

School of Design and Art

**Beyond Gesture: An Investigation into a Corporeal Language
of Feminist Performative Anti-Painting**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: Lauren McCartney

Date: 27/10/2017

Abstract

Drawing from Western art history and criticism, feminist theory and the work of a number of relevant modernist and contemporary artists, this practice-led research project uses performative painting to question how the female body can parody histories of objectification, and conventions of appropriate female behaviour. Through an examination of how the performing female body has overcome masculine ideals of action painting, this project applies a reading of anti-painting to the performative processes attributed to becoming painting, rather than a perceived final stage of being painting. Thereby, it analyses the work of anti-modernist and contemporary women artists who have engaged with a humorous and playful approach to performative painting. It reveals artworks that are created by and for women, where both painterly materials and the female body misbehave. In the process it establishes forms of feminist performative painting that not only provoke patriarchal hierarchies in painting, but also reveal a corporeal feminism that defies them.

Amelia Jones's concept of para-feminism and Laura Castagnini's extension of para-feminist parody are applied to a reading of contemporary art practice by women to consider situations in performative painting where the female body is humorously exaggerated, to the degree that it becomes a spectacle and an object of laughter, whilst simultaneously disrupting preconceived ideas and myths about femininity, misbehaviour and painting.

My artistic outcomes address four key thematic trajectories that inform this project: anti-painting; the wetness of paint; female misbehaviour; and feminist humour. Anti-painting is framed by questions surrounding the materiality of paint and how it can be approached through performance and video. Specifically, the materiality of wet paint is used as a signifier for female fat and accompanying female misbehaviour - and as an extension, feminist humour. These significations are, in turn, captured through video to deconstruct the established masculine encoding of painting as medium specific.

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Introduction: *Key Concepts and Chapter Outlines*

Anti-painting is a concept that challenges perceptions of what a painting can *be*. It is an approach to painting that expands painting into multiple disciplines and artwork where 'origins of the source material are irrelevant' (Barragán 2011, 23). My specific concern is with the processes involved with *becoming* painting, rather than the final stages of *being* painting - in other words, I am interested in the actions that occur through the creation of a performative painting, rather than the material outcome of the work. Building on this focus, feminist theorist Amelia Jones defines para-feminism as a way of thinking that runs alongside and builds on first and second wave feminist thought (2006, 213). Laura Castignini extends para-feminism through her concept of para-feminist parody, which examines how female artists have humorously paid homage to, or updated the work of women before them (2015, 23). Anti-painting is explored in this project, through applying para-feminist and para-feminist parody readings to my understandings of performative painting, and to create artwork that draws from the history of women, rather than as a continuation of established ideas of masculine action painting.

My project draws from western art history and criticism, feminist theory, and the work of a number of relevant modernist and contemporary artists. This project offers new knowledge in an area of research that seems somewhat under represented, despite the trajectory of feminist artworks that have developed since modernism. My practice-led research has revealed a series of interrelated concerns that can be framed through my research question: *If action painting is historically grounded in patriarchal values, how can contemporary feminist performative painting offer a corporeal language that draws from and builds on feminist art history?*¹ The concerns that extend from my research question ask, what does it mean to undertake action painting from a history of women, rather than the masculine art historical canon that

¹ 'Performativity' was first coined by linguist J. L. Austin in 1961. Performativity refers to a linguistic expression that doesn't only describe something but 'simultaneously changes the world, creating new situations. In other words, this is an utterance that brings about the thing it describes. "I declare you man and wife" is a classic example, for it performs the action at the same time as it describes a new state of being' (Barragán 2011, 25).

continues to dominate institutions and criticism today? What does it mean for contemporary feminist artists to engage with performance and painting, when both have been addressed more than forty years ago during second and then third wave feminism? What does it mean to present the medium of painting exclusively through performance and video? And finally, why is feminist humour such a powerful tool in breaking apart the patriarchal values that continue to dominate contemporary painting?

My initial approach to practice-led research was one that I eventually rejected. My project was embedded in the belief that the significance of painting lay in the application of paint, along with the visual grandiosity of large scale artworks that exhibited a great deal of endurance in my painterly attempts. However, through the examination of how women painters were marginalised in modernism, it was revealed to me that action painting was not the ideal place for women to make art.

My focus on anti-painting firstly developed as a counter-approach to my practice when I was creating and exhibiting paintings that were mainly hung on the walls, arranged on the floor, or stained the gallery as remnants of a performance.² I became aware that this framework of exploring performance and painting links directly to a critique of modernist and masculine action painting. Instead of continuing on this canon, I sought to focus on the trajectory that women have created through anti-painting modes of artmaking. I acknowledge that historically, feminist art developed as a reaction against patriarchy; however, it became clear to me that I needed to create artwork that was beyond responses to masculine painting.

Feminist art history often draws from interdisciplinary scholarship and this exegesis is no exception to this approach, as I extract from art history and theory, cultural studies, and comedy. The theoretical framework that has developed through this project is part of an art historical survey of feminism and painting, within which the relationship between theory and practice holds

² I am referring to the projects *Reflection Paintings*, 2014, and *The Hula Hooping Project*, 2014, that are discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

a key role to my methodology, as do the materials and concepts in my practice upon which I draw.

Feminist art history is a practice that aims to challenge and dismantle established frameworks of history based on dominant patriarchal values (Nochlin 1988, xii). In Linda Nochlin's words,

Feminist art history is there to make trouble, to call into question, to ruffle feathers in the patriarchal dovecotes. It should not be mistaken for just another variant of or supplement to mainstream art history. At its strongest, a feminist art history is a transgressive and anti-establishment practice, meant to call many of the major precepts of the discipline into question (1988, xii).

Through reading and considering the social and historical shifts that have occurred in feminist painting, I aim to contribute new knowledge through my practice, and in order to do so, existing literature needs to be studied and articulated. I have selected artists, theorists and writers who are relevant to the development of anti-painting, parafeminism and parafeminist parody to synthesise and formulate the ideas I have developed through my practice.

It is unlikely that a cis-gender, white male would set out to write a credible dissertation on how the male body has been oppressed or objectified (de Beauvoir 1949, 15). He certainly would not have to begin a text by defining himself as male and his perception on how his body has been unfairly misrepresented in painting and that more writing needs to be developed on that topic.³ At the same time, however, I am aware that I speak from a position of privilege and power and in this exegesis I offer my research from my own understanding as a woman - specifically, one that has not experienced life as a woman who is not white, poor, uneducated or not heteronormative, and one who has received a substantial amount of university

³ I refer to the terms 'men' and 'women' as the two most commonly performed gender identities. I acknowledge that not everyone identifies with these two genders or the sex they were born with, and those who do not conform to these social roles are subject to oppression and discrimination (Penny 2014, 12). For the purposes of this research, I will be focusing on my own experiences as a woman who identifies with being traditionally female in a male-dominated society.

funding and support to complete this PhD. I cannot write for all women or from anyone's perception but my own. I can only speak from my own understanding of my body and painting, although by no means do I intend for this research to be yet another text by a privileged woman, written for those in the same position.⁴

Key Concepts and Chapter Overview

The concepts explored in my practice develop through a historical discussion that engages with pre-existing ideas of feminist performative painting alongside addressing each of my objectives: the wetness of paint; anti-painting; misbehaviour; and feminist humour. In the following section I set out the main ideas that are encountered in this exegesis. They are presented in the order in which ideas first appear in each chapter and include chapter summaries to demonstrate how each key concept is framed in this exegesis. Chapters One to Four present an in-depth historical and critical analysis of action painting and offer an alternative perspective through a feminist reading of performance and video-based painting. The fifth chapter focuses solely on how the artworks that have been created as part of this project have informed each of the key themes addressed in previous chapters.

***HIS*tory**

The history of men in painting is not a central theme in my practice; however, it is the starting point for my investigation into anti-painting, parafeminism and parafeminist parody. These concepts have initially derived from the understanding that the dominant art historical canon is one that has overwhelmingly privileged the artwork, criticism and the establishment of art institutions as male. The dominant canon in western art history is a structure that favours artworks and texts that reflect masculine artistic mastery. The canon supplies and validates the belief that white, heterosexual men are the

⁴ I acknowledge I cannot tell women who are from different cultural backgrounds to mine what it means to be a feminist, or what equal rights and freedom for women in their cultures entail (Gay 2014, xii).

exclusive driving force behind creativity in western culture (Pollock 1999, 9). This masculine supremacy is not a phenomenon, rather it can be argued that it has been maintained by patriarchy throughout the course of western art history, which I refer to as *H/Story*. Griselda Pollock explains that, 'The canon thus not only determines what we read, look at, listen to, see at the art gallery and study in school and university. It is formed retrospectively by what artists themselves select as their legitimising or enabling predecessors' (1999, 4). In order to examine alternative canons of western art history, the modernist canon must first be deconstructed to reveal how and why masculinity is naturalised.

Along with the canon, the foundations of action painting are grounded in the male notion of the heroic painter.⁵ This figure develops through the limited narrative of hypermasculinity where overtly masculine characteristics such as violence, bravery, endurance and strength are exaggerated. Dominant forms of abstract expressionism and action painting are constructed from the proposition that the selfhood of the male artist was, in Jones's words, 'in some way *represented or expressed* in the tortured structures of his abstracted forms, his corporeal immanence transcended through creative activity...' (1998, 81, original italics). This mythical male artist is also analysed by Nochlin. Her concept that the hero or great male painter is one that positions men as the accepted norm, while women are deemed to be outsiders (1971, 43). In Nochlin's words, "Why have there been no great women artists?" She continues, "There are no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness" (1971, 43). Greatness in art is measured against the achievements of men and in this exegesis I explain that an alternative set of criteria is needed for women that builds from female experience, rather than the great male artist. There is also an absurdity in the notion of the great

⁵ In its early stages, action painting was primarily centred in the United States (Orton 1991, 3). The term 'action painting' was first coined by American critic Harold Rosenberg in his essay 'The American Action Painters' (1952).

heroic male painter, as this hero is only *painting* after all.⁶ Nevertheless, this hero paradigm sustains the belief that in order to succeed at action painting the artist must dominate their material. This, of course, is a façade to continue the masculine domination over painting and suggests that paint is a gendered (feminine) material.⁷

Chapter One, 'Modern Heroes and their Materials,' sets up an examination of the historical and patriarchal conditions that women painters in the West have endured during and after late modernism. Clement Greenberg's (1909-1994, USA) and Harold Rosenberg's (1906-1978, USA) views on modernist painting are discussed in terms of how they helped to establish gender bias in painting and criticism, as both critics were highly prominent in framing how masculine painting was considered in the 1940s and 1950s in the United States. While both critics contributed to the gendering of painting, they also failed to acknowledge their influence on the gendered bias through which modernist art history was read.

Greenberg's criticism is firstly analysed through his writing on Georgia O'Keeffe's (1887-1986, USA) paintings which he framed as decorative, that is, having elements of neatness and precision and, therefore, falling into the realm of the feminine.⁸ My analysis of Greenberg's criticism expands into his writings on the grid, in particular those focused on the work of Piet Mondrian (1872-1944, Netherlands). I posit that Greenberg's ideas about the decorative

⁶ Steve Garlick proposes that the reception of art itself is gendered as feminine, where '[p]opular opinion in Western societies has long held that the arts belong to the realm of the "feminine." Engaging with works of art is often regarded as a frivolous activity, as something belonging to the sphere of leisure or play, and thus as not being a properly "manly" concern' (2004, 108).

⁷ Although it can be argued that the gendering of painting is a tactic to label different characteristics of painting, this project will reveal that the gendering of painting was also a tactic art critics used to maintain the reign of masculine painting. Scholarship on femininity as a cultural construct in the West is abundant. For example, Simone de Beauvoir explains that '[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine' (1949, 295).

⁸ The decorative can be defined as: 'Decoration in the sense of the elaboration of abstract surface patterns "for the pleasure of art, without seeking to convey any truth with it..." (Kunin 2010, 89).

also adhere to my contention about the modernist grid, as both the decorative and the grid share elements of neatness and precision. Building on my discussion on the modernist grid, I compare the shared characteristics of the decorative and the grid to a contemporary analysis of Agnes Martin's (1912-2004, Canada) grid drawings. Although Martin's grids show neatness, precision and control, her works have been described through feminine stereotypes such as being poetic, intimate and seductive (Kaneda 1991, 75).

This chapter extends from establishing Greenberg's gendered bias on the decorative in modernist painting, to a reading of Rosenberg's considerations on action painting. Like Greenberg's criticism, Rosenberg's perspective on action painting was based on a position where masculinity in painting was the norm. Rosenberg established that the canvas was an arena where the act of painting takes place, or where the painterly act of the (male) artist is mapped out (1952, 22). His writings on the gestures of the romanticised male body as vital to action painting can be interpreted as gendered. I argue that Rosenberg's notion of the action painter as heroic in their gestures sets up the foundations for the key issue I identify in action painting, where the bravado of male painters inhibited women artists from becoming commended as action painters.

Expanding on the gendering of painting, I use Jackson Pollock's (1912-1956, USA) and Yves Klein's (1928-1962, France) artworks to argue that masculine mastery over material was the key to modernist action painting (or in Klein's case, a parody of action painting). During late modernism, the media played a significant role in maintaining the representation of male action painters as heroic in their painterly attempts. Not only was the myth of the great male painter, such as Pollock, present in their art discourse, but through photography and film as well, whereby these visual narratives of the painter in action added another layer of heroism. I argue that this dual performance of the male painter painting, along with his finished canvases, demonstrates that maintaining a certain degree of control over his material was inseparable to his identity as a Master.

Figure 1: Harry Shunk, *Yves Klein performance 'Anthropometries of the Blue Period,'* 1960, 1960, photograph, gelatin-silver print, 20 x 25.7 cm, International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Paris.

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/harry-shunk/yves-klein-performance-anthropometries-of-the-yTEosNrdhuM-lxsylSfWg2>

As a counterpoint to my discussion of the construction of Pollock's identity as a genius, I consider how Klein physically removed himself from the action in action painting in his *Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (*Anthropométrie de l'époque bleue*) in 1960 (Figure 1). Rather than using his own gestures to create his works, Klein used nude female models as his brushes. The models covered themselves in paint and pressed their bodies onto large rolls of paper. Klein provides a parody of the notion that the canvas was an arena where the performance of painting took place, as he challenged the concept that it was the actions and processes of the male artist that created action paintings. Although *Anthropometries* had the potential to also parody male-dominated action painting, I argue that by using objectified nude models, Klein is complicit in contributing to the trajectory of masculine modernism.

Lastly, and to set up the premise of Chapter Two, the wetness of painting lays the foundations for my discussion on feminist performative painting as my research discloses that although there has been much criticism on the process of action painting, in comparison, the gendered dimensions of the way in which paint itself transforms from wet to dry has not been addressed in art criticism and scholarly writings. For example, although both Greenberg and Rosenberg wrote extensively on action painting and the processes of the body of the (predominantly male) painter, neither considers the processes of paint in the cycle from being liquid when applied to eventually becoming dry on the canvas. I suggest that, from a feminist reading, this is because the wetness of paint is metaphorically female. What is stereotypically feminine, such as messiness, being out of control, hysterical – even menstruation - can all be linked to the wet qualities of paint - that is, sticky, slimy and slippery.

Wet Paint

I contend that to read painting as feminine is not to confine painting to a gendered reading because the artist is a woman, but to analyse painting for its social, representational and political contexts. It is also important to highlight that for a woman to be considered as feminine is in itself a privilege, as not all women comfortably sit within the accepted constructs of western femininity. Many of these frameworks lay unexamined throughout modernism as the cultural attitudes about women's ability to create were reflected in the hierarchy of the artistic canon and the undervalued status of women's creative production (Auther 2004, 353). Mira Schor explains, 'There may be a gendered dimension to the critique of representation, the fear of narrative, since, historically, what must be excluded from art discourse is tainted by femininity' (1996, 152). For example, Greenberg constructed feminine painting as decorative with characteristics of neatness and precision. Helen Frankenthaler's (1928-2001, USA) paintings were also described as feminine by Rosenberg and Eugene Goossen, and I establish that by gendering her work they were describing it on a superficial level, rather than critically engaging with the work's social and political contexts.

By examining the construction of painting as having feminine characteristics, I reveal that the gendering of painting is much more complex than a position that assumes men make masculine painting and women create feminine work. In my discussion of the feminine, I suggest that new ways of painting can be envisaged that reject traditional modernist forms and aim to disrupt the modernist norm of masculine painting.

Lucy Lippard's approach to anti-modernism is also integral to the overarching argument used throughout this exegesis because it provides a conceptual framework for analysing the key women action painters who used their practice as a form of resistance to modernity and modern art. Lippard explains,

Feminist methods and theories have instead offered a socially concerned alternative to the increasingly mechanical “evolution” of art about art. The 1970s might not have been “pluralist” at all if women had not emerged during the decade to introduce the multicoloured threads of female experience into the male fabric of modern art (1980, 362).

Lippard’s argument is grounded in her examination of feminism’s lack of involvement in modernist art. This is not to suggest that there were no women creating substantial work throughout modernism, but what feminist art achieved was an *anti-modernism*, which refused to partake in male-dominated forms and instead focused on deconstructing and challenging masculine modes of modernism. Lippard stresses that through an anti-modernist lens, it is impossible to narrow down feminist art to a particular style, as feminist art cannot be defined as one particular movement or material (1980, 362). Furthermore, an anti-modernist framework is more accurate to this project than invoking post-modernism because the language of post-modernism (and modernism) celebrates the male artist as master, whereas anti-modernism creates a resistance to modernist thought and practice in painting.⁹ This dynamic is explored throughout this exegesis with subsequent chapters also examining how the concept of anti-modernism has informed artworks by women action painters.

Chapter Two, ‘Women Staining the Heroic Narrative,’ extends Chapter One’s discussion on gender and painting. Through a consideration of the work of Frankenthaler and Lynda Benglis (b. 1941, USA), this chapter addresses how the stain and the pour, used by each artist respectively, disrupted established masculine ideas on action painting. However, critics Rosenberg and Goossen labelled the stain in Frankenthaler’s paintings as feminine as the framework for metaphorically gendering painting did not fit into the masculine dominated

⁹ Laura Cottingham explains the issues with post-modernism and women’s art: ‘In the new “masculinity” of the postmodernity of the ’80s and ’90s, the masculine imperative of High Modernism continues unabated. In fact, it is almost as if the controlling codes of American social dominance [sic] that contained the ’50s but ‘were’ [sic] sublimated in the most successful art of the period reemerge, this time aggressively and overtly, in the celebrations of capitalism, male hegemony, and Eurocentrality that arrived within the so-called postmodernity of the early ’80s’ (1994, 133).

modernism. Benglis's poured artworks defied modernist ideas about painting. She created what critic Robert Pincus-Witten refers to as "frozen gestures" where splashes of liquid latex and polyurethane foam appeared to hover in space (1974, 57). However, through an analysis of Pincus-Witten's criticism of Benglis's work, I propose that to call her work "frozen" suggests they are on pause, incomplete or unfinished.

In addition, Frankenthaler and Benglis's approaches to painting adhere to Lippard's definition of anti-modernism because through the stain and pour, both artists shape an understanding of painting that is not bound to masculine and modernist trajectories. I compare anti-modernism to Nochlin's argument that there are no great women artists because greatness is a masculine term. I examine the links that establish how women artists resisted the gendered bias associated with their work and instead created artwork that defied patriarchal hierarchies and drew from their own experiences as women.¹⁰

Misbehaviour

Despite male dominance over action painting, early performance art can also be argued to be a movement primarily practiced by women. In the 1960s, artists and critics '...who were keen to subvert modernism were exhilarated by the promise of theatricality and its potentially revolutionary femininity' (Blocker 2004, 6). I use the term 'performative' rather than 'action' when I refer to gestural based painting by women, in an attempt to shift the language of action painting from the history of men to how women have approached painting from the 1960s through performance.¹¹

¹⁰ It is important to note that the wetness of paint, the stain and the pour are three different conditions of painting. Frankenthaler's staining and Benglis's pours are both *methods* of painting. The wetness of paint is part of the process the medium of paint undergoes before it dries. Through the application of their mediums, both artists engage with the wetness of paint in their work. The stain is wet as it soaks into Frankenthaler's canvases and the pour is wet when 'frozen' in time in Benglis's artworks.

¹¹ Examples of how women have engaged with performance and action painting in the 1960s include Shigeko Kubota, *Vagina Painting*, 1965, Niki de Saint Phalle's series *Tirs (Shooting Paintings)*, 1961-1964, and Carolee Schneemann, *Eye Body*, 1963.

In the 1990s, post-feminism was becoming a prominent movement as women reacted against second and third wave feminism. Post-feminism is approached by Angela McRobbie as a way of thinking about feminism that undermines feminist achievements in the 1970s and 1980s. It proposes that the freedom and choices women have because of the accomplishments of the first and second wave have aged and appear to be redundant (2004, 255).¹² At the same time, the phenomenon of the bad girl was becoming prominent in feminist thought and re-established the notion that since the 1960s women had been repositioning and challenging the binaries and cultural codes associated with the sexuality and objectification of the female body (Smyth 1993, 6). Through an examination of a series of *Bad Girls* exhibitions that occurred in the United Kingdom and The United States from 1993- 1994, this exegesis establishes that the bad girl is a concept that is '[i]rreverent, personal, shocking, funny, and fey, Bad Girls dares to attack on two fronts at once: offending proscriptive feminism as well as the reactionary forces of patriarchy' (Bush, Dexter and White 1993, 3). I apply the concept of the bad girl as an example of the misbehaving female body. However, this exegesis also establishes that the bad girl was problematic as it is framed through predominantly white, wealthy, cis-gendered and heteronormative understandings of women. In addition, the bad girl categorises women artists as being either good or bad depending on what patriarchal-enforced feminine stereotypes they hold or challenge.

Through the course of this project it became clear to me that when women performed their bodies in ways that approach slapstick and parody, they contributed to a corporeal language that threatened the patriarchal structure of the objectified or desirable female body. I discuss slapstick and parody with reference to the concepts of performance, the bad girl and the grotesque

¹² Clementine Ford gives insight to post-feminist thinking. In the opening paragraphs of her book *Fight Like a Girl*, she explains her position on feminism in the 1990s: 'When I thought of feminism, I thought of a tired old movement filled with irreverent ideas and even more irrelevant women. They didn't understand that the world had moved on. It wasn't the seventies anymore! Women were allowed to shave their legs and wear make-up and look like *women*, dammit! It didn't mean that they were being subjugated by patriarchy; it just meant that they cared about looking nice. What could possibly be wrong with that?' (2016, 1, original italics).

woman to set up the context for my own performing body. The grotesque is approached by Mary Russo as 'open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing' (1995, 8).¹³ There are similarities between Russo's idea of the grotesque and the characteristics of wet paint. Patriarchal stereotypes tend to link women's bodies to the grotesque. Therefore, I ask, if paint takes on characteristics and a language of feminine stereotypes and the female body openly performs these stereotypes, how does this contribute to women's art and criticism? I use fat as a signifier to examine the grotesque body, as to have fat is to fall short of dominant western ideas of beauty.¹⁴ Fat is also as a material that shares a similar viscous density to thick lashes of heavy, wet paint (discussed in Chapter Five).

As defined by patriarchy, fat is a female indulgence as well as typically undesirable excess of female flesh. Naomi Wolf explains that fat is '...portrayed in literature of the myth as expendable female filth; virtually cancerous matter, an inert or treacherous infiltration into the body of nauseating bulk waste' (2002, 191). This attitude towards fat does not necessarily manifest through the physicality of women's bodies, but through, '...old-fashioned misogyny, for above all fat is female; it is the medium and regulator of female sexual characteristics' (2002, 191-192).¹⁵ This project accordingly explores the idea that when women use fat, especially in ways that parody patriarchal ideals, there is a certain power that develops through the grotesque that threatens to abolish the very structure that patriarchy uses to assert its dominance over women's bodies. I explore female fat through the

¹³ Russo's concept of the grotesque draws from Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque (see: Bakhtin 1984; Freud 1919; Kayser 1981). We might also recall Julia Kristeva's closely related concept of abjection (see: Kristeva 1982).

¹⁴ I acknowledge that fat has different connotations in non-western countries. However, in the West it is a marker of difference between women of different socio-economic statuses and cultural backgrounds. Maud Ellmann explains that within western culture, 'The fat woman, particularly if she is nonwhite and working-class, has come to embody everything the prosperous must disavow: imperialism, exploitation, surplus value, maternity, mortality, abjection, and unloveliness. Heavier with projections than with flesh, she siphons off this guilt, desire, and denial, leaving her idealized counterpart behind: the kind of woman one sees on billboards, sleek and streamlined like the cars that she is so often used to advertise, bathed in the radiance of commodity' (1993, quoted in Russo 1995, 24).

¹⁵ In Western history, there have been numerous 'fashions' when it comes to how fat is distributed on women's bodies. For example, between the fifteenth to seventeenth century, large, round bellies were considered to be desirable, while during the nineteenth century plump faces and large buttocks and thighs were considered to be ideal (Wolf 2002, 184).

work of Melati Suryodarmo (b. 1969, Indonesia) and Janine Antoni (b. 1964, USA) as both use materials such as butter, chocolate and lard as substances to overindulge in their performances.

Chapter Three, 'Dangerous Women,' expands on how women artists have challenged the construction of femininity and critiqued patriarchal forms of domination. This chapter begins by establishing the 1990s bad girl phenomenon as one where women artists playfully embraced feminine stereotypes, and used their bodies and artistic materials to challenge masculine power structures. Building on this disruption, I analyse the misbehaving female body through comical techniques of slapstick and parody present in performances by Suryodarmo, Antoni, Ursula Martinez (b. 1966, United Kingdom) and Laresa Kosloff (b. 1974, Australia). Through a focus on feminist readings of humour, in particular representations of fat and the grotesque female body, I argue that issues such as the marginalisation and objectification of women throughout western art history have been playfully provoked by all four artists. They examine female experience, rather than focusing only on a reaction or protest against how femininity has been constructed by men.

Feminist Humour

As this research project developed, a consideration of anti-painting became warranted.¹⁶ My approach to anti-painting bears similarities to action painting in the sense that both concepts are concerned with the processes of painting. However, like anti-modernism and my understanding of performative painting, anti-painting is unpacked through a feminist reading of painting that draws

¹⁶ Anti-painting can be linked back to Dada where it was practiced as a protest to traditional ideas about arts practice after World War I. John G. Frey explains, "Dada is anti-painting. Dada is anti-poetry," signified not a rejection of creative activity, but a rejection of Art as it was practiced by their predecessors, a reaction against all the rules and standards and methods and practices associated with the hated world that has spawned the World War, a reaction against all the literary and artistic attitudes of the past - against realism, against Beauty, against the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake, against the dilettantism of an Anatole France, and so on' (1936, 12).

from the history of women, rather than as a continuation of established ideas of medium specificity in masculine action painting.

Figure 2: Rachel Lachowicz, *Red Not Blue*, 1992, performance. Production still from performance.

<http://www.lachowicz.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Red-Not-Blue.png>

I refer to Saatchi Gallery's 2005-2006 series of exhibitions *The Triumph of Painting* to frame my concern that contemporary painting continues to be most prominently interpreted through masculine painting traditions, specifically when the focus is on painting's materiality. The works of the primarily white, male artists included in the exhibitions are centred around a re-establishment of medium-specificity in painting that, I argue, can be linked to painting continuing to be bound in modernist male traditions about painting. My discussion on anti-painting develops as an approach to how women artists such as Rachel Lachowicz (b. 1964, USA) have deconstructed and challenged medium-specificity through performative painting, as Lachowicz uses cosmetics as her painterly material and the bodies of men as her brushes in works such as *Red Not Blue*, 1992 (Figure 2).

Figure 3: Mariana Vassileva, *The Milkmaid*, 2006, DVD, 3:00, video frame.

<http://www.dna-galerie.de/en/artists/mariana-vassileva/mariana-vassileva--works.php>

Figure 4: Johannes Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*, 1657-1658, oil on canvas, 46 x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2009/vermeer>

I discuss the concepts of materiality and medium specificity in performative painting and video through curators Paco Barragán and Selene Wendt's 2011 exhibition, *When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten!*, at The Stenersen Museum, Oslo. The exhibition is significant as it is grounded in bringing together artists who test the limits of painting through movement, performance and the screen. Mariana Vassileva's (b. 1964, Bulgaria) *The Milkmaid*, 2006 (Figure 3), is used as an example of how women have provoked reconsiderations of medium-specificity in painting. At no stage of the video work that references Johannes Vermeer's (1632-1675, Holland) painting *The Milkmaid*, 1657-1658 (Figure 4), does Vassileva engage with the materiality of paint, rather it is the absence of paint that makes the work significant to this project. Paint is contextual as Vassileva uses a model to act out the female subject in Vermeer's painting, adding movement and sound through video, both elements that arguably cannot be entirely achieved by paint on canvas alone.

I also examine how women artists such as Myritza Castillo (b. 1981, Puerto Rico) and Kate Gilmore (b. 1975, USA) have explored performance and painting in their practices, and I analyse whether the resulting painted canvases from their performances are a primary aim, or at times a necessary element of the finished work. Building on Gilmore's and Castillo's work, I examine the feminist implications of presenting painting through performative and video formats, where medium-specificity and the physical paintings that occur as a result of performative painting are secondary to the processes that take place when creating the work.

Jones uses 'para' to describe a model of contemporary feminist art that runs parallel to pre-existing forms, rather than as a continuation of the 1990s phenomenon of post-feminism. She explains that para-feminism is 'a conceptual model of critique and exploration that is simultaneously parallel to and building on (in the sense of rethinking and pushing the boundaries of, but not superseding) earlier feminisms' (2006, 213). Unlike post-feminism, para-feminism also aims to shift dominant models of thinking about feminism,

in particular acknowledging and rejecting feminism as an overwhelmingly white, western and heteronormative movement (2006, 213).

More recently, Laura Castagnini has combined Jones's notion of parafeminism with Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody to create parafeminist parody. Parafeminist parody aims to examine not only how feminist artists parody patriarchy, but a tongue in cheek reading of how women parody the work of women before them (2015, 23). Parafeminist parody establishes a feminist language that, as Castagnini explains, 'intends to explicate forms of humour currently emerging in contemporary practices' (2015, 30). This exegesis focuses on applying parafeminist parody to a reading of performative painting. In particular, I focus on how the contemporary artworks of Gilmore can be read as playfully building on Antoni's performances from the 1990s. I explore how both artists have engaged with painting and signifiers of femininity (such as performing in feminine clothing and using hair dye as paint) and how they reverse or mock feminine stereotypes in favour of an understanding of femininity that speaks to and empowers women.

This exegesis acknowledges that there is a significant difference between how men and women are received when making humour based work, when what is considered the norm in comedy is male behaviour (Russell 2002, 15). In Joanne Gilbert's words, 'Men are the initiators of humour; women are the reactors' (2004, 74). To clarify Gilbert's disparity, American comedy writer Anne Beatts explains,

If you were a boy, having a sense of humour meant...pouring salt on the head of the girl who sat in front of you so it would look as though she had dandruff. If you were a girl, having a sense of humour meant laughing when someone poured salt on your head (1992, quoted in Gilbert 2004, vi).

These differences in approaches to comedy are based on the understanding that men are assumed to be funny until they prove themselves otherwise, while women begin with the expectation that they must prove themselves to be funny in the first place (Russell 2002, 3). This exegesis focuses on the

understanding that, because of the patriarchal beliefs surrounding the performance of both humour and gender, in order to be funny, women have to approach humour differently and work much harder at maintaining the space between object and subject of their work. Parafeminism and parafeminist parody propose a solution to how women utilise laughter. Instead of following dominant male paradigms in comedy, women playfully parody the work of women that preceded them, with a focus on deconstructing female experience and issues associated with feminine or feminist stereotypes.

Figure 5: Kate Gilmore, *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2013, HD video, 1:49, video frame, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland.

<https://vimeo.com/70697488>

Figure 6: Kate Gilmore, *Sudden as a Massacre*, 2011, HD video, 1:47, video frame, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland.

<http://www.kategilmore.com/sudden-as-a-massacre-2011/>

Chapter Four, 'HERstory,' continues an examination of feminist humour by exploring how women artists have used performative painting and video with a focus on anti-painting and a parafeminist study parodying the historical development of feminist art. Through an analysis of the performances and videos of Lachowicz, Castillo, Vassileva, Gilmore and Antoni, this chapter establishes a definition of anti-painting as painting that draws from the history of feminism, rather than the dominant masculine canon. Building on anti-painting, this chapter expands on the discussion of Jones's concept of parafeminism and Castagnini's parafeminist parody. I examine how contemporary women artists - specifically, Gilmore's performances *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2013 (Figure 5), and *Sudden as a Massacre*, 2011 (Figure 6) - have used video to engage a feminine and playful approach to performative painting. I examine how her works can be read as building on and light-

heartedly parodying Antoni's *Loving Care*, 1993 (Figure 7), and *Gnaw*, 1992 (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Janine Antoni, *Loving Care*, 1993, hair dye mopped onto the gallery floor, performance, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.

<http://www.skidmore.edu/news/2012/3536.php>

Figure 8: Janine Antoni, *Gnaw*, 1992, three-part installation: 600 lb of chocolate gnawed by the artist; 600 lb of lard gnawed by the artist; display with 130 lipsticks made with pigment, beeswax, and chewed lard removed from the lard cube; 27 heart-shaped packages made from the chewed chocolate removed from the chocolate cube, dimensions variable, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

http://www.saatchigallery.com/aipe/janine_antoni.htm



Figure 9: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #5*, 2016, (left), *Movement #6*, 2016, (centre), and *Movement #7*, 2016, (right), installation view, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne. Photograph by the artist.



Figure 10: Lauren McCartney, *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015, digital video, 4:43, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.

Lastly, because of the breadth of historical and critical research presented in the first four chapters, a deliberate decision was made to present the concepts of my own practice in one chapter. Chapter Five, 'Feminist Performative Anti-Painting,' organises and reflects on my research journey and the developmental shifts that have taken place as I endeavour to understand my research process over time. The artworks *Movement for Action*, 2016 (Figure 9), *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015 (Figure 10), *Limp*, 2015 (Figure 11), *Parody Heals*, 2015 (Figure 12), and *Spare Rib*, 2015 (Figure 13), are discussed in depth in relation to the four key themes - namely, the wetness of paint; anti-painting; misbehaviour; and feminist humour - that have been outlined in this Introduction. These works are by no means literal interpretations, nor illustrations of the key themes addressed in this project, rather they build on and reinterpret the feminist concepts presented in the previous chapters.



Figure 11: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, 2015, digital video, 3:07, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.



Figure 12: Lauren McCartney, *Parody Heals*, 2015, digital video, 2:10, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough, sound by Tom Hogan. Screenshot by the artist.



Figure 13: Lauren McCartney, *Spare Rib*, 2015, digital video, 3:50, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough, sound by Tom Hogan. Screenshot by the artist.

Chapter One: *Modern Heroes and Their Materials*

How could different narratives, models or identities intervene in what is generally accepted to be art's history without merely confirming the endless play of the One and its Other? Can the difference of the "feminine" make a difference to what we learn from the cultural past? Can we escape the idealised Story of Great Men without longing for Heroised Women?

Griselda Pollock 1999, xiii

This chapter argues that the historical discourse of modernist action painting and its encoding has been primarily shaped by heterosexual, western, middle class men, and is deeply biased and resistant to adequately reflecting diversity and difference in painting practice. In this chapter, American art critics Clement Greenberg's and Harold Rosenberg's considerations on late modernist painting are examined in order to establish modernist concepts of painting's materiality, as both critics have substantially influenced how modernist painting has been critically framed. Their positions on the decorative, the grid, and action painting are essential to discuss in order to reveal the differences and contradictions in their approaches to abstract and action painting as gendered and male dominated forms of artmaking.

Central to my discussion on Greenberg is an examination on how he considered painting by women artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe to be decorative and feminine. I argue that these tropes were tactics to frame painting by women as something that did not fit into established modernist ideas about painting. Expanding on Greenberg's gendering of painting, I propose his criteria for the decorative (neatness and precision) can also be applied to my understanding of the characteristics of the modernist grid (flattened, geometric patterned and precise). By comparing Piet Mondrian's (masculine) grid paintings to contemporary criticism on Agnes Martin's grid drawings (as feminine), I demonstrate how masculine modernist painting was a space where women were marginalised, not because of the work they were making, but because of their gender.

