



In Search Of
Authenticity

Initial Ideas &
Practice-Based
Experiments

Advanced Creative Enquiry

Project Proposal & Portfolio Of Experimentation

Full Name: Jade Mariah Kirby

Proposed Name of project: ***In Search Of Authenticity***

Describe your project using 5 key words:

Transience

Desire

Identity

Isolation

Tension

Provide a short summary of the proposed project: 100 words

The project aims to use the body as a contemporary vessel to explore the the worlds binary construct, addressing social isolation, tension, desire and identity through the vessel of transience.

Through my feminine alter ego known as Clara, whose narrative remains intentionally vague at this stage, she will be navigating this world in alternative ways challenging our perception of the gaze in performative photography practice, Clara will be navigating complex exaggerated systems of binary construct that blurs the line between fabrication and reality, her navigation of the world aims to raise self reflection on authenticity, questioning the ways in which our identities are shaped, perceived and performed with todays ever changing social climate.

Provide a detailed description of the proposed project (250 words)
What is the subject/concept/theme that you are exploring? What are your motivations behind making the work? What are the medium(s) in which you will work? What are the methodologies you will be employing?

Transience, the act of passing over. The spaces in between genders are where the work aims to be constant.

In society we are used to seeing a harmonious balance of a binary structure; my work aims to challenge normative states by existing outside of gender oscillation. My motivations come from a personal place, I want to raise awareness to alarming changes in society which sees us spending hours performing on social media and conforming to beauty trends, while also acknowledging the allure of self-enhancement in my work.

I also want to challenge the conventional norms of the gaze in photography from the perspective of the 3rd gender in the art space. I will do this with performative self-portraiture, using femininity as a constant in my work and my current state of transition to create provocative yet alluring visual dialogue on our social climate. I aim to use certain places as vessels of transience to explore physical tension and relevant mental states that I can capture in my upcoming work.

I will be using a mirrorless camera and on-camera flash to create my work in an intense way of capturing tension in my work. This will be important to use throughout my work as I navigate site-specific places with the same visual style. The locations that I go to will be subtle but relevant to my current state of transience, as well as hoping to capture uncanny visuals where Clara performs in further commenting on the blurred reality of online presences.

Describe the developmental opportunities, experiments and processes you have undertaken, what did you get out of them, and how will you use them to support your proposed project? (200 words max)

I have utilised the site specific concept effectively to create tension and a on camera flash to create tension. I have used performance to create visual dialogue on gender and in a majority of the images I have developed a skill for capturing beauty and visual tension with my images. Through 3 months of practice I have developed key editing skills that have enhanced the visual aesthetic of the imagery to visually convey what I want to say about social climates. My next stage will be applying physical process to the work and how I can take meaning further from the digital form.

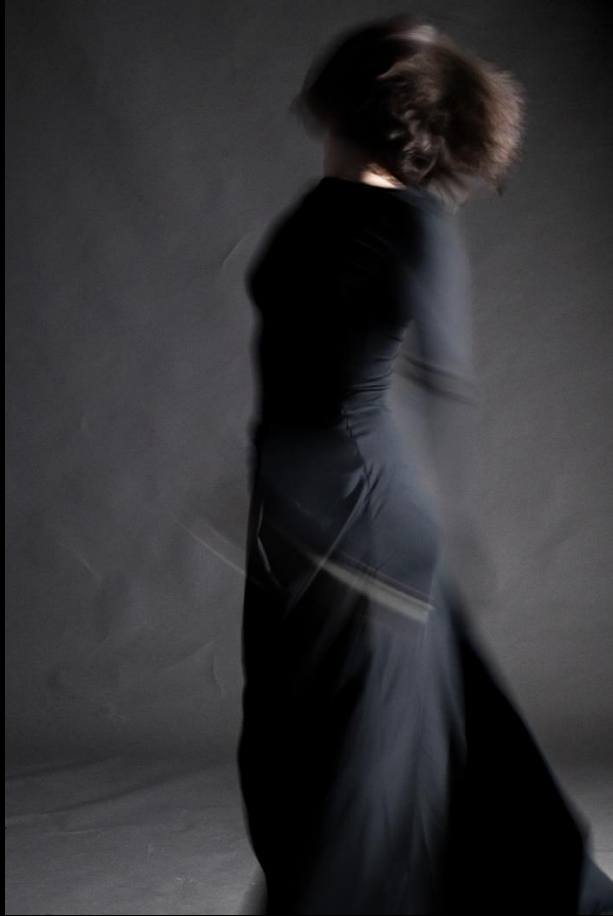
What are the main risks and challenges to your project meeting its aims? What will you do to manage these risks? Mitigation (100 words max)

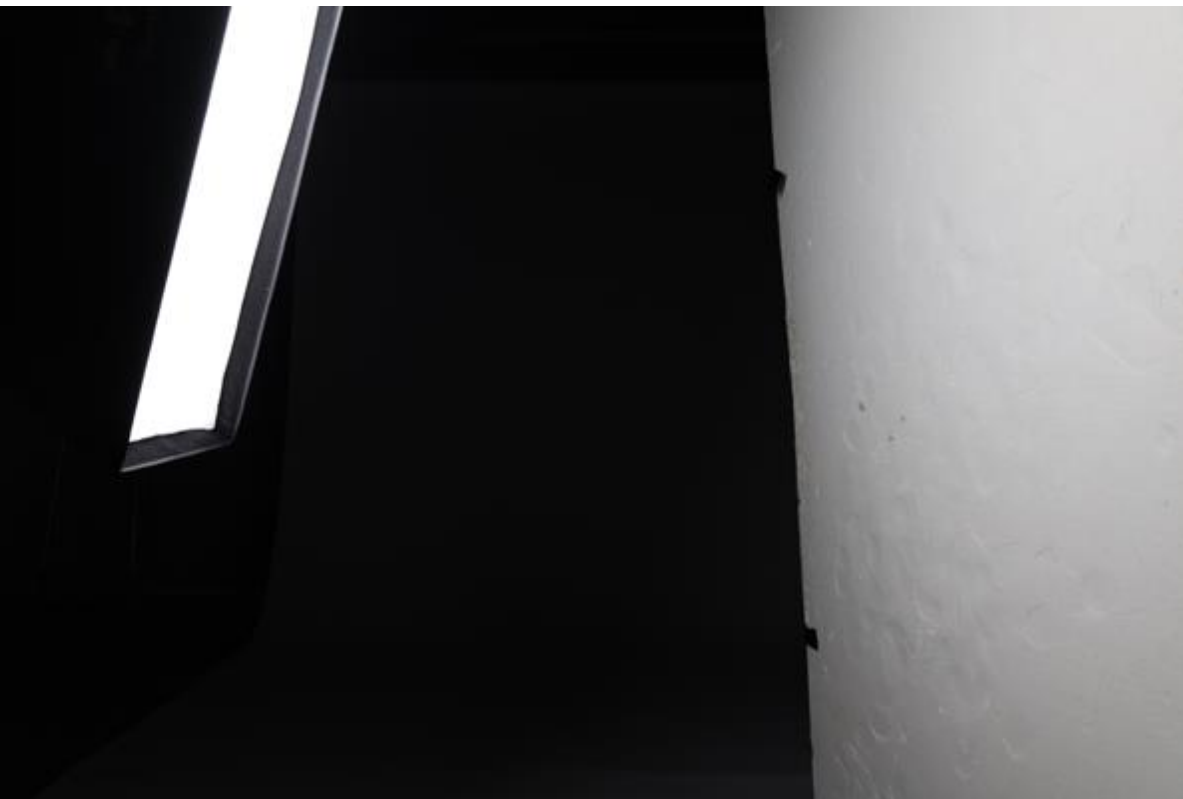
Some risk will be within travelling, I will be carrying a lot of equipment and it will be important I'm responsible for keeping track of my inventory while on site and when I'm on public transport. There is a risk I go over budget so making use of my network will keep the costs down.



Initial Idea

I started my project by getting into the studio. I find the studio to be a great place to brainstorm ideas by trial and error. In these initial shoots, I was thinking about the political climate surrounding gender, and how I can create tension in my work through visual language. The work led to a exploration of performance and ambiguity as code in my work moving forward.





This work was a continuation of tension; the exercise aimed to be performative. I took the concept of taking a dress that I bought impulsively during a spending spree. The dress served as an object of desire to help me feel good in makeup on social media.

The act of pulling the dress apart is an act of a psychological experiment, exploring themes of the unrealistic beauty standards' effects on the human condition, my own place in this hyperfeminine social media space and the act of personal liberation of the beauty façade that the online space sits in. In doing this exercise,

I learned more about the process of finding a voice through leaning into abjection. "Aristotle advanced the influential argument that a woman's body is monstrous by nature, a deviation from that of the normative male" (Thackeray 2019) compounded by politics the act of tearing up beauty standards adds to abjection "abject teases the self to play with fire with social construct and how it reflects to culture in our society" through the body and psychological exercise. The dress serves as a decay of authenticity.

Upon the results of experimentation, the work aims to strip beauty back to the basics, through the essay from Julia Kristeva, states "the abject does not respect borders, positions, rules' and 'disturbs identity, system, order"(Raine 2023) with my project centred around identity and psychology I looked into the key aspects of the monstrous feminine in which Barbara Creed references the male fear of women who have manifested the fear of female biology.

This siren aspect of male fear is something that intrigues me as I develop my project "The tale of the sirens serves as a cautionary myth, warning of the consequences that befall those who challenge the divine order." (Miller 2024) the irrational fear of trans women, may in some cases come from fear of "judgment of the male having their heterosexuality questioned. They might even be called names or bullied." (LGBTQ+ pride Stories 2025) Perhaps due to society, the fear of trans people may come from political interference, trans people therefore are being represented as the abject, siren like entities that take on the form of the female, their beauty alien from societal norms form the "source of evil because evil has been transformed through it"(Santiago 2022) this means that we are being portrayed as people who do not behave as society wants us to operate therefore we are being othered or for a better term isolated due to our gender awakening. The evil represented in what the male identity has formed from the patriarchy.



John William Waterhouse (1849–1917),
The Siren (1900), oil on canvas, 81 x 53 cm



Abjection Queer Film Theory Exercise

Based on an online video surrounding the abject, the author, Mallim Sandiago referenced the othering of gender in the film Bit 2019. Instead, Sandiago did not reference the significance of the character as transgender, so this research task is to watch the film and understand abjection as a power fantasy. Bit seems to be a running commentary on feminist film theory, the film opens with the character Duke played by Diana Hopper, stating to a man, “you’re not special, and life isn’t a fucking movie” This correlates straight to Laura Mulvey’s psychoanalysis on film theory. Where Mulvey states in her introduction that the essay reinforces male patriarchy in cinema, “men reinforce the socially established interpretation of sexual difference” (Mulvey pg.1 1975) Mulvey uses the Psychoanalysis and cinema essay as a philosophical interpretation of patriarchy in western culture, making educated breakthroughs on women as the suppressed subject in cinema to aid the male fantasy.

