

ADDRESSING THE SELF
THROUGH THE SUBJECTIVITY OF THE OTHER

A PRACTICE-LED INVESTIGATION OF A PARTICULAR ARTIST-MODEL RELATIONSHIP

BY
LAWRENCE BUTTIGIEG

DOCTORAL THESIS

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

2014



VOLUME ONE OF TWO

© by Lawrence Buttigieg 2014

All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

As an artist working with the female model, this practice-led research examines concepts of alterity and subjectivity while challenging the dominant role of male subjectivity in the western world. It revolves around the relationship between myself and the female subject, a specific woman who within the context of my work epitomises but at the same time transcends womanhood. This undertaking suggests that my representations of her body grow out of a dialectical tension between the feeling that the female other has almost become a metonymic extension of myself, and the awareness that such a feeling is at the same time illusory.

The practical component of my investigations takes the form of body-themed box assemblages which are reminiscent of polyptychs, tabernacles and reliquaries. However, the sacred images which form part of these ecclesiastical items are replaced with others showing close-ups of the fragmented bodies of the model and myself. While this kind of profane artefact acts as a receptacle for our bodies which are broken down and enshrined together with other objects, it constitutes part of an ongoing process whereby the relationship between myself and the female figure is metamorphosed, re-shaped, and re-visioned. The significance of these creations is meant to extend beyond their artefactual existence and become mediums through which I re-visit female sexuality and eroticism and assess them within a spiritual context, albeit in the circumscribed framework of a particular woman. The artefact's ultimate objective is to appease my innate desire to access the other via a self-reflexive process which involves both mirroring and distancing at one and the same time. This process also includes an exploration into the spiritual with the aim of exploiting that which is 'other' in the western theological tradition, namely God and the Divine. The gaze is also deeply involved in this exploration of the other. In fact, while our bodies are subjected to a re-visitation and trans-valuation in parts through multiplication and fragmentation, the gaze is in the process broken down into a series of glances which originate from myself, the viewer or the female subject. This process questions and disrupts the dominance of the male gaze, and its associated precepts, in Western visual culture.

Finally, by correlating the model's body with the divine, my artefacts seek to give this woman, as an embodiment of the 'true other,' a trans-corporeal identity. Rather than seeking to exert control over the other, they provide a pious space wherein the self and the other are able to encounter each other in a manner that initiates an equitable relationship, unhindered by presumptive knowledge. This is aided by the aesthetics and dynamics underlying the box assemblage which, while expressing gender fluidity and encouraging disengagement from preconceived dogmas—a sort of reverse cognition—also enhances the experience of its deific symbolism.

CONTENTS

List of illustrations — v

Acknowledgements — vii

INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 1 THE FAMILIAR AND THE UNKNOWN	5
<i>Literature review and related research question — 5</i>	
<i>The model, myself, and other artist-model relationships — 15</i>	
<i>The materiality of the artefacts — 22</i>	
Chapter 2 THE SELF AND THE OTHER	27
<i>The self and the other — 29</i>	
<i>The gaze — 33</i>	
<i>My work as a means of self-representation — 42</i>	
<i>My work within the genre of the female nude — 48</i>	
Chapter 3 THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE	55
<i>From painting to box assemblage — 56</i>	
<i>Fragmentation and plenitude — 62</i>	
<i>The allure of female nakedness — 70</i>	
<i>Re-visioning the female body — 75</i>	
Chapter 4 RECEPTION AND DISPLAY	81
<i>Geographical and cultural contexts for my work — 81</i>	
<i>'Witnessing' — 87</i>	
CONCLUSION	89
<i>Bibliography — 91</i>	
<i>Appendix I — 103</i>	
<i>Appendix II — 104</i>	

ILLUSTRATIONS

The following are the list of figures in Volume One. All artefacts presented at the viva are comprehensively illustrated in Volume Two. While both documents are digitally archived in Loughborough University's Institutional Repository, access to Volume Two is restricted.

	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Small tabernacle for Kelly</i> , 2011- (unfinished) W 208mm, H 309mm, D 241mm (when closed) private collection	cover
0.1	David Penprase, <i>Untitled</i> Sepia-toned gelatin silver print on 16 x 12 inches fibre paper image reproduced from <i>Passion, pleasure and pain</i> by David Penprase; a limited edition publication, copy 259/1000	3
1.1	Marlene Dumas, <i>Fingers</i> , 1999 oil on canvas, 400 x 500 mm private collection	6
1.2	Mona Hatoum, <i>Corps étranger</i> (detail), 1994 mixed media Centre Pompidou, Paris	7
1.3	Jenny Saville, <i>Passage</i> , 2004 oil on canvas, 3360 x 2900 mm private collection	8
1.4	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Reliquary for Idoia</i> , 2012 mixed media; W 149mm, H 149mm, D 149mm (when closed) artist's collection	10
1.5	Helen Chadwick with <i>Piss flowers</i> , 1992 photograph by Kippa Matthews	11
1.6	Pierre Bonnard, <i>Nu dans la baignoire</i> (<i>Nude in the bath</i>), 1925 oil on canvas, 1048 x 654 mm Tate, London	13
1.7	Gustav Klimt, <i>The kiss</i> (detail), 1907-8 oil on canvas, 1800 x 1800 mm The Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna	16
1.8	Ronald Brooks Kitaj, <i>Los Angeles no. 22</i> (<i>Painting-drawing</i>), 2001 oil on canvas, 914 x 914 mm Marlborough Gallery, New York	18
1.9	Still from Jacques Rivette's film <i>La belle noiseuse</i> , 1991 featuring Michel Piccoli as Édouard Frenhofer and Emmanuelle Béart as Marianne Pierre Grise Productions	20
1.10	Stanley Spencer, <i>Double nude portrait: the artist with his second wife</i> , 1937 oil on canvas, 915 x 935 mm Tate, London	21
2.1	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Cabinet of sublimated desires</i> (detail), 2009- (unfinished) mixed media; W 652mm, H 652mm, D 543mm (when closed) artist's collection	28
2.2	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Reliquary for Idoia</i> (detail), 2012	30

2.3	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Cabinet of sublimated desires</i> (detail), 2009- (unfinished)	34
2.4	Gustave Courbet, <i>L'origine du monde</i> , 1866 460mm x 550mm Musée d'Orsay, Paris	38
2.5	George Segal, <i>Picasso's chair</i> , 1973 mixed media Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York	40
2.6	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Cabinet of intimate landscapes</i> (detail), 2009- (unfinished) mixed media; W 552mm, H 551mm, D 545mm (when closed) artist's collection	42
2.7	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Tabernacle for ourselves</i> , 2013- (unfinished) mixed media; W 515mm, H 465mm, D 447mm (when closed) artist's collection	43
2.8	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Idoia with books</i> , 2008 oil on canvas, 1950 x 1300 mm artist's collection	44
3.1	Joseph Cornell, <i>Untitled (Medici princess)</i> , circa 1948 mixed media; W 283mm, H 448mm, D 111mm private collection	57
3.2	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Reliquary for Idoia</i> (detail showing sealed glass vial containing her pubes), 2012	64
3.3	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Tabernacle for Idoia</i> (detail showing internal cylindrical space), 2011- (unfinished) mixed media; W 480mm, H 480mm, D 480mm (when closed) artist's collection	66
3.4	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Tabernacle for Idoia</i> (detail showing a 'crucified' Idoia), 2011- (unfinished)	67
3.5	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Cabinet of intimate landscapes</i> (detail), 2009- (unfinished)	68
3.6	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Tabernacle for ourselves</i> , 2011- (unfinished)	69
3.7	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Peep-hole box</i> , 2013- (unfinished) mixed media; W 319mm, H 321mm, D 657mm (when closed) artist's collection	79
4.1	Andres Serrano, <i>Piss Christ</i> , 1987 Cibachrome print, 1520 x 1020 mm private collection	82
4.2	Still from Martin Scorsese's film <i>The last temptation of Christ</i> , 1988 Cineplex Odeon Films	83
4.3	Diego Velázquez, <i>Las Meninas</i> , 1656 oil on canvas, 3180 x 2760 mm Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid	86
5.1	Lawrence Buttigieg, <i>Cabinet of sublimated desires</i> (detail), 2009- (unfinished)	94

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of a number of persons. A special word of thanks goes first and foremost to Marsha Meskimmon for being such an excellent supervisor and a source of inspiration in the past five years. Her insightful analysis and acumen made me constantly rethink my work in a highly stimulating fashion. I would also like to thank Gloria Lauri-Lucente who always believed in my work and urged me to embark on this project. Throughout she was readily available with sound advice on my work. This research would not have been possible without the collaboration of Kelly Attard, Lucya Sokolov, and Idoia Tabone who shared my enthusiasm in the creation of the artefacts.¹ I thank them for accepting to be part of this project. Finally, a word of thanks to my wife Sandra and our three children, Lisa, Isaac and Gregory, for their support.

¹ Aliases have been used in lieu of birth and family names to protect these women's privacy.

INTRODUCTION

Together with the series of thirteen body-themed box assemblages, this thesis is the culmination of the practice-led investigation I undertook at Loughborough University under the supervision of Professor Marsha Meskimmon. Based on the premise that the best way to explore one's inner self can be achieved within the context of a dialectical relationship between subjectivity and otherness, my inquiry addresses the following research question:

To what extent can my body-themed box assemblages operate as a means of mediation between myself and the other by engendering a self-reflexive process of mirroring and distancing at one and the same time?

The hypothesis that the female subject may well be the locus of an encounter between the self and the other, has gained piquancy for me over the past five years throughout which my artworks evolved from the relatively straightforward paintings of Idoia as a singular subject [fig. 2.8], to the more acute and complex box assemblages which feature multiple representations of her, at times coupled with portrayals of myself. The development of these artefacts not only compelled me to reflect on my relationship with this particular female model and to seek why I portray her body the way I do, but also to direct my attention to the self-referentiality inherent in my creations. Thus, my inquiry is not just concerned with what the box assemblage relates about the female body it portrays within its folds, but also with what my long-lasting association with Idoia as the owner of this body, has to say about myself through it.

At the very outset, I wish to state that I am aware of the challenges involved in renegotiating the conventions associated with what is traditionally considered to be a dichotomic relationship between the male artist and the female model, a territory affected by centuries-old gender inequities. To this end, while drawing a great deal on feminist and (to a lesser extent) queer theory, as a male heterosexual artist I endeavour to the best of my abilities to refrain from objectifying and over-sexualising the female model.

I contend that these artefacts grow out of a dialectical tension between the feeling that the female other as represented by this woman has become part of me, in a sort of metonymic extension of my subjectivity, and the awareness that such a feeling is at the same time illusory. While I may be spurred to work with the female nude with the hope of succeeding in capturing the essence of the female other, at the same time I am aware that such a desire can never be completely realised. Paradoxically, it is the awareness of such an impossibility that motivates me to insistently focus my attention again and again on the same person. Although this anxiety is ever present in my encounters with female models, it emerges more strongly with Idoia, perhaps because our long-standing relationship has been sustained by virtue of our willingness to accept that which is unknown and unique in each other. Idoia's standing as *the* female subject within my work has gained so much significance throughout these past years that she has pushed herself beyond the status of just a female model. In fact, I consider her as a particular kind of woman who not only embodies, but surpasses muliebrity. But I am also aware that if at times I seem to idealise Idoia to the point of transforming her presence/absence to pure abstraction, at the same time I also emphasise her corporeality.

Underpinning this relationship is the affinity I feel for her, an affection which rather than ebbing away through the passing of time, has been enriched even further. Since our first encounters in a life drawing group in 1998 I have been in a position to discern the subtle changes she has physically undergone. Moreover, the repeated use of Idoia as a subject has prompted me to initiate a process of 'distillation' through which I accentuate what *I*

consider to be her quintessential qualities and curtail those which I deem unnecessary. This is just one of a set of processes which eventually translates into the box assemblage, or rather that which might be considered as an adequate representation of both Idoia and myself.

The inquiry is addressed both through this text and the artefacts; the former not only serving as a reflective analysis of my methodology, thoughts and feelings, but also their explication. Although the artefacts are fully illustrated in the second volume of the thesis, which also doubles as a complete inventory of the studio work presented at the viva, the first volume is interspersed with visual references to the artefacts, highlighting the rationale underlying the processes involved in their creation, their salient features, and their development as a series. I should also like to add that the titles of a number of box assemblages are accompanied by the adjectival 'unfinished.' This indicates my intent to pursue these works further, an endeavour which complements their processual nature.

Idoia's presence in the series of artefacts is complemented by that of two other women, Kelly and Lucya. While Idoia and Kelly are Maltese, Lucya hails from Belarus. Starting off as a glamour photography model in the late 1990's, Idoia quickly moved to the artistic genre of photography modelling, a part-time profession which she kept going for a good number of years. Probably, her greatest achievement in this regard was a short but intense stint with world renowned UK photographer David Penprase [fig. 0.1]. At present Idoia forms part of the senior staff in the prime minister's office. Kelly is a University of Kent PhD graduate, and currently holds a lecturing post at the University of Malta; she is also active in *Alternattiva Demokratika*, the local green political party. Besides artistic modelling, Kelly's other avocation is competing in triathlons. Lucya is a full-time mature student at the University of Malta and a freelance fashion consultant. These three women are mindful of their commitment to this project and the kind of exposure they are subjecting themselves to. In her contribution which appears in Appendix I, Kelly intimates that she finds her involvement in this 'artwork-in-progress'² to be a worthwhile and rewarding experience. I am also aware that the participation of these women subjects my research to ethical guidelines as per Loughborough University's clearance process.³ I have looked into these guidelines and hereby declare that my work is compliant with them.

Chapter One, *The familiar and the unknown*, presents the basis of my inquiry that stems from my experience of repeatedly (though not exclusively) working with the same female model for the last fifteen years, and discusses the mutually beneficial rapport that exists between us. Though the thesis contains an ongoing literature review on the various issues discussed, Chapter One contains a distinct survey of publications that lays out the theoretical basis of my research, and highlights its relevance and singularity within the current discourses concerned with concepts of alterity and subjectivity. Following this, the chapter refers to particular artist-model relationships that are characterised by an enduring synergy and identifies the motivational forces underpinning such liaisons. Finally, it addresses the materiality and artefactual nature of the box assemblage.

Chapter Two, *The self and the other*, addresses notions of self-referentiality and transfiguration as they influence and characterise my box assemblages. It discusses how these artefacts, each with its particular design and degree of complexity, assuage the angst brought upon me as a result of the conflictual juxtaposition between my

² As indicated on page 32 of the *Handbook for postgraduate research students, 2010-2011*.

³ *Ethical clearance* in 'Handbook for postgraduate research students, 2010-2011,' p 14.

fascination with Idoia and my awareness that I can never fully comprehend the alterity she embodies. Also, it addresses the gaze as an agent of complex intersections between the model, myself and the viewer, and assesses the artefact's self-representational attributes, in particular its faculty of metamorphosing what starts off as a process of idealisation of the subjects' bodies, which include my own, into a process of self-identification with otherness. The chapter ends with a discussion on the box assemblage's effectiveness in addressing and representing the complexities of the female body.



Figure 0.1

David Penprase, *Untitled*

Sepia-toned gelatin silver print on 16 x 12 inches fibre paper

image reproduced from *Passion, pleasure and pain* by David Penprase; limited edition publication, copy 259/1000

Chapter Three, *The sacred and the profane*, explores the intertwined nature of these two antipodal concepts, and how they impinge on my inquiry. It discusses the usefulness of the box assemblage as a means of addressing such notions, citing amongst other features its versatile and contradictory nature—from one point of view implying confinement and control, from another permitting the grouping of unrelated objects—which is conducive to a physically defined space where contrariety may be addressed. The chapter points out that with such a paradoxical nature, this unitary structure is capable of affecting not only an intersection between the

feminine and the divine, but also a hypothetical coalescence of the bodies-in-pieces of its subjects—the model and myself. It explores these themes in the light of the interplay between fragmentation and plenitude. This chapter also discusses the allure of female nakedness which lies in its ability to hint at, while at the same time conceal, the subjectivity of its owner, and the box assemblage’s ability to re-vision the female body.

Chapter Four, *Reception and display* discusses the box assemblage within an international frame of reference, correlating it with the works of two leading international artists who embrace rationales not dissimilar to mine. It also addresses the relevance of the geographical and cultural contexts in which it is produced, in particular the fact that the model and myself are easily identifiable in a tightly knit community of an island city state of less than 18 squared kilometres and just over 410,000 people. The chapter then goes on to address the functionality of the box assemblage in terms of Kelly Oliver’s notion of ‘witnessing.’

Besides summing up this inquiry, both in terms of practical project and the thesis, the *Conclusion* highlights its contribution to knowledge. Of particular significance is the contextual juxtaposition of self and other, the thematic resource of my artefacts.

Chapter one

THE FAMILIAR AND THE UNKNOWN

My practice-led research seeks to demonstrate that my body-themed box assemblages, more than artefactual representations of myself and Idoia who for the past fifteen years has been the cynosure of my studio practice, operate as the means through which I seek to mediate between myself and the other via a self-reflexive process of mirroring and distancing at one and the same time. Such a process allows me to venture into the unknown with the aim of exploring that which is 'other' in the western theological tradition, and also what is traditionally construed as God, or the unreachable Deity.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each dealing with a particular topic. For the most part of the first section, entitled *Literature review and related research question*, I survey debates on conceptual underpinnings of representation, subjectivity and alterity, the female nude as a genre, and artist-model alliances. While the primary aim of this review is to explore what motivates male heterosexual artists, including myself, to pursue the representation of the female body, it underscores the theoretical basis of my own work both as an artist and a scholar. Over the past five years these binary occupations have been beneficially intertwined and conducive to the box assemblage. As an artist I have been perennially absorbed in the quest for the ultimate representations of myself and that which is other in my existence, a task which for the last fifteen years also involved the body of a particular woman. At the same time, as a scholar I have engaged myself in de-complexifying, or rather disambiguating, the intricacies of my thoughts and feelings through the erudite discourses of various theoreticians and philosophers. While throughout this collective analysis of debates I draw pertinent parallels with my own work, I also address the appositeness of my research question.

In section two, entitled *The model, myself and other artist model relationships*, I look at a number of artist-model liaisons that are characterised by their longevity and chart analogies between them and the relationship I share with Idoia, the predominating subject of my artefacts. I argue that the essentialness of artworks resulting from such enduring relationships is the mediated exchange between the self and the other which the female subject's body is capable of bringing about.

In the last section, entitled *The materiality of the artefacts*, I address the practical component of my research. I provide an outline of how this developed from the singularity of a painting on canvas [fig. 2.8] to the more complex box assemblage, in the process borrowing from church iconography and establishing through otherness the hypothetical link between the female body and the ineffable. I demonstrate that although at a componential level its materiality is incognizant and incapable of showing affection, the inanimateness of its hybridity is deceiving since its various parts not only sustain multiple links with the model and myself, but seem to have our own lives diffused into them. I also note why the last in the line of box assemblages radically departs from its predecessors on several counts, more conspicuously in terms of construction and shape.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RELATED RESEARCH QUESTION

Contemporary artists attest to the enduring interest in the female body. Marlene Dumas [fig. 1.1] and John Currin promote it through overtly sexualised representations; Jenny Saville and Marc Quinn use it to accentuate the fluidity of gender; while Marina Abramović resorts to her corporeality as a means of its representation (Biesenbach 2010; Danilo 2005; Hattenstone 2010; Solomon 2009; Vander Weg 2006).



Figure 1.1
Marlene Dumas, *Fingers*, 1999
oil on canvas, 400 x 500 mm
private collection

It might be possible to argue that a common determinant in the works of these artists is the use of technological media. In 1936 Walter Benjamin wrote that while technology allows the creative arts to be duplicated and transposed, it relinquishes the 'aura' of the original (Benjamin 2009). Thirty-nine years later Jean Baudrillard implied that computerisation had pushed the world into hyperrealism, a state where representations may exist independently from their original counterparts (Baudrillard 1975). Hypothetically, the female body, and also the self for that matter, can be multiplied and dispersed autonomously from its precursor, analogously to what happens in biological tissue engineering, whereby the tissual material produced does not presuppose an original (Lechte 2008: 303). This points to the box assemblage's inherent and existential contradiction on account of its constitution. On one hand, as a receptacle holding multiple simulacra of the female model and myself, it pushes itself away from our carnal selves and suggests that the link between us is superfluous; on the other, it connects with us through 'relic-ing,' a neologism coined by art historian Cynthia Hahn (Hahn 2011: 9).

Susanne Kappeler's assertion that for any representation there is somebody setting it up and somebody experiencing it implies that any realism 'revealed' to an audience is controlled (Kappeler 1986: 2-3). W J Thomas Mitchell maintains that sight is conditioned to the extent that we only see processed realities (Mitchell 1986: 38). Such affirmations are evident through the series of representations spatially confined in the box assemblage. As the viewers, out of necessity, must consciously direct their sight toward and into the artefact's circumscribed presence, any illusion of reality it imparts is a far cry from that simulated in a cinema theatre (Mulvey 1989: 14-27). Thus, in this regard the box assemblage may be read as the result of an elaborate process which actualises a disengagement between the real and represented subjects, concurring with Lisa Tickner's view that an unconditional link with the real does not exist, and Stephen Heath's statement that reality is an issue of

representation, while reality itself is a question of discourse (Tickner 1998: 357; Heath 1976: 73). Notwithstanding the pre-eminence of Idoia in the artefact, I still remain its primary creator and invariably, its representations of this woman are more consonant with my own self than with their carnate counterpart.

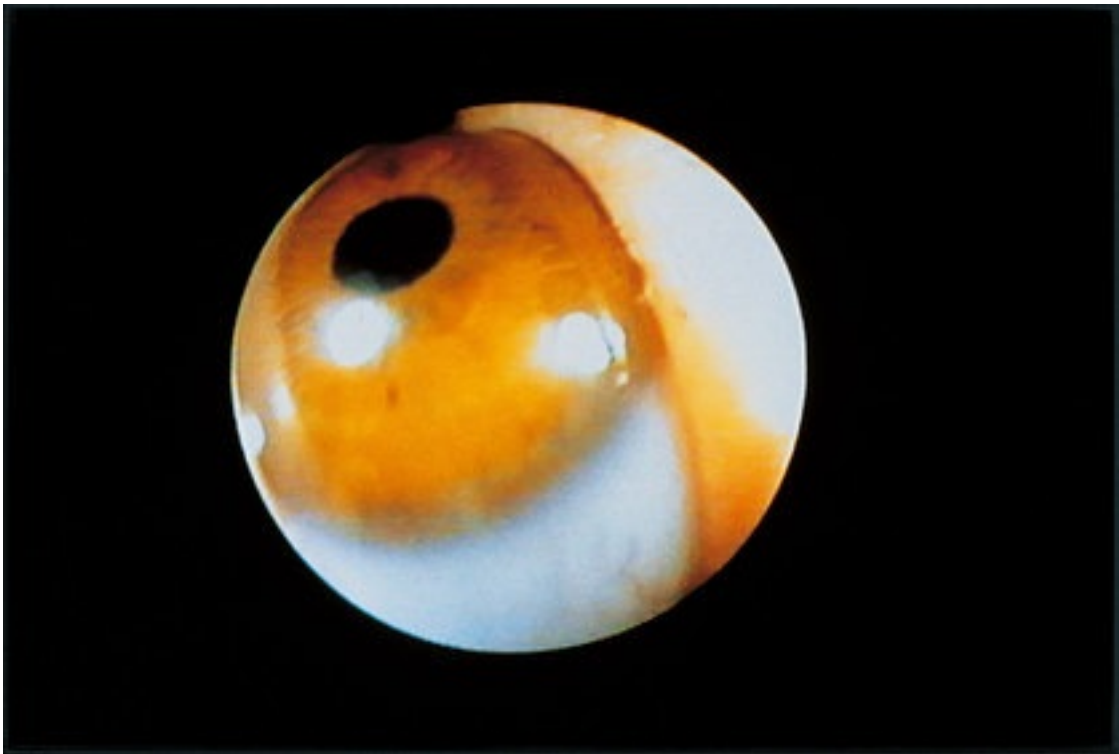


Figure 1.2
Mona Hatoum (1952 -), *Corps étranger* (detail), 1994
mixed media
Centre Pompidou, Paris

Marsha Meskimmon suggests that self-representation may take the form of ‘processes’ or ‘interactions’ citing as an example Mona Hatoum’s *Corps étranger* (1994) [fig. 1.2] which subjects the viewer to bizarre endoscopic footage from the artist’s body (Meskimmon 2001; Russ 1996). Modern imaging technology, capable of examining the body in an intense manner and laying bare its biological and physical complexities, has created a new visual culture for the gaze.

Baudrillard’s hyperreal and Meskimmon’s representation-as-process brings to mind Helen Chadwick’s comments about the mutability of the self in her work with photocopied images:

Out of the copier, no longer separate from other things, I am now limitless. The essential elementary self is gone, evaporated into a vigorous plurality of interactions. I discharge myself, time and time again, in a discontinuous flow, a passage of impossible state leaping into successive configurations (Holborn 1989: 29).

Going a step further, in ‘Mind and body: in feminist criticism beyond the theory/ practice divide,’ Meskimmon unequivocally declares that ‘[t]he body is process’ and one must be responsive to its inherent dynamics and fluid boundaries (Meskimmon 2003). This unambiguous call is reflected in the box assemblage which, designed as a performative device, is geared to embrace the changeability of our bodies.

A body in a processual state is Jenny Saville’s *Passage* (2004-5) [fig. 1.3], a powerful painting of a transgender subject ingeniously rendered in colour and light. The works of Hatoum and Chadwick are also characterised by light construed as luminance and embrace Cathryn Vasseleu’s intimation that an embodied femininity may be

engendered by re-conceptualisations of light (Vasseleu 2005: 126-7). The box assemblage seeks to follow suit, refashioning light to serve as a medium of convergence and assimilation between the female model and myself.

Notions of fluidity are also taken up by the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti who argues that sexuality is responsive to identity adjustments, and consequentially implying that sexual dissimilarity is also an actuality among women themselves (Braidotti 1994). She designates the body as the threshold of subjectivity and the point of intersection between a person's biological reality and social milieu. According to Braidotti, desire provides a unifying sense of continuity for the subject's evolving existence and its intersection with the other. With desire's such function, the African American writer Audre Lorde articulates the erotic, that which in *Uses of the erotic: the erotic as power* she refers to as 'true knowledge' (Lorde 2007: 89).



Figure 1.3
Jenny Saville, *Passage*, 2004
oil on canvas, 3360 x 2900 mm
private collection

Closely associated with the erotic are female genitalia, those that are repeatedly refashioned through representation. While pornography idealizes them to appease the male gaze, pathology degrades them. As mediated records whose carnal references do not exist, they recall Baudrillard's hyperreality and Benjamin's lost 'aura.' However, most of the box assemblages hold vagina casts [fig. 1.4] that, construed as metonymical presences of the originals, uphold through temporal space their exact physical appearance. This affords the viewers' visual and tactile sensations that are anticipatory to the perpetually deferred sexual acts (Freud 2011: 34-35).

The vaginal simulacrum recalls Luce Irigaray's *When our lips speak together* in which she employs the labia metaphor to challenge self-centred subjectivity with a fluid and tolerant one (Martin 2000: 152). For her, the 'two lips'

symbolise communication between a male-dominated existence and the realm of the other, or that which stands for both the feminine and the divine; an equivalency based on the intersection between philosophy, theology and writings of mediaeval women mystics (Joy 2006: 17; Barker 2010: 322). Irigaray's hypothetical discourses on such an association, enticed me to seek for myself, through the box assemblage, the same kind of relationship. Of particular interest is her 'sensible transcendental' which positions divinity and carnality together, the former being the fulfilment of the latter. Addressing interpersonal relations, in *Way of love* Irigaray counsels that each one's threshold of accomplishment should be the divine, rather than mutual subjugation. Promoting the sensible transcendental on the basis of lack of a female gendered deity, she reinterprets divinity as the complete realisation of oneself and the establishment of perfect harmony with others (Irigaray 1987). An analogous 'existence' is actualised in the course of my sessions with the model, albeit temporally limited to their duration. Such moments bring about what Catherine Clément refers to as mystical syncope, spells of 'pure' harmony and pleasure which dismiss inhibitions and fear of the unknown, moments when Idoia is perceptibly ready to give me access to her own interiority (Clement 1994). Personality and the libidinal self are a truthful reflection of each other and Idoia's sexual awareness in such instances endorses Alphonso Lingis' assertion that '(p)erception is an inscription of a dynamic version of the outside within and a reflection of oneself on the outside' (Lingis 1985: 51-3). Human sexual desire is not only concerned with unqualified corporeal attraction but also with the 'incarnate subjectivity' of a body (Lingis 1985: 20). Sexuality is a major determinant of consciousness, and gains significance through the objectifying encounter between two or more persons as '(t)he sexual impulse is entirely addressed to the other; it is intentional' (Lingis 1985: 19). Also, '(e)roticisation is something that happens to a body already expressive, a body that faces,' and thus Idoia summons me (Lingis 1985: 61).

But each box assemblage holds a number of representations through which the natural body of the female subject undergoes a radical transformation, a process amply discussed in Lynda Nead's *The female nude, art, obscenity and sexuality*. According to Nead, '[t]he female body—natural, *unstructured*—represents something that is outside the proper field of art and aesthetic judgment; but artistic style, pictorial form, contains and regulates the body and renders it an object of beauty, suitable for art and aesthetic judgment' (Nead 1992: 25). But holistically, as a unitary artefact with several simulacra in its hold, the box assemblage shies away from anyone's objectification to function as a bespoke artefactual device capable of converging and assimilating the subjectivities of artist and model.

Also, women artists such as Jenny Saville avert the objectification of the bodies they represent (Roberts 2004). Her works such as *Matrix*, 1999 representing Del LaGrace Volcano who declares himself/ herself as intersex by design, highlight the ambiguity associated with sex and corporeal identity (LaGrace Volcano 2009). With such a title, Saville alludes to the Wachowski brothers' 1999 film trilogy and consequently to Baudrillard (IMDb 1999). Her work corroborates what Elizabeth Grosz has to say regarding meaning and ambiguity associated with our physical presences:

Bodies speak, without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativised; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms, and ideals become incarnated (Grosz 1995: 35).