Modernist action painting provides the historical background for my research, because it questioned what a painting and by extension, the artist's body could *do*

(Slifkin 2011, 229, italics added). In other words, action painting is concerned with the role the body plays during the process of creating a painting, where the gestures or actions of the artist unfold the painterly narrative that appears on the canvas. This chapter examines Rosenberg's writings on action painting to support my argument about modernism's privileging of male painters. I analyse the bias toward women artists, specifically how the gendered body of the artist was an essential aspect of action painting. Rosenberg's critique of the body is used as evidence of how male bodies were the accepted norm in action painting. Although he insists that the gestures of the body were central to action painting, the romanticised male body as the prototype for his argument is not adequately questioned in his criticism.

Although there is a long history in western art that favours men as heroes, my focus is on the observation that action painting perpetuated or reinvented this trope through an emphasis on the identity of the male painter and his mastery over his materials. As an example of modernist heroism, this chapter will specifically focus on Hans Namuth's 1951 short film of Jackson Pollock (co-produced by Paul Falkenberg). The film reiterates the myth of the male artist by presenting Pollock as an artistic genius as he is captured in the midst of his gestural painting act. Namuth was not only concerned with Pollock's painterly processes, but as the film unfolds, a narrative about Pollock's identity is created that is overtly heroic and masculine. I argue that this phenomenon of the artist as persona or celebrity was essential to action painting, as the movement was not only about what and how the artist created work, but how artists themselves are woven into the act of painting. In addition to the film, a photograph by Namuth, of Pollock is analysed where his wife, artist Lee Krasner (1908-1984, USA), is present. This image positions Krasner in the background of Pollock's action shots, subtly representing the docile female admirer of her husband's mastery.

Yves Klein's *Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (*Anthropométrie de l'époque bleue*), 1960, provides a counterpoint to how male artists interpreted the heroic gestures of action painting, as Klein used paint-coated nude female models as his brushes. While under Klein's commands, the models or 'living brushes' (1961, quoted in Jones 1994, 561) dragged and slid themselves and each other across large rolls of paper placed on the floor, creating abstract prints of their bodies. Klein's approach to

action painting (although misogynistic in his use of nude women) can be interpreted as a parody of American action painting. I contend that to be considered a hero or genius, the artist had to master their painterly materials. Instead, Klein kept a physical distance from his materials, where he used the labour of the bodies of the models to create his work. In comparison to Pollock's method of painting, Klein's mastery is made by removing the artist's body from the equation and instead commanding his living brushes and materials to paint for him.

This chapter concludes with an examination of the wetness or slime of painting that occurs during the process of creating an action painting. I argue that there is a gap in research and criticism as far as the significance of the wetness of paint in masculine action painting is concerned. Neither Greenberg nor Rosenberg consider the transformation of material (wet to dry paint) in their writing on the processes of abstract and action painting. I suggest one reasoning is because from a modernist perspective the wetness of painting can be perceived as metaphorically feminine, as it adheres to feminine qualities of paint as outlined in the Introduction (out of control, messy, and hysterical). Using *Anthropometries* as an example, this chapter argues that Klein not only dehumanises his nude models, but also removes himself from the painterly mess of the physical process of action painting. *Anthropometries* provides a disassociation and distance between the male action painter and his materials. I establish that not only was modernist painting gendered, but paint itself was subject to being metaphorically female.

Art H/Story Canon

At the heart of dominant art history is the construction of the male artist as a hero or genius. Although this narrative has existed throughout history, in late modernism the male hero was reinstated in the 1940s and 1950s by artists and critics of the New York School of abstract expressionism and its sub-genre of action painting. Marcia Brennan explains,

Although the very centeredness of white heterosexual masculinity makes the primacy of this subject position seem self-evident in postwar American culture, for the New York School artists the parameters that established such normative masculine

identity had to be rigorously asserted and routinely maintained (2004, 80).

Building on Brennan's assertion, because there is such a strong historical account of masculine heroism in art, male artists are automatically assumed to be geniuses.

This assumption is discussed by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock who use the term 'Old Master' to describe the historically male genius. They state,

It thus becomes clear why there is not a female equivalent to the reverential terms "Old Master." The term artist not only had become equated with masculinity and masculine social roles - the Bohemian, for instance - but notions of greatness - "genius" - too had become the exclusive attribute of the male sex (1981, 114).

The construction and persistence of the male genius relies on the dominant art historical canon to remain in power, where the term 'woman artist' is structured as the opposite of the master painter (1981, 114). This control cannot be sustained through action painting alone, instead I suggest that masculine identity was linked to painting through culturally-appealing narratives of the artists' personalities as Eurocentric and heterosexual.

Figure 1.0: Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31*, 1950, oil and enamel paint on canvas, 269.5 x 530.8 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78386>

A prominent model of how the establishment of the male artist as genius was perpetuated in modernism is found in Pollock's action paintings. Pollock's most well-known artworks, his drip paintings, are some of the most cited examples of modernist action painting as his drips, splatters, and the flicking of his brush mapped out the movements of his body whilst painting (Brennan 2004, 77). *One: Number 31*, 1950, (Figure 1.0), is an example of how the narrative of the male artist as a genius or hero has been translated through painting. The work is not only grand in scale (at 269.5 x 530.8 cm) but in the complex range of painterly gestures that make up the

layers of mark making on the surface of the canvas. Brennan suggests that Pollock's painterly techniques

...intrinsically evoke a body that they do not conventionally depict. In the process, the paintings seem to raise the provocative question of how a body can be abstractly present, or conversely, of how gendered human presence can be conceptualized in the wake of its own figural absence (2004, 76-77).

Pollock's genius comes across not only through his mark making but through the actions of his body. The presence of the male body, whether recognisable through its form or indirectly suggested through abstraction, is intrinsic in order to maintain the narrative of the heroic male painter.

Figure 1.1: *Spread from Jackson Pollock article in Life magazine, August 8, 1949.*

<http://yalebooksblog.co.uk/2012/01/20/the-discovery-of-an-american-icon-extract-from-jackson-pollock-by-evelyn-toynton/>

Figure 1.2: Martha Holmes, *Pollock Drools Enamel Paint on Canvas*, 1949, photograph from *Life magazine*, August 8, 1949, gelatin-silver print, 34.3 x 27.1 cm, The Life Magazine Collection, New York.

<http://yalebooksblog.co.uk/2012/01/20/the-discovery-of-an-american-icon-extract-from-jackson-pollock-by-evelyn-toynton/>

Images of Pollock in action were often paired with those of his drip paintings in publications such as *Life magazine* (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).¹ These images of the artist in action, such as, *Pollock Drools Enamel Paint on Canvas*, 1949, by Martha Holmes, helped to ingrain the notion of Pollock's work as masculine, where 'artistic subjectivity became invested into nonrepresentational painting' (Brennan 2004, 108). Capturing Pollock in the midst of painting demonstrated that the corporeal actions of his body were conjoined with his materials (2004, 108). According to Brennan,

¹ Dorothy Seiberling (1949) wrote the accompanying article.

By placing an emphasis on the interrelational nature of gender, embodiment, and aesthetics in Pollock's abstract artworks, we will be able to interrogate the distinctions that inform such typical binary categories as masculinity and femininity, self and other, embodiment and abstraction, and corporeality and transcendence as these terms were repeatedly manifested in period critical discussions of the drip paintings (2004, 80).

Pollock's paintings represented how a gendered body could be present in action painting and how masculine identity continued to confirm patriarchal constructions of modernist painting. However, by presenting Pollock through the narrative of the great male artist, the possibility opens up for a reinterpretation of gender stereotypes in painting. I suggest that modernist action painting was not overtly masculine in and of itself. Film and photography also helped to construct the heterosexual male artist's identity in action painting as the master of his painterly materials.

Figure 1.3: Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock*, 1951, film, 10:13, video frame from film.

<https://www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/process1.shtm>

Figure 1.4: Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock*, 1951, film, 10:13, video frame from film.

<https://www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/process1.shtm>

The framing of Pollock as heroic is evident through Namuth's 1951 short film (Figures 1.3 and 1.4) on Pollock that builds on the myth of the male artist by presenting Pollock as an artistic genius as he is captured in the midst of his gestural painting act.² The film begins with Pollock outdoors, hovering over one of his paint-splattered artworks. Immediately, he clarifies that he paints directly onto the canvas without the need to conduct any preliminary experiments. In my observations

² This depiction of Pollock is reminiscent of Hollywood movies that use the trope of the white male hero - for example, the film adaptation of Ian Fleming's James Bond since 1962; James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, 1955; and Batman since 1943.

throughout the film, Pollock appears much older than his thirty-nine years and is never seen without a cigarette in his mouth throughout the course of the film. His clothes are dirty and his demeanour not unlike the on-screen bad boy icons of the 1950s such as Marlon Brando.³ As the film progresses, Pollock is captured deep in the act of painting. The emphasis is not so much on the finished work but Pollock's methods of production. Pollock explains, 'I can control the flow of the paint: there is no accident, just as there is no beginning and no end' (1951 quoted in Namuth 1951). Unlike the conventional modernist image of the painter at an easel, Namuth captures Pollock looming above or on his giant canvases, appearing to dominate them as he performs the double act of masculinity and the process of painting.⁴

The film reinstates the dominant narrative of action painting as vastly heterosexual and masculine, characteristics that when braided together, support the myth of the great male painter. This point in modernism was significant because, in Griselda Pollock's words,

...we need to conceive this indubitably creative moment in the histories of painting and Modernism as open to a radical destabilisation of fixed positions, fixed notions of sexual identity and subjectivity *precisely because of the actual character of the artistic moves that were being explored* (2003, 148, original italics).

Extending on Pollock's idea that action painting was metaphorically masculine, the question subsequently arises as to whether the gestures or actions in modernist action painting are also masculine. The gesture in action painting occurs through the movement of the male body as he paints and the hyper masculine characteristics of the artist (for example, Jackson Pollock's brooding personality as he paints) (2003, 149).⁵

³ Films where Marlon Brando played the 'bad boy' character include Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One*, 1953, and Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1951.

⁴ Craig Staff gives a definition of easel painting by comparing it to Renaissance painting where the artist would often paint onto interior walls. Easel painting is also a portable means of painting that is not physically attached to an architectural surface (2013, 133). Examples of artworks by men who have captured their 'genius' through self-portraiture in front of the easel include Henri Matisse, *The Artist and His Model*, 1919, and *Self-Portrait*, 1918, and Vincent Van Gogh, *Self-Portrait in front of the Easel*, 1888.

⁵ Tropes of hypermasculinity include machoism, physical strength and bravery, where '..."masculine" affects are systematically increased, enhanced, and exaggerated, whereas the "feminine" affects are decreased, abated, and suppressed' (Mosher and Tomkins 1988, 65).

Figure 1.5: Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock at work on One: Number 31, as Lee Krasner looks on*, 1950, photograph, dimensions unknown, Estate of Hans Namuth. In Marcia Brennan, *Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post- Painterly Abstraction* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 79.

Krasner, who was also a painter and married to Pollock, played a significant role in how Pollock's genius was documented and received in photographs of Pollock painting (Figure 1.5). In photographs such as Namuth's *Jackson Pollock at work on One: Number 31, as Lee Krasner looks on*, 1950, Krasner is subtly positioned at the margins of the shot as a passive and almost anonymous figure (Brennan 2004, 80). Brennan explains that while Pollock painted, Krasner's presence

...had the practical and symbolic effect of enabling her husband at least partially to consolidate the boundaries of his public identity so that a more sympathetic and culturally intelligible persona could emerge from their shared domestic existence (2004, 99).

It can be argued that Pollock's masculinity was further ensured through Krasner's docile figure in Namuth's photograph (perched on a stool behind Pollock as he painted). This revealed that both Pollock and Krasner had to adhere to their respective gender roles in order for the cultural framing essential to action painting to take place. It is also evident that Pollock's identity as an artist, and how it sat in the broader cultural context that his paintings were created in, was intrinsic to the gendered and aesthetic meanings that so strongly informed late modernist painting.

Gendered Painting

Although Krasner was a successful abstract painter in her own right, her work has been often overlooked institutionally, as it was unable to be separated from her identity as a woman and the wife of one of late modernism's most prominent artists

(Pollock 2003, 162).⁶ In Krasner's words, 'I was not the average woman married to the average painter. I was married to Jackson Pollock. The context is bigger and even if I was not personally dominated by Pollock, the whole art world was' (1973 quoted in Brandes Gratz 1973). If we consider the merging of Krasner's paintings with how her identity as an artist was constructed in Namuth's photograph of Pollock, her status as Pollock's wife and supporter overrode Krasner as an artist (Pollock 2003, 164). I contend that this was not because Pollock was a better painter, but the prominent sexism in late modernist painting, which ignored Krasner's contribution to action painting.

Figure 1.6: Mark Patiky, *Krasner in the studio, 1966, at work on Portrait in Green*, 1966, photograph, dimensions unknown, Pollock-Krasner Foundation, New York.

<http://www.aageastend.com/contents/pollock-pollock-krasner-studio-springs/>

Figure 1.7: Lee Krasner, *Portrait in Green*, 1966, oil on canvas, 140.3 x 239.4 cm.

<https://hyperallergic.com/296877/the-fly-in-the-ointment-lee-krasner/>

Griselda Pollock suggests that when analysing Krasner's works such as *Portrait in Green*, 1966 (Figures 1.6 and 1.7) in comparison to Pollock's canvases, Krasner's work emits a much more considered exploration of colour, space, depth and scale than Pollock's paintings (2003, 164). Griselda Pollock explains,

...it does need to be said that Lee Krasner was a much more profound colourist than her husband ever was and her exploration of the problematics of space, depth, and surface with colour was sustained, unlike his, over an entire creative career into the 1980s (2003, 164).

⁶ Griselda Pollock observes that she has only once encountered a permanent exhibition that includes both Pollock's and Krasner's work - at the National Gallery of Australia in 1986. Outside of the United States, the NGA owns six of Krasner's paintings, Museum Ludwig owns one Krasner work in their public collection, one work is in a public collection in Spain, and one is in the Kunstmuseum in Bern (2003, 162).

Through her choice of large canvases and prominent lashes of mark making and colour, her work reflects a bold difference to how she was framed as a passive spectator presented in the background while Jackson Pollock painted (2003, 164). However, because action painting is predominantly masculine, it was not the ideal place for Krasner's paintings. Griselda Pollock reasons that any difference in painting from the masculine norm '...gets stymied by the cultural politics of crass sexism that predetermined the non-reading of any art made by a woman...' (2003, 164). Although Krasner's work is arguably more avant-garde than her husband's, modernist painting as a cultural site for practice was one that has proven to be a space that only men could occupy.

Decoration and Intuition

It was not only the media and artists who endeavoured to structure action painting as masculine, critics of late modernist painting played a key role in reaffirming painting as masculine, while marginalising the work of women. One of the key figures in my discussion on the gendering of modernist painting is Greenberg, who I argue contributed to, but also failed to acknowledge, the gendered lens through which modern art history was viewed. Greenberg wrote extensively on abstraction and action painting, and his writing reveals an inconsistency where he associates the decorative as a trope for femininity. I suggest that the characteristics of the decorative which he identified run parallel to the modernist understanding of the (masculine) grid.

Intuition is arguably a key trait of modernist action painting. I suggest that to be intuitive in painting is to work without strict premeditation in planning the composition as the work is applied onto the canvas with gestures and mark making. However, intuition can also be framed through feminine stereotypes such as being out of control or illogical. Shirley Kaneda explains that the gestural process of intuition in action painting is read as feminine because '[f]or the male, such an act is heroic, a mark of genius, but intuitiveness has long been considered a weak feminine trait, as ambivalent, vague, or unresolved' (1991, 78). Kaneda points out that although intuition can be branded as feminine, there is a contradiction. When the work of male

artists was labelled as intuitive, they were also considered to be heroic and masculine in their intuitive gestures.

Greenberg reveals how the intuitive can be positioned as masculine when he discusses it in relation to Pollock's paintings. In Greenberg's catalogue essay for Pollock's 1967 retrospective, *Jackson Pollock* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Greenberg states that 'Pollock's "all-over" "drip" paintings seem swiftness and spontaneity incarnate, but their arabesque interlacings strike the uninitiated eye as excluding anything that resembles control and order, not to mention skill' (1967, quoted in Auther 2004, 353).⁷ He continues that it was '[n]ot skill or dexterity but inspiration, vision, intuitive decision, [that] counts essentially in the creation of aesthetic quality' (1967, quoted in Auther 2004, 353). However, I contend that although his paintings could be perceived as intuitive, because of Pollock's overtly macho character, his masculinity overrode any lingering interpretation of femininity.

Like intuition, the decorative has been historically positioned as a mode of painting that is somewhat ambiguous and feminine. In Elissa Auther's words, the decorative has the potential in painting to 'restore the genre's significance as an art of profound insight or, alternatively, a mode of painting blurring the divide between art and design or commerce with an attendant loss of artistic identity and meaning' (2004, 342). In my analysis of Greenberg's writing, his strategy within his criticism was to use the decorative as a suppressive veil for what he considered to be feminine painting.⁸

Figure 1.8: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Black Iris III*, 1926, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 75.9 cm, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/69.278.1/>

⁷ *Jackson Pollock* was curated by MoMA curator William Lieberman

⁸ In early modernism, the decorative shifted from that of a positive characteristic of modernism, to what Auther describes as 'its antithesis through the demonisation of mass culture, ornament, and femininity' (2004, 339).

I contend that a gendered bias can be discerned in Greenberg's criticism of O'Keeffe's paintings, in his description of her work as decorative. O'Keeffe's abstract works, such as *Black Iris III*, 1926, (Figure 1.8), consists of soft, velvety, folds of colour, that depicts the brief bloom of the black iris (Donagh 1980, 46). However, her compositions have often been described as reminiscent of female genitalia, and by extension, framed as feminine (an observation that O'Keeffe hotly contended) (Nochlin 1976, 115). Griselda Pollock argues that O'Keeffe could not escape her paintings being branded as feminine because she was a woman painter. In Pollock's words, O'Keeffe was

...consistently interrogated about the quality and ambition of her painting because of her allegedly unmerited reputation as a *painter*. This revealed so clearly the still potent symbolic investment in painting itself and the need to protect this practice at all costs from "women" (1999, 186, original italics).

Comparable to the links between Jackson Pollock's masculine identity and his paintings being framed as the mark making of a genius and Krasner's work as marginalised, O'Keeffe's identity as a woman was intrinsic to her work being read as primarily by a woman and secondarily by an artist.

Greenberg's criticism of O'Keeffe's paintings was that her work was a means of superficial ornamentation which had the look of art but lacked any depth (Auther 2004, 352). In Greenberg's words, O'Keeffe's canvases have

...very little inherent value. The deftness and precision of her brush and the neatness with which she places a picture inside its frame exert a certain inevitable charm which may explain her popularity...but the greatest part of her work adds up to little more than tinted photography (1946, 87).

Here, Greenberg has used terms associated with femininity (precision, neatness, charm) as the negative characteristics of painting and decoration (Auther 2004, 353). By condemning the decorative as having a lesser aesthetic value in art, Greenberg establishes that the qualities of decorative or feminine characteristics do not adhere to modernist painting.

The Grid

Another key polemic that I have observed with Greenberg's concept of the decorative is that many of its qualities run parallel to that of the modernist grid. The grid has been used throughout modernism as a form of painting that followed structure and control. Rosalind Krauss explains that the grid differs from other forms of abstract painting as it is '[f]lattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature' (1979, 50). The modernist grid maps out the flatness of painting, while rejecting any form of narrative (1979, 50). I suggest that the grid is an ideal motif to critique modernist masculine modes of painting because it developed almost exclusively during modernism and has been explored by some of the most prominent male modernist painters such as Mondrian.⁹ The grid also offers an antithesis to action painting, where there is no room for intuition, nor a map of the movements of the artist's body as they paint. Instead, the grid is a space in painting that is concerned with the flattened aesthetic of the surface of a painting.

The grid can be framed as masculine as its elements are controlled, uniform, mechanical, and it uses linear forms of painting that follow a strict geometric patterning. In Kaneda's words, 'If the male aspect of geometry is determinate and objective, the female counterpart is indeterminate and subjective. Within the feminine, the laws of geometry are not so much broken as made conditional' (1991, 77). Kaneda suggests that to break the laws of the grid would be considered to be approaching femininity and I suggest, by default, the decorative. However, when reflecting on Greenberg's critique of O'Keeffe's work, the decorative has elements of reproduction, neatness and precision. These are all terms that can be used to describe the aesthetic value of the grid (Auther 2004, 353). By comparing Greenberg's notion of the decorative to my notion of the qualities of the grid, what is revealed is a paradox, where the same description of precision and repetition is evident in both feminine (the decorative) and masculine (the grid) constructs of painting.

⁹ Other prominent male artists who have used the grid include: Jasper Johns (b. 1930, USA), Sol LeWitt (1928-2007, USA) and Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935, Ukraine).

The similarities between the decorative and the grid in Greenberg's theory is evident in his critique of Mondrian's paintings which he considered as adhering to his concept of modernist painting, in particular flatness. Greenberg emphasised that '[f]latness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art' (1961, 309).¹⁰ I suggest that there are crossovers between Greenberg's notion of the decorative and his description of modernist painting. In Greenberg's essay 'The Crisis of the Easel Picture,' 1948, he describes late modernist painting as follows:

Though the "all-over" picture will, when successful, still hang dramatically on a wall, it comes very close to decoration-to the kind seen in wallpaper patterns that can be repeated indefinitely - and insofar as the "all-over" picture remains an easel picture, which somehow it does, it infects the notion of the genre with a fatal ambiguity. I am not thinking of Mondrian in particular at this moment. His attack on the easel picture was radical enough, for all its inadvertence, and the paintings of his maturity are ostensibly among the flattest of all easel pictures (1948, 222).

Although Greenberg is highlighting in his essay aspects of easel painting, his description also adheres to elements of the grid such as patterning and indefinite repetition. In addition, he is quick to add that he does not consider Mondrian's grids to fall into the decorative. For Greenberg, Mondrian was radical and worked with the conventions of flatness in late modernist painting enough to bypass wallpaper (1948, 222).

Figure 1.9: Piet Mondrian, *Composition No.1 with Grey and Red*, 1938/
Composition with Red, 1939, 1938-1939, oil on canvas, mounted on wood support. 105.2 x 102.3 cm, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3053>

¹⁰ Greenberg focused on flatness throughout his career; however, it is in his 1961 essay 'Modernist Painting' that he emphasises flatness as what he considers to be one of the key constructs in abstract painting. Greenberg's view on flatness is that '[i]t was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that remained, however, more fundamental than anything else to the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism' (1961, 309). Flatness was a key aspect of Greenberg's theories in regards to modernist painting. However, my focus and interest is on another aspect of his criticism, the decorative, to demonstrate that there was gender bias in Greenberg's criticism.

However, in my interpretation of the structure in Mondrian's paintings - for example, *Composition No.1 with Grey and Red, 1938/ Composition with Red, 1939, 1938-1939* (Figure 1.9) - Mondrian's grids can be characterised as indicative of decoration. The painting is uniform and repetitive in terms of composition and colour. Furthermore, in my analysis, Greenberg is aware that his critique is overlapping with his previous concept of the decorative, for he describes late modernist painting as '...very close to decoration' (1948, 222). This tension between the decorative, the grid and the intuitive opens up the possibility to critically discuss feminine and masculine characteristics of painting as an approach that, I contend, is not fixed to a particular type of painting, but can be perceived as a tactic used to ensure modernism's masculine hierarchy.

To further clarify my point that the grid was a motif of masculine modernism, I refer to the work of Agnes Martin. It is evident, to me, that her grids disrupt mechanical configuration and instead create openness and flexibility for the grid's geometric form. Unlike Mondrian's paintings, Martin's involve the simple repetition of pattern and loose line that forms a grid-like structure on the canvas, creating a clear distinction between the uniformity of the modernist grid and intuition.

Figure 1.10: Agnes Martin, *Summer*, 1964, watercolour, ink and gouache on paper, 23.5 x 23.5 cm, Collection of Patricia L. Lewy Gidwitz.

<http://lacma.tumblr.com/post/146269664001/agnes-martin-at-lacma-now-on-view-agnes-martin-is>

Figure 1.11: Agnes Martin, *Untitled*, 1960, ink on paper, 30.2 x 30.6 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/34006>

In *Summer*, 1964, (Figure 1.10) and, *Untitled*, 1960, (Figure 1.11), Martin reduces the grid to a series of arbitrary dots and lines that make it appear unpredictable, as there is no determinate aspect in her use of geometry (Kaneda 1991, 75). In contrast to Mondrian's neatly painted grids, Martin's marks end before the edges of her paper supports. By exposing the ends of the grid, Martin challenges Greenberg's concept of the neat and tidy decorative. Although her pencil and ink grids show precision and repetition, they also reveal the methods behind her mark making. Kaneda explains, 'The lack of uniformity of the dots announces the instability of the grid to mask these differences; the grid becomes the site of indeterminacy rather than control' (1991, 75). By exposing the messy edges of her grids, Martin's works suggest intuition and a break in the repetitive dots and rectangles, which highlight each individual mark as hand drawn and also suggest that her grids are unfinished as they do not follow the neat geometry of Mondrian's grids.

Despite offering a method of creating artworks that differed from the established modernist grid, art critics responded to the visible gestures on Martin's canvases as poetic gestures, based on intuition and, therefore, feminine (Kaneda 1991, 75). In Kaneda's words,

It is not a question of decorative or non-decorative, it is a question of the personal and impersonal. Stable and unstable, passive and aggressive, conceptual and intuitive. "Rigorousness" is not hinged to aggressiveness, and Martin's rigor does not manifest itself as objective or stable form, but through seduction (1991, 75).

One reason why Martin's work was seen as less prestigious than her male counterparts is because, as a woman artist, Martin has been unable to shake the stigma of having her intuitive grids labelled as passive, poetic and unfinished (1991, 75). Despite Kaneda's bid to explain why Martin's grids were considered to be feminine, her characterisation of Martin's work as seductive (as opposed to being aggressive) can also be interpreted as a gendered reading of the grid that bears some similarities to Greenberg's gendering of painting by women artists. Building on my previous point that painting was considered to be feminine or masculine as a symptom of the artist's gendered identity, Kaneda's claim that Martin's works are

seductive can be seen as an example of ingrained misogyny that has carried on from modernist painting.

The Arena

Although Greenberg's ideas were influential in the development of abstract painting, he cannot be taken as the sole voice. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Rosenberg's writing was considerably valued among the action painters until Greenberg's criticism became prominent and Rosenberg was subsequently neglected in scholarship (Orton 1991, 3).¹¹ I specifically focus on Rosenberg's writings on the act or processes of action painting. Similarly to Greenberg, Rosenberg's writing was grounded in masculine conceptions of painting that are positioned as the norm, reinforcing the narrative of masculine individualism and the western art historical canon as predominantly male.

In his essay 'The American Action Painters,' 1952, Rosenberg discusses what he considered to be the primary concerns for action painting - the process of creation. He explains that the act of action painting, '...began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act - rather than a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or "express" an object, actual or imagined.' Rosenberg continues, 'What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event,' that was created through the gesture of the artist's body (1952, 22). Rosenberg's concept of action painting explored the possibility for radical change in painting - in particular, how the act of painting could become performative, as his criticism on action painting was shaped by the role the artist's body actively played in the creation of the work. Rosenberg's concepts offer a view on action painting, where the act or processes (the event that takes place in the arena or, in other words, on the support) of painting are favoured over any, if not at all, resulting painted canvases.

Extending on Rosenberg's focus on the body, I argue that by acknowledging the body of the artist is an essential tool in the processes of action painting, there is an

¹¹ Daniel Siedell explains that unlike Rosenberg, Greenberg had the backing of '...considerable institutional support, in defining what constitutes quality art criticism and how it should function within the artworld. Greenberg's has become the standard against which subsequent (and previous) critics' texts are measured' (2002, 16).

opportunity to highlight the gendering of late modernist painting. In this chapter I have established that this gender bias was not so much a stylistic tendency of painting but based on the identity of the artist. In Rosenberg's words, the characteristics of action painting are as follows: 'A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist...The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence' (1952, 23). Rosenberg has established (and as I have demonstrated with the photographs and film capturing Pollock in his painterly act) that the identity or persona of the artist was intrinsic to the artwork. I can apply Rosenberg's concepts, although not explicitly stated by him, to my argument that the action painter was predominantly male. If the body of the artist who creates the painterly event on the canvas is essential to modernist action painting, I contend that, consciously or not, Rosenberg's framing of the action painter reveals that it was male bodies which were the accepted norm.

However, this male body also engaged with the intuitive, which as I have argued, can be framed as a feminine trait. In Rosenberg's words, '...what gives the canvas its meaning is not psychological data but *rôle*, the way the artist organizes his emotional and intellectual energy as if he were in a living situation' (1952, 23, original italics). Like Greenberg's critique of Pollock's processes as intuitive, Rosenberg also emphasises that intuition was essential when engaging in the act of action painting. When considering that it was the (male) body that was prominent in modernist action painting, it can be read that through action painting, what was emphasised was the heroic human struggle of the (male) artist, through the intuitive expressions of gesture that manifested through paint on the canvas (Marie 2006, 45). I suggest that this struggle of the male artist was in fact where a key issue of the gendering of modernist action painting lies, where masculine bravado inhibited women artists from becoming acclaimed as action painters.

Slipping and Sliding: Paintings Hysterical Slime

Figure 1.12: Harry Shunk, *Yves Klein performance 'Anthropometries of the Blue Period,'* 1960, 1960, photograph, gelatin-silver print, 20 x 25.7 cm, International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Paris.

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/harry-shunk/yves-klein-performance-anthropometries-of-the-yTEosNrdhuM-lxsyISfWg2>

Building on Rosenberg's concept that in action painting the artist cannot be separated from their (masculine) identity, I argue that key to maintaining the myth of the artistic genius is the fundamental rule that the artist must master their materials. In other words, in order to succeed at heroism through action painting, the artist must overcome the constrictions of painting's materiality. This mastery over materials has been discussed through the double performance of film and photographs of Pollock captured mid gesture and alongside his paintings. Expanding on how Pollock was framed as a master painter, action painting is the ideal space to critique mastery, as the movement is supported by the intuitive gestures of the artist that, I argue, are still somewhat controlled as they are dependent on the hand of the artist.

Figure 1.13: Yves Klein, *Large Blue Anthropometry (ANT 105) (La grande Anthropométrie bleue (ANT 105))*, 1960, dry pigment and synthetic resin on paper, mounted on canvas, 280 x 428 cm, Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa, Spain.

<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/27>

As a counterpoint to Pollock's paintings, Klein presented a different kind of mastery over action painting, where his body made no contact with the act of painting. During his performative *Anthropometries of the Blue Period (Anthropométrie de l'époque bleue)*, 1960, (Figures 1.12 and 1.13), he unapologetically used the naked female body as a tool for painting; as a substitute for his brushes and mark making (Jones 1998, 86). In the performance, the models cover themselves in Klein's International Klein Blue pigment and drag each other over large scale sheets of blank paper.¹²

¹² *International Klein Blue* is a rich blue pigment that Klein invented and patented (de Duve and Krauss, 1989, 79).

Unlike Pollock's paintings being created in the studio with only Namuth or Holmes present as primary witnesses to Pollock's painterly act and with Krasner looking on in the background, Klein's event occurs in a room full of spectators, while an orchestra plays Klein's *Monotone-Silence Symphony* (Figure 16).¹³ Dressed in a tuxedo and tie, Klein watches this event take place; however, he never touches the models or comes close to the work, as not to risk staining his spotless suit with pigment.

By removing himself from his materials, Klein shifts the role of the action painters body from producer to director, critiquing American action painters such as Pollock. Klein explains, 'I would like to make it clear that this [*Anthropometries*] endeavor is opposed to "action painting" in that I am actually completely detached from the physical work during its creation' (1961, quoted in Jones 1998, 89). *Anthropometries* is a compelling example of action painting that critiques Rosenberg's notion of the canvas as an arena. Klein's work reconceptualises painting, and his gestures can be read as a parody on what Rosenberg established as modernist action painting (where the key focus was on the movements of the artist). Furthermore, instead of Klein's heroic body being the focus while he paints, his models take on the labour of his mark making, while an audience witnesses their painterly acts, turning the processes of action painting into an overtly theatrical event.

Klein's use of nude female models is problematic as it maintains masculine supremacy in painting. Rune Gade explains that Klein '...undermined the common idea of painting as an index of the painter's body, and consequently also the connection to a more "vulgar" expressive tradition in favour of the less bodily potentials of painting as an intellectual and reflective practice' (2010, 167). Despite Klein's innovative way of reconceptualising and challenging action painting through the construction of painting as theatrical, he does not attempt to challenge the passive role women were given as artists (or as in Krasner's case, the wife of a male artist). This issue, unconscious or not, is addressed by Klein who clarifies,

¹³ Klein composed *Monotone-Silence Symphony* that was scored for an orchestra and choir. The piece contains a D- major cord that was held up to seven minutes and followed by forty-five minutes of silence (Kania 2010, 350).

These living brushes are under the constant direction of my commands...Personally I would never attempt to smear paint over my own body and become a living brush; on the contrary, I would rather put on my tuxedo and wear white gloves. I would not even think of dirtying my hands with paint. Detached and distant, the work of art must complete itself before my eyes and under my command. Thus, as soon as the work is realized, I stand there, present at the ceremony, spotless, calm, relaxed, worthy of it, and ready to receive as it is born into the intangible world... (1961, quoted in Jones 1994, 561).

Klein demonstrates that he purposely distanced himself from the act of painting and refers to physical creation of his work as dirty. By detaching himself from the physical aspects of painting, his work can be read as feminised, as it is the female body that physically engages in the messy act of painting and creates the composition of the resulting artworks (Gade 2010, 167). Klein potentially opens up a more considered parody of American action painting. By using women as his brushes, there is the possibility of not only challenging mastery over materials as the dominant force in action painting, but also offering a method that playfully critiqued the reign of masculine identity. However, as the nude models follow Klein's instructions, they do not have agency, as they are only his physically exposed brushes that are directed to move under his commands. Klein's work contributes to, rather than challenges, the trope of modernist painting through the patriarchal associations with the naked female form.

As my final point in this chapter, I argue that there is a gap in modernist criticism on action painting in regards to the transformation of paint from wet to dry as part of the painterly process. Neither Greenberg nor Rosenberg adequately consider the transformation of material (wet to dry paint) in their writing on modernist painting. This is particularly surprising for Rosenberg as he, like Klein, focused on the processes associated with painting. I suggest that Greenberg's and Rosenberg's avoidance in interacting with the wetness or slime of painting is problematic. For example, although Klein states that this was in order to remain detached and distant from his dirty materials, the separation can also be read as gendering paint through the physical avoidance of painting's slime.

It is problematic not to consider painting's wetness in modernist art criticism, especially when contemplating how the focus in action painting is on how one masters their material (often in large quantities of liquid form as shown in Pollock's and Klein's work). I argue that when paint is wet or sticky, it can be seen as taking on feminine stereotypes such as being out of control or the producer of bodily fluids- (for example, menstruation). In Gade's words, the wetness of paint is

...closely connected to both a somaphobic and misogynist tendency that denounces and eliminates the parts of painting that it itself feminizes through the establishment of a discursive association between painting, bodily fluids and femininity, all of which are negatively valorized and stigmatized (2010, 166).

Painting's slime or wetness can be gendered as female because it disrupts control over gesture and form. This is not to say that all painting that undergoes the process of wet to dry should be read as feminine. Instead I argue that when studying action painting's male privileging, it is clear that although the act of painting can be considered intuitive, there is a structure put in place (for example, the photographs of Pollock) that is designed to capture the male action painter as one who is in control of his materials, both historically and physically.

Jane Blocker outlines the reason for painting's wetness to be associated with the feminine and her ideas can be applied to Klein's *Anthropometries*. Blocker explains, '...performance's feminine associations are rhetorically displaced onto painting through disparaging claims about painting's messiness, contamination, decorativeness, eroticism, expressiveness or emotionalism' (2004, 73). Accordingly, *Anthropometries* can be read as a fear of the contamination of the feminine qualities of painting, more so as the female body was involved in the process of Klein's painterly act (2004, 73). Reading Klein's work as feminised deconstructs the gender hierarchy in action painting, giving Klein the opportunity to further challenge action painting. Yet, by separating himself from the messy act of painting with nude female models in his place, he reaffirms painting as masculine.

