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I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment.

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Whiteread *House* (1993) at Rachel Whiteread's Uncanny Monument 'House' URL:
<https://www.frieze.com/article/rachel-whitereads-uncanny-monument-house> Accessed on
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Hans Bellmer Games of the Doll. 1949 | URL: <https://photoanthology.org/projects/the-games-of-the-doll> MoMA Accessed on 18/04/2026

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Contingent (1968) by Eva Hesse – Artchive, URL: <https://www.artchive.com/artwork/contingent-eva-hesse-1968/> Accessed on 15/04/2026

Introduction:

In this proposal 3 key terms that are going to be discussed and then moving on to create a research question to further explore these topics in a dissertation. The first word to discuss is going to be; *Materiality*, in the sense of physical objects used by artists to convey certain feelings and emotions from the viewer. Next, the term *Decomposition* looking at how discomfort is often a feeling portrayed in art, as well as looking at examples of physical decomposition and decay used by artists. The last term will be; *The Uncanny* looking into how artists use familiar objects to evoke uncomfortable feelings from their viewer.

Materiality:

Looking at materiality as the state of being from the physical matter used and its substance or quality of material, how the choices made by artists affect how their work is perceived conceptually, emotionally and socially. For example, the density of matter; using hard ridged materials such as concrete or bronze provokes feelings of strength, sturdiness and an uninviting presence. Whereas using soft and light materials such as textile or paper feels more approachable and inviting. Material can also be used in contrast, using soft malleable materials in shape of things that we would preconceive to be dense or tough. Using Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) as an example of what changing the material of an object and giving it a new form can evoke feelings from the viewer.



Figure 1

Rachel Whiteread (b.1963), the first female artist to win The Turner Prize, has created a variety of work where the physical material choice for her pieces forms a large part within the concept of her work. The material she uses interacts with the spaces and objects she focuses on; her work involves lots of casting of a variety of objects and even recreating entire rooms. She creates versions of these objects with different material that often seem to be mimicking the original but have an unwavering difference about them. Her work, *House* (1993), a public sculpture consisting of a life-size concrete cast of the inside of a London townhouse, that was due to be demolished amid the housing crisis. This was her first time taking her work into a public space and in such a large-scale, but her sculpture was not well received by the public and was later destroyed 2 months later.

Whiteread's *House* is particularly interesting because she has cast and exposed something that many people don't think about and that is the negative space within the walls of the home. It's the space where activity inside of the home happens, where people exist. Searle explains this with "What, finally, has been exposed is an empty setting, a place where people once led a life of intimacies, grew up, grew old and died" (Townsend, 2004, p. 19). She exposes the actual inside walls where all this happens, but at the same time fills the space, so all is left is a negative cast of the internal walls of the home. "*House* was an architectural death mask of a domestic space and of a century of its inhabitants" (Blazwick, 2019). The home, somewhere that is usually private and associated with feelings such as comfort and security, she has reversed those feelings by exposing the bare foundation of the walls, filling the space where people would have once moved around and gathered, and choosing a material that is hard, tough as often seen as unpleasant.

The complete destruction of this concrete house is notable because concrete is usually a long-lasting durable material, often used in houses but instead as a foundation. Concrete as a material takes many steps in perfecting, in *Stuff Matters*, Miodownik discusses the qualities of concrete he says; "It is a Philosophy as much as it is an engineering technique, completing a cycle that starts when the Earth's mantle creates rock" (Miodownik, 2013, p. 71) speaking on how the raw natural material is sourced and then re-configured and created it into manmade forms for us, as humans to re-design and enjoy. He then describes concrete as a "Modern Material. It lends itself to pouring and moulding, to the rapid building of vast sculptures" (Miodownik, 2013, p. 77). This makes sense why Whiteread would choose such a material for her sculpture works, something that she can capture

such small detail down to light switches and at the same time create these largescale impressive works.

The material used in art and by artists is such an important part of the work and Whiteread broke the trend and stereotype when she stepped a more male-dominated area of sculpture. Taking up space within the art world, and because she doesn't create with a small sized domestic scale, instead quite the opposite she is not afraid to take up physical space. She uses some motifs of the home throughout her work, such as her piece; *Ghost* (1990), where she again casted the inside of a room into a giant sealed block, and actually displayed this inside of a gallery space," Whiteread reverses the conventions of walking into and viewing a room" (Fraser-Moore, n.d.). She makes a very recognisable space into something we cannot understand anymore, with the opaque windows and sealed up doors. She says, "I was interested in relocating a room, relocating a space, from a small domestic house into a big concrete anonymous place, which is what the museums have done." (p.53) (Townsend, 2004). This really highlights her ability to take exact replicas of these spaces and turn them into something so much different, with the use of material.

