

# Reinterpreting the Mannequin

## Allen Jones, Cathy Wilkes and Morag Keil

*Amy Budd*

The cultural colonisation of women's bodies in art has long been a target of feminist critique. As Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock have argued, **'when confronted with images of a woman, or images in which we discern what we take to be a woman, the act of interpretation and recognition often confirms ideologically sexist and patriarchal meanings for that figure'**, such as the image of **'woman'** produced according to the ideology of man.<sup>1</sup> Sheila Rowbotham summarises the implications of this for women in her influential text *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* by suggesting it is through the politics of representation that **'we learn ourselves through women made by men'**.<sup>2</sup> In a culture saturated with man-made images of women, we are profoundly shaped by such artificial symbols of femininity, particularly as it is through these images that we come to imagine **'what we were or might be'**.<sup>3</sup> However, images of women are so frequently exploited as representational subjects, as Laura Mulvey proposes that they often figure as an empty **'sign'** in visual culture, without necessarily signifying the meaning of **'woman'**.<sup>4</sup> As a result, much feminist work has of necessity become critical work, a work of negation of those easy and ideologically bound

pleasures associated with an image of **'woman'** produced by men as an **'object of desire'** or identification for women.<sup>5</sup>

Given the abundance of feminist theory problematising the representation of women in art, how then should one attempt to read work by contemporary artists who integrate contested male-manufactured **'signs'** of women into their wide and varied practices? In particular, artworks by women artists who re-appropriate and therefore seemingly endorse the dreaded ideal of femininity, the female shop mannequin? Glasgow-based contemporary artist Cathy Wilkes is one such figure.

Wilkes states her unapologetically awkward installations stem from issues or problems in her own life and are attempts to renegotiate relations between human beings and objects. Yet this in turn is problematic, as Wilkes sculptural constellations of everyday objects crucially depend upon the inclusion of numerous *svelte* denuded female shop mannequins, used by the artist to signify the female subject in her work. As a result, her large-scale assemblages are directly implicated in wider discourses of art history, particularly contributing to feminist narratives that interrogate



Allan Jones *Women as Furniture: Table, Chair, Hatstand* (1969)  
 Courtesy of Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen

the signification of “*woman*” via the vacant “*sign*” of the shop mannequin.

Wilkes’ contemporary appropriation of the plastic female nude significantly also establishes a dialogue with the work of British artist Allen Jones, whose infamous sculptural series *Women as Furniture* from the early 1970s appropriated the female form by exaggerating and contorting the bodies of mannequins into submissive positions of domesticity. Yet, Wilkes’ enigmatic utilisation of the mannequin does not necessarily reproduce the same misogynist meanings for “*woman*” as Jones’ sculptures. So, before looking closely at the implications of Wilkes’ ready-mades, it seems necessary to consider first the historical and contemporary usages of mannequins in art by examining the context and content of Allen Jones’ work.

Jones became a notorious figure throughout the Women’s Movement following a solo exhibition of *Women as Furniture* in the early 1970s. This highly controversial series comprises three life-size female effigies, individually entitled *Chair*, *Hat Stand* and *Table*, whose manufactured bodies are manipulated by Jones into three distinct positions of erotic subservience. Modelled in clay, cast in fibreglass, then painted and clad in leather accessories, the contorted and exploited bodies of these serviceable women-as-objects indulge the sexual urges of the artist, whilst ideologically ‘**dislocating the expectations of the viewer**’ through their passive utilitarianism.<sup>6</sup> Merging the practicality of household objects with the visual grammar of fetishism, Jones intends to provoke the viewer ‘**to decide for him/herself about the aesthetic stance**’,<sup>7</sup> in other words to negotiate the object