This chapter has addressed the criticism of Greenberg and Rosenberg in order to present the key ideas in modernist action painting that privileged heterosexual, white

male artists. Through their considerations on the decorative and action painting, I have established that the feminising of late modernist painting was not a reflection on the artist's work but rather revealed the misogyny embedded in modernist thinking. This chapter has suggested that the masculine motif of the grid can be referred to as feminine if Greenberg's criteria for the decorative is contemplated. By applying Greenberg's criticism of O'Keeffe's abstract paintings to his opinion of Mondrian's grids, I have argued that a bias may be discerned in his approach that is based on the gendered identity of the artist.

By deconstructing Rosenberg's focus on the body of the action painter, this chapter has established that his writing on action painting as an arena reiterates the male body as the norm for which the act of painting takes place. The notion of artistic genius is also entwined in this act, and accordingly this chapter has suggested that to succeed within action painting one must master their material. I have identified this mastery with the work of Pollock. I have demonstrated that along with the act of action painting being present on the canvas, documentation of the male artist whilst painting further re-establishes the privileging of masculinity in late modernist painting. In contrast, Klein physically separated himself from the act of painting by using models as his brushes. However, even though Klein parodies American action painting by separating himself from the 'act' of painting, he, too, reinforces the ideology that painting remained masculine territory through the objectification of his nude models.

Lastly, I suggest that action painting has also opened up new possibilities for women artists as its focus was on the gestures created by the body. This allows for a more direct acceptance of female physical and bodily expressions within art and culture. However, as illustrated in the case of O'Keeffe and Martin, the response by critics has been to fall back on reading their work as predominantly women's art that was compared to (and ultimately regarded lesser than) the work of the male artist as genius. My proposition about the wetness of paint as being gendered as feminine sets up the foundations for the following chapter, where I will discuss feminist responses to action painting and how women artists have negotiated masculine dominated forms of art making. I have already argued that modernist action painting was not the ideal movement for women artists. To counter this position, Chapter Two

looks more closely at how women rejected masculine painting and instead, through the stain and pour in painting, opened up the possibility for alternative readings of modernist painting, affirming that feminist and anti-modern art histories can serve as alternative histories that contest and repudiate established modernist norms.

Chapter Two: *Women Staining the Heroic Narrative*

Within the male bastions of the art world, it was art criticism that assumed the task of preserving tradition, of critically constructing, or reconstructing, through the use of gendered metaphor, a form of painting where men could be men and women could be women.

Lisa Saltzman 2005, 380

This chapter argues that the artworks of Helen Frankenthaler and Lynda Benglis threatened hypermasculine modes of modernist action painting through their use of the stain and pour respectively. This chapter reveals how Frankenthaler and Benglis developed forms of painting, where the focus was not on mastering gesture or materials. Rather, the stain and the pour offered alternative approaches to masculine action painting after late modernism.

Crucial to my approach to Frankenthaler's and Benglis's work is Lucy Lippard's concept of anti-modernism. As outlined in the Introduction, Lippard suggests that the greatest contribution by women artists during modernism was, in fact, their lack of involvement (1980, 362). I suggest that anti-modernism, rather than post-modernism, is a more appropriate response to the work of Frankenthaler and Benglis. Both artists partake in anti-modernist painting that is not a continuation of masculine modernist or post-modernist traditions; instead, they use a visual language of painting that is resistant to modernist art (1980, 362).

Implicit within anti-modernism is the deconstruction of the male painter as a heroic figure. Linda Nochlin's seminal essay, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971) suggests that there are no great women artists because greatness is a masculine concept. Nochlin's reading of greatness sets up the foundations for my argument on how painting has been considered either feminine or masculine, depending on the gendered identity of the artist. Nochlin discusses how gendered language in art has been structured to favour the narrative of the male genius and be dismissive of the work of women artists. By applying Nochlin's argument to anti-modernism, what is revealed is a correlation between the gendered language used in the 1960s to describe painting by women such as Frankenthaler and Benglis as

feminine, and the development of artwork by women that resisted modes of masculine modernism.

Chapter One established that late modernist painting was grounded through art criticism in tropes of masculinity. This chapter extends on the discussion of painting as masculine by analysing the contradictions in critic Eugene Goossen's criticism of the stain. Frankenthaler and Arshile Gorky (1904-1948, Armenia) both engage with the stain in their paintings. Goossen's criticism reveals that both artists used similar techniques in their paintings. However, he framed Frankenthaler's work as feminine, while maintaining that Gorky's stains defied femininity, because they were painted by a man.

This chapter examines the language Goossen and Harold Rosenberg used to construct Frankenthaler's work as feminine. Building on my observation that there is a gendered division in how critics have approached the stain in abstract painting, I argue that Goossen's and Rosenberg's criticism attempts to describe the work that Frankenthaler was making, rather than critically engaging with the work's meaning. Their writing is compared to Lisa Saltzman's feminist readings of Frankenthaler's work, highlighting the gender bias in reactions by critics to Frankenthaler's paintings. This chapter subsequently considers the shifts in the discussion of the work of women painters after feminist writing began challenging the patriarchal biases of art historiography.

In the 1960s, Benglis became well known for her poured three-dimensional paintings, made from thick layers of brightly coloured latex and polyurethane foam. Through writer Susan Richmond's and critic Robert Pincus-Witten's approaches to Benglis's materials and pouring processes, this chapter examines two key issues in relation to her work. Firstly, Benglis's spills of paint signposted a shift in thinking about materials, particularly in regards to her three-dimensional sculptured pours that appear to be splashes of paint, hovering in space. Secondly, the critical language surrounding Benglis's work is examined to demonstrate the uncertainty of critics in terms of how to approach her work. This chapter contends that Pincus-Witten's description of Benglis's artworks as fallen or frozen suggests that her gestures are incomplete, paused, on standstill, or unfinished.

This chapter turns to discuss how Frankenthaler's and Benglis's large scale artworks proved to be challenging for publications and institutions. Firstly, I compare how Frankenthaler and Jackson Pollock were positioned in photographs that accompanied magazine spreads on their work. In Chapter One, I established that in Martha Holmes's photograph of Pollock for Life magazine (Figure 1.3), the artist was captured hovering over his canvas, while in the midst of his painting process. On the other hand, I discuss that when Frankenthaler was photographed for Life, she was passively seated on top of or with her back to her paintings, rather than being captured in action.

Expanding from the docile positioning of Frankenthaler, this chapter examines the initial rejection of Benglis's poured work *Contraband*, 1969, from the exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* at the Whitney Museum, New York. Despite the engagement of the exhibition with concept of anti-modernism, Benglis was one of only two women artists included in the survey exhibition. There was a curatorial concern that the scale (the work was 1011.6 cm long) and bright colour of her work would detract attention from other artworks. I contend that although *Contraband* was a predominant example of anti-modernist art, her work was treated as problematic because it shifted the attention from the (primarily male) artists in the exhibition.

Destabilising Marginalisation

In 1964, Clement Greenberg curated an exhibition titled *Post Painterly Abstraction* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).¹ The exhibition highlighted a new school of abstract painting in New York, which focused on an approach to abstraction that was purely optical (Brennan 2004, 12) and was later labelled as effeminate by critics when compared to the work of first generation abstract painters

¹ The artists included in *Post Painterly Abstraction* are Walter Darby Bannard (1934-2016, USA), Jack Bush (1909-1977, Canada), Gene Davis (1920-1985, USA), Thomas Downing (1928-1985, USA), Friedel Dzubas (1915-1994, Germany), Paul Feeley (1910-1966, USA), Sam Francis (1923-1994, USA), Helen Frankenthaler, Sam Gilliam (b. 1933, USA), Al Held (1928-2005, USA), Ellsworth Kelly (1923-2015, USA), Nicholas Krushenick (1929-1999, USA), Alexander Liberman (1912-1999, Ukraine), Morris Louis (1912-1962, USA), Arthur Fortescue McKay (1926-2000, Canada), Howard Mehring (1931-1978, USA), Kenneth Noland (1924-2010, USA), Jules Olitski (1922-2007, USSR), Ray Parker (1922-1990, USA), David Simpson (1928, USA), Albert Stadler (1923-2000, USA), Frank Stella (b. 1936, USA), Mason Wells (1906-1984, USA) and Emerson Woelffer (1914-2003, USA).

such as Pollock and Willem de Kooning (1904-1997, Netherlands) (2004, 12).² Katy Siegel argues that this reading of abstraction as feminised was based on the concept that

Process, painting, femaleness, seriousness, and personal identity all collide here, conflicting with a “modernism” calcified at this moment in the mid-1960s by critics, perhaps with the collusion of some artists, as a rather narrow and noninclusive practice (2015, 9).

The tendency to label post painterly abstraction as feminine was supported by critics (such as Goossen and Rosenberg) who, according to Siegel, saw these canvases as lyrical or emotionally expressive and as having minor historical importance when compared to the work of the male modernist icons of the 1950s, such as Pollock (2015, 10).

In post war abstraction of the 1960s, women artists faced two key issues. The first was navigating through and exposing the myth of abstraction, as within the second generation of the New York School, painting continued to be associated with masculine and misogynistic themes that came out of responses to action painting. In Mira Schor’s words, ‘The problem was that the universalism of pure abstraction turned out to be a myth that was exposed once theory began to critique the assumptions underlying modernism’s notion of universality as put forth by Western white men’ (2009, 93).³ The second issue that women faced was continuous marginalisation, both artistically and critically. For example, despite the number of women working in abstraction in the 1960s, Frankenthaler was the only one to be

² Brennan explains that post painterly abstraction became prominent in the New York School in the late 1950s due to the eminence of art criticism. The focus in abstract painting was ‘... placed on the “purely optical” clarity of advanced modern painting, along with its “lucid” and “non-tactile” effects’ (2004, 12). However, there was also an emphasis of a “loss of body” that ironically, as Brennan states, ‘...seemed only to provide formalist critics with an expanded rhetorical strategy for promoting idealized conceptions of masculine creativity’ (2004, 12).

³ Schor explains that even today the myth of the heroic male artist continues to be expanded through publications such as Mark Steven and Annalyn Swan’s biography, *de Kooning: An American Master*, 2004, which she highlights as having a key focus on de Kooning’s sexual escapades. Schor also uses the example of prominent contemporary American art historian and critic Kirk Varnedoe, who used the term ‘macho’ to describe the work of Pollock during his retrospective *Jackson Pollock 1998-1999*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2009, 93). Although these may appear as minor examples that reflect attitudes towards the male hero or genius, they are nonetheless evidence that this myth continues to exist.

included in Greenberg's exhibition *Post-Painterly Abstraction*.⁴ I suggest that both of these issues contribute to evidence that painting was not the ideal space for women artists to successfully create work in.

In my observations, femininity was often used by critics in the 1960s as a term to frame women's work. However, there is a gap in criticism on the implications that have prevailed. There was a continuous tendency to label the work of women as feminine, despite feminist artists and historians having challenged modernist ways of thinking about painting. For example, Saltzman claims that the reasoning for a lack of engagement with artworks by women was partly because of the influence of Greenberg's legacy over modernist art history and criticism as well as the '...methodological practice of Anglo- American feminist art history, whose materialist hermeneutic typically privileged the analysis of figuration over abstraction' (2005, 374).⁵ Saltzman's concern is that because there was a penchant for art criticism to frame painting as either masculine or feminine, artworks were characterised as heroic and masculine, or as (inferior) symbols of female experience, while other forms of art making that did not fall under those categories were ignored (2005, 374). To account for the division in responses to post painterly abstraction, it has been suggested that it is not only the gender or politics of the artist that causes abstract painting to be framed as either masculine or feminine, but the way that materials, process and composition are characterised (Richmond 2013, 11).

⁴ Women painting abstraction in the 1960s include Sonia Gechtoff (b. 1926, USA) Grace Hartigan (1922-2008, USA) and Joan Mitchell (1925-1992, USA).

⁵ Greenberg's legacy expanded into his magazine articles. Throughout his career, Greenberg wrote extensively on the work of women artists; however, when writing in women's magazines, his gender bias is apparent (Skidmore 1992, 11). For example, in Greenberg's 1968 article in *Vogue*, he describes minimalist sculptor Anne Truitt (1921, USA) through a gendered lens. Collen Skidmore summarises, 'Greenberg asked how Truitt, whom he described as "a house-wife, with three small children, living in Washington," could possibly "belong" to the center of the art world (New York). "How could such a person fit the role of pioneer of far-art out?" Indeed, those do seem to be formidable obstacles - but for women only' (1992, 11). Greenberg continues, '...the artist would have been able to dissemble her feminine sensibility behind a more aggressively far-out, non-art look, as so many masculine Minimalists have *their* rather feminine sensibilities. But Truitt is willing to stake herself on the truth of her sensibility, feminine or not...' (1968, 284, original italics).

The Phenomenon of Surface

Although women were making significant contributions in painting, I argue that apart from centering on the gender of these artists, the focus by critics was primarily on the material qualities or formal characteristics of the work. Lippard suggests that the work of women artists is often read through what she explains as surface phenomena that encapsulates what can be considered to be women's contribution to art during and after the 1970s - for example, body art, video, performance, collage, as well as the exploration of shifting traditionally 'low' forms of art such as embroidery and sewing into high art (1980, 362). Lippard proposes that '...these are simply *surface* phenomena. Feminism's major contribution has been too complex, subversive, and fundamentally *political* to lend itself to such internecine, hand-to-hand stylistic combat' (1980, 362, original italics). Lippard is referring to thinking about art by women primarily through their use of surface or materials - for example, the stain that occurs when Frankenthaler applies thin paint to a canvas, or the three-dimensional structures that are created as Benglis pours polyurethane foam. However, as Lippard points out, this approach of surface phenomena is problematic as it fails to negotiate the social and political contexts feminist artists critiqued through their work (1980, 362). I would add that such attentiveness to surface phenomena also implies that painting by women artists was seen to be superficial (as opposed to masculine abstract painting by artists such as Pollock, which carried different associations despite having a similar pictorial depth).

Furthermore, within this surface phenomena paradigm, new or self-critical forms of art making are considered to be the most prevalent. Lippard explains, 'For years now, we have been told that male modernist art is superior because it is "self-critical." But from such a view self-criticism is in fact a narrow, highly mystified, and often egotistical monologue' (1980, 362-363, original italics). Lippard continues, 'Much or even most of the best art by women has turned its back on the "new," preferring to go deeper into visual forms that have been "done before" (mostly by men)' (1980, 363). Lippard's argument further supports the concept of anti-modernism. For example, as one of the goals of both anti-modernist and feminist art is to revolutionise the very character of art, a rejection of the art world's "I-did-it-first"

(1980, 362) approach meant that one of women's greatest contributions to art is their lack of indulgence with modernism's values.

The question of explaining how and why masculine modes of language in art criticism have been established may be answered with reference to the narrative of the male genius. The position of the second generation of male New York School painters or post painterly abstract artists is essential to consider when building on the construction of genius or greatness in abstraction. Nochlin explores the prominence of greatness from a feminist perspective in her essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', 1971. She explains that greatness in art is not based exclusively on sex or gender, but through the art historical canon, institutions and education, where the criteria for greatness is embedded within masculine ideals (1971, 44). In Nochlin's words,

...there is a different kind of "greatness" for women's art than for men's, thereby postulating the existence of a distinctive and recognizable feminine style, different both in its formal and its expressive qualities and based on the special character of women's situation and experience (1971, 44).

However, the claim that greatness can be transformed is problematic in itself. This is because it searches for providing alternative criteria to measure women artists against, as opposed to searching for a means of art criticism that was not gendered (Pollock 1988, 48). Throughout this exegesis, I return to the point about searching for this alternative criteria, where the achievements of women artists are discussed without the tendency to fall back on having their progress measured in comparison to men.

Magazines: How Women Can "Get with It" Creatively

An example of how the femininity of women artists has been framed after modernism, is with the rise of these artists being featured in magazine editorials in the 1960s. Artists such as Frankenthaler were used as examples in women's magazines as 'they did not retreat from their newly attained positions, nor did their continued presence in the artistic sphere after the war go unnoticed' (Saltzman 2005,

374). They were framed in a way which suggested, in Saltzman's words, that '[t]he art world was described as "under siege," threatened by a "feminine invasion..." (2005, 375).⁶ The anxiety over the increase of prominent women abstract painters correlates with this chapter's argument that these women were threatening the hypermasculine modes of practice through their use of materials, gestures and the establishment of anti-modernism.⁷

It can be argued that the feminine invasion Saltzman is referring to is a rhetorical device used to dramatise magazine articles. One article that demonstrates the anxiety about the rise of women abstract painters is Jean Lipman and Cleve Gray's October 1961 *Cosmopolitan* article titled 'The Amazing Inventiveness of Women.'⁸ The article focused on what Lipman and Gray describe as the youthful appearance of ten young women artists (including Frankenthaler) as well as their marriages (most were married to artists), and how their femininity shaped their paintings (Skidmore 1992, 10).⁹ Lipman and Gray explain,

Women are more intuitive and are able to express their emotions with less constraint than men. Here is the true reason for the emergence of women as leaders of modern abstract expressionism. Women are now making visible for the first time a whole new world of feminine reactions to life (1961, quoted in Skidmore 1992, 10).

Expressions of femininity as an emotional response to painting were central to Lipman and Gray's framing of the featured artists in their article. I argue that the femininity Lipman and Gray observe is not based on aesthetic choice, rather it is constructed by the assumption that women create work that is intuitive and

⁶ Saltzman is referring to post World War II culture in America.

⁷ For a reading on the differences between how female and male artists are approached in publications, see Roger Clark and Ashley Folgo (2006). They presented their findings on the exclusion of women from institutional (primarily high school and university) textbooks. They concluded that recent art history textbooks authored or co-authored by women were likely to include and engage with women artists. However, some influential texts authored by men, have maintained the exclusion of women. For example, the only woman artist featured in the 2002 edition of *The Story of Art* by E. H. Gombrich is Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945, Germany) (Clark and Folgo 2006, 47).

⁸ The artists featured in *The Amazing Inventiveness of Women* are: Nell Blaine (1922-1996, USA), Lee Bontecou (b. 1931, USA), Joan Brown (1938-1990, USA), Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan (b. 1922, USA), Sonia Gechtoff (b. 1926, USA), Elaine de Kooning (1918- 1989, USA), Louise Nevelson (1899-1988, Ukraine) and Ethel Schwabacher (1903-1983, USA).

⁹ Prominent examples of these relationships include, Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell (1915-1991, USA) and Elaine de Kooning and Willem de Kooning (1904-1997, Netherlands).

emotionally driven. Lipman and Gray attempt to convince their readers that these feminine characteristics are what distinguish women as leaders in abstract expressionism. However, it can also be contended that by focusing on the appearance of women artists, rather than their artwork, they remained passive in comparison to their male counterparts.

Figure 2.0: Cover of *Cosmopolitan*, October 1961, magazine cover. Cover photograph by Gordon Parks. In Katy Siegel, ed., *"The Heroine Paint": After Frankenthaler - Stains, Flows, Decoration, Play, Ambition: A Different Account of Painting from the 1950s to the Present Day* (New York: Gagolian Gallery, 2015), 82.

Further evidence of the framing of Frankenthaler's femininity as the key concern of her practice is also found in Goossen's 1966 article in *Current Biography*. Similarly, to his article on Frankenthaler in *Cosmopolitan*, Goossen focused on her appearance, rather than her work. In his words,

There are still plenty of women painters around, but there are also a few painters who are women. Frankenthaler is in the latter category. Distinctly feminine also in appearance, she is five feet six and a half inches tall, weighs 133 pounds, and has brown eyes and brown hair. Sometimes she is photographed standing by her paintings with a mischievous smile on her face (1966, quoted in Brennan 2004, 133).

Goossen's description of Frankenthaler further confirms a framing of women action painters that was based on their gender first and merit second. I suggest that there are problems with *Cosmopolitan*, *Current Biography* and *Life*. They both diminish Frankenthaler through their writings on her and glamorise her through descriptions of her feminine appearance. Additionally, on the cover of *Cosmopolitan*, one of the cover lines proclaimed, 'Why Women Abstract Painters Can Be Better Than Men' (Figure 2.0). Although this cover line appears progressive in its acknowledgment that women artists can in fact create work on par with or better than their male contemporaries, it backed up my argument that women painters were inextricably linked to their work through their identities as women, evident in the descriptions of their works also correlating with traits that are distinctively feminine.

Figure 2.1: Helen Frankenthaler in *Women Artists in Ascendance*, *Life*, May 13, 1957, magazine article. Photographs by Gordon Parks. In Katy Siegel, ed., “The Heroine Painter”: *After Frankenthaler - Stains, Flows, Decoration, Play, Ambition: A Different Account of Painting from the 1950s to the Present Day* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2015), 72-73.

The positioning of Frankenthaler in *Life* is significant when compared to how Pollock was situated in relation to his canvases. In the photographs in *Life*, he was framed as a master through his physical presence, by looming over his floor-bound works, captured in the midst of his gesture and action (Relyea 2015, 117). On the other hand, Frankenthaler is positioned as submissive, as she is captured sitting on her canvases (Figure 2.1). When considering how Frankenthaler was photographed, Lana Relyea explains, ‘The stain makes history when wielded by a man, *Life* seems to be saying, while for a woman it makes a cushy throw rug, a domestic accessory’ (2015, 116). There is a clear contradiction in how both artists have been portrayed through photographs in *Life*, with Pollock clearly in control over his material as demonstrated with his stance that dominates the canvas. On the other hand, Frankenthaler is passive, posed like an accessory to her work. There are no references to her artistic process or gestures; instead, she appears to be an immaculately dressed and domesticated decorative addition to her canvases.

Accidental Seepage

One way to account for why Frankenthaler’s technique of staining was constructed by critics as feminine is through an examination of the similarities between her diluted oil paint and watercolour. Throughout western art history, watercolour has been primarily used by women and has been associated with amateur women artists (Swinth 2001, 65). This is because watercolour was ‘a pretty material for lady amateurs to use in flower-painting or vase-decorating’ (La Farge n.d., quoted in Swinth 2001, 74). As the popularity of watercolour grew in the late 1800s, Kristen Swinth points out that there was an increasingly large divide between men and women working with the medium, between ‘high and low “masculine” and “feminine” arts’ (2001, 76). I contend that the division between these binaries is evident with

criticisms of Frankenthaler's methods of staining. Like the substance of watercolour, her thinned-down stains were considered to be feminine through their materiality.

Ironically, in the 1800s, male artists began embracing watercolour over more superior mediums such as oils, because '...the painter of watercolor, exercises far more skill, must be far more resourceful, and, in the end, with his [sic] simple means, often suggests more than the oil painter is able to represent' (La Farge n.d., quoted in Swinth 2001, 74). However, Laura Owens suggests that because the materiality of watercolour is much more difficult to master, or even rework (the paint stains the surface of the support rather than sitting on top as with oils or acrylic), the medium was seen as adhering more to decoration than serious abstract painting (2015, 70). In Owens's words on Frankenthaler's technique,

...no one's watercolors are ever thought of as a major part of their art. So I sometimes see her paintings as a political maneuver championing watercolor like effects - feminine, minor - as a medium, which to me is a very interesting idea and reinvigorates painting in amazing ways (2015, 70).

Despite Owens's suggestion that Frankenthaler revived watercolour and that her paintings have significant political value, Owens continues to frame Frankenthaler's paintings as feminine. Her use of language is problematic in terms of how she describes Frankenthaler's stains as 'watercolor like effects - feminine' (2015, 70), because this language maintains the stigma that staining methods of painting were predominantly feminine in appearance.

Figure: 2.2 Ernest Haas, *Helen Frankenthaler in her studio at East 83rd Street and 3rd Avenue, New York, with works in progress*, 1969, photograph, dimensions unknown, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, New York.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/patricia-zohn/culturezohn-helen-and-company_b_8339042.html

I contend that Frankenthaler's technique of thinning her paint and using it to stain her unprimed canvases can be read as anti-modern. Her approach to painting

represented a shift from the trope of the masculine action painter as master over his materials. Frankenthaler's paintings were not about control over gesture, but an approach where the loose application of paint spilled onto the canvas, appearing like it was accidentally knocked over, as captured in Ernest Haas's photograph of Frankenthaler (Figure 2.2). In Frankenthaler words,

My medium is a combination of turpentine, tube paint and enamel. I use brushes or a palette knife but I often shake or toss the paint off the brush - rather than apply it - or use my shoe or hand, controlling and changing the accidents with specific ideas (1957, quoted in Siegel 2015, 14).

She was not concerned with the crux of modernist action painting, that is, work which focused on the narrative of its process. Unlike the dripping and layering technique used by Pollock, every mark on her canvas appeared like it was created in one act (Moyer 2015, 106). Carrie Moyer explains, '[Frankenthaler's] not interested in showing us the narrative of how the painting got made - despite the interest in her process, everything seems to "appear" in a painting all at once' (2015, 106). Moyer's interpretation of action painting reveals that in Frankenthaler's work, the layers of process and gesture are absent. Instead, Frankenthaler allows her paint to seep into the surface of the canvas as one continuous layer. Frankenthaler disperses the narrative of Rosenberg's emphasis (as discussed in Chapter One) that visual evidence of process was an essential part of action painting.

Building on how the stain was constructed as feminine, it can be surmised that the actual resulting painting is not only what was gendered, but the act or process of the artist's body as they either mastered or failed to overcome their materials. In Saltzman's words, 'Pollock may have flung paint about in a bacchanalian frenzy, but that was part of his mythic, male genius, his actively creative artistic persona, impregnating the virgin canvas with his life-giving seed' (2005, 376). However, for Frankenthaler, her work '...merely allowed accidents to happen, passively staining the linen canvases with the seep and ooze of bodily fluids' (2005, 376). Like wet paint, Saltzman suggests that the stain can be perceived as a metaphor for the menstruating female body, and refers to the assumption that Frankenthaler's works were seen as simply accidents (2005, 376). Saltzman's reflection on how

Frankenthaler's work was received by male critics opens up the possibility for a reinterpretation of how the act of action painting is navigated. "Accidents" suggest that artist is not maintaining a mastery over their materials, and as this exegesis has argued, this mastery is an essential requirement for masculine action painting.

An example of Saltzman's assertion that Frankenthaler's works were framed as accidental is found in Rosenberg's criticism of her work. Rosenberg demonstrates a bias against Frankenthaler's work from the perspective that her paintings were constructed entirely by chance. Rosenberg describes Frankenthaler's accidental process as follows:

The early paintings, with their borrowing from Pollock, Gorky, Kandinsky, and other occasional stainers, are sensitive, but more timid than sensitive... with Frankenthaler, the artist's action is at a minimum; it is the paint that is active. The artist is the medium of her medium; her part is limited to selecting aesthetically acceptable effects from the purely accidental behavior of her color. Apparently, Miss Frankenthaler has never grasped the moral and metaphysical basis of Action painting, and since she is content to let the pigment do most of the acting, her compositions fail to develop resistances against which a creative act take place. The result is a distressing flabbiness... (1972, 64).

Rosenberg claims that Frankenthaler's compositions are aesthetically pleasing purely by chance or accident, with no acknowledgment of her skills or creative process. I contend that Rosenberg is setting up a confusing attempt to preserve dominant forms of modernist masculine painting by gendering Frankenthaler's actions in painting as "accidental." In addition, although Rosenberg acknowledges that male artists such as Pollock, Gorky and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944, Russia) also used the stain in their work, it is apparent that Rosenberg perceives their work as continuing to be seen as masculine. However, I suggest that Rosenberg hints that their use of the stain must be limited and the male artist must demonstrate that the stain does not deter his control over his painterly material.

Although critics such as Rosenberg refer to Frankenthaler's painting processes as accidental, Frankenthaler claims that she uses tools that hold her paint, such as her

brushes or even her shoes, to *alter* the control she has over her material (Siegel 2015, 14, italics added). In addition, I contend that there are parallels when comparing Frankenthaler's processes to the notion that the male action painter mastered his materials. By controlling the gestures and tools she uses to paint, Frankenthaler has as much control over her materials as male action painters. However, unlike the artworks of men such as Pollock (whose paint sat on the surface of the canvas), once Frankenthaler's paint is poured onto the canvas, it spreads as it soaks into her supports.

Figure 2.3: Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952, oil and charcoal on canvas, 219.4 x 297.8 cm, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York.

http://images.frankenthalerfoundation.org/www_frankenthalerfoundation_org/1952_Frankenthaler_Mountains_and_Sea_copy3.jpg

Frankenthaler's painting *Mountains and Sea*, 1952, (Figure 2.3), demonstrates a method of staining that was not based on an accidental process. The washes of colour in the painting are broken up by black lines, creating a distinction between Frankenthaler's loose splashes of paint and controlled gestures. Saltzman argues that it was the pooled areas of colour in *Mountains and Sea* that caught the attention of critics, and the painting became Frankenthaler's breakthrough work. Although Frankenthaler's distinct method of painting set her apart from her male colleagues, this also opened up her work to be approached by critics as overtly feminine (Saltzman 2005, 376).

Bleeding The Stain

The terms 'decorative' and 'lyrical' have often been associated with Frankenthaler's large scale canvases as a means of gendering her work as subtle and passive compared to her male counterparts. Daniel Belasco explains, 'Women artists were chastised when they crossed a line into a stereotypically feminine aesthetic of stains and flourishes that became perceived as erotic and anti-intellectual' (2015, 90). Belasco is referring to the contradiction that Frankenthaler faced through staining.

She was engaging with a means of painting so overtly feminine that she was risking her work becoming completely misinterpreted (2015, 90). Although Belasco is attempting to frame Frankenthaler in a way where she appears as heroic in her risk taking - that is, to paint in a way that was likely to be seen as nothing more than decorative - his point (like Nochlin's) is based on comparing her to masculine modes of painting.

The question arises as to who was making this misinterpretation of Frankenthaler's work, and why. Returning to Lippard's approach to surface phenomena, an analysis of the impact of the stain in action painting in the 1960s reveals a gendered discourse that challenged the well-established masculine modes of modernist painting. The stain has been structured in art criticism as not only the result of pouring paint onto canvas, but also in terms of the stain's association with the cultural coding of menstruation (Saltzman 2005, 376). Saltzman explains that staining was an extension of the female body and '...came to signify the trace of an involuntary bodily function, of uncontrolled nature, turning painting into the record of an accident' (2005, 376). Comparing the stain to menstruation reveals a deep bias towards Frankenthaler's work, not to mention a bias with misogynistic connotations. Furthermore, the links between the stain and menstruation can associate the female body with being irrational and out of control, whereas men in modernism were associated with culture, rationality and reason.

Evidence of thinking about the stain as feminine is demonstrated in Goossen's account of Frankenthaler's work, where he discusses her work by drawing a comparison to Pollock. He explains,

Frankenthaler's painting is manifestly that of a woman... Without Pollock's painting hers is unthinkable. What she took from him was masculine; the almost hard-edged, linear splashes of duco enamel. What she made with it was distinctly feminine, the broad, bleeding-edged stain on raw linen. With this translation she added a new candidate for the dictionary of plastic forms, the stain (1961, quoted in Saltzman 2005, 375).

Along with the links that can be drawn between menstruation and the ‘bleeding-edged stain,’ (1961, 78) I argue that what Goossen is suggesting, is that Frankenthaler leeches off the work of Pollock and her work is derivative in comparison. However, there is an inconsistency in Goossen’s line of thinking. On one hand he is suggesting that Frankenthaler’s paintings are dependent on the impact Pollock’s drip paintings had on late modernist painting. Yet, Goossen also admits that Frankenthaler created the technique of staining in painting as ‘a new candidate for the dictionary of plastic forms’ (1961, 78). Goossen’s gender bias is revealed through his position that although Frankenthaler’s technique was iconic, her work depended on that of a man’s. Furthermore, I suggest that what Goossen demonstrates is that the value of Frankenthaler’s paintings falls short because she is a woman.

Double Standards

In this chapter I have argued that the stain was misinterpreted and overlooked in Frankenthaler’s work because she was a woman painter. Extending on this discussion, I contend that men were free to shift between gendered associations of painting. In Rosa Lee’s words, ‘In effect, men are able to move to and fro across gender boundaries with far greater ease than women, escaping from the “restrictions” of masculinity to explore more “feminine” aspects of their psyche’ (1987, 8). Lee is referring to the construction of language and an art history that is based on masculinity as the norm, whereby modes of practice by women were put into a separate category of art making, one that is measured against the dominant masculine art historical canon. The soaking of paint into Frankenthaler’s canvas was the dominant force in her compositions, rather than (as discussed in Chapter One with the work of Pollock) through the controlled gestures of the artist’s hand.

Figure 2.4: Arshile Gorky, *Agony*, 1947, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 128.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78740>

Figure 2.5: Arshile Gorky, *The Calendars*, 1946-47, oil on canvas, 86.4 x 104.1 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/arshile-gorky-making-the-calendar>

Although losing control over one's painterly material is framed as a feminine trope in painting, as discussed in Chapter One with reference to the wetness of paint, there is a paradox when examining Gorky's stained paintings. Gorky's works are visually feminine in his subtle and delicate blotches of paint; however, his staining was praised by Goossen in his critique of Gorky's works. As Goossen explains, '...many of his later pictures *Agony* (1947) [Figure 2.4], and *The Calendars* (1946-47) [Figure 2.5], for example, have a feminine delicacy in the sensuous line that only a man could have produced' (1961, 78). This link is further supported by Saltzman, who explains that Gorky '...is solely capable in his masculinity, of enacting femininity, of taking its culturally coded trappings and representing them with admirable, if not superior, skill' (2005, 377). Saltzman highlights a contradiction between responses to Frankenthaler and Gorky's work. Frankenthaler's work was inseparable from her femininity. On the other hand, Gorky was able to freely engage with the stain without repercussions of his work being labeled as an overtly feminine form of painting.

Fling, Dribble, Dip and Drip

Expanding on the concepts established in Chapter One on mastery, Michael Phillipson explains that the exclusivity of masculine painting opens up the opportunity for the marginalised to develop alternative modes of painting outside modernism. In Phillipson's words,

If it is mastery itself which is undergoing deconstruction and if the modern tradition of painting is conventionally recuperated as a tradition of masters, then feminist practice has not surprisingly tended towards the exploration and celebration of difference(s) at the margins of painting (1985, quoted in Lee 1987, 5).

Nochlin further supports Phillipson's concept. She explains that women artists '... might be said to be inventing new media, or to borrow a useful phrase from critic George Baker, "occupying a space *between* mediums"' (2006, 318, original italics). Through an anti-modern approach to painting that breaks away from modernist modes of painting, women artists have challenged the barrier between the hierarchies of materials. They have established new ways of expression that could accommodate action painting, abstraction and disciplines such as sculpture, performance, body-based work, and new media.

I suggest that, like Frankenthaler, Benglis did not explicitly explore feminist issues in her work. However, a reading of her paintings in retrospect from a feminist perspective is essential to argue my claim that her approach was anti-modern. The strategies Benglis used to dismount the narrative of the heroic painter can be found through her approaches to gesture. Richmond describes Benglis's work as 'a product of complex choreography, necessitating a balance of spontaneity and precision, not to mention physical endurance...' (2013, 16). Benglis took the very nature of gesture that is masculine action painting and transformed it via her technique of pouring brightly coloured latex that produced large scale artworks.

Figure 2.6: Lynda Benglis, *Fallen Painting*, 1968, poured liquid latex, 901.7 x 175.9 cm, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

http://images.artnet.com/images_us/magazine/features/finch/finch8-8-4.jpg
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For example, Benglis would often create her poured works in situ, where the architecture of the gallery would serve an important purpose, expanding painting beyond the static canvas and onto the floor and walls of site-specific spaces, as explored in her work *Fallen Painting*, 1968 (Figure 2.6).¹⁰ In Richmond's words,

¹⁰ In situ is a means of art making where the work is created, installed and exhibited within a particular site: 'site-specific art initially took the "site" as an actual location, a tangible reality, its identity composed of a unique combination of constitutive physical elements' (Kwon 1997, 85).

The constrictions of the conventional painting format prohibited the kinds of compositions she sought to achieve with her material processes; by attending to the interactions of colour on colour, rather than colour on canvas, she effectively dissolved the two-dimensional surface and its assertion as a physical ground (2013, 18).

Richmond affirms that by taking her material beyond the canvas stretcher, Benglis's pours took Frankenthaler's anti-modernist engagement with her material to another level. Both artists use a similar technique of pouring their materials on surfaces; however, unlike Frankenthaler, Benglis rejected the modernist emphasis of the flat canvas support in painting (2013, 18).

Figure 2.7: Bob Fiore, *Lynda Benglis Creating the Work Contraband*, 1969, photograph, dimensions unknown, Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York. In Susan Richmond, *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 22.

