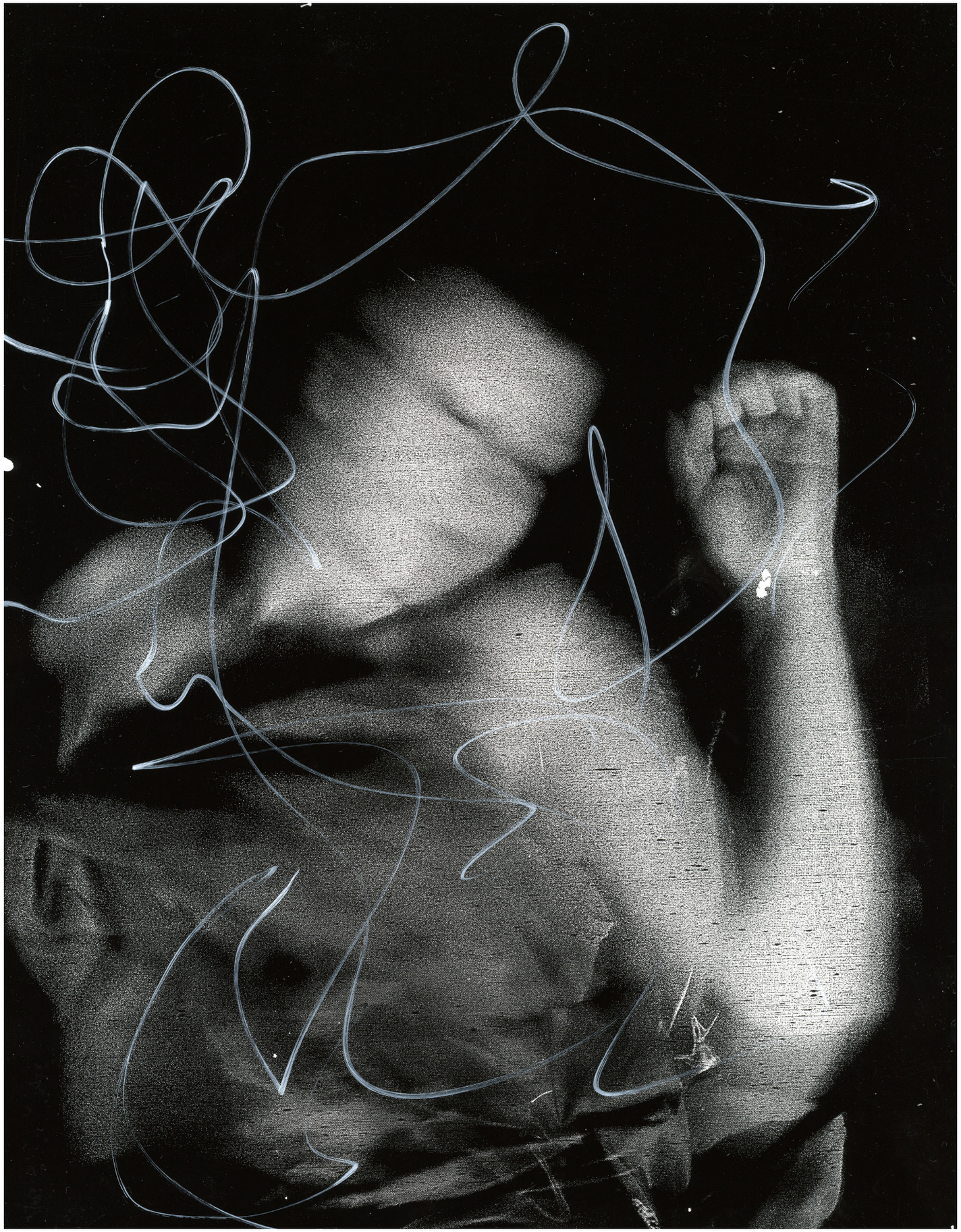


































Experimental strategies

Within this project, through experimentation and playing with different processes, I want to explore the fluidity of human identity and how we are consistently and constantly in flux within ourselves. Spending a lot of time alone forces one to reflect on the whole concept of self in general, for me I've spent a lot of time reflecting on gender fluidity and sexuality and labels we often attach to ourselves, ones that might not fit us as we grow.