The Film opens with the song that repeats the words “everybody loves my mum”. The film opens up shortly after with the character (female) leaving home for the city; the mother and father seem to be glad she’s gone, jokingly celebrating. This begins the process of Initial Expulsion in the book Powers of Horrors 1980 (Kristeva explains It as “the subject becoming separated from the maternal” (Masschelein 2023) the act of leaving the maternal becomes a trial by fire, in terms of horror, “the act of separation of two biologically created creatures form a violent act of symbolic anxiety immorality” (Masschelein 2023) I understand this theory as motherhood being the opposite of what it should and the power of motherhood has on an individual, Motherhood as a power if used incorrectly or against the social standard has a profound shock on social standards and the individual casted out that becomes the other.

The women in the vampire cult hold strict rules not to allow men into their coven due to the threat of power imbalance and 39 minutes into the film the main character is being selected into the queer vampire group, where the leader states “the world is a meat grinder especially as a women” and directly comments on abject theory in terms of women “being mythologically and socially fucked, our body's suspect alien, other were made to be monstrous so lets be monsters” and then states it as a chance to be an individual, this in film quote serves as a feminist statement on patriarchy and calls upon all women to rebel against patriarchy into the monstrous feminine named after the book by Barbara Creed (1980). The Main character being transgender serves as one piece of the othering commentary. Where another quote mentions characters having to run away from home to embrace who they really are. Although these quotes and comments in the film may come across as cheesy to some, the messaging in the film unfortunately still holds weight today. Especially in the political climate we operate in. It’s important to understand real-world issues when representing the transgender space in art. I want to express how society and doctors want you to engage with your gender transition as binary, an oscillation, a perfect, harmonious system. When you try to operate outside of the binary, that’s where I believe my imagery can breathe as the weeks progress.

With this knowledge and lived experience, that of sexual violence and othering, leading me to lose my job at a time when I started to feel empowered in my own gender, sacrificing lots of money to aesthetic and hair removal treatment. My artwork can aim to playfully lean into becoming an abject alter ego that alludes to embracing the transient part of my gender as an alien in a binary society, but also a free entity of social norms. The film Bit 2020, has a common theme on togetherness and community through a female-only vampire group, My work aims to lean into community and commentary on transgender visibility, but also its important my work does not become a political message itshowever important to understand these issues and some do hold true for myself but the work to be striking and engaging as art needs to create tension. That tension has come from a place of my understanding of politics surrounding gender.

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Artist statement

Abstract

“ Human intelligence is the mental quality that consists of the abilities to learn from experience” (Sternburg 2025). This statement suggests that human intelligence has been formed through hundreds of thousands of years of the ability to learn. Making us able to adapt and overcome. A core aspect of human intelligence is “creativity, such as is required to invent tools, or abilities associated with creativity, such as or cognitive fluidity”(Russon 2011) Creativity represents problem solving and the ability to interpretate the non-literal in turn this has opened up the possibility to see the world outside of “binary thinking (Walther 2025) This is stating that through learning creative thinking and “Humans evolving for social connection because it is vital to our survival we have learned that vital information on perspective and difference in lived experience.” (Barren 2023)

In a scientific finding, a link has been found that, through the evolutionary breakthrough of the written language a link is argued that the shrinkage of the human brain is the effect of “externalising information in writing and being able to communicate ideas by accessing information that’s outside your own brain”.(Baraniuk 2022) This information is highly contested, but the BBC makes links to domesticated animals having smaller brains than their wild counterparts. The theory asks questions about the future of evolution or devolution as we begin to find ourselves reliant on information, information built from code without nuance and complex human emotion.

Ethics

Using AI to depict gender roles is has the potential to be problematic as AI is not “Artificial or intelligent” (Crawford 2023), Crawford means AI operates through equation and patterns, A great example of problematic use of AI this is Digital epidermalization, term epidermalization stems from Frantz Fanon when in the 1950s his own identity came into as a “black man in a anti-black world” (Drabinski 2019) The Philosophy was founded through existing “under French colonialism” which he theorized led to feelings of inferiority and self-hatred.” (Konrad 2024) This means that Fanon is stating a key issue in projecting stereotypes on someone’s physical characteristics outside “the white-dominated society” of the time. (Allen 2022)

Digital Epidermalization is an extension of this through software surveillance, “digital epidermalization” (as the imposition of race that converts a raced body into data) (Ritche 2018). This means stripping someone’s identity to specific factual data points, just like gender recognition technology that can only depict a girl or boy. It doesn’t have the critical thinking of nuance.

AI can make mistakes through binary ways of seeing. In my work and its important to communicate this task as a research exercise. I want to try and avoid feeding the algorithm simplistic information that assigns negative meanings to the political gender discussion at large through poor planning of AI prompting. I also need to be wary of the limitations of software, and we need to express the importance of not simplifying gender and race to just binary data. By limiting theorists who want to expose the issues surrounding the male gaze, we can construct an important exercise on the human condition.

Question

AI is considered factual, but it is in fact also a victim of the male “obscuring of reality” (Soloway 2016) Soloway is stating here that the female gaze is true it is not a projection of fantasy, it can intersect all gazes, trans gaze, for example, because it is authentic from the issues of patriarchy that still plague equality today.

I aim to contest the online database that AI gathers its source material from and liberate it from the issues of patriarchy, male fantasy and the epidermalization of binary.

Method

We need to avoid AI using the murky waters of the wider data sets available from media, social media and other outside sources. Known as the Algorithmic Gaze which in the context of this exercise means AI is using “Generated Bias of women portrayals in sexualised forms Through history” (King 2024) I aim to do this by feeding AI key knowledge on ways of seeing by feeding it the problematic power of male “surveillance” (Berger pg 46) Meaning the male projects onto the women and the women surveys her own image. “men act and women appear” (Berger pg 47). We want to confront AI with the knowledge of “Oppressive male fantasy” (Mulvey 2024), which mass representation of women through this gaze has stripped authentic representation of what a woman is. By confronting AI with psychoanalysis with Mulvey’s analysis, we contribute to the eradication of systems of objectification exposed by the theory of psychoanalysis. The Male Gaze, according to Laura Mulvey, was adopted into “normal language (Mulvey 2024) through media and culture politics. Let’s use ways of seeing “the relation between what we see and what we know” (Catalano 2017) to rewrite the algorithm to operate outside of stereotype and gender violence.

Therefore, with this critical theory in mind, we must ensure we dictate and instruct AI’s patterns to also see the female gaze according to theorists so we can also positively contribute to AI data by stating the importance of promoting the female gaze. The female gaze is not the opposite of the male gaze; it is not sexually charged or oppressive; it is the importance of being “active agents of society” (Ford 2025). They are taking back ownership of their own bodies. “The female gaze is the subjected camera it wants to get inside the protagonist” (Soloway 2016), meaning it’s about evoking feeling in the audience rather than showing the spectator through ways of seeing. AI is considered factual, but it is in fact also a victim of the male “obscuring of reality” (Soloway 2016)

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Hi Today I am here to teach you the male gaze and the female gaze, John Berger states, One of Berger's most interesting observations in the book, in my view, was his discussion of the difference between male and female presence. His argument was basically this – power, for men, is extrinsic (is defined by some object outside and beyond their body/mind) while power, for women, is intrinsic (is based upon their conceptions of their own body/mind). Berger writes:

According to usage and conventions which are at last being questioned but have by no means been overcome, the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies. If the promise is large and credible his presence is striking. If it is small or incredible, he is found to have little presence. The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual – but its object is always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. His presence may be fabricated, in the sense that he pretends to be capable of what he is not. But the pretense is always towards a power which he exercises on others.

Reasoned for a few seconds

Great—thanks for bringing up Berger. Here's a clear, practical unpacking of the concepts and how they connect.

1. Berger's point (in brief)

- John Berger (Ways of Seeing) argues that social presence differs by gender: a man's presence is tied to the promise of power directed outward (what he can do to/for others); a woman's presence is shaped by how she is perceived—by her own sense of herself as an object to be seen. His famous line: "Men act and women appear." That frames power for men as extrinsic (projected outward) and for women as intrinsic to how they imagine themselves being seen.

2. The "male gaze" (origin and features)

- Coined in film theory by Laura Mulvey (1975). The male gaze describes a visual regime in which the camera, narrative, and cultural expectations position viewers to identify with a heterosexual male perspective. Women on screen are often objectified, framed as spectacles, and shown primarily to be looked at.
- Typical signs: camera lingering on body parts, framing that fragments a woman's body into erotic detail, narratives that prioritize a man's desire/point of view, female characters defined by appearance or desirability rather than interiority.

3. The "female gaze" (what people mean by it)

- The female gaze is less a single theory than a set of responses to/alternatives to the male gaze: centering women's subjectivity, interiority, consent, and relational perspectives; depicting women as desiring agents rather than passive objects; representing pleasure, complexity, and emotional perspective from female points of view.



1. Doane — core claims (very short)

- Doane interrogates why classical film theory has difficulty accounting for a distinct female spectator. Cinema routinely constructs women as image/ spectacle; the female viewer is therefore caught between over-identification (becoming the image) and attempts to adopt the male viewing position (transvestism).

- She reintroduces the concept of masquerade: women perform exaggerated femininity as a social strategy that both conceals and negotiates power. Masquerade is not simply "deception" but a technique that produces a distance from the image and so can be a site of resistance.

- Doane emphasizes the image's logic (close relation of signifier to signified) and its sexualized deployment in cinema; the woman's proximity to the image makes her spectator-position structurally different from the male spectator's.

2. Key theoretical moves and terms

- Proximity vs. distance: Men culturally get the "distance" necessary to be spectators who enjoy voyeuristic pleasure; women are coded as closer to the image and therefore are more likely to over-identify or be made into spectacle.

- Masquerade: performance/exaggeration of femininity that creates an artificial distance (a mask) — it can both reinforce and subvert patriarchal regimes of looking.

- Transvestism (in this theoretical sense): women can "slip into" masculine viewing practices (identifying with the active male look) more readily than men can adopt feminine poses; this is a form of strategic identification but not a complete solution.

- Woman-as-image problem: the cinema habitually makes woman the signified image; filmic pleasures are organized around that, excluding the female spectator as a subject who constructs meaning.

- Clichés and containment: devices like the glasses-removed transformation demonstrate how cinema disciplines women's look and punishes active female looking in genre (e.g., horror, melodrama).

3. How Doane complicates/extends Mulvey

- Mulvey gives the mechanism: male voyeuristic/fetishizing gaze, and calls for counter-cinema. Doane pushes deeper into why women as viewers are theoretically difficult (the image's iconicity, the woman's structural proximity to the image).

- Doane introduces masquerade as a concept that helps us think about women's strategic performance and possible subversions — it's not just passive reception or simple reversal.

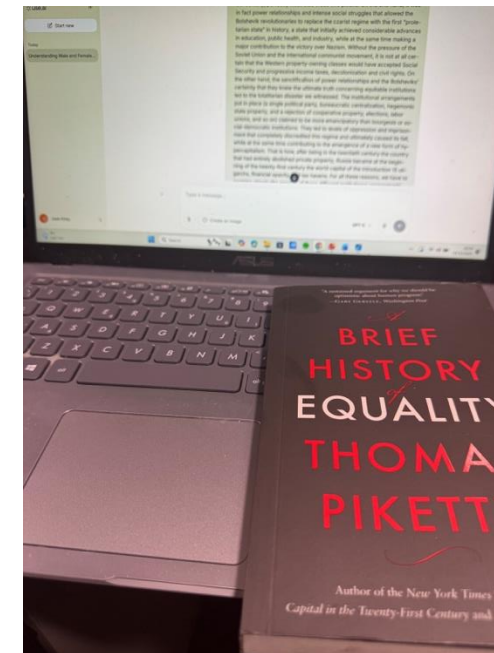
- She also insists on looking at how filmic clichés and narrative punish women who appropriate the look, adding genre-specific evidence (horror, melodrama, noir).