Frankenthaler, Benglis and Pollock all created artworks by hovering over their supports (as shown, for example, in the image of Benglis in Figure 2.7). However, unlike the works of Frankenthaler and Pollock, Benglis's works such as *Fallen Painting*, 1968, remained on the floor when completed, rather than being hung on the wall of a museum. In terms of 'mastery,' this shift in exhibition can be read as an anti-modernist response to action painting. Nochlin explains,

...if the dynamic thrusts and drips, extruded from the wall with sinister bravado made a mockery of traditional art itself, desecrating the building in which traditional art was taught and presumably sanctified, nevertheless, contradictorily, the dripping folds of polyurethane themselves recalled past traditions (Nochlin and Reilly 2015, 21).

Building on Nochlin's point that Benglis defied traditional understandings about the possibilities of painting, Benglis's floor-based artworks can be framed as anti-modernist as they ironically adhere to Rosenberg's conventions of the arena. For example, in Chapter One I discussed Rosenberg's notion that the canvas was a metaphorical '...arena in which to act...' (1952, 22) where the male artist carried out

his heroic painterly gestures. I contend that Benglis's method of pouring subverts Rosenberg's notion of the arena as the space in which the processes of action painting were carried out. Unlike Pollock's paintings or Yves Klein's *Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (*Anthropométrie de l'époque bleue*), 1960, that, once completed, were hung neatly on the gallery wall, Benglis's artworks, such as *Fallen Painting*, remained on the floor (the arena). Furthermore, Benglis's approach to action painting is pioneering as she creates a relationship to the act of gesturing that is not bound to the authority of masculine modernism. Although Benglis's gestures are reminiscent of Pollock's, the results, as shown in *Fallen Painting*, appear to mock, rather than conform to modernist methods of action painting.

Figure 2.8: *Lynda Benglis in Fling, Dribble, Dip, Life*, February 27, 1970, magazine article. Photographs by Gordon Parks and Hans Namuth. In Susan Richmond, *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), Plate 3.

Figure 2.9: *Lynda Benglis in Fling, Dribble, Dip, Life*, February 27, 1970, magazine article. Photographs by Gordon Parks and Hans Namuth. In Susan Richmond, *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), Plate 4.

Benglis created work that arguably pushed late modernist understandings of the possibilities of gesture in painting through her three-dimensional coloured latex and polyurethane pours. However, like Frankenthaler, criticism ensured that Benglis was unable to be separated from a comparison with the work of male artists, in particular Pollock. This is particularly evident when studying how Benglis was captured in the midst of her painterly process by *Life* magazine in 1970 (Figures 2.8 and 2.9).¹¹ Unlike how Frankenthaler was passively posed on her paintings, Benglis is captured during her process of pouring. Her figure is androgynous as her back is turned to the camera. Her gestures are strikingly similar to those of Pollock captured by Holmes

¹¹ The *Life* magazine article 'Fling Dribble and Dip' (1970) by David Bourden, also discusses the work of Eva Hesse (1936-1970, Germany), Richard Serra (b. 1938, USA) and Richard Van Buren (1937, USA).

and Namuth and *Life* ensures this does not go unnoticed by including an image in the top left hand corner of Pollock hovering over his canvases as he drips paint (Richmond 2013, 23). Benglis's spread in *Life* suggests that, as with Frankenthaler, there was difficulty in approaching Benglis's work without referencing male artists. The lack of ability to frame Benglis's works without drawing from the work of men is a further example of the difficulties women artists faced in the United States in the 1960s. They could not escape from having their work read as feminine and compared to their male contemporaries.

Frozen Gestures

Figure 2.10: Lynda Benglis making *Adhesive Products* at the Walker Centre Minneapolis, 1971, Walker Arts Centre, Minneapolis. In Katy Siegel, ed., "*The Heroine Paint*": *After Frankenthaler - Stains, Flows, Decoration, Play, Ambition: A Different Account of Painting from the 1950s to the Present Day* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2015), 142.

Benglis's works were characterised by Pincus-Witten as frozen gestures - a reflection of Benglis's choice of liquid latex as a form of paint, which she poured on the floor or on structures, freezing her pours in time. (1974, 54). Pincus-Witten explains, 'With the endless environment as the ground for the frozen gesture, she embraced the notion of theatricality and all it implies - temporality, performance, personality, media exploitation' (1974, 57). Building on Pincus-Witten's observations, it can be argued that all action painting results in a frozen gesture as paint dries; however, Benglis's gestures with polyurethane foam, for example, *Adhesive Products*, 1971, (Figures 2.10 and 2.11) brought with them a disruption to the values and hierarchies of modernist painting (Richmond 2013, 10). Richmond goes on to say that Benglis's material has enabled her

...to go where less confident artists might fear to tread: towards the decorative, the theatrical, and the vulgar, for instance. With a healthy dose of humour and respect, the artist has tackled cherished artistic values and hierarchies (2013, 10).

Richmond argues that the terms ‘frozen gestures’ or ‘fallen paintings’ not only refer to the physical act of Benglis’s gestures, but also indicate a playful, indirect reference to the fallen woman - a woman who has lost her innocence or chastity, as well as the erotic or objectified woman, who has remained a prevalent subject throughout art history and contemporary media (2013, 41).¹²

Figure 2.11: Lynda Benglis, *Adhesive Products*, 1971, pigmented polyurethane foam, destroyed, installation view, Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis.

<http://www.walkerart.org/collections/capsule/adhesive-products/images/cover.jpg>

I would further suggest that to characterise Benglis’s works as fallen is to suggest they occurred accidentally, not unlike Goossen’s critical portrayal of Frankenthaler’s accidental paintings.¹³ To fall or to freeze is to suggest that an action has ended prematurely, or is unfinished. Within action painting a fallen, or frozen gesture can also suggest that the painterly act has stopped partway, and has been captured as incomplete or partially refined, as opposed to being captured in its final state. In addition, Pincus-Witten’s framing of Benglis’s work contradicts her claim that, ‘I was not interested in isolating each pour in the installation pieces - I was interested in the final image...’ (1988, quoted in Richmond 2013, 24-25). Here, Benglis outlines the opposite approach to how her paintings were framed by Pincus-Witten, who also suggests, wrongly in my opinion, that her emphasis was not on creating a narrative of her painterly gestures, but on the resulting composition (1974, 54).

Benglis’s work is an example of anti-modernism, as her gestures cannot be modernist in their formation, since they do not draw from a mastery over materials,

¹² Examples of paintings of the fallen woman throughout history include Richard Redgrave, *The Outcast*, 1851, and George Cruikshank, *A destitute girls throws herself from a bridge, her life ruined by alcoholism*, 1848. These artworks can be found in the exhibition: *The Fallen Woman*, 25 September 2015 - 3 January 2016, The Foundling Museum, London.

¹³ Benglis also referred to her work as ‘fallen paintings;’ however, my research does not indicate that she was suggesting that they were unfinished processes. Instead, Benglis was referring to the final placement and presentation of her paintings on the floor, as demonstrated in her artwork *Fallen Painting* (Figure 2.8) (Richmond 2013, 18).

nor function as a continuation from post painterly abstraction in their form. Amelia Jones states, 'By reiterating the codes of normative artistic subjectivity but through the body of another, Benglis denaturalizes the usually assumed link between these codes and the male body' (1998, 96). Benglis is able to access a means of authority that historically has been denied to women action painters, as she pauses her materials mid-gesture.

Furthermore, Benglis's pours, as demonstrated in *Adhesive Products*, can be read as capturing the wetness of paint as it is transferred from brush to canvas. By freezing gestures in thick, gloopy forms, Benglis extends on the gap I have pointed out in Chapter One, where the transformation of paint from wet to dry lacked adequate consideration in modernist action painting.

Anti-Illusion: Contraband

As recognition of her processes as anti-modern, Benglis was asked to exhibit in the landmark exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, 1969, at the Whitney Museum of American Art.¹⁴ The exhibition curated by Marcia Tucker and James Monte was the first of its kind to present work that was process based and deliberately shifted from modernist aesthetics (Richmond 2013, 20). The exhibition was strongly influenced by Robert Morris's (b. 1935, USA) 1968 *Artforum* essay 'Anti-Form,' in particular, his observations on the shifts that were occurring from modernist, formalist aesthetics, to an emphasis on materials and process-based art (Richmond 2013, 20). Richmond explains that the artists were

[u]tilising unconventional materials and elemental physical procedures, they allowed such variables as gravity and chance to inflect the working process, the end results

¹⁴ The artists in *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* are Carl Andre (1935, USA), Michael Asher (1943-2012, USA), Lynda Benglis, Bill Bollinger (1939-1988, USA), John Duff (b. 1943, USA), Rafael Ferrer (b. 1933, Puerto Rico), Robert Fiore (b. 1942, USA), Phillip Glass (b. 1937, USA), Eva Hesse, (1936-1970, Germany), Neil Jenney (b. 1945, USA), Barry Le Va (b. 1941, USA), Robert Lobe (b. 1945, USA), Robert Morris (b. 1935, USA), Bruce Nauman (b. 1941, USA), Steve Reich (b. 1936, USA), Robert Rohm (1934-2013, USA), Richard Sierra (b. 1939, USA), Joel Shapiro (b. 1941, USA), Michael Snow (b. 1929, Canada), Keith Sonnier (b. 1941, USA) and Richard Tuttle (b. 1941, USA).

of which no longer conformed to clear-cut categories of painting and sculpture (2013, 20).

The exhibition appears to embrace many of the anti-modern ideas discussed in this chapter, particularly how Benglis's free-forming artworks sat in relation to rejecting the heroic gestures of masculine action painting. However, like Frankenthaler's work being included in Greenberg's *Post Painterly Abstraction*, Benglis and Eva Hesse were the only women to be included in *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, thus supporting the notion that there was a significant disproportion of female artists to male artists in what are arguably significant surveys by institutions of painting and process-based art in the United States in the 1960s.

Figure 2.12: Lynda Benglis, *Contraband*, 1969, pigmented latex, 295.3 x 1011.6 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In Susan Richmond, *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), Plate 2.

An example of the issues Benglis faced from institutions can be found when she withdrew her work *Contraband*, 1969, (Figure 2.12), prior to the opening of *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*. Richmond points out that there is no solid evidence that explicitly states why Benglis removed her work, yet Benglis has claimed that the curators were unhappy with the scale and colours of the work (particularly her use of bubblegum pink) (2013, 21). In Richmond's words, Tucker and Monte '...expressed concern that the latex pour would deflect attention away from other works in the exhibition, none of which contained a comparable degree of colouration' (2013, 21). Tucker and Monte, however, made a compromise that Benglis's 34-foot-long work could be reconsidered on a smaller scale. *Contraband* remained in the exhibition, yet was placed outside of the main gallery and was partially draped over a ramp so as to not block the flow of visitors in the space (Richmond 2013, 21).

I contend that the apprehensions that the curators had with Benglis's work reflect the previously discussed obstacles that women artists had to overcome in the 1960s. The exhibition was grounded in the concept of disrupting modernist ideas about form and process, both characteristics that strongly apply to Benglis's work. In Tucker's

words, Benglis's works were 'neither stretched nor hung' (Richmond 2013, 22). However, by altering the positioning of Benglis's work, the curators shifted their approach in terms of one of the core ideas in the exhibition - namely, site-specificity as an essential aspect of anti-illusion art. In addition, the concern that Benglis's work would detract attention from the predominantly male artists in *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* suggests that there were still institutional and curatorial issues in regards to women artists creating grand, large scale artworks that shifted attention away from the works of the men they were exhibiting with.

In conclusion, this chapter has established the gender bias women faced in the 1960s, through Nochlin's argument that only men can be considered to be great artists because greatness is embedded within masculine language. Building on Nochlin's ideas, I have suggested that both modernism and post-modernism are also movements based in masculinity. Building on Lippard's ideas, this chapter has offered anti-modernism as a counterapproach that women artists engaged with to resist and challenge masculine ideas about painting. Through anti-modernism, women such as Frankenthaler and Benglis disrupted established ideas about masculine action painting as set up by Greenberg and Rosenberg.

I have argued that Goossen and Rosenberg engaged with Frankenthaler's work on a superficial level or through its surface phenomena. Both critics had a tendency to only approach Frankenthaler's paintings through her pouring technique, rather than the social and political implications of a woman artist creating large scale paintings with her unique method of staining the surface of her canvases. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that critics and writers (in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Life*) interpellated and labelled Frankenthaler's work as feminine.

Frankenthaler and Benglis opened up possibilities for action painting that shifted the masculine notion of maintaining a mastery over painterly materials. Frankenthaler's works were often described by critics as "accidental" in her processes. However, this chapter has argued that her approach to the stain is an example of anti-modernism. Although Frankenthaler has explained that she had control over her painterly technique, unlike the work of other artists whose paint stopped moving once laid on

top of their support, Frankenthaler's seeped into her unprimed canvases, staining the surface of her support.

In this chapter, Benglis's artworks have also been framed as anti-modernist. Rather than creating action paintings in the studio that were to be hung on the wall, her brightly coloured poured works were created and remained in situ. I have argued that Benglis's work challenged established ideas of the heroic action painter through her approach to gesture. In works such as *Adhesive Products*, Benglis halted her processes mid-pour, creating what both Benglis and Pincus-Witten refer to as frozen gestures. This chapter has contended that through freezing her gestures, Benglis masters her control over her material in a way that defies the actions of the heroic male painter. However, this chapter has also revealed that despite Benglis's pioneering engagement with painting, her work was deemed problematic in the male-dominated exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*.

Lastly, this chapter sets up the foundations for Chapter Three, 'Dangerous Women,' where I examine how women have used their bodies and their materials to engage with artmaking that has developed through a female corporeal language. In this chapter I have established that women were pushing the boundaries of painting, as well as how their bodies have been perceived through patriarchy and the media. Chapter Three extends on these notions by examining women artists whose performances can be read as provoking and challenging patriarchal stereotypes of femininity. Through a reading of feminist humour, in particular parody and slapstick, Chapter Three explores the role comedy plays in defying the objectification of women. It establishes how the performing female body threatens to destabilise patriarchal values and undermine masculine territory in art and western culture.

Chapter Three: *Dangerous Women*

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. An elderly waiter with trembling hands was hurriedly spreading a pink and white checked cloth over the rusty green iron table, saying: "If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden, if the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden ..." I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end.

T. S. Elliot, *Hysteria*, 1920¹

This chapter examines the phenomenon that occurs when women make performative artworks that position them as the comic. I argue that Melati Suryodarmo, Ursula Martinez and Laresa Kosloff present their bodies in humorous ways through slapstick and parody and in doing so, their works are threatening to masculine hierarchies. This chapter argues that the threat occurs because of a corporeal language of feminist humour that draws from female experience, rather than a direct reaction to or protest against how femininity has been constructed by patriarchal values. By positioning themselves as the subjects of their work, Suryodarmo, Martinez and Kosloff can be read as women who are well aware of (and poke fun at) the stereotypes associated with the feminine body. They claim masculine territory by performing themselves as the joke, the spectacle and the grotesque woman.

In order to discuss how Suryodarmo, Martinez and Kosloff use their bodies to humorously deconstruct femininity, the concept of the bad girl must first be examined. In the context of this research, bad girls are women artists who use their bodies and artistic materials to disrupt masculine power structures. I frame the emergence of the bad girl as an initial strategy for resisting patriarchal stereotypes of

¹ Quoted in Henry 1960, 77.

femininity. The concept began to develop in the 1970s as women artists were challenging the construction of femininity. They critiqued patriarchal forms of domination through humour and performance, often playfully tackling serious issues such as the oppression of women and the objectification of the female body (Cottingham 1993, 54).² However, I argue that bad girl approaches to performative art making are problematic as they are based on an opposition to how a good girl should make art, where the criteria of good and bad girls are determined by patriarchal values. As a solution, I propose an understanding of how women performance artists draw from female experience, rather than creating work only as a reaction or protest against patriarchal constructions of good, bad and feminine.

Chapters One and Two established that patriarchy has historically endeavoured to contain and control women's bodies, as demonstrated by the sexist reception of women artists in the context of abstract expressionism and action painting. This chapter focuses on how women have used humour to explore and critique constructions of their female identity and sexuality, challenging the view that Corrine Robins describes as '...man being sex that defines humanity; women standing for sex or the gendered other' (2000, 37).³ When approaching humour and the female body, laughter can be interpreted as a strategy that women have used to collectively take control over how they have been represented, specifically through the patriarchal construct of femininity (Willson 2015, 11).⁴ Building on my discussion of femininity in previous chapters, I argue that comical devices such as slapstick and parody subvert social expectations of what it means to be feminine not only in art history but in western culture more broadly.

² This chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of mid twentieth century developments in feminist performance art. For a reading on the history of feminist performance, see: Peggy Phelan (1993).

³ Humour can be approached as the juxtaposition of two or more mismatched elements that when fused, create a funny situation (Klein 2008, 48). Humour manifests in many forms: jokes, slapstick, satire, parody, puns and so on; however, this chapter focuses on reading slapstick and parody as the tools that Suryodarmo, Martinez and Kosloff employ in their work.

⁴ Exhibitions and events specifically on women's humour include: *BACKFLIP: Feminism and Humour in Contemporary Art*, 2013, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne; *Shifting the Gaze: Painting and Feminism*, 2011, The Jewish Museum, New York; *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, 2007, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; *Faces of Laughter: Female Strategies in Art*, 2001, Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, Amsterdam; *Laughter Ten Years After*, 1995, Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown; and *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, 1983, Protetch McNeil, New York City.

I approach slapstick as a vehicle for physical comedy, where the joke lies in the spectacular failure of the body to remain upright, functional or controlled. It is a subgenre of comedy that involves the exaggerated movements of the body and physical mishaps that result in bodily failure (Heiser 2006, 87). Jörg Heiser describes what happens when slapstick is performed: 'While the classical tragic hero consciously decides to carry out the task at all costs, the slapstick hero either quixotically fails to complete it, or inadvertently succeeds through his hesitations and failures' (2006, 87). In this chapter, slapstick techniques such as failure can be observed in Suryodarmo's *Exergie - Butter Dance*, 2000, where she repeatedly attempts to seduce her audience by dancing on a stage covered in butter. Although she acts out feminine stereotypes, such as performing seductively, due to her fatty material, she ensures that her attempts to dance are thwarted with the inevitable and painful outcome of slipping and falling on the hard ground.

This chapter examines Suryodarmo's choice of butter as a material for feminist humour by applying Mary Russo's concept of the grotesque to Suryodarmo's inappropriate and illegitimate expressions of femininity. Unlike western classical aesthetic depictions of the nude female body, the grotesque woman is one who displays natural but 'shamefully' unaesthetic female bodily processes such as menstruation, ageing, disease, weight gain and loss, bloating, and reproduction (Russo 1995, 8). By using Russo's observations about the grotesque as being in part about the transgression of gendered behaviour, I argue that for women, stepping outside of feminine behavioural traits is especially dangerous to men, as they challenge a space produced and controlled by patriarchy.⁵ In addition, this chapter draws links between a reading of butter in *Exergie - Butter Dance* as a metaphor for female fat, and Janine Antoni's work *Gnaw*, 1992. In *Gnaw*, Antoni uses her mouth to devour two large slabs of chocolate and lard. I argue that both Suryodarmo and Antoni use materials that represent female indulgence and excess - two traits that are arguably connected to notions of feminist humour as both are characteristics of feminine misbehaviour.

⁵ I acknowledge that Russo's definition of the grotesque is based on dominant heteronormative culture, which is problematic as it can be seen as an exclusionary text. However, within the parameters of this project, and as my practice is informed by my own experiences as a woman, who is privileged to be heteronormative, I approach her work as building on my own ideas and experiences.

Alongside slapstick, parody is one of the most common forms of humour (Hutcheon 1985, 2). In Linda Hutcheon's words, parody is '...repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the background text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signalled by irony' (1985, 32). Parody is a form of imitation that uses irony to expose differences rather than similarities in the subject of attack (1985, 6). In this chapter, parody is examined through the performances of Martinez and Kosloff, which playfully mimic patriarchal modes of femininity and painting respectively in order to offer what I interpret as feminist alternatives.

I apply a feminist reading of parody to Martinez's subversion of burlesque striptease in her performance *Hanky Panky*, 2007. Martinez exaggerates gestures of flirtation and seduction through humorous expressions and magic tricks. By playfully deconstructing feminine stereotypes through striptease, Martinez parodies the female nude as a tool of desire for men. Kosloff also uses her body as a tool to critique patriarchal values as she challenges dominant forms of masculine painting by wearing a three-dimensional painting in the video-based performance *Spirit & Muscle*, 2006. *Spirit & Muscle* can be viewed as parodying masculine action painting. Kosloff disrupts the painterly gestures that make up the framework of action painting (Kosloff 2010, 143). Unlike the action paintings discussed in previous chapters, in *Spirit & Muscle*, Kosloff performs with a painting that has already been painted. There is no emphasis on the act of painting as critical to the work, rather Kosloff physically embodies her painting, where her movements and gestures are not mapped out with heroic splashes of paint; her body *is* the painting.

Bad Girls

In 1993 and 1994, Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White curated *Bad Girls* at the Institution of Contemporary Arts, London, and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, respectively.⁶ The exhibitions highlighted a selection of work by women

⁶ The artists in the U.K. exhibitions *Bad Girls* are Helen Chadwick (1953-1996, UK), Dorothy Cross (b. 1956, Ireland), Rachel Evans (1965-2009, UK), Nicole Eisenman (b. 1965, France), Nan Goldin (b. 1953, USA) and Sue Williams (b. 1956, USA). My focus when discussing these exhibitions is not on the work exhibited, but the curatorial and conceptual reasons for the artists and their artworks being defined under the umbrella category of bad girls.

artists that reclaimed, in the curator's words, 'the power and seduction of images and materials' (1993, 3), that were sensuous both aesthetically and physically, and that challenged masculine forms of artmaking - for example, Helen Chadwick's luxurious furs, Dorothy Cross's juxtaposed cow udders with silver Victorian dish covers and Rachel Evans's delicate drawings of couples embracing. At the same time as *Bad Girls* was shown in London and Glasgow, Marcia Tucker curated the exhibition *Bad Girls* at the New Museum, New York, 1994, and Marcia Tanner curated *Bad Girls West* at the University of California's Wright Gallery, 1994. These exhibitions followed a similar concept to their U.K. counterparts, with a focus on humour as well as addressing how women could provoke, reject and claim back patriarchal constructs and stereotypes of femininity.⁷

In her catalogue essay for the U.K. exhibitions, Cottingham explains that the bad girl is to be read as ironic, as it does not refer to art per se - that is, bad in terms of art that is poorly created, or the opposite of good. Instead, it should be regarded as a phrase for describing excellence, a phrase that originated within African American urban jazz culture in the United States. For Cottingham, the use of bad is linked to rebellion, recklessness, and working against patriarchy (1993, 54). She explains, 'The irony and humour in the title hopes to coax reminds [sic] us that the artists submitted under this nomenclature, despite their museum appearances, still endure classification as a subculture rather than a dominant cultural location' (1993, 54). In the context of the exhibitions, the word 'bad' is used to humorously describe women artists whose work predominantly explores female experience and challenges patriarchal modes of art history (1993, 54). Although the concept of bad girls can be seen as an attempt to playfully highlight the hierarchy in the work of men and women within the dominant historical canon, it can be argued that labelling women as bad is upholding them as Other than the already established norms of femininity.

⁷ In 1993-1994, five exhibitions with the *Bad Girl* title were exhibited in London, Glasgow, Los Angeles and New York City. The number of artists in each exhibition varied. For example, six artists were included in the *Bad Girls* exhibitions at the Institute for Contemporary Arts, London, and the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow. At the New Museum, New York, over fifty artists were included in the exhibition, and dozens who work in video and performance were also included in the exhibition but at satellite sites. In addition, forty more artists were exhibited at the UCLA Wright Gallery, Los Angeles (Cottingham 1995, 77).

Cherry Smyth explains that the work in the U.K. *Bad Girls* was a reaction to the notion that '[f]eminist artists have attempted to undermine dominant cultural iconography, which frames masculine as active, rational and omnipotent and feminine as passive, irrational and subordinate' (1993, 6). The conceptual and curatorial focus was on work by women who explore forbidden territory (1993, 6).⁸ However, Smyth's reading of women artists as bad girls and the suggestion of breaking into forbidden (masculine) terrain maintains the notion that there are masculine modes of materials and artmaking, to the extent that in order for women to use such methods, they are automatically labelled as disrupting preconceived ideas about what art is and who can produce it.

I suggest that Smyth's approach to bad girls can be read as reinforcing the subordinate status of women. For example, Smyth describes *Bad Girls* as a celebration of feminism in the 1990s, where the artists are '[s]ly, in-your-face, disturbing, provocative, haunting, subtle, sensual, shocked, sexy - the bad girls have come' (1993, 12). Consciously or not, Smyth has outlined a key issue women face with creating work labelled as feminist.⁹ There is an assumption to mark feminist work as strictly a response to patriarchy is problematic as it reinforces the idea that feminist art is primarily based on reacting against the masculine-dominated canon, where the pandering to masculine painting was a key technique used by critics to frame painting by women as secondary and decorative.

Cottingham further examines the concept of the bad girl in 'How Many "Bad" Feminists Does It Take to Change a Lightbulb?' (1995). The essay is a response to her 1993 catalogue essay for the U.K. *Bad Girls* exhibitions, as well as the ideas in the U.S. exhibitions, where her position on exhibiting women's artworks under the

⁸ The forbidden territory that Smyth refers to is in terms of how the artists in the exhibition continued along the trajectory of feminist art by using materials or social issues that she states would previously have been taboo. For example, Dorothy Cross uses cow udders to challenge differences in power between men and women in her works *Dish Cover*, 1993, and *Dish Cover (Baby)*, 1993 (1993, 6). Smyth explains, '...an udder is placed, inappropriately snug, against a silver serving dish, as if it were a disembodied breast ready to be suspended above a thirsty mouth, served at table.' She continues, 'Cross suggests that although work patterns between the classes are more disrupted, women are still servicing men, their roles subordinate and submissive, their breasts offered as comforters, disembodied from the whole woman' (1993, 6).

⁹ The artists discussed in this chapter do not necessarily refer to their work as feminist. Rather, I read their work through a feminist lens.

title of 'bad' shifted. Cottingham's revised approach highlights the key issues with the bad girl. For example, the term alludes to empowerment of women and rebellion against patriarchy, through 'bad' behaviour. Cottingham explains,

...the exhibition rhetoric often pretended to divorce the "good" from the "bad," as if to suggest that the "Bad Girls" the curators wanted to describe, document and fabricate are [sic] some kind of new independent breed (a special kind of '90s phenomena?) the shows couldn't help but directly invoke the "good" half of the patriarchally-split female subject because it is already historically situated and therefore automatically called forth (1995, 73).¹⁰

What is problematic about using the bad girl as a term of female or feminist empowerment is that it divides women into good or bad, depending on what traits they possess (these traits being established by patriarchal ideals of how women should behave). Historically, the terminology of the bad girl is derogatory, as this structuring of good/bad models in relation to female behaviour, '...even if consciously attempted as subversive, is still nothing more than a parroting of a male supremacist construct' (1995, 74). In other words, it is impossible for women's emancipation under patriarchy to thrive when what is structured as rebellion or freedom is, in fact, based on rejecting what patriarchy has established as traits of femininity (1995, 74).

Equally problematic in the construct of the bad girl is the assumption that all women are white, middle class, cis-gendered and heterosexual. The patriarchy that the bad girl provokes and rebels against is one that is also constructed as white, middle class and heteronormative (Cottingham 1995, 74). For example, although the bad girl may be intended to counter sexism, Marcia Tucker claims that her approach to the bad girl was based in her understanding of the good girl. Tucker explains that her idea of the bad girl as a force of rebellion stems from her childhood where she could remember her mother listing attributes that a girl must aspire to gain to be

¹⁰ By "90s phenomena," Cottingham is referring to the post-feminist era that was prominent in the United States. Naomi Wolf reflects on the issues and frustrations feminism faced in the West during the 1990s: 'We were just coming out of what I have called "The Evil Eighties," a time when intense conservatism had become allied with strong antifeminism in our culture, making arguments about feminine ideals seem ill-mannered, even freakish. Reagan had just had his long run of power, the Equal Rights Amendment had run out of steam, women's' activists were in retreat, women were being told they couldn't "have it all"' (2002, 2).

considered 'good.' These included falling in love with a wealthy man, don't let boys know that you are intelligent, and don't leave the house without wearing a girdle (Cottingham 1995, 74). However, Cottingham notes that these tropes are privileged: 'Each of these admonishments, while obviously directed toward a girl/daughter listener and situated within the terms of 1950s-style sexism, are also implicated in social and economic class distinctions' (1995, 73). It can be assumed that only women who have the privilege of being wealthy are socially enabled to meet wealthy men and those who can obtain an education are able to expand their knowledge and intelligence (1995, 73). I contend that these tropes are based on a narrow focus, where the bad girl is only applied to an exclusive group of women.

There are similarities that can be drawn between the bad girl and post-feminism. To claim to be post-feminist is to imply that feminism has achieved the goals that were set up by first and second wave feminists (McRobbie 2004, 255). However, it can be argued that post-feminism was only concerned with the achievements accomplished by western white women. For example, as white women have gained patriarchal territory and as women of colour have also become progressively visible, socially, culturally and economically, other attendant issues arise (Butler 2013, 46). Ironically, even though the bad girl is branded as setting out to disrupt patriarchy, it nonetheless adheres to an exclusive reading of feminism. It may even be suggested that the women who fit the category of the bad girl ultimately remain non-threatening in terms of maintaining a feminism that is white, straight and wealthy.

Furthermore, if the *Bad Girl* exhibitions were aiming to push women's art beyond feminine stereotypes, the use of good and bad, and the need to engage with patriarchal constructions of femininity would not be key features of the exhibition (Cottingham 1995, 73). Cottingham explains that for women, 'What we want is the freedom to be individuals - to construct our lives and sexualities for ourselves - not the non-choices forced on us by the very terms of our opposition' (1995, 75). Building on Cottingham's assertion, I contend that what the bad girl concept reveals is grounds for a language of *women*. I propose that this language draws from and enhances previous waves of feminist thought and art, rather than as reactions to marginalisation from masculine constructs.

What's So Funny?

Tucker outlines how humour also plays a key role in how women have used their bodies to playfully disrupt notions of femininity. In Tucker's words, humorous performance is,

..."characterized" by an inordinate ability to mix disparate elements with wild abandon and confound categories, social positions, and hierarchies of space, language and class; to provide both a "festive critique" and an extreme utopian version of society at the same time; and to reconfigure the world through laughter (1994, 23).

Tucker's definition explains that through performance, women artists can challenge conventional ideas of what it means to be female. However, like the concept of the bad girl, Tucker's reading of performance is constructed as a response to masculine-dominated forms of art making. She is suggesting that performance, especially humour in performance, is a vessel for women to write their own language, yet this language is based on playing out the opposing characteristics to what is acceptable feminine behaviour under patriarchy.

I propose that a feminist corporeal language is separate from pre-conceived images of the objectified body. A feminist language does not follow established norms set in, for example, advertising and the mass media's depiction of women's physical appearance.¹¹ Instead, this language includes, '[e]verything from female sex characteristics to female bodily functions can be used as material for free artistic articulation' (EXPORT 1989, 88). A feminist corporeal language opens up new ways for women to explore female experience by focusing on sexuality or the role the female body plays in an art historical or social context.

¹¹ The beauty industry is one of the major contributors to the media construction of the myth of heteronormative femininity. This 'myth' is referred to by Wolf as the overarching theme in her book *The Beauty Myth*, 2002. It is the construction of feminine ideology and beauty ideals fueled by the beauty industry and patriarchal values (2002, 7). Wolf explains that in order for the beauty myth and therefore beauty industry to exist, '[w]omen must want to embody it and men must want to possess the women who embody it' (2002, 12). The artists discussed in this chapter directly challenge the notion of beauty through their bodies and materials.

Humour is my key focus in considering how a feminist corporeal language is read through the performing female body. Corporeal feminist humour is a concept, following Limor Shifman and Dana Lemish, that ‘...challenges traditional views of gender by targeting men and resisting dominant constructions of femininity’ (2010, 873). Within the performative female body, I argue that women can disarm patriarchal constructions of femininity through a corporeal language that is established through the opposition to modes of gender stereotyping and inequality. In Jacki Willson’s words, ‘The strategy of laughter gave feminists the opportunity to bind together image and voice, giving them the anarchic freedom to wilfully take ownership of and pass judgment over how they were represented’ (2015, 11). However, because of the patriarchal beliefs surrounding the performance of both humour and gender, in order to be funny, women have to approach humour differently. In particular, because of the marginalisation and objectification of the female body, women have to work much harder than men at maintaining the space between the object and subject of their work.

Shifman and Lemish’s and Willson’s readings of humour are problematic because their views maintain that men must be present in some form in order for the construction of humour by women to be considered feminist. Their views relate to Sheri Klein’s concept of humour, where she argues that feminist humour is never only designed as a joke because its aim is to interrupt the tradition of male humour where women are subject to humiliation (1993, 65).¹² I find these approaches taxing because it assumes that women are automatically victims and situates feminist humour as always functioning to critique the status of patriarchy.

One of the primary obstacles women’s humour has had to overcome is that it can be read as stereotypically hysterical (as demonstrated in this chapter’s epigraph in T. S.

¹² Instances of this humiliation can be found in writer Lindy West’s *Shrill*, 2017. West uses the example of American comedian Daniel Tosh who in 2012 was performing at the *Laugh Factory* in Hollywood where he made a series of comments about how funny rape jokes are. A woman heckled Tosh by saying, ‘Actually, rape jokes are never funny!’ (2017, 168). Tosh replied, ‘Wouldn’t it be funny if that girl got raped by, like five guys right now? Like right now? What if a bunch of guys just raped her?’ (2017, 168-169). Tosh is using comedy to remind the woman who spoke out against a violent joke about women that she was in a vulnerable position and that comedy was men’s space (2017, 173). This is just one example of the humiliation women face when they are not only the ‘butt’ of a joke, but when they stand up against misogynistic culture in comedy.

Elliot's account of a female companion laughing in *Hysteria*, 1920). Jo Anna Isaak points out that when language is shifted from the authoritative and into the ostracised or absurd, it becomes feminine (1996, 37). In Isaak's words,

The feminine is heard both in what is said and in where it is said. Language, when it moves away from authoritative pronouncements and into the irrational, is heard as feminine. When the voice of the marginalized or the mad predominates, when it becomes hysterical and "rants," it is heard as a woman's voice (1996, 37).

Although Isaak is referring to written or spoken language, her ideas apply to a humorous corporeal language (such as slapstick or parody). I argue that one reason as to why feminist modes of humour have been overlooked or misinterpreted in the dominant canon, is because they threaten and break down the very structure of western patriarchal culture. This perception also opens up the possibilities for feminist humour to not only develop around issues such as sexist stereotypes and the historical exclusion from art major institutions, but to build on female experience through a language exclusive to women.

Slapstick Dancing: Butter and Fat

Figure 3.0: Melati Suryodarmo, *Exergie - Butter Dance*, 2000, performance, Navigate – Live Art, BAL TIC & Stubnitz, Newcastle, United Kingdom, 2005. Photograph by Oliver Blomeier.

http://www.melatisuryodarmo.com/works_Exergie_Butter_Dance.html

Slapstick is one mode of comedy that women use as a tactic to critique passive femininity. In Alison Ramsey's words, when women use slapstick it can be described as '...boisterous knockabout physicality, heightened pretend violence and frequent use of sight gags and pratfalls, it represents a double affront to the norm of passive femininity' (2014, 373).¹³ The exaggerated and often clumsy movements of slapstick

¹³ Examples of women performing slapstick include Lucille Ball in *I Love Lucy*, 1951-1957, or the awkward way in which Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson navigate through life in *Broad City*, 2014-present.

enable women to unravel the ideal of the feminine as subordinate. Women use their bodies to fail to complete often-repetitive tasks or fail to maintain stereotypes of the female body, and in doing so, they become a spectacle through their improper expressions of performing femininity.