Just as Julie Taymor's film portrays Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) as a transgressive figure who challenges patriarchal institutions through her body's 'speech,' the work of many women artists tends to counter objectification

through corporeality itself, seeking through it empowerment and feminacy (Macedo 2004). Nead argues that feminist art is mainly concerned with the re-appropriation of female identity:

If the tradition of the female nude emphasises the exterior of the body and the completion of its surfaces, then women's body art reveals the interior, the terrifying secret that is hidden within this idealised exterior (Nead 1992: 66).

With *Piss flowers* (1991) [fig. 1.5], produced by her urine and that of a male colleague, Chadwick transgresses the bodies' boundaries and collaboratively uses their liquid waste to produce an art that blurs gender distinctions. Mary Douglas' observation with regard to the body's boundaries is relevant here:

We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins (Douglas 2002: 150).



Figure 1.4
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Reliquary for Idoia*, 2012
mixed media, W 149mm, H 149mm, D 149mm (when closed)
artist's collection

While in Chadwick's case the object is part of the artefactual process, in mine it is a constituent of the artefact itself. Any of the subjects' hair which 'traversed' the bodily boundaries is, through a relic-ing process, re-

contained within the boundary of the box assemblage, an endeavour influenced by the body-part relics conserved in reliquaries and venerated in Catholic churches. Although a reliquary sustains such a remnant as tangible memory of its pious owner, tenet-wise it is a segment of a soul's previous and future container. Through resurrection, this partitioning is rectified (Bynum 1991: 263-4). The Eucharist endorses the hypothesis that a body fragment is an embodiment of the whole (Bynum 1991: 295). This corroborates the power of the fragment that, in lieu of the body's plenitude, establishes a presence that goes beyond the temporal and physical attributes of the actual body.



Figure 1.5
Helen Chadwick with *Piss flowers*, 1992
photograph by Kippa Matthews

Returning to the issue of female artists, art history of the past half century clearly indicates that many female artists have turned to their bodily selves as vital resources of expression. While Annie Sprinkle addresses female sexuality through the explicit use of her own corporeality (Laqueur 2003: 407), Chadwick identifies her body as an experience-oriented sensorial apparatus, at times highlighting its mutability and animality. Other artists, such as Abramović and Carolee Schneemann, while comprehending the underlying potential of their bodies, have found it useful at various stages of their careers to team them up with those of male artists. For a period of

thirteen years, spanning between 1976 up to 1989, Abramović not only intensely collaborated with the Germany-born performance artist Ulay, but also perceived him as her alter ego. While not seeking persistent relationships, throughout her career, Schneemann sought the input of several male artists such as Joseph Cornell. Similarly to Abramović and Schneemann, I see the merits of a collaborative alliance with a person of the opposite sex, in my case a model rather than an artist. By ‘coupling’ my body with that of this woman, I address the fluid boundary between male and female subjectivities. Even though women artists and feminist theorists are ardently committed to undo the objectification of the female body I may still contribute toward gender equity.

The box assemblage not only dismisses the traditional hierarchical distinction between artist and model but brings about a convergence and assimilation between the two. At times I am more ‘model’ than creator, sharing both roles with the female subject. The motivation underlying the depiction of my body might not be unlike that which animates Joan Semmel’s autobiographical works; I do believe that we share the same insistence of portraying the ‘specific person.’ While I do not conceal my vulnerability by a veneer of assertiveness, she shuns away from idealised femininity (Schwendener 2013). This is particularly evident in the 2013 exhibition of her works, called *Joan Semmel: a lucid eye*, held at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York.

This same perseverance in representing the specific person is also evident in the self-portraits of Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) which, according to Hilton Kramer, manifest the temporality and weakness of human flesh (Kramer 1998). However, these figurations of himself are in sharp contrast with his nudes through which he transformed his lifelong companion into an idealised and ageless woman. While art historian Linda Nochlin, perhaps rather inopportunistly, describes Bonnard’s nudes as the ultimate embodiment of male desire, and art critic Peter Schjeldahl dismisses them as grossly corrupt, I contend that these works are the result of Bonnard’s earnest attempt at coming to terms with the other. Rather than seeking the objectification of the female body, he sought the subjectivity of the other through it. At times this endeavour obliged him to exercise regulation on the female subject and he acquiesced by placing Martha within oval shaped tubs, metaphorically symbolising both the vulva and confinement. Merlin James notes that the incongruity between Bonnard’s scrutiny and Martha’s obliviousness to it permeates his nudes with psychological tension (James 1998). His was a lifelong pursuit for the female other and this struggle is taken to extremes in *Nu dans la baignoire* (1925) [fig. 1.6] where the intersection between artist, female body, and viewer is complete, as the lower half of the female body could belong to any of the three. James aptly intimates that:

...Bonnard’s nudes of Martha are themselves, on many levels, self-portraits. That is, they are portraits of her as him, and him as her. They are even self-portraits by her, in which she creates and recreates, depicts and wipes out, completes and immortalises, herself. They are tragic paintings because, given her incapacity to relate to anything but herself, Bonnard, to have her attention, must become her (James 1998).⁴

For Timothy Hyman such self-referentiality is the common denominator between Bonnard and his near contemporary and acquaintance Marcel Proust (1871-1922) in whose case it is particularly evident in *A la recherche du temps perdu*.⁵ (Mavor 2007: 319; Hyman 1998: 141-2; Proust 2003).

I believe that the articulation of such intense self-referentiality is spurred on by the presence of a ‘significant

⁴ *Nu dans la baignoire* (*Nude in the bath*) was bequeathed to the Tate Gallery by Simon Sainsbury in 2006.

⁵ I have made use of the English translation: Marcel Proust, *The Way by Swann’s*, trans Lydia Davis (London: Penguin books ltd, 2003).

other' who does not necessarily need to be a lover or someone coterminous to an individual's daily existence as in the case of Bonnard. It suffices that the ubiety of such a 'soul' is circumscribed to one's creative realm as is the case with my own artist-model relationship.⁶ While this polemic also applies to the works of Abramović and Schneemann, it alters the significance associated with the traditional notion of the muse. The redefined kind of 'muse' I am after is that debated in Christine Battersby's *Gender and genius*, and beautifully summed up by Patti Smith who, in reference to an exhibition set up with Robert Mapplethorpe, says that they '...chose to present a body of work that emphasised our relationship: artist and muse, a role that for both of us was interchangeable' (Battersby 1989; Smith 2010: 252).



Figure 1.6
Pierre Bonnard, *Nu dans la baignoire* (*Nude in the bath*), 1925
oil on canvas, 1048 x 654 mm
Tate, London

⁶ Here I refer to the significant other as a 'soul' to stress his or her position as a seat and source of vitality, action and inspiration.

Such a mutually beneficial intersection between both parties, and the kind of interchangeability between them as described by Smith, hinges on the body's relationship to the visible world. For Kelly Oliver vision is a means of direct interaction in a world that already provides a physical link, a proximal sense capable of being developed as part of an effective mode of looking that surpasses the objectification of the gaze. More concerned with matters related to the actual body rather than the theorised one, Oliver suggests that perception may be reformulated in such a way that, besides linking us to our environment and other people, it allows for a response (Oliver 2001: 19). But this is only possible if we concede the consequence of each other's subjectivity. In this regard, appropriating the circumstance of bearing witness, Oliver puts forward the notion of 'witnessing,' a pursuit contingent on mutual and unconditional engagement with each other.⁷

An art medium that competently concretises Oliver's notion of witnessing is body casting as the techniques that it involves go beyond the mere gazing between subject and artist. The resultant artefactual representation not only materialises the physical link between the two, but also transforms itself into a witness to their encounter. However, as with other representations of the human form, the perception of its inherent witnessing potential may be influenced by other circumstances such as its locational presence. This is addressed by Jane Wildgoose who, in her review of *Second skin*,⁸ an exhibition which brought together examples of body casts both as artefacts and as research tools, examines how the reaction to representations of the human body is influenced not only by the subject itself but also by the context in which it is placed (Wildgoose 2002). This issue is particularly relevant to George Segal. Phyllis Tuchmann traces this artist's move from painting to body casting and discusses how he uses this medium to tangibly explore the manner in which actual space affects individuals and the rapport between them. Exploring body casting and the consummate commitment it demands from the model, she shows how in the *Fragments* series, Segal filters down his subjects' bodies to their erotic gist (Tuchman 1993).

Carroll Janis and Joan Pachner, address Segal's bronzes of the human form that, unlike their gypsum counterparts, are enduring and may be placed outdoors (Janis & Pachner 2003). While highlighting Segal's attraction to plaster's malleability and its ability to metamorphose from viscous to solid state, the inherent permanence of bronze empowered his sculptures to transit from the protected ambience of the art realm to the exposed and harsh surroundings of the actual world. This material distinction does affect their bearing—while the bronzes affirm the persons' immutability within their own environment, the plaster ones emphasise the frailty and alienation of the human condition.

The same intense engagement with human concerns is present in the works of Carolee Schneemann and Joseph Cornell. Joanne Roche investigates Schneemann's *Moon in a tree* in which she conveys to her audience salient experiences of her deep friendship with Cornell, and implies that this was intimate but never physical (Roche 2001). In this performance she divulges their shared fantasies, such as the hypothetical life drawing class, in the 'psychic' space of the studio, where they draw each other's bodies. By transposing this rendezvous to a metaphysical space, they permitted themselves to imagine and yet defer their sexual encounter. With her dramatics Schneemann revives Cornell and suggestively demonstrates memory's ability to reconstruct a person's identity at any time. Schneemann's performance hinges on memory, a faculty which plays an important role in

⁷ Kelly Oliver's notion of 'witnessing' is addressed in the final section of Chapter Four.

⁸ *Second Skin*, an exhibition of life casts and contemporary sculpture, was held at Leeds' Henry Moore institute in 2002.

the works of both artists. While Schneemann interprets her recollections through her body, Cornell analyses and registers them through his box constructions with which he exploited to their limits the conventional and psychological potentials of the box (Noble 1994: 5).

Following these two artists' concern with the mutual representation of their bodies, I address the female subject as an accessory to the artistic process. As Euan Uglow's model, Lisa Coleman says 'It was also very liberating for me as a woman to be naked and yet feel completely comfortable, being viewed in a completely different way from how society normally judges the female form' (Coleman 2002). Her reaction illustrates how the shift in the roles of men and women has influenced the contemporary depiction of the nude. Interestingly enough, the female sitter expresses her reaction at being observed by the gaze of a male artist. Idoia states that shedding her clothes for the sake of art gives her an amazing sense of fulfilment: 'While at other times my body seems to be so ordinary, when engaged with you (myself) it regains its uniqueness and power to inspire.'⁹ *Model and supermodel* underscores the interdependence of the artist and model and the universal desire to understand the body's substance (Desmarais 2006: 150-61). This is made amply clear in Susannah Gregory's interview in which she reveals her experiences as an artist's model. In a similar vein, Kathleen Rooney confronts her relationships as a model with several artists (Rooney 2008).

But considering the artist's point of view in such a relationship, Nicholas Mirzoeff asserts that inspiration is forthcoming by the very fact that a representation signifies a transformation that, prior to its materialisation, can only be imagined. He notes that '[the body] cannot but represent both itself and a range of metaphorical meanings, which the artist cannot fully control, but only seeks to limit by the use of context, framing and style' (Mirzoeff 2003: 3).

The dissertation goes on to demonstrate that a convergence and assimilation between Idoia and myself takes place through each of the box assemblages presented. As a complex device, this kind of artefact addresses and takes into account several issues to ensure that any attempts at objectification, which might be triggered due to cultural presumptions, are either outrightly dismissed, or else countered by opposing and neutralising actions. In such cases the box assemblage is meant to be contemplated as a device of processual de-objectification. Of prime importance in this ambit is my respect to Idoia's integrity, free will and consciousness which I endeavour to refract through the artefact and conveyed to anyone who beholds it. Although I cannot access her mind and determine exactly what she might be thinking, her demeanour intimates that she prizes the circumstance of myself holding her as a source of inspiration. All this is possible as our engagement goes beyond a matter-of-fact collaboration between artist and model. Throughout our temporally limited sessions—I only share a relatively few hours per month with her—we empathise with each other and complexly interact and energise the encounter. It is with such a state of mind that we commit ourselves to the artistic process.

THE MODEL, MYSELF AND OTHER ARTIST-MODEL RELATIONSHIPS

The kind of issues I address in this thesis oblige me to unequivocally address my relationship with Idoia both as model and woman—a task that demands a good deal of self-reflection and the courage to overcome the discomfiture which the divulgement of personal emotions and sentiments tends to bring about. Of great help in this regard is Kathleen Rooney who in *Live nude model* confronts her relationships as a model with several artists

⁹ Idoia stated this while discussing with me her experiences as a model.

(Rooney 2008). Her recount encouraged me to delve into my relationship with Idoia and discuss it in an analytical way. Needless to say, in my case the viewpoint is reversed as Rooney is the female model whereas I am the artist. While ours are two different perspectives of the same kind of relationship, I am more conveniently positioned to invade the other party's 'privacy.' While Idoia presents me her bare body in all its fleshiness, her access to my corporeality is through the artefact itself, that is, once removed from its carnality. However, in the intimacy of the studio Idoia might transform me into the subject of her scrutiny. My vulnerability and earnestness might be all too visible to her.

Sarah R Phillips asserts that in her relationship with the male artist, a female model may enjoy a controlling stance and challenges her body's objectification (Phillips 2006). The model Susan Gregory claims that she is able to regulate the circumstances of her session with the artist as they unfold, by exploiting her centrality (Desmarais 2006). In a somewhat analogous vein, as female subject, Idoia takes on the role of performer—even when perfectly still she is never passive. She is wholeheartedly committed to the artistic process and although on one hand she is determined to avoid anything that might annoy her, on the other she is ready to undergo unpleasant procedures as long as the end result pleases her.



Figure 1.7
Gustav Klimt, *The kiss* (detail), 1907-8
oil on canvas, 1800 x 1800 mm
The Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

Fully aware that my art does not intend in anyway to objectify her and my approach toward her is nothing but respectful, she releases her inhibitions, transforms her body into a medium of self-expression, and willingly subjects every part of it to the artistic process. Similar feelings are also shared by the other two models, and probably they are the source of Kelly's feelings of connectivity with Idoia and Lucya (Appendix I). Although I feel confident in stating that studio propriety has assured the success of my relationship with Idoia, I am less certain with regard to those particular factors which animate and add excitement to it, sentiments which have kept it tantalisingly appealing to both of us. Although acknowledging that sex is usually precluded from modern day artist-model alliances, Rooney points out that these may still turn out to be intimate, exciting and intense. While I fully concur with such a statement, I would say that desire, attraction and, more importantly, the apprehension of the unknown, play key roles in such a relationship. Occasionally these feelings are the cause of anxiety during my sessions with Idoia, maybe because of the import of our relationship. However, the sense of fulfilment derived from these experiences is hardly ever mitigated, while desire and attraction, together with the aforementioned tension, are sublimated through the artefacts (Leader 2002: 53-4).

Ours is an unconventional kind of friendship since, as Rooney explains, a friend does not usually allow you to stare at and scrutinise her nakedness. More unexpected from a friend is license to physically handle her bare body and use it as an 'accessory' to various processes; even less commonplace is her consent to register by means of camcorders such activities. Such observations made me all the more aware that the implications of my relationship with Idoia needed to be thoroughly addressed, even though such an action did not ascertain clear-cut answers to pertinent questions. Why have I never introduced Idoia to members of my family? Why do I passionately and, I should add, jealously guard this relationship? Is discreetness so critical to such an alliance? Once Idoia has access to my studio space, why is it off-limits to family members and friends? Make no mistake, I am aware that these are not questions which can be easily answered. Any circumspect answers to them must take into account the precariousness of my relationship with her, one which needs to be constantly protected and nourished; and as for the last, the privileged status of the studio space which not only provides a place where we may experience mutual trust and nurture our relationship, but also doubles as a depository for cherishable items and experiences pertaining to ourselves alone. At this point I will make concise references to four artist-model relationships that are dominated by a desire to seek beyond the physical representation of the female body.

Throughout his life Bonnard struggled to come to terms with the other by persistently painting Martha, with each endeavour seemingly delving deeper into her enigmatic existence. In Gabriel Josipovici's novel, *Contre-jour: a triptych after Pierre Bonnard*, when Martha asks him whether he is interested in other models, he answers 'Some people see the same thing in a thousand different women. The interesting thing is to see a thousand things in the same woman' (Josipovici 1986: 56). However, for him Martha was heterotelic; his intent went beyond her carnality, on that which in this case could only be reached through her. While her indifference to him was not an issue, he countered the passage of time by donning her with an ageless corporeality.

Another long-lasting relationship is that between Gustave Klimt and Emilie Flöge, an alliance that remained prolific for 21 years until his death in 1918. What might have started as a brief affair between the two, developed into an emotionally charged and intellectually stimulating relationship. Apart from being Klimt's model and muse, Flöge was an accomplished couturier, and shrewd enough to give a sense of stability to Klimt's otherwise

complicated life. At times, they also collaborated on dressmaking ventures, fusing their design ideas into stunning haute couture. Although they were not married and never lived together, and the chronicles of their lives suggest that they never had sex with each other, the copulation of bodies in the *The Kiss* (1907-8) [fig. 1.7], tells his desire might have been otherwise. Although Klimt might have wished for physical communion with Flöge, their guarded detachment was key for him to go beyond her carnality. The deferential way he treated her and cherished their relationship, is a clear indication of how much he valued her and betrays his apprehension of losing her (Fisher 1992).

More recently, Jewish American painter Ronald Kitaj ardently portrayed Sandra Fisher, his wife and model, throughout his whole career and well after her untimely death in 1994.¹⁰ He was thoroughly convinced that by painting her he could ‘seek communion with her in pictures’ (Myers 2008). Also a writer with a particular interest in Jewish matters, Kitaj resorted to the Kabbalah as a means of conveying his emotions toward Sandra after her demise (Livingstone 2010).



Figure 1.8
Ronald Brooks Kitaj, *Los Angeles no. 22* (*Painting-drawing*), 2001
oil on canvas, 914 x 914 mm
Marlborough Gallery, New York

Although he bestowed Sandra divine status, or that of ‘Shekkinah,’ the feminine deity of the Kabbalah, Germaine Greer points out that

¹⁰ Fisher died unexpectedly of a cerebral aneurysm on 19th September 1994, at the relatively young age of 47.

...Fisher was not divine; she was very, very human. She was one of the first women painters to succeed in painting the male nude as an object of desire. Her boys lie spread-eagled on tumbled sheets, their flushed skin bathed in the golden luminosity of summer afternoons (Greer 2008).

Besides being a successful painter herself, Sandra was a source of inspiration and moral support to Kitaj, her joyousness counteracting his pessimism. Although having met before, it was in 1969 that they came closer to each other, sealing their relationship through marriage in 1983 (Livingstone 2010: 40).

Kitaj strongly believed that works are open to reinterpretation that reflects new circumstances in life. *The sculptor* is a 1992 painting depicting an artist working in earnest on a statue of his recently deceased wife, together with an ephemeral presence of her in the background calling on him to wind down the day's work. While never suspecting the tragic fate of his lively significant other, and unaware that this work might have foreboded the worst to come, Kitaj clearly identified himself with this sculptor, probably apprehensive of the precariousness of their existence. Following his familial affliction, this work took upon it a load of new meanings (Livingstone 2010: 51).

Of particular interest is Kitaj's series of paintings called *Los Angeles*, the first of which dates as early as 2002, eight years after Sandra's death. While this name derives from that of his adopted city, its literal translation, *The Angels*, stands as a pun for himself and Sandra. Here he suggests that they are ephemeral beings just like angels, capable of intense, intimate and amorous moments of togetherness. Although a sense of misfortune is easily felt in these paintings, they were Kitaj's only means of being with his wife. The first of the series, simply entitled *Los Angeles no. 1*, depicts both of them as undressed birdlike creatures with multi-coloured feathers. Fused together at the arms and legs, their bodies are transformed into a permanent embrace or rather a strange kind of hybrid existence. In this example their convergence and assimilation is close to completion. In *Los Angeles no. 22 (Painting-Drawing)* (2001) [fig. 1.8] Kitaj and Sandra enfold each others' naked bodies, while she traces the outline of his face. Such an act implies that both of them are artist and model at the same time and any unilateral attempt at objectification between the two is completely dismissed. In this work Kitaj not only emphasises the competency of Sandra as an artist, but acknowledges her additional merit of inspiring his own work, especially that which relates to the male and female theme (Livingstone 2010: 58-9). The work is reminiscent of *Moon in a tree*, or the hypothetical life drawing class which takes place in the 'psychic' studio space of Cornell and Schneemann (Roche 2001).

After her death, for thirteen years till he took his own life in 2007, Kitaj continued painting Sandra in an ardent manner. In *Painting Sandra*, 2007, completed just before his own demise, Kitaj depicts himself portraying her in a realm that is apart of mundaneness. The painting intimates that the artist not only succeeded in recreating such a realm beyond the picture plane, but also managed to transpose himself to it. This work is reminiscent of Bonnard's *Nu dans la baignoire* as in both examples the artist forsakes his prosaic existence to effect convergence with his spouse.

With regard to my own liaison with Idoia, I am more drawn to the relationship between Edouard and Marianne, the artist and model in Jacques Rivette's *La belle noiseuse* (1991) [fig. 1.9].¹¹ Although theirs is not a long sustained liaison, what makes me biased in favour of their relationship is their synergy, by virtue of which they struggle for that which lies beyond them. On one hand, Edouard seeks the essence of her womanhood, the substance of

¹¹ *La belle noiseuse* is loosely based on a short story by Honoré de Balzac.

her very being; on the other, Marianne is determined to see the artist's quest through, perhaps because she was eager to encounter a facsimile of her true self. In this regard, Edouard was her means to an end. As their pursuit progresses, their relationship becomes more tense and riveting; at one particular instance, when he was about to lose hope, she orders him to continue.



Figure 1.9
Still from Jacques Rivette's film *La belle noiseuse*, 1991
featuring Michel Piccoli as Édouard Frenhofer and Emmanuelle Béart as Marianne
Pierre Grise Productions

But what sets our artist-model liaison apart from the ones I have been referring to, is the relationship between us and the artefact itself. The box assemblage is constantly in a state of 'becoming us'—a unitary, but at the same time bi-corporeal, entity. Although our relationship is not physical, and the touching involved is an unavoidable part of the creative process, we endeavour to converge and assimilate within the spatiality of the artefact itself, while any desired sexual consummation is perpetually held in abeyance through time.

Our intimacy, both corporeal and psychological, is underscored by images of shared nudity placed inside a number of box assemblages such as *Cabinet for intimate landscapes* (2009-) [fig. 2.5] and *Cabinet for sublimated desires* (2009-) [fig. 2.1]. In one particular painting I am the only person exposed, standing next to a fully dressed and seated Idoia while she enjoys a cup of tea. This setup not only disrupts the traditional association of nudity with the female subject, but accentuates the unconventionality of this interchange of dressed and undressed states by presenting it in a domestic setting.

At this point, I wish to make reference to Stanley Spencer's *Self-portrait with Patricia Preece* (1936), and *Double nude portrait: the artist with his second wife* (1937) [fig. 1.10]. In these two paintings another male heterosexual artist shares his nudity with that of a particular female subject. Patricia became Spencer's spouse soon after he divorced his

first wife Hilda in 1937. However, chronicles of their relationship suggest that amorosity was unidirectional, from him to her. Herself a lesbian, she never reciprocated his passion for her and, in all probability, their marriage was never consummated. All along, Patricia remained in love with another woman by the name of Dorothy Hepworth.

Similarly as to what happens in my double portraits, in these two paintings of Spencer the subjectivity of the female model is counterpoised with that of the male artist. Each in its own particular way, this coupling of subjectivities effects a synergy which disrupts the traditional dichotomy between male artist and female model. This opens up the possibility of a kind of intimacy which goes beyond the carnal. Further to this, all these pictures betray the reverential manner in which the artist upholds the female presence at his side.

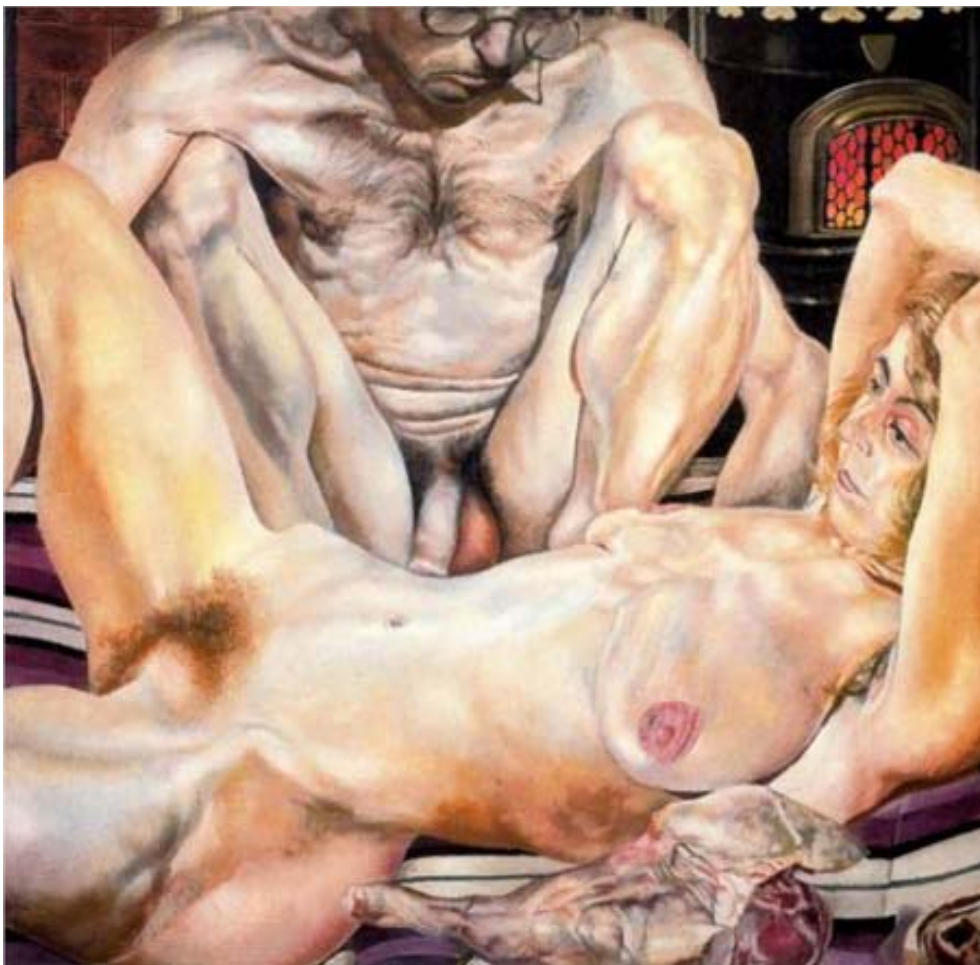


Figure 1.10
Stanley Spencer, *Double nude portrait; the artist with his second wife*, 1937
oil on canvas, 915 x 935 mm
Tate, London

But the similarities between our paintings stop here. My relationship with Idoia is of a completely different nature from that between Stanley and Patricia, and the commitment to our work is dictated by different kinds of earnestness. Spencer's representations, in which he shares his denuded presence with that of Patricia, are cogitations in paint on the lack of empathy between them. Although their bodies are physically close, their sentiments for each other are not. Spencer's objective was Patricia herself; his intent was her love and physicality. Although he was disposed to have them shared with Dorothy, her true love, they remained elusive to him. As for my own double portraits, I do concede that they are permeated with a degree of prurience; however, their ultimate goal goes beyond Idoia's body and my affections for her.

I will end this section by making reference to Lucian Freud, a painter whose emulation of the rawness of flesh with paint is influenced by that of Spencer but, unlike him and myself, upheld a harsh detachment from his female subjects. Freud points out: 'I am only interested in painting the actual person, in doing a painting of them, not in using them to some ulterior end of art' (Hughes 1987:16). And for him, the closest one can get to an unaffected and truthful presence of someone is through his or her nakedness. Freud permits himself to gather factual information from his undressed subjects and translate this into candid representations of them. His ultimate goal is the transmutation of their bodies into paint; he is not interested in venturing beyond this.

Freud's gaze has the sole purpose of recording the 'rawness' of a body's existence. The metamorphosis of its carnal, sexual, and fleshly presence is the unambiguous conclusion of his engagement with the sitter. In *The shock of the new*, Robert Hughes hints that Freud's detached gaze disallows any sentiments which he might harbour for the person concerned, to imbue the painting itself (Hughes 1991: 417). His gaze is 'intimate' insofar as the gathering of pictorial data is concerned. Whether male or female, he subjected his sitters to the same biting scrutiny and work process. And probably, this is why Freud did not find anything ethically wrong in using his own children as nude models. However, this might be regarded as another weird aspect of the dysfunctional fatherhood which was the only kind he was able to offer. He painted his daughter Annie in the nude when she was just 14; an experience which now, as an adult, she considers to have been a transgression of her pubescent body and its innocent mind (Grieg 2013: 176-7).¹²

THE MATERIALITY OF THE ARTEFACTS

At this juncture I would like to turn my attention to the studio-practice component of my investigation. While painting is still my preferred medium since I decided to take up art as a career in 1985, in the initial stages of this current practice-led research I found it necessary not to remain utterly reliant on it in view that throughout Western culture it has readily served as a means of objectification of the female body. In view that painted representations are constructs produced independently from the physicality of the subject, it is understandable that the medium might easily shift to a means of objectification. I was after an artefact that not only respected the agency of the female subject, but allowed her active participation in its creation. To this effect, I sought inspiration from the box works of Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Cornell [and George Maciunas, aware that if I conceived the artefact as a three-dimensional structure, I provided myself a circumscribed tangible space that could host secondary three-dimensional artworks and objects, and also multiple planes to accommodate paintings. I was mindful that such a structure could serve as a platform whereby the model expresses herself. At the same time I turned my attention to the work of Segal, aware that with body casting I could set and uphold a direct physical link between the female subject and myself. With the box assemblage I sustained my fascination of painting but disrupted its objectifying power.

The majority of the body-themed box assemblages I am presenting are characterised by their similarities to polyptychs, tabernacles and reliquaries, the sacred images synonymous with them replaced with close-ups of our fragmented bodies. The appeal of reinterpreting this Christian art form lies, in part, in my desire to create a shrine mainly dedicated to the female body. In many ways the box becomes a fusion of the sacred and the profane, the religious and the sexual. The exploration into the sacred is aimed at exploiting that which is 'other'

¹² Annie is the daughter of his ex-wife Kitty Garman from whom he had already been separated for 11 years prior to this incident.

in the western theological tradition, namely God and the Divine. This kind of exploration is made possible by the artefact's dynamics that encourages the viewer to experience its deific symbolism in stages.

