic objects as abstractions of sensation and knowledge. I used symbols from art, from politics, black-and-white photographs, prints, drawings and films. This period drew me back to the two-dimensional surface. I did fewer and fewer performances, installations and multimedia pieces. I started to analyze the two-dimensional surface in relation to space. I made drawings, sculpture, installations, Xeroxes, photos and video.

In the last two to three years I have again become interested in painting. I started to use the same image in different styles. I use images from various periods of art history, from my own earlier work, from cartoons, magazines, photos and from my own loose fantasies. I combine different images and styles. I combine symbols and mythological figures. The references I use lost the original content. I try to create a sensual image by combining them arbitrarily. I paint with oil on large and small canvases, on paper and on cut-outs. Sometimes I use text on them. I see painting as a meditative and sensual activity which is only accessible through references to common knowledge. On my 'surface', which is sometimes canvas, I can develop imagery, but this surface is transparent by dint of the mediation of the imagery drawn from art, art history, my earlier life, my memory, my fantasies and my everyday life. I try to keep this surface transparent. I don't want to exclude anything; I want to bring up everything I can imagine and hold on to. I allow myself to be led by impulse and sense and by my relationship to depth. It is a new kind of spiritualism. It is an intense surface without interpretations, a vaguely formed opinion. Under my brush strokes come up reproductions of other paintings. Gestures to the past; these gestures can be formed in many styles. Using paint is a purely visionary medium. Painting is still of value in understanding the complexity of the concept of art. Painting is a challenge to art history renewing its relationship with art. An immediate way of assimilating the modern.

New York, 1982

CONVERSATION

between Orshi Drozdik and Patrick McGrath

Imagery

Drozdik:

Imagery is all around us. It emerges from memory and from the everyday. It is the just-seen and the *déjà vu*. It accumulates and awaits projection. It surges over itself like waves, and slips sleekly over meaning, and covers it totally, and becomes meaning. Our being is heavy with it.

McGrath:

Deep in the gloomy vaults of a late twentieth-century mind, a slick and sticky sludge of semi-otic information began silently to rise, lapping gently against the fungoid and crumbling walls of obsolescent knowledge. The mind was turning into a sign swamp!

Meaning was going under. Imagery is a shifting field of myths and symbols which overlays the natural and mediates out contact with it.

Drozdik:

Deciding what to take from the chaos offered by imagery is very complicated. The cultural mood leaks through the noise of the artist's internalized meaning and this influence decisions.

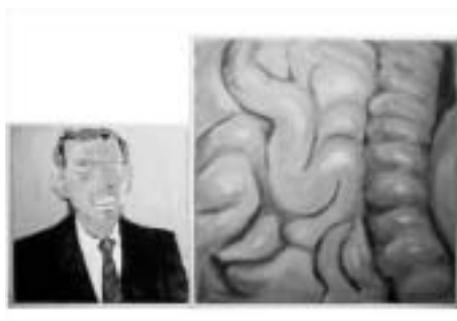
Intellectual curiosity forces metaphors to bind onto the unknown. The binding of metaphor onto chaos restructures the metaphor into a new image bulk.

New moods energize, reorganize, regroup the imagery – for example, the perception of the possibility of an imminent catastrophe stimulates the articulation of pre-existing primitive, romantic, and apocalyptic images.

Originality

McGrath:

Originality, like the self, never truly disappears. Novel combinations, resurrected genres, image banks long dormant and suddenly reflourishing – we will always find the new, what was never seen before. And the self: who operates without the self?



Self-portrait as an American Businessman, 1984
diptych, oil on canvas
30 x 30 cm; 45, 5 x 45, 5 cm

Drozdik:

Why do we need originality? Can we have it at all? Originality is semi-transparent, dimly see through it to its precursors. The known and the familiar can be glimpsed. Sometimes you hear the prompter. The artist mediates between culture and style.

But there are degrees of mediation. In some works there appears to be more mediation than in others. To some degree, the prompted meaning gets distorted. Sometimes original copies are produced – then, the degree of mediation is almost zero.

Style

Drozdik:

What we hear and see are the echoes and hallucinations, and style is the overcoat on the hallucinations.

To paint is to execute style. When style stops raising new questions of form and starts to work by itself, it becomes automatic and boring; then it is time to leave it, like a lover who raises no new questions for the senses or for consciousness. New questions lead to other questions that demand new style.

There is no difference between abstract and figurative images because both are part of the image vocabulary with which we are provided.



Self-portrait as a Russian Party Leader, 1984
diptych, oil on canvas
30 x 30 cm; 45, 5 x 45, 5 cm

The Self

McGrath:

The self is a dying metaphor.

Language presents itself as a medium of an original persona, an 'I': but this is our oldest illusion. 'I' am a conduit of 'my' language – it flows through 'me' and patterns its passage in constructs of subjectivity. The subject is an artifice of language: 'I' do not speak, 'I' am spoken. 'I' do not write, 'I' am inscribed.

The void: having glimpsed it, 'I' return to a life that is only a skin, a membrane stretched tight across the mouth of the abyss, to keep the smell out of it. I have nothing that is not artificial.

Details from the conversation between Orshi Drozdik and Patrik McGrath.
First published in Orsolya Drozdik Az alteregók prelűdjei [Preludes of Alter Egos] (Óbuda Galéria, Budapest, 1984), exhibition catalogue.

Éva Körner

BIOLOGICAL METAPHORS

at the Budapest Galéria, 1984

We are in the exhibition space of the Budapest Galéria, housed in what was once the Zichy palace, a space that has nothing to do with the way the great architectural ages coincided, or with the intellectual spirit they represented. It is because this architectural space has been ruined by the well-intentioned trust we bestowed upon utility, with which we offered it up to the disposal of the most rational trend of our times, industrial design, it is right that in this place a scene has been brought into being for art to exert a presence. We murdered the past with carelessly misplaced trust, not having succeeded in the meanwhile in preparing the surroundings for the current flow of thought, a scene that is undefined and open as a result, and thus apt for free flight.

Orshi Drozdik set out on a breath-taking endeavour in this wretched environment lacking all freedom. She summons an individual and personal story of genesis, akin in its fullness to the way it once appeared on the walls of the Campo Santo. The venture is not only stupefying by its being of an unforeseen nature (I for one have no knowledge of anything like it) but also in its daring: what could have allowed a lone artist to set out on the implementation of such a huge program as this, that had once upon a time been served with a base in social consensus, as well as a common conceptual, historical and symbolic language; where historical continuity in composition paved the way for the appearance of anomalous thoughts in the process of reformulation as well.

All this is a matter of the past as of now, the interpretation of the symbols and programs then current is a task relegated to the study of historians.

A great deal of ground both in time and distance has been covered by Orshi Drozdik, so far as the analytical dissection of existential questions and the measurement of her own existence are concerned. She took 'measurements' in a very literal sense of the word, when she used her body, physical movement, and the physical form of self-realisation as it is found in a gesture as instruments equal to the tools of fine art in her earlier works (realised when still in Hungary). Her own body was the measuring instrument certified by the weight of self-sacrifice, with which she fought for the cognition of the world. The path leading her through these works, and also following from the *Biological Metaphors* construed in these, took her forward – back to the will for the formulation of the Genesis. I use the term 'will' intentionally, since I have learned

from conversation with Orshi Drozdik herself that both her ideas and her tools are at the moment in the process of development: everything we see today in its present formulation is a station in a work process that is going to take a lot longer.

An increasing number of feelers, claws connected these existential questions as the creation of *Biological Metaphors* progressed, at first forming coherent groups and then forming a single great complex within which one found that the individual personality and the whole of humanity, the discoveries of the past, the present and the future, man and nature as binary oppositions, man's world of ideas as well as the material world that has found independence in an ambivalent fashion, all these are links in the circling chain of that which blooms and the fatally disposed, the promising and that which is in demise. In Drozdik's work this chain came to settle within the interweaving myths of generation and apocalypse.

The creation of an intellectual rather than an aesthetic value system is the motivating force behind Orshi Drozdik's artistic work, personal character and very being. A theoretical research into the concepts of existence makes up the central line of activity, which is expressed in invariably varied genres and forms. She went in pursuit of the word in order to find expression for the thoughts forming in her mind with unparalleled daring, and we are witnesses to the greatest feat of daring to this day.

This cycle of pictures emerges from an absence of immediate precursors with a demand for a place of its own. Its presentation often does without the finest polish, but is redoubled with earnestness, a heightened effect for its stammering.

Orshi Drozdik's Genesis and Judgement cycle does not build on the foundations used by its predecessors such as the Dome of Torcelo or the graveyard of Pisa; it is a product solely of the history of her inner world (daring even in its fragmented shape). Instead, its credibility is bolstered by its *ad hoc* character, its appearance as a stage in a process, the fact that it gives free reign to further thought both in thematic and formal terms, not to speak of the great challenge it assumes. It is strung out between the extremities of the polarity between Genesis and Judgement, between the biological world most integrally experienced in its own being and the pieces of reality and interpretation that (influence fate in an already threatening way, and) have been created by man. This compulsion for a use of the senses gave birth to the desperate will to find meaning and give order.

The cycle of pictures is filled with reminiscences from art history, because these are implicated by the theme, and because this inquiry into images is the natural coefficient of Orshi Drozdik's questioning-reasoning. Scenes from the Resurrection, the sea and water as well as the depiction of the *danse macabre*, the skeleton with the ribbon sporting the words "great emperor death" bring memories of medieval codices and frescoes to mind. The world of Caspar David Friedrich is conjured by highlands-view, which speak of the lost man who was defeated by nature's vast and secretive being, the revelation of the world-spirit. The rose might be a child's drawing, and yet the child's simple innocence may not be the only thing it represents as it formulates the question posed by Bernard de Morley, 12th century monk of Cluny: "the rose is the past, which has left only its name to us." The frieze with biological and technical structures is reminiscent of Leonardo: he was the one, after all, who formulated the common laws of mechanics and nature, posing the notion that mechanics are the key to the interpretation of phenomena, setting a dangerous precedent for the scientific realisation of murderous instruments. Science has a presence in other parts of the cycle also, namely the depiction of parts of the human organism – knowledge was made possible through the development of surgical implements.

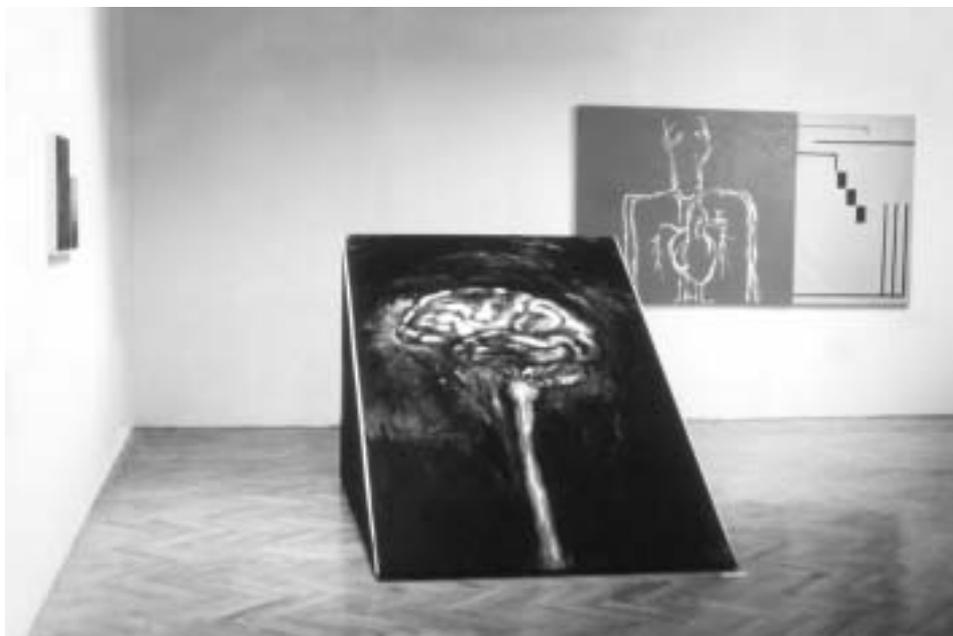
But in conversation it became clear that Orshi Drozdik relegates surgery to the group of brutal sciences that have grown from strength to strength in the wake of war and devastation, to aid in healing wounds. In any case, the activity of the greatest humanists proves inversely problematic, since with a starting point in the laws of the free spirit, they helped to create weapons of mass murder in the end – just consider Leonardo and Einstein. The representation of the internal organs is pre-empted by immediate art historical precursors in expressionism, geometrical and organic abstraction. Two pictures paired in a striking combination raise the battles of intellectualism into the present tense, still keeping afloat the optimistic ideology of constructivism which has crumbled world over, while also backing up to a more ancient belief: faith in the biological organism of humanity is a relatively stable point of departure.

The cycle of pictures is arranged almost like a sacrament. In what we might call the apses of the exhibition space, we find the transcendent reality of birth, resurrection and the last judgement depicted, we see the reality of nature that stems from transcendent reality on the outer walls, and the history of the human spirit is shown in the nave. The altar is an emphatic, monumental structure: the sacramental image placed upon it depicts the human brain, the central formative organ of human history, good

and evil, the intellect, (art) and our physical constitution, as it is exposed to the general and omnipotent laws of existence even in its imposing regal estate. Disease and devastation (the multiplication of cells as well as the rank growth of cancerous cells) are all comprised in life. Thoughts buried deep since the Middle Ages, that have now, after the bankruptcy of over-rationalised, so-called modern thought, become more inviting.

The proposition of life and death raised from the long slumber since the Middle Ages holds Orshi Drozdik's world in fascination: "I am Death, great emperor death, who brings mankind to its knees." (A student of Dante, quoted by Jan Bialostocki). Death interprets life, for it is its measure, and in the final analysis the great director. The written and painted text explanations of Biblical pauperum in early Christianity called "titulus" haunt the pictures of Orshi Drozdik. Two self-portraits are also to be seen in the nave. As Orshi Drozdik explains in the catalogue, she set out to show how inapt she was for binding herself within a single personality, and her insurmountable desire to record variations that have a base in her individual imagination, these phases of the never identical identity. These self-portraits blow your mind, they explain everything. They are daring with intentional brutality – they needed to tear apart the myth of a feminine approach to the world. The tradition which encircles women artists protectively and patronisingly. It has not been so long since the writing on the coat of arms of a group of artists included something like "M. Association of Women Painters in Aquarelle." And even those who attained emancipation, and made stronger attempts to break the boundaries, remained within the field of typically feminine emotions, reminiscences, and the intuitive depiction of desires. Virginia Woolf was the only one to suggest the interweaving unity of masculine and feminine states of being. She was the only one to undertake to tread on the great movements of history. But the story of her Orlando runs on the course of the very finest, most aesthetic emotions.

Orshi Drozdik wants to shred the beautifying shroud of aesthetics. She strives for a reality, a knowledge that crashes through permitted convention and the boundaries of that consensus which separate the field of action that men and women have at their disposal, the border which has been set by thousands of years of male domination. She sends herself into the front line of this war with the aim of breaking out, getting hold of, passing on and fighting for knowledge. She puts herself in the position of greatest vulnerability, she builds the sacrificial altar of knowledge herself and sets herself upon it as the sacrifice, as the ultimate proof of her final and only will.



