



A n n a L e w i s

www.annalewisdesign.com

3 words.....

- 1. Curiosity
- 2. Emotion
- 3. Duality



Background:

- Always Under the vehicle of art jewellery
- The body is always present
- Always posing the question ‘what is jewellery?’

This is a highly detailed and complex collage by Robert Rauschenberg, titled "The Art of the Collage." The artwork is presented within a thick, ornate gold-colored frame. The central composition is a dense, layered arrangement of various elements: several photographic images of faces and figures, some with dramatic lighting or filters; abstract patterns and textures, including a prominent black and white wavy band; and various small objects and materials. Notable elements include a pocket watch at the bottom center, a large feather on the right side, and a small, dark, curved object resembling a shell or a piece of jewelry. The overall effect is one of rich, tactile complexity and visual depth, characteristic of Rauschenberg's work in the realm of conceptual and material art.



On Curiosity

- Link to the bizarre
- Elements that draw me into questions and confusion – thinking objects
- On collecting – curious objects – cabinet of curiosity, collecting the world
- Cultural artefacts
- A curiosity toward material and material combinations
- The history / storytelling / magic in an object
- The power of an object to hold emotional investment be it memory, sentiment, superstition, amulet, luck charm,
- Objects that are unnerving but never gorey, dark but not terrifying
- Objects that have a sense of the uncanny
- Always about beauty but not prettiness
- Unsettle or confuse the viewer – sparking curiosity
- What are your causes of curiosity?

On emotion

- To draw on ones own emotional experiences
- Ability to sense emotion in others
- Highly symbolic but often secretive/symbolic
- Response to current state be it personal or universal
- Work directly influenced by own experiences – it comes out in the work somewhere – cathartic
- Images of work on the body link to overall theme – they tell the full story beyond the object, they make the objects make sense when worn
- The link emerges between body, object and material

On Duality

- Polar opposites
- One cannot exist without the other
- Linked to opposing emotions
- The uncanny – familiar but strange
- Death and beauty
- Darkness and light
- Protect and attack
- Human and animal
- Drawn and repelled all at the same time
- Excess and simplicity – impact
- Wearable and unwearable

Darkness



- An exploration into darkness, a deadly aesthetic that fuses beauty and death, fashion and the uncanny, animal and human. The collection is inspired by the discovery of that which is beyond language, how there is magic and beauty to be found in death. How we are drawn in and repelled, fascinated and fearful all at the same time. The notion of veiling and distancing from the horrible through beauty and photography is central to the work, of decorating death or death as decoration.
- Keywords: veiling, death, beauty, uncanny