In a typical box assemblage, the fragmented bodies are represented by means of a series of paintings and collages that adorns its walls, and plaster casts produced by means of moulds taken directly off them. The surface of each painting, with its layer upon layer of oil paint, appears to replicate the flesh. Colour and light are identifiable with the subjects and the mood the work is meant to express. The aesthetic immediacy of the natural bodies translates into the aesthetic immediacy of the oil paint, and thus the representation acquires its own distinctiveness that is removed from its real life counterpart.

Over the last three years the box assemblage has been the means through which I explore my own sexuality and that of the female model, breaking down our bodies, at times distilling them to their erotic essentials. Through the artefact I exert a degree of control over the female subject whose fragmented parts I multiply, couple with those of my body, and re-interpret through intimate compositions and, where necessary, through sensually charged colours. The sexual charge of the whole setup is augmented by the inclusion of the *objet trouvé* and our personal belongings placed side by side with the representations of our fragmented bodies. Through what Gosden terms 'presencing,' these objects are removed from the places where they usually belong, related to similarly gathered objects, and re-contextualised through the artefact (Gosden 2004: 39).

Unlike painting, the realisation of a box assemblage involves processes that are far more complex. Once I am satisfied with the design of the 'container,' I prepare the working drawings and scale models that eventually serve as the basis for the actual structure.¹³ While all this is going on, I reflect about the objects, including representations of the body, which will become part of the setup. The model is invited to choose items that are meant to establish a direct link with her.

Photo sessions with the model, in which I gather references for future use, are a particular aspect of the box assemblage creation. Critical in these picture-taking sessions is the subject's demiurgic input and the skilful use of the camera whose power lies in its ability to register fleeting moments which otherwise would be lost. I push the camera trigger at those instances when the interaction between us is intense and worth registering. When a particular image is so powerful as to arouse feelings of 'selfsameness' in me, when boundaries between the same and the other seem to be momentarily eroded, it qualifies as worthy reference material. Photography provides me with visual information pertaining to the model's body. My compilation of Idoia's photographs spans one and a half decades and links various stages of her life. Geoffrey Batchen points out that

...photography has never provided us with the truthful appearance of things, but it has guaranteed, through the magic of contiguity, the possibility of a direct emotional empathy across an otherwise insurmountable abyss of space and time. Contiguity, the condition of being in contact, is what can give any sign in the present a direct association with another sign in the past, and it is precisely this temporal and historical connection that provides photography with its uniquely 'carnal' knowledge of the world (Batchen 2001).

The photographs are part of the materiality of the box assemblages once removed from the artefact itself. As records, they are tangible transactions between us which, on one hand permit a distancing of myself from the

¹³ The box assemblages are conceived through a combination of notes and sketches put down directly into notebooks and loose-leaf agendas.

model when the need arises; on the other hand, by displacement, they overcome the limitedness of our physical encounters and allow me to re-experience past interactions.

At this point I wish to state that I am a painter at heart and this is why paintings are a key characteristic of the box assemblages. Painting gives me great satisfaction and I treat it as a private matter, retreating into solitude when I am at it. The solitary hours I spend painting in the studio are the time when the other manifests itself and the presence of anyone else would be unsettling. I fully agree with artist Alex Kanevsky who compares painting to a kind of conversation with the canvas which might be exciting or boring, ugly or beautiful: 'Like a conversation, it can have unexpected turns, sudden discoveries and hidden subtext and periods of silence' (Walker 2009). I dare say the other is another active participant in such a conversation.

For most of the paintings which adorn the box assemblage, I make use of the photographic references I have available, where possible going for a dynamic composition which is capable of establishing and linking various loci of interest. I transpose relevant information from the photograph to the canvas by means of a complex array of pencil and ballpoint markings. I apply paint to the canvas in calculated patches, eventually transforming the paint surface into a kaleidoscope of colours which, seen at a distance, optically blends into coherent forms. Once the painting is complete, evidence of these markings remains, self-reflexively pointing to themselves and to their artefactual status. The resultant contrast between the pliable carnality of the body and the rigidity of the underlying ballpoint lines signals the transformation of the bodies into architectonic forms of flesh. The complex exterior of the body and the underlying 'scaffold' on which they are laid are shown together at a single point in time.

Unlike painting in which space is virtually created within the two-dimensional plane of the canvas, casting is a three-dimensional medium with a direct impact on physical space. I use cosmetic silicone and resin plaster for the mould and cast respectively; both materials, once set, capturing the palpability and nuances of the skin. Probably the most exciting moment of the procedure is when the cast is removed from the mould and I am able to appreciate the result of the work involved. Considering that I seldom paint the model at life-size, it is pleasantly surprising to hold in hand a part-impression of her body that is true to life in terms of both appearance and scale.

It is a binary process whose intent is to come to terms with the very strong feelings I feel for this woman and with the subjective objectification of myself through her, or what Scarry refers to as the condition of 'self-displacing, self-transforming objectification' (Scarry 1985: 166). Through transubstantiation¹⁴ the artefact re-materialises the actuality of a bi-corporeal entity that, unlike the temporality of our breathing existence, is suspended in time together with particular moments of togetherness, sameness and equivalency, to become a locus of our convergence and near assimilation. All this implies that the box assemblage is all about embodied experience, or what Vivian Sobchack refers to as '...the lived body as, at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*: a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialised capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others' (Sobchack 2004: 2). As a complex representational device, with an innate iconography, this artefact is all about our lived bodies and the symbiosis between them. Despite the pre-eminence of Idoia as the female subject in the box assemblage, I still remain its primary creator,

¹⁴ *Transubstantiation*, the process whereby the Eucharistic bread and wine alter their substance but not appearance and molecular structure, is dealt with further on.

and ultimately, I not only transform it into a sanctum for my being, my feelings and my desires, but also into a prosthetic extension of myself.

But notwithstanding its prosthetic attributes, Scarry suggests that there also exists a completely different kind of association between the box assemblage, Idoia and myself; one that intersects its actual creation, or its coming into being, with the liveliness of our subjectivities. Translating into an intimate kind of affinity between the object and its makers, the artefact-in-the-making not only attempts to mirror or augment our selves as seen from without, but also endeavours to simulate our combined consciousness. This process results in a structure that not only embodies the model and myself but externalises our ‘awareness of aliveness’ (Scarry 1985: 289). What makes Scarry’s idea so interesting is that the object of our creation and its ubiquity is not just the materialisation of our existential selves but the exteriorisation of our sentient consciousnesses and, accordingly, our capacity for becoming and re-inventing ourselves through ‘self-replication and self-modification.’

Although at a componential level its materiality is incognizant and incapable of showing affection, as an Idoia-themed sanctuaried structure, the box assemblage is the result of my apperception of this woman’s body and psyche, or rather the materialised maturation of my feelings toward her. While in itself it is unable to apperceive her body and psyche, inherently it is the result of such an apperception. Ultimately, this artefact is a construction whose every component is meant to reflect my deepest emotions for this woman, at times turning out to be not unlike a re-conception of this cherished person. It carries the twofold responsibility of enduringly sustaining my relationship with her while fulfilling my desire to mediate with that which represents otherness in my existence. Imbued with my imagination and acting as a point of interchange between myself and a specific female body, the box assemblage not only acquires its own responsibilities and serviceableness but, notwithstanding the inanimateness of its materiality, it also takes on zoetic characteristics.

The last box assemblage to be added to the series stands out from all the rest because of its pyramidal shape and construction made entirely of milled stainless steel and transparent acrylic. Although it also includes casts and paintings, projected moving images are its main form of representation. On each of the three internal faces of the pyramid are projected looped video clips of three models who, besides Idoia, include Kelly and Lucya. These clips show these women performing as models and participating in the creative process within the studio. Unlike the others, this artefact’s success and functionality is essentially dependent on the moving image. This particular box assemblage might be the way forward with these artefacts.

However, there is also a significant difference between the box assemblages concluded at an early stage of my research, such as *Small tabernacle for Idoia*, 2010, and *Reliquary of Idoia*, 2011 [Fig. 1.4, Fig. 2.2], and later examples such as *Triptych for us*, 2014 and *Small tabernacle for Kelly*, 2011- (unfinished) which, although started a few years back, is still a work-in-progress. While earlier examples are more ‘female oriented,’ later works are more ‘myself cum model.’ This transition is a significant development in my knowledge and insight, both as scholar and artist. It is the direct result of my synthesis of the work of a number of theoreticians, and my perennial pursuit, through studio work, of a better understanding of my own sexuality.

And this brings me to the state of ‘unfinishedness’ of a number of the later box assemblages. Originally, my intent was to bring each artefact to a satisfactory conclusion; however, as my thinking and studio work progressed, the possibility of seeing them drawn to a close became less certain. Through time, the box

assemblage's existence, rather than seeking finality, attuned itself to that of its protagonists; becoming a direct reflection of their subjectivity, it embraced its fluid nature, forever changing over time.

Chapter two

THE SELF AND THE OTHER

While underpinning discourses on the self–other binary, this chapter demonstrates the possibility of bringing about and nurturing a synergy between the two poles with the intent of actualising a symbiotic relationship between them. In terms of two diverse individuals just as Idoia and myself, who willingly share a relationship, this may translate into a fluid and mutually benevolent alliance and ultimately an intersection between their persona.

The desires that have been maturing over the years in my consciousness, and my conviction that all along Idoia, as the other-ed person vis-à-vis to me in our relationship, might be the answer to their partial satiation, tally perfectly well with Hegel's assertion that otherness is a consequence of self-consciousness (Geniušas 2008). Idoia, as the embodiment of otherness from my point of view, posits herself as the key to my deep-rooted feelings. Knowledge that her assimilability is finite, on one hand makes me more zealous for her; on the other hand it frustratingly increases my sense of lack.

In this chapter, throughout which notions of self-referentiality and transfiguration are running threads, I address the relationship between us, and how this impinges on and is represented through the box assemblage. This artefact upholds the discourses of Emmanuel Lévinas and Luce Irigaray with the specific intent of seeking convergence between the other and the self. Based on Lévinas' assertion that the divine epitomises the other, an association that implies superiority and precedence over the self, I set about creating an ecclesiastically inspired structure that incorporates various divine tropes, but also serves as our shelter. Thus, the box assemblage not only provides an ideal space where Irigaray's affirmation on the interchangeability of the feminine and the divine is given tangible form, but also a space where we may be active players. Through its micro-ambience, the box assemblage is capable of subjecting the female body to a de-othering process in relation to myself. This follows my thesis that notwithstanding her specificity, *within the context of my work* Idoia simultaneously personifies and transcends womanhood. Qualifying such a statement, here I refer to Idoia when, in her capacity as female subject, she *expressly* presents herself and performs in my studio. In such instances I do believe that she not only sheds off any traces of Simone de Beauvoir's 'immanence' she might have, but also transforms herself into a quasi-agent through whom I may access the other (Beauvoir 2011).

While in the subsequent chapter I focus more closely on the physical and aesthetic attributes of the box assemblage itself, in the following pages I attest to this thesis by first and foremost demonstrating that these artefacts are in actual fact the means through which I seek to mediate between myself and the other. The chapter is divided into four sections.

In the first section, entitled *The self and the other*, I address the triangulated relationship between myself, Idoia as a 'specific' woman, and the other she represents, a particular kind of association which has been evolving within the confined space of my studio for over fifteen years. While emphasising the centrality of our bodies in this relationship, I discuss how the process of re-visioning and re-assessing it through the box assemblage becomes a means of delving into my own self.

In the second section, entitled *The gaze*, I address the critical role played by the series of main and subsidiary gazes which the box assemblage, as a result of its dynamics, gives rise to and discuss how it becomes a means

not only of complicity but also of cohesion between Idoia, myself and any prospective partakers. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty I discuss the gaze as a spatial entity that although germinating in the intimacy of the studio, is appropriated by the box assemblage itself. The rapprochement between the self and the other that starts off in the studio is taken on and transposed elsewhere by means of the artefact.

In the penultimate section, entitled *My work as a means of self representation*, I assess the potentiality of the box assemblage to act as the locus where my anima may come to terms with that which throughout my adult life has been presenting itself as other to me. While visually the box assemblage is a portrayal of a composite of Idoia's body and my own, it goes beyond the status of a mere representational device to establish and sustain a direct link with us [fig. 2.1].



Figure 2.1
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Cabinet of sublimated desires* (detail), 2009- (unfinished)
mixed media, w 652mm, H 652mm, D 543mm (when closed)
artist's collection

In the fourth and final section, entitled *My work within the genre of the female nude*, I explicate how the box assemblage complexly disrupts the traditional complementary positions of the viewing subject and viewed object and affords an alternative mode of looking at the female body. I assert that the box assemblage, rather than just a representational device for the female body, is the re-materialised actuality of a bi-corporeal entity, mainly made out of the body-in-pieces of Idoia as the female model, and to a lesser extent fragments of my own body, or that

of the male artist. Both of us are the binary driving force behind this artefact, and invariably, we are ever present and visible through it.

THE SELF AND THE OTHER

In my current practice I subject the bodies of the female model and myself to a process of metamorphic manipulation and displacement, I incorporate them in the box assemblage, and thereon I transform them into a composite abstraction. And yet, notwithstanding this transformation, our identities remain recognisable and a complete assimilation between us remains a forlorn conclusion. Lamentably, the impossibility of this venture is due to the phallocentrism inherent in Western subjectivity that effects an uneven relationship between males and females. The term phallogentric was coined by psychoanalyst Alfred Ernest Jones to brand and highlight his disagreement with Sigmund Freud's fixation on the phallus and his insistence that female sexuality hinges on its lack. Dissent from Freud's prejudiced views on the sexuality of the female body comes not only from prominent psychoanalysts, the likes of Melanie Reizes Klein, but also feminist philosophers such as Irigaray who in *Speculum of the other woman* forcefully addresses the shortfalls of phallogentrism and its associated alienation (Irigaray: 1987; *The Literary Encyclopedia*).

I counter the status quo through the box assemblage's realm where Idoia and myself not only 'subsume' to one another but our individual subjectivities become coterminal. Although the artefact presents the body of the female subject in pieces, at times together with others of my own body, it also celebrates its plenitude and thereby counters the notion of lack that Freud associates with it. Probably, these body fragments that take the form of casts produced by means of moulds taken directly off our bodies, are the more conspicuous elements of the box assemblage. As for the female body parts, these require the direct tactile interaction between their owner and myself; she subjects her skin to my hands, enhancing the awareness of each other's presence in the process.

While Paul Schilder describes the skin or surface of the body as a 'zone of sensitivity' whose susceptiveness is more acute at the orificial regions (Schilder 1935: 88), Elizabeth Grosz contends that in reality such a bodily zone extends beyond the stimulus responsive flesh to the immediate space surrounding it (Grosz 1994: 79). This special territory is an extension of the body and its trespassing is tantamount to a transgression of the body itself. The casts in my boxes are the result of a consensual breaching of this space, an access to the body's cutaneous surface and at times ingress of its orifices [fig. 2.2]. The closest the body can get to its surroundings is through its openings that also happen to be areas highly sensitised to physical attraction and concupiscence (Schilder 1935: 88). Thus, body casting demands a heightened commitment from the model, especially when it is directed to her erogenous zones. I go further and say body casting divests the unclothed female subject from the 'invisible garment' of nudity (Carter 2000: 29) and gives the artist direct access to her sensational ego, in both corporeal and psychic terms. Once complete, the body casts together with the 'space' that incorporates the zone of sensitivity referred to above, are transposed to the box assemblage where both acquire and hold particular significance to its substantialness.

Grosz also suggests that the image the subject has of her own appearance which, rather than defined by her corporality, is mutable and pertinent to her psyche and milieu (Grosz 1994: 85). Such an image goes beyond her actual anatomical confines, and claims a permeable boundary that is susceptible to infiltration across it. Needless to say, the same rationale applies to my self-representation, and such infiltrations may be the affection and care

we show each other, or the feelings we share and which are easily discernable in my work. At times, I get the impression that the outer shell of a box assemblage is about to interchange with ours, the actual accessing of its interior becoming a traversal into our own image. While enclosing within its perimeter a segment of the privileged studio space, it also embodies our subjectivities.



Figure 2.2
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Reliquary for Idoia*, 2012
mixed media, W 149mm, H 149mm, D 149mm (when closed)
artist's collection

Casts of the orificial regions, such as those housed in *Reliquary for Idoia* [fig. 2.2], indicate that while still in a fluid state the silicone is capable of limited penetration into the woman's vagina and mildly engaging with her thus. Drawing from Schilder, this implies that the casting procedure establishes an intimate contact between the subject's body and the resultant artefact that goes beyond mere touching. It is an intimate kind of closeness which, originating from the silicone mould 'caressing' the body, pervades the whole box assemblage. While Schilder suggests that the closest the body can get to its surroundings is through the orifices, body casting brings the subject closer to the artist by taking fair license of such openings.

With regard to this closeness, I use a digital camcorder to register the production of moulds taken off the model's body. Looped video clips that show salient parts of this footage are now an integral part of four box assemblages. The power of such recordings captured through the camcorder's own 'gaze,' lies in their ability to relay over and over again what in actual fact are transient yet intense moments. Through playback mode I look at the female subject and myself from a distance, in a spatial and temporal sense. The video clip provides box assemblage with contiguity, transposing my interactions with the female body through space and time.

This brings me back as to why I work with the female nude, an activity I have been doing for over two decades. Essentially, I consider it to be a process of refashioning and idealisation which enables me to create a metonymic extension of the female other whilst I strive to bring out my own desires. Furthermore, the representation of a

woman's body implies interacting with her and relentlessly searching for that which is poignant in the resultant relationship. Jim Mooney aptly states that '[p]oignancy moves us, redirects us, and the movement it gives rise to, leans us toward the other and inclines us toward the condition of implication where the same and the other become entwined, enfolded, enlaced' (Mooney 2006: 138). This makes the undertaking all the more exciting and compelling.

Pursuing the other demands a better understanding of my own being through self-reflection since, as Judith Butler rightly observes, '[a]n ability to affirm what is contingent and incoherent in oneself may allow one to affirm others who may or may not 'mirror' one's own constitution' (Butler 2005: 41). The box assemblage also highlights the precariousness of the self. In four examples this is highlighted by the video clips that, according to Raymond Bellour, are not only capable of representing the self but also the irresoluteness of its identity (Bellour 2008). Thus, the willingness to assert my own limitations turns out to be a form of empowerment with which my desire to come to terms with the other translates into empathy with the model's body and also into a sense of bonding with her. The box assemblage becomes a means of reaching out or rather a source of exchange and, metaphorically, an act of nascency. Such reciprocity is not just with the model in and of herself but also with the female other that appropriates her refashioned and displaced body. This reminds me of Bernardo Bertolucci's 2003 film *The dreamers* which deals with the triangulated relationship between Isabelle, Theo and Matthew. While Isabelle and Theo are twins sharing a self-devouring kinship, Theo is their newly found friend, who will also be the intruder, the stranger.¹⁵ At one point in the film the siblings are described not as individuals but as two halves of the same person. Although in Bertolucci's film this dualism is taken to extremes, every so often I feel that the box assemblage attempts to embrace such dualism; despite being a unitary structure, within its folds it holds the near-assimilated corporeality and individuality of two persons.

No matter how close two individuals can get, there will always be a degree of disengagement that hampers the realisation of a complete bond between them. People can share anything but not their existence because a degree of unspecified difference, which makes complete understanding unattainable, always stands between them. Fernando Pessoa in *The Book of disquiet* addresses this predicament:

I suppose no one truly admits the existence of another person. One might concede that the other person is alive and feels and thinks like oneself, but there will always be an element of difference, a perceptible discrepancy... (Pessoa 1991: 29).

This is relevant to the relationship between the female subject and myself. Nonetheless, the creative process allows me to venture into what is enigmatic in her personality, and address the anonymous diversity she represents. Her engagement sustains my link with the other, a link that is aided by the closeness and 'touching' demanded by the artistic processes involved. Rather than a detached action required by a manufacturing process, this kind of touch approximates an endearment and a caress, that which according to Cathryn Vasseleu '...gives shape to flesh in the form of a non-negatable, non-incorporable otherness as the site of an affection that cannot be gathered' (Vasseleu 2005: 126).¹⁶ This touch gets imprinted in the artefact and as a consequence may be experienced through it.

¹⁵Bernardo Bertolucci's *The dreamers* is based on Gilbert Adair's novel *The holy innocents*, first published in 1988 and again in 2004 as *The dreamers* by Faber and Faber Ltd. Adair, who draws inspiration from Albert Camus' *Étranger*, is also the film's screenwriter.

¹⁶Here Vasseleu is drawing on Irigaray.

My pursuit for the other through the model's body, an endless process in itself, is also a means of affirming each other's complex and mutable nature. It is the result of the corporeal generosity that permeates our artist-model relationship. Unconsciously, or perhaps even consciously, we take on board Rosalyn Diprose's assertion that '[i]t is because bodies are opened onto others, rather than being distinct, that we can act, be affected, have an identity, and remain open to change without conscious direction' (Diprose 2002: 69). Idoia has always consented to and aided my search for that which is other through her body. My representations of her are the result of an elaborate and long process that actualises disengagement between the real and represented woman. Invariably, the latter is more consonant with my own self than with its carnate counterpart.

So the box assemblage may be contemplated as a personal physical construction of what Silverman terms 'identity-at-a-distance,' or rather a representation of the other with which I am capable of orienting and correlating myself. Although it attempts the ultimate idealisation of the female subject, it is 'aware' of the futility of such a pursuit. If such an elusive objective were possible, it would result in a demoralising experience, as I would be unable to assimilate myself with the end result. Rather than an unreasonable exertion at perfection, this artefact is a heartfelt attempt at the idealisation of and identification with the female subject in full knowledge of each other's limitations and differences.

Such a discourse elicits reference to the notion of the 'good enough' threshold, devised by Donald Woods Winnicott to describe mothers who do not seek or desire maternal perfection, and appropriated by Kaja Silverman to describe an alternative kind of ideality which accedes to further improvement. The box assemblage effects a 'good enough' idealisation on a woman who, while I find to possess physical attraction coupled with an appealing disposition, one might easily cross in the street in view of the smallness of our island-state. Being particularly interested in my work, comfortable in my company and readily available to partake in my projects, Idoia also proves to be a 'good enough' model. And so with such a 'good enough' model it seems much easier to me to establish a dialogue with that which is 'other' or what Irigaray refers to as the difference that is nearest to oneself (Irigaray 2002: xii). Ultimately, the box assemblage is a 'good enough' representation of *ourselves*, not faultless but one which embodies our 'unresented preoccupation' with the task at hand (Winnicott 2005: 13-14; Silverman 1996: 225). Besides acting as a window on an intimate world shared by this woman and myself, its structure becomes the defining border of the voyeuristic experience and the outside or real world of the viewer.

As artist and craftsman I materialise the concepts of difference, presence and intricacy just referred to above through the materiality of the artefacts, in this case the box assemblages. As a consequence of the processes involved they end up being profusely marked with referential signs that lead back to me and the model. This brings to mind Richard Sennett who points out that '(m)arking an object can be a political act, not in the programmatic sense, but in the more fundamental matter of establishing one's presence, objectively' (Sennett 2009: 144). Thus inscribed, the power of the box assemblage's collective whole, which includes both the container and the contents, to witness the actuality of our existence and the sensuality and eroticism of our artistic allegiance, is enhanced. Here I am asserting that the artefact seems to be capable of animatedly answering and fulfilling Kelly Oliver's appeal to be witness and engage with us. But this is only possible if it is a sentient object, a theme that is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

The foregoing reflections on my artefacts compel me to refer again to Sennett when he states that '(p)eople invest thought in things they can change and such thinking revolves around three issues: metamorphosis,

presence and anthropomorphosis' (Sennett 2009: 120). Likewise, I create the chassis of the box assemblage and the representations of the model's and my own fragmented bodies. I then transpose and encase the latter, together with several objects which I collect and hoard over time, into the former. Hence the whole set-up is metamorphosed into an *objet d'art*. With the self-referentiality inherent in the manufacturing processes, my presence as part of the artefact becomes more forceful. Ultimately, through anthropomorphosis the interior of the box structure becomes a 'private' space that enshrines our subjectivities and the difference between us.

In view of this, the box assemblage goes beyond the status of inanimate construction. As prosthesis of myself it reaches out to the female subject and takes hold of its essentialness; as a physical construction it acts as an alembic that purifies her body. My commitment to the box assemblage betrays the sense of obligation, or rather responsibility, I feel towards the female model, or what Lévinas refers to as responsibility for the other, even though I am constantly aware of my limited control over her (Lévinas 2008: 95). Similarly, I cannot control the other and as a result of my pursuit I become accountable for that which I cannot control. Ultimately the artefact metamorphoses into a processual device with which I identify with the female body. Paradoxically, while pursuing an assimilatory engagement, the assemblage box upholds the subject's uniqueness in full respect of its otherness.

THE GAZE

While in the preceding section I addressed the bond between Idoia and myself, here I focus on the gaze and the critical role it plays in such processes. According to Jacques Lacan, the gaze is not simply a question of viewing other people and objects but also awareness that oneself might be the subject of the objectifying gaze of someone else or a device (Lacan 1998). This is the premise underlying Mulvey's concept of what might be called the cinematic male gaze, which highlights male dominance in film industry (Mulvey 1989: 14-27). This results in a cinema intent on servicing a heterosexual male audience, and sustaining a gender power imbalance. The ambience of the cinematic space, the way the female body is controlled by the camera and projected onto the silver screen, the anonymity and advantageous position of the audience, are conducive to voyeurism and scopophilia.

The process of perceiving the existence of another person or object through sight, is just part of the gazing experience which essentially is a dynamic and power-based encounter between the parties concerned. Going a step further, Maurice Merleau-Ponty implies that seeing is a means of projecting oneself to the realm of the sensible where our consciousnesses may hold an entitative homogeneity, and sight being just a 'tissual' part of it (Merleau-Ponty 1964). While upholding Merleau-Ponty's notion of an interconnectedness permeating our existence, Irigaray emphasises the physicality of such interconnectedness, and asserts that this provides us with a complex array of ways and means of interaction between us and of which sight, as an intrinsic part of our liveliness, is just one of them.

Oliver cites the air, that element which envelops us and guarantees our propinquity, as a clear example of tangible interconnectedness; a state further enhanced through vision (Oliver 2001). While signalling that the gaze holds the potential of recognition and rapprochement between the self and the other, she laments that undue emphasis on the 'space between us' jeopardises this potentiality. But Lévinas asserts that any physical apartness may be countered by the face that not only presents us with an accessible path to the each other's interiority, but compels us to get closer to each other rather than shunning each other (Lévinas 1969: 198) [fig. 2.3].

Turning to a work of art and its viewer, art historian Norman Bryson affirms that the gaze, as a direct connective agent between the two, may be replaced by the glance, or series of glances, that takes into account the probability of a constantly changing physical interaction, and consequently a variable depth of vision, between them (Bryson 2006). This may be the result of the viewer's mobility and, as in the case of the box assemblage, the intrinsic dynamism of the artwork. By disrupting the unity of the singular painting and replacing it with a sequence of works, they force the viewers to constantly shift their viewpoint in relation to the subject. But with the box assemblage the gaze is even more convoluted. While in this kind of artefact the body is no longer shown in its entirety but is re-visited and trans-valued in parts through fragmentation and multiplication, the straightforward gaze usually associated with my nude paintings is likewise broken down into a series of gazes which originate from myself, the subject or the viewer. In turn, each of these gazes may be replaced by a series of glances brought about by the ever-changing depth of field between the parties concerned.



Figure 2.3
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Cabinet of sublimated desires* (detail), 2009- (unfinished)
mixed media, W 652mm, H 652mm, D 543mm (when closed)
artist's collection

As a perceptual faculty, the gaze not only acts as an agent of various and, at times, complex forms of communion and communication between us, but also as a means of establishing a specular relationship in which it functions as a locus of intersection, or as a mediator, between selfhood and otherness. The onlookers of the box assemblage might trigger such a relationship simply by opening its hinged panels to examine its contents. Furthermore, through the process of taking in the model's and my own fragmented bodies in a gradual manner while progressing into the box to the intimate parts and the miscellanea placed inside its core, knowingly or unknowingly, a relationship of complicity, based on visual and tactile participation, is established between us and the viewers, or rather the 'participant-spectators,' a term used by Marsha Meskimmon to denote viewers whose interest in a work of art goes beyond just gazing.¹⁷

¹⁷ Meskimmon uses this term in several of her works including *Contemporary art and the cosmopolitan imagination* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011) and in the editorial introduction to *Women, the arts and globalisation* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2013).

The gaze is also key to what art historian Paul J Karlstrom metaphorically describes as the studio ‘dance’ which unfolds in the sheltered space of the studio and through which the model engages with the artist in a sequence of transactions, involving psychological and postural bargaining (Karlstrom 2009: 122). While aimed at gradually shedding away self-conscious feelings about our bodies and curtailing any deep-rooted inhibitions, the ‘dance’ is also meant to encourage the development of a relationship between us which, although based on mutual trust and studio propriety, is intimate and coloured by ambiguous overtones at the same time. For the model it is a process of self-discovery and sexual liberation capable of eliciting a profound experience and cherishment of her body and femininity. Karlstrom contends that more often than not, such heightened confidence in her own sexual body enables the model to consciously express it as such, together with a sensuality that in other contexts is usually repressed. Attesting to these observations, Idoia feels that my studio is a place where she can give free reign to her corporeal and psychological self. It is often the case that this ‘dance’ is taken to higher levels with subsequent sessions, pushing the boundaries between model and artist even further. When Idoia is around in the studio, this transforms itself into a kind of intimate theatrical space where we both play out well-defined roles, not unlike those of actor and director-cum-actor respectively. On its part, the box assemblage also encloses a similarly intimate space, or rather a diminutive form of that within my studio, in which the same sequence of transactions we engage ourselves in while in the studio are re-enacted.

The theatricality of the box assemblage is not just the corollary of its choreographed setting, both around and within the outer shell where the central space acts as a miniature stage, but also of its temporality. While it is capable of re-enacting the sequence of physical and mental transactions performed by the female subject and myself in the studio, it entices the partakers to share and be part of our experience. The partakers may take it upon themselves to get underway the ‘dance’ movements by opening up the box assemblage and in a certain order bringing into view the various ‘bodies-in-pieces.’ Furthermore, four box assemblages are capable of temporally ‘linking’ with the sequence of movements that take place in the studio by means of looped video clips.