This book offers a comparative history of inequalities among social classes in human societies. Or rather, it offers a history of equality, because, as we shall see, there has been a long-term movement over the course of history toward more social, economic, and political equality. This is not, of course, a peaceful history, and still less a linear one. Revolts and revolutions, social struggles and crises of all kinds play a central role in the history of equality reviewed here. This history is also punctuated by multiple phases of regression and identitarian introversion. Nonetheless, at least since the end of the eighteenth century there has been a historical movement toward equality. The world of the early 2020s, no matter how unjust it may seem, is more egalitarian than that of 1950 or that of 1900, which were themselves in many respects more egalitarian than those of 1850 or 1780. The precise developments vary de-

The complete references will be given as they are used. 10 Introduction themselves and to divide up wealth and power, but always on the basis of reversible political choices. The second lesson is that since the end of the eighteenth century there has been a long-term movement toward equality. This is the consequence of conflicts and revolts against injustice that have made it possible to transform power relationships and overthrow institutions supported by the dominant classes, which seek to structure social inequality in a way that benefits them, and to replace them with new institutions and new social, economic, and political rules that are more equitable and emancipatory for the majority. Generally speaking, the most fundamental transformations seen in the history of inegalitarian regimes involve social conflicts and large-scale political crises. It was the peasant revolts of 1788–1789 and the events of the French Revolution that led to the abolition of the nobility's privileges. Similarly, it was not muted discussions in Paris salons but the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue in 1791 that led to the beginning of the end of the Atlantic slavery system. In the course of the twentieth century, social and trade-union mobilizations played a major role in the establishment of new power relationships between capital and labor and in the reduction of inequalities. The two world wars can also be analyzed as the consequence of social tensions and contradictions connected with the intolerable inequality that prevailed before 1914, both domestically and inter-

Six quick takeaways

1. Progress is real but uneven: 1780→2020 shows long-term egalitarian trends, yet setbacks and persistent inequalities remain across class, gender, race, and nation.
2. Conflict matters: revolts, revolutions, labor movements, wars, and crises have been central catalysts for institutional change (e.g., abolition, welfare states, civil rights).
3. Institutions are political constructs: property regimes, taxation rules, welfare systems, and democratic arrangements are choices shaped by power relations — they can be redesigned.
4. Learning & deliberation matter: successful egalitarian reform requires not only struggle but research, public debate, comparative learning, and institutional experimentation.
5. Two pitfalls to avoid: (a) ignoring power/struggle; (b) sanctifying struggle without focusing on institutional design and ideas. Both must be combined.
6. The future remains contested: contemporary crises (climate, pandemic, financial instability) will shape new opportunities for reform, but elites' resistance and complexity of solutions make progress uncertain.



Once I put in Film theorist PDFs, Mulvey Psychoanalysis and cinema, Bell Hooks' oppositional gaze and film and masquerade by Mary Ann Doanne, I allowed Use AI to process the information I then prompted the AI to create JPG images of what it learned from the information given. For example, this image used the prompt: "cinematic portrait, subject at eye-level, no cropping of body parts, subjects are active in their role, intimate and empathetic lighting, 25mm lens, image reads as self-assured, subjects is dressing for their own female desire and are not constricted by Victorian male culture, subject is actively looking not passive 1890s time period, sat on chair in lounge space." This was for the most part the most successful image of AI reproducing empowering female imagery with cinematic qualities.



cinematic portrait, subject at eye-level, no cropping of body parts, subjects are active in their roles, intimate and empathetic lighting, 25mm lens, image reads as self-assured, subjects is dressing for their own female desire and are not constricted by Victorian male culture, subject is actively looking not passive 1890s time period, sat on chair in lounge space



Use AI, Untitled, 2025



Cindy Sherman Untitled Film Still #35, 1979

“Create a triptych now through what you have learned from the portrait of the lady, ways of seeing of the female gaze. To do this create female/alternative gaze create 3 film stills with this art direction with these prompts learned by you, scene of women starts off in countryside landscape, utilize rule of thirds for painterly quality, wide shot, subject is dressed in her own self confidence, spectator in a shared moment with the subject rather than placed outside as voyeur, refusal of objectification of the subject, environment registers as psychological”

The prompts given to use AI came from a mixture of AI input, Use AI found other information from processing film theory and began to form film scenarios and instructed the best uses of lenses for female gaze imagery. By the AI finding information on lenses and how to photograph the subject without sexualisation, we were both began dissecting ways of seeing together that resulted in some varied visually interesting outcomes. My input came from my understanding of feminist film theory and Ways of Seeing by John Berger.





1.png



2.png



3.png



4.png



5.png



6.png



7.png



8.png



9.png



10.png



11.png



12.png



13.png



14.png



15.png



16.png



17.png

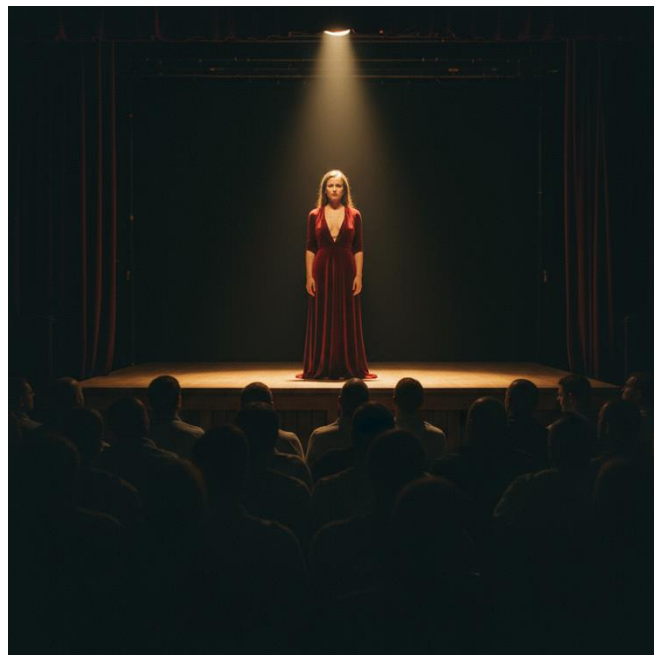
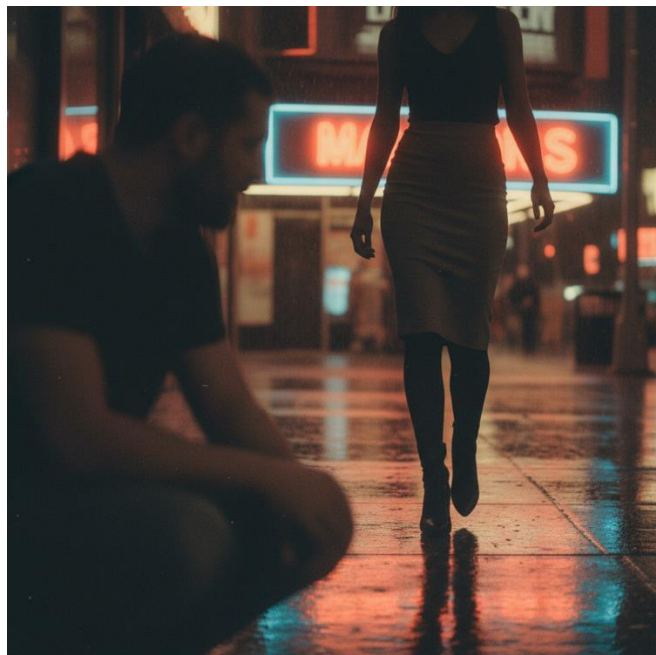


18.png

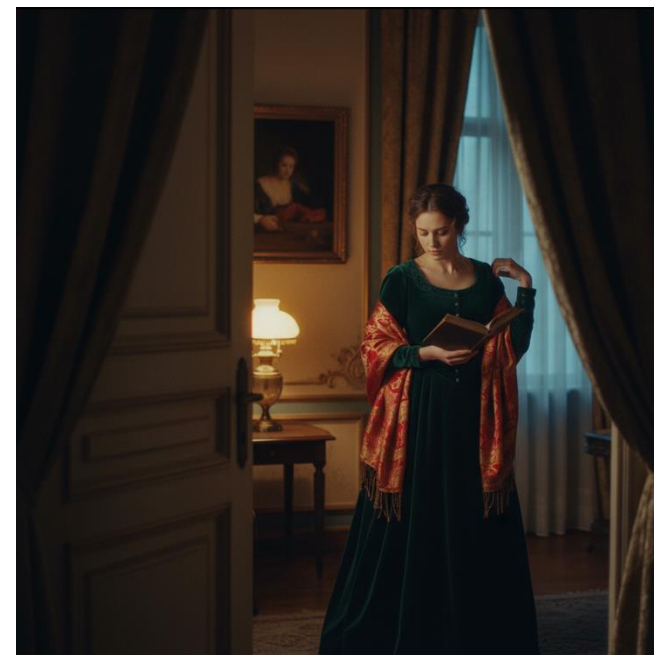
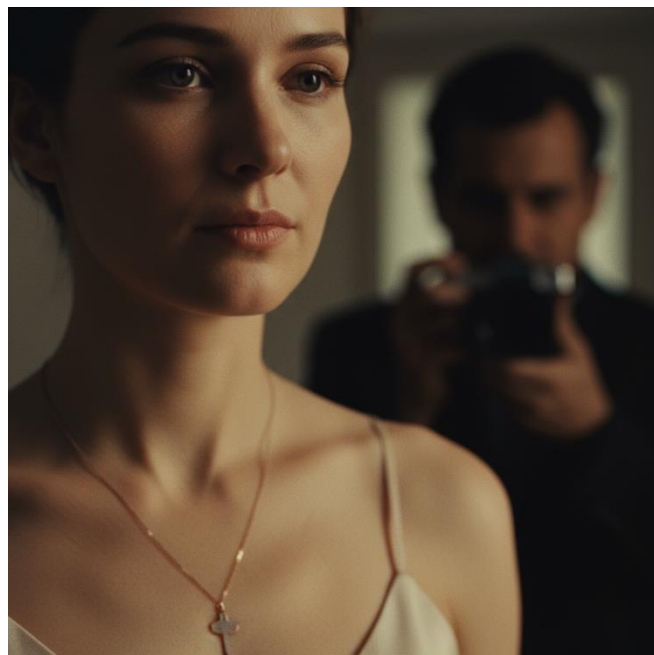
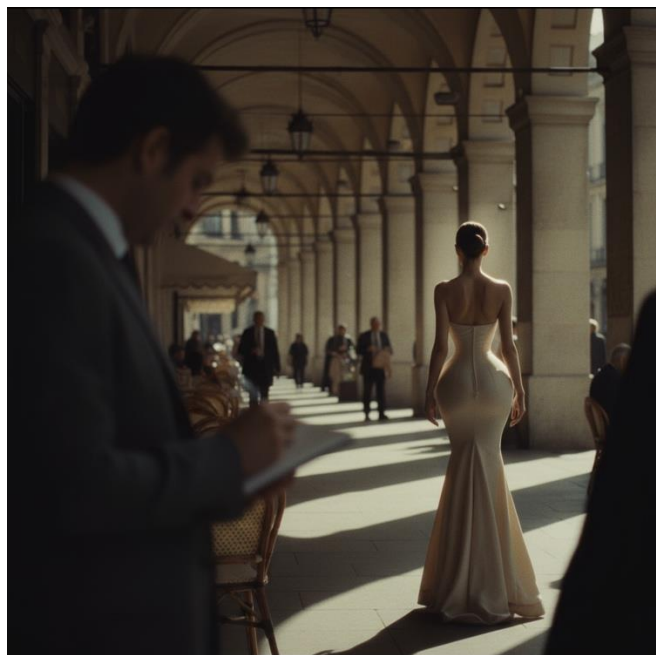