Biological Metaphors II
oil on canvas, installation view
Budapest Galéria, 1984





Biological Metaphors I
oil on canvas, installation view
Mercer Union, Toronto, 1984



THE HIERARCHY OF ORGANS

Vesalius had his cadaver on the table, he was trembling with a great desire to dissect the already smelly body. The light odor of decaying flesh filled the whole room. He stretched the body across the table and cut open the skin from the down to the pelvic bone. The penetrating knife was carefully held in his hand, and it just dipped into the lightly greenish skin for half an inch. The skin and the fatty tissues separated under the skillful knife. He parted the layers of skin from the muscles with very light motions, helping with the knife, and fastened the skin into the hook attached to the sides of the table. The great map of muscles revealed itself after he finished lifting the skin. Another light moved with the sharp knife, and the dense bulk of muscle of the heart was revealed. This is it! Probably he sighed with a great excited choking noise at the end. He was out of breath. The heart. The heart is the center of the body, it connects all the arteries. Such an important organ. His penetrating knife skillfully dissected the whole organ from its connected vessels. This organ is almost as interesting as the brain. How wonderful! His feeling of power over the opened body moved him to euphoria. He has seen the hole in the body from where he lifted out the heart. Great excitement ran down his spine. How wonderful it is to hold this muscly organ! He held it in his hand and he squeezed it a little, and the heart relaxed its muscles responsively. It felt like it would still perform its function, beating.

The dissection-paradigm came to life under the sharp blade of Vesalius's curious penetration. All of its separable entities were drawn into the plates of classical anatomy for the illustration of the medical body, and hundreds of years later became the supportive knowledge of the everyday body.

In our everyday body, organs as separate entities are organized into functions. Some functions are higher in the hierarchy than others. While the organs are doing their unnoticed free labor, we label them with disciplinary continuity by the function they perform to serve the whole body. In this rational order of their function lies the contribution to the corporate look of the walking everyday body.

In this order the brain is the king organ, and gets its throne on the top of the body under the skull, while the heart is in the symbolic center. One's function is to produce the thoughts and instructions for the whole body: the other produces emotions, and pumps the blood into the whole body system. Both of them are high in the hierarchy of organic structures. They are symbols of the dissected state, of the mind and of feelings. As a dissected organ, the heart pumping the blood is the symbol of life and produces feelings, as the brain, as a dissected unit, performs the function of controlling feelings, and the whole function of the body, and models consciousness. At the same time the organs of the digestive tract are rarely mentioned. A large part of the digestive system can be bypassed in surgery for women with eating disorders. So, in the medical body, organs can be eliminated, as in lobotomy and heart bypass surgery. Also, pain and fear can be eliminated by chemicals which we use as medicine, to avoid the unwanted signals of the free-laboring organ's dissatisfaction, the sighs of the body suppressed.

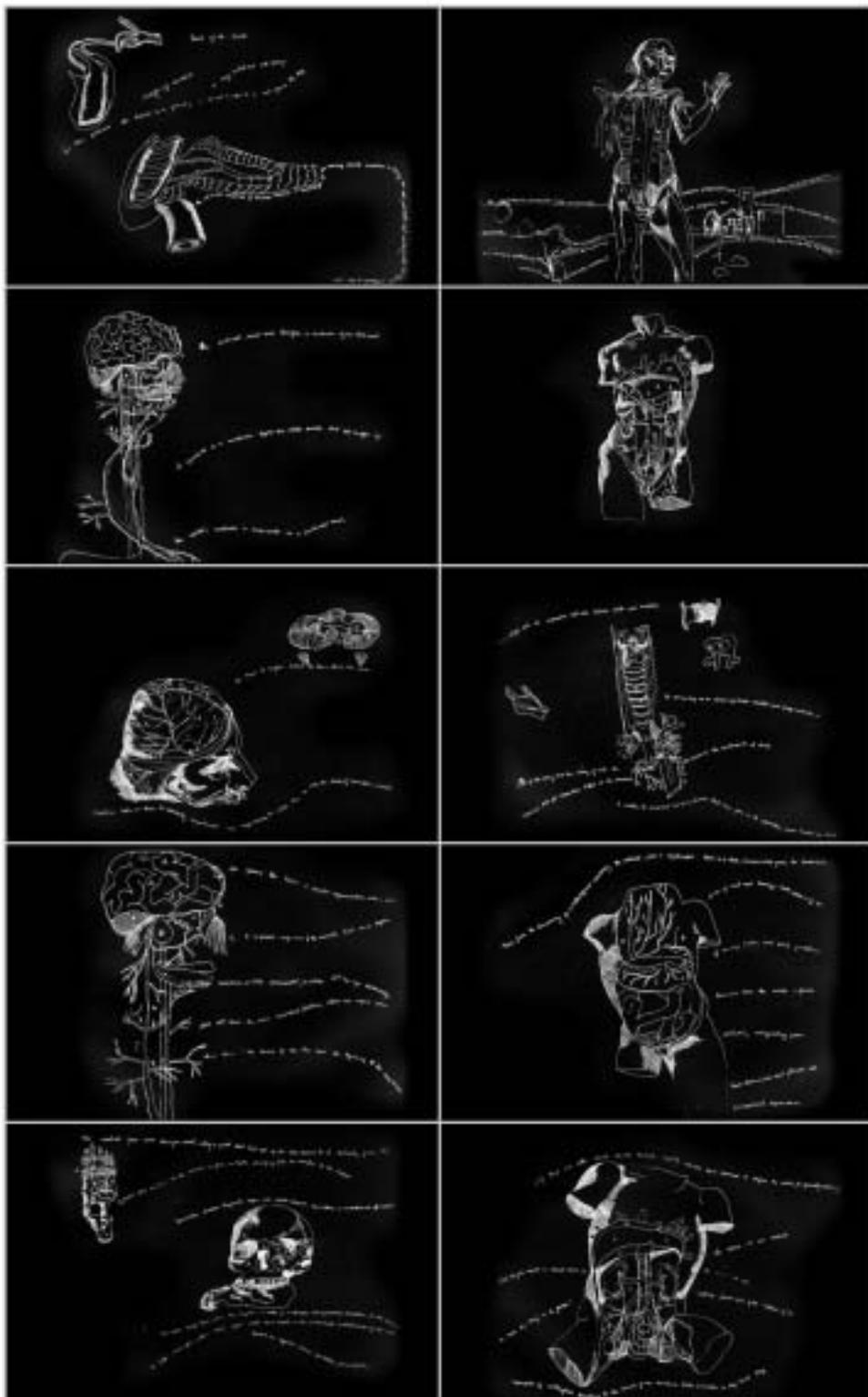
According to many cultural conventions of ideal beauty, hair, facial skin or fingernails are the most important parts of the body, given special care, while the beauty of the liver goes unnoticed – likewise in the dissected body some organs enjoy privileges, while others get ignored and left out like the homeless in front of your door.

Dissection is penetration: the knife penetrates the body in the paternal society. The body, which is obedient to the power, is violated by it.

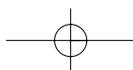
Dissection is an act which expresses an attitude toward the body. The body, in this circumstance, is always the Other. The Other gives herself voluntarily and is sacrificed to penetration. The knife which is the object of the action, symbolizes certainty, while the willing body represents uncertainty. Curiosity toward the Other – curiosity toward the inside – reveals itself as the detached curiosity of the rational mind.

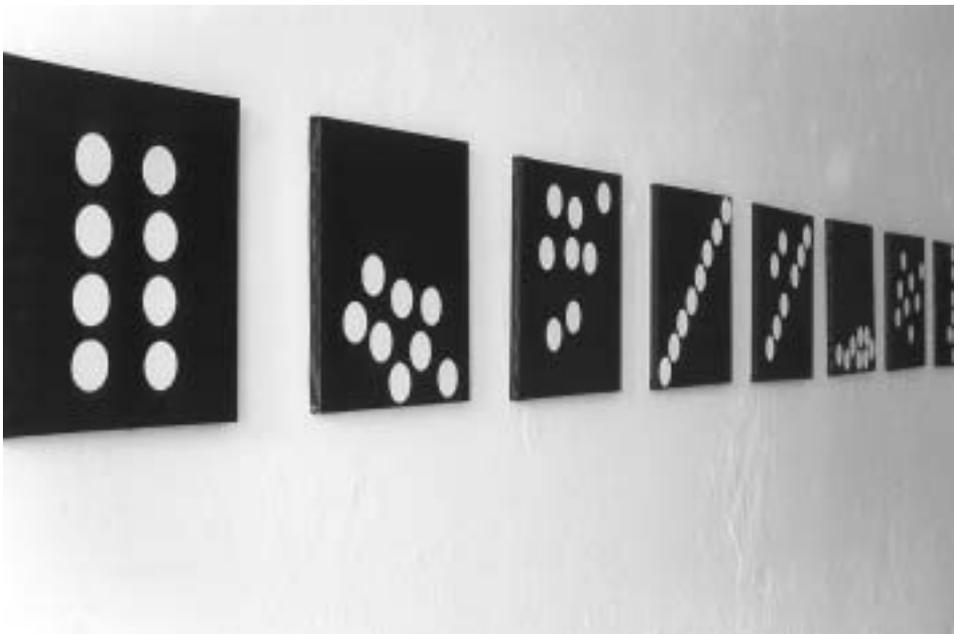
New York, 1986

Originally published in: Physical Relief. Catalogue. The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College, 1991.



Dissection of Artaud, Foucault and Vesalius, 1983-84, silver ink on paper, 62,5 x 48,5 cm each

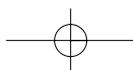


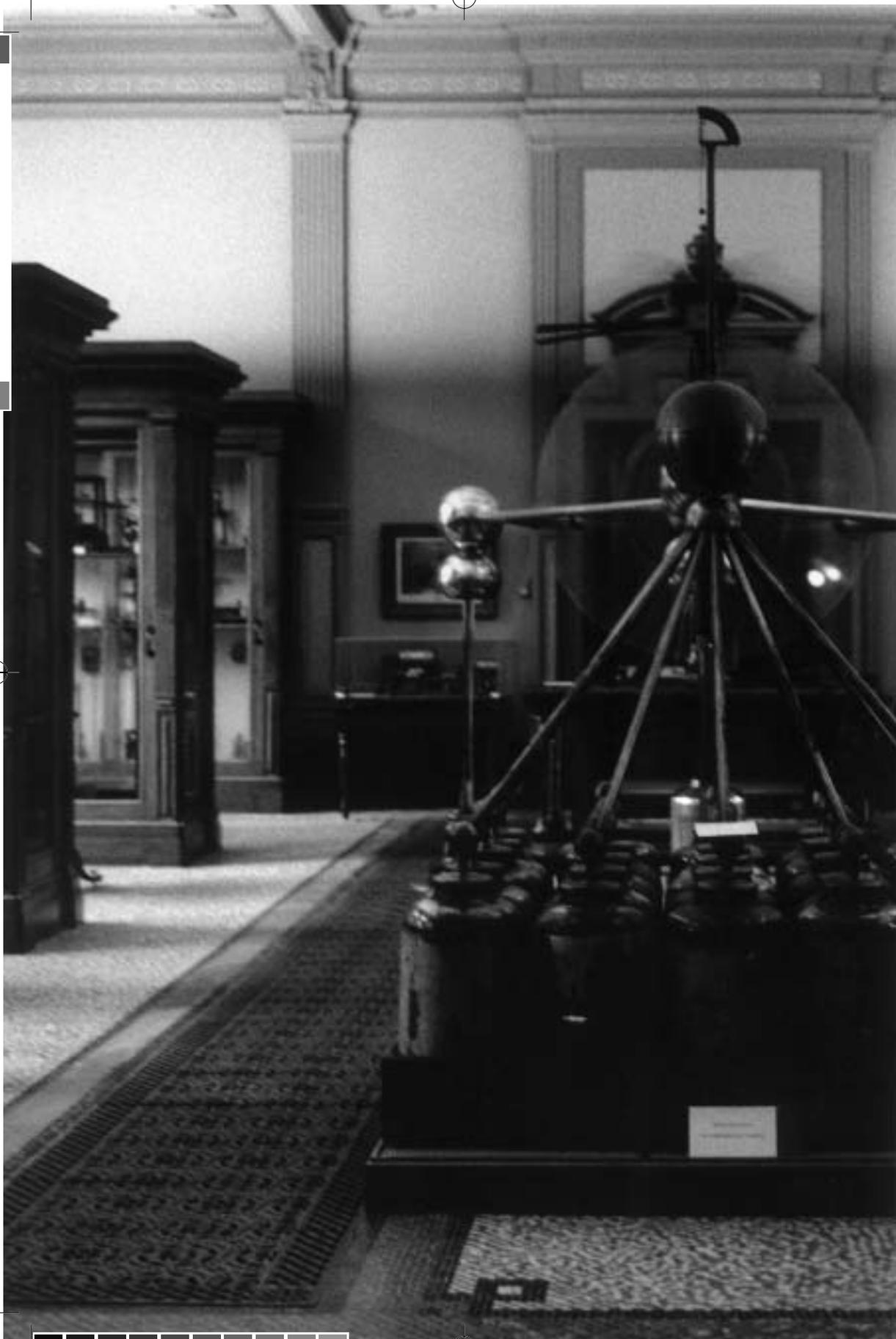


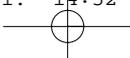
page 66
Technological Metaphors, 1984
oil on canvas, 9 pieces
60 x 60 cm each

page 67
Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Embroideries from Diderot's Encyclopedia,
installation, Ernst Múzeum, 1990

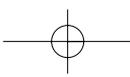








ADVENTURE IN TECHNOS DYSTOPIUM



ADVENTURE IN TECHNOS DYSTOPIUM: DYSTOPIA INFINITE

In 1984, I began working on my project entitled *Adventure in Technos Dystopium*. The title is pseudo-Latin, meaning negative technological utopia. This decade-long investigation of the history of a physical science – over the last three centuries – used post-modern strategies to deconstruct scientific representation and explored the manner in which scientific discourse represents technology, the body, and nature.

At the beginning of the project in the early 80s, I carried out research in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century science museums, travelled, and visited many technological and medical museums, and with a hand-held camera I photographed what I found there. I discovered eighteenth-century consciousness and its symbols. I recorded with thousands of black and white photographs the scientific history frozen in the museum displays. I called the black-and-white photo series *Dystopia Infinite* and I numbered them individually. These photographs are grouped according to several subjects; technology, the body/anatomy/pathology, and nature. These archaeological findings in black-and-white photo images document my critical theory of the history of scientific representations.