During private sessions with the model my intense gazing and absorption in what I am doing might serve as a catalyst for her self-awareness. Her returned looks not only attest to our complicitous relationship, but at times seem able to take possession and control the perceptiveness I direct toward her. Interestingly, Kelly states that “I am not affected in any negative way by the gazing, to the contrary I see it as the laborious and intense way in which the artist is making significant use of my pose to create his art.” She also expresses her feelings in the following terms:

I am intensely in touch with my own body, through my own sexual exploration, my interest in literature about female body image and sexual identity, and through the practical use of my body in sport. Thus, the body casting is another way of feeling the presence of my body contributing to my self-awareness.¹⁸

Such statements clearly suggest that the model feels totally comfortable and safe in my studio and company, confident that I will not violate her bare and accessible body. She might also feel empowered, aware of the ‘hold’ she has on me.

This introspection brings me again to Merleau-Ponty’s intriguing ideas about the body and its relation to the visible world. Of particular interest to me is his notion of the gaze as ‘flesh,’ or rather as a spatial entity, capable

¹⁸ Kelly is quoted directly from a conversation between us which took place on 20th July 2014

of shrouding and causing the subject to ‘quiver’ with its attention. Transposing such notions to my studio, Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that at any particular instant the gaze is both part of my corporeality and the model’s visibility, and thus both metaphorically and existentially, it is capable of transforming our lived experiences into one. Also, such a concept excludes the possibility of myself seeing the model’s body ‘all naked’ as it is enveloped by my gaze that clothes it ‘with its own flesh’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 130-1). In elaborating his theory of the gaze, Merleau-Ponty asserts that ‘[a]s soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 134). Such a double vision shared by the artist and model brings about a consequence of seeing and being seen, or rather a transformation of sight into insight (Murray 2007: 2-6). Merleau-Ponty’s statement sheds an exciting new light on my private sessions with the model. It not only implies that Idoia reciprocates my looks, and somehow our ‘looks’ become interchangeable, but we share a congruous unity.

With the gaze’s ‘flesh’ the very act of observing the model, even while she is just lounging in the studio, is not just a process through which I caress her with my gaze, but also a coalescence of our bodies. The physical distance that separates us is taken up by this flesh which ultimately, may be the very essence of our convergence and assimilation. Such coherence is particularly felt in processes where the physical distance between us is eliminated altogether or when the body’s ‘zone of sensitivity,’ as referred to by Schilder and discussed earlier on, is breached (Schilder 1935: 126). Our bodies become an ‘intertwining of vision and movement’ and it is only by looking at and reaching out to each other that the artefact may be conceived and created (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 162).

Pondering further over my interaction with the model which takes place in the confined space of the studio, in which we seal ourselves during a private session and which in many ways is both part and an extension of myself, brings to mind Oliver’s metaphoric use of the placenta as a means of describing a ‘circular’ mode of interaction between one person and another. For Oliver ‘[t]he placenta sets up the circulatory communication between (and within) the maternal body and the foetus so that rather than destroy each other, through the mediation of the placenta, they engage in mutually beneficial fluid exchange’ (Oliver 1998: 150). The studio space provides the right setting where a demiurgic interaction between us may be nurtured and the artefact conceived. Oliver pursues further the fluid exchange metaphor by stating that

[o]ur experiences of ourselves is not a fortress defending itself against the outside world. Instead, we experience ourselves as flux and flows of moods, sensations, and thoughts that are changing. ...We cannot step out of the circulation of ourselves and our relations towards others (Oliver 1998: 151).

These ‘others’ include the partakers of the box assemblage which, being designed in such a manner as to hold varied levels of intimacy and surprise, and emulating the placental attributes of the studio space, induces them to explore its contents and what it is all about.

At this point, it is relevant to discuss how the gaze impinges on the box assemblage which, as a hybrid whole, is more consonant with a cabinet holding a number of subsidiary artefacts that fetishistically represent parts of a particular female body and my own, together with a miscellanea of other items. On account of its nature, to be looked at and explored, the box requires a sustained period of time throughout which the viewers’ gazes are interrupted and broken up, while they are stared back at by its protagonists through their fragmented bodies.

The more conspicuous of these fragments are the polychrome plaster casts of depilated genitalia pertaining to the female subject. The malleability of this medium, coupled with the ability to metamorphose from a paste to a solid state, makes it ideal for such representations. While the plasticity of this material allows me to physically engage with it, the resultant whiteness of the cured cast provides me with a surface to paint on.

These casts represent that part of the female body that, for a woman, holds more psychological significance than any other. It is not just an area of erotic importance or a symbol of her femininity, but a bodily opening through which she comes closer to the world (Schilder 1935: 124). It is a nexus between her exterior and interior and a locus of both pleasure and pain. While depilation of the pubic hair is necessarily a routine procedure for the production of such simulacra, its practice symbolically sheds away the signal that the female body has reached womanhood and reproduction age. The bare genitalia emphasise prurience rather than womanhood. The lustful connotations of a shaved pubis are alluded to by Carrie in *Sex and the city* when, feeling sensitised following a Brazilian wax, she exclaims “I’m so aware of down there now. I feel like I’m nothing but walking sex” (Season 3/ Episode 14). Drawing on my own observations, I strongly believe that Idoia’s willingness to present me with open poses to have her bare sex cast and reproduced over and over again, suggests that she is expressly locating her ‘being’ in her genitalia and using such casts to assert herself. Karlstrom acknowledges this when he points out that sexuality is not only an important part of identity but also ‘an indivisible component of self-hood’ (Karlstrom 2009: 151).

At this point I wish to make reference to Gustave Courbet’s *L’origine du monde* (1866) [fig. 2.4] whose focal point is the explicitly displayed sex of an anonymous woman. Assuming a relaxed and open pose, she presents the viewers with a stark and candid view of her unshaved genitalia. The subject’s luxuriant and dark bush, contrasting sharply with the pale fleshliness of her thighs, partly visible buttocks, belly, and right breast, not only frames her vagina but highlights its very being. The absence of the body’s head and other parts, makes this brazen exhibition of female sex more forceful, while sealing its owner’s anonymity.

According to Emma L E Rees, the missing head suggests a disengagement between this woman’s persona and her sexed body part—they definitely do not reside in the same space and any possible rapprochement between the two is invariably held at bay (Rees 2013: 73). However, she points out that the viewers may never know whether or no their gaze, directed at this body, is being countered by that of its owner. Such uncertainty may prove unsettling to anyone who attempts a voyeuristic engagement with it. Drawing on Karlstrom, I would like to broach the idea that in lieu of her missing head, this woman might be returning the viewers’ gaze through her sex by suggesting that the body’s sex may be standing proxy to its watchful face (Karlstrom 2009: 151). However, any similarity between Courbet’s representation of this woman’s partial body and Idoia’s body-part simulacra in the box assemblages ends here. In the case of Idoia, each body part is presented to the participant-spectators as part of a group which collectively not only restores her plenitude, but also her capacity of interacting with them.

As for Courbet’s female subject in *L’origine du monde*, the way he zooms on her sex, uses the ‘rule of thirds’ to secure its significance on the picture plane, and at the same time precludes her face, betrays his total control on the representational process through which he objectifies her partitioned body. This is also intimated by the metaphorical signification of the title of the work itself which reduces her to an anonymous and generalised body part.

At this juncture I wish to underscore once again that unlike other media, such as the traditional arts and also photography and film, body casting must physically connect with the subject in question. While the simulacra thus produced are once removed from her body, their materialisation necessitates its direct imprint. As at a particular point in time, her body was an actual accessory to the medium, indubitably the model senses that she is bestowing part of herself to it. With regard to body casting, Kelly declares that

There is a certain satisfaction of knowing that your body is being preserved in time through the casts which fascinates me. I am also very intrigued by the way the casts are used to explore an aspect of female sexuality.¹⁹ Therefore the physical sensations, which range from pleasurable (silicone being smeared) to possible uncomfortable (silicone pulled off) are just overlooked when considering the grandness of the whole project. Having a history in long distance sport disciplines I believe affects my pain tolerance, which might play a significant role in this situation. I am aware though that this might not be common in all women, or even shared with the other models, who might not have my same opinion about the experience.²⁰

In a number of box assemblages, the plaster simulacra of the female subject's body are coupled with others of my own body.



Figure 2.4
Gustave Courbet, *L'origine du monde*, 1866
460mm x 550mm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The above suggests that through the box assemblage the model is metamorphosed into a sexually charged subject, presented in parts together with my own fragmented self, which is prone to elicit viewers' reactions ranging from discomfort to arousal. Any feelings of uneasiness are augmented by the knowledge that this *objet*

¹⁹ Kelly also makes reference to this in her 'reflections' in Appendix I.

²⁰ Kelly is quoted directly from a conversation between us which took place on 20th July 2014

d'art does not present them with fragments of a generalised female body but with the body-in-pieces of a real and identifiable woman, intimately associated with those of a real and identifiable man.

Following the reference to the vagina casts, I wish to discuss the implications which body casting itself has on the gaze. While painting is the result of sight, body casting is the product of a direct engagement, involving sight and touch, between artist and model. It is directly affected by the subject's appearance and demeanour at the time of production. It is the result of a strict collaborative process between the two in which she unequivocally intervenes. Through casts of parts of her body that are especially sensitive to sexual stimulation, I distill her corporeality to its erotic essentials. The process not only corroborates Merleau-Ponty's ideas about vision, touch and space, but also blurs any defined delineation between the creative inputs of the persons involved (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 162). This alliance allows the subject to exert a substantial amount of control on the outcome and bridges any disengagement between her and the artist. In the process, the visual conventions usually associated with the male gaze are disrupted and the rapport between artist and model enhanced. Thus, through her body I lure the other, but at the same time the other lures me—while my sight is liable to 'possess,' it is 'possessed' by the other. By motivating the artistic process itself, the woman transforms herself from a passive object to an agent.

The particular issues pertaining to the dynamics of casting the female body in plaster are taken up by Brenda Schmahmann in *Cast in a different light: women and the 'artist's studio' theme in George Segal's sculpture* (Schmahmann 1999). Reflecting on Segal's work which is inspired by the female subject and using it as an example, she makes an interesting observation that unlike traditional art forms which work 'off the model', body casting is a procedure which actually 'works from the model,' the female subject becoming an essential accessory within the process [fig. 2.5]. Schmahmann notes that while the application of viscous matter to the model's skin, together with the scrutiny and touching involved, are acts of sexual domination over her body and well-being, the subject intervenes on her own representation as this is imprinted off her body. Thus, Segal's work disrupts the traditional assumption whereby male consciousness transforms the passive female body into an artefact. This break with tradition is more significant in *Ruben's women*, 1984, where the usual conventions associated with the male creative genius are challenged in the studio, the hub of creative invention. The same kind of 'defiance' is encouraged and takes place within my studio. Schmahmann also claims that George Segal's female models are potentially capable of controlling the scrutiny they are subjected to and divert attempts at signification which is ever present in more orthodox art practices such as painting and sculpture (Schmahmann 1998). As an artist producing casts of the female body myself, I fully concur with such observations as I have direct experience of such matters with Idoia. Notwithstanding the fact that Segal and myself exploit plaster's tactile and viscous nature to emulate female flesh, the signification referred to by Schmahmann is seldom present in our work. The resultant affinity between the model's caressable flesh and the tactile surface of the cast originates from the looking and physical contact involved—actions which are played out on equal terms. At this point, Irigaray's musings regarding touch are particularly relevant:

Touch which lies invisible in everything, including seeing. Touch which will remain hidden in what is most tactile in it (Irigaray 2002: 174).



Figure 2.5
George Segal, *Picasso's chair*, 1973
mixed media

Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York

Consequential to this looking and touching, Idoia permeates herself through me and into the box assemblage, transubstantiating herself into it. Confronted with such a process, the viewers are invited to take the role of participant-spectators by coming to terms with their own bodies and desires (Karlstrom 2009: 137). Probably, Merleau-Ponty is referring to this kind of relationship when saying that:

[...] my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognise, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 162).

The affinity referred to above between the casts and the flesh is augmented by the choice of colours I employ to emulate the skin, and which are very much akin to those of my paintings. Such colours intimate that the light caressing the flesh of my subject is refracted and transformed into an erotic kind of luminosity. I reenact this caressing of the body by means of the brush with which I apply the skin hues in dabs of liquid paint. Here I

recall Cathryn Vasseleu's observation that '[t]he illumination of flesh in the caress is not an embodied ideality or the preconceivable first light of consciousness, but is a (re)generation in the body' (Vasseleu 2005: 123).

Likewise, I pursue a process of observation and (re)generation, emotionally charging the bare whiteness of the raw plaster with colour. The runny state in which I apply paint, while simulating the model's nuanced smooth skin, also hints at the visceral nature of the body's fluids. This concords with Mira Schor's claim that paint is capable of representing not just the flesh but also the 'goo' of the female body (Schor 1997: 213-4). Besides visual pleasure, these three-dimensional representations of the body are meant to seduce the viewer by their velvety surfaces. Surfing one's fingers on them induces a variety of tactile sensations, a result of different 'skin' textures and paint variations.

Following observations regarding the part played by perception in general, and the gaze in particular, in the manufacture of body simulacra, I wish to point out that all this is complemented by the digital eyes of the camcorders that are set up to record remotely and in such ways as not to unnecessarily disrupt the earnestness of the proceedings. With their ability to capture moving images, these devices allow me to gaze at the model and myself from an out-of-body vantage point and may provide a pragmatic solution to Pessoa's quandary when he says that

I've never managed to see myself from outside. There is no mirror that can show us to ourselves as exteriors, because no mirror can take us outside ourselves. We would need another soul, another way of looking and thinking (Pessoa 1991: 146).

At present, this is the closest I can get to standing apart from my body and gazing back at myself. The looped video clips played inside the box assemblage not only add the notion of 'temporality through space' to the artefact, but give the viewers a glimpse of the processes which take place in the otherwise private space of the studio. Although they might serve as a scopophilic access to the female subject, through their narrative it is indisputably clear that she is capable of thwarting off any objectifying gaze directed toward her. Being set up inside the artefact's structure, as an integral component of its materiality, the onlookers are fully cognizant that any gazing which links them to this temporal space has to pass through binary apertures. These are the openings through the structure and the luminous 'window' of the screened or projected image. With such easily discernable idiosyncratic and physical attributes, these moving images easily bring out in the viewers what Laura Mulvey oxymoronically terms as 'passionate detachment' (Mulvey 2009: 27). While they might be allured by this model and the situations she places herself in, the video clips suggest that she prevails over her body and her actions, and collaborates with me in the production of the artefacts. Thus, the onlookers' relationship with the woman 'inside the box' may be that kind which acknowledges her otherness—one that respects her sexuality and femininity and through which they may in turn confront their own sexuality and erotic feelings. As for myself, the box assemblage allows me to step back and observe from a distance my own self and its interactions with the female subject. Reflexively, the box assemblage betrays my mutable identity. The multiple representations underscore the impossibility of articulating a fixed definition of myself, while the juxtaposition of my body, and parts of it, with those of this woman draws attention to the porosity of my body's boundary and the precariousness of my self [fig. 2.6].

The footage captured by the camcorders offer tangible proof that my pursuit for the other through the model's body is an endless process, but at the same time it is a means of affirming each other's complex and mutable nature. The relationship and proximity between us makes us turn into each other, even if only momentarily.

The creative process allows me to venture into what is unknowable in this woman; I am allowed to address this anonymous diversity. Idoia becomes the medium through which I reach out to the other.



Figure 2.6
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Cabinet of intimate landscapes* (detail), 2009- (unfinished)
W 552mm, H 551mm, D 545mm (when closed)
artist's collection

MY WORK AS A MEANS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION

Through the agency of my box assemblages, I strive to appease my ‘anima,’ or that which Gareth Hill describes as ‘the archetypal predisposition for the experience of *otherness*’ (Hill 1998: 54). While for Carl Jung the anima is an individual’s true inner self, here I am also using it to denote the more basic and common denominator of our liveliness, Georg Stahl’s idea of anima, that which sustains our lived experience (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Aiming toward this goal, the outer skin of this kind of constructional artefact acts as an enclosure to an intimate space, a kind of miniature theatrical stage on which the convoluted association between Idoia, synchronously the woman and the other, and myself, is re-visited and re-assessed. For Hill otherness is the ‘...expression of all that which the ego personality cannot identify as like himself’ (Hill 1998: 54). With such an unequivocal definition in mind, I consider the box assemblage as the locus where my anima may come to terms with that which, throughout my adult life, has persistently established itself as other—an entity which lures me but at the same time renders me unable to wholly identify with it.

Through the realisation of a box assemblage, my desire to assimilate the other translates into an empathy with the model’s body and also into a sense of bonding with her. What starts off as a process of idealisation of a

woman's body and my relationship with it, eventually metamorphoses into one of self-identification with otherness. Consequentially, my desires and passions are projected onto the box assemblage as they strive to transform it into a particular kind of artefact, one that is imbued with self-referential connotations mirrored through the transfigured and fragmented bodies of Idoia and myself, and the other items placed inside it. At times the affinity between us is so compelling that my various representations of her inhabiting the structure may seem to be more congruous to self-portraits, while others that are meant to be self-portraits appear to be more akin to portraits of her.

Through body casting parts of ourselves are *metonymically transferred* to the box assemblage where they are *rematerialised* in resin plaster and *reassembled*, in most instances paired and in direct contact through an elusive interface, with each other. That which might be referred to as the caress between artist and model is thus recreated inside the box but, unlike its real life counterpart, it is frozen in space and time through the chemical properties of the plaster.



Figure 2.7

Lawrence Buttigieg, *Tabernacle for ourselves*, 2013- (unfinished), detail
W 515mm, H 465mm, D 447mm (when closed)
artist's collection

Tabernacle for ourselves, 2013- (unfinished) [fig.2.7] presents a composite simulacrum showing part of Idoia's body, that between the navel and thighs, together with her left hand cropped at the wrist; and my left hand which grasps her inner right thigh. Notwithstanding this nexus, our individual body parts have different relationships with the structure. While Idoia's are repositored inside it, her hand resting close to her genitalia and sharing the isolation of her truncated body, mine is an extension of it. This adduces the idea that the box assemblage serves as a common surface between myself and Idoia and brings to mind that kind of imaginary skin, as envisioned by Didier Anzieu, which acts as an interface between a mother and her child. Such a 'skin' not only alludes to the protection offered by the mother to her infant, but also to the dilemmic juxtaposition of attachment and separateness that governs their existence. The body of the box assemblage seems to act in a similar fashion,

myself as part of the structure providing protection to and establishing a bond with the female subject, but at the same time affirming the distinctiveness or separateness between us (Segal 2008: 45).



Figure 2.8
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Idoia with books*, 2008
oil on canvas, 1950 x 1300 mm
artist's collection

This permeation of ourselves through the box assemblage is complemented by the relayed touch, the relic-ing process, and also our belongings. All this suggests that every component of the box assemblage encapsulates and exteriorises a part of the history of our relationship. And while we give our 'presence' to the box, it reciprocates by putting at our disposal the possibility of dissemination beyond the confines of our physical bodies. In this context, the body-part relics that, notwithstanding the negligibility of their material presence, carry the DNA or the genetic presence of our personae, gain particular significance.

This kind of artefact brings about a transubstantiation of a collective body—that of Idoia and myself—that, through intense moments of togetherness, sameness and equivalency, not only translates into the box assemblage itself, but generates the power to shore up all pertinent connections related to it while establishing others with the outside world. The concept of transubstantiation might as well be complemented with that of consubstantiality which, as construed by Mary Helms, corroborates my assertion that the inertness or inanimateness of the box assemblage is deceiving since its various elements not only give rise to multiple links with Idoia and myself as a result of the affectionate closeness, but also seem to have our own lives diffused into them (Helms 2008).

The box assemblage's agency to network the experiences and processes embodied within itself is very much sustained by the dynamics of its design. First and foremost, it draws the viewers' attention toward itself through its substantial albeit quiescent presence, which has a direct and physical affect on the spatiality of its surroundings. Once it engages their attention, it endeavours to charm them with the finer details of its design and more so where applicable, with the colourful paintings and collages adorning its external walls which ought to prompt them into a mild involvement with the female protagonist and myself. However, at this point the inquisitive viewers are meant to take their association with the artefact to a higher level by identifying the means of opening it up and getting access to its interior. Once this is achieved, and while the relationship just initiated is further developed, they are rewarded with an array of tactile and visual experiences.

It is worth noting that the box assemblage emphasises a number of associations but overlooks several others which it does not consider to be of any particular interest to most viewers. For example, it does not draw attention to the various processes which bring about its very existence, such as the conceptual and working drawings. Nor does it highlight the procurement of the various kinds of timber and hardware it makes use of, or the actual manufacture of its chassis. Likewise, the box assemblage does not indicate what goes into the production of the subsidiary artefacts such as the paintings, casts, moving images; and nor the criteria adopted in the selection of the various items picked up over a period of time, temporarily hoarded, and eventually placed inside it. However, it does highlight the interconnection between Idoia, myself, and its actuality in terms of design and substantiality which includes the several things just mentioned, and which, on the basis of their connection with either one or both of us, have been removed from the ordinariness of their earlier existence and placed inside it to become an intrinsic part of its display.

Notwithstanding the studio-based teamwork between the model and myself, I am the one who takes the lead from the box assemblage's inception up to its completion; I am the one who has been engaging Idoia for all these years, finding in her the right combination of physical and psychical appeal complemented by exceptional modelling skills; and finally, I am also the one who labours on the actual artefact and brings it to a satisfactory conclusion. Despite my input, ultimately Idoia is the stimulus throughout the whole process, and if it were not for her, in all probability this kind of artefact would not have materialised or else would have taken a very different course.

From the very instant I started ruminating on the idea of creating a box assemblage a few years ago, my conceptual designs revolved around Idoia and my relationship with her. This kind of artefact was a way forward from the relatively large paintings [fig. 2.8] I was producing at that time of this model, which not only freed me from their two-dimensionality but also took my representations of her to a higher level of complexity.

Over the past five years I have also hired Kelly and Lucya, to be part of the box assemblage series. My choice of these two women, whom I have known for a number of years and with whom I have worked with on a regular basis, is based on my desire to complement and augment Idoia's contribution toward my search for that which is other, and 'fill out' elements which are wanting in Idoia's corporeal and mental disposition. I find it apposite to point out that Kelly's and Lucya's relationship with their bodies is quite different from that of Idoia with her own. On one hand Idoia's views of her body are dictated by Catholic religious sentiments, and she does not find it easy to digest my attempt at equating a woman's body (and more so her own) with the divine; on the other hand, the relationships of Kelly and Lucya with their own physical selves are strictly laical. While all three women are intrigued with the ideas behind the box assemblage, their differing attitudes toward their carnal selves do have a bearing not only on the relationships I share with them but also on the artefacts themselves. Although Idoia is featured prominently in the series of box assemblages, a few examples are dedicated to Lucya and Kelly, and yet others highlight the complementarity of the three women by bringing their bodies together within their folds.

While the foregoing text highlights the pre-eminence of the situational presence of the female subject in the box assemblage, it also identifies myself as both the creator and the cardinal player in the whole act. Ultimately, the artefact not only evolves into a sanctum for my own self, my feelings and my desires; rather, its array of things and components which give it its material form translate into what Chris Gosden refers to as 'prosthetic extensions' of myself (Gosden 2001: 164-65). Addressing the question and relevance of notional prosthesis within my work, I draw on the intriguing ideas of David Wills, to connote that the creation of a box assemblage is a process of recontextualisation of my own self since from the very instant of its conception, I render myself an ancillary existence through its prosthetic attributes (Wills 1995: 46). Ideationally, any prosthesis is not limited to the actuality or physicality of a material accessory but incorporates thoughts, feelings and desires that not only determine its very existence, but sustain its staying power. Even this very writing, as part of a treatise through which I gather my thoughts and reflect systematically on my studio work and its repercussions on my very existence, may be contemplated as a fundamental component of the prosthetic nature of the box assemblage. While all this implies that the singularity of the box assemblage's physical existence is just the tangible part of a device, the import of this kind of artefact is more convoluted since it is made up of a complex arrangement of secondary prosthetic potentialities and which themselves translate into the 'prosthetic extensions' just referred to. These arise from its inherent parts such as the various representations and objects, and which together contribute to the collective whole. While each of these items presents itself as that which its appearance and material existence allows it to be, for example an oil on canvas painting, a plaster cast, a semi-precious piece of jewellery, a TFT-LCD screen, and a pico-projector, through what Wills refers to as the 'complicated principle of *alterability*,' it also represents something which goes well beyond its materiality (Wills 1995: 47). Maybe, from the examples cited the most obvious are the digital screen and the pico-projector, two devices capable of playing back in a looped mode moving images registered in my studio. Amazing about these instruments is their faculty of playback, for which a physiological counterpart does not exist, and their faculty to electronically transpose us through space and time. The same argument applies to the camcorders that, for all intents and purposes are also prostheses. While my eyesight is an absolute necessity in my interactions with the model and the creation of the actual artefacts, the complementary electronic vision afforded by the camcorders adds an exciting dimension to the whole experience.

The presence and function of the electronic device within the box assemblage illustrates Wills' assertion that '(b)y means of prosthesis the relation to the other becomes precisely and necessarily a relation to otherness...' (Wills 1995: 44). The play-back of footage captured in the studio which invariably shows the model and myself pursuing a series of activities, affords us the possibility of establishing alternative kinds of relationships with our own selves or rather their digital versions, which inevitably render us as other even to ourselves. Thus, once my box assemblage is set up and equipped with such electronic aids, it invariably not only enhances my relationship with the female subject, but also establishes my association with the other. In addition, Wills contends that any prosthesis sets in place a 'prosthetic network' with the power of prosthetizing whatever and whomever it relates to. Likewise, the box assemblage's reticulation takes hold of us, and any person who wishes to participate in our rendezvous, not only to imbue us with its otherness, but also to establish between us a relationship of difference (Wills 1995: 46).

Following this discourse on the rationale underlying my assertion that the box assemblage may be considered as a prosthesis, I wish to draw attention to the fact that in such a capacity the box assemblage betrays a lack, an insufficiency, and ultimately a weakness on the part of its end users. While the last mentioned include the model and any viewers who partake of its agency, the foremost beneficiary of such an artefact is me, its initiator and the person who, more than anyone else, deems its existence to be imperative. Hence, endowing myself with the box assemblage's prosthetic resourcefulness is an acknowledgment of a lack within and of myself. What might be described as an obsession and also a fetish with a particular woman who subtly has influenced my involvement in the arts for the past fifteen years, metamorphoses into the box assemblage—a symbol of my dependence on her. While it betrays my belief that Idoia might as well be a means of achieving fulfilment, the box assemblage is an impassioned artefact which attempts to get hold of this woman's existence not for the sake of subjugating it but to gain access to the other. Besides this, with its prosthetic virtues the box assemblage not only impregnates with its otherness myself and anyone else who relates with it, but brings about our division, or rather pluralisation. Interestingly, for Wills the complementariness between this pluralisation and otherness is evocative of Irigaray's observation that a woman as other is essentially always two rather than one, on account of her two labia which are always in contact and readily caressing each other (Wills 1995: 44; Irigaray 1977, 24).

However, faultlessness is beyond the mastery of any prosthesis, no matter how ingenious it might be, and lack of perfection ultimately translates into a 'lack of fit' and the subsequent disenchantment that creeps in between it and its user. Likewise, once an assemblage box is completed I become aware of its insufficiency and this urges me to address its shortcomings through the creation of a superseder. Thus, each box assemblage is meant to surpass the previous one in terms of prosthetic proficiency and effectiveness.

At this point I wish to draw a few parallels between the relationship I share with my box assemblages and that of Aimee Mullins with her variety of prosthetic legs. Her collection includes a pair sculpted out of solid ash and used for the first time at Alexander McQueen's London fashion show in 1999; a pair of high performance and award winning carbon-fibre Cheetah legs; and the crystal legs, which in actual fact are made out of clear polyurethane, that were specifically conceived for Mathew Barney's film *Cremaster 3* (2002) (Mullins 2009; Barney 2003). Each of these pairs of non-human lower limbs physically extend and fetishise Mullins' body, transposing it to the world of the haute couture, the fast world of the feline, and the fantastical realm of Barney's epic. Interestingly, she takes a posthuman outlook toward her prosthesis seeing them as body enhancements rather

than rehabilitative aids. While acknowledging and underscoring that my box assemblages as prosthesis are of a totally different kind, conceptually more metaphorical than physical, they do extend my own body and that of the model, fetishise them in the process and concede some access to the realm of the other. However, Mullin's extensions are not perfect—a case in point are the Cheetah legs which although give her superhuman speed, they do not permit her to stand in a stationary position unsupported. Likewise, my box assemblages provide limited access to the other.

From time to time throughout my career as a painter, I have resorted to self-portraiture, scrutinising myself and registering on canvas what I deem to be facial and body expressions that reflect my interiority. However, over recent years I came to acknowledge the superficiality of such an approach, notwithstanding their expressive likeness, realising that any attempt of pursuing the self through an artwork, first and foremost requires a thorough understanding of what constitutes the self and its mercurial nature. Looking at works by Barney, Schneemann, Abramović, I understood that one approach to the self is through the subjective intermediacy of another person or persons, in my case the female subject.

The box assemblage not only provides a platform for such an approach, but also allows the engagement of the viewers. While through the artefact the boundaries between my body and that of the female subject seem to coalesce, highlighting the fluidity of our subjectivities, its structure goes beyond the act of enveloping our corporeality but functions as a permeable skin that is amenable to sociality, or contact with the outside world. Although the box assemblage endeavours to establish itself as an actual 'presence' of our own bodies, it also acknowledges Amelia Jones' assertion that any representational model, no matter how complex, can never thoroughly contain the agency of a body or bodies it seeks to render. While as a performative device it is already a bi-corporeal self-portrait in the making at concept stage, no matter how much it tries throughout its inception and materialisation, it proves to be *never enough* in this regard (Jones 2006: 22).