and decide whether to sit/stand/use the object as desired. Here, “*woman*” as signified by the mannequins, is implicated in a misogynistic game of representation. As Marco Livingstone writes, taking ‘**the greatest liberties with the human form**’ Jones initiates an illusion of signification and interpretation, where the exploitation of “*woman*” as “*sign*” is temporarily masked by the artist’s supposed expert art making techniques and an ‘**an extraordinary fidelity to natural appearances**’.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, from a woman’s perspective there is very little that is “*natural*” about the subjugated bodies of Jones’ mannequins. Yet Livingstone soon realises ‘**these figures are not counterfeits of reality but exaggerations of the truth**’, particularly where the sexed anatomy of “*woman*” has been highly exaggerated in each sculpture to ‘**emphasise sexually desirable areas, such as the breasts and buttocks**’.<sup>9</sup> Jones’ exaggerations of the physical form intensify the viewer’s experience by manipulating his response with eroticism. As a result, *Women as Furniture* exists as an ideological and illusionistic representation of “*woman*” made in the image of man, an exclusively male-orientated scopie pleasure produced by the artist.<sup>10</sup> In his defence, Jones argued that ‘**my exaggeration of the female form is for a good reason. The figures of course are not real people, but painted signs and a sign should be clear**’.<sup>11</sup> Of course, Jones’ concept is hardly new. The body and image of woman has been appropriated for architectural, sculptural and design purposes across history, from the architectural Caryatids in Greek temples to Victorian edifices, Man Ray’s iconic sofa of Mae West’s lips and other *objects d’art* throughout the centuries.<sup>12</sup> Yet by deciding to



exaggerate this “*dangerous*” representational route by supremely exploiting women’s already exploited image, *Women as Furniture* continues to be troubling for feminists.

Laura Mulvey’s writing on Allen Jones is significant here, particularly her seminal essay ‘You don’t know what is happening, do you, Mr Jones?’, which succinctly maps out a psychoanalytic framework through which Jones’ fetishistic visual language and grammar can be read. Using Freud’s understanding of the male unconscious to deconstruct the ‘aesthetic stance’ of Jones paintings and sculptures, Mulvey’s essay exposes the unreliability of man-made representations by claiming that such images of women can only reveal the conscious desires of their cultural producer. Their parades of female forms often have very little to do with “*woman*” and everything to do with man as ‘**the true exhibit is always the phallus**’.<sup>13</sup> As Mulvey states, ‘**man and his phallus is the real subject of Allen Jones’ painting and sculpture, even though they deal exclusively with images of women on display**’.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly, Mulvey’s analysis of *Women as Furniture* is drawn out of the interaction between Jones’ images of women and the explicit content of mass media collected as ‘**source material**’ by the artist.<sup>15</sup> First published in the 1969 monograph *Figures*, Jones’ sprawling scrapbook depicts numerous images of semi-naked women cut from respectable (*Harpers Bazaar*; *Life*, *Vogue*) and non-respectable (*Exotique*, *Bound*, *Bizarre*) magazines, along with a plethora of postcards, pulp fiction, cartoons, film stills and other mass media advertisements.<sup>16</sup> Distributed across the opening pages of *Figures*, Jones’ visual library in many ways precludes the ‘aesthetic stance’ of his (re)produced female forms in *Women as Furniture*. From playboy pinups to rubber clad bondage girls, the female forms in Jones’ image bank are always buxom, nearly naked women with splayed legs teetering on stilettos. As Laura Mulvey states, ‘**by publishing these clippings Allen Jones gives vital clues not only to how he sees women, but to the place they occupy in the male unconscious in general**’.<sup>17</sup> Namely, that women exist as frequently fetishised objects for male scopophilic pleasure, produced in a ‘**state of suspended animation**’ by Jones, ‘**without depth or context, withdrawn from any meaning other than the message imprinted by their clothes stance and gesture**’.<sup>18</sup>