Suryodarmo blurs the spaces between comedy and failure while performing her femininity in her work *Exergie - Butter Dance*, 2000 (Figures 3.0-3.2). Ramsey's concept of slapstick can be applied to Suryodarmo's work because, if slapstick can be summarised as the performance of repetitive acts of pretend violence and failure on bodies for the purposes of comedy, then Suryodarmo's work should be met with laughter. Instead, her work (although funny) is also difficult to watch as Suryodarmo uses her body to exaggerate and contort stereotypical understandings of femininity. By sensually dancing on top of a stack of blocks of butter in *Exergie - Butter Dance*, Suryodarmo opens a space that is 'often a little uncomfortable' (Sanchez-Kozyreva 2013) as the audience watches her attempt to dance on a slippery stage.¹⁴

Exergie - Butter Dance begins with Suryodarmo walking on a floor to the sound of Indonesian drums. Dressed in a short, tight dress and red high-heeled shoes, she begins to dance on 20 bricks of butter placed on centre stage. As Suryodarmo dances, the music quickens in pace and as she attempts to keep up, she begins slipping on the butter - falling to the floor and clearly in pain. However, every time she falls, she gets back up and repeats the steps of the dances, aware that this will lead to her losing her balance again. As the repetitious dance develops, it is clear Suryodarmo is self-sabotaging her routine and as its duration progresses, it turns from being funny into embarrassing as she repeats the same movements and always ends up on the floor. Through the performance, she mobilises slapstick to highlight the continuous failure of her body to perform the seductive femininity she presents at the beginning of the dance.

¹⁴ Suryodarmo's heritage and cultural influences play a key role in *Exergie - Butter Dance*; however, my focus is primarily on her choice of materials and how her work can be approached through slapstick. For further information on the cultural context of Suryodarmo's work, see Sylvia Tsai (2013).

Figure 3.1: Melati Suryodarmo, *Exergie - Butter Dance*, 2000, performance, Navigate – Live Art, BALTIC & Stubnitz, Newcastle, United Kingdom, 2005. Photograph by Oliver Blomeier.

http://www.melatisuryodarmo.com/works_Exergie_Butter_Dance.html

There are similarities between slapstick and the grotesque woman, as both concepts are based on the failure of the body when it falls short of appropriately expressing human behaviour. I use the term 'grotesque' to refer to 'low' and undesirable bodily functions such as the hungry stomach, genital fluids, menstruation, bowel and bladder movements, that are often (but not entirely) linked to the feminine (Boyle 2013, 87). The grotesque body is also one that is the opposite to the classical body, that Russo describes as adhering to 'high' culture. In Russo's words, 'The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek' (1995, 8). Like the comical failure of the body in slapstick, my reading of the grotesque body is concerned with how performing misbehaviour or undesirability can be a tactic in feminist performance to provoke patriarchal representations of the female body.

Figure 3.2: Melati Suryodarmo, *Exergie - Butter Dance*, 2000, performance, Momentum, Le Bain Connective, Brussels, Belgium, 2009. Video frame by Sven Govaert.

http://www.melatisuryodarmo.com/works_Exergie_Butter_Dance.html

The grotesque can be read as a patriarchal construction of femininity which, as Russo explains, can be illustrated through the metaphor of the grotto or cave.¹⁵ She clarifies, 'As bodily metaphor, the grotesque tends to look like (and in the most gross metaphorical sense to be identified with) the cavernous anatomical female body'

¹⁵ The grotesque is not inherently patriarchal, however within the scope of this project my interest is exclusively in depictions of the grotesque female body.

(1995, 1).¹⁶ My interest in the grotesque is in how it can be applied to my discussion on female fat, as fat has also been socially structured as undesirable, as ‘always and already transgressive’ (Russo, 1995, 60). Butter, or fat, is an indulgence, or a substitute for the female body, as women often have higher fat levels than men (Heon 2001, 8). Through Suryodarmo’s engagement with butter as material (as she slips, slides and becomes coated in it), her work can be interpreted as entering the realm of the grotesque by making a spectacle of herself in her performance and as a result, indulging in an inappropriate or illegitimate expression of femininity.¹⁷

Laura Castagnini explains that when women use food in art, especially ‘in the corporeal pleasure of grotesque food behaviours’ (2015, 30), women modify established representations of female desire. Suryodarmo does not consume the butter she uses, but simply by privileging its use in her work, she asserts the strong historical correlation between grotesque representations of the female body and food. As Naomi Wolf explains, women are conditioned in the west to feel guilty about overindulgence, ‘...female fat is the subject of public passion, and women feel guilty about female fat, because we implicitly recognize that under the myth, women’s bodies are not our own but society’s’ (2002, 187). It can be suggested that Suryodarmo’s choice of butter as a material representative of fat, playfully challenges the notion that women are to restrict themselves from indulging in such foods.

¹⁶ Russo lists examples of grotesque women as including ‘the Medusa, the Crone, the Bearded Woman, the Fat Lady, the Tattooed Woman, the Hysteric, the Vampire, the Female Impersonator, the Siamese Twin, the Dwarf’ (1995, 14). More contemporary examples include Tracey Gordon in *Chewing Gum* (2015-present), Mimi Bobeck in *The Drew Carey Show* (1995- 2004), Rosemary Shanahan in *Shallow Hal* (2001) and Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (1989).

¹⁷ As I have argued, in comedy, there are differing expectations for women and men. The grotesque spectacle further highlights these biases. In Russo’s words, ‘Men, I learned somewhat later in life, “exposed themselves,” but the operation was quite deliberate and circumscribed. For a woman, making a spectacle of herself had more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries...’ (1995, 53). Suryodarmo engages with the spectacle through her materials and movements as they contribute to her loss of control over her body.

Figure 3.3: Janine Antoni, *Gnaw*, 1992, three-part installation: 600 lb of chocolate gnawed by the artist; 600 lb of lard gnawed by the artist; display with 130 lipsticks made with pigment, beeswax, and chewed lard removed from the lard cube; 27 heart-shaped packages made from the chewed chocolate removed from the chocolate cube, dimensions variable, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

http://www.saatchigallery.com/aipe/janine_antoni.htm

Figure 3.4: Janine Antoni, *Gnaw*, 1992, three-part installation: 600 lb of chocolate gnawed by the artist; 600 lb of lard gnawed by the artist; display with 130 lipsticks made with pigment, beeswax, and chewed lard removed from the lard cube; 27 heart-shaped packages made from the chewed chocolate removed from the chocolate cube, dimensions variable, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

http://www.saatchigallery.com/aipe/janine_antoni.htm

Such use of fat as a material can also be linked to Antoni's *Gnaw*, 1992, (Figures 3.3 and 3.4), shown at the 1993 Whitney Biennale.¹⁸ Antoni attempted to chew through massive slabs of chocolate and lard, each weighing 300 kg, and then created a series of heart-shaped boxes and lipstick made from the gnawed-off chocolate and lard and pigment (Heon 2001, 5). Chocolate is a feminised food that can be read through the association of sweetness with femininity and the sweet taste of chocolate. The female chocoholic can be described as '...celebrating female weakness and surrender to temptation' (Barthel 1989, 431). In addition, it can also be suggested that chocolate is a symbol of excess, as to over-indulge in chocolate is to stray from the cultural obsession of women's weight control as a condition of femininity (and good girl behaviour) (1989, 431). Antoni's devouring of chocolate

¹⁸ Antoni's *Gnaw* also challenges minimalism as the movement was influential to several generations of artists (primarily men) in the west. Heon explains that Antoni's work presents connotations of desire in relation to feminist performance and modernist modes of minimalist artmaking. In Heon's words, 'Antoni forces these two lineages of art, one largely feminine and physical, the other largely masculine and cerebral, into uneasy confluence' (2001, 5). Antoni's cubes resemble minimalist sculptures; however, unlike the industrial sculptures of minimalist artists such as Donald Judd (1928-1994, USA), Antoni's mouth has stripped away the static geometry of her cubes (2001, 5).

provokes the notion of female excess as she undertakes the absurd task of gnawing through a 300 kg block of chocolate.

Furthermore, Antoni's labour-intensive work, using her mouth as a tool, can be interpreted to represent the sexual associations with women's mouths (2001, 8). Laura Heon uses chocolate to explain the relationship between a woman's mouth and food: 'Chocolate is a sensuous food, an aphrodisiac, a traditional present given by a man to a woman to express his erotic interest, and eaten by her to acknowledge that interest' (2001, 8). In addition, lard, like Suryodarmo's butter, is a stand-in for female fat or flesh, which goes against the good girl image as it can be seen as indulgent and excessive in terms of expressions of femininity.¹⁹

Both Suryodarmo and Antoni use their bodies to undertake exhausting labour-intensive tasks (Heon 2001, 5); however, due to their choice and volume of materials, their tasks (sensually dancing and eating) prove to be impossible. Gnaw, in Heon's words, exaggerates the tension between '...what it is to be feminine and what it is to be female, particularly with regard to desire' (2001, 8). Heon's observation can also be applied to Suryodarmo's choice of butter as a material as it not only ensures that Suryodarmo is unable to perform her dance as a sexualised object, but, like Antoni's chocolate and lard, *Exergie - Butter Dance* represents feminine indulgence and excess.

The third issue in *Exergie - Butter Dance* is the juxtaposition between the sexualised female body and how Suryodarmo presents her body, as she is purposely dressed provocatively to perform a sequence which is bound to end in self-inflicted pain and injury. Her body language illustrates what Hannah Ballou questions as, 'what if a normatively sexy female comic body (if it exists) subverts this notion by paradoxically being the ideal against which it may be found to be lacking?' (2014, 180). The behaviour of women making a spectacle out of themselves is one that resonates in

¹⁹ The effects of fat and chocolate being seen as sources of indulgence for women are evident in Kevin Durkin, Kirsty Rae and Werner G. K. Stritzke's 2011 research findings. After collecting data from 84 women, they conclude that '...accompanying the considerable sensory gratifications of chocolate are strong concerns about its potentially unhealthy nutritional properties, weight gain, and aversive feelings associated with over-indulgence. Women identify chocolate as prominent among components of their diet that they must reduce or omit if they wish to regulate their weight' (2011, 222).

Exergie - Butter Dance as the work playfully addresses the restrictive standards associated with femininity and being a good girl. I argue that through her choice of materials, associations with slapstick, and her failed attempt at femininity (or good behaviour), Suryodarmo successfully makes a spectacle of herself. However, this spectacle, in my opinion, is one that is threatening to patriarchy as it separates her from dominant male culture, exaggerates her femaleness, and opens up a dialogue about the key issues connected to breaking conventional rules of femininity.

Antoni's and Suryodarmo's art can be read as bad girl works by dint of their use of fatty materials. Both artists engage with the patriarchal construct that female fat is something to be feared by women (Wolf 2002, 187).²⁰ Both artists are 'bad' in the sense that they indulge with fatty products by performing with their materials to '...attack traditional notions of the feminine while presenting the specificity of female experience' (Heon 2001, 8). However, I contend that their work can also be read beyond the constraints of the bad girl. Through their use of representations of fat as a material, both artists defy ironically sexualising their bodies and materials for male pleasure. By reclaiming fat, both artists do not just engage in misbehaviour as a reaction to the splitting of the bad and good girl. They open up the opportunity for fat to be read as a material that is part of a contemporary feminist language that has developed through a corporeal engagement with the female body.

Hanky Panky: Strip Teasing Parody

Figure 3.5: Ursula Martinez, *Hanky Panky*, 2007, performance, *Just for Laughs* Festival, Montreal.

<http://www.ursulamartinez.com/gallery/index.html>

I will now consider how femininity has been explored through parodying the unruly woman, a concept that is closely related to the grotesque female body. In Natalie Davis's words, 'Play with an unruly woman is partly a chance for temporary release

²⁰ Other women artists who have engaged with fat in their work include Mu Boyan (b. 1976, China), Faith Ringgold (b. 1930, USA), Mika Rottenberg (b. 1976, Argentina) and Jenny Saville (b. 1970, UK).

from the traditional and stable hierarchy; but it is also part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power within society' (1975, quoted in Russo 1995, 58). Through parody, women have taken on the sexual stereotypes placed on them where the political is critiqued through the 'foolish' aspects of humour. This humour attached to the absurd, playful and self-deprecating deconstructs behavioural and social norms that are essential to patriarchal power (Willson 2015, 5-6). Anthropologist Victor Turner states, 'The danger here is not simply that of female "unruliness." This unruliness itself is the mark of the ultraliminal, of the perilous realm of possibility of "anything may go" which threatens any social order and seems the more threatening, the more the order seems rigorous and secure' (1977, quoted in Isaak 1994, 32). The concept of the bad girl can be applied to Turner's approach to unruliness. Through feminist humour, women provoke and break down patriarchal hierarchies, and when doing so in a playful and mischievous manner, social norms are challenged.

The behaviour of the unruly woman or woman as spectacle manifests through parody in the work of Martinez in her burlesque striptease *Hanky Panky*, 2007, (Figure 3.5), performed as part of Montreal's *Just for Laughs* comedy festival in 2007.²¹ The striptease parodies the sexualised genre of burlesque performance as Martinez takes control of how her body is objectified and becomes the subject of her work, rather than complying with the social conditions of femininity. Willson describes the work as '...groundbreaking. It was humour performed through this fusion of winks, smiles and sexualized exaggerated action, which created an exciting departure, a whole genre of humour, challenging how a female sexual subject was perceived' (2015, 6). Martinez begins the performance wearing a grey power suit that she strips off to Henry Mancini's song *A Shot in the Dark*, 1964, while pulling out red silk squares from various hidden locations in her clothes and underwear (and eventually a knotted scarf from her vagina).²² Winking and smiling at the audience, Martinez coyly makes the squares disappear through illusion. As she strips, the camera pans to the audience who look both amused and confused as the seemingly

²¹ Martinez has performed *Hanky Panky* throughout the world; however, I use her performance at Montreal's *Just for Laughs* festival because it is an example of how readings of humour shift when presented in a comedic and entertainment context.

²² Power suits are a signifier of women's power within a capitalist society, as they are traditionally worn by men in the west as a symbol of status and wealth (Budgeon and Currie 1995, 181).

sexy burlesque dance is abolished as Martinez uses absurd body language in her act. In Willson's words, 'The laughter provoked from Martinez naked and winking whilst pulling silk scarves knotted together in a magician type fashion from her vagina disrupts the smoothness of any recuperative pleasure of this genre. She parodies its display' (2015, 6). In contrast to masculine modes of female sexuality as 'routinized, unimaginative, and uninspired' (Kauffman 1998, 58), it is clear that by performing these clichés, Martinez is having a blast and relishing in women's laughter.²³ However, unlike Suryodarmo, Martinez's work is clearly framed as comedy because it exists within a context where humour is expected (for example, performing *Hanky Panky* as part of the *Just for Laughs* comedy festival).

Martinez uses her body to state the obvious (the performing female nude as an object of masculine desire); however, in doing so, she opens up a range of readings, including a reference to Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, 1975, as she completes the performance nude while pulling a knotted silk scarf from her vagina.²⁴ The female nude is the most prominent example of how women's bodies have been used by male artists, where, in Griselda Pollock's words, 'A social and sexual hierarchy are pictured: the artist is canonically male (signalling the fusion of Culture with masculinity); *his* material is female (the assimilation of nature, matter and femininity)' (1992, 139-140, original italics). Martinez's work can be read as challenging the notion that the cultural context which the female body inhabits is one that privileges the heterosexual male as the viewer (Smyth 1993, 6). Her work repositions the female body as a sexual subject - as she embraces the bad girl approach to artmaking, and as she uses feminine clichés to parody the nude woman.

As Cottingham highlights, from the perspective of the bad girl, there is a contradiction in relation to sexualised behaviour. In Cottingham's words, 'If

²³ *Hanky Panky* was posted on YouTube and went viral. Martinez received an array of emails about the work, primarily from men. She subsequently used these texts in the work *My Stories, Your Emails*, 2010, where Martinez reads out the often misogynistic responses to *Hanky Panky* (Willson 2015, 5-6).

²⁴ In *Interior Scroll*, 1975, Schneemann stood on a table with two white sheets. She undressed and covered the table with one sheet and her body with another. She then dropped the sheet clothing her and painted her body with large brushstrokes. Schneemann read from her book 'Cezanne, She Was a Great Painter,' 1976, and then pulled a paper scroll from her vagina that she proceeded to read from (the text on the scroll being an imaginary conversation between Schneemann and a dismissive male director). Unlike Martinez's neat method of pulling her knotted handkerchiefs, Schneemann's menstrual blood mixes with the scroll (Blocker 2004, 123-125).

sexualised behaviour by women is in itself transgressive, could it ever be argued that it is the *only* female transgressive behaviour?' (1995, 76, original italics). Although Martinez's parody is clearly mocking feminine stereotypes in a very humorous way and also challenges the sexualised female nude (as her body does not conform to feminine modes of seduction), I contend that the work exists as a primary reaction to masculine-enforced gender norms. In addition, in Hutcheon's words, parody is '...authorized by the very norm it seeks to subvert. Even in mocking, parody reinforces; its formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence' (1985, 75). It can be suggested that an area where parody crosses over with the construction of the bad girl, is found through the understanding that both concepts draw from certain authorities in order to make fun of them – specifically, in this project, through patriarchal enforced stereotypes of the sexualised female body.

Playing the Role: Parody and Painting

Figure 3.6: Laresa Kosloff, *Spirit & Muscle*, 2006, digital video, 4:39. Production still by Christian Capurro.

<http://scanlines.net/person/laresa-kosloff>

As a contrast to how Suryodarmo and Martinez use their bodies to challenge feminine stereotypes, Kosloff uses her body to parody masculine modes of modernist artmaking. However, like Suryodarmo, but unlike Martinez, her work is not framed in a comedic setting, such as a comedy festival. My interest in Kosloff's work is in how she uses her body to provoke and make fun of masculine modes of material, rather than solely focusing on how men have objectified the female body. Kosloff's parody differs from Martinez's because it does not aim to make fun of an objectified body that already exists; instead, Kosloff parodies masculine modes of art practice, particularly modernist painting and minimalism.

It is important to explore female experience in art when examining how women artists have used materials in painting, as it shifts how the art object is presented. In Pollock's words, 'What we are taught is how to appreciate the greatness of the artist and the quality of art objects' (1988, 5). But what occurs when that art object is a woman's physical body? Kosloff positions the female body as a site to reclaim autonomy, where the body, as both the subject and object in painting, overcame what precedents were set, such as Yves Klein's nude living brushes and the trope of the nude female model throughout western art history (Parcerisas 2012, 237).

Figure 3.7: Laresa Kosloff, *Spirit & Muscle*, 2006, digital video, 4:39. Production still by Christian Capurro.

<http://scanlines.net/person/laresa-kosloff>

The video *Spirit & Muscle*, 2006, (Figures 3.6 and 3.7), takes place in Kosloff's studio, where she wears a series of costumes that resemble three-dimensional geometric paintings (Kosloff 2010, 47). Kosloff's body is completely hidden within the costumes except for her legs and occasionally her arms that stick out through holes in the work. Her limbs playfully draw attention to how the female body moves in this space as she often is caught off balance or restricted in her movements because of the awkwardly shaped painting she is wearing, as she attempts to create an array of poses (Vasiliou 2006). By applying Hutcheon's concept that parody can '...function as a conservative force in both retaining and mocking aesthetic forms' (1985, 20) to Kosloff's work, it can be argued that through the comical movements of her body, Kosloff both retains the aesthetic of modernist painting and mocks it by wearing the painting. She puts her female body in control of the work.

Kosloff's methods can be framed through Sheri Klein's approach of women challenging modes of femininity. In Klein's words, 'As women are depicted surveying themselves and their femininity, they do to themselves what men do to them. The woman turns herself into an object and she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed as part of her identity' (1993, 61). By controlling her art object by wearing it, but also losing control of her body's movements because of the object's awkward

form, Kosloff is parodying masculine-dominated materials as well as highlighting the lack of women's involvement in modernist painting (Kosloff 2010, 43).

Kosloff explains that the work is a reflection of modernist art history favouring men (2010, 43). In Kosloff's words, 'I reflected on these received cultural values in *Spirit & Muscle* by literally inserting my (female) body into costumes that refer to the modernist canon' (2010, 43). Similarly to Suryodarmo and Martinez, Kosloff makes a spectacle of herself through her clumsy movements. However, Kosloff's work also diverges from Suryodarmo's and Martinez's because she is physically immersed within an abstract painting. It can be argued that Kosloff's *Spirit & Muscle* not only disrupts masculine painting, but also offers a feminist response to action painting by inserting her female body into her painterly materials.

Building on Kosloff's performing and posing body, her role in *Spirit & Muscle* can be read through the concept of the bad girl, as she disrupts the male gaze. Kosloff implies she is nude through her bare limbs, however, her nakedness is in opposition to the nude woman in art. Although clumsy at times, Kosloff's clenched fists, flexed muscles, and active stance, as she poses, demonstrates that her body is not passive. Unlike the bad girl, Kosloff does not embrace the overtly feminine. In contrast to how Suryodarmo and Martinez present their bodies as sexualised, Kosloff's femininity is ironically masked by the masculine canon of painting.

This chapter has argued that the concept of the bad girl initially challenged and disrupted established ideas about the female body as an object of desire for men. I have framed the bad girl as an approach to artmaking that women artists have used to playfully resist patriarchy through humour and performance. Additionally, through an examination of Cottingham's and Smyth's writings on bad girls, this chapter has highlighted the problematic readings of the concept. Although the bad girl is based on a rebellion against being a good girl, the bad girl and the good girl are nonetheless terms based on patriarchal structures of how a woman should and should not behave.

Through examining how slapstick and parody has been utilised in the performative work of Suryodarmo, Antoni, Martinez and Kosloff, this chapter has suggested that

these artists successfully use humour to step out of the constraints of femininity and offer alternative readings of how the female body can be constructed as subject, rather than object. I have argued that the discussed works of all four artists can be read through feminist humour, as a language that draws from female experience, rather than only as reactions against sexist, patriarchal values of femininity. Furthermore, as the female body shifts from being considered as feminine, it often then enters the conceptual realm of the grotesque. Suryodarmo, Martinez and Kosloff become the subjects of their work through their unfeminine or inappropriate behaviour, where their bodies exaggerate their femininity through comedic tactics.

This chapter's study of how women have used their bodies to explore and challenge feminine stereotypes sets up the premise for the following chapter. Feminist modes of performance-based painting developed as a means of anti-painting, where the materiality of painting is not a key attribute of painting. I suggest that the concepts of para-feminism and para-feminist parody have been driven by marginalised women, where the aim is not to react against patriarchal constructs in art and culture, but to draw from and build on what already has been established by women in first and second wave feminism.

Chapter Four: *HERstory*

Painting is dangerous, not because of its complicity with capitalism, not because of its obsolescence, not because of its role of institutionalizing the avant-garde, not because it is a tired object, but because of its role in securing the power of male artists and masculine modes of expression and representation.

Jane Blocker 2004, 98

This chapter considers how the artworks of women who explore painting through performance and video can be read as humorous vessels that deconstruct masculine ideals in painting and also build on the historical trajectory of feminist art. Through the performance and video artworks of Rachel Lachowicz, Myritza Castillo, Mariana Vassileva, Kate Gilmore and Janine Antoni, I demonstrate how these artists have focused on a feminine and playful aesthetic of anti-painting, a concept which has been used to engage with artworks that challenge established understandings about what painting can *be*. In Chapter Two I proposed that Lucy Lippard's anti-modernism was a more precise term for feminist art occurring after or responding to modernism (1980, 362). In this chapter I offer a feminist and contemporary understanding of painting that can be discussed through the concept of anti-painting, where painting can expand into multiple disciplines such as performance and video.

Through the performance of painting in video, the action or process of painting is clearly visible, where '...we see the results of the artist's hand as we watch a painting progress in front of our eyes' (Barragán 2011, 23). Paint is also not limited to, for example, pigment on canvas which, from my own research and personal observations, continues to dominate and be encouraged in major institutions and art school education.¹ This chapter is concerned with the processes attributed to *becoming* painting, rather than focusing on determining the final stage of being painting (Ring Petersen 2010, 13). In other words, through the critical lens of anti-painting, this chapter examines the processes that occur as a painting is being created, rather than the final material outcome of the work. I interpret performative

¹ I have taught numerous undergraduate classes on painting and art theory at Curtin University from 2011 onwards and observed that the majority of students engaging with painting endeavour to initially produce or discuss work that consists of paint on a flat surface, even when alternative options are presented to them.

anti-painting as contemporary painting that is entirely process based. Unlike the examples of modernist action painting in this exegesis (for example, Jackson Pollock's work), I approach anti-painting's materiality as subservient to the role the body plays. The physical remnants of painting are left over, rather than serving as finished artworks.

Chapter Three considered the parody of patriarchal stereotypes of women through the performing and misbehaving female body. This chapter extends on these issues through an examination of Lachowicz's cosmetics-based anti-paintings. I consider how her use of feminine materials, such as lipstick, are shaped into representations of paint to parody the dominant masculine art canon. *Red Not Blue*, 1992 - a parody of Yves Klein's *Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (*Anthropométrie de l'époque bleue*), 1960 - and *Mondrian Bulge*, 2005 - a parody of Piet Mondrian's painted grids - address a playful privileging of painting as a masculine material. Lachowicz's parody of painting can be read as anti-painting because she uses non-traditional materials as paint (although cosmetics can be considered to be paint as they are designed to be applied to women's faces to enhance patriarchal notions of beauty).

My focus on the moving image stems from my understanding of how painting is translated when presented through video, as elements of movement, duration, sound and performance all push painting beyond its traditional limits, as discussed throughout this exegesis. Through the analysis of curators Selene Wendt and Paco Barragán's 2011 exhibition *When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten!* at The Stenersen Museum, Oslo, this chapter examines medium-specificity in performative painting and video. I ask whether painting needs to be accompanied by tangible materials. The inclusion of the painterly remnants in performance suggests that materiality remains a key element in contemporary painting.

Building on Wendt and Barragán's writing, Castillo's work is used to discuss the relevance of presenting physical paintings as performative outcomes. In her video *Under Construction*, 2007, Castillo destroys a painting that is then reconstructed into a neat frame and hung alongside the video that documents her tearing the painting apart. I question the significance in exhibiting both the painting and video, asking why the materiality of painting is seen as an essential element in contemporary

painting. An example of a video where painting is referenced but does not involve the medium of paint is found in a discussion of Vassileva's video *The Milkmaid*, 2006. Vassileva performs Johannes Vermeer's painting *The Milkmaid*, 1657-1658, by using an actor to mimic the action of the model in Vermeer's painting. However, paint is only present in the context of reference. In no part of Vassileva's work does she engage with the materiality of paint.

This chapter applies Amelia Jones's notion of para-feminism and Laura Castagnini's concept of para-feminist parody to build on my discussion of anti-painting. A para-feminist reading can be applied to painting that is performative and video based, as both movements have been key developments in feminist art (Blocker 2004, 6).² Para-feminism was first conceptualised by Jones in *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject* in 2006. For Jones, para-feminism frames the effects of feminism in art through a 'politics of positionality' (2007, 9) with the female body as the anchor for these politics.

Jones bases her concept of para-feminism as an alternative to the prominence of post-feminism in the 1990s as post-feminism implies that feminism has achieved what the first and second waves set out to accomplish (McRobbie 2004, 255). As previously discussed, terms like post-feminist are problematic because they refer to an end to or rejection of feminism thought. On the other hand, para-feminism suggests a way of thinking that runs alongside and builds on first and second wave feminist thought in order to propose new ways of thinking about feminism beyond what has been established under patriarchy as visual and cultural norms (Jones 2006, 213).

Para-feminist parody draws primarily from feminist history that generates humorous images by and for women, rather than about them. Castagnini expands on the

² Feminist performance art is a growing area of research interest and a field much broader than can be covered in this exegesis. For an interesting discussion on the representation of women through performance see Blocker, Jane. 2004. *What The Body Cost: Desire, History and Performance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Similarly, Amelia Jones has a good discussion on the performing feminist body through video in Jones, Amelia. 2006. "Cinematic Self Imaging and the Televisual Body (Cinema, Video, Digital Video)." In *Self/Images: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject*, 134-162. Oxon: Routledge.

possibilities of parafeminism through her concept of parafeminist parody, offering a model of contemporary feminist art that rethinks previous methods of feminist artmaking (2015, 24). Parafeminist parody does not aim to discredit older feminist artworks, rather the concept uses tools associated with femininity to reconsider the politics of feminism whilst paying homage to second wave feminist art and the impact the concept of bad girls had on feminist thought (2015, 24).

Gilmore's performances *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2013, and *Sudden as a Massacre*, 2011, can be seen as parafeminist parodies when compared to Antoni's *Loving Care*, 1993, and *Gnaw*, 1992 (as first discussed in Chapter Three). Gilmore's work can be read as humorously reconsidering the materials and staging of the female body present in Antoni's work. Gilmore's choice of materials and absurd task-based activities draws parallels with Antoni's self-deprecating performances. Both artists use the labour of the female body to create their works. Antoni chews through blocks of chocolate and lard in *Gnaw* and takes on the role of the domestic woman in *Loving Care* by cleaning the floor of the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London. Gilmore plays into feminine stereotypes by using a girlish palette and very feminine outfits that are often inappropriate and restrictive to the tasks she carries out.

I argue that, consciously or not, Gilmore's works can be approached as examples of playfully parodying the earlier works of Antoni's performances. The materials in *Sudden as a Massacre* bears similarity to Antoni's chocolate and lard blocks in *Gnaw*. Gilmore also uses blocks of material, in this instance, clay that is dug out by a group of women who fling handfuls of clay around the room. In addition, a parafeminist parody reading can be applied to *Love 'em, Leave 'em*. Gilmore can be perceived as parodying Antoni's mopping technique in *Loving Care* by dropping pots of paint on the ground that, like Antoni's dye, leave a mess on the pristine white floor.

Women Painting

After the emphasis on performance and video in the 1970s and 1980s as key areas in which feminist artists were creating work, the 1990s saw a shift. Women were painting again and some of that generation's most prominent painters, for example, Polly Oelbaum (b. 1955, USA) and Agatha de Bailliencourt (b. 1974, France), used a palette of girlish colours and visual language that embraced rather than rejected pre-existing associations with femininity (Ring Petersen 2010, 17). In Anne Ring Petersen's words, these women were '...challenging the established notions of what a "powerful" or "great" painting could be, and their works call for a re-evaluation of such vital questions about gender-specificity in painting' (2010, 17). Returning to how male modernist critics Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg defined painting by women (for example Georgia O'Keeffe, Helen Frankenthaler and Lynda Benglis) as decorative, lyrical and feminine, it is significant that women in the 1990s were re-approaching what had been ostracised as feminine painting. By exploring concepts of painting that had been considered to be feminine, women used painting as a tool of empowerment, and a way to disrupt and challenge patriarchal values in painting.

However, my concern is that contemporary painting continues to be primarily interpreted through masculine painterly traditions, where the focus continues to be on medium-specificity. Katy Deepwell questions if there is any significance, especially after modernism, in feminist artists reinvesting in painting, considering its history continues to manifest as a male-dominated practice. In Deepwell's words, medium specificity is '... the claim which is so clearly aligned to reinstating or trying to maintain a late modernist perspective and holds onto painting as a category' (2010, 143). She suggests one way to resolve this dilemma is to render a blurring of the conditions in which painting is medium-specific (2010, 143).

The three-part exhibition *The Triumph of Painting*, 2005-2006, at the Saatchi Gallery, London, can be interpreted as an attempt to re-establish painting as a medium-specific form of artmaking that continues to be embedded within its masculine-

dominated modernist roots.³ The title of the predominantly white, male-centric exhibition reflects Deepwell's argument that contemporary painting remains bound in the modernist tradition of medium-specificity. Furthermore Alison Gingeras's catalogue essay supports painting's status as resistant to the influence of more contemporary forms of artmaking.⁴ Gingeras explains,

...since the contemporary viewer has become so saturated with camera-made images, hyperrealistic forms such as photography and film have become banal and ineffective. Painting has regained a privileged status. The medium's tactility, uniqueness, mythology and inherent ambiguities has allowed painting to become an open-ended vehicle for both artist and viewer to evoke personal recollections, to embody collective experience and reflect upon its own history in the age of mechanical reproduction (2005).

Gingeras highlights the point that the exhibitions were centred on surveying contemporary painting. However, I argue that the curatorial approach was conservative especially when considering how the artists that were selected have negotiated the possibilities of painting's materiality. The majority of artworks in the exhibition are made from traditional painting materials such as paint and canvas, which suggests painting's triumph continues to be based on firmly clutching at the principles of modernist painting such as flatness and mark making on canvas. Despite being located within a contemporary setting and shown in arguably one of the most influential institutions in the West, painting remains as privileged art form in *The Triumph of Painting* (Wu 2011, 197). Furthermore, only three women artists (Marlene Dumas, Inka Essenhigh and Dana Schutz) were included in the exhibitions. For a gallery with the such a high economic and cultural status in

³ The artists in *The Triumph of Painting* are as follows. Part One: Peter Doig (b. 1959, Scotland), Marlene Dumas (b. 1953, South Africa), Jörg Immendorff (1945-2007, Germany), Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997, Germany), Hermann Nitsch (b. 1938, Austria) and Luc Tuymans (b. 1958, Belgium). Part Two: Franz Ackerman (b. 1963, Germany), Kai Althoff (b. 1966, Germany), Albert Oehlen (b. 1954, Germany), Thomas Scheibitz (b. 1968, Germany), Wilhelm Sasnal (b. 1972, Poland), and Dirk Skreber (b. 1961, Germany). Part Three: Dexter Dalwood (b. 1960, UK), Inka Essenhigh (b. 1969, USA), Eberhard Havekost (b. 1967, Germany), Michael Raedecker (b. 1963, Netherlands), Dana Schutz (b. 1976, USA) and Matthias Weischer (b. 1973, Germany). Three more exhibitions were planned in this survey, however only the first three took place. Although there were marginally more women artists involved in plans for the last three exhibitions, their presence was still minor compared to the male artists included (Wu 2011, 211).

⁴ Gingeras is an American curator and writer working in the US and Warsaw.

contemporary art (2011, 198-199), I contend that it is concerning that such a small number of women are represented in one of the gallery's major surveys of painting.⁵

Rachel Lachowicz: Cosmetic Painting

Figure 4.0 Rachel Lachowicz, *Red Not Blue*, 1992, performance. Production still from performance.

<http://www.lachowicz.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Red-Not-Blue.png>

One solution to the issues surrounding the materiality of contemporary painting is to confront the conditions in which painting is medium-specific. Following on from my examination that Laresa Kosloff's work *Spirit & Muscle*, 2006, was a parody of modernist painting, Lachowicz is another example of a woman artist who directly challenges painting as being masculine dominated and bound to a very narrow set of conventions. Her cosmetics-based appropriations of iconic paintings by male artists reveal a return to using feminine mediums that previous generations of feminist artists resisted. By using a material that is directly linked to feminine beauty ideals, Lachowicz not only parodies male action painting but also painting's materiality.⁶ It can be argued that by using cosmetics as paint, Lachowicz deliberately communicates that her material cannot be separated from patriarchal structures of femininity.

Figure 4.1: Rachel Lachowicz, *Red Not Blue*, 1992, performance. Production still from performance.

<http://www.lachowicz.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Red-Not-Blue.png>

⁵ More evidence of male-centric surveys by the Saatchi Gallery can be found in the 2016-2017 exhibition *Painters' Painters*. The exhibition included only male artists who work primarily with paint on canvas. The artists in this exhibition are Richard Aldrich (b. 1975, USA), Dexter Dalwood (b. 1960, England), Raffi Kalendarian (b. 1981, USA), Ansel Krut (b. 1959, South Africa), Martin Maloney (b. 1961, UK), Bjarne Melgaard (b. 1961, England), Ryan Mosley (b. 1980, England), David Salle (b. 1952, USA) and David Brian Smith (b. 1981, England).

⁶ In the west, beauty ideals include youthfulness, thinness, clear skin, white teeth, full breasts, and shining hair.

Lachowicz's performance-based work *Red Not Blue*, 1992 (Figures 4.0 and 4.1) is a direct feminist critique of Klein's *Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (*Anthropométrie de l'époque bleue*), 1960, where paint-coated female models pressed and dragged their nude bodies across large sheets of paper. *Red Not Blue* contains nude, lipstick-caked men pressing their bodies onto sheets of canvas while Lachowicz, dressed in a cocktail dress, stockings and high heels, looms above them and directs their movements (Jones 1998, 278). The men in this performance are the source of labour under Lachowicz's instruction as they are pulled across the floor in order to imprint their bodies on the surface of the canvas. While standing on a scissor lift, Lachowicz attaches a lipstick to the flaccid penis of one of her models and holds the makeshift brush in place. The upwards motion of the machine assists in drawing a vertical line of lipstick on a roll of paper attached to a wall (Jones 1998, 278). The resulting prints (Figures 4.2 and 4.3) share visual similarities to Klein's *Anthropometries*; however, the body and material has shifted from the traditionally objectified nude woman and paint on canvas, to the awkwardness of the lipstick-coated nude male body completely under the control of the woman artist.

