

Holly Walker

My female body.



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My female body.

It looks familiar. And it is, it is shown everywhere.

Advertised as consumable,

accessible

My female body is selling you beer,

My female body cleans your home,

My female body is waiting for you online,

My female body,

My female body is an object, in the subject of \_\_\_\_\_ life.

.  
. .  
. .  
. .  
. .  
. .  
. .

Is 'my female body' an independent object?

Comfortable to look at through the *dominant gaze*.

the soft skin

the long lashes

the pink lips

the wide hips

the gentle hands

You know I'm reminded of Maya Angelou,

"It's in the reach of my arms,

The span of my hips,

The stride of my step,

The curl of my lips.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally." (Angelou, 1995)

This has all been said before.

by me.

This time feels different though.

I am going to try and articulate why and in the process hopefully learn for myself. This writing piece is an act of embodied research in itself. This is my performance practice transferring into my language and writing style.

Undoubtedly being predominantly a nude performance artist, as a woman, empowers me.

I get a rush of courage every time I bare my flesh and I dare my audience to have the “guts to deal with cunts” (Wilke, 2007).

This is the same rush I imagine the women of the '60s and '70s had during their coming-out period and the beginnings of exploring their sexuality. Gray Watson writes, “This focus on the immediacy of the body was enacted by a young generation of artists who displayed their own, often naked, bodies in the public sphere, and extended by some who made their own bodies the theme of their artistic exploration” (Watson, 2007, p. 8 - 9).

I can feel them with me. I feel the same need to enact the feminist cry,

“The personal is political.” (Watson, 2007)

“The personal is political.” (Hanisch, 2009)

“The personal is political.” (A whole bunch of feminists in the 1960s)

Perhaps because I am still physically trying to explore notions of my identity for myself.

Embodiment in performance involves an emotional and psychological engagement, and a physical enactment. Doing this in my body, a body that is already marked with so many politics, feels to me to be the most human, grounding and connective form of creative and conceptual communication. I'm learning who I am and what my politics are, then creatively communicating them. Amelia Jones writes, “If the point of any feminist and/or queer theory and practice is, at the very least, to create an awareness of the ways in which gender and sexuality inform discourse and determine structures of individual as well as collective social, cultural, and economic power, then we can say that both are inherently *political*” (2016, p. 15).

My politics may be fundamentally different from those of the performance artists of the '60s and '70s, but there are echoes of the past and new politics that arrive with cultural and social change that beg me to make art.

There are new politics and attitudes towards feminism. I don't want to lose momentum in the movement but there are moments of criticism around whether our world still needs feminist, nude, even '*vulgar*' artistic protests.

yes.

2016. Tess Thackara writes, “The art world must reflect this more expansive, diverse form of feminism, finding commonalities across races, genders, and classes. We must both draw connections between the work of women and other oppressed groups, and spotlight their diversity and specificities. Some have tried to argue that it’s time to put identity politics to bed; it’s not. The experiences of many people in this world are still shaped by the way they identify themselves, or the way others identify them. But we need a vastly expanded notion of the conditioning factors that make up our realities” (Thackara, 2016).

We still need feminism; we still need protest.

“Revolution is not a one-time event.” (Lorde, 1984, p. 140)

)

Real questions I have been asked in 2017 – only because I am a female performance artist:

“Why do you need to live perform?”

“Why do you insist on doing it nude?”

“Are you just trying to be provocative?”

“Didn’t we have the sexual revolution already?”

“Are you a lesbian?”

“Butch or Femme?”

“If you’re a feminist, do you still suck your boyfriend’s dick?”

“Are you dom or sub?”

“Can you be a sub and a feminist?”

“If you are in a monogamous relationship, can you still be a nude performance artist?”

“Does your partner know?”

“You must sleep with a lot of people because you’re a feminist and don’t care right?”

“Can I kiss you?”

I have become intimately accessible.

*But it’s 2017...*

Before I learnt about my feminism, I thought I was just loud and sexually confident.

In 2017 I am still loud and sexually confident, but I also have research and embodied experiences to ~~justify this.~~

Understand this.

