

OUTRAGEOUS AGERS

A collaboration between ROSY MARTIN and KAY GOODRIDGE

Rosy Martin and Kay Goodridge use theoretical and performative strategies to analyse and contest the social and cultural constructions of the ageing body. Our approach is at times parodic, playful, confrontational, intellectual, vulnerable, transgressive, carnivalesque, tender: always engaging.

Our art works confront stereotypes of the ageing woman, which currently leave little space for negotiation and suggest decline, loss of sexuality and redundancy. The rhetoric of popular cultural representations, e.g. cosmetic advertising, reinforces these disavowals. Consequently, ageing is seen as a problem to be overcome, hidden or denied.

What does it mean for a woman to inhabit an ageing, unstable body? We ask this question as artists who use our own bodies as a medium for exploring social and psychic realities, inviting the audience to reconsider their preconceptions.

This work is about the unruly, carnivalesque even grotesque body, which refuses to be ignored. Irony, humour and transgression are used to subvert clichés - for example 'mutton dressed as lamb'.

Ignoring the implicit notice 'no woman over 30 need enter' we re-visit Top Shop (famous West End London store for young women's fashions) to try on and perform our fears. Squeezed into the frame, our bodies mirror the desire and discontent of the loss of the anyway already impossible 'perfect' body. Presented as light-boxes, in their luminous presence they challenge, cite and create a parody of fashion and advertising photography.

Bodily anxieties, such as flabby bellies, crêpey bosoms and triple chins become transformed into an aesthetically gorgeous frieze of large photographic prints, in which one image appears to merge with the next, creating bodyscapes of flesh that bear traces of lives lived. Double exposures confront notions of the unstable, ever changing body, containing echoes of its history, projections towards its future, within itself.

In a series of scripto-visual works, key theoretical texts are projected onto the fragmented ageing body to challenge, subvert and make visible the inscription of medical, psychoanalytic and cultural discourses upon the body. The authority of such normative and clinical prescriptions is undermined by the exuberance and presence of the vitality of the living, breathing body. Flesh overpowers word. The body answers back. Black and white prints formally echo the authority of the printed word.

The 'Bathing Belles' series positions the older women's body as a site of pleasure and fun, inspired by the iconography of the comic seaside postcard. Two figures stand in liminal space. Does middle age evoke similar anxieties to adolescence, as concepts of self-identities shift?

Video installations use story-telling and performance to voice and visualise contesting ways of inhabiting an ageing body. *'Time will Tell'* places the post-menopausal body on a plinth, in a defiant dialogue with the Neo-Classical perfection of the 'Three Graces'. *'I feel like chicken tonight'* contests the promise of 'youthfulness in a jar', in a series of transformations, playing with the hopes and fears that surround ageing. A video booth invites the audience to question their own voyeurism and the admonishment 'never make a spectacle of one-self'. In an ironic take on the striptease, carnivalesque in its incorporation of tubi-grip as the new lycra, the audience is finally asked *'What do y'a think you're looking at?'* Evoking cheeky music hall humour the audience is reminded that *'When you're smiling'*, the whole world smiles with you.

As the demography shows, Europe and USA have an ageing population that will not go away, nor be ignored. In challenging, re-inventing and transforming dominant cultural representations, we voice and visualise other ways of inhabiting an ageing body.