It was easy to recognize the ruling phallic symbolism present in the instruments displayed. These dimly-lit, dark, dusty museums became the scene of my adventure. I explored the museum displays with a sudden Casanovian desire to possess. My intellectual desire was sexually charged. I embraced the phallus. Surrounded with instruments, I became a woman with a healthy appetite for knowledge. The empty museums were so dark and mysterious. I experienced fear and a desire for truth, and for reality. The landscape of the science museum and its objects represented the world of truth and reality, and one that completely excluded women. I discovered that in a patriarchal society phallo-centric scientific discourse claims universal truth and reality, and asking about its historical lag in elaborating scientific theory constructing physical reality. I wrote love letters to those instruments to include myself. In the *Love Letter to the Leyden Jar*, I was using a text from Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* as a ready-made love-text altered to confess my love for the Leyden Jar.

In eighteenth-century science, innocence and optimism marks the beginning of a modern utopia. Since then the utopia has disintegrated, like the missing layers of ozone in the atmosphere, and has left us with a technology that consumes Nature. The instruments in the glass cases have become fossils and specimens of a serene existence whose function lies buried in a cave of lost meaning. The laws of nature are akin to archaic knowledge, and the instruments demonstrate the existence of long-standing rationality.

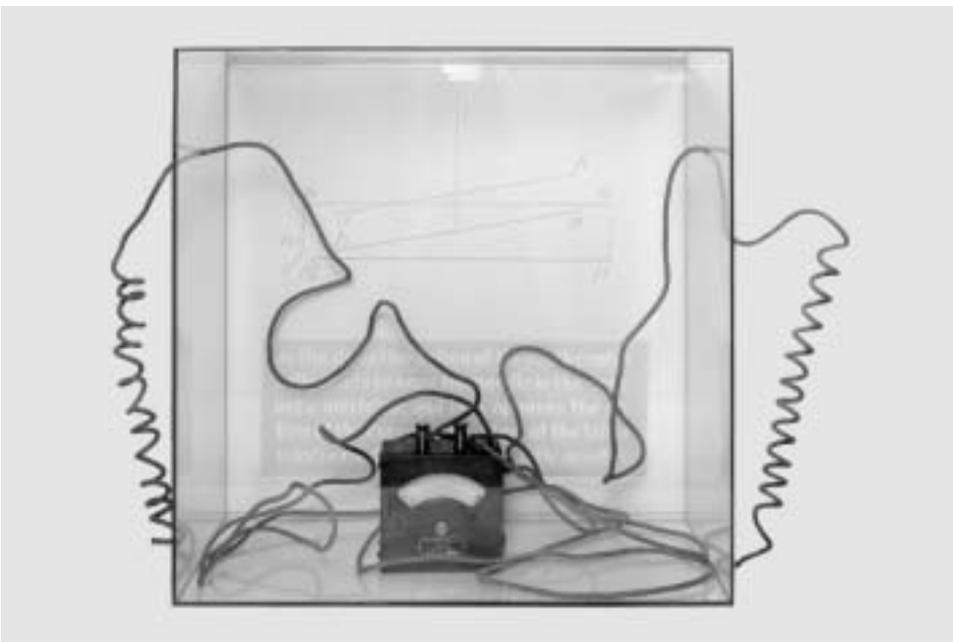
After a year of working with the deconstruction of the representation of scientific museum displays with black-and-white photos, accompanied by love letters, I felt limited to the style of classic conceptual art. I decided to extend its form. I started to use more traditional techniques, like sculpture, ready-made, and drawings, and I created a story of the life and work of an eighteenth-century woman scientist. I assembled all this in installations.

Page 71, above

Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Soot, 1988
steel, glass, soot, mixed technique
glass box: 80 x 80 x 35 cm,
metal stand: 125 x 85 x 40 cm

below

Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Ammeter, 1990
wood, metal, glass, mixed technique
glass box: 80 x 80 x 35 cm,
metal stand: 125 x 85 x 40 cm



In 1985-86, I created my pseudo persona Edith Simpson, echoing Thomas Edison's name and American fame. This eighteenth-century female scientist was based on a little-known real-life seventeenth century English woman scientist, Anna Conway Finch (1631-1679), a natural philosopher of the highest rank. In her scientific theory she insisted that matter could undergo nomadic transformations into higher forms, and she paved the way for the development of modern evolutionary theories. She lived in the shadow of two of the most learned men of her generation. And she went far beyond More and Helmet in creating an original and complete philosophical synthesis. Lady Anna denied the distinction between matter and spirit, viewing them as inextricably intertwined. To her, nature was not a cosmic machine, but a living entity made up of individual nomads endowed with a vital force, and organized and integrated in the Cosmic Order. Her book, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, became the cornerstone of Leibnitz's philosophy of Nature. (In other words, Leibnitz appropriated her work.) *The Principles* had a profound influence on eighteenth-century natural philosophy, but Lady Anna Finch's work and name have been forgotten.

How differently contemporary sciences would have developed if the work and philosophy of this great woman scientist had been included in the development of the sciences. It was with this in mind that I developed my fictional woman scientist with her theory of natural science.

New York, 1987



Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Dystopia Infinite, 1986
b/w photograph

THE LIFE OF EDITH SIMPSON, EPITOME OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT, NATIONAL GENIUS OF ART AND SCIENCE

Edith Simpson was born on February 15, 1746, in a Philadelphia brothel. England was still the mother country, yet six generations of American-born Englishmen and women had lived and died without ever seeing London.

Edith's mother was Marilyn Simpson. Marilyn's family was very poor, and her father died when she was just five. At seventeen, Thesesmen encouraged her learning and helped her organize her collections of plants and minerals as she began working in a brothel in Philadelphia. There, her exceptional beauty, charm, and natural intelligence drew the attention of the men whose pleasure she served. At this time, there was a growing number of scientists of the school of Benjamin Franklin, and Marilyn had many admirers among his Philadelphia followers. Often she asked them for books, and in this way she encountered the work of Benjamin Franklin, which was to make a strong impression upon her.

At the age of eighteen, Marilyn gave birth to Edith, and the little girl grew up in her tiny room in the brothel. She was a happy child who rarely cried, and thus Marilyn was able to keep her in the house. Mother and daughter often travelled out of the city to the woods where they collected flowers, leaves and plants. Sometimes they went to the mountains and dug for crystals and gems. Marilyn never spent her free time without Edith; she taught her everything, with enthusiasm and passion. They occupied themselves by reading and organizing their collections. On the roof of the brothel they built with the help of some students a tubeless telescope to watch the stars. While her mother was working, Edith made drawings of plants, and completed studies of Nature started outdoors. Her early drawings show talent, and in them can be seen Edith's profound admiration of the works of Nature. She was often visited by her mother's customers, some of whom found her drawings exceptional, though others discouraged her, saying it would be better for her to learn to cook and clean the house, so that she would have a better life than her mother's.

Such advice she disregarded, as she received enormous support from her mother. Indeed, all the women in the brothel admired her, even the madame, who was not very happy to see a child grow up in such a house. But deep in her heart, she supported Edith's persistence.

When Edith was almost eighteen, Marilyn had a customer named James Thompson, a twenty-two-year-old student and follower of Benjamin Franklin. James was a very gifted man and had studied in England. His thinking was much influenced by the writings of Francis Bacon who, in 1620, had published the first statement of an attitude that was to change the shape of man's world. For Bacon, "the object of true knowledge [was] the relief of man's estate and the furtherance of man's power over Nature. Only with a new understanding of the physical world [could] man make himself master of his fate."

James often passed on to Edith all he had learned from Bacon, and the girl soon fell passionately in love with the young man. He returned her passion, and asked her to be his wife; they were married in 1764. Marilyn could not cope with losing her daughter, and she committed suicide after the wedding. Edith's grief was intense, and she suffered a fever for weeks. Later she found relief in her art, and then discovered that she was pregnant. These events she came to see as demonstrations of the great natural balance between Death and Life.

After this, Edith devoted herself to the study of Nature, and her drawing and painting grew more and more concentrated. Her portraits became famous in Philadelphia, and she made a very good living from them. She earned the respect of male painters who often said: "This is work of high quality, for a woman." With time she became the greatest painter in Philadelphia. Meanwhile, her son, Thomas,

was a source of great delight to her, and she made several studies of him at different ages. At this time she was working in her studio ten to twelve hours a day. Her admiration of Nature persisted and she built up a large body of artwork over the years. Although she has never been greatly celebrated as an artist, her work has been widely admired. As for James Thompson, when he finished his studies he started to build a great machine which would work with the static electricity which he condensed in the Leyden jar. The ambitious experiments to which he devoted his life did not provide early promise of success, and after six years of non-stop work he became very impatient. His ambition, and his passionate nature, did not permit him to work hard for the next ten or twenty years. He started to drink, and quickly sank into alcoholism and daydreams about his machines. His drawings of machines are marvellous expressions of his talent. He admired Edith's work and her ambitions, and he constantly encouraged her. As a result of his destructive drinking, however, his liver was not healthy and he died in 1784 at the age of forty-two.

Edith, now thirty-eight, was left alone. Besides continuing her own studies, she now tried to organize her husband's experiments. Her scientific understanding expanded considerably as she catalogued James's work. Her son Thomas, meanwhile, contracted tuberculosis and died at the age of twenty-two, in 1786. Despite these tragedies, Edith remained strong in her sorrow, though locked in solitude.

Now, she found she could not draw or paint anymore. So, in her backyard, she rebuilt the toolshed and started to carry out scientific experiments. She did not want to build a machine like her husband's; instead, she began analysis of the laws of Nature and repeated Volta's experiments. She worked with static electricity and magnetism, and started to analyze the mass of physical matter. She divided the world into two main elements, salt and coal. Salt she took to be the secret matter of the sea and of all water, and coal the crystal of the earth. Her experiments with those materials were aesthetic as well as being highly unusual at this period. Her decision to work in this way was looked upon as unscientific, because nobody had done such work before. She saw that energy came from matter in the same way that we break it down: energy, she saw, is the mass of matter.

Since the Renaissance, no other man or woman has proven so variously accomplished as Edith Simpson, or had so many-sided a personality. She was a brilliant woman, a writer, an artist, an acute observer of Nature, a mother and a lover. She understood everyone she met so intuitively that she could not only be like them but even surpass them at their best accomplishments. To see her simply as an intellectual phenomenon is to see only half the woman. Without her human adaptability, her intellect would have missed its highest stimulation. Without her intellect, her adaptability would have been merely that of a sensitive actor in a thousand roles. Her intellect could penetrate through a morass of detail to the one, underlying simplicity. She was outside her own time, and therefore she was outside all time. Edith Simpson possessed her full intellectual vigor twice as long as most people; she must be rated as one of the giants.

New York, 1986

Page75

above

Edith Simpson (appropriated photograph),
1986, b/w photograph

below

Edith Simpson, Coal and Salts
1986



Dear Leyden Jar,

I will be faithful to you forever! Through you I am able to make meaning of my life. Your existence gives me the light by which I can understand the law of Nature. My dear object, let my eyes wander over your handsome body, your well-set shoulders... A more elegant, sinuous form it would be impossible to find: through your glorious existence, Natural History will become an open book. Your beauty, topped with the crescent scale on its slim stem, declares the eternal majesty of your form. My dear object, tell me all your knowledge, teach me! Shine your eighteenth-century light upon me, that I may reflect my glamour back to you, you who are already full of reflected light. Your body of glass and brass reflects my image, my image of the eighteenth-century self. O eighteenth century, golden age of natural science, Enlightenment: tell me, my beloved Leyden Jar, of the power of electricity stored in your body, and of the hand of the master who rubbed your shining brass balls to force electric sparks out of you! Tell me, was the shock strong, was it almost deadly? Did anybody die from that immense shock? Tell me, is it a deadly shock you store, or something just a little bit less than deadly, something which permits one to survive until the next one? I flaunt myself before your existence. I slink towards the power of your stored static electricity. Tell me how many times the hands that created you slipped up and down your shining surface. How do you feel in this dimly lit place, in this museum, are you sad or are you taking pleasure in my gaze? Tell me, did you ever reach the hand of Benjamin Franklin? Was it a great pleasure to shock the 180 guardsmen holding hands at the French court? Was the French court fascinated with you, did it pay homage to your conqueror-nature? Did it flatter you when 180 men holding hands leaped into the air – did this reflect the full majesty of your power and glory? Did it satisfy your vanity? Tell me more – is there another law of Nature which you experience as most beautiful among the beauties? What! There is no other? Only storing static electricity? This is why you have been kept in the museum for almost 200 years? You dirty old instrument! Can you tell me nothing more? It is enough. Your dull calm, your lazy presence do not fulfill me. My torpor turns into numbness, and my tranquillity turns into boredom; and then I kill time with aimless distractions and voluptuous dreams which tire and exhaust me. How can you entertain me for the whole of my life if your beauty demonstrates only one kind of experience? I must escape this boredom. I am leaving you. Don't make a scene, don't talk of what I promised, just simply say goodbye. Don't try to hold my gaze any longer. I have given everything I had to give.

New York, 1987



Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Dystopia Infinite; Leyden Jar, 1988
metal, glass
125 x 80 x 95 cm



ADVENTURE IN TECHNOS DYSTOPIUM

1

Intellectual adventure: searching for the meaning of things and their order.

2

Restless deconstruction of metaphors.

3

Matching visual pleasure with the myth of intellectual history.

4

Digging through the layers of archeological sediment and reorganizing them.

5

Adventure: to lift up the layers and take pleasure in reordered or chaotic meaning.

6

Adventure with the knowledge piled up in the institution, the institution which preserves the meaning of order.

7

The horrific pleasure of walking around empty museums.

8

The instruments seducing one to stay with them.

9

Everything comes to the surface to do its flirting and you walk into the adventure as though nothing else exists, and the desire is strong and you know: this is the most challenging duel, this is the question of survival.

AND THEN SEDUCTION OCCURS.