As Mulvey’s essay makes clear, Jones’ imagery is that of fetishism, where ‘**the sight of woman’s imaginary castration is displaced by the artist onto a variety of reassuring but often surprising objects – shoes, corsets, rubber goods, belts, knickers, etc – which serve as signs for the lost penis but have no direct connection with it**’.<sup>19</sup> As a fetishist, the

sign itself is the subject of Jones sexual fantasy, thus explaining his fixation on certain objects (leather straps, corsets, stilettos, gloves) or parts of the (female) anatomy (breasts, nipples, buttocks) in his work, where the object or anatomical part signifies the (Jones’) phallus, and replaces a relationship with a real person, or “*real*” images of women in his work. Yet, as mentioned previously, there is a visual grammar of fetishism at work in Jones’ imagery. According to Freudian logic, women without a phallus, like the women in *Chair*, *Table* and *Hat Stand*, have to undergo ‘**punishment by fetish objects**’ ranging from tight shoes and corsetry through rubber goods to leather and torture, to compensate for their sexual “*lack*”.<sup>20</sup> As a result, all three female forms are humiliated into erotic positions of forniphilia by Jones, from kneeling on all fours in *Table*, being choked in leather and precariously balancing on stilettos in *Hat Stand* to subjecting the body to painful contortion in *Chair*. Jones’ trilogy of nameless women are mutually constricted by leather corsets, collars and belts, and then bent into submission by his phallogocentric visual language. Such misogynistic representational images perceptibly stem from the women pictured in Jones’ scrapbook. Reading his work alongside the imagery collected in his scrapbook one can see Jones’ female forms ‘**clearly form a definite pattern, which have their own visual vocabulary and grammar**’.<sup>21</sup>

Jones’ work may throw new light on the notion of woman as spectacle, yet the way in which the female image has been systematically appropriated and transformed by the mass media continues to be troubling, particularly when comparing Jones’ explicit representations of “*woman*” to the eroticised female bodies that currently populate contemporary culture. Thirty years on, the materiality of Jones’ mannequins may have dated, particularly in terms of superficial changes in fashion, yet his highly exaggerated female forms are nevertheless immediately recognisable to a contemporary audience. Not only due to their iconic cultural status, but because their physicality resembles an “*ideal*” desirable image of woman popularised and disseminated by the mass media today, particularly in fashion, gaming culture and the adult film industry. The gap between the ideological sign of the mannequin and the “*real*” image of woman is closing quickly, especially as an increasing number of women choose to alter their corporeal image with plastic surgery and extreme dieting. When Sheila Rowbotham warned us that ‘**we learn ourselves through images made by men**’, she did not imagine that the politics of representation would lead to women



Cathy Wilkes *Non Verbal (version)* (2006) Oil on canvas, mannequins, aluminium tray, corn oil, LCD screen, pram, motorcycle helmet and mixed media Dimensions Variable Courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute/ Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow Photo: Andre Norin Installation view Printemps de Septembre, Toulouse -September 2006

consciously choosing to imitate artificiality through their very “real” bodies. In this context the “flawless” mannequin continues to endure as a somewhat modest, yet nevertheless emblematic female “sign”. Returning to Wilkes, how should one read her inclusion of the plastic female nude from a feminist perspective, particularly after Jones’ misogyny, and in a climate where the mannequin is more contested sign for femininity than ever?

As Sophie O’Brien notes, ‘the human body, and specifically the female one, is similarly both a real and conceptual point of departure in Wilkes’s work’.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Jones’ explicit representations of “woman” in *Women as Furniture*, Wilkes’ utilisation of the mannequin, although fetishised to an extent, is far more enigmatic in its representational visual grammar. Manifesting as stand-ins, props, or even shadows of real women, the female mannequin in Wilkes’ assemblages strangely returns us to the personal and specific, and the problems of representing female subjectivity through images of “woman”.

Drawing upon the most intimate of personal experiences (the birth of her children, the death of her mother and father, her own domestic life), Wilkes’ materially awkward and visually mundane installations invite viewers to ‘search for

the associative meaning of objects’ through the precise assembling of readymade materials. Rejecting the seductive, glossy aesthetic of custom-made manufacture evident in Jones’ work, Wilkes’ material constellations instead embrace the brute aesthetic of the everyday, where component objects range from electric ovens to step ladders, through to pushchairs, TV monitors and dirty kitchen bowls and other ephemeral detritus. It is here within this system of found materials that the female mannequin is located, signifying human, and particularly female agency and labour as key concerns of Wilkes’ work. Vulnerable and powerless in their plastic nakedness, the female figure recurs in most of Wilkes’ installations. Yet seen as single elements, the mannequins alone cannot be regarded as a cipher through which to decrypt Wilkes’ practice. They lose their figurative obligations amongst a whole host of other materials and become objects ‘equal to all others in the room’.<sup>23</sup>