Even within queer communities there's often a need or expectation to label yourself as soon as you explore your sexuality and identity. Within my friendship group during the ages 15 to 17 I finally felt comfortable to explore this but also felt pressure to find myself quickly and to "fit in" to a label. Within romantic relationships I've felt a similar pressure, being told I am one thing or being told I couldn't present myself a certain way because it was "too masculine" and they didn't like that.

Gender expression and performance is only something I really began to consider when I was about 17 almost 18, we're conditioned from a young age to think of gender and sex in a very binary sense and it is hard to unlearn this thinking. I think a lot of queer people sort of have a complicated relationship with gender expression as a lot of mannerisms or expressions one might have might be considered "masculine" for example growing up and feeling that disconnect from yourself and how others expect you to be, which I don't think is exclusive to the queer experience, rather just feeling like you don't live up to how a "girl" should be (or a boy vice versa).

I have a lot to learn and there is a lot I don't quite understand. I don't remember how I became concerned with the anxieties and issues that I am now concerned with. In my previous projects I've explored my body issues, I want to link this with identity, as I feel like before I've focused mostly on my body as an object outside of myself. I've always felt somewhat uncomfortable in my femininity, struggling with my body and appearance, to me, are direct outcomes of my uncomfortableness and uncertainty surrounding my identity and my feelings of being abnormal and different to people around me growing up in a cisnormative and heteronormative society.

This sense of "otherness" that I've felt, being queer and feeling outside of the "norm" but why is there still this feeling of otherness? I've always struggled to put myself into a box and just stay in that box.

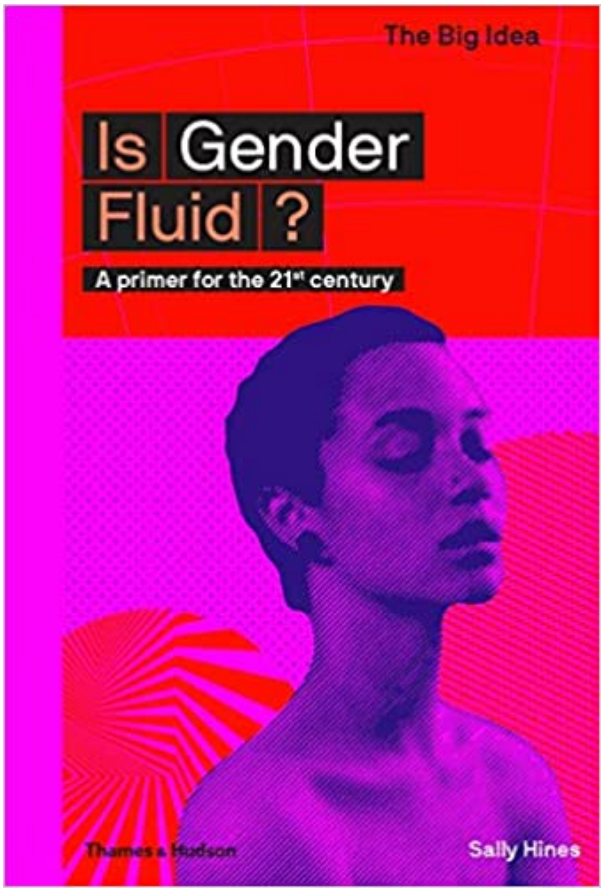
Womanhood to me has felt sort of alien, I feel a disconnect. What does it mean to be a "woman"? why do I feel this disconnect? Perhaps it's the way I grew up feeling like a stranger to it, comparing my experiences with that of my sister who is the same age, growing parallel to someone who I was almost expected to mirror but failed to do so. Maybe it's the disconnect I felt when I didn't get into relationships until I came out, simply telling myself maybe I was asexual rather than even really considering the fact I am queer. I try to explain it like, I'm in a room and femininity is something im watching from a distance, over time ive learnt to imitate it, interpret it in my own kind of way. However, I'm also unsure of how others perceive me, I don't want my shyness and soft spoken sort of exterior

to be experienced and perceived as “feminine” because that’s not how I feel…but I have no control on how others choose to put me into a box.