Phobia



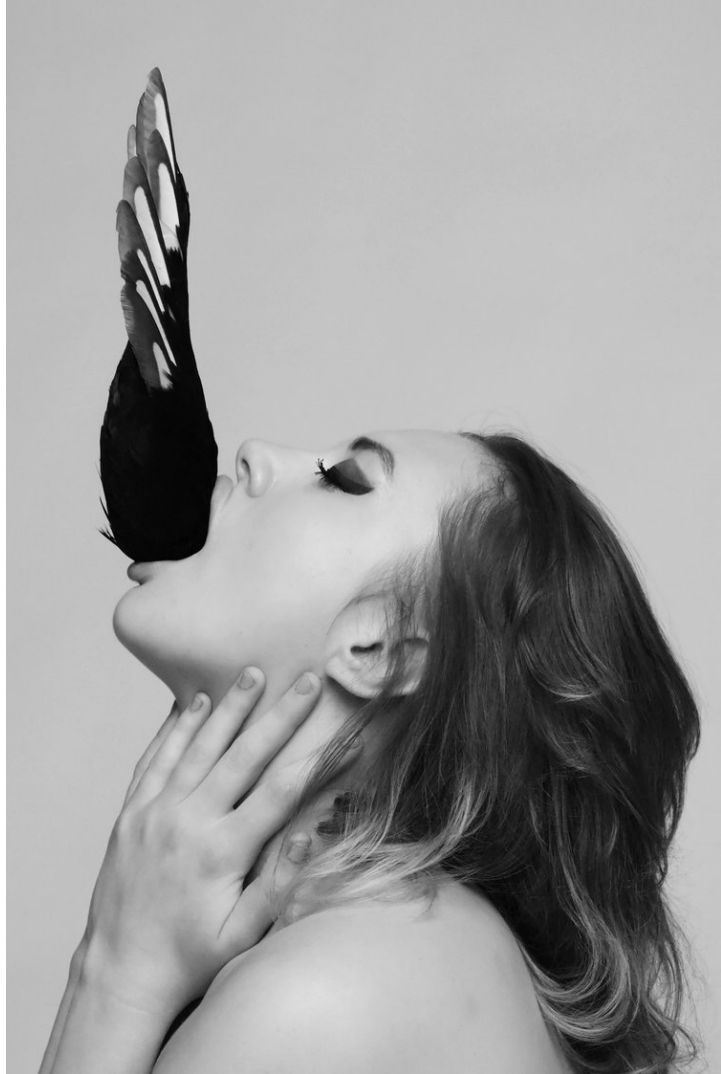


- “ a weight of meaningless which crushes me “ (Kristeva,J 1982)
- ‘Phobia’ is a return to darkness. Much like the uncanny it becomes a scene of a haunting of the same thing, an in-between state, at the very border of death. The scene becomes otherworldly, a claustrophobic space where the distance has collapsed to 50 and 30cm gaps. Is this a protective boundary in which we try to hide or is it a prison we try to fold out of in order to escape? The room is familiar but strange, turned upside down; the interiority is unknown destabilizing our perception of reality. We are denied sight and speech. The face is broken down. But we are both darkness and light and one cannot exist without the other.
- It is engulfing us and we mutate and break ourselves to either escape or to exist in the very space that crushes us.

Anadlu — Welsh for breathe



Elle Se Montre





- The translation of ‘Elle Se Montre’ is literally ‘to show itself’. It is tied to the idea of the monstrous, in a state of becoming; or a state of emotion, the forms are a mutation of an alternative body and animal. These creatures are metamorphosing; they are alive and dead, artificial and real, familiar and strange. The monster shows itself as something that is not yet shown, that is not yet know.

Stay







- *“The Corset was preceded by the Stay. My key visual research stems from a Stay exhibited recently in the ‘Fashioned From Nature’ exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum constructed from whalebone (baleen), linen bound with silk. Dated 1780.*
- *I am very drawn to the Victorian era during the 19th century and the visual and cultural elements that define this particular time. The mourning rituals, the Victorian obsession with death and with collecting the curious. The fashion depicts the distortion of the female body, silhouettes exaggerated beneath bustles, layers of garment and elaborately decorated in exotic feathers fuelled by the plume trade.*
- *I examined the role of women during this time and their place in middle class society. The defining wearable artefact of this time, and symbol of the material culture of Victorian womanhood is the corset. A morphic object that played a central role in the history of the female body, quite literally shaping and controlling the notion of the feminine ideal.*
- *The corset is an object of confliction and contrast, it represents both control and support. An ubiquitous object and outward symbol of self-control, (or social control by men). It is symbolic of discipline, beauty and sexuality yet hides a dark truth by painfully punishing the body in order to fit this feminine ideal. The restriction of this tight cage, crushing internal organs and ribs often making the wearer ill, suffering for a tiny wasp like waist perhaps could be a reflection of the lack of freedom or voice experienced by women at this time. ‘Stays’ were designed to make any unruly female flesh ‘stay put’ and by doing this were also thought to be arresting the unruly female mind.*

- *It cultivated the desirable 'morbid' beauty sought at the time and societies macabre obsession with mortality making it somehow about female sexuality. An ill almost death-like fragile demeanour frequently celebrated in art and literature during this period, to appear lifeless was to appear ladylike and therefore vulnerable. Yet the corseted woman in contrast was empowered to manoeuvre within these social constructions and manipulate them to their own advantage. The irony perhaps of the corset allowing a working-class woman to escape their origin by attracting the attention of a man that might elevate their social status.*
- *Men publically praised a tightly bound body and both women and men were responsible for contracting the waist to dangerous proportions. The hand span waist was the ultimate goal, for a man's inclination to completely encircle the female waist with two hands. The waist become a site of sexual objectification and the corset was key to this and operated to keep the flesh still, by anchoring and stabilizing the torso to convey a femininity that was both sexually desirable and controlled. Women could appear to be ether virginal or dangerously sexual.*
- *Control of both mind and body, the woman as an object or possession of beauty, a trophy on the arm of a man. But was the corset also a weapon used by women to control society and men themselves?*
- *I am a jewellery artist that works with feathers. Birds in direct contrast are symbols of freedom, of flight and of liberation. The work explores the contrasting elements of both female freedom and restriction.*