Decomposition:

Decomposition, the act of something breaking down, decaying, changing forms physically. Looking at material decay, the deterioration of matter used by artists and the feelings caused by this. When creating work many artists will think about the longevity of the physical materials they are using, in terms of conservation and the lifetime of their work. But the use of materials that will not last is interesting because, often the artist will be aware of this and continue to work with that matter. Organic, natural or just not long-lasting materials are examples of this, where the artist would be intentionally using materials that are out of their control, which feels very intentional to their process.

Eva Hesse (b.1939) was known for her sculpture work, often involving more abstract materials like wire, plastic and latex. The material she was using in her work really stands out because she was creating lots of objects that were erotic or had body-like forms. She also created a collection of objects that she described as *Nothings*, “roughly hand-sized, fleshy, visceral forms that seem to address something bodily, like innards” (Atacus, 2024) that seem so be hinting at parts of the body. Because they simply hint at being bodily forms, they can almost be described as decomposed parts of the body, with their fleshy nature.

Hesse’s material choice was interesting, particularly when she discovered and started creating more with latex, because it has unique qualities, with its flexibility to be turned into many forms and its malleable nature. However, an issue that is proposed to her is the rapid deterioration of the material. She first discovered latex in 1967 and enjoyed using the material as an industrial surface and using it in a painterly way, she was aware of the fragility of the material and that it would decay over time (Nixon, 2002, p. 77). Her resilience to continue using latex throughout her work, especially for many larger pieces of work, showed that this material was important for her work. “The possibility for work to disintegrate,.. because it can literally be walked on, bearing in mind any amount of wear and tear, and imagined in the appearance of the surface as obdurate” (p.77) the material she was using was threatening to disintegrate and collapse but perhaps this was her intentions.



Figure 2

The piece of work *The Contingent* (1968) by Hesse does not even exist anymore because the original work deteriorated long ago, while replicas have since been made. But the ethical nature of replicating these works is questioned because they were made intentionally by Hesse who could have changed her material if she wanted.

Made up of various large latex panels hanging from the ceiling that appear to have different textures. Because the process of decomposition within the latex is natural, they age different times, seen by the slight colour changes. As the material begins to disintegrate it turns from the fleshy rubber texture to a hardened, darker more wrinkled version of itself almost like it is aging like human skin. In an interview with Cindy Nemser, Hesse says “Life doesn’t last; art doesn’t last” (Nemser, 2017),

which relates to her creative process as an artist but also sadly related to her shortened life with Hesse dying in 1970.

The Uncanny:

The word uncanny first used by German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch in his essay *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906), he used the German word “unheimlich” (meaning unhomely) to describe things first seen negatively. (Tate, n.d.). Later written by the Psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, was the essay titled *The Uncanny* (1919) he describes the uncanny as something that is “undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror” (Freud, 1919, p. 219). It seems to be often described as something visually scary but there is also a factor of the uncanny as something that does not immediately appear frightening on the surface. But instead, the more you look and notice, you will find something abnormal, often highlighted with things or beings that appear human, because we unconsciously recognise other people as living. The use of the uncanny has been used and repeated many times within art often using the body, and it still manages to capture the attention of the viewer and often cause the same feelings created with illusion that leads discomfort while viewing the piece.

The artist, Hans Bellmer (b.1902), part of the Surrealism movement, whose work all largely consisted of exploring the female body in ways that can only be seen as uncanny and disturbing. His work all consists of depicting what seem to be young girls in vulnerable but also seemingly erotic and seductive ways, often using mannequins and dolls parts removing any self from these girls and turning them into just faceless body's. It is said that he even “conceived it under the erotic spell of his young cousin Ursula” (Marcoci, 2012), which could show that his work was not a commentary of the sexualization of young girls but perhaps showed his way of enabling the corrupt subject.