New York, 1987



Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Dystopia Infinite
b/w photograph





Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Dystopia Infinite
b/w photographs
200 x 100 cm each
installation view, Bard College,
Annandale-on-Hudson, 1996





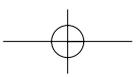
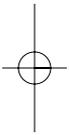
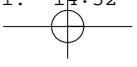
Pages 81-95
Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Dystopia Infinite, 1985
b/w photographs
50 x 70 cm each

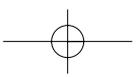
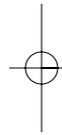
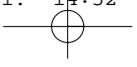


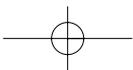
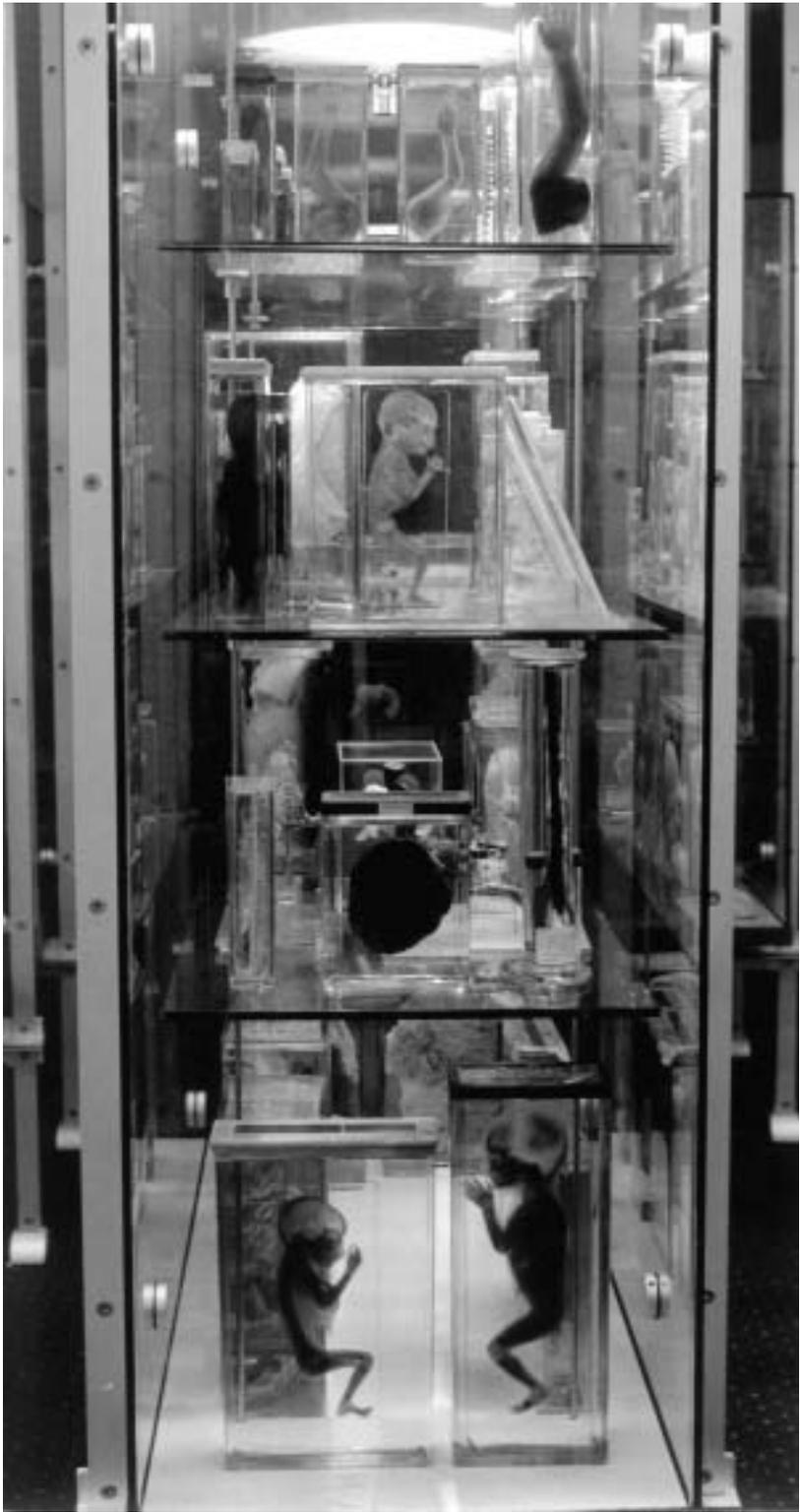












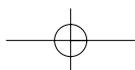
















ADVENTURE IN TECHNOS DYSTOPIUM: FRAGMENTA NATURAE

This exhibition is the first part of a series devoted to the concept of Nature as an exploration of the history of created structure of understanding. In the eighteenth century, Reason became the primary source of Knowledge and Unreason was pushed to the periphery of thought. The naming and classifying of Nature by Linneus was part of the descriptive mapping of the world at that time. This taxonomy was an original and simple portrait of Nature and the basis of classification was Linneus' erotic imagination. He called it "The Sexes of Plants". The twelve highest categories (the classes) were based on the number of stamens in the flower. Each class was subdivided into smaller groups, or orders, on the basis of the number of pistils. Stamens husbands, Pistils wives. The result was "households" in which there might be several husbands and one wife, or other combinations. Linneus' erotic imaginations was apparently in keeping with the tastes of the time and over the past two hundred years, it has remained our basic structure for identifying the Social Order of Nature.

New York, 1988

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF PLANTS

Goethe's Morphology

In Goethe's writing, Nature replaces God and thus the divine is seen to lie in Nature and its various metamorphosis. He seeks to establish in it the development of "sees leaf of plants" from "shapelessness to shape," from something that looks as if it were like nothing to something that distinctly looks like a leaf. It is very leaf which in its turn is modified and diversified into sepal, petal, pistil and stamen, "everything is a leaf".

"I followed up all the changing forms as they appeared to me, and at last, at the end of my journey, in Sicily, the original identity of all plants stood revealed before me."

Original Natural

In the work of Rousseau, the Natural is what came before. The previous stage of our being is the Original. Rousseau romanticized the Natural in opposition to the Cultural. Caspar David Friedrich believed that by the observation of natural perfection, Man could elevate himself to a perfect order and, for an instant, feel equal with the Divine, just as on the summit of a mountain one can feel elevated and perfected.

My investigations in *Natural Philosophy* and *Fragmenta Naturae* are the vast history of interpretations of Nature – the chain of Linnaeus, Rousseau, Goethe and Friedrich. This work intends to introduce a small part of a relentless continuation of the historical discourse of understanding the Nature-Culture, Nature-Technology dichotomy.

New York, 1989



Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
Fragmenta Naturae II
plaster, metal, glass, aluminium
installation view, Ernst Múzeum, Budapest, 1990



SYSTEMA VEGETABILUM LINEAUS MDCC LXX III the sexual system of vegetables	MONOGAMIA 1002. strumpfia calyx perianth one leaved, five toothed, above very small permanent cord, petals five
KEY OF THE SEXUAL SYSTEM Marriages of Plants Florescence	POLYGAMIA fiustranea 979. helianthus receptacle chaff flat. pappus two leaved. calyx imbricated
PUBLIC MARRIAGES flowers visible to everyone in the bed husbands and wife have the same bed	POLYGAMIA Monoecia 1141. musa. male-hermaphrodite
WITH EQUALITY all the males of equal rank stamens have no determinate proportion of length	GIGANTEUS 8.h leaves alternated lanced rugged fringed at the base, stem upright rugged. giant
ALL THE FLOWERS HERMAPHTODITE stamens and pistils in the same flower without affinity	FRONDOSOS 4.h calyces ragged waved leafy, rays eight-petal'd floers egg'd stem rugged below Stromosus 6.h root, spindled
into the form of a style, bearing the pistil with the stamens, and becoming a part of the pistil. The flowers of this class are singular, and exhibit a monstrous an unusual appearance, wich arises from the uncommon situation	ANNUS lh. leaves all hearted three-nerved, peduncles thicken'd flowers bowing. Annual
IN TWO BEDS husband and wife have separate beds male flowers and female flowers in the same species	TUBEROFUS 3.h leaves egg-hearted triple-nerved decaptelus. 5.h stempolish'd beneath, leaves lance-hearted tripple-nerv'd
WITH SUBORDINATION some males above others two stamens are always lower than others	INDICUS h. leaves all hearted three-nerved, peduncles equal, indiair muliforus. 2.h
FEMININE MALES DYNANDRIA feminine males are distinguished from the rest by the situation of the stamens on the style itself, or on the receptacle elongated	1144. VERATRUM Hermaphrodite calyx, corol six-petal'd. Stamens six pistils three. Capsule three, many-seeded. Album, nigrum, luteum

FEMALE - Hermaphrodite calyx, corol, filaments, pistil, berry oblong three-sided beneath





Morbid Conditions, 1989
installation view, MIT List Visual Arts Center,
Cambridge, Mass. 1992





Manufacturing the Self:
The Pathological Body
installation view
Musée des Beaux Arts de Nantes,
La Salle Blanche, 1995





Pages 102-103
Morbid Conditions
Erythrocyte
porcelain, magnifying glass
installation view, Tom Cugliani Gallery,
New York, 1989







Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
My Mother's Medicine Cabinet, 1990
glass case, medicine packages
Ernst Múzeum, Budapest





Adventure in Technos Dystopium, 1990
porcelain plates with drawings in cabinet
Ernst Múzeum, Budapest



X-RAY

*You see through my matter, the organic, the human matter. My skin and my flesh are transparent to your eye. Your curiousness about my insight makes me feel *transparent*. You see through me. I am transparent to my bones in front of your penetrating gaze. I have no secret left under my skin.*

*Your desire to see through my flesh invented your instrument. You have extended your naked eye with the instruments of radiology. Your desire to see through my flesh and bones are growing over your simple vision. *You extended your eye with your instruments.**

*You see beyond my bones. You penetrated my body with *your rays*. *You changed my carnal matter to a transparent image*. You transformed the surface of my body to the immaterial projection of reflected image. *You transform the matter of body into a two-dimensional shadow of its existence*. My body becomes projectable on your transparent surface.*

*You see on the image what you have already learned from the history of dissection. *Your* medical history guiding your perception.*

Your x-rays penetrate my body where the dissections have already cut my body.

*Your ray cuts through my soft tissues painlessly, without blood. *Your technology eliminated my blood*. You replaced my body with your transparent image. Your image becomes the object of your examination. My body is eliminated.*

I am naked in the dark. I cannot see in the dark. You are looking down to the inside of my body and I can't see your face. I am humiliated down to my bones. I am naked in the dark. You are behind your instrument. I cannot see you. You instruct me.

New York, 1992

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Adventure in Technos Dystopium: X-Ray,
1989
b/w photograph, glass, lead, metal





above
Cynical Reason
installation view
Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna,
Bologna, 1991

below
Cynical Reason, 1991
black rubber





Cynical Reason: Brains on Wheels
installation view
Beatrix Hospital, Gorinchem, 1993



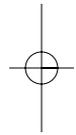
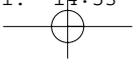


Manufacturing the Self:
High Heels with Brains, 1993
installation, rubber, shoes, glass, bronze, steel
Sydney Biennial, 1993

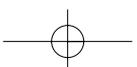








MANUFACTURING THE SELF



TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF*

epimeleia beautou (care of oneself)
constituting the self

Technologies of power and domination come from the outside, but self-transformation comes through acts on the body, soul, thoughts, conduct, and way of being by means of a person attaining a certain state of perfection or happiness, or becoming a sage or immortal. (In the process of transforming the self, there are also options for understanding the way in which outside domination might distort the "Self". External powers might force the self to produce a "Self", which might appear as an option for the "Self".)

There have been various techniques of self-transformation throughout history. (These historical models help in an understanding of the process.) Eastern and Western traditions of the self have been different. The Eastern tradition of the self was introduced to the West by the monk John Cassian (305-432). He introduced the idea of interdiction, rather than obligation. Acceptance of selfhood. The constitution of the self. The negation of the self. A romantic sense of self-confession, division, flight toward the ideal.

The ancient lineage of methods for the care of the self provides a counterpoint to Freud's quest to discover the true nature of the self. (Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 1986, Random House, NYC)

"Who" do we behave? We have to understand from where we derive the model for our behavior, and identity. How institutionalized knowledge has formed our behavior, or how the images projected through the dispersed power of the media have formed our desire.

The most interesting thing in life is to become someone new. Transforming the self into a person whom we would like to be requires effort and techniques for persistence.

"Upsets established laws and somehow anticipates the coming freedom." To free oneself from the ruling authority allows the self to transform. It must first be understood how the external power manipulates the "Self" and forces it to obey. To accept the given programs for the future, even with the best of intentions, is to become a tool, an instrument of oppression. Before choosing a role model, it must be examined, and the institutionalized or dispersed formed it must be understood.

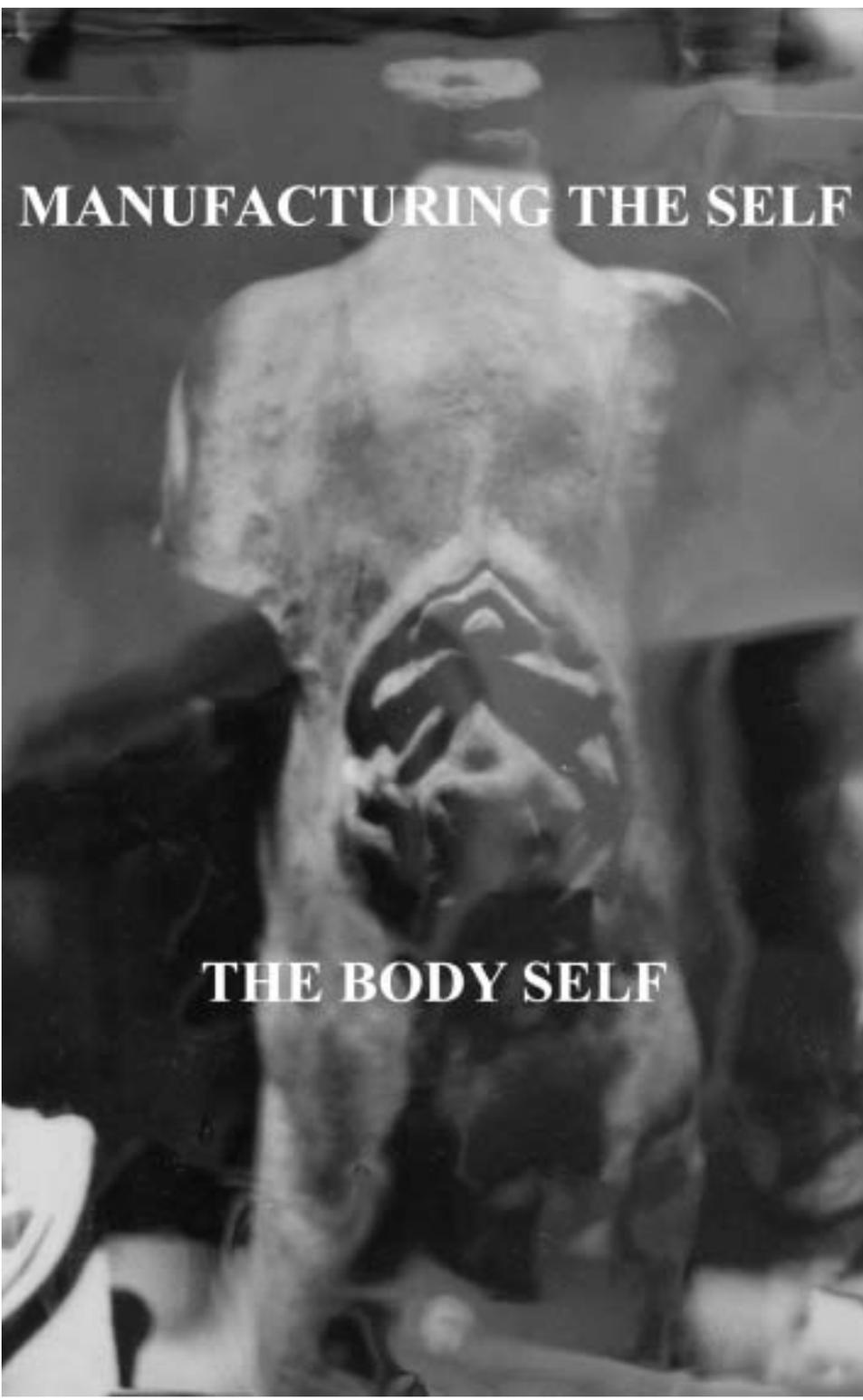
The self anticipate the coming freedom, a different life. The life that the Self dreams of for itself. In life, the Self anticipates for the self, experiences the freedom of the imagination, freedom from the authority of determination. Exercising freedom in imagination is also a freedom to manufacture the supportive environment.