MY WORK WITHIN THE GENRE OF THE FEMALE NUDE

Although the naked body of a particular woman is a focal point in each and every box assemblage, from an iconographic point of view this artefact goes beyond the Western tradition of the female nude, to disrupt the asymmetrical gender power base usually associated with this genre. Rather than a straightforward depiction of a woman in an undressed state for the perfunctory delectation of the viewer, this artefact is an empathetic and metaphoric structure that not only welcomes and embraces gender fluidity by means of its hinged panels, but also nurtures affectation within its wombed main space and other interstices. While the time-honoured criteria for portraying the female nude make a clear distinction between the observant position of the male artist and the acquiescence of the model, my work shuns such divergent statuses and opts for a mutually beneficial collaboration between myself as the male artist, and the female subject as my model (Polinska 2000: 48). Consequentially, this artefact challenges and disrupts the proclivity of traditional representations of the female nude that, according to John Berger, are apt to guard the anonymity of its motivator, or the male voyeur, by not portraying him (Berger 2008: 54). The box assemblage does away with this kind of regulation, making amply clear that the model and myself are the binary driving force behind it. Invariably the two of us are ever present and visible within it through manifold representations, giving rise to convoluted gazing and complexified iconography.

I am aware that Idoia's disposition as a model might be affected by the stereotyped representations of sexualised and objectified female bodies permeating Western culture and impinging on our daily existence. However, while such an influence probably infiltrates to some degree my own work, it does not alter the import of the box assemblage as ultimately in this kind of artefact Idoia is 'presencing' her own self.²¹ Moreover, even while she emphasises her sexuality through the agency of her body, she synchronously does her own looking, taking in and returning the gaze of whoever is looking at her, including myself. At times she also returns her own gaze, this is particularly the case when the artefact is still a work-in-progress and she is required to perform in front of a studio mirror, or else when the artefact is complete and she joins the community of unnamed onlookers to examine it. In such situations it is very likely that she recognises traces of sexist influence in her appearance and comportment.

By theatrically displaying within its confines parts of Idoia's body either as individual pieces or else paired with others from my own body, the setup of the box assemblage affords an alternative mode of looking at the female body. This is especially the case with the coupled fragments which complexly disrupt the traditional binary positions of the viewing subject and viewed object, and suggest that men and women may not only share each other's presence and affection, but also look at each other on equal terms. In such examples, the woman is no longer required to avert the gaze of the onlookers and, with regard to women gazers, their obsequious alter ego is dismissed. The fact that the male objectifying gaze has dominated the artistic scene for ages, makes the rationale underlying this kind of artefact highly significant. While the box assemblage is a locus of convergence between Idoia and myself, set up in such a manner to discourage mutual attempts at objectification, the various processes involved in its creation nurture the potentiality inherent in such a convergence and subsequent intersection.

But my work also answers Lynda Nead's call for the empowerment of the female body in art so that it is taken beyond its titillative power (Nead 1992: 60). While the various simulacra of the female body constituting the box assemblage might be the source of sexual gratification for some or many, the way I present the composite whole makes amply clear the high esteem, at times bordering on deference, in which I hold the female body. These artworks translate into an exaltation of womanhood, acknowledging it as a source of unique sagacity and exclusive subjectivity.

The very act of looking at other people may have an impertinent and regulating intent that inevitably leads to a process of objectification (Mulvey 2009: 17). But the gaze generated by the box assemblage which starts off at its inception, continues through its coming into being, and persists in the course of its material and artefactual existence, is much more complex and engaging. It is an agency through which the model and myself may direct our gazes at each other on a par, and as a collective body within it, reciprocate the looking directed at us from the viewers. This is partly due to the artefact's actuality that is the result of a strict cooperation between us, a fact that distances it further from traditional representations of the female nude. While at times the model allows herself to exert a contracted control over the outcome of the creative process, at others she takes upon herself the role of artist and creator, especially when subjecting herself to body casting or performing to the camera lens. On such occasions she acquires the faculty of redeeming her identity and, acting as their surrogate, that of other women.

²¹ I use the term 'presencing' to emphasise the beingness of this person in the artefact.

Although it is unlikely that Idoia consciously associates her participation in my art practice with any feminist belief or a specific political school of thought, I am convinced that within the precincts of my studio she feels empowered to use her flesh as a medium of self-expression. Although one might argue that Idoia's demeanour in my company is conducive to self-objectification, it is a subjectifying kind of conduct through which she never ceases control of her actions. While she is aware that with or without accoutrements she is transformed into an artefactual accessory, she is also knowledgeable that as a result of her subordination to the box assemblage, her bodiliness becomes her own forthright means of expression. Interestingly, she exploits the artefact to her advantage, not only as shelter but also as platform to express herself, thus suggesting that the structure is far from being a contraption of bondage for the female nude. Appropriating and transforming it into her own territory, its space becomes her prerogative in which she may manipulate her body and, to a certain extent, also my own.

But the ambit of my box assemblage goes beyond the circumscribed existence of Idoia and myself. On a broader level, it is meant to give a glimpse of the complexity of womanhood in general and, by countering the long established traditions pertaining to the female nude in the Christianised west, demonstrate that a woman's nakedness need not be merely the object of male desire. Contrary to what Margaret Miles tends to suggest, the box assemblage evinces that there is more to the act of a female model baring her body than simply the delectation of male desire. However, while I agree with Miles that Western culture lacks an iconographic tradition that equates the female body with spiritual endeavour, my artworks may be considered as an attempt at rectifying such a state of affairs (Miles 1991: 176-7). By simulating a particular woman with the divine, I assert that the potentiality of muliebrity goes beyond instinctual and carnal objectivity, I acknowledge its inestimable subjectivity, and in the process I give it its rightful place as a source of transcendental revelation.

While the woman-divine analogy will be discussed at length in the following chapter, here I will only say that the contextual divinisation of the female body is achieved through the box assemblage's structure and iconography. Anyone familiar with the Catholic faith and its churches will easily read their implicit influence, associations which become particularly forceful and contentious in Malta where the Catholic Church is a potent part of the Establishment. Here, very likely, it will be construed as a transgressive act—the sacred enshrinement of a profane body through boxing, that ironically takes place within the metaphorical 'box' of the island's insularity. In *Tabernacle for Idoia* [fig. 3.3, fig. 3.4] I equate this woman's carnality with that of Jesus Christ who for his followers signifies ultimate love and ultimate other. The dignified interior of her churchly-styled receptacle houses parts of her body, not unlike a genuine tabernacle holding the Host which according to Catholic church doctrine serves as nourishment to both body and soul, and attests to Christ's human and material attributes. Aided by the box assemblage's design dynamics and purposeful intersection of the deific with womanhood, Idoia is more than capable of subverting the stereotypical representations of the female body, and thwarting off the objectifying gaze of others. The artefact establishes series of consequential associations with this woman's body that outweigh concerns that it might be metamorphosed into a cultural commodity or else exploited for sexual arousal. While in her responsibility as co-creator of the box assemblage, she shamelessly presents her body to anyone who desires to see it and dares them to interact with its simulacra, the artefact equates her corporeality with the divine, pushing it beyond its materiality and the objectified existence of a merely living body. In addition, by presenting Idoia's body in a dignified, guarded and fragmentary manner, it intimates that her material and supernatural existence is precious and precarious at the same time. Although I am aware that I

can only impart to the partakers of the artefact a limited part of my discernment of this woman, the artefact grants them the experience of those attributes, such as the aesthetic beauty of her body, which tends to make me momentarily forgetful of my own self. However, even though at times I might think otherwise, the dialectical tension between the sacred and the profane is never completely resolved, while the seriousness of the transgression is dependent on the beholder.

Our physical rendezvous may be experienced through the material totality of the box assemblage but more so through the casts which are meant to be touched. The necessity of ubiquity and skin contact for the coming into being of these items vouches for the material existence of our flesh. They not only disrupt suggestions that our bodies might be evanescent existences, but tangibly prove the substantial beingness of our bodies. The composite cast in *Tabernacle for ourselves* [fig. 2.6; fig. 3.6] represents a kind of temporally suspended embrace which in actual fact is a re-materialisation of our physical interaction. By directing their gaze at it the onlookers establish a link with the actual touching that went on between us but 'once removed' through its agency. With regard to all body-casts the partakers are afforded the possibility of deriving profound pleasure from handling and experiencing their texture and forms that, although lacking the suppleness of actual flesh, not only embody its sensuality and eroticism but, as a result of their solidified material state, perpetuate our bodily experience. Thus, as a display the box assemblage not only arouses the sexual curiosity of the partakers, but affords them visual and tactile sensations. Although these are synonymous and anticipatory to the sexual act, this is perpetually deferred (Freud 2011: 34-35). With regard to the bodies, as a consequence of their fetishisation, which is achieved not only through fragmentation and compartmentalisation, but also through their correlation with devotional objects and transcendental entities, their impact on the partakers is even more forceful. Here I wish to point out that the box assemblage is a composite fetish, made up of a series of objects that work out as fetishes in their own right, operating in a slightly different manner than the kind of fetish described by Sigmund Freud in *Three essays on the theory of sexuality*. While Freud's fetish presents itself to its bearer as a simple and tangible substitute for the sexual object, the box assemblage as fetish is meant to complexly impinge, sensuously and psychologically, in such a swift and forceful manner upon its partakers that it stirs their deepest feelings. Although this experience might not last longer than a few minutes, throughout its temporal length the boxed presence of Idoia and, to a lesser extent, myself 'transports' them to an altered realm where the female form reigns supreme and makes them temporarily dismiss their prosaic pursuits in favour of what we have to offer (Freud 2011).

All this suggests that an interface may be formed between the skin of the partakers and the various surfaces of the box assemblage. While through this interface the artefact may convey to them various experiences, they may reciprocate such 'action' on its part by effecting a degree of displacement of their own selves into its materiality. This takes place because the object at hand is so powerful in terms of significance and aesthetic value that it overwhelms the person touching it.²² Such an occurrence is a superlative example of Merleau-Ponty's notional flesh, the commonality of which suggests that everything, including ourselves, is analogous. Ultimately, the box assemblage in and of itself reveals my desire to present those precious moments when the materialities of Idoia's constitution and my own seem to fuse, a sensation brought about by the affinity which exists between us and

²² This experience is akin to what Elaine Scarry refers to as 'radical decentering' in *On beauty and being just* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 111-2.

which is amplified through the material proximity of our bodies—a situational paradigm where Merleau-Ponty’s entitative element merges us all together (Merleau-Ponty 1968).

While the erstwhile explicates the fundamental characteristics of the box assemblage as a unique kind of representational device, I will now address its critical source of inspiration. Unquestionably, the artefact betrays my interest in and fascination with Idoia’s bodily presence and mien. This is especially the case when she articulates her body in such a manner as to exploit its inherent sexual potential and projects strong sexual innuendoes. I am also interested in how her svelte body clothes itself, how particular garments accentuate her slimness and sex appeal, and how the sensuality of her skin is enhanced by the perfume and cosmetics she wears. I am intrigued by the physicality of her body, characterised by its curvilinearity and petiteness, and her delicate features, such as her hands which look so tiny and fragile when placed next to mine, a contrast clearly noticed in *Tabernacle for ourselves* [fig. 2.6]. In addition, I am evermore keen on observing those minutiae of Idoia’s body such as its instinctual, albeit insignificant and inconsequential, movements which are a continuous reminder of the élan vital sustaining its objectivity. Examples are the way her body involuntarily shudders and reflexively responds with goose flesh when the studio is subjected to slight but unexpected drops in room temperature, and how her body spontaneously reacts when she steps out of her shoes and her feet touch the cold surface of the floor. Another instance is the sense of satisfaction evident on her face when, feeling perfectly at ease and safe in her nudity, she indulges in the comfort and security provided by my studio and my presence. Due to the logistics of the various processes involved in a typical session, Idoia might find enough time to indulge in the comfort of the setup, and to pamper her nude body by means of the various beddings and fabrics at her disposal. All this is also proof of the body’s material existence and its capacity to sensually intercept, through its inbuilt sensuous receptors, other substances including those with tenuous tangibility such as air itself.

The box assemblage also seeks to represent those instances when an intense ecstatic sensuality emanates from Idoia’s carnal existence and permeates the whole ambience of the studio. These moments are brought about by her erotic potential which flaunts itself through her demeanour within its sheltered confines. In these particular moments her body seems to coalesce with the materiality of the studio and myself, once again bringing to mind Merleau-Ponty’s omnipresent entitative flesh. For just the duration of these occasions, I feel empowered to uphold, assimilate to the fullest, and record her beauty and sensual eroticism.

But Merleau-Ponty’s ideational flesh may also be applied to the scaled-down environment of the box assemblage itself, or rather the micro-space enclosed within its walls. Permeating the structure’s materiality and enclosure, it brings about an intertwining of its various components, including Idoia’s and my own fragmented bodies, to form a complete whole. Just as on the grander scale of our existence, and through the agency of such flesh, the materiality of the surroundings merges with our constitutions and our animae become one with the alterity as embodied by others, it also coalesces our body fragments and relics with the chassis of the box assemblage and its various other components. This fusion between the transubstantiated body parts and the materiality of the remainder of the artefact highlights the reversibility of our objective and subjective identities. While my alterity is represented by Idoia’s material and incorporeal substance and that which constitutes the rest of the box assemblage, from her point of view it is the other way round—myself being part of that which is other to her.

Thus, the box assemblage brings about through re-creation a situational and reversible relationship between the female model and myself. It draws its effectiveness from the fact that our animate material identity gives us the

power not only to acknowledge the physical presences of each other, but also to show affection toward each other. Consequentially, the box assemblage brings about the sensual and desirous feelings which are reflected back and forth between us, exciting our consciousnesses and titillating our bodies, and which transform it into a symbol of our passionate, albeit unusual, relationship.

At this point I wish to make reference to Elaine Scarry's philosophical observation that designing and constructing an artefact is an emphatic experience, while the end result itself is a conscious and sentient creation. Furthermore, a successfully designed and constructed object that relates well with both its creator and its partakers, transforms the artist's original pursuit from an autonomous embodiment to an interpersonal one. On one hand design and creation are the transformation of feelings into objects; on the other hand, affective perception of objects is their translation into feelings. As for the box assemblage, we project our feelings outward and into it, while others internalise it by the agency of their feelings. While the naturally occurring world around us is indifferent to our well-being and survival, it provides us with the necessary resources with which we create things to ease the travails of our existence (Scarry 1985: 288-9). Although in the previous section I hinted that the box assemblage is prosthetically related to the model and myself, Scarry suggests that there also exists a completely different kind of association between us three, one that intersects the actual creation of the artefact with the liveliness of our subjectivities. Translating into an intimate kind of affinity between the object and its makers, the artefact-in-the-making not only attempts to mirror or augment our selves as seen from without, but also endeavours to simulate our consciousnesses.

However, although I am receptive to Idoia's somatic signs that reveal whether she is feeling comfortable or distressed, calm or agitated, sensuous or indifferent while performing or lounging in the studio, I cannot access her thought processes. Using my imagination I transform, shape, and permeate with Idoia-related devotion a group of materials to create the box assemblage. While the shape and dynamics of the artefact are aimed at bringing forth the ultimate quintessential sanctuary for manifold representations of Idoia inspired by my affectivity toward her, its elaborated inwardness hints at the preciousness I appraise in these simulacra. I am not only 'making-real' the box assemblage, but also projecting my own sentience through its agency.

Thus, at this juncture I ruminate on the box assemblage's faculty of effecting a re-conception of the female body. My thoughts on this matter are prompted by Vivian Sobchack's interesting observation regarding the pregnant body whereby she describes it as '...a material expansion of oneself but also the coming into material being of an other who is *not* oneself' (Sobchack 2004: 289). Mulling over such a circumspect description, I cannot help myself from drawing an analogy between the phenomenon of maturation of one body inside another as the case of a mother bearing a child, and the underlying concept of my own box assemblage.

Earlier on I describe the artefact as prosthesis of my own body that extends it beyond the natural confines of its material presence. While it is amply clear that the underlying predisposition for this 'material expansion' is the embracing of Idoia's body or that which is other to myself, drawing a conceptual analogy between this kind of artefact and the maternal body is pertinent. Whilst pregnancy is capable of arousing in an expectant mother a 'passionate sense of devotion' toward the other who dwells inside her, I ideationally assert that the box assemblage is capable of arousing feelings and sentiments inside me that might be just as strong. These ever evolving emotions start building up when the artefact is still a set of ideas at the notional state prior to its inception, they run through the whole process of its creation, and keep going strong throughout its existence.

Although such an analogy might be considered as inappropriate and irreverent to motherhood whose wonderment is exclusive to women, conceptually this is a valid and significant resemblance in as much as the artefact is a product of my 'flesh and blood.' Similar to the notion of pregnancy, the box assemblage augments my materiality so that it is able to shelter the metonymic presence of Idoia, in full respect of her material subjectivity.

Just as pregnancy is bound to the physicality of the body and is a factual example of a material enfolding, it is also tied up with its deepest passions, sensations, and desires. At times these are capable of overriding the conation of a child-bearing woman and seize control of her mundane life. While acknowledging the fact that pregnancy may be the source of apprehension and sentiments of alienation through the 'invasion' of one's body, Sobchack points out that more often than not, this state brings about to the mother a loving sense of affection toward the 'alterity' that is nurtured inside her. Although the physical circumstances suggest complete ownership of the child by the mother, it is never completely so. But every living person, not just expecting mothers, is susceptible to comparable feelings, apropos to which Sobchack asserts that although at times these seem to spin out of our control, their source, the place of their inception and germination, remains within us. It is such feelings that impel us to wish and fascinate about other people and things, to get to know them intimately, and to get hold of and control their otherness. Or, more unequivocally, endeavour to make 'their alterity *as our own*' (Sobchack 2004: 288-9).

In conclusion, the box assemblages are Idoia-themed sanctuaried structures imbued with the affinity and affectivity I feel for this woman. Each example carries the twofold responsibility of enduringly sustaining and maturing my relationship with Idoia (if she quits they will still be around) and fulfilling my desire to come to terms with that which is other in my existence.

Chapter three

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

In this chapter I explore the intertwined nature of the sacred and the profane and discuss how these antipodal concepts impinge on my inquiry into the self and the other. At various instances in the following pages, I make frequent use of terms such as sacred, divine and God. As not to be misconstrued, I wish to point out at the outset that as used here these appellations signify different forms of ‘transcendence,’ or the otherness that transcends my knowledge. Declaring my position thus is essential in view that I come from an island state where over 90% of the population professes to be Catholic, and where Catholicism is entrenched in the constitution as the state’s religion. In such a scenario, such terms are inevitably associated with the Catholic faith. Notwithstanding the fact that I am aware that coming to terms with such otherness is an impossible task, through my research I attempt to establish some kind of rapport with it and the realm that it inhabits. On a purely imaginary level, this space might be that inhabited by the deity, if such a deity indeed does exist. Although divided into four sections in each of which I address a particular theme, the whole chapter is underpinned by my desire to discern and come to terms with the potency that spurs my creativity.

In the first section, entitled *From painting to box assemblage*, I examine in detail the artefactual side of my practice-led research as actualised through a series of thirteen individually fashioned mixed-media box assemblages. Besides highlighting the salient features of a few examples of these three-dimensional structures and the sources of their inspiration, I discuss how they push the boundaries of my rapport with a particular woman. Furthermore, I explicate how this kind of artefact, through the dynamics of its design and contents, not only constitutes part of an ongoing process whereby my relationship with the female subject is continuously re-fashioned, but also draws links between this fluid association and the diametrically opposite notions of the sacred and the profane.

In the second section, entitled *Fragmentation and plenitude*, I expound on how I subject this woman’s body to a series of fetishising processes that consequentially bring about its multiplication and fragmentation, but paradoxically restore its omnitude within the confines of the box assemblage. This is not unlike the ciborium of morsel-sized wafers and chalice of a few millilitres of wine that, once consecrated, are understood to be the real presence of the complete body of Christ. Moreover, I focus on the plucked body hairs and personal effects, both ‘treasured’ inside the box assemblage, which allude to the innate powers attributed to first-class and second-class relics as a consequence of their association and proximity to hallowed persons. As actual body specimens integrated into the artefact, the hairs blur the distinction between it being a representational expression and it being the actual ubiety of the subject.

In the penultimate section which goes by the title *The allure of female nakedness*, I address implications that may be associated with a state of undress such as pleasure, enticement to touch, and vulnerability, while at the same time expound on the distinctive qualities of female exposure manifested through the box assemblage. Although this kind does not make the subject of my artworks any less liable to the implications just outlined, it is hinged on absolute trust between my model and myself and translates into an invitation to intimacy between us. I explicate how the allure of such a state lies in the fact that when Idoia performs naked in my studio, her skin becomes the interconnection between myself and the other, just as the superficies of the consecrated host and wine which,

once transubstantiated through consecration, become the delineation between that which is profane and that which is sacred.

In the last section, entitled *Re-visioning the female body*, I demonstrate how the box assemblage is the materialisation of a re-visioning process powered by the female subject's libidinous influence on me. And ultimately, how it translates into a sophisticated representational device which doubles as a metaphor of my own self; the inherently conflicted constitution of the box assemblage, brought about by its sacralised structure and impious adornments, alluding to my own, at times troubled, emotions.

FROM PAINTING TO BOX ASSEMBLAGE

I consider my body-themed box assemblages as a natural progression from my relatively large nude paintings. Being a three-dimensional, dynamic, and multimedia artefact, it not only offers me wider possibilities to exercise my creativity than the flat surface of the canvas, but also affords the viewers the prospect of an intense interaction with it. Unlike a painting, the box impinges on real and tangible space, and thereby is capable of defining, shaping and enclosing it. Furthermore, as a basic structure with well-defined confines and the ability to encase and contain, it offers versatility and restraint when used in specific ways. In her introduction to *Worlds in a box*, an exhibition which toured the United Kingdom between May 1994 and February 1995, Alexandra Noble makes reference to such a contradictory nature of assemblages based on the box. While outlining the potential a box offers at the hands of artists such as Joseph Cornell (1903-72) [fig. 3.1], she points out that whereas the grouping and assembling of unrelated objects alludes to the unconventional nature of contemporary art, because of its very nature the box implies formality and control (Noble 1994: 5).

Each box assemblage carries, in purposely designed recesses on its walls and doors, a series of oil paintings that gives it its distinctive character and contributes to its overall visual impact. Although the presence of paintings throughout the artefact betrays the importance I attach to this medium, within its context it operates as one of several components in the whole setup. Unlike the paintings adorning its exterior, which are constantly in full view, those concealed inside may only be seen if the box is opened. These paintings may be considered as an offshoot of my larger canvases that generally depict the subject's body in its entirety. However, contrariwise in the artefact's context, more often than not they depict the fragmentary body whose parts are brought together and staged within its perimeter. The relationship between the larger representations and the smaller ones appertaining to the assemblage box may be viewed in the light of the interplay between fragmentation and plenitude, concepts that are discussed in the subsequent section.

Whereas the box assemblage's hinged and foldable panels are reminiscent of polyptychs, as 'container' it is not dissimilar to tabernacles and reliquaries found in Catholic churches. The way it provides protection and privacy to its primary representations and objects is not unlike that adopted by the Netherlandish diptych and triptych, whose rise in popularity in the Low Countries in the last quarter of the fourteenth century was directly related to that of what was known as Modern Devotion (*Devotio Moderna*) (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). This religious movement placed emphasis on Christ's humaneness, and was in sharp contrast to the scholasticism of the likes of Thomas Aquinas who placed emphasis on Christ's divinity. As with these prayer devices, the box assemblage is meant to encourage introspection and self-reflection. By re-visiting and re-interpreting such ecclesiastical art forms through the box assemblage, besides acknowledging their iconographic power, I betray my desire to create a shrine for the female body.



Figure 3.1
Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (Medici Princess)*, circa 1948
mixed media, W 283mm, H 448mm, D 111mm
private collection

At face value the assemblage box may appear to be merely a complex framing device for relatively small paintings which represent the whole or parts thereof of the model's body and, to a lesser extent, that of myself, as well as a cabinet for safe keeping other simulacra of our bodies together with an assortment of objects. However, its coming into being forms part of a continuing practice through which my association with the female model is constantly re-visioned, re-shaped, and metamorphosed. As a hybrid artefact, it situates our fetishistically encased, and even enshrined, broken down bodies in a particular context—a frame of reference strictly identified with us as its creators and subjects at one and the same time. On account of its nature, to be viewed and explored the box requires a sustained period of time throughout which the gaze is interrupted and broken up.

While David Morgan states that sacred images are capable of transforming their surroundings into devotional spaces in which encounters and interactions with the transcendental become possible, my box assemblages intimate that such an assertion applies equally well to erotic images. Collectively, its representations of our bodies manifest a desire to overcome their artefactuality and aspire to transubstantiate into that very essence

which they evoke. In the process they transform the space both within and outside the box into their own sanctorium—the ambience becomes sacred and personal (Morgan 1998: 66). The box assemblage's association of the erotic body with sacred shrines and iconography may be read as my reaction to Marina Abramović's assertion that throughout the ages human beings have sought to make themselves equal to their gods through eroticism, believing that in the latter there exists something superhuman which comes from the gods (Paparoni 2007).

Even in societies that are not dominated by religion to the extent of Malta, the notions of the sacred and the profane are still relevant. Roger Caillois addresses such concepts in *Man and the Sacred* stating that the sacred embraces both pure and impure elements, the former being distinguished by benevolence and harmony, while the latter is characterised by antagonism and disruption. This contrariety brings to mind what Sigmund Freud refers to as the sexual and death instincts, also referred to as the pleasure and reality principles, and also Eros and Thanatos. Despite being antipodal, these two instincts bring about a dynamic, albeit compromissary, existence. Although the sacred, with its contradictory constituents, has nothing to do with a secular existence, it is desired and needed in the profane world (Caillois 1959). This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that notwithstanding the present widespread apostasy in the West, people still seek links with the sacred.

The presumed possibility of pursuing such links for myself through Idoia's body makes me value more the comradeship and time I share with her. Her accessible fleshliness not only makes our rendezvous the ideal occasion where she may give free reign to her erotic, what Audre Lorde refers to as the true self, but also kicks in the pleasure principle through arousal (Lorde 2007: 89). However, the reality principle draws my attention to the limitedness of our relationship and thereupon spurs me to produce the box assemblage, a physical space where our encounter may be kept continuously 'alive.' At this juncture a comparison between the contents of the church tabernacle and the box assemblage is in order. Although both are body-in-pieces, that of Christ (the hosts) placed inside the tabernacle promises an incorporeal indulgence achievable through death; on the other hand, that of the female subject (the simulacra and relics) placed inside the box assemblage offers a corporeal indulgence, the subjectivity of which is achievable through the acknowledgement of one's fluid boundaries. This correlation also highlights the fact that Catholicism tends to associate the sacred with the reality principle, implying that sorrow and bodily pain might be the way forward to sanctity. In Freudian terms, one can construe the box assemblage as an attempt to inject a strong pleasure principle in the reality principle associated with Catholicism.

Scholars such as Luce Irigaray call attention to the benefits reaped from the sacred. In *Divine woman* she contends that notions of the divine are a means of affirming both individual and collective identities (Irigaray 1993: 55-72). Raised in a staunch Catholic country, in the perpetual fear of the almighty and omnipresent God, I find particular appeal in Irigaray's appraisal of the oppositional dichotomy between the carnal and the divine, and her hypothetical stance that these two notions may not be incongruous after all. Upholding their complementariness, she asserts that the divine is the fulfilment of the carnal.

In *Divine women* she implies that since in the western world that which constitutes the divine tends to forego the female gender, the association between the two is evanescent. Thus, she contends that from a feminine point of view what is termed as 'love of God' needs only signify on a personal level a beckoning to realise the full potential of oneself. According to Irigaray realising oneself also means being intersubjectively respectful to

those around us, a behaviour which is beneficial to the relationship that matures in my studio, namely that between the female model and myself (Irigaray 1993: 62).

The appeal of the piety is also evident in the contemporary art scene. It bears witness to Jerry D Meyer's assertion that '[p]ostmodernist artists intent on engaging contemporary culture in issues of political portent have referenced religious images and formats in order to invest the aesthetic artefact with a power and authority still resonating with the shadow of its former religious context' (Meyer 1997: 19). One such artist is Jenny Saville who, in works like the *Atonement studies* (2005-6), makes explicit references to the religious imagery of Giacomo Serpotta's *Altar of the holy crucifix*, 1720 (Church of Santa Ninfa dei Crociferi, Palermo). This kind of work by Saville might have been provoked by a desire to mitigate the dearth of a figure of the divine that is specific to woman, a spiritual vacuity that Irigaray blames for the absence of a sexually specific subjectivity for women (Irigaray 1993: 55-72). While Saville draws inspiration from religious artefacts, Abramović in video works like *Belgrade*, part of *Balkan erotic epic*, appropriates archaic rituals to pursue the divine discourses of her ancestors. Rather than their original intent of warding off evil and aiding the endearment with the divine, what has preserved the allure of such rites is the very fact that they can be put to the aforementioned use (Paparoni 2007: 27). Serrano's *Piss Christ* might be considered as a show of disdain to the image of Christ's and a direct provocation to the deference it enjoys in Western society. However, the juxtaposition of the divine and the abject may be an audacious challenge to the categorical separation of the sacred and profane.

Likewise, my box assemblage is a fusion of the profane and sacred, or rather the sexual and religious, and subjects the raw sexuality of its subjects to a process of transubstantiation whereby the ordinary yearns to be converted into high-art (Gosden 2004: 37-8; Nead 2001: 85). Furthermore, the notions of Eros and Thanatos are rooted in this artefact because it eroticises and fetishises our bodies through processes such as fragmentation that are intrinsically destructive operations. Eventually, these artefacts posit several intriguing questions, some of which may remain unanswered. Do they consecrate the carnality of an ordinary woman while playing off the grace and sanctity associated with representations of the Virgin Mary (Lasareff 1938)? In view of their similarity to worship aides, do they tap the flux of eccentric devotion usually associated with reliquaries of holy people and direct it to the corporeality of a common person (Mitchell 2002)? Do they implicate an unconscious desire to create transcendental associations with female sexuality? Are they meant to concur with Irigaray's view that Mary might be the physical link between the divine and the flesh (Martin 2000: 200)? Are they meant to reinterpret long sustained religious beliefs such as the Annunciation? With regard to this, Irigaray provocatively suggests that Mary may have been the one to send out a messenger angel to God, rather than the other way round. A logical sequence implying that Mary empowered herself to transcendently transform her own body (Martin 2000: 210).

While prone to provoke debates, these questions intimate that the realisation of a box assemblage involves complex thought processes that hinge on the antipodal notions of the sacred and profane. More importantly, a number of the box assemblages equate the female body with that of a male God suggesting that contrary to Western theological thought, the deific may be sourced from a woman. They go beyond their artefactual existence and become mediums through which I re-visit female sexuality and eroticism, albeit in the circumscribed framework of a particular woman, and assess them within a spiritual context. The representations of the female body within the perimeter of the box while capable of disrupting attempts to be collectively used

as a mirror which reflects the 'otherness of sameness' (Irigaray 1985: 152), they are able to safeguard the 'true otherness' of the woman they represent.