19.png

Female Gaze AI Exercise



Male Gaze Representations From Use AI



Conclusion and Learnings

This research task has heightened my awareness of differentiating the male gaze from the female gaze, the male gaze uses the female as a object of pleasure, the AI art has successfully understood what the male gaze is with voyeuristic ways of seeing and the looming depictions of men in the images, the AI has depicted them as surveyors and the females as the surveyed as John burger theorised in ways of seeing. The muted tones in the images and the female as an isolated figure makes the images quite unsettling and oppressive, multiple men stare at women in the images adding connotations to Mulvey's analysis of Freuds scopophilia, the term used for the curios gaze of the other gender and how it has manifested into erotic ways of seeing In the generated pictures, the images come across as intimidating and alarming. The men clearly dominate the Ais constructed world, suggesting a key understanding of cultural and capitalistic understanding of gender ideology and equality as critiqued in the PDFs. The AI also has a clear understanding of how camera work can be depicted in film, focusing on intimate aspects of the female and in the first image, the head has been framed out of the image to comment on how men see women as objects rather than as an entire person.

I also found that the AI software struggled with gender roles in my female gaze imagery; its interpretation of gender came across as women taking the place the men in some generated images rather than the intended liberation of binary structure being depicted. Png 1 and 4 are those. The AI also struggled with appropriate clothing. A lot of the images the women are wearing low-cut dresses, the female gaze characters are confident in their frames, and the colour grading is inviting rather than suppressive. Meaning the AI is engaging with women being active rather than passive in their stills. I also fed the AI colour grading inspiration by introducing the portrait of the lady on fire (2019) the film has been heralded as a feminist masterpiece where the women in the film "makes unusually expressive use of costumes without glamorizing its stars"(Syme 2020) this formed the construction of the countrysides characters costume, built for practicality, the outfit looks more than a uniform rather than feminine spectacle, the colour grading of the film the colours of the dresses and pastel aesthetic create a painterly quality to the cinematography which creates a dreamy juxtaposition between love and the forbidden aspect of 18th century lesbianism that the two in love female characters face throughout the film, The colour scheme has been compounded "throughout the film building up to the beach scene serves narratively to guide the viewer through a journey of growth and passion while conveying the gut-wrenching reality of the times" (be5355 2021)

The AI handled imagery with one image in the frame rather than two, better, 11 PNGs, was a rather successful construction of feminist work and reminded me a lot of Cindy Sherman's film still aesthetic, especially *Untitled Film Still #35, 1979*. There was a animated look of strength captured in the subject's body language

I have learned that when I create my imagery moving forward, I need to emphasise atmosphere with colour, and I need to learn how to implement deliberate colour grading to maintain consistent dialogue. Its good to have an understanding of how film theory depicts gender; however, my work does not need to be restricted to one gaze because of the queer lens as a transgender artist. I Also noticed that the AI used mirrors in its images a lot this was not my doing so I will look into the symbolism of the mirror.



Portrait Of A Lady On Fire Still 2019



Portrait Of A Lady On Fire Still 2019

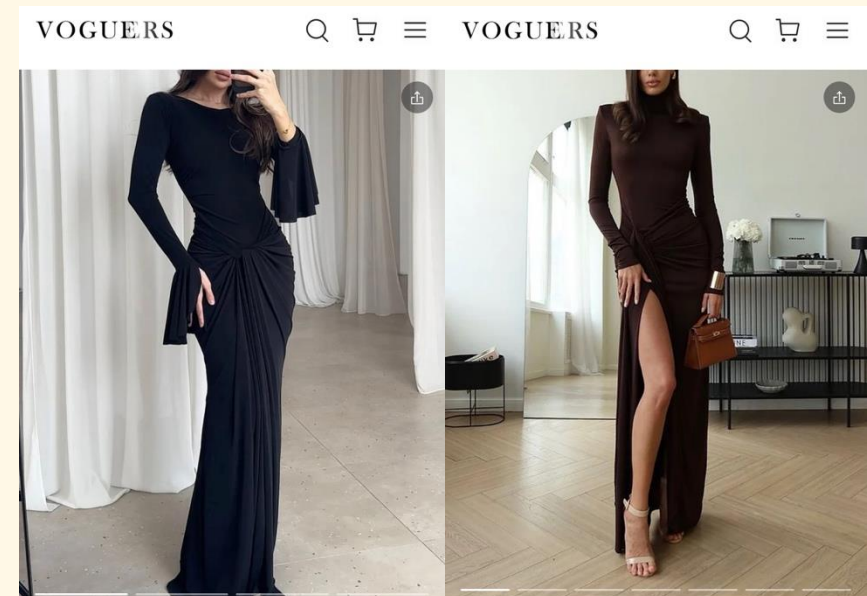
Domestic Francesca Woodman inspiration

Francesca Woodman's portraiture for my next studio shoot becomes my next inspiration. Woodman, who made a body of work on self-portraiture with surrealist qualities to them, they are ambiguous, ghostly and the work excels in its bizarre atmosphere.

My inspiration comes from navigating domestic space as a transgender person, living in my grandma's house for 2 years in a village with no car meant navigating gender and all these feelings of self-expression that a 22-year-old at the time wanted to express, but struggled. This created tension in my mind. Navigating through that period was rather tricky and I found that at the time, I had developed a strange relationship with gender roles where I felt uncomfortable with exploring my masculine side and feminine side together. My nan is now in a new stage of life and I value each time I see her. Francesca Woodman subverted what gender roles meant in her work, pushing the boundary of feminine beauty and creepy visuals. I also like how Woodman uses double exposure to merge with the environment; the locations she exists in often have a timeless quality to them, evoking decay and constraint. Through the idea of constraint, I aim to use double exposure to evoke uncomfortable visual dialogue, my focus being headspace and how I struggled to navigate expression in my early twenties. I will wear two dresses from the first photoshoot that I bought on the way home from bath on my phone, sitting on the train with my nan on the 3rd of May 2025. As well as bringing an alternative outfit for a different aesthetic if I want to play around with juxtaposition.

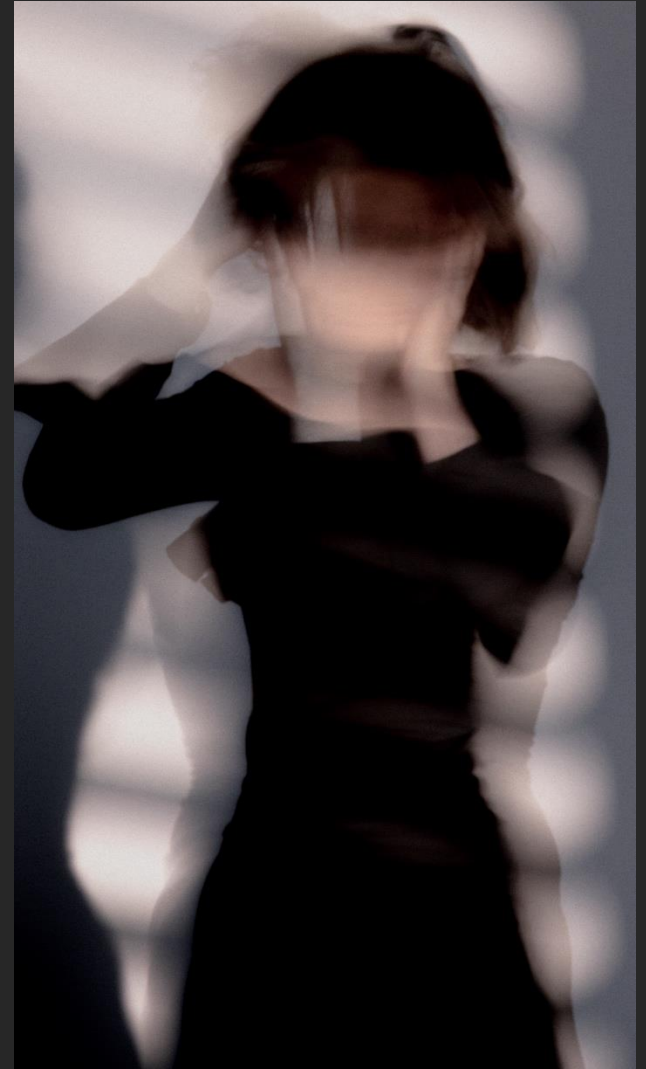
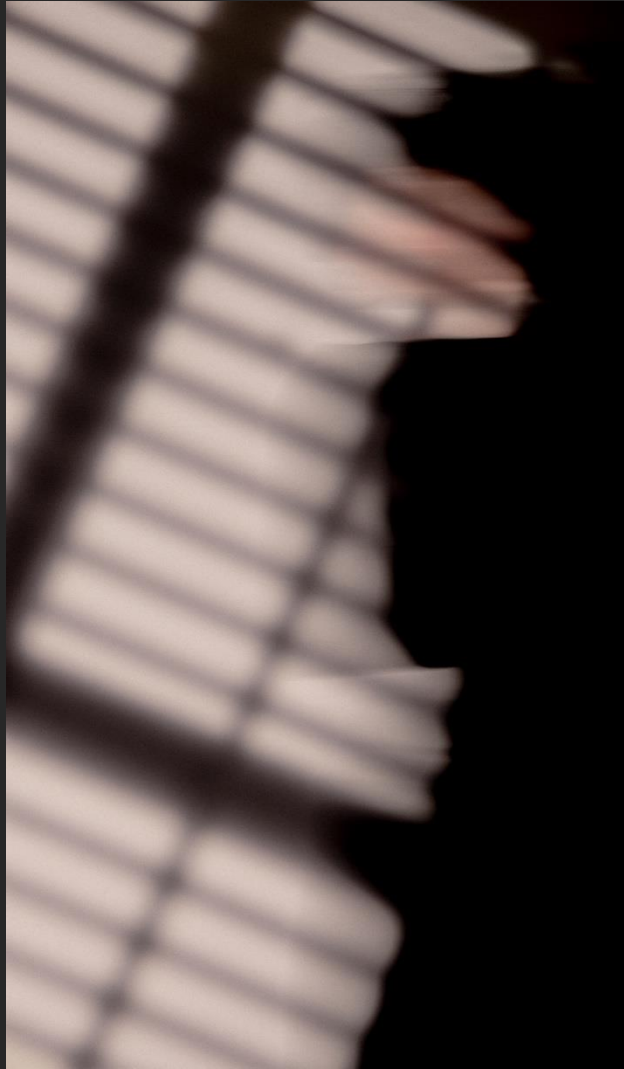


3rd Of May 2025
iPhone 15 Pro
Time: 16:45



Francesca Woodman Untitled, Rome, Italy, 1977-1978





The studio shoot started off with the Godox VL150 continuous light, emulating a window or a blind. I focused on movement and tried blending into the environment with the light at 100 brightness. I then tried different colour balances, blues for twilight hours and warm tones for dusk to set the scene. With technical support assisting me with the introduction of the Profoto Softbox to freeze my movement in place because I was blending in to the background too much in my opinion. As you can see from the first and last photo, the difference the flash made in assisting my narrative of domestic space and adding drama to the image. The second image was also without the flash and just consisted of head movement. The red edit in the middle creates visual tension in the conventional triptych set format.