Xabier Arakistain writes, “I discovered feminism as a theory that explained my life to me and clarified that social dynamics I was living in had a logic: the logic of the patriarchy. So I wasn’t introduced to feminism rather, I had to go and look for it.” (Arakistain, 2016, p. 226)

I had a similar experience to Xavier Arakistain with my own *‘feminism virginity.’* In the way that once I began to learn about it, it sounded like my own story, a place I belonged, a familiar space.

Once I found this space it became hard to want to be anywhere else. This evolved my feminist identity, because I found a place that was the same.

Once I lost my '*feminism virginity*.'

A lot of people become really interested in me.

Similar to my actual virginity.

I suppose they were both provocative events.

Feminism was a same place to me, But other to people around me.

I Learnt.

being woman

is being

other

being a feminist woman

is being

other

being a nude, performance artist, feminist, woman

is being

other.



As a body.

And a performance artist.

The feeding of my mind will decide where I position my physical self in the world, how my physical self acts in the world. Raised by a solo mother, inspired and informed by my female whakapapa,

It isn't surprising I've ended up a feminist performance artist.

The knowledge I have gained from these women has shaped the research of myself. In sharing this research in the form of performance art, I hope to communicate in a new language the knowledge these women have fed to me and invite it to be accessible to other bodies, The audience.

“The key to emotional strength and personal freedom is always to bring the responsibility back to ourselves. We may not be able to change events, but we can change our response to them” (2001, pp. 66).

Knowing these histories and letting them inform my work is about reproduction, re-articulation and producing something based on historical embodied experiences, for the new cultural, social and economic climate.

Sometimes it can feel like a failure when the audience believes sexual politics and feminism in performance art is outdated. They love to see a naked girl, but don't want to deal with the politics. My 21-year-old body can bring currency to the creative concept and I do feel a responsibility to make my work accessible and thoroughly considered.

I have contemplated how perhaps when viewing something like a feminist, nude performance, the audience needs to step back and stop immediately trying to receive knowledge for themselves, be changed or cultivated by the work. By looking into the performance artist, the performance body, and rather than instantly and probably subconsciously trying to make a relative connection to their own experience or circumstance, they could look into the body performing the work and witness their position.

Why do they feel the obligation to do this?

Why are they putting their body in front of me?

What sort of importance does the subject they are addressing have, to a point they will perform a 'concept' essentially in hope that someone may understand or gain some clarity of their own?

Rather than trying to consume, observe.

Make an exchange.

Give art a chance to communicate with us before we look back within ourselves.

My Art is an object, in the subject of \_\_\_\_\_ life.

We can decide how much of our time and ourselves we commit to each object within our vaster subject. By giving more time, making more space to see an object, understand and listen to an object. We can alter our beliefs and position within our subject. Humans too often try to resolve their questions or problems in their lives by becoming quiet and existentially looking within themselves for an answer.

Because, god forbid, disrupting someone else with reality.

Art can ask us to look at it, but to really gain anything from the work we have to look past ourselves.

Jeanette Winterson writes, "Art, all art, not just painting, is a foreign city, and we deceive ourselves when we think it familiar. No-one is surprised to find that a foreign city follows its own customs and speaks its own language. Only a boor would ignore both and blame his deflating on the place. Everyday this happens to the artist and the art. ... We have to recognise that the language of art, all art, is not our mother tongue" (1996, pp. 4).

At this point of being a performance artist I have felt a shift in the way my artist body transfers into my personal body and this somehow enables a sort of accessibility to me.

Have I shared too much of a physically intimate experience with an audience that I am now supposed to be comfortable with exposing myself?

My nude self.

My emotional self.

Making my 'private parts' public parts.

What constitutes private parts and public parts? It feels to me at points that these sites were proscribed by someone else, everyone else.

I would much rather be naked in a room full of art critics than have to have a conversation with one about an emotional trauma of my past. This may not be normal.

The emotional trauma is there in my body and it informs my creativity.

My embodied experience informs how I communicate in society; it defines my perceptions of the world.

When I perform nude it feels like I am giving an audience my story, my honest and purist self.

Because literally here I am this body. Its scars, its hairs, its bruises, see all of me.

This is my gift to you.

I see the performance as a gift to the audience, a gift of perspective or an opportunity to empathise with a new concept that may have been foreign to them.

This is my gift to you.