What is this projects aim to me?

- Exploring my complicated view on my own identity and how I feel as though im constantly changing, from one month to the next, from one day to the next.
- The comfort I take in performing for the camera, using my body to express myself in ways I would never be able to do publicly or with an audience.
- How the camera is an observer to these performances.
- Looking at the camera as a “mask”, a tool I use to sort of distort my reality in a way that brings me comfort, the way a mask conceals identity in a way that may make someone perform a way they wouldn’t if they were fully exposed.

Is Gender Fluid? : a primer for the 21st century
Sally Hanes
Thames & Hudson



For this project I wanted to begin to look deeper into identity and the fluidity of it, sort of to help me understand my own feelings, too. So I looked at this book on gender and the fluidity of it across time, different cultures, societies etc.

There are differencing stances on how people experience "gender". "a social constructionist view of gender proposes that gender roles- the patterns of behaviour prescribed as 'normal' or 'ideal' for each sex- are not entirely determined by human biology and evolution, but are to some degree created and perpetuated for each sex by the society and culture we live in. Gender identities and expressions that fall outside this prescribed behaviour are presented as 'abnormal'." P.44 This view basically recognises the significance of HOW we are brought up and the gender norms and expressions normalised and encouraged by our environment (family, friends, education etc). It's not hard to identify some of these norms, for example we see it in marketing for toys, girls are encouraged to play with dolls and cooking sets and stuff whereas boys are encouraged to be adventurous.

Growing up in a cisnormative and heteronormative society you don't really become conscious of these things until you are old enough to have already gone through all of these confusing feelings of feeling "weird" and "abnormal", although now I find more peace in the feelings I found hard to digest the more I come to understand the reasons why I may have felt this way growing up. My family aren't unsupportive, per say, but rather they struggle to relate to me and I struggle to relate to them as I feel like I have this whole aspect of myself they will never understand. You sort of form your own communities as you get older and realise there's others with similar feelings and experiences to you. It's isolating if you don't have this.

<u>Research:</u>

<u>Gillian Wearing</u>

Wearing is an English artist known for her photographic and video work in which she explores identity both in regards to herself and other people. She often utilises ways of altering perception such as using prosthetic masks to cover her own face and other peoples, in "Family Stories" she adorns realist masks of her relatives and her younger self.

I'm interested in her work "Secrets and Lies" (2009), in which "ordinary" people don silicone masks and are invited to confess all to the camera. Wearing invited these everyday people through posting an advertisement online asking for volunteers. Within her work she often wants to break taboos and explores this idea that we perform in public and in private we are separate. In these masks people were able to tell their darkest, deepest secrets, confessing all to a total stranger. Why were these people able to tell all, did the mask create a sense of security and anonymity, allowing oneself to be detached just enough to expose themselves completely.

To me, this idea of being able to expose all in this weird, unfamiliar environment reminds me of the power of the camera and this façade we have in front of it. Through self-portraiture and playing with images of myself I am able to bring to the surface stuff I don't freely offer. Past traumas, fears and my anxieties in the world around me suddenly ready for whoever

chooses to see and pick apart. It's me, but in some ways, it is not me. I feel unattached from the person in the photographs yet connected at the same time.

The camera could be like mask, it's a tool that helps us filter ourselves in the way a mask does…hiding parts of us and allowing other parts to come to the surface. I know that I am being captured but instead of hiding it allows me to perform for the camera, in ways I would not be comfortable doing so in front of others or even for one person. What am I doing without the camera? A performance that is uncaptured is still a performance, the camera allows me to further manipulate the performance, manipulate the images in a way that better expresses my inner self.