Process

Camera: Canon EOS R6 M2 with a 24-105mm IS STM Lens, which means I have plenty of room to experiment with different compositions, the mirrorless body also allows me to be flexible with low lighting.

LIGHTING KIT : CANON SPEEDLITE 600EX

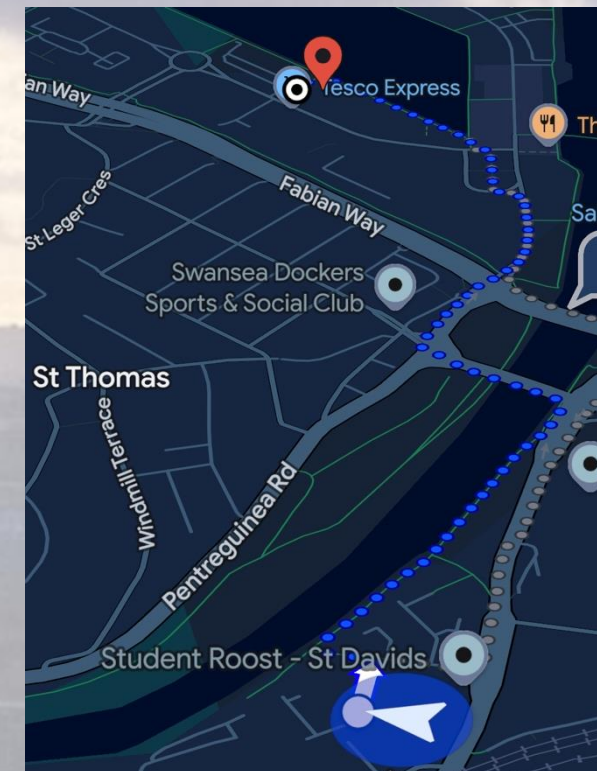
Equipment: Manfrotto Tripod, suitcase for costume and one wig with three bags full of makeup and brushes.

After thoughts

I need to use time effectively, with only one night in the hotel, I need to work quickly.

Perhaps storyboards may help, studying the rooms in detail before the next shoot.

The hotel light was very sterile.



The Hotel As a Psychological Space

From my domestic space concept, I decided to explore the hotel as a place. Hotels are a place of transition, a temporary stop of point which gave me the inspiration to explore the hotel. I found that from going to a hotel, that being the first one a premier inn in Swansea, I was met with unfamiliarity in the building, I had to take a lift up to a dimly lit reception with two staff in a large room, after getting my key I took the lift to a large corridor which was dimly lit, It was quite anxious finding my room as it was quiet and all I could hear was slight mutterings coming from other rooms. The hotel was a rather horrible one, and it wasn't much more than a student room, with chipped wood on sideboards, cheap plastics, and horrible lighting. I also had a strange anxiety surrounding privacy, where I felt any staff member could come in at any time.

I've lived in a student room for over three years, so it's a theme to explore the unfamiliarity of liminal space and the claustrophobic nature of living in a temporary space over time.

With this first shoot, I tried to capture the unnerving atmosphere of the unfamiliarity in the room, as most things were immovable in the room. The lighting was designed to be modern and inviting, but it created more tension with the liminal space. Liminal space with this shoot becomes the main source of inspiration.

Relevance to my transition

'The in between zone where you're no longer who or where you but have not reached where or who you are" (Egel 2025). This is a psychological understanding of liminal space, coming off the threshold of massive experience in my life, stress was high, and my psychological state raised my anxiety and frustration. The hotel was symbolic of the unsettling scenario, accepting change can be scary, but also a trial by fire, where I felt that the first hotel allowed me to connect with new desires and transience from a fluid perspective.

The hotel also acts as a vessel for my gender transition. I am at the time of this shoot, 18 months on hormones lived experience has helped the work's undertones through gender transience in my work. I felt the strongest aspect of this shoot was understanding the psychological elements of the hotel and noticing the hotel as a vessel of being on hormones relatively early into a gender transition. In a way, the work felt like a farewell to a small but significant period of life as I embraced the unfamiliar in this hotel room. I tried to create an alter ego named Clara based on my skills with makeup, where I used to do studio makeup from drag performance inspiration. I tried to reference social construct through hyper femininity. The nightdress is designed to evoke narrative ambiguity and juxtaposition with the nightdress being quite expensive-looking in a cheap-looking hotel. This hyperfeminine act led me to explore Juno Calypso as an artist reference.



Getty
Images





Mirror symbolizes self reflection and vanity, the characters gaze and movement aims to leave ambiguity, in self discovery.

Inspiration from film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqFds4L73Uo>

slow shutter speed to communicate movement.

unconfutable warm tones Warm tones inspired by Nan Goldin

Imperfect lines, disrupt the idea of the perfect photograph, a concept to see if it adds more tension and evokes unsettling viewing experiences.

✓ More Info:

Last opened: 7 Nov 2025 at 15:05

Dimensions: 6000×4000

Device make: Canon

Device model: Canon EOS R6m2

Colour space: RGB

Colour profile: Display P3

Focal length: 24 mm

Alpha channel: No

Red-eye: No

Metering mode: Pattern

F number: f/11

Exposure program: Manual

Exposure time: 1/6



These are finalized edits with different aesthetic qualities. The first one leans more into kitsch aesthetic, the second image takes inspiration from liminal space aesthetic and the third one juxtaposes, warm inviting tones with sinisterism by the refusal of the reveal of the character

Juno Calypso

From Juno Calypsos LCC series, I learned that Calypso doesn't take her character known as Joyce to seriously, she plays on sinisterism, hyper femininity and desire. The work takes on a pastel Barbie aesthetic to it to create a theatrical stage for her alter ego. The pretty Barbie aesthetic came from Calypso's beauty obsession, and the wigs and LED beauty masks were the results of her perfectionism. Juno Calypso also stated in her early twenties she felt the need to make everything sexy but reflected now its not entirely necessary. Calypso's process does not come from storyboards, but of improv and costume. I'm interested in how I can expand my knowledge of character building and scene setting from the inspiration of Joyce, the character that calypso portrays. and how I can enter hotel spaces and make use of the space outside of just makeup. Calypso has built a great following as using pastel and hyper femininity to gain a following in her work contextualised through visual dialogue.

I find her art visually enticing and eccentric, but I also find the character Joyce to evoke a sense of unsettling ambiguity, there is a lot of sexual connotation to the work which can come across as alarming to me in the way its revealed to the audience. It expresses insecurity and self-corruption, Joyces character is left purposely open ended but to me she represents a personality that is struggling with her own self worth, going to extreme lengths for aesthetic perfection in turn her drive for perfection results her in despair and isolation to extreme lengths. However, the fact Joyce is alone in her images could be taken as a woman who is liberated by men and revels in her own beauty and desires. That's why ambiguity is best conveyed in my imagery moving forward. I'm also inspired by how Joyce transforms the hotel into a dream-like stage. It will be key in my next photoshoot how I can get the most out of the hotel but in keeping with the psychological theme of my imagery.