Of substantial consequence to the box assemblage is the *objet trouvé* and more so the model's personal effects, that once grazed her skin; besides acting as fetishistic mementoes of her body, these establish a direct and tangible link with her. While some are meant to evoke past experiences, others act as metaphors to fragmented memories. At this juncture Salman Rushdie's observation with regard to the incompleteness of memory is particularly germane: 'The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities' (Rushdie 2010: 12). It implies that anything placed inside the box assemblage acquires new meanings and associations. Collectively, the shell and constituent parts of the artefact may assume a significance that takes them beyond their physical presence and positions them in a realm akin to the divine.

In a tangible manner, the box assemblage's hybrid wholeness concords with Irigaray's assertion that the other may be interpreted as contemporaneously feminine and divine (Barker 2010: 322). This hypothesis is based on the intersection between philosophy and theology and her research on the writings of mediaeval women mystics such as Angela of Foligno (1248-1309). What Irigaray finds so compelling in the texts of these writers, who lived at a time when women were considered as corporeally unchaste and their gender inferior, is the assertiveness with which they conveyed their experiences as ordinary and devout women. By undauntedly accepting the denigrated status bestowed on them and womanhood in general, these mystics were able to correlate their existence with the inexplicability of God, whose antithesis to anything rational paralleled their own presumed predisposition. The status of God in the texts of these apophatic mystics is very similar to that of woman in post-feminist writings. An interesting example of the latter is Irigaray's own attempts at describing what is woman:

Woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, in-finite, *form is never complete in her*. She is not infinite but neither is she *a* unit(y), such as letter, number, figure in a series, proper noun, unique object (in a) world of the senses, simple ideality in an intelligible whole, entity of a foundation, etc. This incompleteness in her form, her morphology, allows her continually to become something else, though this is not to say that she is ever univocally nothing. No metaphor completes her. Never is she this, then that, this and that....But she is becoming that expansion that she neither is nor will be at any moment as definable universe (Irigaray 1985: 229).

Ann-Marie Priest suggests that such a colloquy picked from *Speculum of the other woman* is comparable to a mystical text. And while I appropriate the box form to re-vision and re-assess the female body, Irigaray adopts the linguistic approach and conceptual structure of the mystic writers to develop a 'feminine negative theology.' Moreover she advances the idea that God is also woman, not with the intention of assigning a female sexual identity to a supreme being, but rather to emphasise the fact that patriarchy relentlessly subjects God and women to the same treatment, that of appropriation, repression and interpretation (Priest 2003: 5-6). Her arguments are motivated by the personal accounts of these women in whose texts she identifies a hypothetical realm in which woman and God may be juxtaposed and reappraised in relation to each other. Angela's pursuit was not just drawing herself nearer to God but a complete assimilation of herself into Him through Christ to whom she affectionately referred as the 'God-man.' For Angela partaking of the Eucharist was an ecstatic and sensual experience that climaxed into an intersection with Christ's body. She made no distinction between the edible Host and his corporeal body so its consumption was a way of blending their bodies into one (Morrison: 1998: 2). Similar coalescent experiences took place in her cryptic visions:

He draws my soul with great gentleness and he sometimes says to me: 'You are I and I am you.' ...I am in the God-man almost continually. It began in this continual fashion on a certain occasion when I was given the assurance that there was no intermediary between God and myself (Angela of Foligno 1993).

Molly Morrison suggests that ultimately her physical connection with Christ, which involved carnally identifying herself with him, consuming him, and being embraced by him, also lead to piercing his body (Morrison 1998: 2). She describes one such intense visionary experience that took place in the square of Foligno as follows:

It seemed to me that I had entered at that moment within the side of Christ. All sadness was gone and my joy was so great that nothing can be said about it (Lachance 1993: 175-76).

This is an atypical situation whereby the sexual protocols of man and woman are reversed—the male Christ is penetrated by the female Angela.

In the enigmatic realm of their mysticism and through their profound love for the divine, women such as Angela were capable of attaining affinity and intimacy with God that were so strong as to suggest a metamorphosis of themselves into Him. In *La mystérique* Irigaray describes a conceptually and contextually analogous realm:

...the place where consciousness is no longer master, where, to its extreme confusion, it sinks into a dark night that is also fire and flames. This is the place where 'she'—and in some cases he, if he follows 'her' lead—speaks about the dazzling glare which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed, about 'subject' and 'Other' flowing out into an embrace of fire that mingles one term into another, about contempt for form as such, about mistrust for understanding as an obstacle along the path of *jouissance* and mistrust for the dry desolation of reason (Irigaray 1985: 191).

Here Irigaray puts forward the idea of an exceptional association between woman and God in which not only she is capable of acquiring her subjective identity, but the figurations of the feminine and the divine may become interchangeable. Such an unorthodox relationship is the basic principle underpinning my box assemblage; while Irigaray asserts that the divine is a means through which women may achieve a form of transcendence which is unconditionally their own, I claim that the box assemblage is a palpable form of this transcendental state. Grasping the radical significance of women mystics' writings, Irigaray affirms that the feminine and the divine belong to an indeterminate space that is beyond the outer limit of reason. Woman and God share a conceptual space placed at an antipodal position relative to that which is considered rational and masculine. In her writings, Irigaray exploits the very fact that the otherness of God is a keystone of Christian theology and thinking and speaking about this otherness is a Christian's interminable pursuit.

Irigaray's attitude toward the supernatural is in sharp contrast to that of Simone de Beauvoir who considers any kind of spirituality to be at most an accomplice to women's alienation (de Beauvoir 2011: 659). According to Beauvoir woman is invariably condemned to immanence, and the most she can gain from religion is a false sense of transcendence. Also, Beauvoir sees the aforementioned unfavourable sentiments projected toward women as detrimental to their complete development and merely impound them in the realm of the other. However in such an attitude toward that which is feminine, Irigaray sees and exploits an underlying potential, namely that God and woman in their inherent alterity share the potential to disrupt male discourse and enable the formation of a new subjectivity which encompasses both male and female constituents (Priest 2003: 4).

Victoria Barker asserts that by upholding Beauvoir's claim that woman is the absolute other of man and his discourses, one is indirectly regarding her in the same manner as apophatic theologians regard 'God.' Likewise, with its indecipherability woman becomes a challenge to man's own discourse. This indecipherability highlights man's limited cognizance of the other and challenges his claim to absolute and encompassing discourse. Here

the term 'other' is meant to be 'true otherness,' or the feminine defined in relation to itself as distinct from the 'other-of-the-same,' or the feminine defined in relation to the masculine (Priest 2003: 6). All this highlights the shortcomings of male thought processes. From a negative theological point of view the inability of discourse to grasp the other in its totality is evidence of the conceptual limitations of western thought (Barker 2010: 320).

By correlating the model's body with the divine, my box assemblage seeks to give this woman, as an embodiment of the 'true other,' a trans-corporeal identity. Rather than exerting control over the other, it provides a space with pious overtones whereby one is able to encounter the other and initiate an equitable relationship, unhindered with presumptive knowledge. The artefact's aesthetics and dynamics lead to a process of disengagement from preconceived dogmas, a sort of reversal cognition. And with our congruous bodies we entice the viewers to join us as partakers of this conceptual space. Using Irigaray's words, the box assemblage becomes a space for '... the meeting with an other, another who is different while being the nearest to ourselves: the clearing for the advent of a dialogue or conversation between the two parts of humanity in the respect of their otherness to one another' (Irigaray 2004: xii).

FRAGMENTATION AND PLENITUDE

This section focuses on notions of fragmentation and plenitude that, although diametric in nature, are reconciled in the box assemblage. Here I explicate how this kind of artefact, by bringing together simulacra of fragments of a woman's body, bits of her actual being retrieved during processes to which she subjects herself to in my studio, and parts of my own body, it not only transcends our collective corporeality but metamorphoses itself into a manifestation of our plenitude.

Directing my attention to Idoia, I assert that by means of the box assemblage I subject her body to a series of actions and processes that not only results in its fragmentation, but also in the forsaking of her corporeal wholeness and unified sensational ego. Then, through the compartmentalisation of the resultant body-in-pieces, I cut her off from external influences. For her this brings about a state which is not unlike that of a neo-natal child who is still oblivious to the singularity of its own body and more so of its physical boundaries. At this early stage in life, the child is consummately bonded to the mother who makes provision for all its needs, both physical and emotional. Throughout this state, which Jacques Lacan refers to as the Real, the bond with the mother is unyielding and external influences irrelevant. The Real brings about a state in life when the person, while experiencing the body in a fragmentary manner, is capable of enjoying a pure plenitude—it lacks and wants nothing (Grosz 1990: 34). My artefact simulates for Idoia those conditions that are only possible at that early stage of existence, just after one's birth. However, this time round, the bond is not with her mother but with myself through the artefact's prosthetic attributes.

Hence, my perception is that through the artwork Idoia, as the actual female subject in this project, *may* experience once again a pure plenitude. Here I draw an analogy between the state of the neo-natal child and that of the fragmented and cased woman, but while the new born experiences its own body in pieces due to a lack of self-awareness, the model presents herself in pieces as a result of the artistic process and expects to be experienced as such, through gazing and touching.

This endeavour is influenced by the body part relics conserved in precious reliquaries and venerated in Catholic churches. Although a reliquary sustains such a remnant as a tangible memory of the existence of its pious

owner, for the faithful a relic is a segment of a soul's previous and future container with which it will eventually reunite through resurrection. The last mentioned is a believable process through which the soul or self rejoins a transformed body that is able to defy the putrefaction brought about by death. Ascension to heaven means that any partition and decay of the physical body are rectified. (Bynum 1991: 263-4). Capitalising on the concept of the body as a container, I claim that the model's body part fragments, which I sanctuarize inside the box assemblage, are not just representative of her corporeality, but a segment of a collective whole that makes up the receptacle of the other.

But notwithstanding the abundance of reliquaries and relics appertaining to the Catholic Church, when it comes to the physical body, the status of any disassembled parts in relation to its wholeness has always troubled theologians. Contentious issues of their debates are whether the physical body is an essentiality to the person, and consequentially, whether its material integrity is paramount to the person's continued existence from the start of life to the afterlife.

The dogma of the Eucharist, in which the bread and wine transubstantiate into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, is yet a more complex dilemma of body partitioning since at the point of consecration there is already an issue of believable partition—that of the blood from the rest of the body. Notwithstanding the rudimentary partitioning of Christ's body into the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, believers seem not to find any flaw with the mystery of the sacrament and trust that once consecrated, both consumables are the indivisible body of Christ. The faithful partake from the contents of the ciborium and chalice with the belief that they are receiving Christ's complete body into their own.

The mystery of the Eucharist endorses the hypothesis that any piece of a fragmented body is an embodiment of the whole (Bynum 1991: 295). Intriguingly, in a particular vision Catherine of Siena saw herself marrying Christ using a wedding ring made out of his foreskin (Bynum 1991: 172-3). This is a highly symbolic experience since it not only intimates that her communion with the Lord was so strong that a severable part of his body became her own, but also suggests that for Catherine, Christ's prepuce embodied his physicality and sexualised humanity. Effectively, Catherine's vision corroborates the power of the fragment that, in lieu of the body's plenitude that might be absent, is capable of establishing a different kind of presence that goes beyond the temporal and physical existence of the actual body. Despite my views on transcendence, I draw from such powerful theological tropes and use them as a basis for my research, because Western Christian tradition underlies my intellectual formation. In certain ways, my position is not unlike those of journalist Oriana Fallaci and scientist Richard Dawkins, who consider themselves as 'Christian atheist' and 'cultural Christian' respectively. Although nonbelievers, they do acknowledge their Christian roots.

Acknowledging the power of the fragment myself, I compound the significance of the box assemblage by sanctuarizing in them sealed glass vials holding pubes and other hair lifted off the female subject's body [fig. 3.2]. Notwithstanding the diminutive presence of such hairs, as body part fragments themselves, they effectually establish her physicality and also her sexualised humanness within the structure, at a space and a time that are independent from her physical actuality.

Regardless of the ethical and theological concerns raised by the significance that is customarily attached to body part relics and their fervent veneration, throughout history the partitioning of the body has been promoted by ecclesiastical authorities themselves with the aim of producing multiple reliquaries of the same person. A recent

case is the production of two reliquaries that contain the blood of the late Pope John Paul II. Since one is kept at the Vatican's Office for Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, and the other at Rome's Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital, at any particular time John Paul's 'presence' is attested to at two different locations (Vatican Press Office, 29th April 2011). In this particular case the presumed bilocation of the subject is made more forceful by the graphic nature of the relics which are two ampoules of liquefied blood. Their fluid state gives the impression that they have just been extracted from a living body.²³



Figure 3.2

Lawrence Buttigieg, *Reliquary for Idoia*, (detail showing sealed glass vial containing her pubes), 2012
mixed media, W 149mm, H 149mm, D 149mm (when closed)
artist's collection

It is relevant to point out that the process of conserving such body bits, including fluids as in the case of John Paul, in reliquaries specially crafted out of precious metals and stones, not only gives them permanence and gravity, but also a sensation of belonging to a whole. Also, time and again the Catholic Church makes claims that a body, or parts thereof, of a holy person is the agent of unexplainable phenomena, and uses these occurrences to support the belief that such remains are not only a tangible 'presence,' but also mediators between heaven and earth. Analogously, but in more modest terms and without any claim to preternatural powers, the body fragments in my artefacts, through their power of allurements, act as mediators between my world and that of the other. They bring about a profane intercession between the two even though imbued with religious overtones.

However, the practice of attaching particular significance to body remains is not limited to those faithful who wish to relate directly with the subject of their pietism. Throughout the western world deceased loved ones are interned in family graves where relatives may pay their respects to their remains. Bodies are also pulverised

²³ The blood's liquid state is the result of anti-coagulant present in the ampoules at the time of extraction.

through cremation, placed in single or multiple urns, and taken into homes where they become cherished quiescent bystanders to the lives of their surviving relatives and friends. All this reflects the importance we attach to our bodies and their material continuity, even for the agnostic among us.

Body fragmentation is also the subject of controversial debate among intellectuals whose interests go beyond the religious realm. Routine practice in any major hospital includes surgical procedures throughout which organs, including beating hearts, change bodies.²⁴ In other interventions, bodies are compounded with xenografts, while *Nip/Tuck*²⁵ is the order of the day in any plastic surgery clinic. All this confirms that the perennial question *to what extent are we our own bodies* is relevant today as ever (Bynum 1991: 297).

At least we know that the physical boundary of our body is the skin, which also happens to be one of its vital organs. Skin, as the envelope of a person's body, is the protagonist of Pedro Almodovar's 2011 film *La piel que habito* in which he intriguingly addresses the connection between the way we look, the way we feel and the relevance of the body to the self. In this fantastical tale, a talented but psychopathic plastic surgeon, Robert Ledgard, not only intervenes on the sexuality and appearance of an involuntary patient, but substitutes this person's natural skin with a transgenic one. The victim's body is subjected to a continuous process of mutilation and mending, but while Ledgard successfully accomplishes both tasks, the self that inhabits it remains unchanged.²⁶

Mindful of the story line of this film one might be tempted into viewing the various simulacra of the woman-in-pieces that are key to my box assemblages as the result of a disintegrative process played out on Idoia's body with the ultimate aim of depriving her 'self' of its envelope. However, they are meant to be loving interventions on her body. Metaphorically, I 'open up' this woman's skin to make her ego more accessible, while at the same time the outer skin of the artefact's structure becomes her secondary integument and interface with the outside world. The box assemblage arrests the ephemerality of the skin that, according to Sara Ahmed, 'materialises' the passage of time through the formation of wrinkles, blemishes and other markings, while relinquishing the smoothness associated with youthful flesh (Ahmed 2001: 2). Body casting registers these distinctive features of the skin and its spatiality, as they happen to be at a particular moment in the body's lifetime. No matter the stillness of the body, its living skin is constantly in a dynamic state; even the unconscious act of breathing intermittently dilates and contracts the skin of the chest. But the artefact also memorialises our shared experiences by re-enacting our proximity and touching, and validating the intercorporeal link that these bring about.

Thus, while the box assemblage, through various processes, fragments and fetishises parts of her body, it has the power to restore its 'wholeness.' As in the case of a church reliquary with actual body part fragments, my artefact is endowed with the power to represent the self of the woman concerned. Furthermore, although in some artefacts the corporeal wholeness of the model's body remains unseen, the pieces available not only suffice

²⁴ As reported by *TransMedics*, in 2006 a beating heart was transplanted for the first time in medical history. This took place at the Clinic for Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery, Heart and Diabetes Centre NRW, Ruhr University of Bochum, Germany.

²⁵ *Nip/Tuck*, a TV drama in 100 episodes in six series produced between 2003 and 2010, recounts the cosmetic interventions of two plastic surgeons on their patients.

²⁶ Almodóvar, Pedro. *La piel que habito*. Trans. *The skin I live in*.

to provoke the viewers to imaginatively recreate an undivided representation of her, but also to apprehend her sexuality. Besides this, as an artefact with well-defined boundaries, the viewers are encouraged to draw a parallel between the space that it encloses and the female body within.

In *Sexual difference* Luce Irigaray addresses the link between female body and space. She observes that although woman as mother is capable of giving man a sense of place, man simply ‘...envelopes himself and his things in her flesh’ and consequentially exploits the spatiality of her body for his own ends (Irigaray 1987: 123). Herein, through the artistic process and the artefact itself, I symbolically restore to woman that place which, although naturally her own, has time and again been appropriated by man. I feel indebted for the sense of place offered by a woman’s body that, despite being our first dwelling place, has so often been deprecated and its spatiality abused.



Figure 3.3

Lawrence Buttigieg, *Tabernacle for Idoia* (detail showing internal cylindrical space), 2011- (unfinished)
mixed media, W 480mm, H 480mm, D 480mm (when closed)
artist’s collection

As a male artist who cherishes the mystery and otherness of the female body, and who is determined to open up to it, I humbly venture with my artefacts to renew woman’s relationship with those qualities that Irigaray considers as unique to womanhood—the spatial and the foetal. I do this by giving the subject of my artworks a piece of my studio space which, once enclosed within the chassis of the box assemblage, becomes partly her own. This spatial fragment is part of that where the artefact is conceived and created and notwithstanding its modest size, it becomes the place where the encounter with the other may take place. Although the box

assemblage is a relatively small structure whose inside cannot be physically experienced as architectural space, nonetheless it conveys inestimable significance and any viewer beholding it is meant to be affected by its intimacy and sacrality.

The inside of the box assemblage is designed in such a manner as to create a progression of intimate spaces in which the various representations and other items are compartmentalised in a ranking order that reflects the significance and value, in terms of shared experiences and memories, each holds to the female subject and myself. *Tabernacle for Idoia* [fig. 3.3] consists of a centrally placed cylindrical compartment concealed inside a cuboid shell. To access it one must first unlock and swing apart the two sides of the outer case, and then push aside a circular door that hides it. This is the artefact's main and more intimate space, sheltering inside it polychrome simulacra of Idoia's vagina and right hand. The fan-shaped series of five small recessed spaces in the chamber's floor holds various objects belonging to Idoia and myself. Other smaller spaces are in the form of two vertical groups of nooks that flank the inner chamber.



Figure 3.4
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Tabernacle for Idoia* (detail showing a 'crucified' Idoia), 2011- (unfinished)
mixed media, W 480mm, H 480mm, D 480mm (when closed)
artist's collection

Following this very brief spatial analysis of *Tabernacle for Idoia*, I direct my attention to the paintings adorning its walls. While two portraits on the outside show an attired Idoia, two of the three on the inside, placed on either side of the central chamber, equate this woman's exposed body with that of Christ, while recalling his Crucifixion and Deposition [fig. 3.4]. The one showing her in a cruciform pose is inspired by the appearance in a vision of nun Lukardis of Oberweimar (c. 1276-1309) to a monk in the late thirteenth century which showed her on the cross analogously to her crucified Lord (Bynum 1991: 155). But while the aim of the vision of Lukardis might have been was to establish a mystical union between Jesus and herself, mine is to emphasise the

link between that which is 'other' and the divine. Whereas in these images Idoia's body is correlated with that of Christ's male carnality, in the central compartment her enshrined body parts are associated with his divine nature. Drawing on Irigaray, *Tabernacle for Idoia* graphically reinterprets the phrase 'and the Word became flesh' (John 1:14) to vouch for a new kind of theology which upholds sexual difference, and respects the otherness of women. Thus, through *Tabernacle for Idoia*, 'the flesh may become word' (Mulder 2006: 68).

These aforementioned observations suggest that the box assemblage opens *onto* what Gaston Bachelard calls the dimension of intimacy in which the interior itself and the contents are able to prompt one's thoughts, dreams and imagination (Bachelard 1994: 85) [fig. 3.5]. Since these experiential concepts cannot be reconciled with temporal limits, they endow the artefact with the essence of the infinite and while some experiences of our complicitous relationship are revealed, others remain concealed even when the structure is wide open. Such an engagement with the artefact starts at the moment when the viewer decides to gain access to its interior with the aim of exploring it.

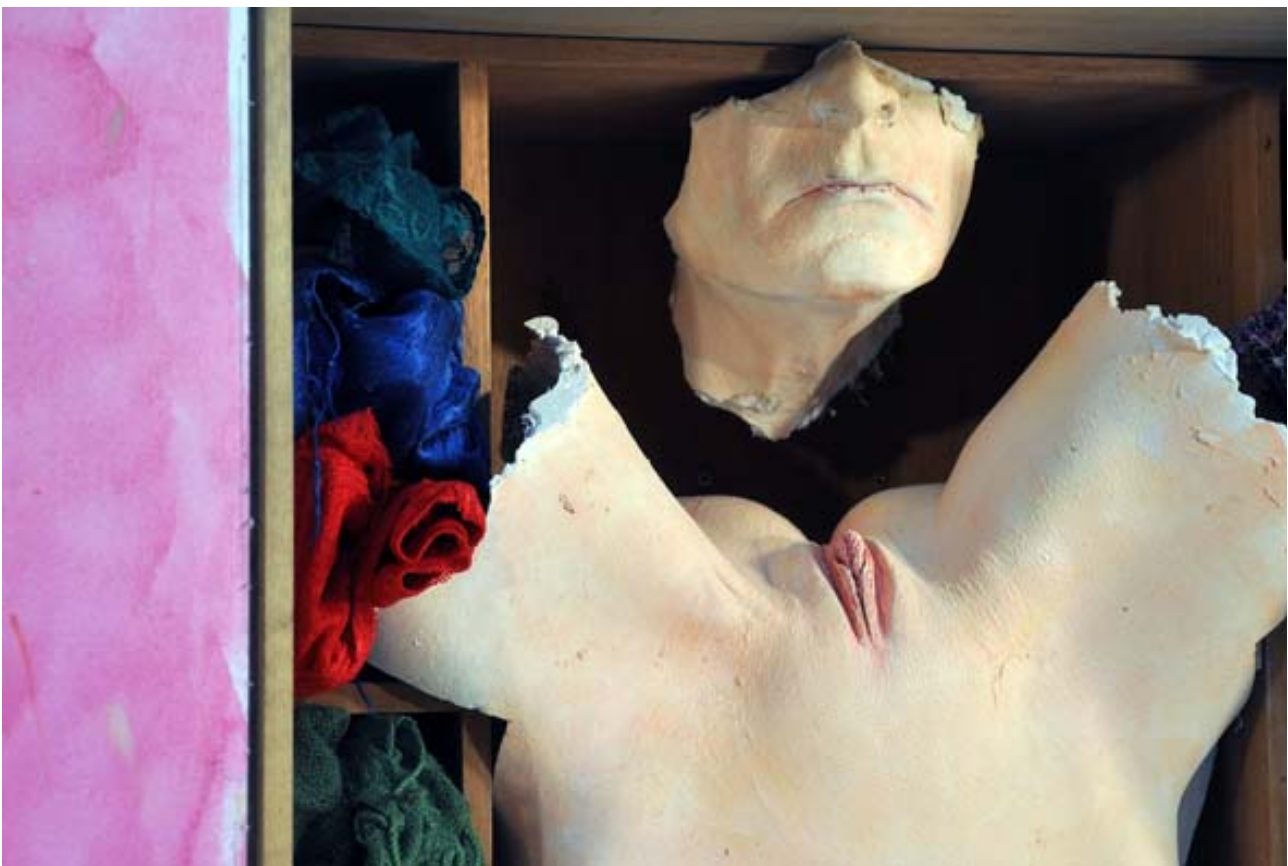


Figure 3.5

Lawrence Buttigieg, *Cabinet of intimate landscapes* (detail), 2009- (unfinished)

W 552mm, H 551mm, D 545mm (when closed)

artist's collection

Access to the inside of *Tabernacle for Idoia* [fig. 3.4] is through two hinged and convergent panels whose capacity to swing back and forth is barely noticeable when closed. However, this closure is only sustained through the impermanent interface brought about by the coming together of two distinct surfaces, not unlike that performed by a pair of lips, wherein the touch between the flesh is ephemeral and the continuity between the outside and inside is never really cut off. Once the panels are parted from each other, the interior of the box assemblage becomes visible and accessible once again. Part of the artefact's opening mechanism is a literal and physical interpretation of Irigaray's two lips metaphor.

Such a design concept brings about the kind of ‘wonder’ taken up by Irigaray in *Sexual difference* and with which I seek to permeate the artefact as a means of enticing the viewer. Drawing from Rene` Decartes, Irigaray describes wonder as the ‘first emotion,’ the sort that is not *yet* diluted by antagonism and which is capable of bringing around our appreciation of sexual difference through curiosity and fascination (Irigaray 1998: 425). This kind of wonder, which never ceases to be present in my encounters with the female model, powers my creative drive. Artwork after artwork, especially those dealing with Idoia, I am invariably filled with awe at a woman’s sexuality and the other that she embodies.



Figure 3.6
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Tabernacle for ourselves*, 2011- (unfinished)
mixed media, W 515mm, H 465mm, D 447mm (when closed)
artist’s collection

My aim is to affect those persons who wish to experience my box assemblage with such reverential feelings toward the female body. I do so by luring them to take a closer look and experience an unconventional representation of a particular woman whose body-in-pieces is re-assembled, together with parts of my own body and various objects, in a distinct and sacralised space. Danyl Ferrari and Valentina Spalten rightly point out that the significance of any object is altered as a result of its juxtaposition to other things. Thus, the consequence of the body-part relics, the representations, and the miscellaneous items, is amplified by their proximity to each other. The viewers are invited to behold these both as individual and distinct pieces and also as a collective whole. Deprived of the quality of wholeness, the body fragments invite ambiguity, apprehension and reflection. Individually and collectively, each one of them lures the viewers to envisage and ponder the story they wish to tell (Ferrari & Spalten 2011: 46). The viewers are meant to acknowledge that although they are presented with partitioned bodies, the box assemblage as a complete whole reaches out beyond their corporeality. They are given the opportunity of examining its various parts, use their imagination where it is lacking, and ultimately identify with the other.

The box assemblage reifies Irigaray's notion of transcendence which, shunning away from hierarchical differentiation in terms of divineness, it not only encourages participatory engagements but also promotes the notion of an 'in-dwelling' divine. This is the cardinal difference between any of my artefacts and a church tabernacle. Taking *Tabernacle for ourselves* as an example, this box assemblage seeks to discredit the notion that the self may be 'essential' or absolute, not only by laying emphasis on its fluidity and vulnerability, but also by bringing about its 'con-similation'²⁷ with the other [fig. 3.6]. As for the church tabernacle, although it may be the meeting point for the self and the other, this other is always assumed to be an absolute being (Joy 2006: 4).

THE ALLURE OF FEMALE NAKEDNESS

Although the 'fleshliness' of the subjects of the box assemblage may seem to contrast sharply with the ciborium of wheat-based wafers housed in a church tabernacle, there exists an important analogy between the two. Just as the host is meant to associate with its partakers through consumption, the contents of the box assemblage are also meant to be associated with its partakers, but through gazing and touching. While the external walls of the box assemblage are in most cases adorned with representations of a clothed woman and man, its inner space harbours others that portray their whole and fragmented bodies in an unveiled state. A closer look at this intramural group of representations of bodies reveals that the woman's nakedness is not the timid and ambivalent kind which might be conducive to emotions of vulnerability and submissiveness on her part, and which is so stereotypical in contemporary erotica (Carol Duncan 1993: 109). Their nakedness is not the type encountered through the looking glass that, at times, might bring to our minds feelings of self-abjection. Rather, these images represent a shameless and uninhibited kind of exposure not unlike the one shared between a mother and her child—a state of shared nudity that, hinging on absolute trust between two persons, brings about warm feelings of intimacy, tenderness and innocent desire.

Although they are concealed inside the box structure, with the more risqué ones sheltered in its penetralia, these representations of nudity are meant to be sought out by the inquisitive viewers whose actions might push them beyond the state of 'just nakedness,' or the state of simply having one's skin exposed, to the precarious situation which Rob Cover terms 'nakedness *as gazed upon*' (Cover 2003: 54). Consequentially, such gazing is likely to trigger their sexualization because persons engaged in a sexual act tend to expose themselves and make what is intimately personal to them available to the scrutiny and pleasure of others. Also, while a person may perform 'nakedness' to seduce or embarrass other people, it may be a virtuous invitation to share intimacy and propinquity with others. This is because notwithstanding the possibility of a tantalising encounter, baring one's body is also tantamount to exposing, offering and making oneself available. Thus, the ordinariness of being naked does not render this state any less personal and private, at least for many people, and it is the sharp contrast between the commonness and intimateness of such an activity which might disrupt the matter-of-fact performativity of nakedness.

Interestingly, in *Naked* Elizabeth Grosz outlines three main situations where shared nakedness is unequivocally permitted. The first of these situations is when the naked person is still a child, secondly when the exposure takes place within the context of an intimate relationship, and thirdly when the state of undress is mediated through a process of representation within the ambit of an array of possible settings such as medicine, art and

²⁷ *Con-similation* is my play on the words convergence and assimilation.

entertainment. All three examples are conducive to corporeal affection where the actual nakedness comes along not only with an urge to gaze and draw pleasure from such gazing, but also constitutes an enticement to touch (Grosz 1997).

