The Impolite Body

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A successful symposium took place in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, in honour of the recipient of the biennial Françoise van den Bosch Award. The established international contemporary jewellery prize went to American artist Lauren Kalman. Two years ago, award recipient Lin Cheung was celebrated with a mini symposium, a format that has been repeated this year. Back then, the theme was crafts. This time the title was Designing Adornment, Questioning Beauty. Adornment and beauty were questioned from a bodily and gender perspective. Apart from keynote speaker Meredith Jones, an academic expert in feminist theories of both the body and media and communications, museum curator Amanda Pinatih took the stage, as did laureate Lauren Kalman herself and critical curator and art historian Manique Hendricks. In other words, this was the feminist edition.



Panel discussion with Manique Hendricks, Lauren Kalman, Meredith Jones and Amanda Pinatih; shown on screen is Lauren Kalman's Device for Filling a Void (4) acquired by the Françoise van den Bosch Foundation.

Lauren Kalman's practice revolves around objects and the body, she is not a typical jeweller. Some of her pieces are reminiscent of prostheses. Take, for example, the piece from her series Device for Filling a Void (4), (2015), acquired by the foundation and exhibited in a glass case in the auditorium. Pressed against the palate, screwed tight to the teeth, it makes

the wearer ache, cramp, and drool. The performance of wearing these pieces and capturing that on photo or video, is an essential part of her work. She uses a visual language reminding of medical equipment, and definitely also of jewellery. Stones and pearls are pinned directly on the skin in one work (Blooms, Efflorescence, and Other Dermatological Embellishments, 2009). In another, gilded ornaments lead the gaze to the intimate parts of a female body, "to question an art historic narrative that privileges a utopic, and myopic masculinist Eurocentric narrative"[i] (But if the Crime is Beautiful, 2014-2019). Where the female body traditionally should be closed, small and quiet, Kalman would explain during the symposium, she shows her body opened, not looking its best and with her eyes rolled back. Moral detail: it is always Kalman herself who is the model – she does not want another to endure this kind of extreme physical discomfort.



Françoise van den Bosch Award winner Lauren Kalman at the symposium Designing Adornment, Questioning Beauty at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

Labour to perform the feminine role

To start the symposium, recently appointed Design Curator Amandah Pinatih welcomed the audience on behalf of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. After a period of unrest in the museum and a refurbishment that left jewellery almost invisible (much to the dismay of the jewellery community), it was a relief to hear that the newly redesigned permanent collection includes jewellery again.

Pinatih handed over to Meredith Jones. The feminist scholar's keynote All That Glitters: 21st Century Feminine Bodies was in a sense a theoretical clarification of an 'incompleteness' that Lauren Kalman addresses through her work. Kalman's pieces speak of the pain and effort we go through to adorn ourselves 'appropriately'. As if we are not complete without

objects and makeup or without augmentation by men. Meredith Jones treated us to a critique of adornment, in connection to the performance of femininity. Jones took Kalman's video Avatars (2015) as an illustration for the concept of 'labour', in this respect a woman's hard work to perform the feminine role. This afternoon, 'we' meant 'women', although the filling in of the masculine role can be a masquerade as well.

Jones lined up several scholars, like Judith Butler: "(…) what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body".[ii] Or sociologist Mary R. Jackman who in The Velvet Glove controversially suggests that coercion by the patriarchy happens with the consent of both de dominant and the subordinate groups. Meredith Jones illustrated the ideas of psychoanalyst Joan Riviere, who coined the above-mentioned concept of masquerade, with a pearl beaded hood by Kalman from But if the Crime is Beautiful… Hoods (2014-2016). Later, in the panel discussion, Lauren Kalman added that her masks, like an executioner's hood, are at the same time empowering, oppressive, and ambiguous to read.