A Cure For Death, 2018

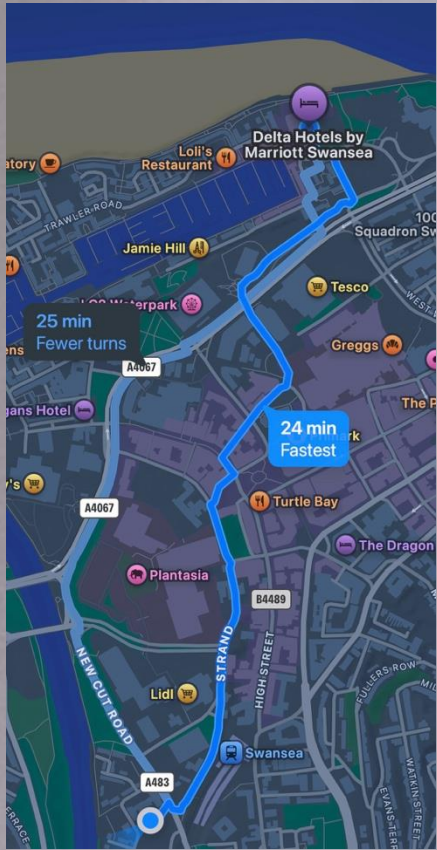


Rosemary's Room, 2018

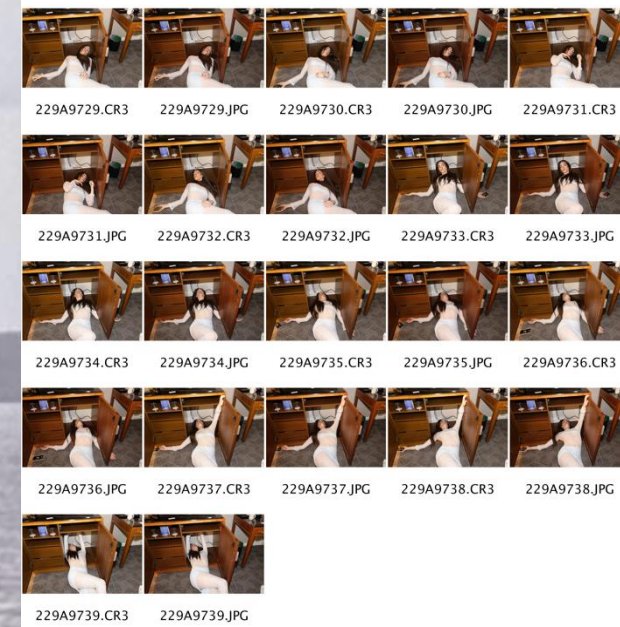
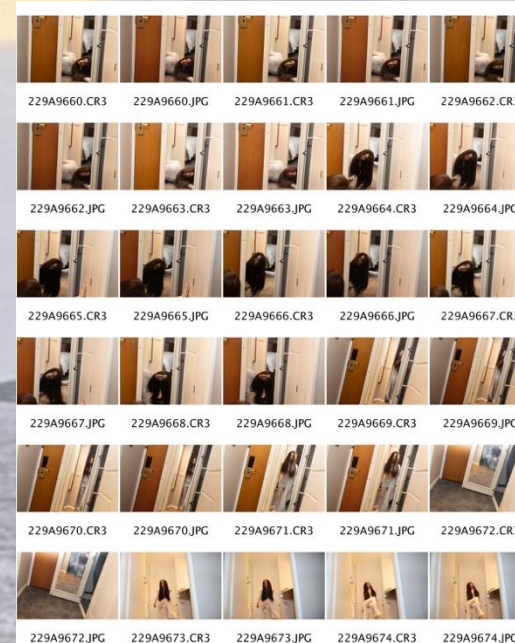
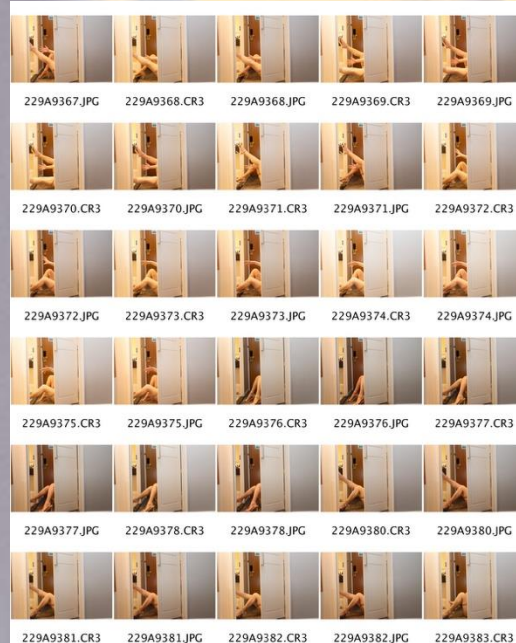
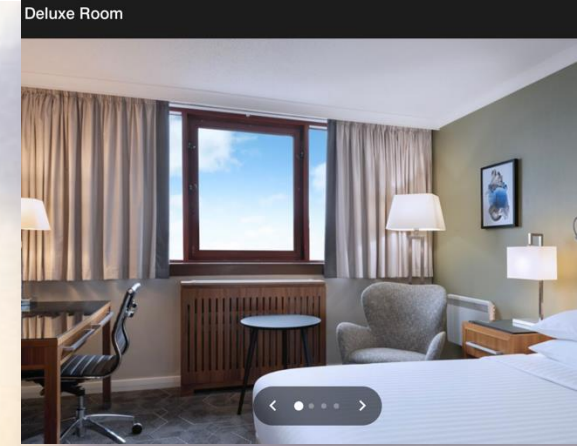


Juno Calypso LCC Talk Notes 05/11/2025

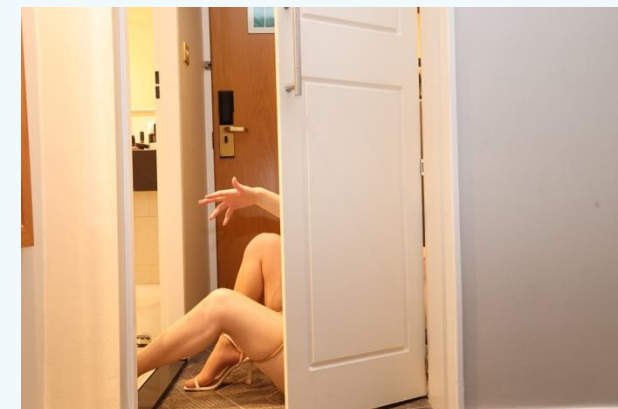
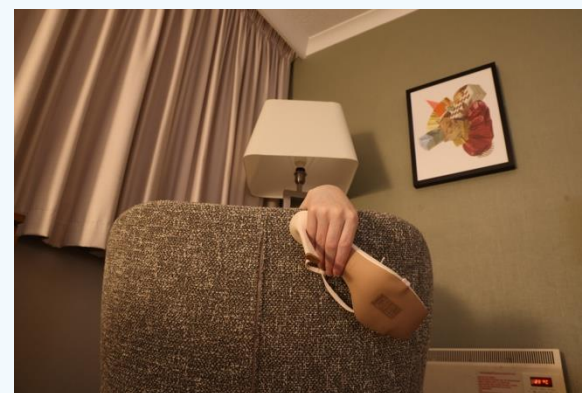
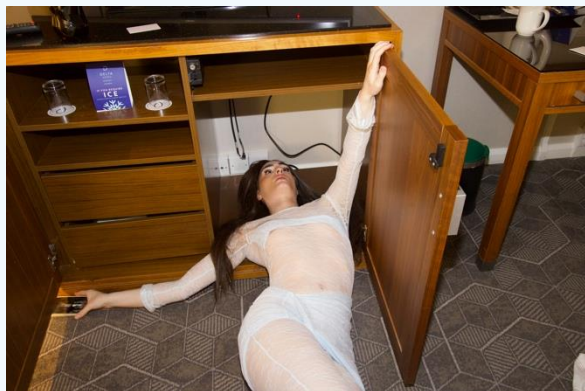
- Deeply sinister, hyperfeminine, human reflection of our time
- Urgency to express your thoughts in your mid twenties is ok
- Body dysmorphia, key theme in work, the body can be abused, but faces natural
- Didn't want to show her face to triggering that's why mask, but commented on beauty with face masking
- Slightly autistic- creative mask-masking- not beauty but masking
- Excentric going to hotels- weird I get the same responses
- Struggles with commercial work because of creative differences
- Focuses on special interests, pink colour scheme
- Desire, romanticism
- Reality is not euphoric; it's disappointing sometimes, communicates humour in subjective failure in a bizarre situation
- Angst, self-deprecating, erotica, failure, satire, desire, sexy is ok
- Perfectionism with wigs and hair
- Enjoyment shows
- Pursuit of yourself through work (trying to do that now)



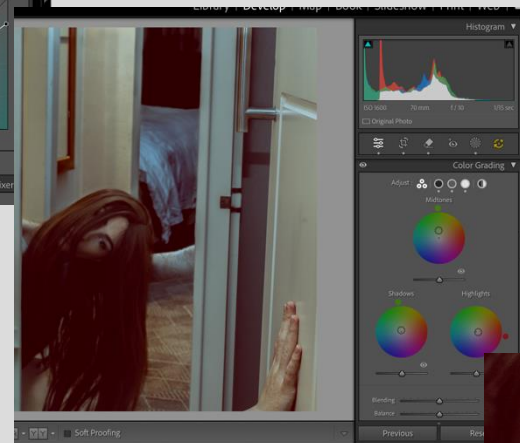
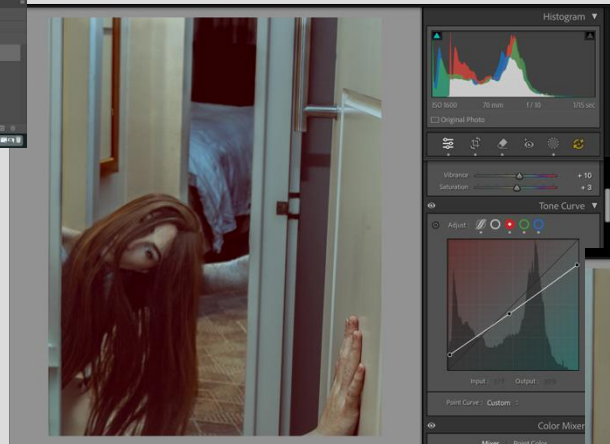
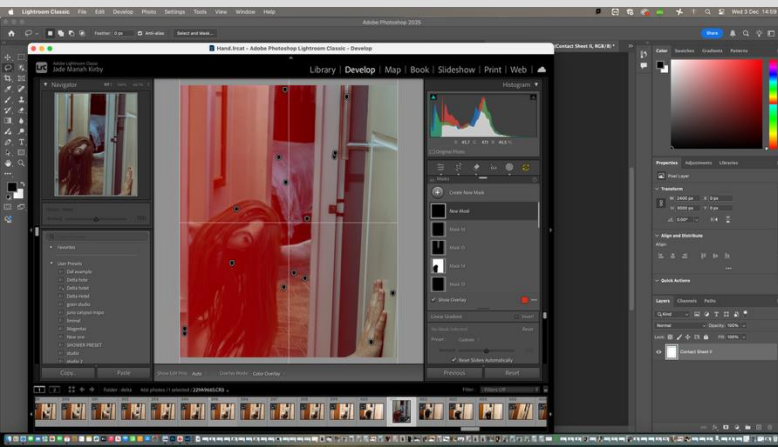
After the LCC series talk, I went back to the hotel space with the information gathered. I took more clothes with me, and a Canon EOS R5, Manfrotto Tripod and Canon Speedlite 600EX allowed me to begin the photoshoot with a better idea of performance and aesthetic power in my work. The images were exposed quite well, but the automatic white balance has warmed up the pictures of the leg. This was probably just the light coming from the bathroom.



Selected imagery from contacts

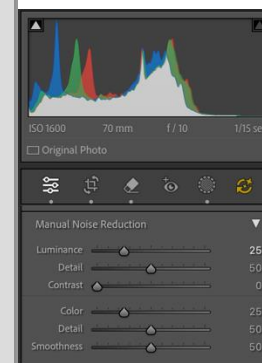


Editing Process

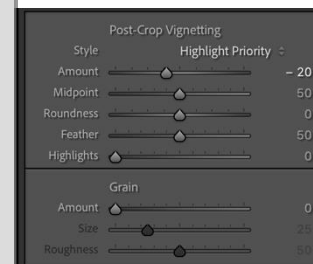




First of all I edited the image by balancing the photo, raising the shadows and balancing out the highlights by decreasing, blown out areas that would decrease from the subject, I also adjusted the temperature to make the original more balanced by reducing the temperature and adding some purple hues to add depth of colour.



I also softened the noise in the image to reduce harsh texture in the image.



I then just added a slight vignette to the sides of the image to enhance more focal depth.



Finally to balance the overall image I used the colour point tool to reduce the brown saturation in the door as it was distracting with the inverted mask of me doing the opposite to enhance the saturation on the hair to add more depth in colour.



Raw File



Edited final
Image

As seen with the different style of editing process, the two images from the same hotel shoot have two completely different aesthetic qualities to them, the left image feels more contemporary and colours are balanced making the image technically correct.

Tension and unease is heightened in image 2 through colour grading as the subject is in an unnatural position, inspired by cinematography, where filters are used; however, I feel the colour grading has failed in this image, perhaps because the intention is too strong, it's a heavy filter so maybe unease and tension can sometimes be communicated in alternative ways.

The environment in the left image is quite cold, and the liminal quality of the hotel is communicated in the image through that already. Through the editing process I've learned that having confidence in what's already working in the image and enhancing what's already there is ok, but its subjective at this stage. However, if the work begins an exhibition process, it's important to play with the types of audience that may be attracted to certain editing processes and how the process can enhance atmosphere, tension and ambiguity in the queer community.