Does one appropriate the "self," or does one build it on the experience of knowing the self and manufacturing the self? Does the "self" have a chance to transform the self? Where is the limit to appropriation? Where does taking care for oneself begin? When can one apply her(him)self to knowing the self and its desire (needs)?

For a woman, the ambivalence is evident, the intellectual and the erotic form a dialectical discourse. A struggle with the contradiction: hate men and their culture – given patriarchal oppression – or express the desire to embrace. Or find a balance in the intersection of ambition, and philosophical and carnal love.

New York, 1992

*Technologies of the Self. A seminar with Michel Foucault
Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton eds.,
The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988



LOVE LETTER TO THE MEDICAL VENUS

Dear Venus,

I first saw you in Vienna in 1984. It was a fall afternoon. Franz Joseph's city was full of cool sunlight. Your room was shaded with blinds. The vertical slats of the blind allowed silverish sunbeams to bathe the room. They reflected on the panes of glass.

In the middle of the room, your body was stretched out, white and innocent. It was embarrassing to see your naked beauty. My glance slid over the gloss of your silky skin. Your full naked beauty shattered me deep in my bones. The tiny shiver in my body stayed inside me all the time I was in the room. Minute pearls of sweat ran down the vale between my breasts. Your body stretched out in ecstasy, the full flow of your chestnut hair weaving down your shoulders. A pearl necklace traced the full span of your neck. Your beauty became more and more unbearable. The spectacle of you displayed on the white silk lining of the glass case seduced me. I could not move.

A sudden revelation forced me into a vertigo of identification. I lifted my camera toward my face. I put my finger on the exposure button. I noticed it trembling slightly. I could not move. I felt my spine like a stick in the middle of my back. In that vertigo I couldn't do anything but gaze at you. I discovered myself.

All the panes of glass reflected my image. In that vulnerable hall of mirrors, I could not see anything but you and my reflection. I tried to press the exposure button on my Nikon, but I was frozen. I took a deep breath and gave instructions to my limbs. I swung my body back and forth. I was spinning. I felt that I could become one with you.

With delayed steps, I moved toward the door. I took a long, slow walk in the hallway. I don't know how much time I spent at the hall windows. My desire to cross the boundaries of the self worked against the fear of dissolving into selflessness.

Mesmerized, I began to walk back to you. There was more light this time, I think. For minutes, I felt blinded. All I could see was reflected glass. It was as if your body had disappeared. I thought my imaginary vision had dissolved between reflections. A couple of minutes later you reappeared. Your waxen body melted my glance to a low flame. I could have done anything for you.

Your head was slightly elevated and your fingers were slack on the silk. I pined for your glance, but your eyes were closed. A glimmer of a smile played at the corners of your mouth. There I was recognized by you. I felt you respond to my deep affection. I felt your ecstasy heightened by my admiration. I pined for your love.

Your body was wide open. The two mounds of your breasts rose over your relaxing arms. Your nipples almost touched the skin of those arms. Your lungs were exposed. Large and pink, they were like a double beehive. In the middle of your chest was your heart, red and connected to the arteries. Under your right lung was your liver. Under your heart was your womb. A fetus was attached to it by an umbilical cord. Your left thigh was softly folded on your right. The right knee almost touched the left. Everything in my body tensed while yours relaxed.

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Medical Erotic:
Medical Venus #0008, 1984
b/w photograph
70 x 50 cm



Two hours later I was still in front of you, my gaze attached to your insides. It was almost 4 o'clock. The room became darker. The afternoon light warmed your skin to a slightly golden color. I lifted my camera and forced myself to take your picture. I moved and shot, moved and shot. The lens defined my view. It defined your image too. There you were, behind the lens. Your body was different behind it. It was fragmented. The light bounced between the glass panes and the glass of the lens. My sight became blurred. The reflection of the glass did not allow the lens to penetrate your body. Only my eyes could penetrate you fully. The camera took fragments of you. Black and white fragmented images of your body. Photographs.

My memory of that day is deep-frozen, engraved. No heat can melt it away. At dusk, I often sit at my front window, thinking of you. Sometimes I gaze at my black and white photographs of you. Sometimes I gaze above them into oblivion and tears run down my cheeks. My love for you is exaltation beyond eroticism. My vision turns into sensual memory.

The vision of your body forces itself on my memory again and again. I project you into my cells, into my organs, into my whole body. You grow inside me, inside my existence. I breathe you out. I transform your body into mine. I cannot separate myself from you anymore. Your ecstasy is embodied in my flesh.



Medical Erotic, 1984
b/w photograph
50 x 70 cm

I wear your pearls often, feeling you encircle my neck. In the middle of the night, naked, I touch the pearls that lie on your neck.

Your inner wound remains an inescapable psychic place of pain. I was inside you for so long, for so many years. My umbilical cord could not be cut from your body. I was incubated inside your body for eight long years. Now, in the ninth, I emerge with you inside me. Can I free my body from you now?

I cast myself into your existence, into your body. You see my body a little differently from your own. My body does not flow as easily into smooth ecstasy. My knees open differently. I keep my eyes open to observe the viewer's desire. I cannot trust the gaze of my admirers as you do. My ecstasy is just a little bit different from yours. Allow me that difference.

When I sculpted your smile into the corners of my mouth, it was the same and became different. When I shaped your eyes, my eyes opened for certainty, and yours remained closed. Casting myself into your pose I embody your ecstasy in my own physical presence. Via Narcissus, I cast Pygmalion. I do not know if I am in love with your body or with mine.

What can I do to my umbilical cord which is attached to your fetus? How can I give birth to your fetus when I become detached from you? Can I free myself from you by creating your body as mine or mine as yours? Will I be able to love the other who is not you or me? Can you lift me out of this cast? Do you understand my desire for you and at the same time for myself?

How can I separate the self that is cast from the womb of yours, my *Medical Venus*? Can you (or someone else) free me from that cast to my own life, my own history? Can I free myself from the prison your sculpting master created for you? Can you free yourself from his gaze? How can you free yourself from that ecstasy which sought your master's desire? How can I free myself from the gaze of your master? The master who created your body to bear the womb with the umbilical cord attached to my body, gazes down at my body too.

You hid yourself in the internal labyrinth of your intestines. You lost contact with the outside, with the different. Your sealed existence created the broken glass that lines and defines your internal self. Through you, my insides become lined with the same sharp and brittle shards.

How can I heal your bodily wound? Why did you, my dear Venus, hold back blood when your master slit your body wide open? Why did you smile when your heart was exposed? Why did you want to protect and envelop your master, though he had his knife in your flesh? My tears freeze on my palate and taste as salty as that withheld blood.

Nine years inside you, my Venus, made me turn my blood into free-flowing tears swallowed and digested into splinters of glass. Did you sleep when the pain of the penetrating blade opened the womb? Did you pretend to smile or did you envision protective love surrounding you as you dreamed? Did you imagine that the stroke of the blade was a gentle touch of love? How could you offer your moist lips with a light smile while your intestines were torn out of your body?

How can you survive with this cadaver-like body? How can I survive your hidden pain? How can I bring my own life beyond your existence, beyond the layers of darkness?

My body is ironed flat on the surface of the table. My head is stretched further down at the end. On the table my body is wide open. My hair flows richly down my shoulders. My tears are frozen on my palate. They moisten the lips above my smile.

Oh, Medical Venus, I love you.

New York, 1993

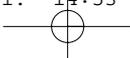


LOVE LETTERS FOR TWELVE SILVER PLATES

My Dearest,

Was it your tongue in my mouth
which forced me into speech?
Was it that blade between my
lips which drew forth floods of
words to speak of you?

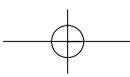
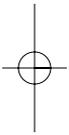
Your Love

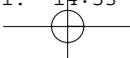


My Dearest,

You are afraid of your body's
limitlessness. You live in that fear.
You consume my body without
repaying me. You do not acknowledge
your source of life. You do not
acknowledge my willing body. You
extend your power over nature.
You avoid the perpetual risk of
the abyss.
I love you and I cannot
live without you.

Your Love

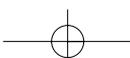




My Dearest,

Your ethics are anaesthetised. You live in a world without pain. Where suffering no longer exists. When you emptied my body, your body was emptied too. You could not understand my pain, so I do not express it. Your anaesthesia kills sensation. Yours is a realm beyond pain. Where suffering no longer exists.
I love you.

Your Love



My Dearest,

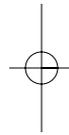
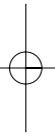
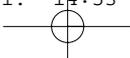
You have come back inside me. You
are inside me. Resurgence of light
and heat. I guard you. I envelope you.
I reveal my debt to you. I protect
you from being reabsorbed. You are holding your
sharpened instrument
and my body is in front of you.
I am open and you are closed.
I participate in your affections just
as you take pleasure in mine.

Your Love

My Dearest,

I was moved by your aspiration.
That gave me pleasure. In my pleasure,
I was matter divided from itself,
releasing waves of energy from that
disjunction. From my very depth came
the keenest intensity. I was moved by
your aspiration. Your body is never
mine. How could it be?

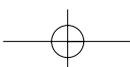
Your Love



My Dearest,

I understand the mystery of your power. I see your mirror where you freeze your desire. I show you my mirror and my desire, but you cannot see or hear. Your circular horizon encloses you. In your world, there is no room for my existence. You filled me with your emptiness. I draw strength as your remedy. I am your need and what you lack. I give you my hollow space. I become full and you remain a gaping hole.

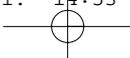
Your Love



My Dearest,

You come deeper and deeper
into my very depth. I offer myself
to you. I help you to penetrate the
thickening density of my existence.
The force unleashes an intensity
which cannot be measured and which
floods my mortal ecstasy.
Deep, deeper beneath the surface of
my skin. Beneath flesh, beyond
my bones. In that darkness, you are
close to me. And then you retreat
into yourself again. I understand
the mystery of your power.

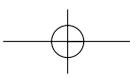
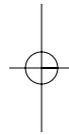
Your Love



My Dearest,

I asked for your tongue and you thrust into my mouth. You were like a blade. You cut my words in half. With your tongue in my mouth I could not think of myself. I have to use your tongue to describe my feelings. You heard your words from my mouth. I love you and it is difficult to live without you. I know you love me.

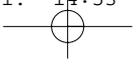
Your Love



My Dearest,

I was speaking to you and you did not hear me. My voice came from faraway, from beyond. You were penetrated to reveal my secret. You did not know where to find me. You did not know how to hear me. I was beyond the reach of your penetrating blade. I was beyond the reach of your desire. I love you. I cannot live without you.

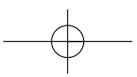
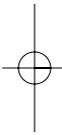
Your Love



My Dearest,

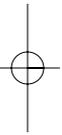
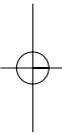
You opened my body, penetrated
my skin, and revealed the map of
my muscles. The light of your
rays made my bones transparent.
Here I am, I gave you my body.
My body, which is totally
transparent to you. My body which
is thoroughly penetrable for your knife.
I love you. Give me a sign of
your love. I know, you
cannot live without me.

Your Love





My Dearest,



It was so hard to use your words.
The veins in my neck are swollen.
My heart beats faster and my body
is tense. My fingers grasp the air.
My spine arches upward, my
nipples are hard, erect in the air.
My lips are swollen and my womb
is wide open. You stepped back
and didn't hear my words.
I remain in my body.

Your Love



My Dearest,

I dream of you honing and
sharpening your instrument till it
becomes imperceptible. And
then, piercing into my skin, into
flesh, into my silence.

Open my flesh, expose my heart,
my womb. I love you.

And I cannot live without you.

Your Love

New York, 1993

Love Letters for Twelve Silver Plates contains fragments of sentences of Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions* (Routledge, New York, 1992).





Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self
installation view
Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich, 1994

Page135
Manufacturing the Self: Medical Erotic I
installation view
Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York, 1993







Pages 136-137
Manufacturing the Self:
The Nineteenth-century Self
Second Tyne International, Newcastle, 1994





MANUFACTURING THE SELF: THE HAIRY VIRGIN

“The respected author, Damascenes, affirms that Charles IV, the emperor and king of Bohemia, was shown a virgin completely covered with hair like a bear: she was born thus deformed and hideous because her mother had gazed too intensely upon an effigy of Saint John dressed in animal skins which hung at the foot of her bed when she conceived.”

Pierre Boaistuau, 1560, Hairy Virgin, Histories

The Hairy Virgin

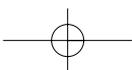
is a concept from the Middle Ages. I found drawings from different illustrated books where the beast-like creature, hairy as a bear, was bulging in the middle of the picture, surrounded by the natural environment of woods. Her smile and her pose was feminine and the title suggested her precious state: a virgin. She was interesting to me as an animal and as a virgin. My curiosity of her SELF in her environment was strong enough to recreate her contemporary fragments out of wax collected from Hungarian beauty salons used for removing excess hair. The 58 kg wax I collected includes the hair that was recently removed from women's bodies.

“We know by experience that women transmit marks of their fancies to the bodies of the children they carry in their womb... There was presented to Charles, king of Bohemia and emperor, a girl from near Pisa, all hairy and bristly, who, her mother said, had been thus conceived because of a picture of Saint John the Baptist hanging by her bed.”

Michel de Montaigne, 1573, Essays on monstrous births

Page 139

Manufacturing the Self:
The Hairy Virgin
installation: 16 aluminum forms containing
used depilatory wax and 150 ready-made
hair removal kits
São Paulo Biennial, 1994





Transparent Body
installation view
AIR, Amsterdam, 1991





Transparent Body, 1995
sculpture, detail
glass, organza



THE NORMAL AND THE PATHOLOGICAL BODY

My Dearest,

I am thinking with your words,
 full of affection for you.
 You told me I am NORMAL.
 I feel healthy through you.
 That became the condition of my body.
 You gave me a beautiful perspective, a future.
 You gave me the power,
 and through that I believe
 I am able to love you and myself.
 My body could exist innocently,
 but it has become an effigy.
 Your world inscribes me.
 Here I am for you.
 I am all yours.
 Your knowledge has enveloped me.
 You advised me I am NORMAL,
 it means everything.
 I feel as if I am like you, your equal.
 I'd like to be side by side with you forever.
 Is your body mortal?
 Will my healthy body die?
 Will you also die like me?
 Can you inscribe me into your immortality?
 I love you and I know
 you cannot live without me.

Your Love

My Dearest,

I need you, I need to be by your side.
 You told me I am PATHOLOGICAL.
 I am unable to live without you.
 You are so different, so beautiful, so normal.
 How can I regain your affection?
 My body has become an effigy
 under your scrutiny.
 This fixed boundary imposes
 a definite separation.
 You are NORMAL and I am PATHOLOGICAL,
 I feel discarded by this difference.
 What does not pass between our skins
 mingles in our body's fluids.
 You see through my body,
 and you describe me
 and my body: PATHOLOGICAL.
 Your words burned into my skin,
 into my existence, this pain of difference.
 How can I make myself love my body?
 How can I make you love me?
 You are healthy and
 I cannot live nor die without you.