Figure 4.2: Rachel Lachowicz, *Red Not Blue – Three Torsos with Penes*, 1992, lipstick on canvas, dimensions unknown, private collection.

<http://lachowicz.com/works/#!prettyPhoto>.

Figure 4.3: Rachel Lachowicz, *Red Not Blue – Penis marking (from scissor lift descent)*, 1992, lipstick on canvas, dimensions unknown, private collection.

<http://lachowicz.com/works/#!prettyPhoto>

Lachowicz uses lipstick for two specific reasons. Firstly, it is an oil-based product that can be compared to oil paint; and secondly, in the West, lipstick is automatically associated with femininity (Hurd Clarke and Bundon 2009, 198).⁷ Lachowicz explains, ‘...when we talk about an artwork made of lipstick, it immediately becomes gendered and can be perceived as less important because cosmetics are associated with artifice’ (2016, quoted in Cempellin 2016, 89).⁸ Cosmetics are gendered as feminine and separate from heteronormative masculine identities; however, when presented in a way where their form changes from beauty product to painterly pigment, the role these materials play in western culture shifts significantly. In Lachowicz’s words, lipstick ‘instantly becomes political, and is so because women are essentially marked while men are free’ (2016, quoted in Cempellin 2016, 86). Lipstick is part of the complex system that structures women as objects of desire (Hurd Clarke and Bundon 2009, 198). Its purpose is to enhance the complexions of women, for the appeal and desire of men. Through her materials and performative tools for painting, Lachowicz parodies painting as a privileged art form and also updates the language of painting by literally stripping power away from the white male and applying it to the marginalised woman artist.

Figure 4.4: Rachel Lachowicz, *Mondrian Bulge*, 2005, eyeshadow, pigment, 3D plexiglass cover, 128.3 x 127 x 101.6cm, private collection.

<http://lachowicz.com/works/#!prettyPhoto>

Figure 4.5: Rachel Lachowicz, *Mondrian Bulge*, 2005, eyeshadow, pigment, 3D plexiglass cover, 128.3 x 127 x 101.6cm, side view, private collection.

<http://lachowicz.com/works/#!prettyPhoto>

⁷ Laura Hurd Clarke and Andrea Bundon conducted a study in 2009 on older women’s reflections on wearing lipstick. In their findings, they found that lipstick was the most used cosmetic by the women interviewed. For many of the women, lipstick was worn when they were younger as a sign of rebellion as well as peer acceptance. In the case of older women, lipstick was used to enhance the lips so as to appear more attractive in their appearance (2009, 198).

⁸ Examples of other women artists who use cosmetics in their work include the installation works of Karla Black. Pipilotti Rist’s *Open My Glade (Flatten)*, 2000, is another example of a parody of cosmetics. Rist presses and rubs her heavily made-up face across a glass window, smearing her makeup and distorting her face in a grotesque manner.

To further expand on the power of materials in feminist painting, Lachowicz's *Mondrian Bulge*, 2005 (Figures 4.4 and 4.5) takes on the form of the grid. Like *Red Not Blue*, the work is made from feminine beauty products, specifically different shades of eyeshadow.⁹ In my previous examination of the overlapping characteristics that described the decorative and the grid, I suggested that if the strict geometry of the grid was broken, it would be considered to be approaching femininity and, by default, the decorative. Yet, according to Greenberg, the decorative represents neatness, precision and repetition. At the same time, however, these are all terms that can also be used to describe the aesthetic significance of the grid (Auther 2004, 353). Lachowicz's repetitious eyeshadow grids parody the modernist principles of the grid (particularly Mondrian's). Her choice of materials also suggests a new use for the absurdity of a product used to smear across one's eyelids in a bid to transform into a more 'feminine' version of a woman. Furthermore, Lachowicz's materials do not suggest (unlike the Saatchi Gallery) that contemporary painting has returned triumphantly, anchored in medium-specificity.

Although Lachowicz attempts to create work that shifts from dominant art historical references, the femininity associated with cosmetics continues to be linked to women's practice and the female body (Lachowicz 2013, 31). Lachowicz explains,

The materials are not essentially feminine, but we experience them through a culture that desires bodies to be gendered and sexualized. Although these bodies are absent in much of my work, their sexualised presence is referenced through the cosmetics I employ (2013, 31).

Even though Lachowicz's use of feminine materials in *Red Not Blue* and *Mondrian Bulge* parodies modernist painting and challenges the hierarchy of medium-specificity in painting, I argue that her artworks still rely on referencing the work of men to communicate its meaning. What is problematic about continually referring back to the work of men is that it ensures that the work of women continues to be compared to that of men's, or seen as challenging or deconstructing how patriarchy

⁹ Lachowicz has parodied the work of numerous male artists including Chuck Close (b. 1940, USA), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968 France), Gerhard Richter (b. 1932, Germany) and Andy Warhol (1928-1987, USA). In the context of this research, *Red Not Blue* and *Mondrian Bulge* are used as examples because both Klein and Mondrian have been discussed in Chapter One of this exegesis.

has enforced stereotypes of femininity. On the other hand, approaching painting that draws from feminist art history, rather than the dominant art history that has been discussed throughout this exegesis, results in women creating work that explore female experience without needing to directly reference the patriarchy that has marginalised them.

Moving Paintings

To exemplify how anti-painting can be applied in a contemporary context, the merging of video with performative painting is an avenue that disrupts the hierarchy of painting. I argue that when translated to the screen, the materiality of paint can be seen as subordinate, particularly when the action of painting is performed with the gestures of the female body. This approach to contemporary painting is significant because it demonstrates a method to painting that does not follow the trajectory of masculine action painting. The focus is not on how the artist masters their materials, rather how the body engages with the concept of materiality in painting.

An example of an exhibition where painting is explored through performance and video is found in *When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten!*, 2011. The exhibition explores the shifts that occur when newer mediums and media such as performance and video use the older medium of painting. Wendt explains that through the fusion of painting with performance and video, what occurs is a means of '[m]oving the iconography of painting from the dusty recesses of art history into a relevant, contemporary context...' (2011a, 18). My interest in this exhibition is in terms of how painting and the moving image have intersected theoretically through a series of essays and articles based on the ideas and artworks present in the show. In particular, the title of the exhibition alone indicates a contradiction, suggesting that there is something wrong with painting when it moves through video or performance (2011b, 39).

Wendt and Barragán argue that the concept of the pictorial as a moving image is a very complex process for defining painting (2011, 8). It is a process that unfolds when '...painting measures itself against its own history and mythos while at the same time deploying interdisciplinary and digital approaches in which the authenticity

of an artwork or the origins of the source material are irrelevant' (2011, 8). My concern is not in formulating a definition in which the conditions of painting deteriorate into some other artistic discipline. Rather, I am interested in how women have used performative painting and video to explore a corporeal language where painting is deconstructed as it is read through the moving image and the process of painting unfolds through movement and time.

Figure 4.6: Myritza Castillo, *Under Construction*, 2008, DVD, 4:46, video frame.

<http://www.myritzacastillo.com/under-construction/>

Figure 4.7: Myritza Castillo, *Under Construction*, 2008, DVD, 4:46, video frame.

<http://www.myritzacastillo.com/under-construction/>

Castillo's *Under Construction*, 2008, (Figures 4.6 and 4.7), is an example from *When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten!* of how understandings about painting shift in meaning depending on the media with which it is created. Castillo carefully creates scenarios where she 'deconstructs narrative sequences that through pictorial motifs display very specific moments in time' (Acevedo 2010). *Under Construction* is set in front of a wrapped painting in an otherwise empty room. Dressed in jeans and a hoodie, Castillo casually examines the work, and the footage cuts to her sitting and laying in front of the painting, as if she is pondering the work (many of her positions seem to parody the male genius musing over his masterpiece).¹⁰ After laying down sheets of plastic on the floor, Castillo proceeds to throw hammers at the work and tears the canvas off its stretcher (which she also breaks into pieces) and packs the contents of the painting into a glass box.

¹⁰ For example, at the beginning of Hans Namuth's film on Jackson Pollock, Pollock is captured hovering and musing over his paintings.

The transformation that occurs to the painting through the violent acts of the performing female body is a key aspect of Castillo's work. In no part of the performance is there any evidence that the act of painting has taken place. What we recognise as a painting is an already constructed artwork; its process has not been documented (although Castillo did create the painting) (Barragán 2011, 26). This process of taking one medium (painting) that is then presented through another medium (video) relates to Chiel Kattenbelt's discussion of how mediums translate as they develop back and forth into different forms. In Kattenbelt's words, 'The taking up or imitation of the methods of representation of one medium by another medium can also function as a specific, medium-crossing form of intertextuality, which implies that one medium refers to another medium' (2008, 24). However, in *Under Construction*, the video has been exhibited alongside a neat glass box with the contents of the painting pressed inside.

The video is a performance of the deconstruction and transformation of painting, where '[t]he painting's imminent death is the performative act that produces the final work' (Acevedo 2010). I contend that the need for the physical components as the outcome, along with its neat reconstruction to be subsequently hung on the wall of an institution, is problematic as it suggests that the performative deconstruction of painting on the screen needs to be gathered and reconstructed as an art object. I contend that this process of bringing painting back to the traditional material conditions of painting is ironically what *When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten!* attempts to avoid.

Figure 4.8: Mariana Vassileva, *The Milkmaid*, 2006, DVD, 3:00, video frame.

<http://www.dna-galerie.de/en/artists/mariana-vassileva/mariana-vassileva--works.php>

Figure 4.9: Johannes Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*, 1657-1658, oil on canvas, 46 x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2009/vermeer>

On the other hand, Mariana Vassileva's *The Milkmaid*, 2006, (Figure 4.8), is a direct reference to Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*, 1657-58 (Figure 4.9). In the work, an actor Maria Dabow stands in front of a crisp white backdrop; her clothes and props are also white. She pours milk into a bowl while monks can be heard softly chanting (Wendt 2011a, 20). Wendt states that Vassileva's work is a '...careful, measured understatement that bridges a gap between past and present. Vassileva turns a very well-known image into a mirror reflection of itself, using movement and sound as devices to contemporize the original motif' (Wendt 2011a, 20). *The Milkmaid* challenges how the representation of women has been written into art history as Vassileva has taken a famous painting by a man and claimed it as her own through a filmed representation using an actor. Her work is an example of anti-painting as no paint is present in the act of creating the painting, nor in any part of the video. Vassileva's work demonstrates painting that extends beyond the still prominent concept (as demonstrated in the *Triumph of Painting*) that painting is a paint-based discipline. Vassileva reveals an understanding about contemporary painting that is not only paint-free painting, but also produced by a woman about the subjectivity of women. However, like Lachowicz, she is still referencing and challenging men's history in painting.

When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten! demonstrates how the work of women artists such as Vassileva link back to iconic works by men. Wendt explains that many artists in the exhibition are women (yet, only six out of the nineteen artists presented in the exhibition publication are female) who, '...not only reinterpret art history, but also address women's roles within the context of art history and history in

general, in works that speak compellingly of female empowerment' (2011a, 21).¹¹ This understanding of the empowerment that Wendt is referring to is problematic because it relies on a continued tendency to frame the famous work of men as masterpieces, with the responses by women as reactions against these works. I propose that the gap here that needs to be addressed is one where women build on and respond to the history of women's art, creating a language of painting without the need to consistently refer to or challenge the privileges and exposure men have had throughout western art history.

I have argued that artists such as Lachowicz, Castillo and Vassileva have cultivated methods of performative painting that act as responses to masculine-dominated methods of art practice. All three artists challenge painting's materiality by using non-traditional materials. Lachowicz uses cosmetics as paint, and men as her brushes, to parody the artworks of men and challenge established readings of the materiality of paint. Unlike the works of male action painters who have been discussed in this exegesis, the action in Castillo's work is not based on the heroic processes of creating a painting. Rather, Castillo uses force to deconstruct, then reconstruct an already painted painting. Vassileva, too, challenges painting as being medium-specific. She engages with the context of the materiality of paint through the female body that performs a mirrored representation of Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*.

All three artists have created significant feminist artworks that are provocative towards patriarchal ideas about action painting while offering new readings for how the female body can engage with painting. However, I contend that there is still a need to frame a new artistic language that does not necessarily draw from modernism, or dominant art history. In Jacqueline Millner, Catriona Moore and Georgina Cole's words, '...the tools of feminist critique are still yielding valuable new insights, both about historical and contemporary art, while at the same time providing

¹¹ The artists in the exhibition *When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten!* are Monika Bravo (b. 1964, Columbia), Alexey Buldakov (b. 1980, Russia) Ivan Candeo (b. 1983, Venezuela), Myritza Castillo (b. 1981, Puerto Rico), Raúl Cordero (b. 1971, Cuba), Raphael DiLuzio (b. 1960, USA), AK Dolven (b. 1953, Norway), Chus García-Fraile (b. 1965, Madrid), Ori Gersht (b. 1967, Israel), Crispin Gurholt (b. 1965, Norway), José Maçãs de Carvalho (b. 1960, Portugal), Fabián Marcaccio (b. 1963, Argentina), Enrique Marty (b. 1969, Spain), Kristy Shindler (b. 1965, Canada), Sam Taylor-Johnson (b. 1967, England), Mariana Vassileva (b. 1964, Bulgaria), Bill Viola (b. 1951, USA) and Tim White Sobieski (b. 1961, Poland).

sources of strength to combat the effects of ongoing social and institutional misogyny' (Millner, Moore, and Cole 2015, 148). This chapter pursues artwork by women that extends beyond a reaction or reference back to the artworks of men. Lachowicz, Castillo and Vassileva all use the female body to challenge masculine assumptions about the role objectified women have played in western painting's history. In addition, they all push against what I have argued to be masculine ideas about medium-specificity in painting. However, I also seek to find artworks that can be framed through the specific characteristics of parafeminist parody where women playfully critique and build on the work of other women. I build on the examples of anti-painting through performance and the moving image, as found in Lachowicz's, Castillo's and Vassileva's work. I am interested in considering and seeing the possibilities for combining the relationships between the female subject and body, how the body is represented, and the spaces that the body is placed in (Jones 2006, 212).

Parafeminism

Parafeminism proposes that contemporary feminist artists are approaching artmaking through a critical engagement with second wave feminism that extends beyond established white, middle class, heteronormative subjects that have been the main narrative in first and second wave accounts of feminist thinking (Jones 2006, 213). The concept of the bad girl is one such example in this project where only the voices of privileged, white women have been predominantly heard. On the other hand, parafeminism engages with the concept that dominant ideas about feminism need to shift in order to be inclusive to those who lay outside the parameters of dominant western feminist thought. Jones explains,

...I would like polemically to argue for the explicit rejection of the tendency within dominant strands of second-wave feminism to assume a normative gendered subject who is white, middle class, heterosexual, and "First World" (i.e. from Europe or North America), as well as the tendency to prescribe certain behaviors or strategies - to argue, for example, that women who do not deploy a particular kind of bodily language or cultural practice are not "proper" feminists (2006, 213).

Jones offers para feminism as a contemporary means of art practice that pushes the boundaries of feminist practice. In Jones's words, para feminism aims to '...make use of (or even invents) new forms of power *tied* to the historical and present forms of feminine (not by any means necessarily "female") subjectivities, while not assuming that power only exists in certain obvious forms' (2006, 213, original italics). What is significant about Jones's concept is that it highlights issues with first and second wave feminism, while also offering a way of navigating through contemporary feminist theory and practice that does not outright reject previous ideas of feminism, but instead builds and expands on them.

The power Jones is referring to can be interpreted as not only the patriarchal implications that have created the feminine, but also the implications dominant forms of feminism have created regarding proper feminist behaviour. In Jones's words, para feminism, '...understands "gender" as a question rather than an answer - and a question that permutates through an array of other subjective and social identifications' (2006, 213). This power does not manifest through an understanding of the identity or cultural value of women, rather its value is found in an open ended and process based way of approaching how power shifts when applied to different subjects and objects used in works of art (2006, 215).

Parafeminist Parody: Kate Gilmore and Janine Antoni

An example of how para feminism has critiqued previous ideas about feminist artmaking, while also building on the accomplishments of first and second wave feminism, has been conceptualised by Castagnini. She combines Jones's ideas on para feminism with Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody, to conceive para feminist parody. Para feminist parody is a post-2000s approach to feminist practice that humorously references, mimics or pays homage to earlier strategies of feminist art making while also engaging with 'para' as meaning not only 'beside' but 'counter' (2015, 24). In Castagnini's words,

While Hutcheon's insights broaden the term parody to include "beside" and thus account for strategies of compliancy and homage, I would like to reverse Hutcheon's

logic to argue that para-feminism can be expanded to include the term “counter,” and thus account for strategies of distance and critique (2015, 24).

Castagnini suggests that a solution to how contemporary feminist artists navigate para-feminism is through a focus on parodying the work of earlier feminist artists. This is not only to critique the achievements of feminism, but rather a tongue in cheek reference to updating older feminist concepts and forms. Para-feminist parody is a way of approaching contemporary feminist art as both humorous and playful, while using feminine materials to create new ways of interpreting and parodying existing ideas about materiality in artmaking, in particular performative work (2015, 23).

Figure 4.10: Kate Gilmore, *Sudden as a Massacre*, 2011, HD video, 1:47, video frame, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland.

<http://www.kategilmore.com/sudden-as-a-massacre-2011/>

Figure 4.11: Kate Gilmore, *Sudden as a Massacre*, 2011, 2.525 tons of clay, dimensions unknown, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland.

<http://pica.org/event/kate-gilmore/>

Para-feminist parody can be applied to Gilmore’s performances, which are often comical and awkward to watch because of the enduring, painful situations Gilmore puts her body through. Gilmore’s work explores stereotypical feminine behaviour and expectations, where she often fails to complete task-based and absurd activities, while dressed in overtly feminine outfits that are often inappropriate for the physical work she sets out to achieve (Kosloff 2010, 49).

Gilmore’s work can be seen as playfully reinterpreting physically demanding performances by second wave feminist artists such as Antoni. For example, *Sudden as a Massacre* (Figures 4.10 and 4.11), created and exhibited at Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, consists of five women in a yellow room, all identically dressed in floral sundresses and sandals. On a plinth in the middle of the room is a large block

of wet clay that the women frantically claw at, dig out, and throw at the walls surrounding them until they have completely broken down the 2.525 ton block (PICA 2011). There is no clear purpose for this performance, other than the physical endurance the women put their bodies through and the muddy remains of the women's actions.

The work can be suggested to be para-feminist parody by drawing links between *Sudden as a Massacre* and Antoni's *Gnaw*. I contend that, consciously or not, Gilmore builds on Antoni's attempt to chew through blocks of chocolate and lard, though it is a much more violent approach as the women forcefully throw fistfuls of heavy wet clay at the wall. Gilmore's work also juxtaposes symbols of femininity through the performer's clothes, which appear out of place and inappropriate for the task the women are completing. In Kosloff's words, 'Gilmore negates simple binaries or gender stereotypes through her playful referencing and performance of these roles' (2010, 49). Gilmore's work can be interpreted as building on previous feminist performances, such as *Gnaw*, but also playfully parodying them by introducing overtly feminine dress, worn by her team of women labourers.

Figure 4.12: Janine Antoni, *Loving Care*, 1993, hair dye mopped onto the gallery floor, performance, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.

<http://www.skidmore.edu/news/2012/3536.php>

Figure 4.13: Janine Antoni, *Loving Care*, 1993, hair dye mopped onto the gallery floor, performance, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.

http://www.marthagarzon.com/contemporary_art/2011/01/janine-antoni-loving-care-lick-and-lather/

Links can also be made between Gilmore's paint-based works and the wetness in Antoni's *Loving Care*, 1993 (Figures 4.12 and 4.13) in terms of para-feminist parody. Antoni's work was a performance at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, where she dipped her long hair into buckets of dark hair dye and proceeded to mop the floor

with her human paintbrush. Antoni's labour-intense work is not unlike the everyday household chores or women's work of mopping a floor clean; however, Antoni reverses this activity by using her body as the mop and paints rather than cleans the floor, turning a laborious but arguably useful activity into one that blemishes and stains the pristine gallery floor, with sticky, slimy materials. *Loving Care* has clear links to the modernist male action painters discussed in this project where, like Pollock, Antoni's canvas is on the floor and, like the work of Klein, it is the labour of her female body that creates the painterly outcome.

Figure 4.14: Kate Gilmore, *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2013, HD video, 1:49, video frame, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland.

<https://vimeo.com/70697488>

Gilmore's *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2013, (Figure 4.14), is a performance that takes place on a large white pedestal-like structure, with a hollowed-out interior for her materials to be dropped through. Dressed in a black dress, stockings and heels, Gilmore climbs the pedestal and proceeds to drop pots of black, white and bright pink paint through a cavity at the top. As the pots break on impact, the paint splatters, leaving a wet mess in the otherwise pristine space. Of her gestures that mimic heroic action painting, Gilmore explains, 'I often think about our art "heroes" - how their myths are created, how their greatness is achieved, and, of course, the complicated social and political history behind their work' (Deutsch 2015). Gilmore is carrying out a task that clearly parodies the heroic gestures of masculine action painters, through her act of violently breaking the paint-filled pots as her form of painterly gesture; however, it is her choice of dress and girlish palette that, I argue, can be determined as parafeminist parody.

Gilmore clearly plays into her femininity through her choice of dress and there is a sense of empowerment in her appearance. In Kosloff's words, Gilmore's work 'is used to explore processes of signification, particularly in relation to gender politics and art history. The staging and formal concerns in these works are particularly important, as they connect aesthetics with cultural values, and space with modalities

of power' (2010, 49). When comparing *Love 'em, Leave 'em* to *Loving Care*, Gilmore's work can be perceived as updating the painting technique used by Antoni through a parody of gesture and performing feminism badly. The suggestion of failing to perform to the standards of feminism, or performing it badly, can be a tongue in cheek response to second wave feminism. Gilmore's choice of girlish palette, feminine clothing and physical separation from the paint (unlike Antoni who was coated in hair dye and participated in hard labour as she mopped the floor) can be seen to embrace the feminine (Castagnini 2015, 30). Gilmore introduces feminine stereotypes as a form of empowerment, and presents a rethinking of and new strategies for the aesthetic and the political in contemporary feminist art.

Figure 4.15: Kate Gilmore, *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2013, wood, acrylic paint, ceramic pots, dimensions unknown, David Castillo Gallery, Miami.

<http://davidcastillogallery.com/exhibition/kate-gilmore-2/>

Figure 4.16: Kate Gilmore, *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2016, installation view, David Castillo Gallery, Miami.

<http://davidcastillogallery.com/exhibition/kate-gilmore-2/>

Returning to the materiality of Gilmore's work, in 2016, David Castillo Gallery in Miami exhibited a series of four sculptural remnants from *Love 'em, Leave 'em* as part of Gilmore's exhibition at the gallery (Figures 4.15 and 4.16). The framed outcomes that contained the paint and broken pottery from the performance were hung alongside the video of the creation of the work. The gallery states:

Gilmore shoves not only against traditional form and craft, but also against the legacy of male art world celebrity. The artist's labor, marked by the female figure, is more arduous, its duration longer, and its impact affective as well as material. It is the feminized labor of love that antagonizes the articulation of power. It is the love-hate relationship to objects that persist in the domestic realm despite Art History's efforts at appropriation. It is the response to gendered institutions of home and gallery. It is

the rhythm of attachment and separation that makes greater demands upon female artists than their male contemporaries (David Castillo Gallery 2016).

David Castillo Gallery also frames Gilmore's work as almost a commodity in how her work responds to masculine forms of action painting; her work is patronised as a 'feminized labor of love' (2016) and this labour is pitched as more intensive than that of her male contemporaries. What is problematic about the phrasing of Gilmore's work as a labour of love is that it has been well documented in feminist theory that love is part of the invisible and free labour of women in the domestic household as well as in the art industry. For example, as Macushla Robinson asserts, women are often paid less and have their work shown less frequently and in a smaller volume to the work of men (Robinson 2016).¹²

My perspective on Gilmore's exhibition is that, like Castillo's *Under Construction*, exhibiting the painterly outcomes from a performance downplays the significance of the performative video, especially when that work is performed by a woman. What is specifically problematic is the David Castillo Gallery stating that her work is responding to gendered institutions. I suggest that the way in which the material outcomes is exhibited conforms to the historically masculine-dominated institutional space. Gilmore's construction of the neatly gathered, and wall hung outcomes of *Love 'em, Leave 'em* could imply that both Gilmore and the gallery are continuing to rely of (historically masculine) materials-based work that is instantly recognisable as conforming to the conditions of painting.

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that an anti-painting approach to performative painting challenges pre-established ideas about the materiality and limitations of contemporary painting. Through my discussion of anti-painting, I have opened up a dialogue that suggests that painting can expand not only into transdisciplinary approaches, but questions the very nature of painting's materiality as tangible or even necessary in its outcome. Using Deepwell's observations on contemporary

¹² Robinson highlights that this free labour is often undocumented and, therefore, it is difficult to rely solely on the measurements of statistics. These undocumented examples of free labour within institutions, in Robinson's words, include 'the realm of interpersonal relationships; in the studio, the gallery or late at night on a laptop in bed; in long, unaccounted for hours and work brought home from the office on maternity leave. It happens in conversations and meetings where women must appear subtly more humble, more efficient, more dedicated than any of their male counterparts' (2016, 4).

feminist painting, this chapter has argued that the return to a feminine aesthetic in painting has been explored by artists such as Lachowicz to parody the work of prominent male artists such as Klein and Mondrian. The significance of Lachowicz's use of cosmetics as paint is that she also challenges the primary role of cosmetics as materials that create feminine beauty. Lachowicz offers an alternative method of painting, which parodies painting as a privileged art form.

This chapter has argued that a para-feminist approach to feminist painting opens up the possibilities for new forms of power to exist that navigate away from already established forms of western feminism. Furthermore, with reference to examples of the work of Antoni and Gilmore, Castagnini's concept of para-feminist parody has been used in this chapter to present a means of referring to art history that is not dependent on masculine interpretations or versions, but draws from feminist histories, playfully updating and offering new ways of engaging with feminist art practice.

I have suggested that by presenting performative painting through the moving image, more research is required to fully examine the continuous and unnecessary way of framing the material outcomes of contemporary performative painting. This chapter has set up the final foundations for Chapter Five, where I discuss the body of creative work that runs alongside this exegesis. The moving image is a key medium in my practice and this chapter has introduced performative painting via the video to highlight the representation and materiality of paint in my performative and video-based artworks. This chapter's discussion of the moving image has inspired new forms of performative painting in my own practice, and my decision to produce videos. The following chapter will build upon the ideas presented on anti-painting, para-feminist parody, and the moving image through practice-led research.

Chapter Five: *Feminist Performative Anti-Painting*

Representation can't live with the woman-who-does-not-exist and it can't live without her. The image of the body of a woman has served historically as the symbol of man's link with nature, his hold upon the material world, but simultaneously it has functioned as a cover-up, concealing a void, allaying his fears, his sense of lack. Woman as a sign is the site of a structuring absence, designating nothing- nothing, that is, no presence. But take away this irreducible alterity and the whole structure of representation collapses.

Jo Anna Isaak 1996, 50

This chapter is an in-depth discussion of the creative outcomes that have informed this practice-led research project. My investigation contributes to a trajectory of feminist artists, discussed throughout this exegesis, who contest masculine notions of engaging with painting through using the female body as the instrument for anti-painting. I primarily use performative painting, captured through video and photographs to parody histories of objectification and conventions of appropriate female behaviour. In my work, I create situations where my body is humorously exaggerated to the degree that I become a spectacle, an object of laughter, and a subject of self-initiated violence, whilst simultaneously disrupting preconceived ideas and myths about femininity and misbehaviour. The use of my body as the subject rather than object of my work is a strategy to overcome patriarchal ideas about femininity. However, it is also important to note that I do not aim to create what Amelia Jones refers to as '...positive images of women to reverse masculine stereotypes...' (2006, 213). Instead, the outcomes in this project contribute to the feminist corporeal language discussed in previous chapters that acknowledges but does not necessarily always draw from masculine prototypes found scattered throughout western paintings history since modernism.

This exegesis examines how the female body impacts discourses around painting. My work is discussed with reference to the four themes raised in earlier chapters. The themes are the wetness of paint, anti-painting, misbehaviour and feminist humour. Each artwork is grounded in the cultural and historical ideas that have been discussed in previous chapters on feminist artmaking. Each artwork contains multiple

elements and varying combinations of the four themes. This chapter will offer an extensive discussion on how my practice has informed the theoretical and critical argument constructed in my exegesis.

Naomi Wolf's notion that the female body is viewed in the west as 'wrong' while male bodies are seen as 'right' (2002, 196-197) backs up the idea explored in my art practice that it hurts to be female. In my practice, I put my body through rigorous routines bound to end in pain and failure, where I inevitably destroy my materials; this ensures that I will be defeated in an attempt to overcome them. My artworks offer the concept that through failing with my materials and with my body, I succeed in creating the work. Ironically, I perceive this as a feminine means of thinking - what may be seen as physical weakness, where the failure of painting is inevitable, is in fact, where the success of my work lies.

However, before I can discuss how my work has influenced my research on painting and the performing female body, it is essential to analyse how my practice has shifted both aesthetically and conceptually over this duration of this project. What began as wall-hung paintings and performance with an emphasis on producing an action painting, transformed into the performative photographs and video artworks over the course of the research project.

Feminine Grids and Hula Hoops



Figure 5.0: Lauren McCartney, *Reflection Painting*, 2013, studio test. Photograph by the artist.

In Chapter One, I suggested that the characteristics of the feminised decorative in Clement Greenberg's criticism correlated with my observations on the modernist grid in painting. The elements that made up what Greenberg considered to be decorative (neatness, precision and reproduction) are all terms that can be used to describe my position on the aesthetic components of the grid (Auther 2004, 352). In my practice I initially aimed to create paintings that captured the duplicity shown in strands of criticism in modernist painting, where decoration was established by Greenberg as feminine, and the grid as masculine.

The stain of paint was discussed as a way to disrupt masculine ideals of action painting, as staining was not about mastering materials; rather, staining alters the control one has over their materials. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, critics Eugene Goossen and Harold Rosenberg labelled Helen Frankenthaler's stains

as feminine in a bid to undermine her paintings through gender stereotypes. Using grids painted with the stain of watercolour, I envisioned creating large paintings that were feminine in their materials. I intentionally chose watercolour to assert a contemporary reinvestment in a painterly medium that has often been regarded as feminine (Swinth 2001, 65) and purposely juxtaposed it with the very mechanical and masculine structure of the grid.

My 2014 series of grid-based paintings, *Reflection Paintings* (Figures 5.0- 5.3), have been pivotal in the development of my doctoral research and assisted in creating a background context for my practice. *Reflection Paintings* challenges the mechanical and rigid structure of the grid by staining each geometric rectangle with watercolour. As the paint soaked into the paper support, it spread beyond the borders of the grid. The most substantial work in the series was *Reflection Painting #8* that was created on a 7-meter-long roll of watercolour paper and exhibited at Melody Smith Gallery in Perth.

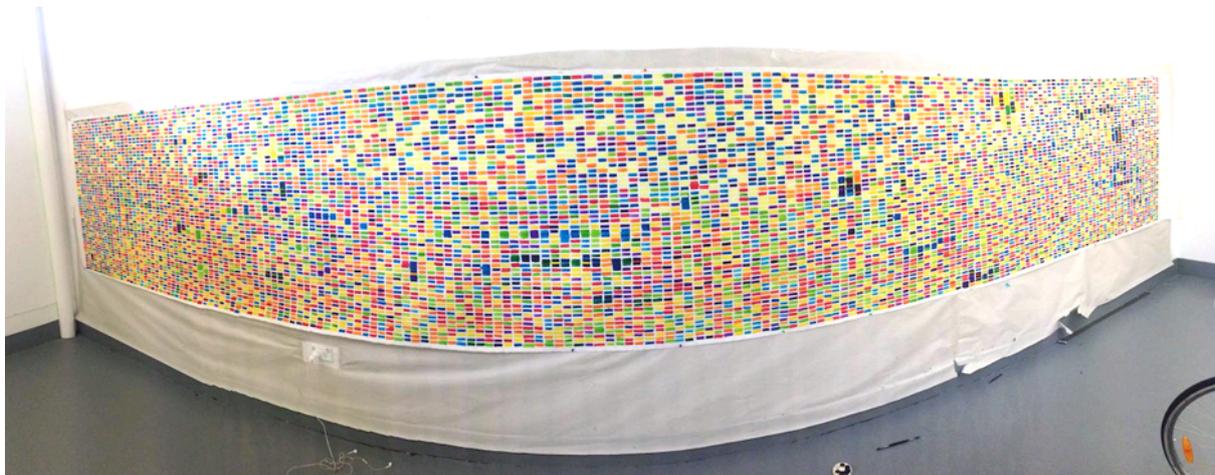


Figure 5.1: Lauren McCartney, *Reflection Painting #8*, 2014, panorama view of work in progress, watercolour on paper, 113 x 700 cm. Photograph by the artist.



Figure 5.2: Lauren McCartney, *Reflection Paintings*, 2014, installation view, Melody Smith Gallery, Perth. Photograph by Kiana Jones.



Figure 5.3: Lauren McCartney, *Reflection Painting #8*, 2014, watercolour on paper, 113 x 700 cm, detail, Melody Smith Gallery, Perth. Photograph by Kiana Jones.

It was also important that if I was to critique and parody the grandness of the scale which the male modernist action painters worked on, I needed to create my own grand painting. In *Reflection Painting #8*, over ten thousand rectangles were individually painted and cut out to make up the painting. This process was initially focused on capturing the physical endurance, dedication and heroism associated with masculine painting as discussed in this exegesis. However, as my research focus shifted from the material, to the deconstruction of material through performance and anti-painting, I considered how this seemingly heroic work could be reconsidered through performance and video. *Reflection Painting #8* became a catalyst for the concepts explored in the videos *Limp*, 2015, and *Parody Heals*, 2015, (as part of my final artworks) where I physically wore my paintings in a bid to parody the concept of mastery over materials.



Figure 5.4: Lauren McCartney, *The Hula Hooping Project*, 2014, performance, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne. Photograph by Brendan McCleary.

The Hula Hooping Project, 2014, (Figures 5.4 and 5.5), was another artwork essential to my development from painting on flat surfaces to performative painting. *The Hula Hooping Project* manifested as a series of videos documenting the creation of a painting in the enclosed space of Gallery Two at Seventh Gallery, Melbourne. The work was a durational performance where I poured tins of brightly coloured paint on the floor and moved in the puddles to create an action painting through what I consider to be the typically feminine activity of hula hooping.¹ Alongside video documentation of the work, I left the painterly outcome of the work on the walls, floor and ceiling of the gallery. The audience could walk into space, and on the work, and be physically immersed in the gestural mapping of my movements with paint.



Figure 5.5: Lauren McCartney, *The Hula Hooping Project*, 2014, installation view, 296.9 x 428.5 x 335.5 cm, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne. Photograph by Laura Couttie.

¹ Hula hooping is marketed by the beauty and fitness industries as a device that helps women lose weight. For example, on the cover of the May 2013 issue of *Self Magazine*, singer-songwriter, actress and television presenter Kelly Osbourne is captured posing in a bikini with hula hoops and the caption 'Kelly Osbourne: Exactly how she lost 70 pounds! That's like half a person!' (Huffington Post 2013). For the purpose of creating *The Hula Hooping Project*, I participated in a hula hooping course in 2014 by Soul Hula in Swanbourne Perth. The ten-week course taught me the basics of hula hooping for the performance.

The overarching challenge behind the development of *The Hula Hooping Project* was translating action painting into video, as well as exploring the possibilities for the exhibition of the painterly remnants of the performance. *The Hula Hooping Project* offered a deeper exploration of the shifts that take place between the process and outcome of action painting. In addition, the installation and performance of *The Hula Hooping Project* proved to be a rich source of information when analysing the various stages of action painting, such as mastery over materials and the transition of wet to dry paint. However, as significant as it was to test out my ideas through performance and a concrete painting as a result of the work, these outcomes did not satisfy my research aim because, like *Reflection Paintings*, they presented a material result. Furthermore, through the process of creating both *Reflection Paintings* and *The Hula Hooping Project*, I came to realise that these paintings did not fulfil my ideas about how my feminist practice sits within a contemporary context. I began to question the very discourse of painting I was participating in.