In *Non Verbal*, first seen in the Scottish pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2005, Wilkes’ concern with both human and body politics first becomes apparent. Two half-dressed female mannequins stand bare breasted and back to back. Perching on tiptoes, they balance precariously with heels and calves staked to the floor, with one wearing black nylon tights





**Cathy Wilkes *We Are Pro Choice* (2007)** Materials: 3 glass bell ornaments, 1 china bell, 1 broken green glass, 2 china cups, 2 glasses, 1 broken plastic glass, 1 broken clock face, 4 clock hands, staples, 2 latex casts of ladder steps with wooden/ wire/metal hanging device, 40cm metal bar. 1 cloth, dried lavender stems, 250cm ladder, 1 plastic racquet, 1 plastic ornament, wire, oil stained canvas 81 x 61 x 3cm, 17cm dia wooden table, 1 toilet pan, 1 mannequin, 2 empty drinks cans. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund 2009

from hip to toe, the other naked apart from thin skeins of paint dripping down her legs. In between them Wilkes places an abandoned brand new TV monitor, whilst ceramic shards and the broken heads of baby dolls lie scattered at their feet. A high-tech pushchair is placed in front of one model, suggesting both the presence and absence of a child, and amongst the other readymades perhaps the commodification of motherhood and waste of material culture. The scene is confusing and strangely dramatic, yet as the title suggests the work, a 'non verbal' or silent encounter is its result. Like the mute mannequins, objects determinedly retain their objecthood and presence in space, leaving the viewer to unpick meaning from the spaces betwixt and between objects.

A basic feminist reading of Wilkes' work could be made by assuming that her work attempts to examine the pressures on modern women to work, raise children and still look like size zero mannequins. Yet Wilkes employs the female

mannequin not to simply to illustrate the "idea" of woman, like the phallogocentric idea of woman so crudely represented in Jones sculptures, but rather as abstract and obliquely recurring motifs that enable Wilkes to adopt an objective stance for re-thinking the ways in which art and female experience are actively perceived. Wilkes herself states 'I've used shop mannequins and also the motif...of the nurse, but the mannequin in general to try to feel what someone else feels in art', whereby re-appropriating the singular "sign" for woman in scattered compositions such as *I Give You All My Money* and *Non Verbal*, allows Wilkes to expose the problematic ways in which viewers, and particularly women, interpolate themselves within visual signs of popular culture.<sup>24</sup> Positioned within a wider system of ready-mades, with their bodies embellished and faces obscured, Wilkes man-made mannequins are made anew, transformed by the artists' own artworking methods into critical signifiers for complex female subjectivities. Rather than simply substituting oppressive images of exploited women's bodies, such as Jones' mannequins, with positive symbolism and confirming stereotypical attitudes towards women's bodies and feminism from a contemporary perspective, Wilkes' instead chooses to invoke a critical aesthetic stance by reworking the very "sign" though which woman is objectified: the mannequin, to speak of the unbridgeable separation in reality and representation, between being and knowing one and other. With certain titles of Wilkes' work, such as *We Are Pro Choice* and *She's Pregnant Again*, alluding to complex female experiences and feminist themes of abortion, domestic labour and maternal care it could even be said that at the heart of Wilkes' installations lies the implicit traumas of being "woman", where the mannequin figures serve to highlight the disjuncture between what we perceive to be "real" against the reality of woman's experience, as signified by the constellations of crude domestic readymades. As Wilkes explains, 'even during the most intimate experience...the births of my children, the deaths of my parents, separation has remained unbridgeable. I rely on my feeling about this, our separation from each other, me the artist, and you... I rely on it to help me resist'.<sup>25</sup>