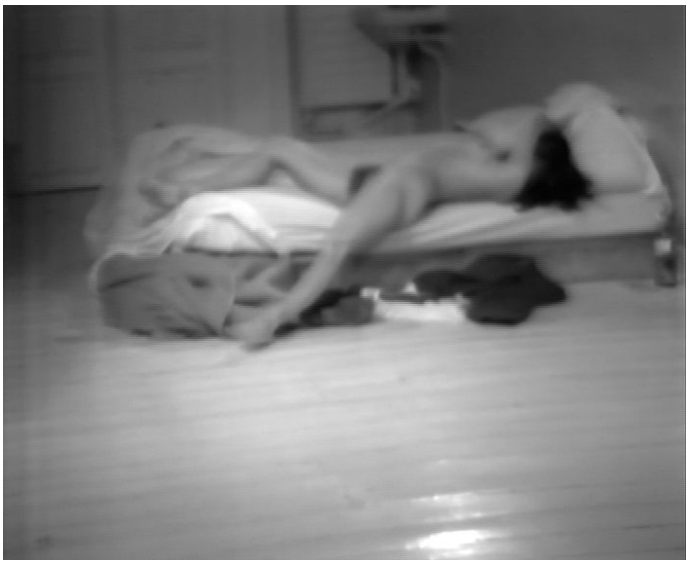


Gillian Wearing, Secrets and Lies, 2009

Lili Dujorie

Dujourie (b. 1941), a Flemish artist, is a multi-media artists who works primarily with sculpture, video and paintings. I am going to be focusing on stills from her video performances *Hommage* à…1972. I'm focusing on this piece as the body is the centre piece and the movement and positions are very striking, something I want to capture within my own work while experimenting in this module.







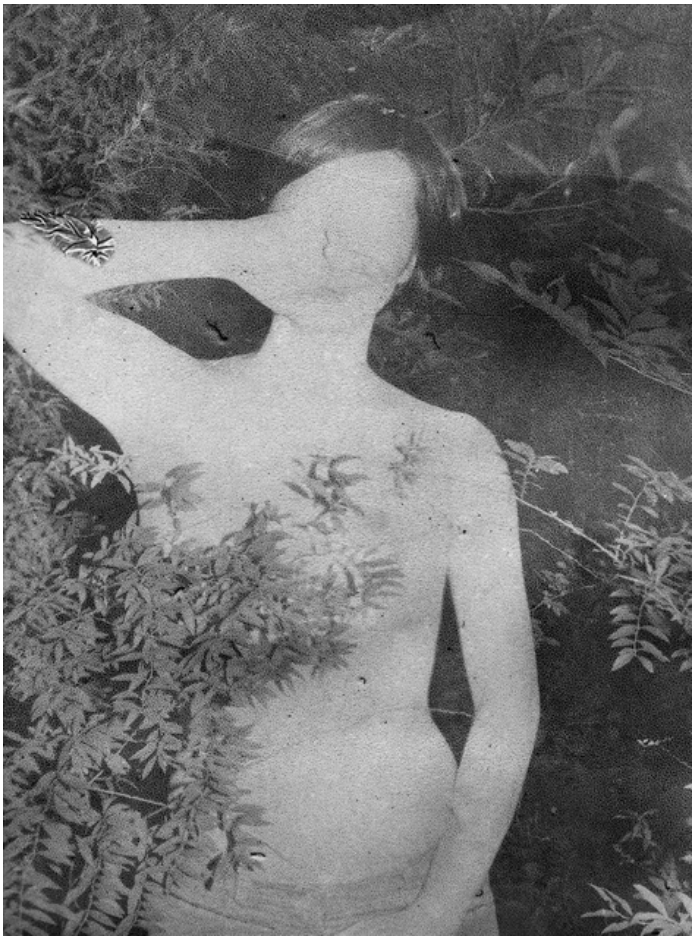


During the time she made her video pieces video was still relatively new tool that artists were beginning to play around with. In these performances she didn't cut or edit, she simply recorded a moment in a linear way, moving her body in the frame, slowly and with purpose. Using video as a sort of surveillance, and observer to the scene, not manipulating the time is it happening in. The way she twists and moves her body across the scene is, to me, is quite aggressive, as if she's wriggling around in discomfort and protest, what could she be protesting? She could be challenging the view of her nude body in line with the male gaze, for me, this kind of movement is like you feel trapped in your skin, desperate to seek comfort in how someone else might view you.

Rather than creating a video piece im more intrigued by the stills themselves has photographic pieces and the movement, motion and distress they capture. I want to create the same sort of atmosphere in this project and perhaps contrast this with images/experiments that depict a still almost statuesque body.

