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Interview: Hayley Newman

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Steve Pantazis talks to Hayley Newman about her current show at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester.

Steve Pantazis: 'The Volcano Lady' photographs document your performance where you wear a costume designed to resemble a live volcano. This work reminds me the Dadaists, such as Hugo Ball, who wore costumes. Has your work been inspired by the Dada performances?

Hayley Newman: In the early days I was really into Dada, it was incredibly formative. Now, I get inspired by lots of other things; more recently the relationship between activism and performance (a relationship which may count Dada in its trajectory as much as the suffragettes). I am interested in the politics of Dada and how art can be both political and subjective at the same time. Artist's and activist's need models for making political work and Dada is a good one to add to any toolkit.

SP: These two photographs are exhibited together with Emily Speed's 'Body/Building' drawings of buildings resembling armour with just two bare legs protruding. Do you feel that there is a strong connection between your practices and work?

HN: When Clarissa (the curator of the exhibition) said she was going to show Emily's *Body/Building* drawings, I suggested that my work *The Volcano Lady* from 2005 might go well with them - initially because of the legs. Over the period of the exhibition we have been able to consider the similarities and differences in both our approaches to making work. The armour in Emily's work reveals/protects fragility while my own work is political, critical, imaginative and fragile at the same time. That might be a good place to start the comparison.

SP: Is your new work 'Domestique,' consisting of over fifty donated used dishcloths with embroidered faces exhibited at Castlefield Gallery, connected to your 2012 performance 'Facing' at Cornerhouse? Can 'Domestique' be considered as the documentation of your performance? What do these dishcloths signify to you?

HN: I started embroidering the dishcloths a few years ago (there are over seventy by the way). Then I made the performance *Facing* at Cornerhouse, after which I continued sewing the dishcloths again. The performance was part of my process of finding out more about the work. In the performance I animated the cloths in front of my own face; bringing them to life. I don't see the cloths as documents of that performance, but entities in their own right. The dishcloths operate on many levels; they are both a critique of invisible labour (domestic and industrial) and expressive representations of faces (animal and human).

SP: *In the video of your performance 'Night Life of the Jewellery,' you are in a jewellery shop, where you are trying on all the jewellery from the window display. In this performance and similarly to others of yours, transformation of your own body/self takes place. Why are you interested in using your own body for transformation instead of others? Is this a mental and spiritual transformation and not just a physical one?*

HN: I don't generally deploy other people in my work. I am certainly interested in the potential of live work to be transformative and how the body (one's own or someone else's) might help that happen. There is always some sort of transformation in a performance, even if the performer is doing nothing; they are doing nothing over time and that becomes something.

SP: *Your new work 'Façadism,' whose title has been inspired by the architectural phenomenon of demolishing a building while preserving its façade, is a photocopied book of short stories. Why the stories are only about face? Will the future entries to the book only concentrate on stories about faces? Can the public contribute a story?*

HN: *Façadism* is a photocopy/facsimile of an unbound book with no page numbers. It could potentially include a limitless number of stories about faces (just like Douglas Huebler's proposal to photograph the existence of everyone alive). This work comes out of an interest in psychoanalysis and ethics; the face and the other. I see writing as an important part of my practice as an artist, and as such this project is not set-up to enable other people to contribute their stories.

SP: *Is this piece connected to 'Domestique'?*

HN: Yes. *Façadism*, *Histoire Économique* and *Domestique* are all connected (and not only by their French sounding titles). All the works are about façades; whether that is the façade of a building, a corporate façade or a face (the façade we present to the world or that others present to us).

SP: *Finally, your 'Histoire Économique,' a series of rubbings of details from the exteriors of banks on used envelopes, is associated to Max Ernst's series 'Histoire Naturelle.' Can you talk about this association and whether there are connections to the notion of body and architecture?*

HN: I started making rubbings of the fronts of banks before I knew about Max Ernst's series *Histoire Naturelle*. I became interested in it later, when it helped me to frame the rubbings both historically and theoretically. Interestingly corporations are given status as individuals via corporate personhood. I am interested in unconscious aspects of corporate life - what is repressed and what is revealed. Frottage seemed an appropriate technique to use in that it is often applied in an attempt to relinquish conscious control of an artwork. In *Histoire Économique* I use it as a method to help reveal something (the unconscious?) of the bank I am rubbing.

Hayley Newman & Emily Speed is on display at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester until 7 April 2013.

Steve Pantazis is an online editor for *Corridor 8*, independent art historian, writer and associate editor for *Versita Publishing* in the field of Arts, Music and Architecture.

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