In Chapter One, I argued that the historical discussion of modernist action painting was shaped primarily by heterosexual, western, middle class men, and, therefore, is inadequate in reflecting diversity and difference in painting practice. Throughout this exegesis I have presented evidence that painting was not the ideal space for women to explore female experience, both theoretically and critically, and through the materiality of painting. However, gendered hierarchies in art opened up the space for women to create work using non-traditional mediums such as video and performance, which Lucy Lippard has described as anti-modernist (1980, 362). Video provides a space for the performance, framing and contextualisation of painting to expose the complex gender-based structures that underpin the meanings in my work. My decision to create videos and, as an extension, photographs, rather than live performance, develops from my interest in how my work could deconstruct the materiality of painting, through the screen, while considering the complex interrelationship between materiality, frames of reference in painting, and feminist art history.

Wet Paint: *Spare Rib*



Figure 5.6: Lauren McCartney, *Spare Rib*, 2015, digital video, 3:50, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough, sound by Tom Hogan. Screenshot by the artist.

I have established that wet paint as well as the stain in painting can be considered to be metaphorically feminine (out of control and messy), that men controlled with their gestures in action painting. The notion of the grotesque seeping and wetness of the feminine stain is explored in my video *Spare Rib*, 2015 (Figures 5.6 and 5.22). My body becomes a living brush in *Spare Rib* as the work is painted on the flesh of my torso. I use flesh as the support for painting, highlighting the process from wet to dry. The body parodies action painting by mastering its wet materials as the wet paint expands, contracts, and cracks as it begins to dry. However, because of how this process is captured on film, the artwork never completely dries and metaphorically addresses the gap I have found in my research that the wetness of paint has not been adequately considered in the masculine construction of mastery over material. In addition, my aim in *Spare Rib* was not to produce an artwork that simply challenges masculine painting, but to consider how an oozing, gooey screen-based painting builds on a feminist language of painting that defies painting as either feminine or masculine.

Spare Rib builds on the discussed criticism of Lynda Benglis's work, as well as her use of materials, to offer an updated approach to the pour. The video playfully parodies the concept considered by both Benglis and critic Robert Pincus-Witten that Benglis's artworks resembled frozen gestures, where Benglis would pour liquid latex (that has a similar density to paint) over built structures. This method of artmaking can be interpreted as 'freezing' the gestures of painting in time. The texture of the paint in *Spare Rib* shares a similar viscosity to Benglis's poured works, such as *Adhesive Products*, 1971. However, unlike Benglis's gestures, the gestures of paint in *Spare Rib* do not freeze in time and space. Through video, seeping paint appears to continuously expand and contract, where the breathing body creates an endless loop of painterly gesture.

Out of all the works presented in this creative project, *Spare Rib* has been transformed the most by approaching the performative through different media. Jones suggests that by transforming the body to the degree where its gender or even skin is unrecognisable, flesh is deconstructed as a material, particularly when this body is presented via a screen. Jones explains, 'Turning the body inside out, its reversibility (its coexistence with the *flesh of the world*) is made evident, the failure of the visual register to comprehend meaning of the self (its "identity" or "identities") through the appearance of the body is made manifest' (1998, 226, original italics). Jones's concept of how the body translates through the screen can be applied to *Spare Rib* as the work pushes what is recognised as a gendered body to its limits, while questioning whether it is the body or the screen that is the surface of the work.

In terms of the performative painting shifting to the screen, a series of possibilities has been explored in this exegesis regarding the limits of painting. For example, in Selene Wendt and Paco Barragán's exhibition *When a Painting Moves...Something must be Rotten!*, 2011, both curators question what is medium-specificity in painting:

When does a painting cease to be a painting? How can we construct a painting that informs itself through the analogue and digital realms? Is a moving painting a perversion of painting? Does painting have an inherently performative aspect? How does this all affect a medium as old as painting? (2011, 8).

My engagement with Wendt and Barragán's queries in my practice has not sought to answer all of these questions, rather I have explored the shifts that occur when painting moves to the screen and how this disrupts patriarchal painterly traditions. For example, alongside the visually fleshy painting in *Spare Rib*, there is a sound component to the work where an unpleasant squelching sound is emitted in sync with the expansion and contraction of the flesh support. Through the combination of sound and movement, I have aimed to explore the perversion of painting that Wendt and Barragan refer to (as these two elements cannot be achieved in painting) whilst maintaining the masculine conception of medium-specificity (as discussed in Chapter Four through a critical examination of the exhibitions *The Triumph of Painting*, 2005-2006, at the Saatchi Gallery).

In my previous discussion on Mariana Vassileva's video, *The Milkmaid*, 2006, I argued that her work can be seen as a playful critique on traditional painting as sound and movement are not predominant elements that are historically associated with painting.² In terms of pushing my own definition of painting, it was important that when creating *Spare Rib*, I not only challenged painting visually. I also built on works such as *The Milkmaid*, where the female body provokes painting's static materiality. In *Spare Rib*, these limitations on painting are parodied through a performative and video format that also updates how painting can be approached in contemporary terms.

Spare Rib engages with my discussion in Chapter Four on Katy Deepwell's question of whether a feminist reinvestment in painting is plausible if painting continues to be male dominated and medium specific (2010, 143). When considering how contemporary women artists have approached painting, it is clear that a rejection of medium-specificity is a key aspect in the methodologies of contemporary painting. In Wendt's words, 'While borrowing from art history is nothing new, new layers of meaning are found in the specific translation from painting to film' (2011a,18). *Spare Rib* repositions feminist painting as a move away from paint - in the sense of pigment on a surface - to the body and media-driven mediums such as performance and

² Although action painting is grounded in the movements of the artist, once these gestures have been mapped out on canvas, the movement of the paint in the process of painting ceases.

video. I suggest the blurring of medium-specificity partly developed as a response to feminism's contemporary revisioning of painting.

Anti-Painting: *Limp*



Figure 5.7: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, 2015, digital video, 3:07, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.

My specific focus in this research project, is on how I can apply a reading of anti-painting to my practice, in particular through performance and video. When a painting moves onto the screen, '[i]mportant art historical themes are popping up in contemporary art practice, and at times art history is being rewritten in the process' (Wendt 2011a,18). Building on my discussion of *Spare Rib* and Wendt's notion that medium and media can shift dominant ideas about painting, my work follows the trajectory in which feminist artists are writing their own art history by shifting concerns with materiality and painting.



Figure 5.8: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, 2015, digital video, 3:07, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.



Figure 5.9: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, studio test. Photograph by the artist.

I have applied the concept of anti-painting to my work *Limp* (Figures 5.7-5.12 and 5.30), where a grid-based painting (specifically, *Reflection Painting #8*) is animated through my performing body. My initial aim for *Limp* was to exhibit the remains of the painting alongside the video of my performance (Figure 5.9), sharing similarities with Kate Gilmore's sculptural remains in *Love 'em, Leave 'em*, 2013, and Myritza Castillo's neatly packaged material outcome in *Under Construction*, 2008 (both discussed in Chapter Four). However, as my creative practice moved away from concerns about the materiality of painting, it was apparent the actual physical paintings that I was performing in were not necessary to the outcome and exhibition of the work. Instead, through the framing of anti-painting and parafeminist parody, I build on the works of women artists such as Gilmore and Castillo by playfully challenging the notion that conventional painterly medium-specificity is to be privileged over the moving image.

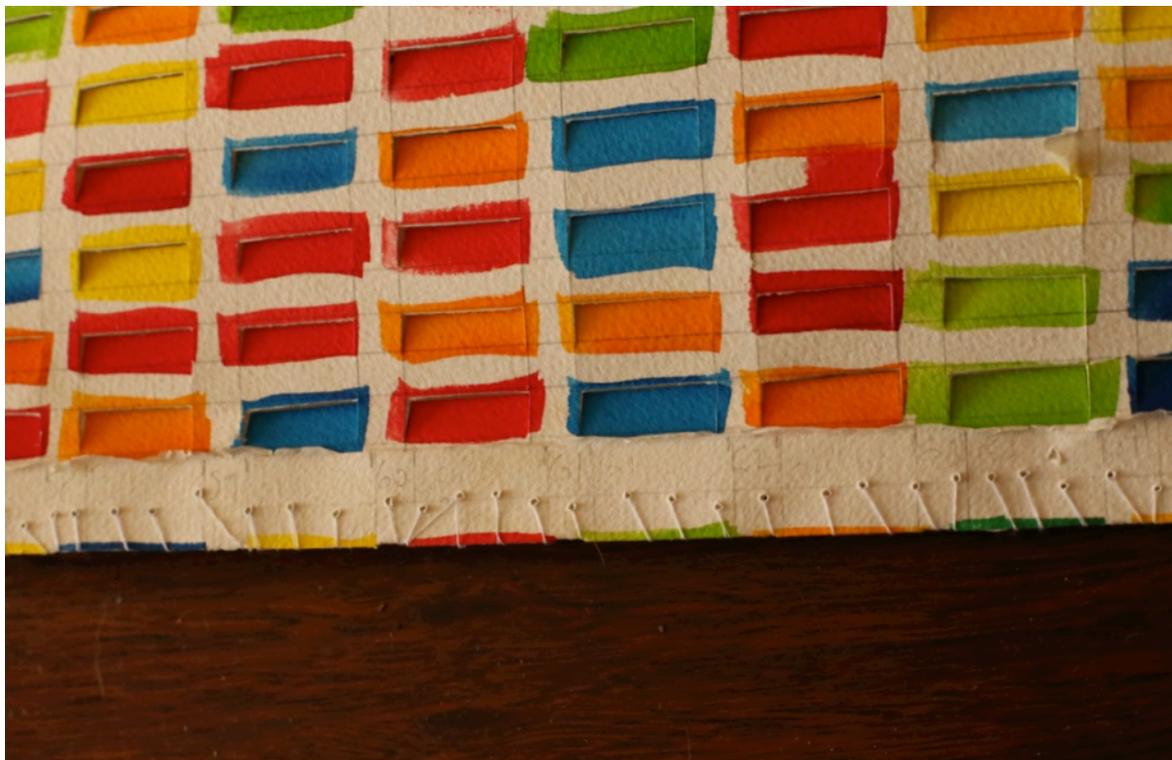


Figure 5.10: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, 2015, detail. Photograph by the artist.

The painting in *Limp* began as the grid-based painting *Reflection Painting #8*. The grid was turned inside out and the 2-sided painting stitched into a long tube that encased my body as I performed. Using *Reflection Painting #8* was essential when exploring anti-painting as the work deliberately plays down the reference of

grandness in painting. Referring back to artists such as Pollock, *Limp* aimed to take the grand, large scale paintings that make up my discussion on masculine modernism and physically destroy it with the gestures of my female body. Furthermore, I playfully attack the formal concerns of the grid through the dynamic of movement. Unlike the characteristics of the modernist grid, my female body disrupts any linear form, precision, control and neatness over the surface of the painting.



Figure 5.11: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, 2015, digital video, 3:07, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.

In Chapter Two, I applied Lippard's concept of surface phenomena to modernist criticism. Lippard argued that criticism during and after modernism focused on the content or *surface* phenomena of women's art (such as materials or formal characteristics) (1980, 362). The examples of male art criticism examined in this exegesis highlight that there was a tendency to approach painting by women as superficial and lacking pictorial depth. I disrupt surface phenomena in my work through performance and video, where I have explored how the female body can claim agency over painting. Like action painting, performative and anti-painting are framed in this project as being concerned with and challenging the processes that occur during a painting's creation.

Limp extends concerns about how action painting by women was framed through surface phenomena based on the content rather than context of their work. With an emphasis on the surface of painting, *Limp* playfully provokes the notion of mastery over materials. However, unlike the painting in *Spare Rib*, this mastery occurs after the act of painting has taken place. There is no emphasis on the act of creating an action painting in *Limp*. I return to my Chapter One discussion on Rosenberg's notion that in action painting, the canvas was an arena where the heroic act of masculine painting took place. I disrupt this aspect of action painting in *Limp*, where I was not concerned with the processes that occur during the act of creating a painting, but how my female body could influence the surface of painting after this process, as I embodied and performed from within the painting.



Figure 5.12: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, 2015, digital video, 3:07, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.

Furthermore, it is not only the canon of masculine painting that I engage with and critique in *Limp*. Although I have argued medium-specificity can be framed as masculine, it is not exclusive to masculine painting. *Limp* parodies the material components of painting as an element of medium-specificity. I draw from the previously discussed artworks of Rachel Lachowicz, Castillo and Gilmore, as all three artists do not engage with their work once their performances have ceased and the remnants of their performances have been framed, hung and exhibited. In

Limp, the act of creating and the exhibition of a painting has already taken place in 2014 in the *Reflection Paintings* exhibition and the *performance* in painting occurs after this process has been completed.

Misbehaviour: *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* and *Movement for Action*

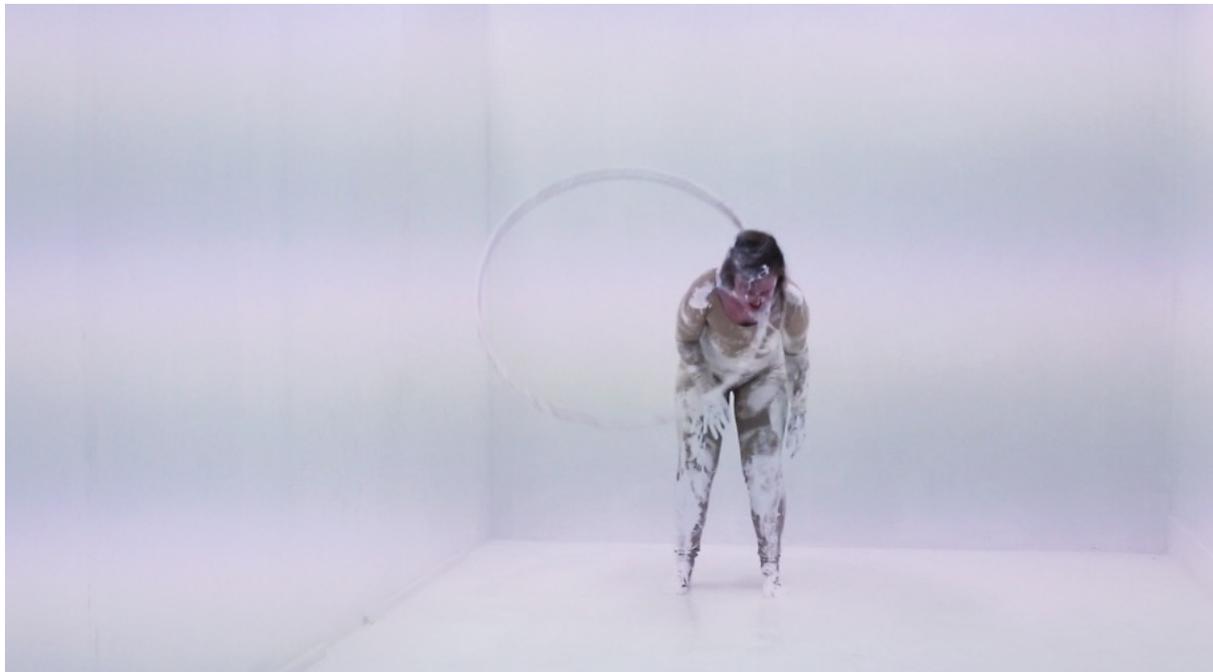


Figure 5.13: Lauren McCartney, *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015, digital video, 4:43, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.

This project reveals connections between my work and the work of women artists who, through feminine misbehaviour, examine the contradictions in how the female body has been represented in art history. However, it is also important to note that I am not referring to misbehaviour in the bad girl sense of dividing concepts into good or bad depending on behavioural traits of women as established in patriarchal terms. Rather, misbehaviour builds on the notion of humorously using the performing female body to disrupt established ideas on painting, while also building on methods of feminist performance that have been discussed in the artworks that have shaped this exegesis.

I have demonstrated that through the performing body, new approaches to painting can be presented that draw from feminist histories and practice. Returning to Linda Nochlin's famous phrase, 'There are no great women artists because women are

incapable of greatness' (1971, 43), she has argued that women cannot achieve greatness because it is a masculine term with a masculine history. However, I do not see the present condition of the contemporary great white male artist, such as Shaun Gladwell (1972, Australia), as anything to aspire to. Instead, what I am interested in is how women have created their own language in art, particularly a corporeal language that challenges or defies masculine forms of artmaking.

Figure 5.14: Shaun Gladwell, *Self Portrait Spinning and Falling (Paris)*, 2015, single-channel HD video, 11:00, video frame, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-03/shaun-gladwell-skateboarding-in-paris/6999232>

For example, consciously or not, Gladwell presents his body as one that, although clumsy at times, completes stunts on his skateboard in a way that can be described as an example of male bravado. When I saw *Self Portrait Spinning and Falling (Paris)*, 2015, (Figure 5.14), at John Curtin Gallery, in 2016, my initial reaction was that the work shared many similarities with my own in terms of capturing the body failing at its tasks.³ In particular, the descriptions of Gladwell's work resonated with me: '...moves such as balancing, spinning, flipping, popping, and sliding - ...endlessly recombines and morphs ... into each other to create new, unexpected forms. It is like action painting without the paint' (Schaffer 2016). The key difference between Gladwell's attempts and my own in my practice, is grounded in his privilege as a heteronormative, white man. He makes no attempt to challenge any of the masculine signifiers present (the skateboard, his masculine appearance, the work taking place in a public domain; outside landmarks in Paris including the arguably male-dominated institution of the Louvre, Paris).⁴

³ *Self Portrait Spinning and Falling (Paris)* was in the group exhibition *Face to Face*, which included works by Carsten Höller (b. 1961, Germany) and Jon Tarry (b. 1958, UK), shown as part of the Perth International Arts Festival, 11 February - 1 May 2016 at John Curtin Gallery, Perth.

⁴ The Louvre, Paris (est. 1793) is one of the top three museums in the world, which includes The British Museum, London (est. 1753), and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (est. 1870), that has not had a female director (NMWA 2017).

As my research developed, I gained insight into the power of a woman's body in performing as a comedic subject. When women engage with humour, the language of physical comedy is altered to reveal the absurdities of how the objectification of the female body continues to be perceived today (Willson 2015,11). *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015, (Figures 5.6, 5.13 and 5.15-5.17), is my primary example of a corporeal language to express how the misbehaving female body can disrupt masculine ideas about action painting (in particular, I provoke the notion that male action painters have to master their materials) through an engagement with slapstick. In this research project, I have approached slapstick as a comical process where the exaggerated movements or physical accidents of the body result in the comical failure of the body to remain upright or in control (Heiser 2006, 87). *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* is concerned with the irrational gestures and distinct physicality of physical comedy and pain, not unlike Melati Suryodarmo's *Exergie - Butter Dance*, 2000 in terms of endurance, and absurdity in the tasks set up, where the body is destined to misbehave and fail due to self-inflicted violence. *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* involves physical pain, discomfort and risk. However, unlike classic slapstick as a comical mode of entertainment, the pain and violence to my body are real. I am not acting.

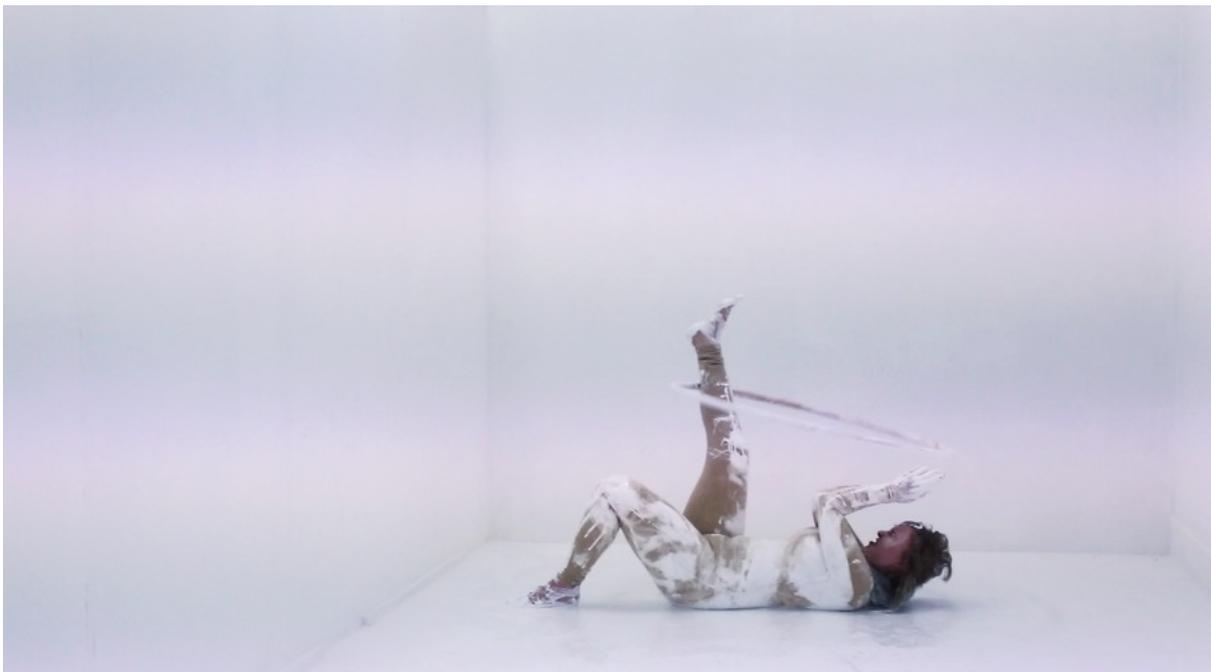


Figure 5.15: Lauren McCartney, *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015, digital video, 4:43, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.



Figure 5.16: Lauren McCartney, *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015, digital video, 4:43, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.

The performance in *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* takes place in my white cube studio as I hula hoop in a pool of white paint, constantly slipping and very clearly hurting myself as I attempt to carry out my task of creating an action painting using my body as the gestures, and the hula hoop as my brush. In reality, though, my brush is reliant on the movement of my body in order to pick up and fling paint around my studio. With each attempt the hula hoop becomes wetter, my physical limitations are revealed in the work through my attempts to overcome my painterly medium. The work builds on the wetness of paint by provoking the notion of mastery over materials, however, in *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* I lose all possibilities of mastery as I slip and fall in the pools of the metaphorically feminine wet paint (where not only is my material out of control and messy, but my body is, too). Building on my self-inflicted failure to master my materials, the performance frames every movement of my flesh as unruly and out of control as the video slowly pans out. My 'nude' flesh is bouncing, wobbling and falling as I set my body up to fail to stay upright. Furthermore, the video has been edited in slow motion to exaggerate the movement of my body even further and to highlight the absurdity of my quest.



Figure 5.17: Lauren McCartney, *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015, digital video, 4:43, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough. Screenshot by the artist.

The task of hula hooping in a pool of paint appears to be initially driven by formal concerns such as repetition and balance. However, the outcome is that my body is intentionally clumsy and lacks any obvious mapping of my painterly gestures (through the choice of the minimal aesthetic of white paint on white walls). I was interested in how I could approach the concept of the brush as a tool of gesture from the perspective of para-feminist parody. In *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* I wanted to draw from how Lachowicz used men as her brushes in *Red Not Blue* to critique the notion of the brush in performative painting.

Reflecting on the use of the labour of men to create artworks, I was concerned with how I could bring the brush back to the labour of the female body by using my own body as an instrument for painting. Building on performing my body as a brush, I also wanted to engage with the body as not being the sole tool for gesture, in order to push my exploration of performative painting. For example, along with my body, the hula hoop is also my brush. In *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, I have aimed to build on the concepts evoked in Lachowicz's exploration of action painting. Within the framework of para-feminist parody, I offer an alternative to the sources of labour that Lachowicz uses by using my body as the tool that creates my gestures. However - and as a counterpoint to the control Lachowicz has over her human brushes - my wet and

slimy material thwarts my attempts to control the movements of my body and the gestures it makes to create a painting.



Figure 5.18: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #1*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 62 × 91 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough.



Figure 5.19: Lauren McCartney *Movement #2*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 62 × 91 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough.

Along with deconstructing the processes involved with a feminist reading of performative painting, I use the nude female body as a tool to not only break down stereotypes of the female body, but also to build on how other women have explored the nude female body in performance and painting. I use either comedic or unruly representations of my body to make fun of the construction of the nude woman as desirable to highlight the sexism present in the patriarchal depiction of female flesh. For example, my *Movement for Action* series, 2016, (Figures 5.18-21 and 5.23-5.26), expands on the concepts explored in my video works. The eight photographs in the series capture different stages of the body in action as I peel myself out of a beige leotard that has been stuffed with approximately thirty kilograms of dough. *Movement for Action* mocks feminine stereotypes in a way that also builds on how artists such as Ursula Martinez in *Hanky Panky*, 2007, have parodied the nude (as both Martinez's and my body do not conform to feminine modes of seduction). The photographs are quite playful because although I'm nude, I'm literally bloated with yeast and dough. Being the subject of my work, I deconstruct the layers of material restraining my nude body and reclaim the agency patriarchy has over the female body, as through my material I parody displays of objectification and that's one of the most powerful things a woman can do.

Movement for Action does not engage with paint in the material sense, but references the wetness of paint through the thick dough that coats the female body. The works are an exploration of how I could push two issues: firstly, my understanding and definition of what constitutes paint; and secondly, how I could reference my materials through *feminism*, rather than masculine art history. As demonstrated with the work of Suryodarmo, Janine Antoni, Laresa Kosloff, Lachowicz, and Vassileva, my understanding of feminist painting is not limited to medium-specificity. This emphasis on the loss of painting's medium has ramifications for photography, performance and video.



Figure 5.20: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #3*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 62 × 91 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough.



Figure 5.21: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #4*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 62 × 91 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough.

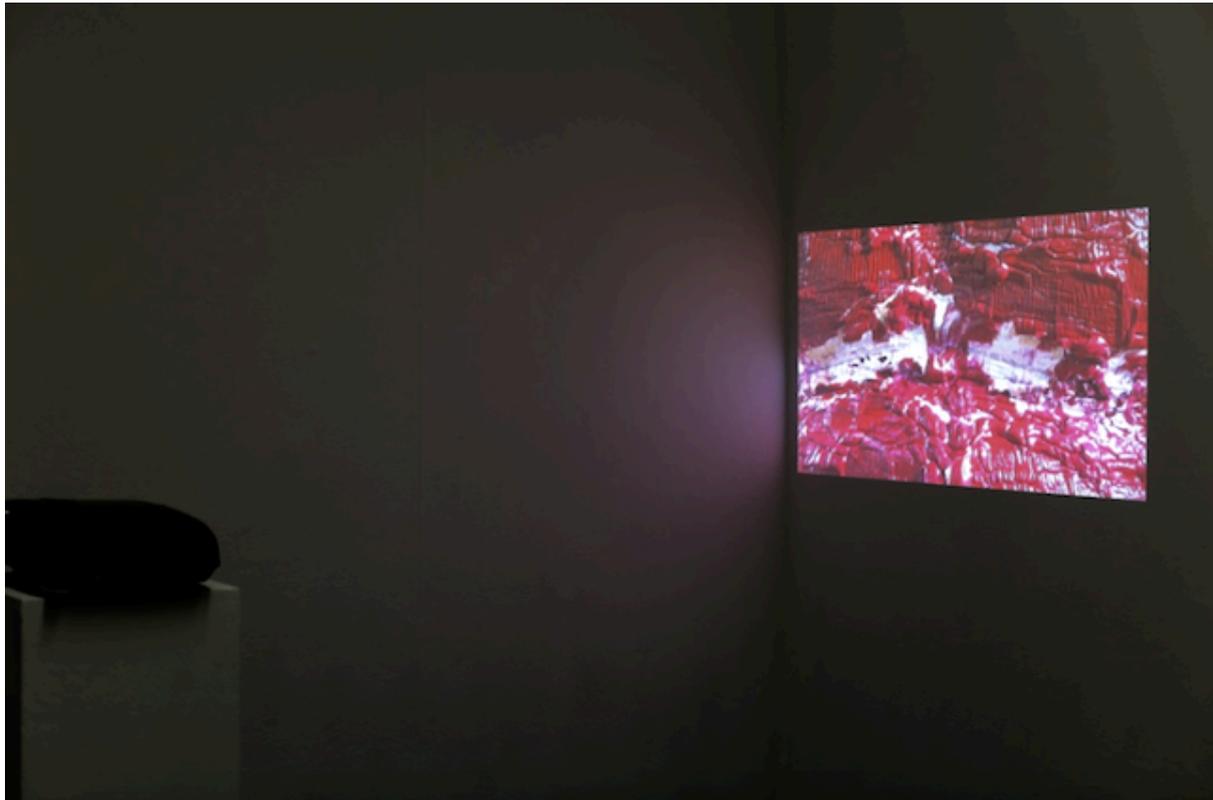


Figure 5.22: Lauren McCartney, *Spare Rib*, 2015, installation view, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne. Photograph by the artist.

There are similarities between the wetness, or slime, of painting, and Mary Russo's concept of the grotesque. In my 2016 exhibition *Movement for Action* at Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, I built on my examination of wet paint and the grotesque by exhibiting the *Movement for Action* series alongside *Spare Rib* (Figure 5.22). My aim in positioning these works together was to test the tension between the use of dough in *Movement for Action* against the thick, wet lashing of paint used in *Spare Rib*. Like wet paint, dough is a sticky, oozing, swollen material that shares characteristics with Russo's concept of the grotesque, which she characterises as '...open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing' (1995, 8). Building on Russo's assertion on the grotesque through my choice of materials, dough, as an unaesthetic material, is also a substance that changes significantly in terms of texture and form because it moves as it rises and expands without the need for the body as a support for this movement, essentially secreting and changing in an irregular way. By exhibiting both the *Movement for Action* series and *Spare Rib* together, I aimed to demonstrate how my practice has sought out contemporary associations with the materiality of painting. Furthermore, it is not the female body that is primarily grotesque, rather it is the wet, slimy materials that coat my body in both artworks that share characteristics

of Russo's concept of unstable and unexpected protrusion that render the body as grotesque.



Figure 5.23: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #5*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 91 × 62 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough.



Figure 5.24: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #6*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 91 × 62 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough.



Figure 5:25: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #7*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 91 × 62 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough

In addition, my materials build on the work of the women artists discussed in this exegesis by offering a means of performative painting that engages with the body through resembling the visceral qualities of fat. For example, in Antoni's *Gnaw*, 1992, she chews off her fatty materials and Suryodarmo slips and slides in slabs of butter in *Exergie - Butter Dance*. I draw from these two artworks and offer an update of materials that encapsulates the similarities between fat and paint. In both *Spare Rib* and *Movement for Action*, I parody the materials of women artists before me, while focusing on how my works have developed through my survey of feminist performative painting.



Figure 5:26: Lauren McCartney, *Movement #8*, 2016, 30 kg of dough stuffed in a beige leotard, c-print, 62 × 91 cm. Photograph edited by Jack Wansbrough

There is also a strong historical correlation between representations of the female body and food (dough being not only a substitute for paint but also the base for many food items). When women use food substances in art, like Antoni's use of chocolate and lard in *Gnaw*, I have argued that it modifies representations of female desire and enjoyment, as women are conditioned to feel guilty from overindulgence or fat (Wolf 2002, 187). The term 'moderation' is one that can be approached as an attempt to

socially constrict the bodies of women through calorific restriction to slim down the body from fat (2002, 196-197). Dieting is structured around the cultural understanding of moderation as historically the most powerful method of the political sedation of women, specifically through the moderation of feminine behaviour (2002, 187).⁵ There is no moderation or obedience in *Movement for Action*. Rejecting moderation is way of regaining control over the female body. *Movement for Action* captures the refusal to conform to the patriarchal structure where fat and the nude female body are areas of shame.

Feminist Humour: *Parody Heals*



Figure 5.27: Lauren McCartney, *Parody Heals*, 2015, digital video, 2:10, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough, sound by Tom Hogan. Screenshot by the artist.

The last theme that my practice explores is feminist humour, which I have argued can threaten and break down the very structure of western patriarchal culture, which seeks to marginalise women and keep their experiences regulated and oppressed. In Jacki Willson's words, 'Humour is inextricably linked into social power and dominance' (2015, 7). My focus on feminist humour is how, through performance, a

⁵ The rise of Tess Holliday, who is marketed as the world's first size 22 supermodel, is an example of shifting attitudes about female fat in the west. However, while the social media-based body positivity movement (where Holliday first became prominent through her Instagram hashtag #effyourbeautystandards) challenged certain beauty codes such as size and weight, dominant beauty ideals remain as corporations have commodified the movement in order to capitalise on it (Cwynar-Horta 2016, 39-40).

corporeal language of women's laughter can develop that defies patriarchal authority. My art practice contributes to feminist humour through using the female body as a tool that challenges feminine stereotypes through parody and slapstick. In my practice, I also aim to offer a corporeal aesthetic that does not draw from masculine trajectories of artmaking, nor to appeal to patriarchal values.

In this exegesis, I have established that within patriarchal culture women are seen as the passive, subdued second sex, who are vulnerable and need protection; however, our bodies undergo pain and suffering on a daily basis. Menstruation, childbirth and menopause are all natural occurrences in the female body that can cause a great deal of unavoidable violence and stress (de Beauvoir 1949, 357). This body is seen by patriarchy as a hysterical body, one that is in crisis over the embarrassment of its functions and '[i]t is in great part the anxiety of being a woman that devastates the feminine body' (1949, 356). It is in these often culturally dismissed forms of violence that the female body is destined to go through that I see a space in performance that I have contributed to in my practice - by putting my body through situations bound to end in pain.

Expanding on this notion of the female body as automatically assumed to be passive, Simone de Beauvoir notes that young girls are discouraged from entertaining the idea of physical violence on themselves, for

...their bodies have to suffer things only in a passive manner; much more definitely than when younger, they must give up *emerging* beyond what is given and asserting themselves above other people: they are forbidden to explore, to venture, to extend the limits of the possible (1949, 353-354, original italics).⁶

Thus, according to patriarchal society, girls are not to engage in acts of violence. What follows as a consequence is the concept (enforced by the beauty and diet

⁶ Although this is a mid-twentieth-century position, there is still evidence that there has been little change for women today. For example, women are subjected to rape culture, the beauty and diet industry, as well as pressure to undergo plastic surgery (which, in my opinion, is a form of mutilation) to maintain a youthful appearance. Clementine Ford explains, 'In a patriarchy, it isn't enough simply to be aesthetically attractive; a woman must also show commitment to the idea of what it means to be attractive. She must be polite and deferential when necessary. She must be agreeable. She mustn't inspire feelings of anger or resentment, or challenge the status quo. And above all she mustn't threaten masculine power' (2016, 198-199).

industry) that women's bodies are 'wrong' or need to be fixed. While on the other hand, men's (heteronormative and white) bodies are right, therefore supporting the patriarchal claim that '...women are wrong and men are right' (Wolf 2002, 196-197). What my work aims to achieve through its painterly materials is an attempt to break down and parody this understanding of women's bodies as not only passive, but 'wrong' because they are female. For example, by placing myself in situations where I am bound to fall over or cause self-inflicted violence to my body (as also explored in *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*), I am challenging the notion of passive suffering as well as my own passive femininity.



Figure 5.28: Lauren McCartney, *Parody Heals*, 2015, digital video, 2:10, screenshot from video, video edited by Jack Wansbrough, sound by Tom Hogan. Screenshot by the artist.