Daisuke Yokota

Daisuke is a Japanese photographer who has a very experimental and abstract approach to his photographic work. I'm researching him because I like the way he portrays people in his work, featuring the body but often you cannot tell much of the body in the image (age, gender etc), they're often anonymous figures or sort of silhouettes with no expression.



Daisuke often works by photographing on a compact camera and then rephotographing on a medium format and then may even rephotograph again multiple times after this, adding more and more distortion, such as light leak, overheating chemicals etc. This process of rephotographing adds texture to the photograph, making it appear more dreamlike and dystopian, disconnected from reality. You can see the texture in his work that makes hints to his long process and experimentation.

Daisuke's work is all about experimentation, playing around with different processes and not being afraid of the outcome, which is something I want to push myself to do; think less about "failure" and more about just playing with my work and having more of a curious process than a technical one.

The way his works often removes the identity of the people photographs has an eerie effect, the photography above looks like a statue in a garden and looks sort of androgynous. I like how the images are sort of soft and harsh at once.



Arnulf Rainer

Rainer (b.1929) is an Austrian artist, known for his mixed media visual experimentations and works.



Moving on from the way Lili Dujorie portrays movement in her video pieces through looking at her stills I wanted to include an artist whose work incorporates other media into the work in a way that emphasises the contortion and movement of the body. I plan on doing some shots which emphasise movement and then incorporate pen or paint in some way to draw attention to this movement, ultimately emphasising the connection and disconnection between self and outwards body. Arnulf's erratic and jarring movements pair well with aggressive motions of the brush.



Experimentations:
I'm going to go through my work in a linear way, to best walk through my process and how each idea fed into the next.

My first experimentations weren't really "successful" but it did begin to spark new ideas and concepts in which I wanted to push my project. I shot my body in different poses, opening and closing my body, trying to express the changing in motions as a representation of a change in self.