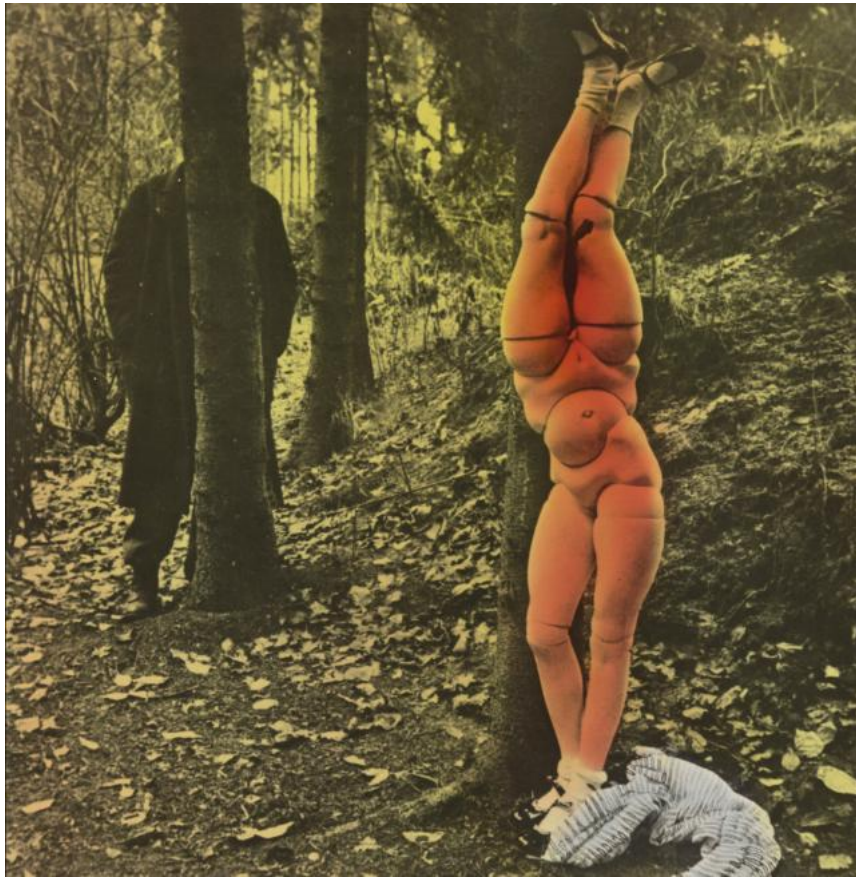


Figure 3

In Bellmer's *Games of the Doll* (1945) he has used the lower ends of the female body, conjoining together to create a full body standing in the forest. It's interesting that he has used only the part with the female genital here because as well as her nakedness it just highlights this area of the body. "As if spying on the doll, whose nakedness, contrapposto pose, and discarded drapery can suggest either sexual provocation or the unguarded innocence of a biblical Susanna" (Taylor, 2000, p. 76). Taking away her face leaves her with no personality, and this also makes her appear more vulnerable

and defenceless as she stands here and is watched by a strange figure. His work does not often have anything other than the body left but here we can see a strange being that seems to be watching.

Relating this work to the uncanny Jentsch speaks on how it can be defined as the “‘doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive’;” (Freud, 1919, p. 226). Which is very much apparent in Bellmer's work with his obsession with mannequins, dolls, limbs and all body parts. Freud then says, “or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate’; and he refers in this connection to the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata” (p.226). And from what seems to be Bellmer's destruction of the body we can conclude they are not living, but they still resemble humans.

His depiction of these young girls always seems to have some sort of surgical theme, drawings showing the internal anatomy of these girls or mannequins with no limbs left, they have similarities to the *Anatomical Venus Dolls* that first began to be used around the 18th century (Guloglu, 2026). They were life-size dissectible female figures made for anatomical instruction. They had the full anatomy for medical education; however, the female versions of these dolls were always an idealised female body. With qualities such as being young, smooth and beautiful bodies, even with unnecessary additions like hair and eyelashes, also notably many of the male bodies did not even have arms and legs because they were considered unnecessary (Guloglu, 2026). Unlike the work of Bellmer, who didn't give the sculptures he made a face and reduced them down to just the body, these dolls often have faces of pleasure or seduction, they were never left neutral (Guloglu, 2026), despite the fact that they were literally cut open, it seemed they were simply a spectacle for the male gaze.

Conclusion:

Within this proposal the deeper exploration of these 3 key words has created many deeper connections such as the large importance of materials used in artwork, but also used by who and does this change the feelings surround them? Looking into the uncanny has given a new view on making art for 'negative' purposes whether intentional or not, that this is an important subject to

explore further. Looking into the work of Eva Hesse has brought more questions as to the intentional use of unstable materials and then into the restoration of artwork without permission. These subjects are fascinating to view through the lens of gender, because it does have an impact on how all these artists and their work have been acknowledged and received by viewers. The research question from this proposal, to continue this research is “In which specific ways have gendered expectations within art held a biased barrier between the artist and the viewer”, exploring this via the material used, expectations from the artists and their intentions.

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