- *In relation to the term Nuda Vita the corset, a piece of undergarment, an intimate object is integral in the proximity to the naked body, its manipulation of the flesh to fit a social ideal to craft a cultural self. The idea of veiling and layering the naked body, by hiding the body to the point at which it is no longer recognisable in it's a natural naked state. It could be argued that it goes against nature itself, a body that is utterly contaminated by social and political conformity.*
- *The corset is a political object, it turns the female into a cultural object through control and distortion. I return to my original object, the unworn, undone corset at the museum. It is bare, naked, exposed and vulnerable. A metaphor for release, its bone like structure is laid open, it appears in part like a bird's wing, free. It is in a state of undress and out of power.*
- ***Design process:***
- *The colours derive directly from vintage corsets and underwear. I have hand dyed the feathers to create deep luxurious tones. The sculptures have been carved by hand from modelling foam directly from my own drawings that evolve into 3d, the foam is painted and layered in a very repetitive time consuming process with multiple hand cut feathers, the forms in parts grow and change as a result of this layering and tufting. The forms have emerged from observations of sections of corset, pattern cut outs, the open undone corset structure. They also allude to a tight curve in the body, the tightness of the waist and restrict and contort on the body and with each other. They can be placed together, twisting and contorting in numerous ways seeming to struggle and merge as one reacts to the next, these pairings have become quite sensual like the corset itself: feminine, deadly and sexual. They are designed to interact with the body, to balance upon it, to fit with with curves or to play the body against itself in awkward, uncomfortable positions. Or it can simply perch, like a 'bird' on the arm of a man."*

Touch Don't Touch







- ‘Touch don’t touch’ is a collection created for Nuda Vita 2020. Building on the idea of the corset being a tool of both constriction and manipulation I wanted to bring the work back to the idea of the naked body in close proximity to the object, be it the corset or the feather sculptures I create. Questions are frequently being asked about what it means to be human and how our humanity is changing, our connect or disconnect with nature and also with each other.
- In our too fast-paced existence, fuelled by technology, politics, the climate and the pressures of modern society, have we become distracted or disrupted from being human? There is a sense of division over issues in the world that is also echoed in a sense of lack of control and in our ability to form meaningful relationships. There are boundaries in place in society to avoid touch, touch makes us human and we are becoming less tactile through fear of being misunderstood. We long to touch and be touched yet have built up defences to ensure those boundaries are kept firmly in place, to keep others at bay. Desire to connect beyond a sense of disconnect, to rediscover the human, the naked body, to seek out connection that is visceral, corporeal and sensual. A need to reunite, to reverse the disruption of the human and override the detachment that is damaging us. The work explores notions of a defensive embrace, these polar opposites consider what is too fragile to touch, too beautiful, too unobtainable. To touch is to destroy, the desire for ‘the human touch’ may ultimately be the ‘touch of death’. Jan 2020
- *The above text was written to accompany the cancelled Munich ‘Nuda Vita’ in 2020 and was written a couple of months before the global pandemic and lockdown rules. Reading this now, a year later and viewing my images that convey people embracing and repelling touch, being protected or restricted by layers of plastic, I get an uneasy sense of what followed. To look at this project now is impossible without a sense of irony and the unforeseen ‘new normal’ that was about to unfold. The fact we have had our isolation and lack of touch pushed to its absolute human limits leaves this work with an overhanging sense of the uncanny. My initial reasons for looking at the notion of proximity and distance has stemmed from a personal observation or inner feeling, a feeling of being out of contact, isolated, a longing for the tactile. A year later such boundaries that existed before have been magnified to become actual rules of distancing, that fear of touch is now a real not imaginary threat. Yet on another level the pandemic has made us reconnect with our humanity, to reflect on what that means and who matters to us. The small stuff has been pushed aside. Freedom over restriction is something we now yearn for and will not take for granted again. The desire to reunite has never been more important, the desire to touch has returned.*
- Jan 2021.

New words....New directions

- Touch
 - embrace
 - Attack
 - Fear and beauty
 - Draw and repel
 - intertwine
-
- Experiments with glass on the body, worn by snakes too (symbols of fear and uncanny beauty)

BOTH Body.Object.Touch.Hold

Collaboration — samina Begum



Key texts....

- The Uncanny – Nicholas Royle
- Jewellery in context – Marjan Unger
- In Praise of Shadows – Junichiro Tanizaki