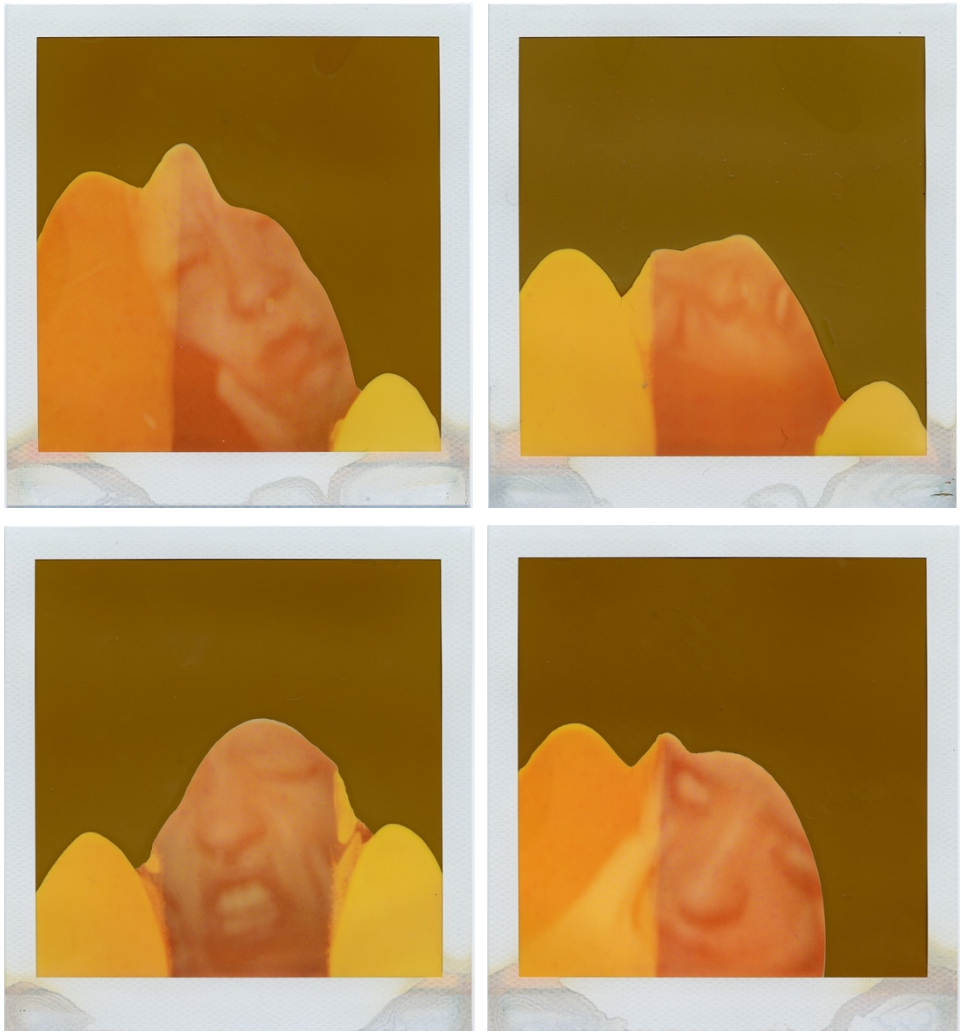


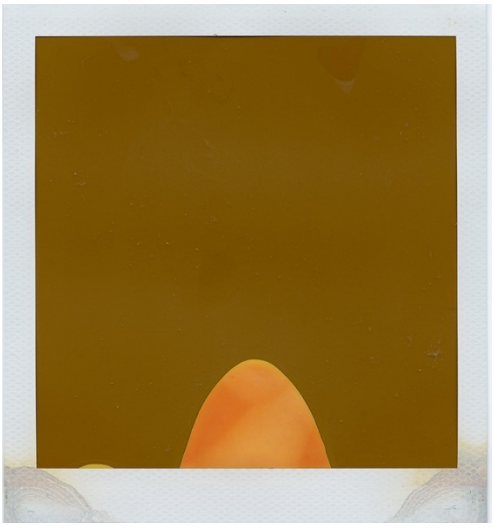




I shot on polaroid and then cut out my body and placed the cut-outs on a scanner and shuffled them randomly to see what results would come to fruition. In the two above I bleached the cut-outs to get the blue/green colours. I prefer the bleached ones, however, these images look too rigid and clean and don't really work for what I want to portray.

I wanted to carry on working with polaroid as the process of a lot of polaroid film speaks a lot about time, the images never fully fix and fade over time, the chemicals can be easily manipulated and changed, too. I chose to use some expired polaroid film.





I had no idea if this experimental shoot would work at all, many shots, as shown in the one here, didn't even come out at all, a whole pack only shot blanks but luckily one pack produced images such as the quartet above. I wanted to capture intense facial expressions, exaggerated discomfort bordering on emotion so intense it's almost caricature. The warm colours are flesh like, they remind me of images of medical images of foetuses, the shapes of the film as it looks like it's melting work well in contrast with the intense facial expressions. The film expired in 1999, the year I was born, which is a weird coincidence, but I guess the way the film has changed as I've grown emphasises change in oneself and the material world around us.

Dark room printing:

Moving on I wanted to do some dark room printing which captured more motion, I had quite a simple set up and sheets on the ground, a desk lamp, tripod and slow shutter speed. I didn't plan any poses, just set the self-timer on an moved my body in a sort of squirming way, similar to how Dujorie filmed her performance.





The comfort in being vulnerable in front of the camera is evident in these shots (above are the negatives I printed onto acetate to experiment with). I can perform in front of the camera in a way I couldn't in front of others, or maybe even completely alone, it gives me a reason to express myself, so in my opinion goes one step above being an observer. There's a mixture of movement and stillness in these experiments. In motion but moments of stillness, that's sort of how I see myself, shifting and changing and never really sure.