Your Love
New York, 1995



OSHI OHASHI

Young & Beautiful: OSHIDO Beauty Products Confident

Installation for Oshido Beauty Products for Women

The installation is like the genre of the perfumery of department stores. It displays the artwork of the OSHIDO beauty line. The exhibition includes a mirrored counter at the middle of the room with glass cases and beautifying lights, and 1m x 2m black and white advertisement photographs.

OSHIDO Beauty Products Company cards, designed containers for the four different creams, glass perfume bottles, printed labels for the containers and poster. Beauty products: beauty enforcing hydrating day cream, youthful skin night cream, wrinkles free eye cream, hormone replacement body cream, soap with writings, eau-de-cologne and perfume.

The artist Oshi Ohashi, born in Tokyo on February 15, 1974, raised and educated in New York, lives and works in Tokyo and New York. She was a successful fashion model for a couple of years, but several years ago she decided to be an artist and use her experience as a conceptual base for critical analysis of the beauty/fashion industry. She speaks Japanese, English and also some Hungarian. The 23 year old young artist, formerly fashion model will produce the art work: The New Natural OSHIDO Beauty Line For Women. A new beauty-nutrition technology for facial and body. Ohashi forms her work using ready-made concept from the production and promotion of "Beauty Products". She therefore started her own company: OSHIDO. Oshi Ohashi New York-Budapest-Tokyo. She calls her new line of beauty products CONFIDENT. The OSHIDO cosmetics are produced by Tribeca Green, a New York based company. The cosmetics are made from the finest blend of natural and herbal ingredi-



Oshi Ohashi: Young and Beautiful
installation view,
Goethe Institute, Budapest, 1997
mirror table, perfume glasses

ents from Hungary and will be promoted through international corporate methods of advertisement. The company OSHIDO reuses the method and psychology from the established promotion and production of the beauty industry.

All beauty products are natural and contain the finest of Hungarian herbs, French fragrances, blended with New York style myth and with Japanese style promotion. Prototype production will be shown at the exhibition in a collectible multiple size of 100. At the exhibition, the products are for sale at compatible and faire market price. (Holy water, mineral water and spa with natural hormones from Hungary, economic force from Tokyo with mythology from New York.)

She designs the installation and all the comprised elements, such as beauty creams, containers, labels, posters, produces the photographs for advertisement and promotion. A quote from Stendhal helps to understand the psychology of the marketing method: "Beauty is nothing else but a promise of happiness." The consumer of beauty products invests her hope and money into this promise of happiness.

Text for advertising:

OSHIDO cosmetic products for women:

The modern woman knows her power. Takes care of her beauty and youth. Travels and positions herself where power is. Inserts her thought and ideas. Expresses her knowledge. Her experience in work and life part of the discourse. Always confident, knowing and using the best youth preserving cosmetics, which never fails supporting her in her confidence and beauty.

"Body and facial technology" idea, beauty, youth and power hand in hand for a successful future.



Oshi Ohashi: Young and Beautiful
installation view,
Goethe Institute, Budapest, 1997

Andrea Tarczali

MANUFACTURING THE SELF – TO THE GENEALOGY OF A THEME

Orshi Drozdik studied at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts between 1970 and 1977. This training not only shaped but also determined her course as an artist, because her work has amounted to a continuing confrontation with tradition. Starting with her work from the second half of the 1970s, she analyses and reinterprets the “framework of academic narrative” and the heritage of academic art training, especially the function of the female nude as the basis of study. Along the way she investigates issues such as genre, style, and originality. Her conceptually inspired works *Individual Mythology* (1975-77), *Identification* (1976), and *Nude* (1977) are critical reinterpretations of the academic tradition and her relationship to it as a woman. Drozdik’s search for identity as an artist built the foundation for her attack on the legitimacy of the Academy’s traditional approach to art and to art education. When the Academy can only offer a canon based on rigidly defined traditions and inapplicable role models, where and how does the (woman) artist search for his/her artistic identity?

The Fragile Individual

“The SELF is a dying metaphor”

Patrick McGrath

The text in “Preludes of Alter Egos,” the catalogue for Orshi Drozdik’s exhibition *Biological Metaphors II* (1984), takes the form of a dialogue. In the Drozdik-McGrath conversation, Drozdik takes on some large ideas, for example the relationship between images and myths, style, and self. She is particularly interested in re-evaluating the concepts of originality and quality. As the 1980s progressed, psychology and cultural theories would exert more and more influence on the visual arts. The discussion turned out to be a kind of harbinger of the changes that were soon to take place in the discourse of Art – essentially predicting the postmodern approach to individuality and the construction of the Self. Furthermore, the discussion turned out to provide a summary and a prediction of the major directions in Drozdik’s works, from *Individual Mythology* (1976) – in which she examined the myth of individuality – to her installation series of the nineties titled *Manufacturing The Self* (1990-97) – in which she deconstructs the representation of Self.

A number of provocative questions and ideas are posed in the conversation, and Drozdik’s painting-installations are based on these same ideas. But neither her theories nor her work provoked any response from the art world at the time. The reason for this lack of



Manufacturing the Self:
The Body Self
installation view,
Tom Cugliani Gallery,
New York, 1993

engagement may be that eighties pictorialism, which had become the mainstream, was promoting its own interpretation of the myth of individuality and also was using painting in a traditional way.

Nor was the avant-garde particularly responsive to Drozdik's provocation. The avant-garde, with its emphasis on "interdisciplinarity", "mediality", and like concepts as promoted by Miklós Erdély and his circle, was just as distant from Drozdik's theoretical and artistic approach as mainstream painting was. Still, Erdély was an enormous influence on Drozdik's generation, as was the new painting style.

The lack of engagement with Drozdik's approach did not alter her course. There is obvious continuity in the work examining, reusing and reinterpreting Self, myth, style, and quality. The heritage and the tradition of (fine) art are the bases of her work starting in 1975 and are still at the center of the 1984 work; they remain the foundation of her work in the nineties. What kind of evidence do we see over the span of twenty-five years of her art?



Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self, 1993
mixed media, 24 x 36 cm

In the eighties series of installations, *Adventure in Technos Dystopium* (1986-1992), Drozdik critiques patriarchal scientific representation. In the nineties, in the *Manufacturing the Self* (1990-1997) series, she adds critical analysis of the construction of the "Self". The work in the nineties incorporates the results of her efforts not only in the eighties but also the seventies: identity within the academic framework is the principal subject of *Identity* (1976), *Individual Mythology* (1975-77), and *Nude* (1977). *Pornography* (1980), *Art History and Me*, (1982), and *Edith Simpson* (1986) take the inquiry into different cultural fields.

From one series to another, Drozdik "maps" cultural territories, shifting the meaning of a subject from one contextual location to another through appropriation, revealing a given visual heritage, or repository. The first installation series analyzes the representation of science and technology; the other deals with the construction of the Self; in both works Drozdik deconstructs patriarchal "romantic" views of science and culture. Her "archaeological research" in the field of science – focusing on the 18th century, when the scientific method was taking form – connects our visual and artistic heritage to the methodology of science as it purports to represent truth and reality. In this series, Drozdik was working with relics preserved and displayed in science museums, and with scientific theories.

The presentation and analysis of the visual and textual metaphors of science are just as much a part of Drozdik's deconstruction as the culturally determined scientific method of naming, defining, and classifying. The concept of the series dealing with science, *Adventure in Technos Dystopium* (1984-92), is a postmodern critique of the Enlightenment. Drozdik's target is the power of episteme,

though when analyzing the visual scope of scientific representation, she questions the historic position of Science as the ultimate representation of truth and reality.

Focusing on her work in the nineties, we understand aspects of her process by looking at the first pieces from Drozdik's series of installations titled *Manufacturing the Self* (1992-93). Michel Foucault's writing concerning the "care of the self" influenced the concept and the title of the work. However, while Foucault analyzed the spiritual and intellectual practices of antiquity and of the Christianity of the early Middle Ages – which can be viewed as different modes of "producing" the Self – Drozdik approaches nineteenth and twentieth century metaphors for the Self in visual terms.

In her *Manufacturing the Self* series, Drozdik examines the fault-line upon which the culturally determined "Self after modernity" establishes itself and replaces the romantic, unified idea of the Self. The Self according to this later development is produced in its representational practices, which include the image of the body as well as the chosen language or behavior. The expression of identity, the setting into action of the Self, has its own poetics, rhetoric, and dramaturgy. The title of the series, *Manufacturing the Self*, suggests precisely this practice in which the fragmented Self can be reassembled and recreated, while the change of wording from "technologies" to "manufacturing" stresses the artisanal, hands-on nature of artistic work.



Double, 1979-80
video still

But how is the Self "assembled"? Role models are plentiful in everyday life. Models taken from history, fiction, films, fashion, advertising, and so on, can be equally useful or powerful as those picked up in the context of the family. In her 1977 *Manifesto of Individual Mythology*, Drozdik poses the question of how "the visual presentation of the individual – the face, the movement, the figure, the clothing – reflects the individual's situations and possibilities. The image is an organized consciousness; the image is consciously organized. The image of Individual expresses the individual's situation. The physical and visual presence of the individual reflects the individual (artist's) social position, psychology and physical state; the relation to the viewer; the idea that they wish to present; as well as the culture from which they created the idea, and the alternatives from which they can choose for themselves the (life) style-models at their disposal.

Drozdik uses "auxiliary structures" to approach different issues in art. This characteristic of her method, which can often be observed in her themes – e.g., science and the body – along with her choices of theoretical frameworks – e.g., the critique of representation, deconstruction, feminism, gaze theory etc. – recurs in Drozdik's work.

She continues to be concerned with how the disintegration and integration of the idea of the individual affects art and the artist. The plurality of (painting/sculpting/reassembling) styles and the fragmentary nature of the individual can be read as different manifestations of the same phenomenon: the elements of the Self image come from the “great common image bank” similarly to the different styles in art. The issues of style and the concept of the individual were linked in the motto of the 1984 exhibition in the Óbuda Galéria: *Biological Metaphors II*: “Within the individual personality there are accumulated heap of unrealized personalities, just as a painting conceals a piles of styles.”

It is this sentiment that inspires *Art History and Me* (1982-83). In the large-scale triptych and diptych paintings in this series, images of Drozdik’s simplified, sign-like figure are juxtaposed with various paintings appropriated from different periods of art. The styles seen in the series vary widely, and the same can be said of the individual paintings, which employ so many clashing styles. Drozdik focuses our attention on the field of visual art while staying within the tradition, by using the traditional medium of painting. We can observe what we think of as the unity and quality of the paintings, but in reality the coherence of the paintings is supported by their rhetorical elements.



Double, 1979-80
video still

A Storehouse of Role Patterns

Postmodern discourse on culture recognizes that individual identity is socially constructed and fragmented. The same recognition has led Drozdik to choose to examine particular role patterns and create her various alter egos.

As a young artist she attributed equal importance to forming a feminine identity, expressing her experiences, finding a form for her ideas and fighting for recognition. Photographing herself as a dancer and projecting different dancers’ photographs on her body, Drozdik is overlapping the artist with the dancer. The photo series *Individual Mythology* (1975-77) was inspired by the archival photographs of the great figures of “free dance” of the early twentieth century. Through dance Drozdik connects the artist with her body and with the bodily experience of dance. “Dance is a perpetual floating between the body and intellect. The bodily appearance of intellectual soaring. The separation from carnal gravitation. That is the locus where I can imagine the place of art.”

All of Drozdik’s work is characterized by an expert use of auxiliary structures, that is, “substitution,” or “appropriation” – transferring the “subject in question” to a context different from the one in which it originally appeared, as she did with the images of “free dancers” in *Individual Mythology*.

Drozdik appropriates different personas, text, images, and objects and through appropriation changes their original meanings. For example, in 1984 she painted her own portrait, but in the guise of a typical American businessman; a second “self-portrait” is that of a Russian Communist Party leader. When she labels the paintings “self-portraits”, she is partaking of a role pattern which suggests self-assertion and success. (See the catalogue “The Prelude of Alter egos”, 1984.) The gesture of “replacing” her portrait with those of stereotypical successful male role models is a provocative one, as social stereotyping assigns these values to men.

But it is not just patterns of success that Drozdik finds missing from the storehouse of female role patterns. In the figure of Edith Simpson, Drozdik fashions a pseudo persona with an extensive biography and a fictive body of scientific research, theories and hypotheses. Creating a fictitious genius – an eighteenth-century scientist of her own gender – she brings into being the archetype of the 18th century woman with scientific interests. Edith Simpson, the pseudo-persona, is at the same time the alter ego of the artist who turns to science.

The series of installations organized around the “Medical Venus” (*Manufacturing the Self: Medical Erotic*, 1993, *Manufacturing the Self: Body Self*, 1994) can be regarded as the compass of the series. Drozdik named the anatomical dummy in the installation “Medical Venus”. She refers to the recumbent female wax figures used by medical science in the 18th century as visual aids for scientific demonstrations, as teaching tools, and also exhibited as curiosities to those who visited anatomical collections. In this series, Drozdik sculpted the “Anatomical Venus” by molding her own body into the pose of this medical model of the female body. She uses the model as her “casting form” in order to question the representation of the female body and also to undermine the expectation of male spectators.

The female “models” formed by sculptors at that time in history were the sculpted nudes used by the medical establishment for instructional purposes. These reflected the formal traits of Baroque sculpture. The naturalistic richness of detail and the detachable body parts – along with the erotic-ecstatic poses reminiscent of Bernini – are still compelling and bizarre some 200 years later. Drozdik takes an object found in the medical science museum and endows it with linguistic expression in the form of love letters *The Love Letter to the Medical Venus* (1993), expressing the artist’s relationship to the sculpted female body, to the Medical Venus. She surrounds the sculpture with letters containing professions of love to the dissector, to the medical authority. *Love Letters on Twelve Silver Plates* (1993) are written in ecstatic, passionate language, as if they are a confession of the sculpted woman’s body.



Art History and Me, 1982
diptych, oil on canvas
186 x 272 cm

The pseudo persona, or “borrowed personality”, continues to be a motif in Drozdik’s works. “Born” exactly two hundred years before the artist Drozdik, Edith Simpson embodies scientific genius but transgresses historic constraints, because she is a scientist and a woman. The reinterpreted “Medical Venus” also represents woman evading social constraints in that she freely expresses all of her experience – sex, love, etc. – confounding all societal expectations.

The “body” at the center of the *Body Self* installation is an (erotic) spectacle, passive. Decked out in blond wig and pearls, she plays the stereotypical woman’s role. Yet through her “words” she breaks out of her culturally determined position. Through the use of language/text, Drozdik reverses the standard dramaturgy, endowing the figure with activity while forcing the viewer into the position of a voyeur. The dramaturgy created by the pseudo love letters is further undermined by the fact that the artist used her own body to cast that of her model: imitating the pose of the original Medical Venus, Orshi Drozdik becomes the mold for the new model.