In giving this gift I gain a sense of fulfillment within myself because I have created art. I have materially articulated an intangible concept and given it to an audience. Encouraging an audience to understand and speak my language with me, language they may have known but forgotten. Language that feels more natural than their mother tongue.

I have developed a performance language to communicate these ideas.

To be consumed

observed

appropriated.

And through consumption, we are potentially at risk of being appropriated or perceived alternatively dependent on different individuals' contexts and embodied perspectives.

“The risk of visibility is the risk of any translation – a weaker version of the original script, the appropriation by (economically and artistically) powerful ‘others’. The payoff of translation (and visibility) is more people will begin to speak your tongue” (Phelan, cited in Schneider, p. 41). The more visibility I have gained, the broader the perspective and context stretches.

I have learnt that I have limited control over the reading of my work. With the consuming culture around art and creative practice, the audience tends to take what they want or need.

This became explicitly clear when I began working in a video medium and sharing my work to a broader audience.

@THEINTERNET.

MORE VISIBILITY

MORE ACCESSIBILITY.

I MOVED FROM AN ARTIST BODY TO SEX OBJECT.

I HAVE ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGED THE ASSOCIATION OF SEX WITH MY BODY WHEN I PERFORM.

SEX.

SEX AS FUCKING  
SEX AS LOVE  
SEX AS GENDER  
SEX AS BIOLOGY  
SEX AS CREATION  
SEX AS WHAKAPAPA

.....BUT I'M JUST SEX TO THE INTERNET...

..... [HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/HOLLYRPWALKER](https://vimeo.com/hollyrpwalker) .....

SHOWING ART OUTSIDE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ART SPACE, AND MAKING IT SO ACCESSIBLE, ALLOWED ME TO RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE IMMEDIACY OF LIVE FEMINIST, NUDE PERFORMANCE. WITHIN INTIMATE GROUPINGS OF PEOPLE, THE PERFORMANCE IMMEDIACY AND INTENTIONS ARE MORE DIRECTLY COMMUNICATED. MY AUDIENCE WAS NOW INFINITE AND BY PROTECTING THE VIEWERS WITH A COMPUTER SCREEN BETWEEN US, THE ACCOUNTABILITY AN INDIVIDUAL AUDIENCE MEMBER FEELS IN THE SPACE, MY SPACE, IS LOST.

PERFORMANCE MAKES ME POWERFUL REGARDLESS OF HOW MY BODY IS READ.

Because I know my truth.

I KNOW, TO YOU, THIS BODY COULD LOOK LIKE,  
YOUR MOTHER'S BREAST  
YOUR PROSTITUTE'S ASS  
YOUR WIFE'S EYES  
YOUR CHILDREN'S KNEES AND ELBOWS.  
YOUR HIGH SCHOOL BOYFRIEND'S HANDS  
YOUR HIGH SCHOOL GIRLFRIEND'S MOUTH  
  
ALL FAMILIAR TO YOU, SOMETHING YOU ALREADY KNOW.

ALL YOURS.

NOT MINE.

'WHAT I LOOK LIKE,'  
  
BECAME FILTERED THROUGH A  
  
'WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO LOOK LIKE, FOR YOU.'

WITHOUT CONTROL OR IMMEDIATE DIRECTION FOR THE GAZE, THE INTERNET TOOK  
SOME OF MY POWER.