Turning back to the box assemblage, notwithstanding the contradictory intimations that may be conveyed both by its actual representations of nakedness and also by the contexts in which these same representations are wrapped up, its simulacra are the corollary of the uninhibited and shameless kind that I endeavour to engender in my studio. This is a protected place where the unclothed Idoia, insightful that her bare body is meant to be observed by a trusted friend, who also happens to be appreciative of its aesthetic beauty and eroticism, may relish the freedom, abandonment and affection such an ambience brings about. In such sheltered circumstances, and through the actuality of her bare and unhindered body, she is able to enjoy her immediate surroundings and company through the totality of her whole body. With the right conditions in the studio, an aura may be set in place in which this woman may feel more inclined to experience and take pleasure from what is around her through her sense of touch. Such a setting is key when I am applying viscous material to her body as part of the body casting process, as this ensures that the skin sensitisation involved brings her pleasurable sensations, rather than discomfort. Throughout this process, a state is created between us, and whatever is in contact with our bodies, that Iris Marion Young refers to as 'fluid continuity' (Young 2005: 69). This is because as all touching is mutual it is liable to erase the borders between her, all the objects we touch, and myself. Ultimately, the allure of such a state lies in the fact that Idoia's whole body surface transforms itself into one great interface between the other and myself. At such instances, the naturists' perception of their bodies is particularly significant as they zealously believe in the directness of their bodies' skin as a means of feeling their surroundings and filtering the experiences these have to offer. For the naturist, there is no part of the body about which one should be ashamed of, and any kind of modesty translates into degrading feelings of shame.

From the aforementioned observations, it is clear that any assessment of the significance upheld by nakedness needs to take into account the context in which it is performed and, if taking place in the presence of gazers, the relationship between them and the exposed person (Cover 2003: 59). With regard to my experiences with Idoia, the very fact that while she performs naked in the studio we consider it imperative to turn the space into an exclusive zone to ensure no intruders, betrays the earnestness with which we attend to our pursuit.

Notwithstanding the lapse of more than fifteen years, Idoia has never ceased to kindle in me a yearning not only to capture through my artefacts her corporeality, but also to fathom the essence that lies beyond it. With a body weight invariably maintained between 45 and 50 kilogrammes, and a height of just over 165 centimetres, Idoia has managed a graceful and well-toned physique throughout the time I have known her. I have seen her mature, and her youthful charm evolve into something more sophisticated. Notwithstanding her petite constitution, I have always presumed that within her prevails the intriguing and complex insight of what it means to be female and possibly a tentative answer to Toril Moi's perennial question 'What is a woman?' I use the adjectival 'tentative' here because being a woman, or a man for that matter, is a processual state that only comes to a halt at the end of life (Moi 1999: 117-8). Regrettably, it seems that no matter how much I strive to comprehend this knowledge, and how forthcoming and obliging Idoia is, there always remains an uncrossable distance between us that makes its complete assimilation impossible. Nonetheless, over the years my work has succeeded in evolving into a satisfactory means of intercession between this woman and myself, and I trust it has become a journey-in-

progress into her inner intangible feelings through physical flesh, or mind through matter, so to say (McDonald 2001: 4). This pursuit remains driven by the hope that at any time my wish to approach the female other may be granted, even though I am aware that such a desire will never be completely realised. Metaphorically, the box assemblage has become my place of proximity with the other, the place for that ungraspable unknown or 'irreducible difference' (Irigaray 2002: xi-xii).

From these notes on personal experiences, it is amply clear that the physical body cannot be just an inert container, with as much as a permeable skin, to what lies inside it. My artworks are meant to be tangible proof that Idoia's delicate body is directly related to her unique knowledge of what it means to be a woman, suggesting that there exists a dynamic synergy between the corporeal and incorporeal. Somehow, her physical body must be in some kind of symbiotic relationship with her existential awareness that not only transforms it into a nexus with the outside world, but also provides it with a tool to express itself and share its knowledge. For many years I have intuitively understood that Idoia's body allows me to access the other, but it was only recently that I have pinpointed that quality which makes her body apt for such a venture. What makes her body responsive to my search for the other and amenable to express her womanhood to me is her unique eroticism, that which happens to be so tantalisingly intriguing to me.

Throughout my many rendezvous with her, I have consistently derived pleasure tinged with desire from scrutinising her skin down to its smallest dimple, from observing how her body picks up slight changes in the ambient conditions. Pushing boundaries even further, body casting has consequentially allowed me to physically feel the tenderness and warmth of her flesh and how her skin reacts to the application of modelling material. All this suggest that not only does the erotic forthcoming from Idoia's naked body permeate these sessions, but it is also the powerhouse which drives the creative process.

Lorde refers to the erotic as a withheld or otherwise underutilised source of energy that, although difficult to define, inherently lies within the female psyche and is capable of pushing a woman's life to a higher level of fulfilment. In her essay *Uses of the erotic: the erotic as power* she argues that western society, aware of the underlying power of eroticism, has invariably sought to dampen and curtail its potency so as to deprive womanhood from its thorough use (Lorde 2007: 87-91). On the other hand, she argues that a shallow and frivolous kind of eroticism, such as that amply evident in the entertainment industry, is wilfully sustained and encouraged only to equate its actuality to woman's supposed vulnerability. While stating that '[t]he erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings,' she encourages women to reclaim the erotic for themselves and exploit its power to the fullest, well beyond its sensational effects on the body (Lorde 2007: 88). But the erotic is not gender specific and through the erotic all may gain cognizance of their deepest irrational feelings. Throughout a private session between Idoia and myself, by allowing the erotic to nourish and thrive on our intense emotions, it not only enhances our self-awareness but rewards us with an appeased state of deep contentment and fulfilment which, once experienced, becomes the desired end goal of future collaborative activities. Idoia, as the one performing naked in these sessions, also has the benefit of indulging and pleasuring herself in her nudity with the knowledge that she may do so without inhibitions, but excitingly aware that eventually her refashioned body will be shared with many others.

Lorde's outlook of the erotic is particularly interesting on account of the fact that while she asserts that it is an integral and fundamental aspect of passion and sensuality, she points out that these, as experienced in one's daily

life, need not necessarily be related to the sexual. For her the erotic is all about giving a human dimension to anything we do and so may well extend beyond the sexual. Just as sensuality and passion may be brought about by non-carnal experiences (such as reading poetry, watching a film, or seeing an exhibition), the remit of the erotic may go well beyond concupiscence. Unfortunately, society tends to differentiate between the erotic and any other deeply felt emotion with the apparent aims of harnessing it, confining it within the ambit of the intimate and personal, and ultimately repressing it.

Lorde describes the erotic as ‘true knowledge’ because it is brought about by instinctive desires and thus may be considered as an intimation of our most profound feelings. It is not unlike innate discernment that, as an indispensable cognition tool, is usually the first step toward ‘further’ knowledge. Throughout our private sessions, Idoia and myself do allow the erotic to inspire the way forward with our collaborative pursuits. Although we plan each session, we allow enough leeway so that the insightfulness forthcoming from the erotic itself may play its part. This is because we concur with Lorde’s assertion that ‘[o]ur erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinise all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives’ (Lorde 2007: 89). For her the erotic not only has the power to heighten our indulgence in the activities we enjoy doing, and yield for us a more satisfying experience throughout, but it also serves as a means of passionately sharing one’s interests in life with others and bringing about a better understanding of that which distinguishes us from one another. The erotic’s amenity of bringing persons closer to each other is achieved by nurturing an intersubjective awareness between them, especially if they are engaged in pursuing a common goal together. A clear example is the relationship between Idoia and myself that, notwithstanding its complexity, has matured over the years. While it has been fuelled by our collaborative commitment toward the common goal of creating artefacts, her nakedness has been the catalyst of this erotic adventure.

I feel that the power of *erotic Idoia* is intensified by the contrast between the apparent vulnerability of her persona, in terms of physical appearance, and what I perceive to be an immeasurableness of instinctual knowledge pertaining to her gender. During our private sessions Idoia accentuates the vulnerability of her nakedness by not only making the more intimate areas of her body available to my gazing, but also to my touch, albeit for the sake of the artistic process. This vulnerability is then moderated through the box assemblage that presents her body in parts. Once fragmented, the various bits are then coalesced with the other components of the artefact, including parts of my own body, to form a complete whole. The box assemblage reconfigures Idoia’s nakedness and gives it a new boundary or skin which takes the form of the structure’s carapace. The artefact not only metamorphoses Idoia’s nakedness into a containable and controllable form, and consequentially makes it more appealing to myself and the viewer, but also sets in motion a dynamic interplay of hiding and revealing which enhances the allure of her nakedness. In this amenable state, identifying with such a body becomes more desirable and pleasurable.

This kind of transformation concurs with Grosz’s assertion that the human body has an innate potential of ‘becoming’—a result of external interventions or flux within the body itself (Grosz 1994: 173-9). With regard to my box assemblage, both kinds of forces confluence on Idoia’s body, to augment its charm, push it to a state where it becomes something other than itself, and ultimately render it more erotic. Thus, the woman’s nakedness is rematerialised through the artefact—from flesh to plaster, paint, canvas, TFT-LCD surfaces, and other

constituent matter. My *objet d'art* not only transposes itself into a refashioned Idoia, but also affirms her 'presence' through her body-part relic treasured inside it. This 'keepsake' alludes to the inherent potential of the female body to transform itself into art and more so to recreate itself into something that goes beyond the confines of its skin.

And thus the box assemblage not only transforms the raw nakedness of Idoia, but through fragmentation, reconfiguration and sanctuarization, prosthetically establishes for it associations which go beyond the confines of her corporeality and temporality. The last mentioned is achieved through the moving images that represent it at a time and place that are independent to the physical and temporal location of Idoia herself. However, I am immediately compelled to reconsider my use of the term 'raw nakedness' since Idoia is only disposed to present me her bare body in the very specific context of the studio space and only once she exhausts a series of long established practices. One of these is the shaving away of any hair from the parts of the body I intend to cast. Such habitual actions, which now have nearly taken on the status of rites, not only help to moderate the sexual overtones brought about by Idoia's nakedness, and keep us focused on the artistic process, but also affirm the context for her performance, the gazing involved and, where relevant, the touching—all three activities which in other circumstances might be considered highly inappropriate.

All this brings me back to the 'gaze.' I am fully aware that my gaze on Idoia's naked body is erotic since it encroaches on its carnal and sensuous subjectivities, or those that characterise its eroticism and sexuality. At this point I wish to make reference to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who advocates a more dynamic understanding of what it means to be sexual, one which not only goes beyond the heterosexual and homosexual binary, but also beyond the carnal itself (Sedgwick 1990: 35). Indirectly, Kosofsky's model is one that sustains Lorde's hypothesis of a more universal erotic which need not be confined to the remit of the libido. Just as Lorde's erotic provenance need not be sexual, Sedgwick's sexuality need not be genital. And with such an approach to both the sexual and the erotic, 'nakedness *as gazed upon*' will be an innocuous and innocent activity, albeit an erotic and sensual one.

While in the introductory paragraph I stated that with my artefacts I am pursuing a kind of nakedness which is similar to that shared between a mother and her child, at this point I wish to complement this statement by saying that my gaze is innocuous and kindred to that of a parent gazing at a bathing child. Although pleasurable, it remains inoffensive. And similarly this applies to Idoia who returns my gaze through her nakedness. Although at times she might present me with an open pose and a 'provocative' look, these are simply reflexive reactions to the sexual undercurrents at play, and remain within the remit of the harmless and friendly. Also, these occasions have to be considered within the light of our long established relationship and the trust that we share between us. The allure of Idoia's nakedness has from time to time been complemented with anecdotal reflections on her same body and also narratives on her life experiences. As a result of these I am very much aware about how she sees her own body, and what she considers to be its strong and weak attributes. She has also given me an idea on how other persons have judged her body throughout the years, and how these experiences have impinged on this same body.

Contrary to what Duncan has to say regarding contemporary depictions of women, namely that 'the female nude, as a genre, is one of many cultural phenomena that teaches women to see themselves through male eyes and in terms of dominating male interests,' I honestly believe that my box assemblages approach a particular

woman's body in awe, conscious of its unique and sacred existence (Duncan 1993: 113). This is particularly evident in works such as *Tabernacle for Idoia* in which she not only readily 'takes possession' of a sort of tabernacle-styled structure, and thus draws a parallel between her carnal presence and the supernatural one of Christ, but inside it she also enacts pertinent episodes of his life. Through this artefact, a woman is appropriating the sacred place of the Son-of-God in ways that establish a parallel between the feminine and the divine, or that inhabiting an unreachable and unknowable domain. Notwithstanding the fact that the box assemblage is a male artist's creation, it does not attempt to subdue or exploit the female form. Clearly enough, I have taken on board Margaret R Miles' appeal to men to forego the female body as an unscrupulous means of 'representation of male sexuality' (Miles 1989: 179).

RE-VISIONING THE FEMALE BODY

While Idoia's complexity as a human being, and more so as a woman, fills me with awe and wonder, I do believe that there is more than just human nature sustaining the allure she plays on me. On the one hand this has led me to delve deep into myself in search of that which triggers my feelings for her; on the other hand, since it is this woman's physical presence that enkindles my passions, I am sure that the cause of such a fascination must either be utilising the agency of her corporeality to impact me, or else it is Idoia herself who uses the 'power' embodied within her in ways which effect me so deeply. Thus, spurred by my desire to seek the source of the power this woman exerts on me, I re-vision her body through the box assemblage.

Although energised by Idoia's sexuality and eroticism, this kind of artefact not only functions as a sophisticated representational device with her as subject, but also acts as a metaphor of my own self. As the materialisation of a re-visioning process that is directed at my relationship with this woman and her *libidinous influence on me*, it also evolves into an exploration of my own sexuality.

Here I wish to recall Kenneth Clark's concept of the female nude, or rather the idealised representation of the female form from which any ensuing sensory pleasure may be regulated and balanced out with an adequate degree of contemplative pleasure (Clark 1984: 3-29). In contrast to Clark's notion, the box assemblage not only addresses the raw sexuality of a particular woman, but through fragmentation disrupts the boundaries and integrality of her body, and fetishistically contaminates any pleasure which might be derived from residual ideality that the body-in-pieces might have. In the process, the artefact seeks out not only to re-vision this woman's carnal significance but also to appraise its transcendental potentiality.

As a physical extension of myself, custom-made to host simulacra, body fragments, relics and possessions of Idoia, the box assemblage acts as a space which pragmatically sustains our rendezvous. However, its resourcefulness goes further as it serves as a melting pot for our subjectivities, and acts as a locus where we may experience each other's alterity. Whereas in contexts that are extramural to it as a structure, Idoia's perception of me is an experience of myself from without and thus beyond my comprehension, through its prosthetic attributes and its power to hold and assimilate her subjectivity, the box assemblage materialises my access to this woman's insight of me.

It is pertinent to note that human sexual desire is not only concerned with unqualified corporeal attraction between persons, but also with what Alphonso Lingis refers to as the 'incarnate subjectivity' of a body (Lingis 1985: 20). Through the objectivity of the box assemblage I identify and contain this incarnate subjectivity, a kind

which not only individuates the body's existence and liveness, in this case that of Idoia, but also its relationship with its milieu.

Lingis goes on to state that sexuality is not just a bodily characteristic which might be expressed through its carnality, but rather a major determinant of consciousness, its provenience lying at the very heart of one's being. He not only asserts that sexuality gains significance through the objectifying encounter between two or more persons, and in which instance it may be their means of osmotically taking in each others' alterity, but stresses that '(t)he sexual impulse is *entirely* addressed to the other; it is intentional' (my emphasis) (Lingis 1985: 19). Thus, through the box assemblage I harness the libidinal instincts that emanate from and cross between the subject's body and my own, and exploit them as media to access the other.

My wish is to get Idoia closer to me in such a manner that circumvents and goes beyond the bounds of sexual consummation. I do this by objectifying my own self through the creation of the box assemblage that, although an extension of myself, is not only amenable to the sanctuarization of her corporeal simulacra and relics, but also to attending to her subjectivity. The artefact, designed *expressly* around Idoia's body, becomes a means of disengaging her from her own worldly concerns and commitments and any extraneous attempts at objectification that might hinder our assimilation.

This disengagement may easily be triggered when casting an especially sensitive area of her body. Independently from her volition, her body not only becomes receptive to my hands but reacts to the alien, yet potentially pleasurable, sensations afforded by the substances employed. The body casting makes Idoia acutely alert of her whole throbbing body but primarily that area which is the focus of my attention. This induced profound awareness of her own carnal and existential self also makes her perceptive to her otherness, that mysterious element capable of getting around her rational intentions to stir her feelings to the core. Such alterity impinges not only on Idoia's subjectivity whose bare body triggers the libido between us, but also my own. The box assemblage is all about these moments when Idoia is perceptibly ready to give me access to her own interiority, a state of mind which is reflected in the way she presents herself to me in the studio. When seductively sprawled on the studio bed or divan, with legs open and ready to be smeared with creamy stuff that finds its way into her labia and skin crevices, she makes clear her disposition to open up her subjectivity to me.

Lingis asserts that our libido precedes and readily influences the formation of our individuality, with the consequence that personality and the libidinal self are a truthful reflection of each other (Lingis 1985: 53). From this it follows that Idoia's disposition to transform herself into an erotic surface that readily welcomes my hands and trade, is a direct reflection of her libidinal self. Although our demeanour is subject to studio propriety and the implicit understanding that it is meant to be motivated by the exigencies of the artefactual processes, Idoia's postural interaction with me remains seductive in nature, and consequently it allows us to feel the closeness of each other's alterity. We become aware that otherness may be more accessible than we ever thought possible.

At these particular moments Idoia is acutely insightful of what is happening to her body, going into a mental state which for this particular period of time overrides all her other concerns. While her body's posture and coordination with her surroundings reflects her perception of the studio and myself, contemporaneously, such physical disposition is a direct reflection of her interiority. They are a real life example of Lingis' assertion that '(p)erception is an inscription of a dynamic version of the outside within and a reflection of oneself on the outside' (Lingis 1985: 51).

At this point I wish to make reference to Catherine Clément's notion of 'syncope,' a term she uses to define existential experiences throughout which the circumstances at hand, such as those just outlined, seem to take over our sensibilities (Clément 1994: 1-21). Syncope occurs throughout the box assemblage's transmutation from concepts, sketches, and rendezvous between Idoia and myself, to a state of quiescence, abiding the arrival of someone willing to explore it and partake from its power. Throughout the delicate process of applying uncured silicone to her orificial regions, we are so overwhelmed and absorbed with what we are doing that we become insensitive to anything that does not concern our pursuit, our attentions being completely focused on the artefactual processes. Syncope also occurs at revelatory moments when percept-wise raw bodiliness seems to acquire an altered state. Examples of this are when insignificant details, such as the tiny creases in the delicate flesh which surrounds the vagina, dimples on the skin, the near-invisible down which nonetheless tends to diffuse the lighting directed on the body, the softness of the breasts, the rib cage bumping underneath the skin, seem to acquire an unimaginable beauty. This is the moment when I pay homage to the poetic beauty, albeit usually overlooked, of the female body. While syncope occurs at such moments, it also transpires throughout the time when the box assemblage is complete and ready to surprise the partakers by its design and contents.

The box assemblage encapsulates the intense feelings which tend to intersperse my sessions with the model. What might be considered as the 'caress' of the artist's hands and eyes on her silky skin, evoking discreet sexual desires and rousing her otherness into action, is transplanted into the box assemblage, where it may recommence at anytime and continue indefinitely. While unable to offer the sensual experience of looking at and feeling the fleshliness of the actual body, the box assemblage as a composite whole, which includes manifold simulacra of our bodies and heterogeneous items, offers an alternative kind of experience. Its sensualised, sexualised and fetishised setup, coupled with its self-reflexivity, transforms it into what Wendy Steiner refers to as 'the real real thing,' ready to be caressed and fondled through hands and eyes (Steiner 2010: 1-7).

Although throughout my text I have highlighted the communicative potential of the body, I do not wish to detract from the significance of the face in this regard. A cursory glance at my artworks shows that Idoia is also capable of opening herself up to others just through her physiognomy and more so through her eyes. Although comprising a relatively small part of the bodily surface, the visage is not only a highly specialised processor of sensory information but excels in distinguishing its persona. While capable of an infinite number of gestures, the face is not simply a question of signs and expressions. Useful to welcome or challenge other persons, to attract their attention, or to reveal and to share with them, it also provides an access to a person's interiority and alterity.

Through our faces we renew our alliances at each and every rendezvous, gauge each other's temperament and reciprocal feelings, and maybe catch a glimpse of what lies hidden deep inside us. Idoia's face is an unsurpassable means of divulging her passions and her otherness to me and thereby soliciting a response (Lingis 1985: 59-60). But more than anything else, through her face she summons me to her bare body, or rather the sensuousness of her carnality. Facing me she presents her erotic self because as Lingis rightly states '[e]roticisation is something that happens to a body already expressive, a body that faces' (Lingis 1985: 61). At the same time, as she bares herself for the sake of the artistic process, she renders herself vulnerable and uncertain to me.

The manifestation of Idoia's selfhood through the box assemblage is in sharp contrast to the perfunctory status bestowed on the female body by traditional Christian doctrine and iconography; a stance which is particularly horrid in the context of woman's capacity to bear children. Both espouse the Platonic philosophical notion whereby in reproduction a woman's function is limited to providing the necessary formless matter that is then acted upon by man to take human form and characteristics (Grosz 1994: 5-6). This conveys the belief that rather than being an essential part of procreation and an effective contributor to the child, the gestating mother is just a physical vessel meant to protect it throughout its unborn state. This dichotomy between the sexes, conceived in the nascency of Western philosophical thought, found support in Christian doctrine and iconography, as is the case with the portrayal of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus. Although his natural mother, Mary is incessantly referred to as the bearer of the son of God, and as a result of the credence that she is the subject of mystical fecundation, her contribution to Jesus' physiology seems to be unimportant to all. Invariably, she is either portrayed as the caring mother, readily supporting her son or enfolding him, or else shown as a transformed woman, shorn of her corporeal rawness and mundane attributes. Karen von Veh points out that while the Virgin Mary attains her divine status via consent to mother a male god, the Christian nomenclatural use of 'virgin' connotes that she is meant to negate her libido in view of her deified status (von Veh 2009: 53-4). Also, it is worth pointing out that no one seems to care whether Mary mothered any other children with her husband Joseph. Simone Beauvoir, with reference to the cult of the Mary, lays bare her denigrated motherly status when declaring that '[f]or the first time in the history of humanity, the mother kneels before her son; she recognises her inferiority' (Beauvoir 1949: 189).

As a rule, Christian iconography that concerns the female body equates serene and physically flawless examples with a pure interiority, and advocates the attainment of a beatific kind of muliebrity. In contrast, the box assemblage focuses on the womanhood of an ordinary person, fragments her body and allows her to fondle her own corporeal pieces. But this caressing of body parts is also open to the partakers and myself with the result that all parties are committed to a complicitous relationship based not only on gazing but also touching. Although the box assemblage makes implicit references to ecclesiastical works of art and artefacts, it tacitly renounces saintliness and probity through fragmentation and contamination, that which might be brought about by disrespectful looks and irreverent touching.

The box assemblage disrupts the patriarchal concept of the female body, such as that implied in representations of Mary as an able foil and maternal enfolder to Jesus, by reversing the roles of the two sexes. The artefact, as an accessory to my body, foils and enfolds that of Idoia. From this vantage point she opens up herself and brings out her sexuality more forcefully. The box assemblage re-vision the female body in such a manner that the ordinariness of a particular woman outdoes the ideality of her divinised counterpart.

Doing away with Clark's complacent and hypothetical female nude, the box assemblage re-vision a woman's body in such a manner that underscores its power, sophistication, and mystery; and also highlights its ambiguous nature. Further to this, it disrupts the containment of its eroticism and sexuality which, according to Lynda Nead, Clark's concept of female nudity is meant to establish and preserve, to re-contain them in a male body, my own (Nead 1992: 12-6). As a metaphorical exploration of my own sexuality, the box assemblage deemphasises the implications that might be brought over by the male gaze. I wish to stress that the woman's fragmented and incomplete body within its confines alludes to the ungraspable whole.



Figure 3.7
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Peep-hole box*, 2013- (unfinished)
mixed media, w 319mm, H 321mm, D 657mm (when closed)
artist's collection

Moving further away from Clark's intent of deriving asexual pleasure from the female nude, the erotically charged box assemblage seeks to engage the viewers through physical contact, in some cases also doing away with the distance between it and their eyes. This is especially the case with *Peep-hole box* [fig. 3.7] that requires them to 'brush' the face or nose against it. The box assemblage expects partakers rather than gazers, persons who willingly and physically interact with its structure and contents. This artefact is designed in such a manner that those wishing to have a look at what lies inside this chamber, need to press their faces to a simulacrum of Idoia's vagina standing in an appositely designed niche just underneath the perforation. All this makes their psychological and physical interaction with the whole setup more intense and complicitous, while through the structure's own orifice they may view intimate footage of the model. Although at times it seems that the model is unaware of the recording device, at others she confronts it and returns the viewers' gaze. This footage is meant to be interspersed with real time moving images, either passively showing the interior of my studio, or else showing the partakers themselves sneaking a glance through the peephole, and thus highlighting their vulnerability while in the guise of voyeurs. The peephole box draws attention on the relationship between the artefact's protagonists and the spying partakers.

And this brings me to the box assemblage's effectiveness in addressing the boundary between representation and lived experience. While this matter has already been dealt with when discussing the presence of simulacra and relics inside the structure, in this particular instance I wish to draw attention to the presence in some of the box assemblages of a particular perfume which is either conserved as a few drops in an apposite vial, or else carried on fabrics which belong to the subject. Here I was inspired by Marilyn Monroe's declaration that *Coco Chanel No 5*, created by Ernest Beaux, was her only sleepwear, a statement which not only highlights the sexual overtones and exquisiteness in the use of perfume, but the fact that a perfume's scent connotes its wearer's skin.²⁸

²⁸ Monroe disclosed this to journalist Georges Belmont during an interview for the French magazine *Marie Claire* in April 1960. In October 2012 Chanel procured the original recording of this interview.

The box assemblage is all about what Anthony Bond refers to as ‘shared bodily sensations’ which it re-visions and makes lasting through its materiality (Bond 1997:13). The artefact banks heavily on mutual experiences which directly impinge on our corporeal sensitivities and which are eventually conveyed to the partakers. While with the box assemblage gazing and touching are meant to go hand in hand, so that each and every component is not only seen but its texture and constitution experienced, just as stated above, a number of items also present themselves with particular scents, most of which find their origin in the perfumes Idoia wears, ready to impinge on our olfaction.

Chapter four

RECEPTION AND DISPLAY

In this chapter I focus on the box assemblage's cogency as a means of engaging with other people, notwithstanding the inwardness of its subject matter. The actuality of obtruding the intimacy of our atypical relationship explains why Idoia and myself are apprehensive of having it shown to the 'wrong' people. As a medium of expression, the goal of the box assemblage is to reach out to others; and while these may be family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers, all groups might include persons with whom we do not wish to share our deepest feelings. This is all about the relationship between the dyadic ubiquity of the female model and myself, as an intrinsic part of the box assemblage, and the irresoluteness of the viewers who at any point in time may constitute either a presence or an absence. Although they might not be physically there, their spectrality is. This is ever present from the moment of the artefact's inception and paradoxically it is capable of shaping the artefact.

This chapter is made up of two sections the first of which is entitled *Geographical and cultural contexts for my work*. In this section I assess my artefacts and their eventual reception by drawing correlations with the works of two leading artists and the outcry they received. Through this discussion I assert that although artists may adopt strategies to get messages across to their audience, these do not always turn out the way they wished for. I also expound on the kind of signs embedded in the box assemblage and how it functions in tandem with its dynamical nature with the aim of achieving the desired effect on its partakers.

The second and last section, entitled '*Witnessing*,' takes its name from Kelly Oliver's book published in 2001 in which she discusses this notional activity as a means of going beyond recognition in terms of interpersonal relationships (Oliver 2001). While mere identification is a limited approach to the other, since it implies an uninvolved comparable appraisal of the latter with oneself, witnessing is a more comprehending and unconditional alternative as it permits the possibility of a response. This philosopher contends that witnessing encompasses address-ability and response-ability, two faculties which permit the pursuit, acceptance and assimilation of another person's true uniqueness.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS FOR MY WORK

In view of the contentiousness of my box assemblage, which at times unashamedly draws parallels between our bodies and that of Christ, I wish to direct my attention to Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) [fig. 4.1] and Martin Scorsese's *The last temptation of Christ* (1988) [fig. 4.2], two works of art whose similarities stops short at their choice of Christ as core subject, and the degree of virulent censure levelled at them since their debut in 1987 and 1988 respectively. Besides their artistic merits, it is these two features that motivated me to delve deeper into these works and seek answers as to why their reception was so harsh. I fear that a similar kind of negativity will be meted out to the box assemblage (Casey 2000; Ebert 1988, 1998, 2008; Holpuch 2012).

The controversy rekindled whenever Serrano's Cibachrome print is exhibited does not hinge on the artwork's iconography or aesthetic value, but the creational process that involves the 'shocking' act of immersing a small crucifix in urine. But bodily fluids are not antagonistic to crucifixions and that of Christ was no exception. The extreme torture involved results in the body losing most of its blood plus other abject material. On the defensive, Serrano says *Piss Christ* is meant to challenge the crucifix's modern day status as fashion accessory, as a

result of which we are inundated with its images and trophies but miss its true significance. Only a relatively few bother to contemplate on the ghastly ordeal Jesus was subjected to, an agony throughout which he ‘shat himself and he peed himself to death’ (Serrano 2012). But I intuit that there is more to this with *Piss Christ*—here Serrano not only challenges but obliterates the boundary between the sacred and the profane, the sacred and the abject. Bringing about a fusion between the two, *Piss Christ* represents a contrariwise process of relic-ing where the actual body part, that which traditionally is the relic, becomes the reliquary itself, a liquid repository for the ‘precious’ cross.



Figure 4.1
Andres Serrano, *Piss Christ*, 1987
Cibachrome print, 1520 x 1020 mm
private collection

While Hollywood films dealing with the life of Jesus usually give prominence to his divine character and successively the manner in which it affects his humanity, *The last temptation of Christ* reverses the approach to his dilemmic attributes and examines how his carnality impinges on his deific existence. Based on Nikos Kazantzakis’ book with the same title (Kazantzakis 1975), Scorsese’s film, while dealing with Christ’s binary human-God nature, is particularly intent on his carnal limitations and weaknesses. It addresses how these features impinge on his paradoxical existence whereby the self and the other (his superhumanity) are embodied in the same body, at most times one playing off the other; a duality which becomes more convoluted when Mary Magdalene enters his life. By precariously balancing Jesus on a presumed sacred-profane boundary, Scorsese polemicalised his whole existence and raised issues that the faithful never really care to address. I believe that this is what triggered such severe disapproval from across the Atlantic. Interestingly, going back more than seven hundred years in history, Angela of Foligno, notwithstanding her low-rank existence and humility, was concerned

with such issues and attempted to address them. For her Jesus was the man-God in whom she perceived a carnal, loving and sensual nature. At times Angela went to such extremes in her ecstatic ruminations as to imagine sexual intercourse with him.