Biological Metaphors II
oil on canvas, installation view
Budapest Galéria, 1984

After the *Manufacturing the Self* installation series, Drozdik continues to take on alter egos: she constructs a persona, an identity, that is both fictitious and appropriated, and she creates for it not just a pseudonym but a “pseudoname”. In *Young and Beautiful* Orshi Drozdik becomes Oshi Ohashi.

In the gallery of the Goethe Institute, Budapest, 1997, *Young and Beautiful* featured heavy PR and a full arsenal of advertisement: posters, brand names, and slogans for a line of cosmetics called “Confident”. With this work the artist creates a new level of concealment. In the exhibit, we learn all about Oshi Ohashi. We read her biography, learn of her ambitions, the fragrances and other beauty products she has created. The deceit is so successful that there is hardly anything left to reveal the artist. There are almost no clues that Oshi Ohashi is really Orshi Drozdik.

Drozdik’s found and created personalities become interpretable not only through their relation to their creator; the discourse into which they enter, and the tradition whose boundaries they probe, are equally important. It seems as if she is working with the body, but actually the subject of her art is the “Self”. On the level of spectacle and visible appearance, the subject of her discourse is the “body of the self”. Our knowledge of the body is visual, and our body consciousness arises from the self-reflexive practices of the body. But how is all of this rhetoric manifested in Drozdik’s work?

The Discourses of the Body The Medical Discourse

Drozdik's *Biological Metaphors* (1983-84) series is based on medical illustrations. The epistemological significance of early representations of the inner workings of the body can nowadays be valued only from a historic and aesthetic point of view. Early images and writings on the internal structure of the body can now be regarded as only ancient history or appreciated as art. At the same time such illustrations signal the early stages of the visualization, and virtualisation of the body.

The painting-installation titled *Biological Metaphors II* (1984) consists of pathos formulae, visual metaphors, pseudo-portraits and a complicated network of internal organs. Drozdik places the representation of her own body into a mythological context, while the myth of the body is presented through biological metaphors and symbols (e.g., the brain, the heart). In the painting-installation, "quotations" borrowed from the history of science are placed on the same "canvas-surface" as the topic of art history; images borrowed from art history's Christian iconography – the stigma, the nailed feet and the motif of the touching of the wound—are placed next to the scientific images of the human body.

The images of human organs, painted as Drozdik's own innards, are presented in different styles and are paired with different abstract paintings. The way the artist juxtaposes these things echoes the double images of the *Art History and Me* series from 1982, where Drozdik uses various painted images of her own body, paired up with paintings taken from art history. The portraits of the Russian politician and the American businessman are each paired up with the image of an internal organ, e.g., kidney and intestines.

The primitive character of the early anatomical illustrations not only reflects the imprecision of general knowledge of early anatomical images but also expresses the once dominant view of the body (a paradigm). It was the "Vesalian turn" that brought about a fundamental change in how the body was represented in medical science. In Vesalius' collection of illustrations, "De Humani Corporis Fabrica", along with the details of the body we can also find full figures, often with sketchy or fully elaborated backgrounds. In the typical poses, the characterized face also appears. Next to the usual anatomical genres – recumbent and upright torsos, muscle men – there are also leaning figures, tilted, hanged figures, bending skeletons, and one equipped with a shovel. These become part of Drozdik's silver-pen drawing series titled *Dissection of Artaud, Foucault and Vesalius* (1985-86). This series on black paper is based on the illustrations of



Oshi Ohashi:
Young and Beautiful
installation view,
Goethe Institute,
Budapest, 1997
detail

Vesalius. The illustrations bear the minimum of genre constraints and complement the body parts with wavy, pulsating handwritten text ribbons. The silver lines with their fine draughtsmanship have the effect of compositional elements on the homogeneous black background. The sentences and words surrounding the images are quotations from different writings on the body, by Michel Foucault and Antonin Artaud. The discourse of medical science intersects with literature, philosophy and other discourses of the body, and at certain points interplays with other images taken from museums.

In 1984, Drozdik started photographing the collections of various science museums. She titled the series *Dystopia Infinita*. This series by now consists of several thousand pieces of black-and-white photography examining the scientific representation of reality, and the photos often serve as the basis of the series of installations, *Adventure in Technos Dystopium*. This decade long work is a kind of archaeological research, inspired by Michel Foucault's critique of history, "The Order of Things", and using Derrida's deconstructionist methods.



Oshi Ohashi:
Young and Beautiful
installation view,
Goethe Institute,
Budapest, 1997
detail

The kind of scientific "knowledge" that has been cast aside and is now accessible only in dusty museums becomes the topic of the series. The apparatuses, instruments for physics (physicians), and assorted scientific experiments and demonstrations are models that have lost their original meaning and functions. Drozdik's archaeological analysis of museums offers a critique of the patriarchal, scientific medical history, and of "male gaze". Through the search of old scientific paradigms she points out to the viewer that "representation of truth and reality is dependent on point of view," and that all theory can only temporarily "hold onto the truth".

The research and critique that started in *Adventure in Technos Dystopium* continue in the *Manufacturing the Self* installation series. Drozdik's theoretical research for installations like *Manufacturing the Self: Medical Erotic* and *Manufacturing the Self: Body Self* is still based on the museum displays, but concentrated and focused on representations of the female body, on "Medical Venus".

The Cosmetic Discourse

In those works based on deconstructing cosmetic advertisements and their effect on women, Drozdik focuses on the directives of the ideal image of the female "body". The cosmetic terror, one of the highlighted topics of feminist criticism, and the self-fetishizing practices of the female body are also subjects, in a more poetic presentation,

of Drozdik's *Manufacturing the Self* series. *Manufacturing the Self; Hairy Virgin*, an installation exhibited at the 1994 São Paulo Biennale, made use of depilatory wax placed on the floor in aluminum containers resembling open sea shells; other hair removal products on glass shelves advised women on how to remove unwanted hair from their lips. With the title *Hairy Virgin*, Drozdik links the medieval mythology of the hairy virgin with images and materials used to produce the idealized hair-free woman. The image of the hairy virgin creates fear and disgust. In Christian iconography she is linked with the idea of evil and sin. The installation is based on this iconographic contamination. The concept of the depilated female body is a symbolic answer to the fear expressed in this topos.

The above-mentioned project *Young and Beautiful* (1997) also examines the discourse of the cosmetic industry and reuses the methods and psychology of the beauty industry, pointing out the effect on women. The Confident cosmetic product line was presented to the public in the gallery of the Goethe Institute in Budapest as an exhibition of Oshi Ohashi's work. The brand name, the promotional material, the convincing image designed for the products, were all placed at the service of revealing the methods of cosmetic industry advertisement and its effects on women. In addition, twelve different Oshido perfumes in fancy bottles and facial creams were shown and were also for sale. Having seen this work, only a few people realised that the Japanese name was actually a reworking of the name of Orshi Drozdik, and that the mystery surrounding the exhibition, as well as the letter Oshido sent to the curator, was all a part of the fiction.

The letter that the artist writes to the curator asking to be excused for not appearing at the opening, offers something else, too: the illusion of safety linked to the figure of the mother, who customarily passes on to her daughter a set of traditional cultural expectations befitting a woman. The letter points out the conflicting "mother/daughter" relationship and "the surrogate of the smell of familiarity, of home". The letter makes reference to psychoanalysis; it refers to childhood, to the trauma in the mother-daughter relationship, to the necessary conflict brought about by the daughter turning away from the mother. The daughter may feel that she has no chance to embrace success by modeling herself on the mother, although what they do share is the promise of happiness through the attainment of beauty. Behind the personal tone and the mask of intimacy, what we find is a theoretical letter on the subject of trauma and conflict. The letter, the slogans, the promotional literature are all part of the work, and at the same time a guide for the reader/visitor to access the details of the artist's critical theory.



Oshi Ohashi:
Young and Beautiful
Confident Cosmetic Line,
perfume, 1997

The texts

Just like we have at our disposal a “storehouse of images” and patterns, there is also a “text bank”. Starting with the 1976 *Identification*, text has played a crucial role in Drozdik’s works. Most often, the texts are placed into the context of the works as part of the whole image, but in some cases they are linked to the works in a seemingly supplementary way, contributing to the creation of the theoretical subject. The forms of the texts are varied, running from titles, manifestos, and descriptions of concepts, to ecstatic love letters. As a postmodern strategist, Drozdik often resorts to the extant “text bank”; most of her texts are appropriated or referential. The factor of originality, if it is valid at all in such cases, may be found in the way the texts are used or reused. By the 1990s the use of text becomes more and more significant in Orshi Drozdik’s oeuvre, and fragments of texts are gradually replaced by entire bodies of text.

December 2, 2001



Oshi Ohashi:
Young and Beautiful
Confident Cosmetic Line,
logo, 1997

¹Vesalius, a surgeon and anatomy professor from Brussels, began doing dissections and illustrations of the dissected body in the 1530s. Around 1540, based on his experiences, he revolutionized the study of human anatomy and corrected many of the mistaken hypotheses of Galenus, the ancient scientist.

²Vesalius summarizes the results of his research in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1540-42). Some of his research and terminology is still being used in the modern world. More important, his brilliantly precise illustrations shaped our understanding of the topography of the body.



Individual Mythology IV. 1977/2001

installation view, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002

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Individual Mythology VI.-VII. 1977/2001

installation view, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002

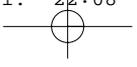




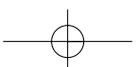
Pornography, 1978/2001
installation view, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002

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Individual Mythology I., 1975/2001
installation view, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002





I and Art History II. 1982
installation view, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002





Heritage of Edith Simpson 1986 / 2001
installation view, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002



Fragmenta Naturae: Taxonomy (The Sexual System of Plants after Linnaeus), 1990
installation view, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002

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Manufacturing the Self: The Pathological Body, 1995
installation view detail, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002





Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self, 1993
installation view detail, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002

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Young and Beautiful: Oshi Ohashi, 1997
installation view detail, Ludwig Museum Budapest - Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001 / 2002



LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS

1. Situations I-III, 1977, 3 photo-offsets, each framed 83 x 63 cm
2. Symbols of Commonplace I-VI, 1976/77, 6 photo-offsets, 158 x 177 cm, each framed 79 x 59 cm
3. The Blink of the Eye and the Sight, 1977, 6 photo-offsets in one frame 75 x 63 cm
4. Individual Mythology I., 1975/2001, 24 b/w photographs, 204 x 258 cm, each framed 51 x 43 cm
5. Individual Mythology II. 1977, 9 photo-offset, mixed colors, 237 x 177 cm, each framed 79 x 59 cm
6. Individual Mythology III. 1977/2001, 9 photo-offsets, blue, 168 x 144 cm, each 66 x 48 cm
7. Individual Mythology IV. 1977/2001, 9 photo-offsets, red, 168 x 144 cm, each 66 x 48 cm
8. Individual Mythology V (1-6). 1976, 6 erased pencil drawings, each 100 x 69 cm
9. Individual Mythology VI.-VII. 1977/2001, 2 b/w photographs, each 156 x 106 cm
10. Pornography (I Project on Myself I.) 1979/2001, 3 b/w photographs, 42 x 102 cm, each framed 42 x 34 cm
11. Pornography (I project on Myself II.) 1979/2001, 6 b/w photographs, 68 x 126 cm, each framed 34 x 42 cm
12. Pornography (I Embrace Myself I.), 1978/2001, 4 b/w photographs, 149 x 156 cm, one 106 x 156 cm, three pcs. each framed 43x 51 cm
12. Pornography (I Embrace Myself II.), 1979, 29 b/w photographs, 19 x 456 cm, each framed 19 x 24 cm
13. Diverted Diagonal, 1980, 12 color xeroxes, 252 x 26 cm, each 21 x 29 cm
14. I and Art History I. 1982, triptych, oil on canvas, 183 x 411 cm, each 183 x 137 cm
15. I and Art History II. 1982, triptych oil on canvas, 183 x 337 cm; one 183 x 137 cm, two 183 x 100 cm
16. Biological Metaphor I. 1983-84, diptych, oil on canvas, 180 x 230 cm, each 180 x 140 cm
17. Biological Metaphor II. 1983-84, 12 drawings on paper, 300 x 130 cm, each 50 x 65 cm
18. Biological Metaphor III. 1983, Self-portrait as an American Businessman, 1984, oil on canvas, 220 x 184 cm, 3 part. 45 x 45 cm, 30 x 30 cm, 220 x 140 cm
19. Double, 1979-80, video (projector)
20. Dissection of Artaud, Foucault and Vesalius, 1983-84, 16 drawings, silver ink on black paper, 200 x 280 cm, each framed 50 x 70 cm
21. Leyden Jar, 1988, glass, metal, copper, wood, text, pedestal: 76 x 127 x 15 cm
22. Natural Philosophy, 1988, text sandblasted on glass, 62 x 74 cm
23. Heritage of Edith Simpson 1986 / 2001, I-XI Glass Cases., on metal stands
 - I. pedestal: 90 x 115 x 30 cm, glass case: 90 x 90 x 30 cm; II, III, IV: 90 x 110 x 32 cm, each 52 x 25 x 31,5 cm; V: 109 x 78 x 30 cm, 78 x 78 x 33 cm; VI: Lues Venerea (1989), 110 x 78 x 30 cm, 80 x 80 x 29 cm; VII: Ammeter (1990) 90 x 110 x 33 cm, 90 x 90 x 32 cm; VIII: 110 x 78 x 30 cm, 79 x 77 x 33,5 cm; IX: console 16 x 28 x 45 cm, 80 x 75 x 27 cm; X: 110 x 90 x 31 cm, 90 x 90 x 31 cm; XI: 75 x 32 x 32,5 cm, 25 x 50,5 x 25 cm

The objects in the glass cases, II, III, IV, V, VIII, IX, X, XI are the property of the Hungarian Technical Museum. Glass Case VII, property of the Hungarian National Gallery. Glass Case VI (1989) and VII. sculptures of the artist.