*We weren't seeing eye to eye.*

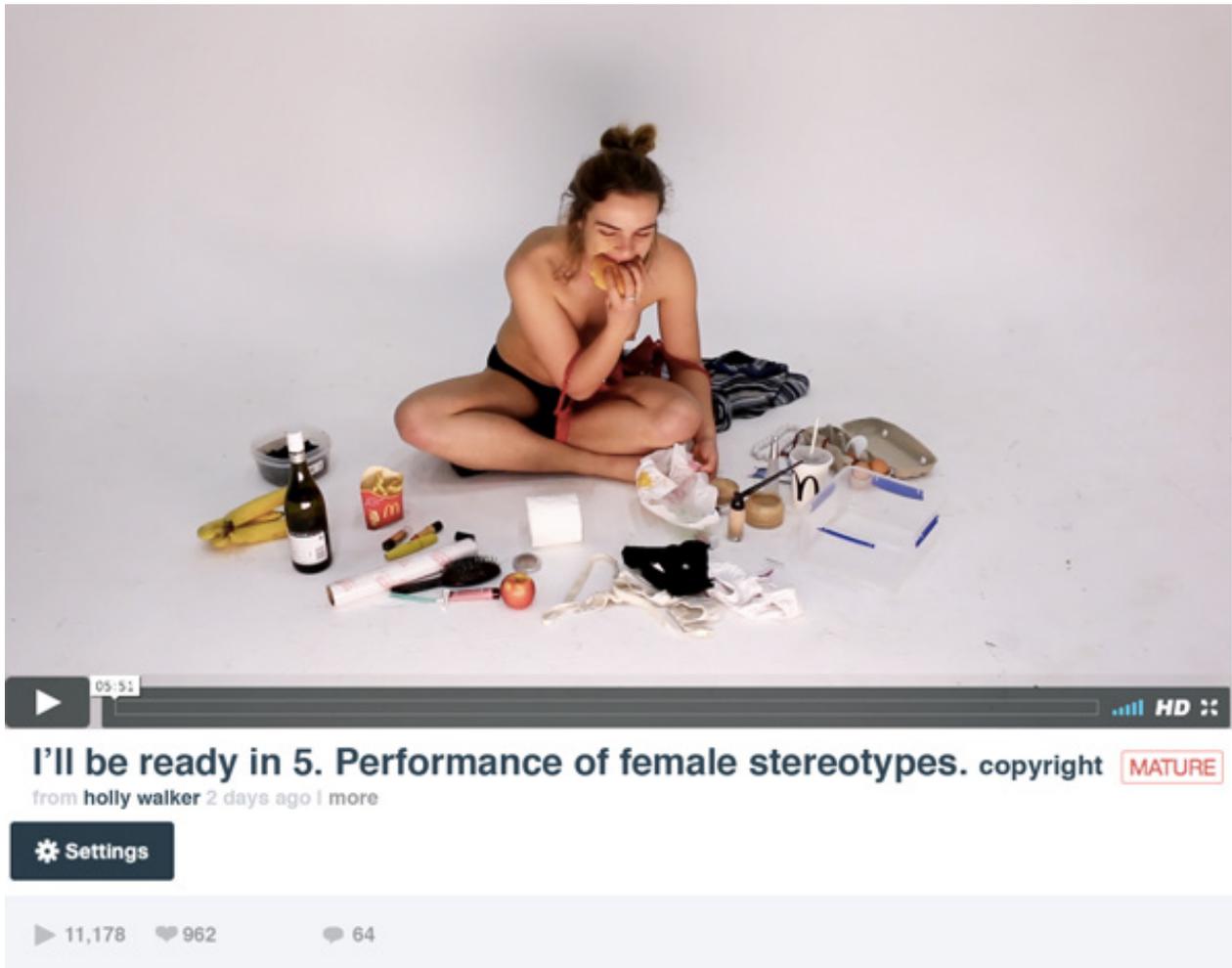
QUITE LITERALLY, THERE IS NO IMMEDIATE EMPATHY OR HUMANITY ABOUT VIEWING A BODY ON A SCREEN. IT IS NO LONGER LIVE PERFORMANCE; IT IS A VIDEO REPRODUCTION. MY CONFUSION AROUND THE ETHICS LIES WITHIN THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF HOW, IF IT'S NOT AN ACTUAL BODILY INTERACTION WITHIN THE SPACE, DOES THAT DISREGARD ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPATHY WITH A PERFORMANCE ARTIST? OR IS THE DISTANCE BETWEEN REALITY AND INTERNET TOO FAR, THEREFORE THE OBJECTIFICATION IS JUSTIFIED?

ALISON ADAM WRITES, "THERE IS A TENDENCY FOR ADVOCATES OF CYBER CULTURE, FROM ROBOTICISTS TO CYBERPUNK SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS, TO IGNORE AND EVEN DENY THE PRIMACY OF THE BODY. THIS REFLECTS A TURN TO THE VIRTUAL, WHICH, AT ITS EXTREME, SEES THE BODY AS MERE 'MEAT'. ... IF, AS I SUGGEST, PHILOSOPHY HAS A TENDENCY TO EQUATE WOMEN WITH THE BODILY REALM" (ADAM, 2005, P. 102).

AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR ONE OF MY VIDEO PERFORMANCES WAS PUBLICISED ON A GERMAN PORN SITE. MY INITIAL REACTION WAS THAT I BELIEVED I HAD DONE SOMETHING WRONG. BECAUSE IT HAD BEEN CATEGORISED BY SOMETHING BIGGER THAN ME AS PORN, IT WAS PORN. OVER 10,000 VIEWS NOW THAT THIS WORK WAS PORN. I'M COMPLETELY CONVINCED AT THIS POINT.

I MADE PORN.

## My big pornographic debut.



IRONICALLY THIS PERFORMANCE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN EXAGGERATION OF FEMININE STEREOTYPES. ALTHOUGH IT CAME TO BE MORE A DISPLAY OF MASCULINE STEREOTYPES ASSOCIATED TO PORN CONSUMPTION. IT FELT LIKE 10,000 PEOPLE SAW PORN, AGAINST ME, WHO SAW PERFORMANCE ART. THE POWER OF THE MAJORITY BECAME CONFUSING AND UNCOMFORTABLE. I READ THAT, "NUDITY REPRESENTS INNOCENTS. AWARENESS OF NUDITY REPRESENTS SIN"(LUCIE-SMITH, 2007, P.12). IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY AND THE FEMALE BODY, I'M NOT CHRISTIAN, BUT FOR SOME REASON WHEN I FELT MYSELF IN A 'DIRTIER', PORNOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT, IT DID FEEL LIKE SIN. MY ARTISTIC, BOLD AND UNFORGIVING PERFORMANCE BODY REVERTED TO THE SAFETY OF THE DOMINANT CULTURE'S PERSPECTIVE. I BEGAN QUESTIONING WHETHER THE ARTIST OR THE AUDIENCE CHOOSES THE CONTEXT.

AM I ART? OR AM I PORN?

I forgot my truth.

## 64 Comments

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**Fr**

It good to see there is still hair on some ladies

---

**ransom**

I want to watch you all day, you look like a dream Holly. You are a very sexy lady.

---

**Noisy Andrew**

The ironic comedy aspect of this is gold..

You deserve 10000 likes..

oh hang on..

"a woman should get 10 000 likes"...

---

**Ulf Larsson**

Hi Holly. Love to see your beautiful naked body. You are such a beautiful woman.

---

**John Angel**

This is incredible! You're talented with this!

I would love to fuck a woman like yo. You seem very emotionally intelligent . I want to show you how much i love your work. x

---

**Ed Porben**

Perfect body!

---

**Angel66**

I want to fuck your tight little ass so badly! I love watching you work so hard. everytime see you have a new video i get so hard 4 you

---

**Noel4**

Adorable ! merci...

---

**Topside**

Very sexy bod!

---

**Dieter Bauer**

Pretty girl , perfect and sexy body .

---

**Jonjon**

When i watch your videos i am wanting to masterbate myself, but it is hard to do so because it is about art making, you a very sexy girl Holly.

---

**Ja Bond881**

Mmmmn gorgeous xP

---

**loinol101**

You are an angel, I love the way you articulate metaphors in your work. you also have a perfect little body which is sexy to watch. thank you.

---

**John An3**

This is incredible! You're talented with this!

---

**William Make**

Would like to see more. Beautiful girl!

**Reply**

If art is in the eye of the beholder,

the beholder,

be holding,

his cock while watching my 'art' ONLINE .

It's no longer my context.

Or my problem.

Realising I couldn't communicate creative concepts with a nude body because it was saturated in everyone else's sex. My body once freeing, became restricting, became frustrating.

"Where the masculine imagination saturates the social arena with its obsessive return to the Woman's body, or the Woman as body, women only have an artificial power frustrated by the multiple obstacles that exist between them and the world" (Irigary, 1984, p. 28 - 29).

I felt like screaming "WAIT, WAIT, *LISTEN TO ME!*"

---

There is a silver lining though, because I refuse for there not to be.