I have highlighted in this exegesis that women often appeared through certain stereotypes: muses, models or the domesticated wife standing in her artist husband's shadow - as shown in Chapter One in Hans Namuth's photographs of Pollock painting. His wife, painter Lee Krasner, who is perched on a stool, remains docile and passive while she overlooks her husband's 'genius.' In *Parody Heals*, 2015, (Figure 5.27-5.30), I perch on a plinth and carry out a series of movements that (similarly to the scenario in *Limp*) are impossible to achieve whilst wrapped in a painting. This artwork was initially influenced by Paul Cézanne's (1839-1906, France) complaints about the issues with painting the female nude. He explains, 'I paint still lifes. Models frighten me. The sluts are always watching to catch you off

your guard. You've got to be on the defensive all the time and the motif vanishes' (n.d., quoted in Schor 1996, 11). The plinth is significant for this work as it suggests a disruption to the still, art object in the gallery, as a platform for the nude woman to sit on (the nude woman being a prominent subject of painting throughout western art history). In *Parody Heals*, I not only provoke the idea of the passive and nude woman with my clumsy movements (where, due to my absurd costume, and makeshift shoes, I stumble or fall, causing obvious pain to my body), but also explore how women can engage with the misbehaving nude woman in performative painting.⁷

Through my thwarted attempts to move my body in *Parody Heals* (this failure of the movement of the body is also a method of slapstick as I am unable to carry out my task of passively posing on a plinth), I also aim to disrupt preconceived ideas and myths about femininity and the sexualised, objectified woman. In Isaak's words, 'Desire in this realm of representation is so intrinsically linked to the effaced woman that an image of a woman that has not undergone this erosion does not signify as an object of desire' (1996, 51). The humour in my work manifests through absurd association and playful performance in order to deconstruct feminine behavioural and social stereotypes that are essential to maintaining patriarchal power (Willson 2015, 5-6).

Furthermore, many of the artists who have been discussed in this exegesis are women artists who not only reinterpret dominant versions of art history but, through the misbehaving and comical female body, also situate women's roles within both art history and western history in general. For example, Laresa Kosloff challenged the absence of women in modernist action painting in the video *Spirit & Muscle*, 2006, as well as how the female body has been situated in painting by physically inserting her body into a painting and performing. Through a series of movements, Kosloff playfully confronts painting as masculine territory, as through her movements, she is

⁷ It is not my intention to explore the feminine connotations associated with high-heeled shoes in depth. For further reading on female sexuality and high heels, see Morris et al. (2013). This study concludes that despite the physical damage and increased risk of trauma that can occur with wearing high heels, there is a strong connection between female sexuality and high heels. The shoes exaggerate the feminine gait and physique (for example, changing the way the wearer walks, and enhancing the appearance of longer legs and smaller feet) - therefore, increasing the appearance of feminine sexuality in the wearer (2013, 176).

in control over how her painting is presented. Kosloff established through using her own body that the female body is the subject of the work, rather than the objectified female body that has been dominant throughout western art history (2010, 44).

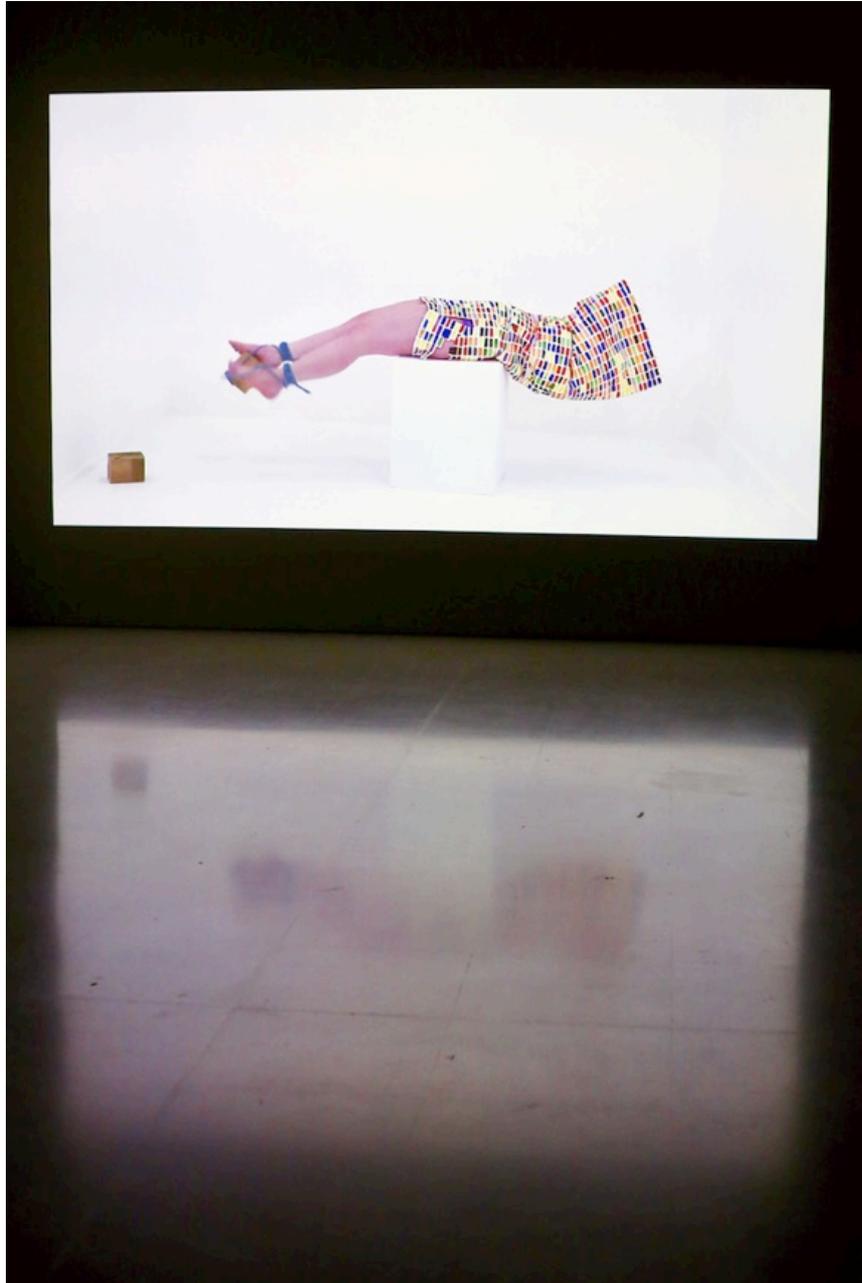


Figure 5.29: Lauren McCartney, *Parody Heals*, 2015, installation view, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Perth. Photograph by the artist.

In *Parody Heals*, I aimed to build on the concept of how women can insert their bodies into painting to not only playfully parody masculine painting, but to draw from the scope of feminist performative painting that has been the crux of this exegesis. Firstly, *Parody Heals* builds on the concept of using the body to disrupt dominant

ideas about the gendering of painting. *Parody Heals* explores the politics of gender in painting through an initial playful reaction to Nochlin's discourse that women have been excluded from art history because the dominant canon is masculine (1971, 44).

In the work, I suggest that through a feminist corporeal language, women are included in their own version of art history. For example, this language manifests in *Parody Heals* as I parody the exclusion Nochlin is referring to by inserting the female body into painting and physically embodying the canon (as I wear my painting). Secondly - and in conjunction with *Limp* - the painting that is worn bears the emblem of the grid. However, unlike *Limp*, my performing body is not an abstract figure that drives the movements of the painting. Instead, the grid in *Parody Heals* is explicitly worn by the representation of the female nude. Furthermore, through methods of slapstick (and by drawing reference to Castillo's act of the destruction of painting in *Under Construction*), the grid is contorted and torn by my body as I lose my balance and my failing body destroys the artwork. In addition, by positioning myself as the subject of my work, I am well aware of (and poke fun at) the discussed stereotypes associated with femininity and through this empowerment, I claim the patriarchal territory over the female body.

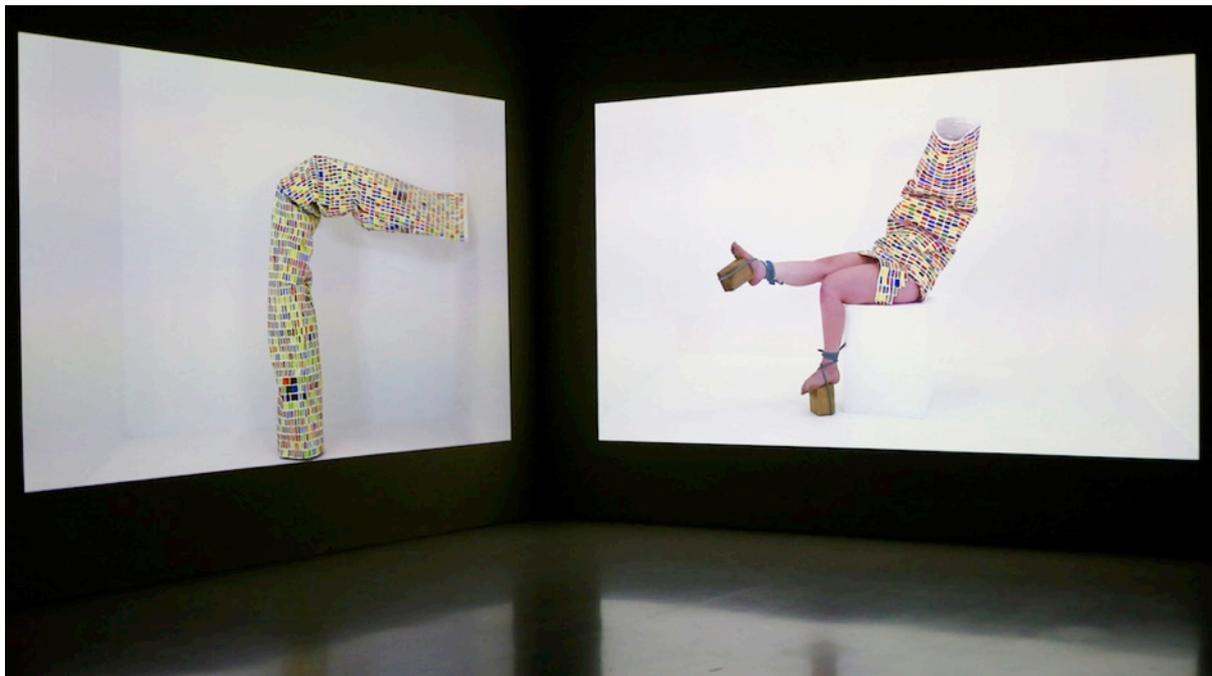


Figure 5.30: Lauren McCartney, *Limp*, 2015, (left), and *Parody Heals*, 2015, (right), 2015, installation view, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Perth. Photograph by the artist.

I also wanted to explore how my work could sit outside the masculine conventions of painting. I extend concepts of anti-painting through my pre-made painting and parafeminist parody by building on how women such as Kosloff have provoked established ideas of performative painting. *Parody Heals* engages with the notion that when submerged within an abstract painting, it is not only the body that becomes a spectacle but the painting itself. I create an absurd and comical juxtaposition between my contorted figure (as only my limbs are visible) and my tragic attempts to be feminine. Returning to the notion of the misbehaving woman, I use my body and material through a corporeal female language of painting that isn't primarily based as a reaction against patriarchal ideas about the female body. Instead, I offer a method of painting where my body activates the work, offering not so much a critique or solution to the masculine canon of art history, but an alternative reading of painting that relies on the female body to exist and operate, and builds on the work of women artists before me.

Through applying the concerns in my four key themes (the wetness of paint, anti-painting, misbehaviour and feminist humour) to the creation and exhibition of the five artworks as part of this research project, I have developed an understanding of performance and painting that humorously references key feminist issues such as the objectification of the female body, while also examining how a history of western art has been created by women. By linking my definitions of feminist performative painting to artwork that playfully challenges action painting, my practice presents new knowledge of how the female body updates not only dominant ideas about masculine painting practice, but also contributes to ways of thinking about painting that draw from a feminist art history and the influence of concepts and artworks by the female practitioners discussed in this exegesis. I have established that a feminist corporeal language is consequently created that threatens patriarchal stereotypes of femininity. Furthermore, I have presented emergent forms of humour that reveal a corporeal feminist language that defies the patriarchal values placed on women and the trajectory of action painting.

Conclusion: *Beyond Gesture: Resolutions and Beginnings*

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement.

Hélène Cixous 1976, 95

When I began this practice-led research project, exploring the contemporary implications for my practice of feminist performative anti-painting, I never envisioned that my practice would undergo such a significant shift in not only my understanding of painting, but my understanding of how much of an impact feminism has had over the still patriarchal and medium-specific discipline. I began this project with the somewhat naïve assumption that I could build a practice of painting that drew from and continued along the threads of dominant ideas about medium-specificity in painting practice. However, as this project developed, through the concepts of anti-painting, parafeminism and parafeminist parody, I began to question what it meant for women to engage with painting in a contemporary context.

Through my research, I have developed a greater understanding of the impact the female body has had in disrupting the dominant canon of masculine art history. My practice fits into a broader framework of contemporary feminist performative anti-painting, and my project has been created at a time when there is evidence of a re-evaluation of painting by women artists as well as feminist art practice more broadly. Although my project is a modest contribution to the colossal scope of feminist art practice, this research has sought to produce new knowledge to contribute to filling the gap I have identified by applying understandings of parafeminism and parafeminist parody to the exploration of performative anti-painting.

My research developed out of my interest in how women artists have used their bodies and the context of painting to defy masculine modes of action painting. I have examined and responded to a newly developed framework of a feminist dynamic of

performative anti-painting. I have gathered and presented research on a range of writers and artists who contribute to the understanding that women have written their own art history, and I have sought to build on the work of women before me through my practical outcomes. Digging into the imperious history of masculine action painting has not been a focus in this project. However, the foundations for my research began with the assertion that the historical discourse of modernist action painting was predominantly male and has been framed by the ideologies of white, heterosexual, middle class men. I recognise that because of the exclusivity of late modernist painting as masculine, there was resistance in the abilities of male artists, writers and critics to adequately reflect on gaps in diversity and difference in art practice. As I have argued in this exegesis, the myth of the heroic painter still dominates discussions on the interface between painting and performance. By first addressing the gendered issues grounded in late modernist art criticism, I have aimed to rupture dominant tropes of masculine action painting through a body of work that explores painting as a generative form for contemporary feminist art practice. In addition, I have developed an understanding of feminist performative anti-painting that does not solely stem from a reaction against masculine ideas about painting.

Through my practice, I have sought new knowledge on feminist performative anti-painting by addressing the research question: *If action painting is historically grounded in patriarchal values, how can contemporary feminist performative painting offer a corporeal language that draws from and builds on feminist art history?* This question has been answered through the formation of a series of performative paintings that address the key themes in my project - namely, anti-painting, the wetness of paint, misbehavior and feminist humor. In addition to my practice, this exegesis offers new research on a feminist corporeal language that not only contributes to the field of contemporary feminist performative painting by provoking patriarchal hierarchies, but also defies established understandings of dominant forms of painting. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss how my findings have developed through my practice.

Firstly, in Chapter One, 'Modern Heroes and Their Materials,' I analysed Clement Greenberg's criticism of Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings, where he depicts her work as

feminine and decorative. I applied the terms Greenberg uses to describe decoration (neatness and precision) to the characteristics that make up the masculine modernist concept of the grid (as shown in Piet Mondrian's flattened, geometric, neat, patterned and precise paintings). I contended that by comparing Greenberg's notion of the decorative to my understanding of the grid, a paradox is revealed. The same aspects that make up feminised decoration are also evident in the masculine construct of the grid in painting. In addition, by examining criticism of Agnes Martin's grids, what is revealed is that her grids were framed as intuitive and poetic; both characteristics of femininity. These examples provided the framework to establish that the gendered identity of women artists was intrinsic to how their work was received by male critics.

I tested how I could disrupt the formal characteristics of the grid in the videos *Limp*, 2015, and *Parody Heals*, 2015, where I turned two large scale *Reflection Paintings* (that had previously been exhibited in *Reflection Paintings*, 2014, at Melody Smith Gallery, Perth) inside out, so the back of the painting was visible. Through this process, the underside of my gridbased artwork and the messy watercolour stains disrupted the neat and precisely measured grid pattern. In addition, I sewed these two paintings into paper tubes that I wore while performing in both videos. I offered an approach to performative anti-painting that explored how the female body can distort the mechanical and metaphorically male structure of the grid. By physically inserting myself and moving within my paintings, I contort the formal concerns of the grid such as control, neatness and linear form.

Building on the gendering of painting, through Harold Rosenberg's considerations of the body in action painting, I examined how the dominant art historical canon produced the narrative of the heroic male action painter. I discussed how Jackson Pollock's heroism was emphasised through published documentation of him in the midst of his painterly act. Through my study on the construction of masculine action painting, I evaluated the notion that mastery over materials was the key to being considered a heroic male painter. However, this mastery over materials also revealed a gap in knowledge. Although there is an emphasis on the gestures of the body during the performance of action painting, I found no evidence in modernist art criticism concerning the process of wet to dry paint during the course of creating an

action painting. In addition to the gendering of painting being based on the identity of the artist, I argued that the wet qualities of paint - that is, sticky, slimy and slippery - can be characterised as metaphorically feminine. Wet paint can be read to share traits with feminine stereotypes such as being out of control, messy, and even linked to the viscous aspects of menstruation, as indicated with Helen Frankenthaler's stains being described as 'bleeding' (Goossen 1961, 78; Saltzman 2005, 376).

I tested the implications of the wetness of paint in *Spare Rib*, 2015, where I created a video that exaggerated the qualities of wet paint. The work audibly squelched in sequence to the slow expansion and contraction of slimy and thickly painted paint that was applied on my torso. The wetness of paint was also tested in *Fail Harder, Fail Better!*, 2015, where I hula hooped in a pool of wet paint. The work contradicted the notion of mastery as a key aspect of masculine action painting as I lost all control over my materials as my flailing body slipped and slid as I attempted my dance. Furthermore, by filming both works, I created an endless loop of wet paint, as a metaphoric response to the gap that I found in modernist art criticism of action painting where the wetness of paint was not considered or, as in the case of Yves Klein's *Anthropometries of the Blue Period (Anthropométrie de l'époque bleue)*, 1960, where the labour of nude female models took care of the messy process of painting.

In Chapter Two, 'Women Staining the Heroic Narrative,' I built on the concept that the wetness of paint can be read as feminine by investigating the ways in which paint and painting have metaphorically been constructed through criticism as having feminine characteristics. I suggested that to defy masculine modernist ideas about painting, art by women such as Frankenthaler and Lynda Benglis can be read through Lucy Lippard's concept of anti-modernism, a term that set up the groundwork for my discussion on how contemporary women artists have utilised anti-painting. I also contended that critics such as Greenberg and Eugene Goossen approached the artwork of women through Lippard's concept of surface phenomena. For example, these critics perceived abstract paintings by women through the formal characteristics or material qualities of the artworks, rather than examining the cultural and political contexts that women artists have engaged with in their work. In *Limp*, I tested how I could disrupt the concept of surface phenomena by performing while

encased in *Reflection Painting #8*, 2014. In this process the artwork has shifted from a static, wall-hung artwork to becoming revived through my body. I was not concerned with taking part in the processes that occur during the creation of a painting. Rather, I have offered a method of practice where the female body can animate painting *after* the act of creation takes place. I provoke the concept of surface phenomena by emphasising the surface of the painting as I embody and disrupt it with my movements.

I argued in Chapter Three, 'Dangerous Women,' that when women perform their bodies in ways that can be read as humorous, their work can be read through a feminist approach to artmaking that threatens to destabilise the patriarchal structure of femininity and the female body as an object of desire. This misbehaviour of the female body has been explored through readings of feminist humour that I have developed through my practice. I considered how my body could playfully fail at performing my femininity in a bid to engage with a humorous feminist corporeal language that is for women through drawing from female experience.

Slapstick was initially explored as a method of comedy to express feminine misbehaviour as the joke in slapstick is centred on the failure of the body through physical mishaps (Heiser 2006, 87). The humour in slapstick manifested in *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* through a loss of control over the movements of the body. For example, despite my attempts to hula hoop in a pool of wet paint, my body slips and slides across my studio floor, thwarting any possibilities for a successful demonstration of the girlish activity of hula hooping. This approach to slapstick in *Fail Harder, Fail Better!* aligns with Melati Suyrodarmo's performance *Exergie - Butter Dance*, 2000, where I claim she mobilises slapstick through her failed attempts to act out her femininity by attempting to seductively dance on a slab of butter.

As my research developed, the implications of the body in slapstick also support my discussion on the qualities of wet paint. Both slapstick and wet paint are united with attributes of being out of control and messy and these are also characteristics of femininity. In addition, I evoke slapstick in the video *Parody Heals*, 2015. I attempt to pose as a nude object, positioned as a painting while wrapped in a *Reflection Painting*. However, due to my absurd costume, I am unable to carry out the task of

passively posing on the plinth. As I result, I stumble and my body becomes stuck in awkward positions, not only disrupting images of femininity but also ripping apart and destroying my painting as I fall. By being unable to pose as the nude in this performance, it is not only the female body that becomes a spectacle of failing femininity, but the painting itself.

Building on the methods of slapstick in *Parody Heals*, I have utilised parody as method of comedy to explore the creation of images of the transgressive female body. Parody is approached in my practice as a method to deconstruct feminine stereotypes. I have argued in this project that passive femininity is essential to maintaining patriarchal power over women (Willson 2015, 5-6). *Parody Heals* parodies the female nude as a prototype for objectification. I create a performative situation in which the female body is submerged within and in control of a painting. In addition, *Parody Heals* also sets out to playfully build on the notion that women have been excluded from the dominant masculine art historical canon. Recalling Hélène Cixous's epigraph in this Conclusion, women must insert themselves in art history through their own movements (1976, 95).

In *Parody Heals*, I physically insert the female body into a painting bearing the grid. Through this incision, I parody the female nude as I am the subject, rather than object of my work. My body is not posing for the male painter to depict, rather it is forcing the context of masculine painting to pose seductively, under the control of a woman's body. In addition, my exploration of parody set the groundwork for my discussion on Laura Castagnini's concept of parafeminist parody, which has been discussed in Chapter Four. I aimed to explore how I could use parody in my practice to not only critique masculine painting, but also build on how other female artists, such as Laresa Kosloff in *Spirit & Muscle*, 2006, have reinterpreted dominant understandings of art history by parodying women's roles in the history of painting.

I also engaged in a means of creating artwork that has been influenced by the history of women, specifically through an analysis of the power of the female body in resisting or making fun of femininity. By expanding on how women have opposed feminine stereotypes through performing their bodies, I extended my research to analyse the ramifications of possessing female flesh and, as an extension, female

fat. I applied Naomi Wolf's concepts of the implications of fat onto my own understandings of how I could create a language of painting in my practice that drew from female experience. I investigated the concept that to engage with fat is a form of female misbehaviour, as it rejects the patriarchal understanding that bodily fat is an area of excess and shame, as well as indulging in inappropriate or illegitimate expressions of femininity (2002, 187). In addition, by drawing from Mary Russo's considerations of the grotesque, I tested in *Movement for Action*, 2016, how I could parody objectified representations of the nude female body to create artwork that does not necessarily create positive images of women as a reaction against feminine stereotypes. In these photographs, it is not the female body that is grotesque and misbehaving, rather it is the bloated, viscous materiality of dough coating the body that dismantles images of women for male pleasure.

I have explored how I could create a synergy between the female body and the materiality of painting. In *Movement for Action*, I used dough as a material to investigate the ideas in this project that have developed from the understanding that medium-specificity in painting is a masculine construct. I sought to test how the viscid elements of fat could be created using materials that shifted beyond paint. Through my engagement with dough, I offered a material that could be referenced through a feminist understanding of female fat, rather than only proposing a shift in my approach to my painterly materials that was based on reactions against masculine painting. In addition, I have also drawn links between female fat and the wetness of paint. I contend that representations of fat through the materiality of dough share a similar viscid density to thick, heavy, wet paint, as explored in *Spare Rib*. By linking female fat to the wetness of paint, I have uncovered a new approach to how the materiality of paint can be considered as part of a corporeal feminist language of anti-painting.

The artworks I have created for this research project are united through performative painting, the dynamic of movement in painting through the use of the moving image, and photography with an emphasis on anti-painting. I have discussed the ramifications of creating screen and photo-based artworks that are not material in their outcome, in order to seek painting that is not based on masculine understandings of medium-specificity. I have also explored how feminist

performative anti-painting can be updated through an engagement with the moving image and photography. In Chapter Four, '*HERstory*,' I have investigated how I can pursue performative methods of artmaking, that draw from a feminist corporeal language, where women artists didn't solely create work that challenged or were a reaction to masculine modes of artmaking. Instead, I wanted to conceptualise how women created work from a history of women artists, and critiqued, referenced and built on the work of women before them.

In the five artworks that have been created as part of this project, I have offered a method of artmaking that explores how women can insert their bodies into painting to not only playfully parody masculine painting, but to create new approaches to feminist performative anti-painting. The feminist corporeal language I have produced in my practice has been framed through the synergy between Amelia Jones's construction of parafeminism, Laura Castagnini's concept of parafeminist parody, and my own considerations of performative anti-painting. As discussed in this exegesis, parafeminism frames artwork by women that push the boundaries or invents new forms of power that develop from both historical and contemporary understandings of feminist art practice (Jones 2006, 213). In addition, parafeminist parody is an extension of parafeminism that focuses on parodying the work of earlier feminist artists in order to critique and update feminist practice (Castagnini 2015, 23).

Although Jones's and Castagnini's ideas have developed in a contemporary context, I have identified that there is space in feminist arts practice for specific considerations of parafeminist and parafeminist parody readings of performative anti-painting. I have addressed this gap by exploring the links between the key discussions in my chapters such as surface phenomena, the feminisation and wetness of paint, and the humorous, misbehaving female body. The crux of my engagement with the gaps in parafeminism and parafeminist parody has developed through a creation of a female language of painting that is not primarily based on challenging patriarchal enforcements the female body. Instead, I offer an approach to painting where my body activates and participates in the creation of artwork. This project has not sought to propose a solution to the masculine canon of art history. Rather, I have developed a body of work that has further investigated, contributed to,

and also found gaps in research on how anti-painting can be approached from the contributions women have made to the canon of painting.

Over the course of this PhD, it became apparent to me that, on an institutional level, aspects of para-feminism and para-feminist parody are areas of feminist thought that could be taken from the realm of creative research and placed within mainstream creative and theoretical practices. An analysis of readings of para-feminism and para-feminist parody, and how they might be applied to contemporary institutional interests in feminist art, is beyond the scope of this project. However, they have aligned with an examination of how women create new languages in art by drawing from a history of women, and building on and critiquing previous approaches to feminist artmaking.

Both Jones and Castagnini stress that feminism has to be continuously questioned, and that their concepts of para-feminism and para-feminist parody respectively aim to shape a means of thinking about feminism that is inclusive of all women (Jones 2006, 213; Castagnini 2015, 24). Links can be drawn between issues of diversity raised by Jones and Castagnini, and Professor Anne Marsh's (Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne) Australian Research Council-funded project, *Women, Feminism and Art in Australia since 1970*, 2016-2018.¹ The study is an extensive investigation of the impact feminism has had on shaping Australian art. The project also seeks to reveal the roles and links between gender, race, class and ethnicity in Australian feminism (Grant 2016). In Katrina Grant's words, 'The project does not assume a uniform feminism, but speaks of feminisms plural and will engage

¹Marsh's project is just one example of the growing feminist-based projects, exhibition and initiatives that are currently developing or have been established. There is not enough space to list them all, however, a selection of contemporary examples within an Australian context includes: *Contemporary Art and Feminism* (CAF), 2013-present, Sydney College of the Arts, and *Future Feminist Archive* (FRAN), 2015-present, presented by CAF, Sydney. An example of a relevant exhibition is *BACKFLIP: Feminism and Humour in Contemporary Art*, 2013, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, curated by Laura Castagnini. The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) is an example of how art institutions are arguably attempting to reinterpret modernist art history with women in mind. AGNSW has partnered up with the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe to showcase artwork by O'Keeffe, along with Australian modernist artists Margaret Preston (1875-1963, Australia) and Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984, Australia) (AGNSW 2017). In addition, the only public collection and largest collection exclusive to art by women in Australia is *The Cruther's Collection of Women's Art* at Lawrence Wilson Gallery, University of Western Australia, Perth (CCWA 2017).

with a wide-ranging demographic' (2016).² At the time of this conclusion I can only speculate on how the nature of Marsh's project could be addressed through a reading of the concepts that Jones has unpacked in relation to a re-evaluation of inclusivity within feminist art practice. Nevertheless, Castagnini has set out in her research on para-feminist parody to unveil how feminist artists have created work that humorously runs alongside, pays homage to, critiques and builds on feminist art history (2015, 24). A reading of para-feminist parody through Marsh's findings opens up the possibility to discover a broader historical scope of a uniquely Australian style of feminist humour and arts practice.

In addition, the archive of feminist practice has been a significant tool in my exploration of how artwork can reference and build on the art of women before me. By drawing from the concepts and artwork of the artists discussed in this project (Janine Antoni, Lynda Benglis, Myritza Castillo, Helen Frankenthaler, Kate Gilmore, Laresa Kosloff, Rachel Lachowicz, Agnes Martin, Ursula Martinez, Georgia O'Keeffe, Melati Suryodarmo and Mariana Vassileva), I have developed a body of work that has further investigated and contributed to the how painting can be approached from the contributions women have made to a feminist canon of painting.

During my time in the studio, I have created artworks that are messy and neat, precise and full of mistakes, with my body either nude or clothed in a painted garment. My practice has taken on board these contradictory feminine stereotypes that do not cease once I step outside the private haven that was my little cube tucked away at the back of the Curtin University painting studios. The issues raised in this project are concerns about what it means to be a *woman*, an artist navigating through the thick, heavy history of men in painting and western culture. I am certainly

² The research gathered for *Women, Feminism and Art in Australia since 1970* will be compiled in two books. The first will be an edited and illustrated anthology of essays, manifestos and stories. The second will be a monograph, consisting of a textual analysis of feminism and art by Marsh (Grant 2016). Marsh's project also includes a research symposium hosted at Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne in 2018, that will run in conjunction to the residency program *Doing Feminism/Sharing* and the exhibition *Unfinished Business: Perspectives on Art and Feminism* (which is focused on contemporary feminist practice) scheduled for 2018 at the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (ACCA 2017). At the time that this exegesis was submitted, the artists in the exhibition were yet to be confirmed.

not the first in this pursuit. Through my exegetical research, I have come across other women artists who are also pursuing a language of *women* and of *feminism*.

As I worked away in my studio over the years, this yearning to create artwork that bypassed the masculine content that has been researched in this project, I often reflected on how my research has extended my development as an artist. I began my practice in with an obsession over the possibilities of the painted grid and I have found a satisfactory ending in a place I never imagined - standing in my kitchen in the sweltering heat of a Perth summer, peeling myself out of a leotard I had stuffed with dough. As an artist, I have practised painting by moving out of my understanding of medium specificity, and into performance and the moving image, in a quest to find a new painterly language that identifies with *women*.

I often find myself questioning whether I will paint again. If I pick up a brush and a tube of paint, will I be giving in to the very problem I have sought to address in this project? Am I still a *painter*? I do not have the answers to these questions. This project has only scraped the surface of what is a complex realm of the possibilities for feminist painting. However, I felt great pleasure in throwing away the painterly remnants of my performances into a dug-out pit at my local tip (Figure 6.0). Not only was I destroying the physical artefacts of this project - the artworks that once encased my body - with this gesture, I was metaphorically, ironically and heroically throwing away the dominant canon - the masculine implications of painting.

I see this project as a small offering to an open-ended investigation into the possibilities for contemporary feminist painting practice. I have endeavoured to expand on an understanding of painting beyond dominant masculine ideas, while moving towards a feminist approach that seeks to respond to how women have engaged with performative anti-painting. My practice offers an exploration of anti-painting that sits outside the masculine conventions of painting that have been addressed in this project. My body activates the act of painting in my performances to create an alternative reading of painting that relies on the female body to exist and operate. Through practice-led research, this project has allowed me to foster and offer new ways of directly engaging with a corporeal feminist language of performative anti-painting.



Figure 6.0: Lauren McCartney, *Endings and Beginnings: The Artist, and Her Paintings*, 2017, Henderson Waste Recovery Park, Cockburn, Western Australia, digital photograph. Photograph by Laurie Edwards.

Appendix I: *Curriculum Vitae, Exhibitions and Activities Related to this PhD*

In addition to this exegesis and the artworks that have been created for this PhD, I have also undertaken a range of activities that have developed over the course of this project, and in doing so created a substantial body of work as my practice has developed over the past five and a half years. I have exhibited my work in two key solo exhibitions in Perth and Melbourne, and two additional exhibitions in Perth and I have given numerous artist talks on my practice.

My work has been included in numerous group exhibitions and, significantly, has been collected by the Art Gallery of Western Australia. I have also tested the ideas in my research and presented aspects of my practice in conference papers in Melbourne, Tasmania and Budapest. To further my experience at conferences I have also chaired and co-chaired a number of sessions. Lastly, I have had the privilege of receiving several research grants and prizes from Curtin University that have financially assisted my research journey. Details of my achievements and participation are set out below.

Exhibitions:

2016: *Movement for Action*, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, January 28 – February 12.

2015: *Gestural Riot*, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Perth, November 27 – December. Curated by Vashti Innes-Brown and Xavier Pardos.

Additional Exhibitions:

2014: *The Hula Hooping Project*, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, April 24 – May 10.

2014: *Reflection Paintings*, Melody Smith Gallery, Perth, February 27 – March 21.

Other Selected Exhibitions:

2015: *Tearing Down the Grid with My Breath*, 2014, as part of Video ARI, Channels: The Australian Video Art Festival, Screen Space, Melbourne, September 18 – 27, Organised by Simone Hine and Kyle Weise.

2015: *The Hula Hooping Project*, 2014, as part of PERFORMANCE, fundraising event, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne. July 5.

2014: *The Weight of Painting*, Paper Mountain, Perth, September 6 – September 21.

2014: *Reflection Painting*, as part of Exhibition 11, 24-hour Light Locker Art Space, Grand Theatre Lane, Perth, March 18 – June 9.

2014: *The Hula Hooping Project*, The Night Screen, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, April 24 – May 10.

Collections:

My artworks as part of this PhD have been collected by the Art Gallery of Western Australia, who acquired *Reflection Painting #7* in 2014. *Reflection Painting #12* and *Reflection Painting #13* have been on loan by John Curtin Gallery from 2014 – present.

Conferences, Presentations and Activities:

2017: *Slide Nights vol.V*, artist talk, Perth Centre for Photography, Perth, February 16. Chaired by Christopher Young.

2014: *The Weight of Painting: The Transition of Feminist Action Painting, from Research to Practice*, conference paper, in *Creating/Action: Physical and Abstract Sites of Arts Practice*, AAANZ (Art Association of Australia and New Zealand), Tasmania, December 5 – 8. Session chaired by Lauren McCartney and Miik Green.

2014: Session chair with Dr. Miik Green in *Creating/Action: Physical and Abstract Sites of Arts Practice*, session chair, AAANZ (Art Association of Australia and New Zealand), Tasmania, December 5 – 8.

2014: *Lauren McCartney + Moe Beitiks*, artist talk, Miik Green Studio Presentation Nights, Maylands, Perth, July 10. Chaired by Dr. Miik Green.

2013: *Remediating Painting and the Body: Baguettes, Breath and Paint*, conference paper, in Open Session, AAANZ (Art Association of Australia and New Zealand), Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, December 7 – 9. Session chaired by Dr. Toby Juliff.

2013: *Remediating Painting: The Painted Body as a Support*, conference paper, in Arts New Frontiers, The 8th International Conference on the Arts in Society, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary, June 24 – 26.

2013: Session chair in *Aesthetic Spaces*, The 8th International Conference on the Arts in Society, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary, June 24 – 26.

2012: Session chair in *Photography and Media Arts*, ACUADS (The Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools) conference, Perth, October 3 – 5.

2012: Session chair in *Regionalism and Education*, session chair, ACUADS (The Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools) conference, Perth, October 3 – 5.

2012: *Remediating Painting: The Painted Body as a Support*, presentation, Curtin University, Perth.

2012: Participant in Dr. Helen Molesworth's Masterclass as part of Together <> Apart, Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, University of Sydney, National Art School, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, July 12 – 14.

Grants and Awards:

2016: Research Through your Lens, HDR (Higher Degree Research) Photography Prize 1st prize, Faculty of Humanities, Curtin University, Perth.

2015: Research Through your Lens HDR (Higher Degree Research) Photography Prize, finalist, Faculty of Humanities, Curtin University, Perth.

2013: Graduate Scholar Awardee, The Arts in Society.

2012 – 2015: Australian Postgraduate Award.

2012- 2015: Curtin University Postgraduate Scholarship.

Articles, Media Releases and Reviews:

2015: Ted Snell, *SoDA15: Department of Art*, Scoop Magazine, September.

2014: Annie Blatchford, *Alternative Art Challenges Masculine Traditions*, Visual Arts Hub, September.

2014: Sam Leung, *The Weight of Painting*, media release, Paper Mountain, September.

2014: Anna Dunnill, *Reflection Paintings*, Six Thousand, February.

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