I experimented with different exposures and also with moving the negatives during exposure



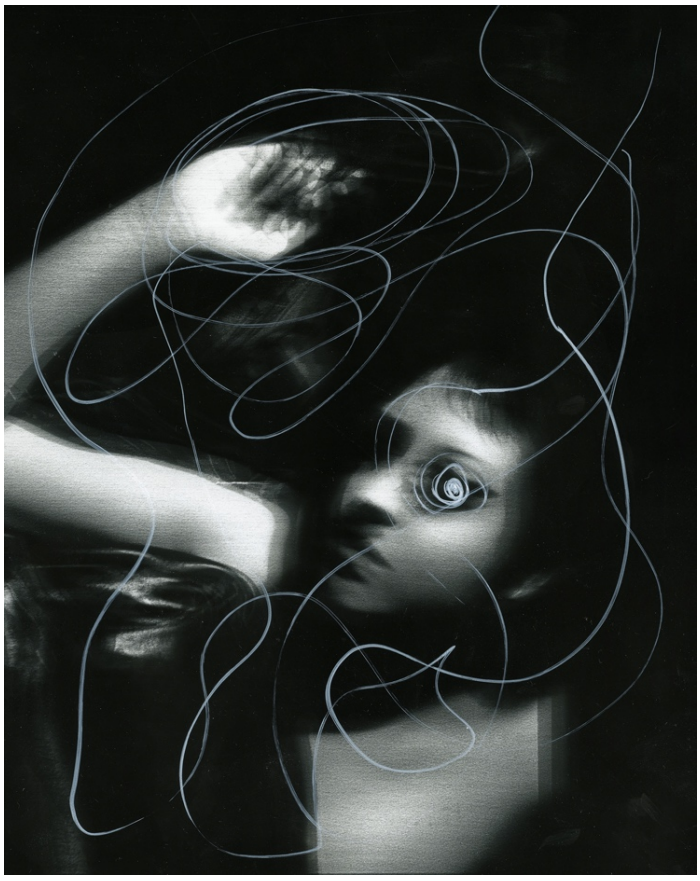


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then experimented with adding paint pen to the prints to emote movement:

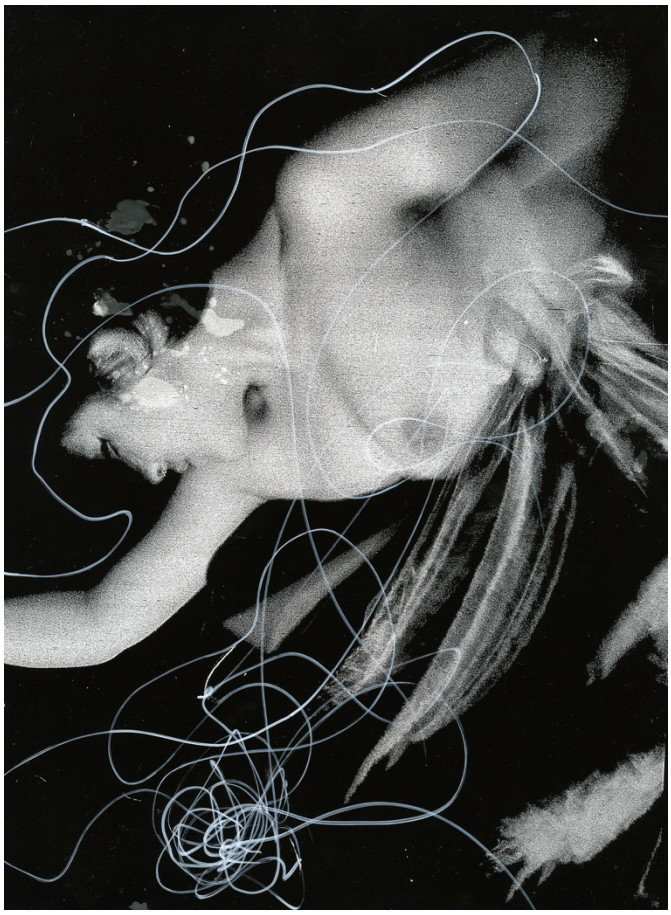


I started of experimenting with different colours but found that the pink was distracting so decided to do the others only using white paint. (I also crinkled the paper on this one to see what affect it would have when scanned).



The blurriness in this image is a result of experimenting with moving the negative during exposure, I think this works well as it adds more rawness and a sense of discomfort which is what I wanted to achieve with these images.





the print to the left has a lot more motion and blurriness than the other, I think this shows the fluidity of the performance and the progression. The sprawling white squiggles add to this, there's no beginning and no end to the paint, which sort of represents the constant flux within ourselves.