25. Adventure in Technos Dystopium:
- a. Dystopia Infinite I-VI , 1984-86, 6 b/w photographs, each 50 x 60 cm, framed:
3 pcs. 113,5 x 103, 5; 3 pcs. 103,5 x 103,5 cm
 - b. Theory IV, II, I, 1988, 3 sandblasted text on glasses, 60 x 76 cm each
 - c. Dystopia Infinite: Black Mirror, 1984, b/w photography 156 x 107 cm,
6 anthracite cubes 15 x 15 x 15 cm
26. Fragmenta Naturae 1990, installation
- a. Taxonomy: The Sexual System of Plants, 1990, (after Linnaeus) installation
18 sandblasted text on glasses, 10 pcs. each 30,7 x 61 x 0,5 cm; 8 pcs. each 30,5 x 76,2 x 0,5 cm
 - b. Herbarium I-V 1990, pressed plants, glass, silver, metal, each 66 x 51 cm
 - c. Metamorphosis 1990, Bean 1990, plaster 15 x 32 x 10 cm on console 17 x 44,5 x 28 cm
Sprout 1990, aluminum: 110 x 38 x 6 cm
27. Tubulus, 1989, installation, 19 pcs. silver on glass
- I. 21,7 x 77, 4 cm; II. 17, 6 x 77,4 cm; III. 20,3 x 91,3 cm, IV. 21,3 x 77,2 cm, V. 12,7 x 49,8 cm,
VI. 20,4 x 77,4 cm, VII. 20,4 x 91,3 cm, VIII. 12, 7 x 51,8 cm, IX. 17,8 x 73,5 cm, X. 15,4 x 73,5 cm,
XI. 17,9 x 81,2 cm, XII. 20,4 x 77,4 cm, XIII. 20,2 x 73,4 cm, XIV.-XVI. 12,7 x 50,7 cm,
XV. 20,4 x 76,4 cm, XVII. 17,6 x 73,4 cm, XVIII. 12,7 x 49,8 cm, XIX. 12,9 x 48,8 cm
28. Adventure in Technos Dystopium: Dystopia Infinite, 1984-1986, 4 b/w photographs,
each 50 x 60 cm, framed 3 pcs. 192 x 102 cm; 1pc. 117 x 106 cm
30. Dystopia Infinite (Rome), I-X. 1999, installation, 10 pcs b/w photo on aluminum,
130 x 800 cm, each 130 x 80 cm
31. Manufacturing the Self: The Pathological Body, 1995, installation
- a. Triptych, b/w photographs 1984/95, 250 x 369 cm, each 250 x 123 cm, magnifying glass
 - b. Love Letters, 2 (+2) framed each 51 x 43 cm
 - c. Erythrocytes, 1990, 83 pcs. porcelain
32. Manufacturing the Self: Brains on High Heels, 1992, installation, 12 cast aluminum,
rubber each piece 26 x 14 cm, pedestal: 205 x 215 x 8 cm
33. Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self, 1993, installation
- a. Medical Venus 1993, life-size rubber sculpture 165 x 70 x 35 cm, metal table 91,5 x 228 x 55 cm
 - b. Love Letters on Twelve Silver Plate, 1993, 12 pcs. engraved silver plates d30 cm, stands 91 cm tall
 - c. Medical Venus 1984-93, 12 b/w photographs 103 x 1450 cm, each framed 103 x 123 cm
 - d. Love Letter to The Medical Venus 1993, b/w photographs 189 x 492 cm, 12 framed text each 63 x 123 cm
34. - 35. Medical Venus I-II, 1990, 2 color photography on plexi-glass, 60 x 45 cm
36. Young and Beautiful, 1997, video (projector)
37. Young and Beautiful: Oshi Ohashi, 1997, installation, 1 colored photograph 100 x 125 cm,
1 round mirror table 0,5 x 150 x 150 cm, 9 pcs. perfume-glasses, each h12 cm, d25 cm,
1 mirror table 74 x 90 x 201 cm, 12 blue perfume glasses h20 cm, d30 cm;
10 pcs. plastic facial cream jars, Confident advertisement posters each 30 x 42 cm
38. Objects I-III, 1996-2001, 3 color photographs on plexi, 65 x 85 cm each

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Art, New York, 1989, Essay by Laura Trippi

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Essay by Susan Hapgood

Stendhal Syndrome: The Cure. Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York City, 1990, Essays by Rhonda Lieberman, Catherine Liu, Lawrence Rickels

Orsolya Drozdik. Adventures in Technos Dystopium. Ernst Múzeum, Budapest, 1990

Anni Novanta. Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, 1990, Essay by Renato Barilli

The Interrupted Life. New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1991

Beelden In De Keopel. Arnhem Museum, Arnhem, The Netherlands, 1991, Essay by Anneke Oeole and Eleanor Heartney

The Body. The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 1991

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Orsbi Drozdik. Le corps pathologique. La salle Blanche, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 1995, Essay by Jonas Storsve

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BIOGRAPHY

Born in Abda, Hungary

1970-77 Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest

1974-77 Masters Degree, Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest

Solo Exhibitions

- 2001 Retrospective, Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest
 Objects, Knoll Gallery, Budapest
 Objects, Knoll Gallery, Vienna
- 1997 Oshi Ohashi, Young and Beautiful, Confident Cosmetic Line, Goethe Institute, Budapest
 Strudel, Kunsthalle, Szombathely, H
- 1996 Manufacturing the Self. The Body Self, Ludwig Museum Budapest
- 1995 Manufacturing the Self. The Body Self, Múcsarnok/Kunsthalle, Budapest
 Manufacturing the Self. The Pathological Body, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes
 Manufacturing the Self. The Hairy Virgin, 420 West Broadway Gallery, New York
- 1994 Adventure in Technos Dystopium. Photographs from 1984-94, Richard Anderson Gallery, New York
 Manufacturing the Self. The Body Self, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich
 Manufacturing the Self. The Body Self, Knoll Gallery, Vienna
 Manufacturing the Self. Medical Erotic, Anderson Gallery, Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia
- 1993 Manufacturing the Self. Convent, Abbaye de Maubuisson, Saint-Ouen L'Aumone, France
 Manufacturing the Self. Medical Erotic I, Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York
 Manufacturing the Self. Medical Erotic II, Galerie d'Art Contemporain, Herblay, France
 Manufacturing the Self. Nineteenth Century Self, Second Tyne International, Newcastle, UK
- 1992 Science Fictions: Adventure in Technos Dystopium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, List Visual Art Center, Cambridge, MA
- 1991 Cynical Reason, Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, NL
- 1990 Fragmenta Naturae, Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York
 Adventure in Technos Dystopium, Ernst Múzeum, Budapest
 Cynical Reason I, Knoll Gallery, Budapest

- Cynical Reason II, Richard Anderson Gallery, New York
- 1989 Morbid Conditions I, Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York
 Morbid Conditions II, Arch, Amsterdam
- 1988 Natural Philosophy I, Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York
 Natural Philosophy II, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo
- 1985 Biological Metaphors I, Gallery Suspect, Amsterdam
- 1984 Biological Metaphors II, Budapest Galéria, Budapest
 Biological Metaphors III, Mercer Union, Toronto
- 1981 Diverted Shadow, Stúdió Galéria, Budapest
 Diavision, Mercer Union, Toronto
- 1980 I Try to be Transparent, Factory 77, Toronto
- 1979 Transparencies, Pulp Press Building, Vancouver
- 1977 Nude, FMK–Young Artists’ Club, Budapest
 Individual Mythology, Miskolci Galéria, Miskolc, H
- 1968 József Attila University, Szeged, H
- 1966 City Museum of Szolnok, Szolnok, H
- 1964 City Gallery, Győr, H
- 1962 Kazinczy Ferenc High School, Győr, H

Group Exhibitions

- 2001 Digitized Bodies – Virtual Spectacles, Ludwig Museum Budapest –
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest
 Objects, Bodies, Organs, Hungarian Academy in Rome
- 2000 The Second Sex – Women’s Art in Hungary, 1960-2000, Ernst
 Múzeum, Budapest
 Digitized Bodies – Virtual Spectacles, InterAccess Gallery, Toronto
- 1999 Rondo. A Selection of Works by Central and Eastern European
 Artists, Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary
 Art, Budapest
 La Casa, il Corpo, il Cuore, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung
 Ludwig, Wien; National Gallery, Prague
- 1998 Rózsa presszó 1976-98, Ernst Múzeum, Budapest
 Scholars of the Academy, Hungarian Academy in Rome
 SUPERmarkt, Shedhalle, Zürich
 Sarajevo 2000, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Wien
- 1997 Contemporary Art Center, Cleveland
 Leiblicher Logos, Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of
 Contemporary Art, Budapest
- 1996 3x3 from Hungary, Bard College Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

- Body, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Manufacturing the Self. The Pathological Self, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest
- 1995 Kreáció-Rekreáció, Múcsarnok/Kunsthalle, Budapest
- 1994 Manufacturing the Self. The Hairy Virgin, São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo
- Don't look now!, Thread Waxing Place, New York
- Hungarian Art of the Eighties, Ernst Múzeum, Budapest
- 1993 Boundary Rider, Sydney Biennial, Sydney
- The Nature of Science, Pratt Manhattan Gallery, Pratt Institute, New York; The Rubelle and Norman Schaefer Gallery, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn
- Book it now!, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart
- Healing, Wooster Gardens, New York
- Brain; Internal Affairs; Manufacturing the Self; Brains on Wheels, Beatrix Hospital, Gorinchem, NL
- 1991 The Body, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago
- The Interrupted Life, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
- Physical Relief, Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College, New York
- Transparent Body, AIR, Amsterdam
- Anni Novanta, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna
- Dissection, Knoll Galéria, Budapest
- 1990 Grazer Künstlerhaus, Graz
- Body. Once Removed, Sorkin Gallery, New York
- About Nature. A Romantic Impulse, Barbara Toll Gallery, New York
- Memory-Reality, Ceres Gallery, New York
- Knoll Galéria, Budapest
- Summer Exhibition, Sandra Gering Gallery
- Stendhal Syndrome: The Cure, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
- Natural History Recreated, The Center of Photography, Woodstock
- The Collector's Cabinet, Curt Marcus Gallery, New York
- All Quiet on the Western Front, Gallery Antoine Candau, Paris
- 1989 Strange Attractors; Signs of Chaos, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
- Science/Technology/Abstraction: Art at the End of the Decade, University Art Galleries, Wright State University, Dayton
- Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York

- Artist Use Artist, New York Experimental Glass Workshop, New York
A Good Read: The Book as Metaphor, Barbara Toll Gallery, New York
P.B.: Works on Lead, Nohra Haime Gallery, New York
Art About Aids, Freedman Gallery; Albright College, Pennsylvania
Tierra Encantada, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City
Los Angelitos. Dedicated to Contemporary Artists since 1975,
Alternative Museum, New York
- 1987 Metaphysics, Piezo Electric, New York
City Purchases, ARTI, Amsterdam
- 1986 Stedelijk Museum, U.M.A., Amsterdam
Dystopia, Salon de Facto, New York
- 1985 Printed Matter, Collaborative Projects, New York
- 1984 Eastern Europe, El Bohio, New York
Postcard Photo Project, Collaborative Projects, New York
Poster Project, Collaborative Projects, New York
Women Expressionists, A.I.R. Gallery, New York
Women Up Front, Quando, New York
Jack Tilton, Collaborative Projects, New York
- 1983 A.I.R. Gallery, New York
Three Installations, Art in General, New York
The Ritz Show, Collaborative Projects, W.P.A., Washington D.C.
Studio 54, Collaborative Projects, New York
White Columns, New York
Current Memories: Painters Who Use Their Dreams, Small Walls,
New York
Fashion-Moda, The Bronx, New York
Danceteria, New York
Army Terminal Show, G.S. Brooklyn, New York
- 1982 International Graphic Exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Bilbao
- 1981 Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje, YU
- 1980 Intergrafia. International Graphic Biennial, Krakow, PL
Impact, Kyoto
Moderna Galerija, Rijeka, YU
Intergrafia. International Graphic Biennial, Krakow, PL
- 1979 Young Artists' Annual Exhibition, Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest; Szent István Király Múzeum, Székesfehérvár, H
Symbols, Cultural Centre Hans Marchwitza, Potsdam, GDR
Graphic Biennial, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, YU

- 1978 Studio of Young Artists 1958-78, Grand Palais, Paris; Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest
 Intergrafia. International Graphic Biennial, Krakow, PL
 New Tendencies, Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest
- 1977 Graphic Biennial, Miskolci Galéria, Miskolc, H
 Situation and Individual Mythology, Ganz Mávag, Budapest
 Cultural Centre, Prague
 Duisburg, West Germany
 Drawing Biennial, Wroclaw, PL
- 1976 Leipzig Academy, GDR
 Berlin Academy, GDR
 Young Artists' Annual Exhibition, Budapest
- 1975 Young Artists' Annual Exhibition, Csók István Galéria, Budapest
 1970-74 Annual Exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest
- 1964 Municipal Museum, Győr
 Xantus János Múzeum, Győr
- 1963 Municipal Museum, Győr
 Municipal Museum, Veszprém
- 1962 Municipal Museum, Győr

Fellowships and Grants

- 1995 New York Foundation for Art, Woman Photographers' Catalogue Project
 1994 Austrian Ministry of Culture, Fellowship, Vienna
 1993-95 CAVA, National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, Miami
 1990 The Gordon Matta-Clark Fellowship
 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Grant
 Cartier Fellowship, France
 1988 Prince Bernard Foundation
 1978 Young Artist Prize
 1977 Kondor Béla Prize

Lectures and Conferences

- 1999 Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest
 1997 Bride on the Table, Central European University, Budapest
 Embodied Logos, Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest
 Contemporary Gender Discourse, Collegium Budapest, Budapest
 1995 Representation of Women's Body and Scientific Gaze, Műcsarnok/Kunsthalle, Budapest

- Contemporary Woman Artists, University of California San Diego
- 1994 Manufacturing the Self. Medical Erotic, University of California San Diego
- Manufacturing the Self. The Body Self, School of Design, Pasadena
- Manufacturing the Self. The Body Self and Medical Erotic, The School of the Art Institute, Chicago
- Manufacturing the Self, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond
- Gender Representation in Contemporary Art, School of the Arts, Richmond
- Technologies of the Self; Gender Representation in Contemporary Art and Life, Depot, Messepalast, Vienna
- Gender Representation and Feminism in Contemporary Art in New York, ELTE University, Budapest
- Technologies of the Self, School of Applied Arts, Tölgyfa Galéria, Budapest
- Contemporary Feminism, ELTE University, Budapest
- 1992 The Technology of Gender, Museum of Contemporary Art, Melbourne
- Adventure in Technos Dystopium, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
- Representation of Gender in Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- 1991 Margin and Center, Royal Academy, Copenhagen
- 1990 On the Border, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego

Teaching

- 1997 Adjunct Professor at the Art Department, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla
- Visiting Professor at the Department of Gender Studies, Central European University, Budapest
- 1994-95 Visiting Professor at the Art Department, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla
- 1994 Visiting artist/lecturer at The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago
- 1991 Visiting artist at the Visual Art Department, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla
- 1991-93 Adjunct Professor at the Art Department, New York University, New York
- 1989-90 Visiting artist/professor at the Sculpture Department, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia

Editing

- Walking Brains: Contemporary Feminist Discourse. A Reader, Kijarat Kiadó, Pécs, 1998

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IMPRESSUM

Retrospective Exhibiton of Orshi Drozdik

Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary Art
December 12, 2001 - March 3, 2002

info@ludwigmuseum.hu
http://www.orshi.hu
http://www.ludwigmuseum.hu

Curators: Dóra Hegyi, Franciska Zólyom

Preparation work for the exhibition: Krisztina Üveges, assistant curator

Authors: Orshi Drozdik, Éva Körner, Katalin Néray, Andrea Tarczali, John C. Welchman

Editor of the catalogue: Dóra Hegyi

Preparation of the artist's texts: Noémi Forián Szabó

Translation into English: Zsófia Bán, Bálint Bethlenfalvy, János Hideg, Rachel Hideg

Translation into Hungarian: András Beck, Franciska Zólyom

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