Wilkes manipulates the "image" of women, but with a lighter touch than Jones. Although mildly fetishised, her treatment of their ideological bodies occasionally seems ambivalent; they are manoeuvred into positions, but not outrageous poses, their hair, faces and skin surfaces are altered, but not entirely exploited. Yet significantly, unlike



Jones' mannequins, the faces of Wilkes' female nudes are repeatedly obscured. In *Non Verbal* (2005) the faces of both mannequins are puzzlingly hidden behind two paintings, whilst in a later version, *Non Verbal* (2006), the entire head of another half-dressed female nude is absurdly, and inexplicably obscured by a white motorcycle helmet. Elsewhere in *Splash* (2006), the frame of a painting is used to sit squarely on the face of a striding, bare breasted half-dressed mannequin. Wilkes' disguised and anonymous figures are simultaneously perplexing and disconcerting but unlike *Women as Furniture* they collectively refuse the gaze of the viewer, perhaps a further subversion of Jones' visual grammar in allowing the representational subject, and women in general, to retain a sense of empowerment in the face of "denuding" their image. Yet this motif of facial obscurity endures throughout Wilkes' installation, becoming elegantly refined in later artworks. In *We Are Pro Choice* a bracelet of ribbon wraps around a mannequin's head, upon which ornamental bells and aluminium drink cans dangle from threads. Although her glamorous make-up is revealed, there is a sense of distracted vision here, a distorted gaze in the figure of the mannequin, as these makeshift trinkets hang heavily across her face. The same ornamental motif appears again in the 2008 Turner Prize installation *I Give you All My Money* but on this occasion the head and face of the mannequin is heavily adorned with a bizarre and awkward chain of trinkets: a ping pong bat, china tea cups, driftwood, string. A nurse's hat rests on top of her head, and interlinked horse shoes also dangle from her wrist. Wilkes' mannequins are embellished, but also overburdened, alluding to themes of psychoanalysis in the metaphorical abstraction of the mannequins' faces, as if the minds of these women are troubled by too many thoughts.

However, as "signs" these figures can not be read individually as Wilkes' installations rely upon the interpretation of the whole assemblage, rather than just individual mannequins. Indeed, Wilkes understands that in encountering her work **'there's no expectation that an audience will participate. And no need for someone to fully understand. At the same time, though contemplation and communion, all objects can become transcendental'**.<sup>26</sup> "Woman" in Wilkes work, and associated themes of female experience and feminist concerns, therefore transcendently emerge from the array of objects physically surrounding the female nudes, in addition to the gesture and poses of the mannequins themselves. Many tabloid newspapers exploited

the fact that Wilkes' mannequins in her 2008 Turner Prize *I Give You All My Money* nominated piece and *We Are Pro Choice* sit on toilet seats, overstating inevitable associations with defecation, waste and detritus. But the mannequin's proximity to, and material relationship with other objects in the space is also revealing. A mother herself, Wilkes selection of readymades repeatedly reference subjective aspects of feminine-maternal experience, where the carefully constructed material lexicon of installations such as *Non-Verbal* and *I Give You All My Money* invoke "woman's" being-in-the-world via the selection of objects on display. In *I Give You All My Money* pushchairs, child-sized bowls of porridge dregs and empty Bonne Maman jam jars allude to maternal labour, whilst supermarket checkouts and empty shopping trolleys speak of today's commodity culture. The domestic realm is referenced through the presence of cookers and kitchen equipment, whilst rosebuds strewn on the floor and a dirty pink foam mat etched with a love heart speaks of clichéd human relationships in romantic terms. Elsewhere the enigmatic yet repetitive motif of the stepladder describes themes of balance (also evident in Jones' *Hat Stand*) as well as notions of progression, uncertainty and perhaps also the invisible "glass ceiling" that lies ahead of women pursuing a career. Material language is, in the end, what makes Wilkes' work so engrossing, as her work satisfies and frustrates in equal measure. Continually revising and reworking material motifs and thematic concerns, Wilkes' sculptural assemblages generate a **'self-critical, complex and unique language that can be re-contemplated for each successive installation'**.<sup>27</sup> Wilkes' re-appropriation of images of women made by men – the visual grammar of the mannequin but also the readymade – enables her to simultaneously critique the stereotypical ideal of femininity, whilst also using it as a tool, a lexicon through which Wilkes' own attitudes to feminine-maternal subjectivity can be articulated.