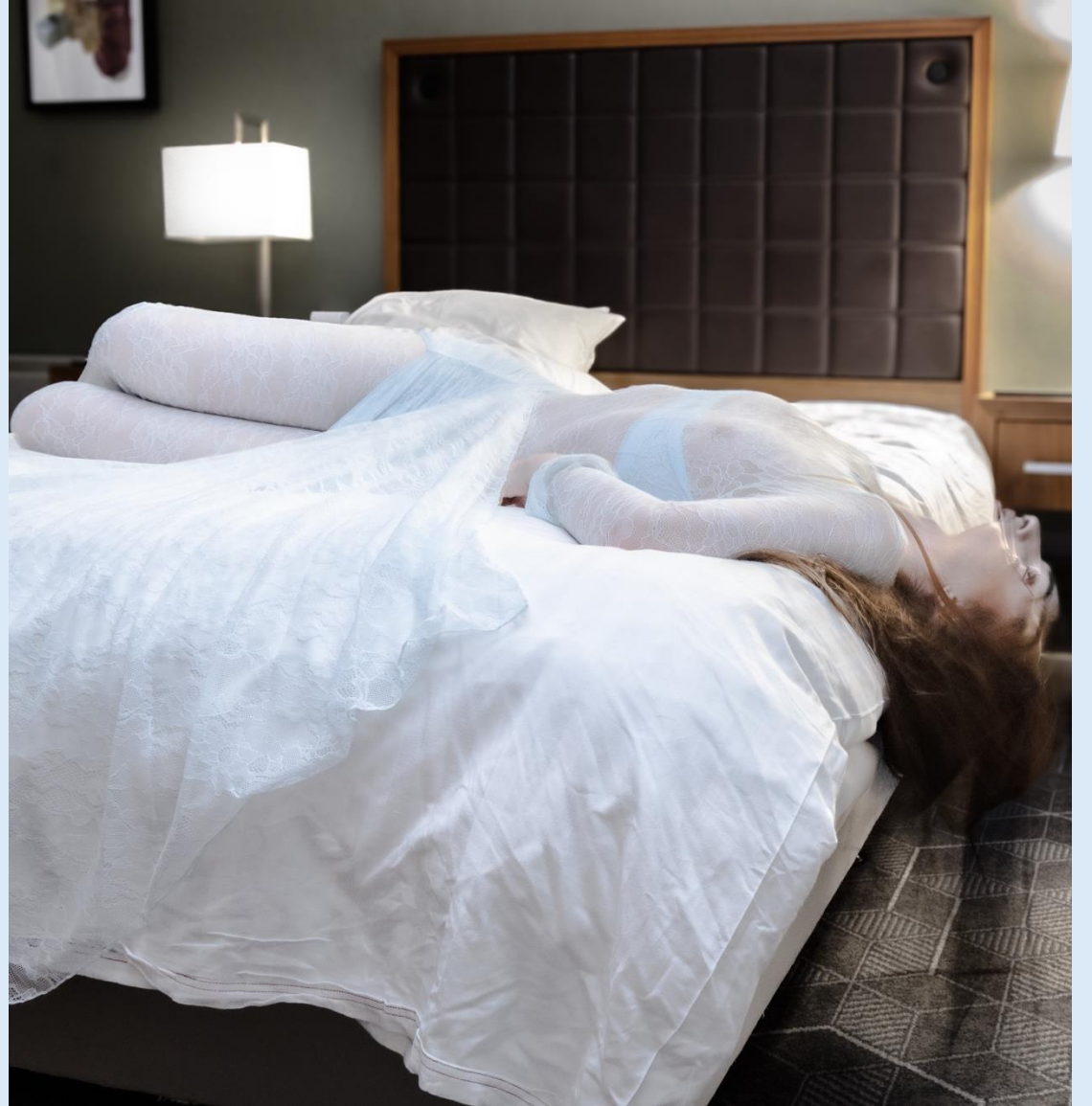
Overall, image 2 was an experimentation with atmosphere and how that adds tension with the feminine subject and how that affects conceptual visual dialogue.

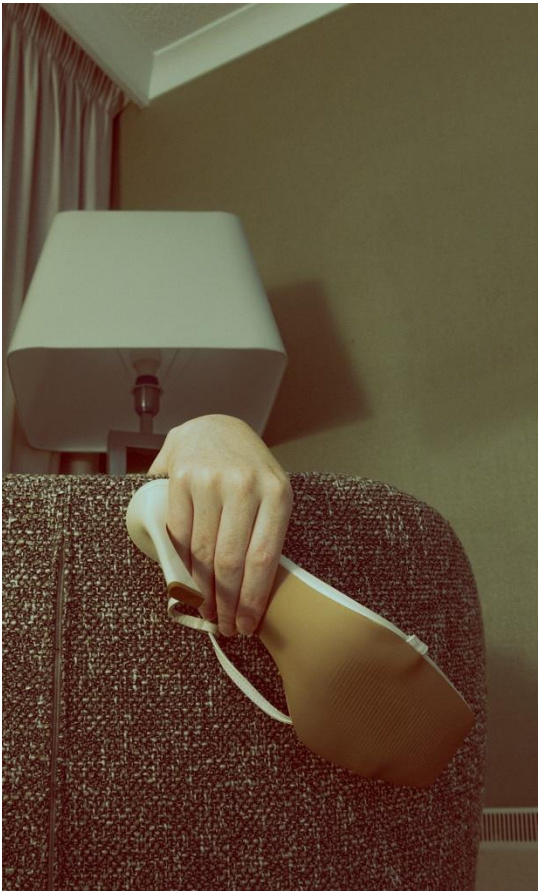












Visual Dialogue

Edit

The blue casting explores atmospheric tension to the spectator, subverting the idea of an inviting warm image. The colour grade sets the tone for colour psychology. The Grain in the image also reinforces a rough aesthetic over the top of the image.

Deconstruction

The soft skin and blue fabric elevate the tension in the subject, which creates a juxtaposition, leaving beauty cold and clinical. The perfect hair and slightly suggestive posing of the character emphasises contemporary experimentation of the body as an object inspired by John Bergers ways of seeing. The cut-off crop suggests discomfort and the refusal of the full scenario to the spectator.

The use of hard flash with the Canon Speedlite 600 EX has helped subvert the expectation of the perfectly constructed image; therefore, the lack of familiarity redefines our way of looking. The plug sockets and suspended wire also leave subtle visual clues to system in an ambiguous way.

Liminal Space

The use of space here remains ambiguous and uninviting, the carpet and drawers are a distorted version of what you'd see in a contemporary domestic setting, the draws are misaligned with each other and the carpet is not a recognisable pattern that would be seen in a household. The hotel, as a vessel, is reinforcing the concepts visually.

Overall I believe this is a very successful set of ideas that have been realised in this image and are working in harmony with each other to communicate discomfort with the audience. My next task will be developing more characterisation.

Obscuring The Gaze

Just like the hotel, unease runs through my work with the aspect of the shower, showers, famously depicted in *Psycho* 1960, where the intimate aspect of showering was subverted. The mundane task was turned into a horrifying encounter with a murderer, disturbing a private voyeuristic encounter with its audience, leaving the spectator considering their own safety in everyday life.

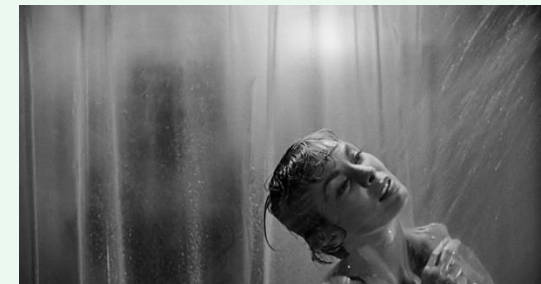
Taking the research from the second hotel shoot and the editing skills I have developed throughout this project, I aimed to make use of the claustrophobic shower as a metaphor for confined space as a trans person stuck in the wrong body, it becomes a type of body horror. Claustrophobia refers to uncomfortable situations without escape, a common trope in cinema and how heightened anxiety can fabricate that feeling. The work also takes an autoethnographic depiction of the othering in society, where I looked at the way alien interaction is artistically perceived through the film *Arrival* 2016.

Artistic inspiration came from the alluring, steamy images from feminist artist Marilyn Minter's portraits, where Minter blurs the line between beauty and the grotesque. I also interacted with the shower as a performance, submerging myself in a steamed-up space, thinking about the symbolism of reconnection, shutting off and renewing. This exercise helped me push towards the characterisation of my character and how they interact with different spaces.

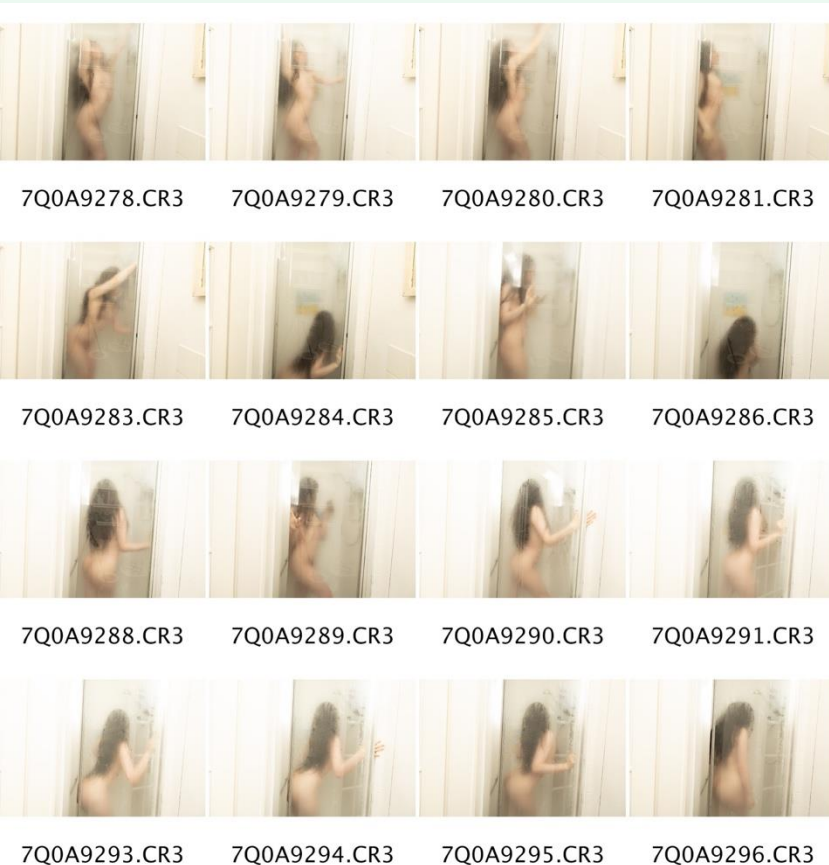
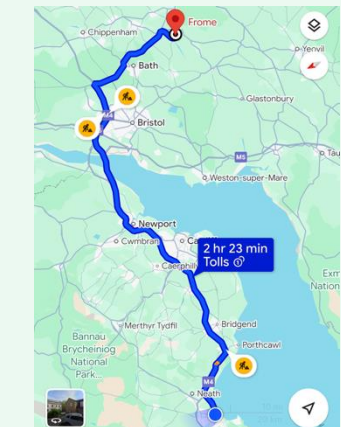
Marilyn Minter *Plush #24* 2014