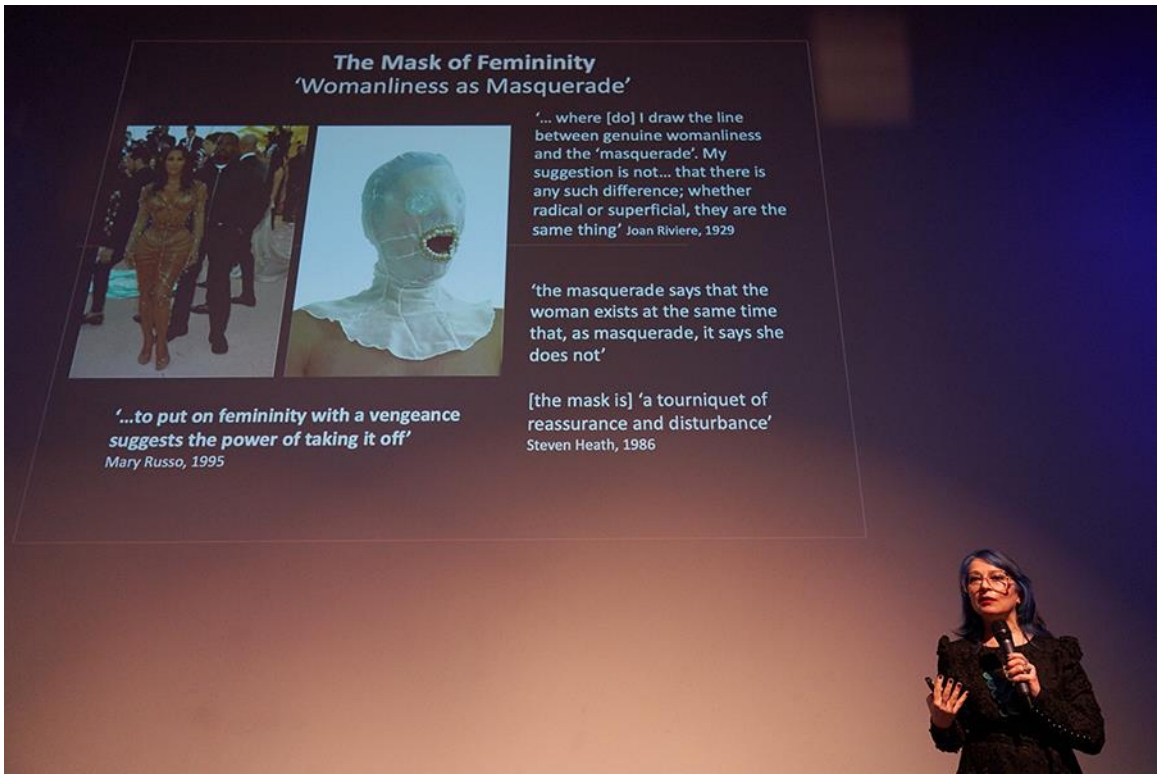


Keynote speaker Meredith Jones near a glass case containing Lauren Kalman's Device for Filling a Void (4).

Matte and glittering surfaces

Two lines of thought by Meredith Jones helped to understand the construction of the feminine bodies at hand. First, the concept of 'Media Bodies' argues that bodies, as matter, are in some sense brought about through media. In a symbiotic relationship, we create media and media create us. The other approach, 'Surface Studies', analyses what meaning lies on the surface. Take glitter, which is, as understood by Glitterworlds author Rebecca Coleman, a material of course, but also a message: working class related, nasty, cheap. And

queer or drag, aesthetics all too often appropriated by indulgent celebs. As an illustration served Kim Kardashian, whose extreme outfits continue to influence our view on beauty. One year she appeared at the Met Gala in such a tight corset cum wet mermaid dress, that she could not sit nor eat or pee. She had taken on the 'hard labour' to position herself like this. Some years later she decided to wear, what Jones referred to as Harry Potter's invisibility cloak to the event. The internet is still out on why she had to be all clad in the mattest of black, even covering her face. Jones suggested a reference to (or appropriation of) matt black 'murdered-out' cars originally popular in black culture. In any event, Jones noted that Kardashian became a silhouette, a conversion from 3D to 2D which was not too unfamiliar for a star who exists both in reality and on screens.



Keynote speaker Meredith Jones discussing Kim Kardashian and a piece by Lauren Kalman from the But if the Crime is Beautiful series.