Here "feminine-maternal subjectivity" can be understood as a post-Freudian exploration of feminine-maternal physical and psychic experience, an aspect of the human subject that the psychoanalyst famously failed to fully theorise during his lifetime. In her seminal text 'Stabat Mater' Julia Kristeva warned us that we are living in an age which lacks a discourse on the complexity and meaning of motherhood, as "She" is one of those ever-present and yet shadowy figures who disappears from the various discourses that specifically try to account for her.<sup>28</sup> Yet as Griselda Pollock asserts, **'in so far as we are born to it, born in it, could live beside and think**



with it, we should pay critical attention to the maternal-feminine'.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, although the shadowy figure of the "mother" is not immediately made apparent in Wilkes' work, thematic concerns regarding immaterial labour and affects of care could be perceived to emerge from the constellations of objects, particularly in the figure of the nurse, thus articulating perhaps Wilkes' own feminine-maternal subjectivity. Wilkes states that **'looking for yourself in a piece of art, trying to see what someone else saw...is to do with the separation that there is between people, and the impossibility of completely feeling what someone else feels'** which she in turn believes is **'most extreme and most human and most painful when someone is caring for someone else, or someone is nursing someone else and trying to feel what they feel and be a companion to them'**.<sup>30</sup> Whether in friendship, actual nursing, maternal care or any relationship, **'to try and feel what someone else feels and to accompany them in their experience of life, and in their suffering'** for Wilkes is related to **'what I'm looking for in language as I apprehend it, coming from somewhere outside me, coming from a work of art or coming from a person, and that is acknowledges in itself the unbridgeable distance between human beings and the vastness of their inner world'**.<sup>31</sup> With this in mind empty the presence of Bonne Maman jam jars, pushchairs, broken dolls faces and the "nursing" female mannequin can only gain greater significance as a signs which speak of immaterial labour and the unspoken female affects of care.

The **"unbridgeable gap"** between inner and outer psychic experience, and the intimacy of human relationships in contrast to material culture, is also evidenced within the crude and sparse installation of everyday objects in Wilkes' work. Here, the installation space is loaded with absences, separation and lost associations between objects, which in turn could be interpreted as the trauma of feminine-maternal subjectivity. Wilkes herself touches on the trauma of separation implicit in maternal experience in referencing the biblical story of Jochabed and Moses when describing her work. Wilkes claims **'I've also used the processes, or the thoughts, of the experience of Moses' mother putting her baby in a basket and putting the basket in the water and pushing it out'** to understand the separation between objects and human relationships.<sup>32</sup> She admits to obsessing over this moment of release, **'the moment when her hand is on that object, the basket and her baby, and the moment when her fingers leave the basket. Do they push the basket? Does the air above the water take the basket? ... I won't leave this**

**sensation alone... I fixate on the sensation and vision of Jochabed's fingers and the bulrush basket which has her baby inside, her fingers rest on the basket, and then she withdraws then. According to her conscience'**.<sup>33</sup> Such deep fixation on the actual details of conscience is something Wilkes declares **'I pursue repeatedly in my work, where I might contemplate over over again events that have happened, or physical experience of objects or of bodies and reassess what really happened, and what that physical experience has to do with the inner reality'**.<sup>34</sup> Wilkes work can therefore be read as transcribing her real, autobiographical female experiences, where artworking and the appropriation of readymades such as mannequins, appears to provide a uniquely expressive language through which complex subjectivities conveyed. With this in mind, Wilkes' re-signification of **"woman"** and female experience via the **"sign"** of the mannequin and other liminal readymade objects crucially gives voice to this critically overlooked aspect of human subjectivity, and in many ways provides insight into how attitudes towards the objectification of women have changed today, where the critical rigour of her practice demonstrates how seemingly misogynistic representations of femininity can be creatively reworked and resignified, rather than refuted and resisted for, by a contemporary woman.