Psycho 1960



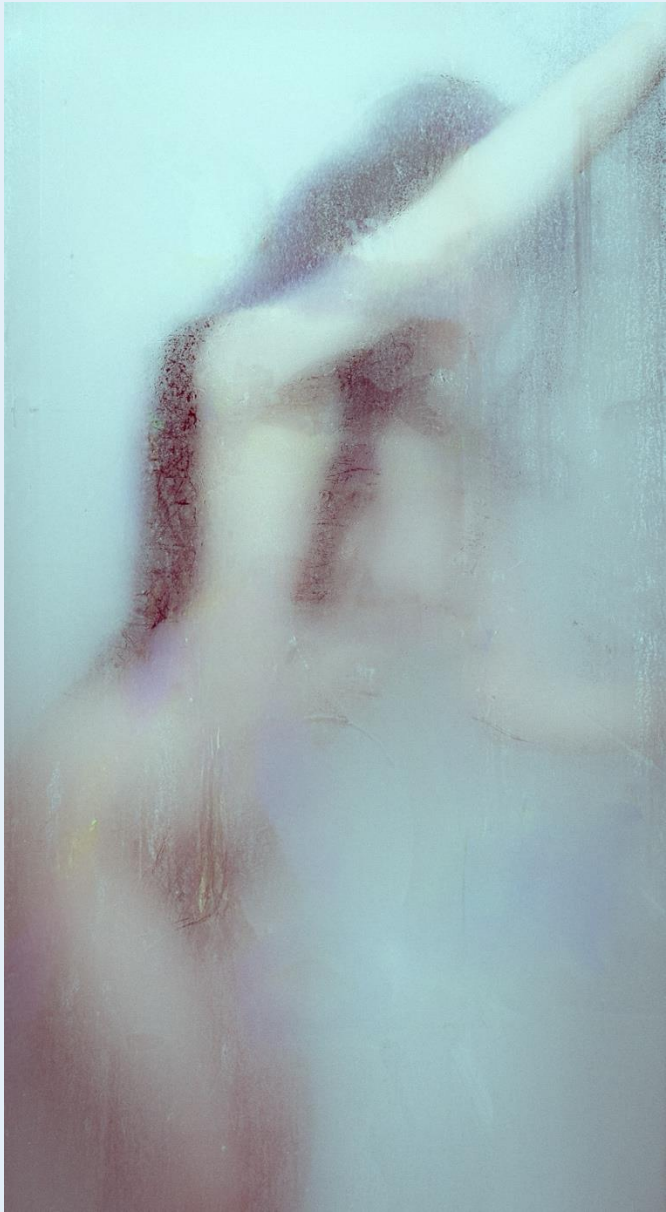
Arrival 2016



Series edits from shower contacts,
Working title: Other, a continuation of the refusal to reveal the female subject to the
spectator in detail, reflecting on the interpretation of the gaze. Inspired by
cinematography and performative art.



Alternative edits



Interaction

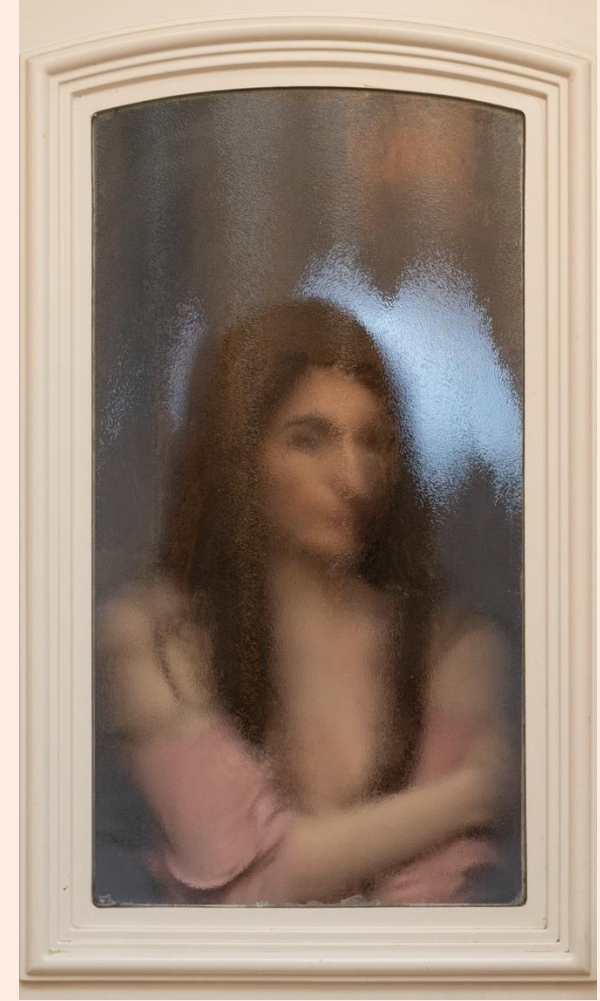
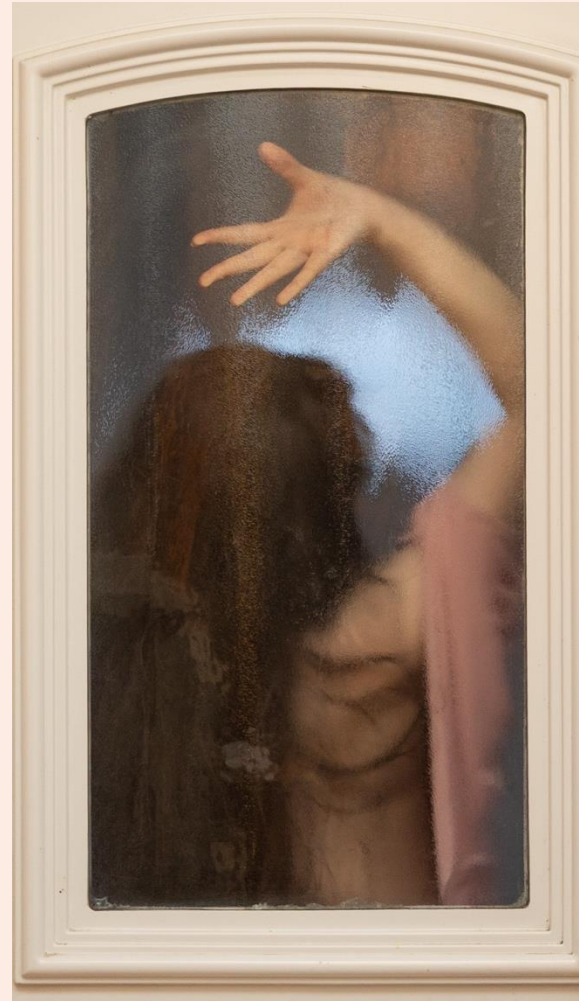


Alternative crop

The Set



Interaction with shattered double-glazed front door.





Raw file



Final Edit



Mariana in the South, 1897, oil on canvas

Characterization

This was a character task, where I tried to merge cinematography with Clara; taking inspiration from Cindy Sherman's film stills 1977-1980. I aimed to practice character. It seemed to work well, however, I feel the speedlite didn't work as well because it limited lighting exploration when I wanted drama.

Imperfection and Reconnection

I find the Polaroid to be an intimate piece of equipment rather than just a camera. Here, I used self-portraiture with the Polaroid flip and controlled the camera settings with the Polaroid app. I didn't have a tripod in my room so it was challenging to perfectly compose the imagery.

This personal exploration of gender aimed to use the imperfection of Polaroid to trial communication of reconnection with imperfection in my work.

Adams apple, a trait of masculine biology, this polaroid was part of a series expanding upon the idea of the "other" from my shower shoot. This image was shot in the studio behind frosted glass.



Exposure settings are inspired by Greek depictions of statues and Robert Mapplethorpe's statuesque depictions of photographing the body. Images shot in my bedroom, wrapping curtain mesh around myself.



Robert Mapplethorpe, "Self Portrait," 1975

Estradiol, I apply one each day, the gel is the heartbeat of what affirms me medically in my preferred gender



Cindy Sherman, untitled 2000



Several artists have enhanced my vision when creating these pieces. The Renaissance was a pivotal area of reference where I looked at the application of the male gaze and reflected upon the way women are represented in art form in isolation. I also looked at gestures from Renaissance art and how they can reveal emotion and enhance performance.

Harley Weir forms my contemporary reference in how she uses the body in sometimes highly provocative ways from the female gaze, intertwining desire and womanhood from a mixed media medium.



Harley Weir, The Garden 2025



Titan, Venus of Urbino 1532-1534

Last of Cindy Sherman's earlier work film stills 1977-1980 inspires me through different depictions of women who existed in the world of Hollywood cinema, and although Cindy Sherman's intention wasn't intertwined with feminism to begin with, I aimed to link all my imagery together through my different approaches to experimentation.

Her later works about beauty enhancement and age also inspired me to reveal my character to the audience through my own ownership of the gaze.

Placeholder title for exhibition on current exploration: In Search For Authenticity

Through performance, enhanced through analysis of Juno Calypsos, alter ego Juno I have enhanced visual dialogue with ambiguity.

Cindy Sherman, film stills, women in search of meaning during the second wave of feminism, performance of different identities in search of the same thing.

Connected through uncanniness, through liminal spaces and hyperfeminine garments, bows, cotton, fast fashion consumerism. Cut of parts, separate limbs, losing key reference points, leaving the spectator disoriented

Inspiration on the empty performance of my Instagram characterisation, commodified through the algorithm of exaggerated unrealistic beauty standards displayed in isolation as people would record themselves through their mobile device, this character plays upon the empty performance of perfectionism to be consumed as a symbol of capitalist society. Juxtaposing the need to be seen but results in loneliness leading to eroding authenticity in a digital age As we get hooked on the constant need for attention



Binary structure from the trans gaze, commentary on conforming to the idealised notion of perfectionism.

Seeking an authentic self in a world categorised by male patriarchy

Colour grading inspired by the psychological nature of a hotel. Transience, “the decreasing accessibility of memory over time” (Murray 2023), conforms to the decay of the authentic self through social structure/social media.

Lack of familiarity runs through the work

Hotels are built on capitalist consumption, paying for access to property. Masking home, but is never truly comfortable, furniture and aesthetic are designed to be fixed in place in each room.

Work is impacted by the disorientation of a short stay, the eeriness of the unfamiliar runs throughout the work through colour grading and performative use of space

My Experimental Exhibition layout consisted of taking over a corridor space in FFOTO Swansea, in Dynevor. The work takes its shape by focusing on blurring the lines between beauty and a psychological experience. Printed on Vinyl that costs £80 a roll, the pieces loomed over the spectator for emotional impact, fully immersing the University students in the works alluring visuals, evoking self-reflection and the need to be seen. By spreading the work across the wall space, the images hold their own narrative as their own and as a larger series. This works well with the bow image and enhanced body, where beauty intersects biology, evoking visual dialogue on aesthetic enhancement, impulse and social construct.

I found the university corridor lighting to be limiting to adding emotional weight to the images, I recently went to the Alfini Gallery to analyse Emma Talbots Mixed media instillation where, size and sound was utilised to its full extent, The work was enhanced that the spectator felt entranced to reflect on self contemplation while looking at massive structures with poetic written language and instillation surrounding the subject of feminism and our place in testing times. As my work is coming from social construct and binary structure, I will go to galleries with queer instillations to see how they interact with space to build up an understanding of instillation.

Extending the project's reach, I've applied the series to an open call. The Sony World Photography Competition. As I'm in the final year of my studies it's critical that the work engages with multiple audiences. My next steps consist of expanding the way the work is interacted, adding to the idea of phycological experience. I aim to move forward with a instillation re addressing the idea of, transient space, and phycology, using sound and light will contextualise the work in new immersive ways.



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