Video art and armpit hair

An interlude in the programme was a spoken column delivered by freelance curator and writer Manique Hendricks (NL). Hendricks is one of those young warriors who is changing the cultural landscape by tirelessly painting a more inclusive future. For this afternoon she took the audience on a vibrant tour of female identifying artists past and present who "challenged views on representation, gender and the body". In the 70s and 80s video art was an alternative, not yet male dominated medium. It was a place where artists like Carolee Schneemann and Lydia Schouten reclaimed control over their bodies. The internet was another hopeful place. In line with Donna Haraway's A Cyborg Manifesto, the question was: "Do we use technology to hack the codes of patriarchy? Can we use the internet to escape gender online?" Unfortunately, the internet turned out to be entrenched with society's gender roles. But today it is also the platform for artists like Arvida Byström, Molly

Soda and Sin Wai Kin to present bodies like they are, with armpit hair and periods and bodies that transcend the gender binary.



Manique Hendricks delivering a spoken column, mentioning Carolee Schneemann's video work.

Having it spill

In the panel discussion, Manique Hendricks asked whether Kalman's work is disruptive, aiming at the disruption of the binary. Kalman answered that many others tackle this topic. Her own work is not speculative, it is rather an analysis of things that have historically led up to here. "Is the body a site of resistance?", Hendricks continued. Kalman's answer: "I inherited and inhabit this not-neutral body. How can I use the power in the body? By having the body to be impolite, not entertaining, having it spill." Kalman also referred to Meredith Jones's mention of the vicious mouth. Jones, who is actively involved with the Vagina Museum[iii], described the medieval image of a portal to hell depicted as a teethed vagina. One of Kalman's favourite places to position her jewellery objects, is the mouth. "Because", she said, "it is at once erotic and a place of protest. And today, also a place of threat of COVID."


Martijn van Ooststroom, chair of the Françoise van den Bosch Foundation.

Unique voice

The ceremonial part was introduced by the foundation's chair, Martijn van Ooststroom. Françoise van den Bosch, after whom the foundation and the award is named, passed away in 1977. Van Ooststroom explained that Françoise challenged what jewellery could be and how it could be perceived. In the 41-year history of the foundation, the prize winners have always been jewellery makers who – in their day and age – expanded the notion of jewellery, just like Françoise and her avant-garde contemporaries back then and just like Lauren Kalman now.

Martijn van Ooststroom quoted from the jury deliberations[iv] describing the winner's unique voice: "Lauren Kalman is a maker of objects relating to the body, creating wearable objects as well as performative pieces and installations that expand the concept of body ornamentation. Her practice is a crossover between craft, performance, and visual art. Using the body as a metaphor, she creates visually provocative pieces that challenge what jewellery and body adornment can be. Through her work she investigates sex, gender, power and beauty, relevant themes that are bigger than the jewellery discipline alone".

To conclude the ceremony, Lauren Kalman received a cheque of € 5000 and a trophy designed by a jewellery student. This most sympathetic tradition of the foundation has already produced many multilayered, quirky and moving works. This year, Eleonora Radke (DE) of the HSD Düsseldorf's New Craft Object Design department, added a Trophy neckpiece to the collection. On seeing the prize winner's work with its opening wet mouths, Radke trusted her ears. The sound Kalman's jewellery makes, according to Radke, must be the German 'schmatzen'. Just say it out loud a couple of times: untranslatable in English but

instantly understandable. And very appropriate for a prize winner in whose work the female body is often present by being quite impolite.

[i] https://www.laurenkalman.com/portfolio/composition accessed 27 December 2021
[ii] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, preface, 1999
[iii] https://www.vaginamuseum.co.uk/
[iv] The jury for the 2020 Françoise van den Bosch Award consisted of: Lin Cheung, winner of the Françoise van den Bosch Award 2018, jewellery designer and professor at Central Saint Martins, London; Jo Bloxham, independent curator and collector; Vanessa de Gruijter, curator applied arts; Anders Ljungberg, silversmith and professor at Konstfack, Stockholm; Theo Smeets, jewellery designer and professor at the Hochschule Trier, Martijn van Ooststroom, chair.