In conclusion, it seems fitting to consider the ways in which Wilkes' practice resonates with younger generations of artists, particularly the way in which her reworking of the mannequin acts as an invitation to fellow women artists to reconsider the ways in which **"woman"** and female experience continues to be represented in the material world. Morag Keil, also based in Glasgow, incorporates the figure of the mannequin into her own enigmatic sculptural installations and like Wilkes uses a similar visual/ aesthetic grammar to achieve her objectives. Keil also uses a mixture of found and readymade objects, and places the mannequin at the centre of her work. In the installation *Out of Your Head* a shop mannequin in a pale yellow sweatshirt is positioned alongside a flag on which is silk-screened what looks like the contents of someone's pocket. Next to her, there is a glass-topped plywood table. Underneath it are a number of photographs of wrists and napes of necks and on top of it are plaster-casts of asparagus spears and other anomalous items. Eschewing autonomy, Morag Keil employs such objects to demonstrate how associated meaning can be generated in the material world; it is dependent on relationships and is constructed in the space between. Once again the mannequin



**Morag Keil *Out of Your Head*. Installation. Embassy Photo: Stephen McGarry. Courtesy the Artist, Embassy, Edinburgh and Wilkinson Gallery, London**

appears as an integral sign within a wider representational system of readymades. Both iconic and intimate, the figure of the female plastic nude clearly endures as a richly symbolic “*sign*” for interrogation by young women working in the representational field. Pollock and Parker stated in *Framing Feminism* that for a work to be “*feminist*”, it must have a political effect as a feminist intervention, to act upon, make demands of and produces positions for its viewer, that above all it should ‘**subvert the normal ways in which we view art and are seduced into complicity with the meanings of the dominant and oppressive culture**’.<sup>35</sup> In re-appropriating the “*sign*” and body of the mannequin, and repositioning it as an abstract figure through which different articulations of feminine subjectivity can be made, both Wilkes and Kiel subvert the “*normal ways*” in which we view art and subsequently accept the persuasive meanings produced by this sign in dominant contemporary culture. As a result, contemporary artists continue to devise new languages for confronting the body politic and reclaiming the representation of “*woman*” in the visual field.

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#### Notes

1. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement* (London; New York: Pandora, 1987) p. 125
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

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4. Laura Mulvey ‘You don’t know what is happening, do you, Mr Jones?’ in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (eds) *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement* p. 130
5. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement* pp. 48-49
6. Marco Livingstone *Allen Jones: Sheer Magic* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979) p. 72
7. Charles Jencks *Allen Jones* (London: Academy Editions, 1993) p. 39
8. Marco Livingstone *Allen Jones: Sheer Magic* p. 71
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Charles Jencks *Allen Jones* p. 39
12. Ibid
13. Laura Mulvey, ‘You don’t know what is happening, do you, Mr Jones?’ p. 131
14. Ibid p. 128
15. Ibid p. 127
16. Ibid. Figures is now part of Tate’s collection.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid p. 130
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Carolyn Keery and Sophie O’Brien *Turner Prize 2008* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008) p. 21
23. Sophie O’Brien *Turner Prize 2008* p. 21
24. Cathy Wilkes quoted from *Turner Prize 2008* video interview on [www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/turnerprize2008/artists/wilkes\\_video.shtm](http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/turnerprize2008/artists/wilkes_video.shtm)
25. Michael Stanley *Cathy Wilkes* (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2009), p. 105
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid
28. Julia Kristeva ‘Stabat Mater’ in Toril Moi (ed) *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) p. 176
29. Griselda Pollock ‘Mother Trouble: The Maternal-Feminine in Phallic and Feminist Theory in Relation to Bracha Ettinger’s Elaboration of Maternal Ethics/Aesthetics’ *Studies in the Maternal* 1 (1) 2009 <http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk> p 5
30. Cathy Wilkes quoted from *Turner Prize 2008* video interview
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Michael Stanley *Cathy Wilkes* p. 105
34. Cathy Wilkes quoted from *Turner Prize 2008* video interview
35. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement* p. 93

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