In considering universal creation myths in relation to my moral compass and my *sin*, I was reminded of this silly quote: “From Eve to Pandora, the female sex has only generated misfortune” (Zabunyan, 2005, p. 89). If so, *sin* and *misfortune* have been some of the most important pivotal points for creation. I only wish to be as radical as those two matriarchs.

My *sin* and *misfortune* with the internet is my context to own now, and I can take from it what I need and leave behind the rest. In the time of being reminded of the sexualisation and objectification that happens when the artist isn't present on the internet, I have been gifted with the knowledge of knowing my art isn't redundant. This has been an insecurity of mine in the process of becoming so involved in feminist art-making. There has been a lingering feeling that I may be over-reacting or being over-emotional. But then I stop and think, in whose opinion?

I want to be over-reacting because just acting isn't comfortable for me.

I want to be over-emotional because just emotional without questioning my feelings doesn't satisfy me.

I'm not talking to the point of extremism, just enough to be radical.

Becoming radical.

I remember the first time I went to Siân Torrington's feminist group, and we had to go around the circle and say why we came to the group. My response was something like ...

"Because I want to learn more about my identity and have a safe space to be myself, a self that feels different to who I am 'supposed to be'."

A couple more people said why they were there ...

"because I want to listen and learn"

"because I don't know enough about feminism and I'm a woman"

"because I think I have too much sex for a girl, and it's been blamed on daddy issues but I don't believe that bullshit, so I figured I was a feminist"

– *that one made me laugh.*

It came to Siân's turn and she said,

"I came to this group because I want a revolution." (Torrington, 2016)

The feeling I had when I heard the boldness and agency in those words is a feeling I became addicted to. It was the gift that my feminist whakapapa had been giving me, but I was there in the room with her.

Realising there are others, embodying our exchange. Powerful and together,

I thought, me too.

Thank you.

## Type references

Chaparral pro.

Designed by Carol Twombly. Finding female typefaces for essays has been an impossible task but I got there: <http://typedia.com/explore/typeface/chaparral/revision/5/>

ORATOR STD.

JOHN SCHEPPLER. IT CAN BE USED FOR TABULAR MATERIAL OR TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION. COMMONLY USED FOR WEB CODING.

### Arial.

Font sourced from Pornhub.

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### Key words

Performativity, body politics, identity, feminism, autobiographic, 'personal is political', 'public/private', sex, gender, protest, New Zealand, art

### Abstract

Before I learnt about my feminism, I thought I was just loud and sexually confident.

In 2017 I am still loud and sexually confident, but I also have research and embodied experiences to justify this.

Understand this.

With a growing understanding of my feminist whakapapa from Audre Lorde to My Mother, and the richness of knowledge they have left for us, I want to share, I want to be loud, I want to talk about sex, I want to talk about personal politics and how it honestly feels, not how it is supposed to feel. This may seem over-emotional, and it is.

I over-react because just acting isn't enough for me.

I'm over-emotional because emotional without questioning my feelings doesn't satisfy me.

I write to understand my space and more than that, who I am within that space. Stripping back false constructions and ideals that have become ritual conformity to reveal, relearn, reverse and find an authentic sense of my identity.

### Author

I am Holly Walker, a 21-year-old woman from Wellington, Aotearoa. I am a newly graduated fine arts student whose practice is mainly based in performance. My works, writing and art practice, explore the abundant realm of feminine sexuality, my own body politics and the echoes of women before through embodied research and autobiographical reflection.

In my work I allow the rational to submit to the emotional. Through this process, I attempt to create a raw, unfiltered expression of questions that leave space for curiosity and engage with my research. By writing in a performative style, I aim to display a journey, a thinking process, to further a communal perspective on the subjects of feminism, identity, gender politics, the private vs the public, and sex.

### Course information

The Honours Research Seminar, at the College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, is a programme of advanced study, led by Martin Patrick, that addresses the application, dissemination and discussion of research practices in contemporary art. Emphasis is placed on selective investigation and presentation of critical issues in the production of art and culture.

The final assignment of this fourth-year seminar functions as an opportunity to effectively articulate aspects of individual studio research practice within a larger critical context. The assignment consists of researching and writing an informed critical essay that both examines and engages with relevant materials related to individual practice. This paper was submitted in June 2017.