Lith printing:
In contrast with the previous prints I wanted to try a new technique and create images so still that there's a statue like quality to them . I utilised some shots I took during the summer which I have no used, printing on acetate through photocopying took away detail and almost removes characteristics from myself, removing these details has an eeries effect as a appear completely white, but this removal of detail comments on the way I struggle with my perception of myself and how often I want others to not try to perceive me.

Some prints came out better than others, the timing is quite tight, I found I often did the process too long and lost too much detail.





The graininess from the poorly printed acetate adds texture to the prints. However, I wanted to try lumen printing with these photographs as I felt it might add another element to the almost statuesque appearance of myself, perhaps more texture or colour which will contrast with the poses.

Lumen printing:







I sprayed salt spray onto the prints before exposing them in the sunlight which is why there's this red ethereal look. As I scanned the prints the light from the scanner darkened them, I'll show below some prints that are lighter







I prefer the lumen prints to the lith prints because I think the changing nature of the lumen prints, the way they are never fixed, fits more with my theme of identity. I wanted these photographs to appear almost genderless, sort of almost showing how I view myself or how I view my disconnect to femininity and complicated relationship with my body.

I went on to experiment with more movement in images but this time cyanotypes.





I like the blurriness and how the hands emerges out of this blur, there's added smudge in the cyan as I put it out while raining which I think works well instead of taking away from the image.





The rain washed more of this print away, however, I don't really like the shape in the image as I feel like you can't necessarily tell it's a. body.



I wanted the background to be blank, as if my body is emerging out of nothing and going into nothing. This to me visually represents the shifting and changing ive experienced and felt growing. The dark blue contrasts nicely compared to the lumen prints as complete different colours on the wheel and the body appears in completely different states; one being eerily still and then appearing in motion and uncomfortable.

Next I wanted to return to polaroid and experiment with shape through polaroid lifts; seeing how I could manipulate the emulsion in a way that works with the pose in the actual image on the .

















I did these emulsion lifts In water, some I think came out better than others in terms of shape and some also broke during the process. For my portfolio I am going to experiment with placing them together maybe in twos and seeing how the shapes can work together. The materiality of the print you get from the lift and then the self-portrait itself is an interesting combination. There's one where I appear as thought im crawling out of a fold, the darkness and low-light emphasise emotion. Ceramic hands caress me

Evaluation:

Although aesthetically my work may not go together thematically they all work together as they all express a struggle with sense of self and discomfort that can come along with this unsureness (which in my experience is a result of the queer experience growing up in a cisnormative and heteronormative society). I pushed myself to try new processes and tried to let go of worrying about failure and instead just focus on the feeling and performance behind the work and using work I didn't think worked as a sort of catalyst to see how I could make it work instead of moving onto something completely new (e.g with the lith printing and the first polaroid shoot).

All of the research I included was extremely relevant to how I went off and experimented, I wanted a mixture of artists whose work I was interested in more aesthetically and then research based more on thematic matters that tied in with my themes.

I tend to worry about how others will perceive my work and not understand the meaning behind it, but I think with deeply personal work it's a lot more interesting if perhaps the viewer doesn't know straight away as the images are more ambiguous and open to having

individuals attaching their own emotions. To me, the meaning is clear. The mixture of motion and stillness in my body and the techniques used to emphasise this focus on my body almost as if I'm an outsider to myself and highlights the disconnect I feel to myself sometimes, specifically concerning femininity.

There's a few things I'd wish I'd spent more time on, such as maybe considering more about lay out when making my prints and how they'd work alongside each other instead of thinking of them more on a single piece basis. But overall I think this project allowed me freedom to experiment the way I best like to, that being in a more physical way and less editing based, as I love having actual prints that you can physically hold, it sort of makes it feel more real and motivates me to keep working as I can see how much work is coming out. This project has also showed the comfort I take in the camera and the safe space It allows me to express discomfort and to capture it in a way I wouldn't be able to put it into words.

Experimenting with motion and experimental processes as a way to express identity and the fluidity of being is something I'd like to carry on in my work, perhaps working on it more in a more cohesive way which for this project I didn't do as I was more focused on the experimental aspect although concept was important too.