Figure 4.2
Still from Martin Scorsese's film *The last temptation of Christ*, 1988
Cineplex Odeon Films

Both *Piss Christ* and *The last temptation of Christ* question whether there really exists a definite division between the sacred and the profane, and allude that if it really exists, it is an ambiguous one. And this is also the case with my own work and explains why they might be considered as blasphemous. They also address the issues pertaining to the self and the other by conceptualising them through the dual nature of Jesus Christ. Dealing with such subject matter myself, I feel a degree of affinity with Serrano and Scorsese and regret the acrid reaction they receive on account of their works. In both cases, it is manifestly clear that their works have been grossly misinterpreted, examples where the artwork-viewer nexus, the conceptual place where the interaction between the two takes place, produces a meaning which radically departs from the one intended by the creators (Barbatsis 2005: 271).

These are clear instances that support active audience reception theory's presupposition that persons do not take in unmitigatedly whatever is presented to them. Rather, they deliberately or instinctively subject such material to a process of re-interpretation that takes into account any contextual relationship they might have with it. Their re-interpretation may also be readily influenced by the opinion of those close to them, be it family, friends and also strangers who might be part of the audience (Maroder 2013: 2-3).

The box assemblage, acting as a polysemic device, is encoded with numerous signs, all meant to convey particular meanings, which collectively metamorphose it into a complex symbol of the binary existence of myself and the female model. On their part the partakers decode the various signs according to their own particular perceptions. However, as visual messages, a good number of these signs sustain a universality that carries their symbolism far and wide and, notwithstanding the fact that they might bear different meanings to different persons, they create a degree of connectivity between them. Probably, the most obvious example is the

cruciform that connotes Christ's passion to a Christian, but an emblem of the Romans' ultimate ruthlessness to others. Also, while for some any vagina may unaffectedly symbolise femininity and nascency, for others, especially the clean-shaven one of a particular person, denotes lewdness and lack of decorum. And again, a number of distinct poses and bodily configurations may express bonding for some, but impropriety for others. Thus, while such signs may become a means of connectedness through their universality, once processed through the minds of the partakers they might translate into a series of paradoxical meanings (Philo 2008: 535-44).

As the creators of the box assemblage, Idoia and myself are consciously aware of the signs we root into it. Although as its main contributor in terms of artistic input and hands-on manufacturing processes, I might be more effectual in this regard, Idoia has the advantage of wider visibility by the agency of her body throughout the whole of the artefact. A good number of these messages are what cultural theorist Stuart Hall would refer to as our 'preferred readings' if the artefact was a literary work. Such signs, whose meanings may be either implicit or explicit, are a direct expression of ourselves and the bi-corporeal entity fostered through our endeavour. All this suggests that while the box assemblage's artisanship and aesthetic value hold particular significance to me, this is surpassed by its symbolic worth which is not only directly linked with Idoia and myself but deals with our deepest archetypal feelings. Both of us consider it to be a very personal artefact, and might be the cause of apprehension when it comes to showing it around.

According to Hall, the partakers decoding these embedded messages may be categorised into three distinct groups, one of which includes the viewers who do so in exactly the same way as Idoia and myself wished them to. In such a scenario their interpretation of the box assemblage is in absolute consonance with the signification we invested in it. The second group includes those partakers who, vis-a-vis the box assemblage, take what Hall refers to as 'the negotiated position,' implying that they accept only part of the encoded messages while dismissing the rest. This might arise when the viewers fail to fully assimilate its underlying philosophical concepts or else disagree in part with them. The last group gathers those viewers who refuse and dismiss all of the box assemblage's underlying messages, in which case their only engagement with it might be their acknowledgment of its aesthetic attributes. All this goes on to suggest that the viewers' interaction with the box assemblage is dependent on several factors that are closely related to them. These may be their religious sentiments and laical fantasies, their desiderata and ambitions, their personal associations and political biases (Hall 1973: 507-17).

At this juncture it is pertinent to point out that signification-wise the signs we embed in the box assemblage harbour a degree of fluidity which not only makes the artefact amenable to moderated re-interpretations, but extends its temporal legitimacy and makes it readily available to reflect new experiences. This mirrors Kitaj's persuasion that the meaning underlying a work of art need not be rigid with the consequence that it limits its purposefulness beyond a particular time frame. The box assemblage holds on to its conceptual potentiality, that sourced from myself and Idoia and that which impelled it into existence in the first instance, but at the same time lacks a steadfast meaning, or set of meanings. Such an absence makes it amenable to 'respond' to the exigencies of the observers, and compliant with Jonathan Culler's assertion that for anything to be *read* '[t]here must always be dualisms: an interpreter and something to interpret, a subject and an object, an actor and something he acts upon or that acts on him' (Culler 1982: 75).

The participant-spectators are meant to examine the box assemblage by carefully opening it up stage by stage throughout which various representations and objects are revealed to them just to be concealed again by the next move. In the process they render visible, at times only fleetingly, that which is private and intimate; each step disclosing and sharing pertinent information with them and inviting them to deliberate on what they observe. Metaphorically, these may be considered as ‘landings,’ what Meskimmon describes as ‘...pauses, moments frequently marked by an extraordinary intensity of self-reflection and the possibility of setting a new course, of opening oneself to a new direction, not from an ahistorical “empty” starting point, but from the material legacy of the journey undertaken thus far’ (Meskimmon 2011: 75).

What they encounter inside the artefact might alter dramatically their initial reaction toward it when still shut, a state that displays to them a series of colourful representations of its protagonists which embellish its otherwise austere walls. The participant-spectators may discriminate between the various simulacra and components inhabiting the box assemblage’s penitentialia, and negotiate for themselves what to look at, scrutinise, and dismiss. A process of action and interaction ensues between the partakers and the box assemblage, establishing a physical and gestural connectedness between them—what laid dormant a few moments earlier, the dynamical character of the artefact, is stirred up and transferred to the partakers’ bodies (Heath & vom Lehn 2004: 53).

The foregoing brings to mind W J Thomas Mitchell’s observation with regard to the pictorial dynamics of Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* [fig. 4.3] where he states that it brings about ‘the sense that the image greets or hails or addresses us, that it takes the beholder into the game, enfolds the observer as object for the ‘gaze’ of the picture’ (Mitchell 1994: 75). As for myself, I have always been fascinated by this monumental painting and Velazquez’s genius in using the actuality of the picture plane as the locus of intersection between himself, the various sitters, the viewers, and the masterpiece itself whose backside is partly visible in the foreground. Although it would be highly pretentious on my part if I were to draw any comparisons between this canonical work of art and the box assemblage, I am confident that in its own modesty my artefact is capable of establishing an active relationship between myself, the sitter and the right kind of observer. As the participant-spectators gaze at and touch/handle the box assemblage, it stares back at them through its various components especially the body parts. This is because, as Wolfgang Kemp rightly states:

In the same way that the beholder approaches the work of art, the work of art approaches him, responding to and recognising the activity of his perception. What he will find first is a contemplating figure on the other side of the divide. This recognition, in other words, is the most felicitous pointer to the most important premise of reception aesthetics: namely, that the function of beholding has already been incorporated into the work itself (Kemp 1998: 181).

This brings me to the engagement of the artefact’s prospective partakers through public display, a task prior to which I must address several pertinent concerns, mostly earlier unresolved issues which now need to be revisited. Underscoring my present undecidedness in their regard, I bring them to the fore in the form of questions. Should I exhibit the box assemblage in a fine art gallery where its artefactual nature will be accentuated as a direct result of the locale? ...or opt for a desacralised chapel whose architectural space, coupled by the possible lingering aura of past religious activities, would highlight its desacralised sacrality? Should the box assemblages be exhibited as a series and thus emphasise their sequential development over the past four years? Should they be accompanied with ancillary items, such as concept notes and sketches, working drawings and models? With regard to the penultimate question, I am sure that their exhibition as a group would highlight their shared characteristics and additionally motivate the partakers to seek the underlying compulsion which

brought them into existence in the first place. As for the last question, such objects will aid the viewers to determine what the box assemblage is all about.



Figure 4.3
Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656
oil on canvas, 3180 x 2760 mm
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

The partakers can never thoroughly comprehend what Idoia and myself privately experienced when pursuing the creation of the box assemblage. Their mental reconstruction of our experiences, based on information gathered from the various identifiable signs embedded within it, will be simplified and notional at best and will be formed in direct reciprocity with the artefact itself which helps put in establishing modes of perceiving and feeling. This observation of Michael Baxandall is particularly germane here:

The maker of a picture or other historical artefact is a man addressing a problem of which his product is a finished and concrete solution. To understand it we try to reconstruct both the specific problem it was designed to solve and the specific circumstances out of which he was addressing it. This reconstruction is not identical with what he internally experienced: it will be simplified and limited to the conceptualisable, though it will also be operating in a reciprocal

relation with the picture itself, which contributes, among other things, modes of perceiving and feeling (Baxandall 1985: 14-5)

The box assemblage not only addresses and symbolises my convergence and assimilation with my model, but endeavours to get this across to others. Although at first the viewers might not be aware of this, reading the various signs inherent in the artefact, they may arrive at an approximate idea of what it is all about. As creators of the artefact, Idoia and myself influence the aesthetic responsiveness of its partakers mainly through the strategic positioning of visual markers which not only affect their personal frame of reference but also arrest their 'wandering viewpoint' by 'defamiliarising the familiar' (Holly 2002: 452). It is at this point that the box assemblage opens up its space to them and, through what Meskimmon refers to as 'reciprocal affective permeability,' they are encouraged to use their imagination to bring about a change in their relationship with us which goes beyond societal limitations. Meskimmon's notion permits a process of convergence which goes beyond the taking in of difference which might result in just a compromissary alliance. Rather, it promotes and upholds a 'lossless' convergence and assimilation (Meskimmon 2011: 87).

'WITNESSING'

The loving eye is a critical eye, always on the lookout for the blind spots that close off the possibility of response-ability and openness to otherness and difference. Love is an ethics of differences that thrives on the adventure of otherness. This means that love is an ethical and social responsibility to open personal and public space in which otherness and difference can be articulated. Love requires a commitment to the advent and partnership of difference (Oliver 2001: 20).

A way forward to this partnership of difference is 'witnessing,' Oliver's own notional proposal of convergence and assimilation between persons which goes beyond mere recognition and acceptance, actions which indirectly imply a pre-state of non-equivalency. It alludes to the binary disposition of perceiving the corporeal through the senses, while at the same time affirming, subjectively and morally, that which might not be present. As a visual artist I consider vision to be a primary agent for judicious witnessing. What makes Oliver's discourse so innovative is that she also addresses the question of subjectivity from the standpoint of those whom we might not have any qualms in 'othering' or designating to the realm of the other. She rightly acknowledges that from their point of view these 'others' do not consider themselves to be so.

Witnessing demands from each one of us the eagerness not only to respond to the call of others but also to address them. And this is precisely what the box assemblage is all about, a structure that provides us with a tangible, equitable and amenable space where Idoia and myself may savour our encounter unaffected by hierarchical distinctions (also in terms of artist and model). The artefact becomes the locus where our differences may be articulated, experienced and comprehended, making way for a consummate kind of love which goes beyond concupiscence. In *Conflicted love* Oliver suggests that Western concepts of loving relationships are fraught with contentious elements, traceable back to the primary one with our mother (Oliver 2000). Although this maternal liaison carries the responsibility of serving as an example for future ones, Freudian psychoanalytic theory asserts that it is of an 'antisocial' kind and destined to cease. This same theory also highlights another conflictual relationship, that with the father which, in view of its concomitancy with the maternal one, should also serve as a model for subsequent communions. This contention arises because while we are lead to believe that the father figure represents ascendancy over nature, we are also meant to posit that such authority over nature comes from nature itself.

Re-visiting such concepts through the works of other philosophers among whom Julia Kristeva, Oliver traces and exploits contrarities in psychoanalytic theories, and asserts that the maternal body is predisposed to social relations, and that the paternal objective is embodied and complementary to that of the mother. Oliver also makes an interesting case for her arguments through the presence and pertinence of affective energy transfer in interpersonal relations which clearly indicates that bodily drives not only cross bodily confines, but are also interpsychical and consequentially social (Oliver 2000).

Following such a re-assessment of loving relations, Oliver takes on traditional key existential understandings such as the presumed distinctiveness of the intellect from the body. Contrary to this mindset, she argues for the inseparability of the psyche from the self's sensorial existence and embodiment, just as Lorde's claim that the intellect and the erotic are meant to be intertwined to the extent that persons become expressions of their complete selves. Oliver also argues against the hypothesis that identity is incorporated with the self, making them an exclusive entity. Such a notion becomes more perilous if identity is understood to be the antipode of difference as this would put the individual in a state of absolute independence and unconnectedness with others. A false hypothesis of this kind implies that a being would only experience whatever occurs within its physical boundaries, and renders it dysfunctional with regard to relations to others. Promoting relationships that are characterised by impartiality, Oliver asserts that each one of us must cease to assume the status of subject while conferring that of other to those around us. She contends that such a position brings about an alienation between us and inveigles me to subject others to a process of dehumanisation and objectification. At this point it is opportune to state that throughout the various stages of the box assemblage's creation, a number of measures are taken which not only ensure that disaffection between Idoia and myself does not take place, but that the uniqueness of our identities is celebrated throughout.

Oliver questions the position taken by several theorists, such as Charles Taylor, who are conducive to the view that the subject is the result of an acquiescence to a call from the other, a position which presupposes the other's actuality (Oliver 2001: 23). This hypothesis is tangibly disclaimed by the box assemblage which upholds the convergence and assimilation of two individuals while championing the subjectivity of both. This is possible because in our interaction we go beyond recognition which connotes that the subject identifies the other through comparative appraisal. In many ways our liaison is based on our willingness and capacity to address and respond to each other, or what Oliver sublimely refers to as our commitment to 'address-ability and response-ability.' Both these faculties are synonymous with the action of witnessing and witnessing is conducive to the establishment of subjectivity. The box assemblage becomes the locus of the interweaving of our subjectivities while providing us with the space where we can experience and nurture our encounter. But the artefact goes even further. No matter the box assemblage's physical distance from the model and myself, it perennially and paradoxically bears witness to the ever-present dialectical tension that arises from my ceaseless endeavour of pushing the boundary between our actualities from a state of blur to that of complete obliteration.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I explore notions of alterity and selfhood while challenging the role of male subjectivity in the western world. In the process I address the intricacy of the box assemblage, focusing on both its capacity to bring about a convergence and assimilation between myself and the female model, and its appositeness as a representational and prosthetic device. More specifically I explicate how this artefact complexly disrupts the traditional complementary positions of the viewing subject and viewed object, and affords an alternative mode of looking at the female body. I also discuss at length why I shifted from my relatively large figurative paintings, four of which are part of the research, to the box assemblages.

On close examination, it is amply clear that the box assemblage is a fusion of the sacred and the irreverent, the religious and the sexual. The thesis affords the reader an in-depth commentary on how, through the dynamics of its design and contents, this artefact not only forms part of a continuing process through which my relationship with the female subject is continuously re-fashioned, but also draws links between this fluid association and the diametrically opposite notions of the hallowed and the profane. The text explains why its exploration into the mystical is aimed at exploiting that which is 'other' in the western theological tradition, namely God and the Divine. In doing so, it examines the manner through which the artefact's constitution prompts the viewer to experience its deific symbolism in a gradual manner. Interdependently conceived and developed, the series of box assemblages, a group of four large paintings, and this thesis, constitute a hybrid research praxis to answer the research question set forth on page 1. For ease of reference, I restate it once more hereunder:

To what extent can my body-themed box assemblages operate as a means of mediation between myself and the other by engendering a self-reflexive process of mirroring and distancing at one and the same time?

Toward this aim and through this text I bridge a wide range of subject areas which include, among others, feminist thought such as that expounded by Simone De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz; various theological themes addressed by Caroline Walker Bynum, Cynthia Eller and Margaret R Miles; the representation in art history as theorised by Susanne Kappler, Marsha Meskimmon and Lisa Tickner; Laura Mulvey's male gaze; and phenomenological theories of Jean Baudrillard and Emmanuel Lévinas. Besides drawing on the erudite debates of these various scholars and several others, it also reflects on a number of artists working with various media whose creative works presuppose a permeable boundary between male and female subjectivities. A case in point is Pierre Bonnard whose 'nude in bath' scenes suggest an intertwining between the male artist's subjectivity and that of the female model. It also highlights the relevance of this research question in the extant field of discourses dealing with concepts of self and other. While scholars such as Kelly Oliver, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler and Erich Neumann usually take a generic and philosophical approach to this subject, my address hinges on a particular artist-model relationship that I share with a specific female model. The thesis also takes on board insights picked up during long hours of studio practice. The series of box assemblages and group of four paintings constitute my 'artwork-in-progress.'²⁹

The forethought which prefigured my research question and eventually led to my specific contribution to knowledge was influenced by early attempts at exploring the spatiality of a boxed structure. I was fully aware

²⁹ As indicated on page 32 of the *Handbook for postgraduate research students, 2010-2011*.

that a unified and enclosable space not only had the potential of bringing together various media but, if appropriately designed, could take on an aura of sacrality and transcendence, blended with strong elements of the profane. Lévinas' affirmation that the Divine is an epitomisation of the other presupposes the latter's preeminence over the self (Lévinas 1969: 194, 197). On this pretext I set about carefully examining examples of Christian ecclesiastical furnishings, namely tabernacles, polyptychs and reliquaries; I also researched the significance of various divine tropes. My intent was to exploit Lévinas' particular association between the other and the transcendent with the aim of designing and creating an artefact that not only provided an agreeable shelter for its subjects but a privileged space, or rather a sanctum, for the 'othered' person. At the same time I used it to bolster my endeavour to make such a structure responsive and amenable to the interchangeability of the feminine and the sacred as expounded by Irigaray. The end result is not just an artefact that provides a space where Idoia and myself are active players; it is also a creation imbued with Lévinas' assertion with regard to the sacred and the other, and Irigaray's equation of woman and the mystical (Irigaray 1985: 191). I also would like to suggest that its micro-ambience encourages and stimulates a de-othering process between and in relation to ourselves, culminating in a melting-pot of our subjectivities. This statement has to be viewed within the context of one of the more controversial issues I underscore in this research, that regardless of the particularity of her persona, *within the context of my work* Idoia not only epitomises, but transcends womanhood. This statement is complemented by my affirmation that when Idoia, in her capacity as female subject, *expressly* presents herself and performs in my studio, she empowers herself to dismiss any of Simone de Beauvoir's 'immanence' she might harbour in other contexts, and transform herself into a medium through which she permits me to access the other (Beauvoir 2011: 16-17).

Of the seventeen designed and commenced box assemblages, thirteen are now successfully completed or in the process of being concluded. While each of these thirteen artefacts deals with subjectivity and alterity in its own particular way, they all sustain gender fluidity. Through their various representations they uphold Rosi Braidotti's assertion that a person's sexuality is never unyielding but readily adapts to his or her identity adjustments. They also vindicate Braidotti's idea that the body is the outset of one's subjectivity and the interface between a person's organic aliveness and the surrounding environment (Braidotti 1994). This explains why I present a number of box assemblages in a state of 'unfinishedness.' This is because harmonised with that of its protagonists, the artefact's actuality is in a state of flux, a direct impression of their mutable subjectivities. And in such a state they share the ultimate goal, albeit ungraspable, of bringing about a convergence and assimilation between the self and the other, or rather between myself and the female subject. Thus, as is the case of any other endeavour of a similar nature, the project in reality can never be finished; it simply draws to a close.

Discussing these attributes at length, I underscore how they transmute the box assemblage into a prosthesis of myself, an existence that goes beyond the status of inanimate object, capable of reaching out to the female subject and securing its essentialness. I draw on Lévinas to argue that such an existence is a token of how much I feel responsible for the female model (Lévinas 2008: 95); but I also draw on Elaine Scarry to claim that the affinity between Idoia, myself and the box assemblage is so intimate and forceful that the latter translates into a tangible actuality of our sentient consciousnesses, or rather our 'awareness of aliveness' (Scarry 1985: 289).

Throughout the text I cross-reference components of the box assemblage to delineate how this artefact acts as a complex representational device which goes beyond the mere portrayal of the subject in question. Each holds

manifold representations that may include paintings, photographs, collages, body-casts and video clips. The paintings may be done away from the subject; body-casts require the direct intervention of the subject's body for their materialisation; while photography and video have the advantage of localising the subject's presence. However, the box assemblage also holds actual body fragments in lieu of a subject's undivided body, just as a reliquary-cum-relic. According to the Roman Catholic Church the latter is part of a soul's 'container' with which it is restored back to a full body through resurrection. Also, the dogma of the Eucharist states that the fragmentary Host embodies Christ's whole body. Thus, with its treasured body fragments, the artefact allows for the 'presencing' of its subjects, the model and myself; in so many words, it may be contemplated as an entity that is autonomous from its precursors. This may be viewed as a paradoxical or twisted interpretation of Baudrillard's notion that a representation may exist without an original. While this may seem the case with the box assemblage, the fact that it carries in its final state a minute part of our very being, transmutes it into the hypostatised bi-corporeal entity that incorporates fragments of Idoia's body and my own. Both of us are the binary impulse behind this artefact, and invariably, we are ever present and visible through it.

Through its complex design, forgathered representations, and preselected contents, the box assemblage reflects Tickner's view that an unconditional link with the real is unattainable; the artefact also manifests Kappeler's assertion that whatever is revealed to an audience is always strictly controlled, as is the case with its 'participant-spectators' (Tickner 1998: 357; Kappeler 1986: 2-3). Such a control is directed toward sentiments of objectification which, aided by cultural premiss, might stem from specific components of the artefact. These are neutralised through the box assemblage's collective and complex constitution which affords the appropriate mitigating actions. And all this is complemented by the fact that the very nature of how the partakers are permitted to engage with these objects is also meticulously regulated. The artefacts are not meant to be displayed just anywhere and to anyone, thus reducing further the risk of commodification and objectification which is so common with explicit images that circulate the present digital age. The artefacts and its display ensure that Idoia's integrity as a free person and sexual being is never violated.

Jointly through the artefacts and thesis I present substantial evidence which strives to establish a non-objectifying and mutually beneficial relationship between male and female subjects. The box assemblage upholds the discourses of Lévinas and Irigaray with the specific intent of seeking convergence between the other and the self. However, I am also aware that my research addresses these same themes within the circumscribed context of my own relationship as a heterosexual male artist with the same female model who has been the subject of my studio output for these past 15 years. Our relationship is still in a process of maturation, continuously shaped by our ever-changing state of mind and body and, indirectly, by the irresoluteness of our relationships with other people. A case in point is Idoia's love life and affairs which from time to time tend to strain our own relationship for various reasons. Nonetheless, at a generalised level my practice-led research succeeds in challenging the dominant role of male subjectivity in the western world. Indeed, the revision of a convention of male domination through the complexity of the making of these artefacts establishes one of the contributions to knowledge of this project. Moreover, the box assemblages are adept examples where the male gaze subserves the predilection for a complex intertwining of gazes and glances that originates from the female subject and myself. In so doing it questions and disrupts the ascendancy of the male gaze, and its associated precepts, in Western visual culture.

I argue that each of the thirteen artefacts expresses an incessant self-reflexive process of concurrent rapprochement and disengagement between myself and the other. The purposefulness of the artefact is catalysed by the female subject's affected presence through simulacra, real body-part relics, and memorabilia of her existence. The inherent potential of Idoia partly lies in her capacity to emulate that which is transcendental and the other in western theological thought. Each box assemblage fetishises and sacralises at one and the same time Idoia's partitioned body. While each of these fragments is meant to be contemplated in succession, collectively they recreate her plenitude. They are a transformed Idoia who lacks nothing; not unlike the Roman Catholic belief that the disunited body and blood of Christ in the ciborium and chalice constitute, in actual fact, his absolute presence. The vial of yanked body hairs and personal belongings inside the box assemblage hint to the presumed inherent potency of first-class and second-class relics, the result of their origin and contiguity to hallowed persons. As actual body parts unified with the artefact, the hairs obscure the differentiation between its state as representational device and that of substantial presence of the subject concerned. Going a step further, the enclosure of the box assemblage not only situates Idoia in a particular frame of reference strictly identified with her and myself, but also apotheosises her.

My work develops the idea that rectifying the inequality of gender relations in the west through Fine Arts does not necessarily need to be the exclusive remit of feminist artists; it also demonstrates that such an antagonistic scenario might bring about other forms of bias. Regrettably, while gender issues are very important to women artists, this is not usually the case with their male counterparts. More positively, my work suggests that this territory should also be the concern of male artists. Toward this aim the box assemblages uphold the notional activity of 'witnessing' as a means of going beyond recognition in terms of interpersonal relationships (Oliver 2001). While identification with the other is a restrictive approach to that who is not oneself, bearing witness to the other implies discernment with the possibility of a response. Witnessing subsumes 'address-ability' and 'response-ability,' two faculties that are capable of seeking, accepting and assimilating the other's true uniqueness. However, this is only possible if the parties concerned acknowledge and uphold the inherent potentiality of each other, no matter the milieu, race and gender of every individual. Rather than contrived, the address to such an inequality should be a natural consequence of the sincere recognition of each others' inherent values.

At this point I feel that it is pertinent to point out once again that the themes addressed in my investigation are decidedly personal and intimate. They concern my liaison with a particular woman whose physical presence, as well as her psychological makeup, has been the focus of my studio work for a considerable length of time. Although non-sexual, our relationship is characterised by sexual undertones. The passionate yearning that has permeated my consciousness for the past years, and my persuasion that key to its indulgence is Idoia, the other-ed person in relation to myself, reckons Hegel's affirmation that otherness is an effect of self-consciousness (Geniušas 2008). Idoia, the embodiment of otherness from my perspective, is critical to my deeply felt emotions. Although awareness that her assimilability is circumscribed tends to be disheartening, it also makes me more impassioned for her.

In the thesis I address the association between the act of taking off one's clothes and the varied bodily sensations which may be inferred through it. These may be anything from a sense of pleasure and an allurements to caress, to distressing feelings of vulnerability. I also discuss the particular qualities of Idoia's self exposure in my studio and through the box assemblage. Hers is based on absolute trust between us and at times translates

into an invitation to intimacy. I explicate how, when undressed and performing in my studio, Idoia's skin becomes the delineation between myself and the other, not unlike the superficialities of the consecrated Host which translate into another kind of delineation, that between the sacred and the profane. Her skin is the barrier which protects her but at the same time a means through which she communicates with me.

And since my research question concerns my own artefacts through which this relationship is continuously metamorphosed and re-visioned, I am faced by the daunting challenge of having to self-reflexively assess the worthiness of my own creations as means of exchange between myself and the other. I am aware that it is next to impossible for artists to be impartial to the appraisal of their own work. This is especially the case with works that have been completed recently, or are still works-in-progress, as their assessment usually requires a temporally detached view. Furthermore, this is not only a complex personal relationship and space to explore, it is also 'art historically' complex as the conventions of male-dominant looking and making with and through the mute female body are very prominent.

However, rather than avoiding or turning away from this task, I draw from my 24 year experience as a practising design architect and civil engineer to audit my own creations. Architecture is an applied art and the aesthetic impact and functionality of any project needs to be assessed and evaluated at the 'drawing board' prior to the commencement of site work. An architect must have the foresight of coming up with well-designed proposals which, when it comes to the actual building, its interior/exterior spaces, and aesthetic aspects, will prove to be both appealing and useful to the end users. It is this kind of foresight which I put to good use when preparing the box assemblage designs. Accordingly, I am confident enough to declare that these artefacts fare very well in undertaking the mediatory task as outlined in the research question above. And here I emphasise that they partly owe their success to the fact that their functionality revolves around a sheltered intimate space that is capable of 'harbouring' and 'protecting' their subjects. A space which in more complex examples is divided into a hierarchical series of spaces, with the more intimate situated in the structure's penetralia.

However, I am also mindful of the box assemblage's limitedness in performing the task just outlined. Nonetheless, it does allay the anguish I feel as a result of my knowledge that Idoia's allurements on me will forever be coupled by the elusiveness of her alterability. Also, each of the thirteen artefacts is a fair substitute for Idoia's presence when she is not around; and a perpetual reminder of that which is other, that which is elusive but tantalisingly real.

Through the combination of artefacts, theoretical argument, and explorations into the histories of art, I have addressed my research question thoroughly and provided a number of key contributions to knowledge as delineated above. As a followup I will take up specific collaborative research work with Kelly Attard, an academic and reader in sexuality studies. Mainly based on academic writing, this will examine themes already addressed in this research but with a wider and direct input from the female subject. Our collaboration might also include studio work that involves a close physical association between our bodies and skins. Herself constantly pursuing a deeper understanding of her own sexuality and that of others, I wish to point out that Attard has also been a valid contributor to my study as model, collaborator and source of reference; always readily available with advice that concerns her role as female subject.

I will develop further the box assemblages, making more use of other materials such as stainless steel and glass, and probably increasing the degree of self-representation in terms of casts of my own body. In the present

series such casts were limited to one example, a hybrid of body parts of the model and myself. Presently I am researching the body casting techniques of Polish artist Alina Szapocznikow (1926-1973), and this might take me to Warsaw and Łódź next summer. I am enthralled by the way Szapocznikow mutates casts taken off her own body and that of others into curious, at times foreboding, configurations.

Toward the end of 2015 I will be exhibiting to an invited public five or six of the box assemblages together with a few large paintings. The venue is the Inquisitor's Palace which is in the town of Birgu in Malta's inner harbour area. This is an extremely interesting building which served as the residence of the Inquisitor between 1574 and 1798. Presently the premises also house an ethnography museum and my display will be in one of the upper chambers with controlled access. Such an event will allow me to gauge reactions from a wide spectrum of visitors as the place is well frequented by locals and visiting tourists. My intention is to record the reception received and use this as a basis for further studies.



Figure 5.1
Lawrence Buttigieg, *Cabinet of sublimated desires* (detail), 2009- (unfinished)
W 652mm, H 652mm, D 543mm (when closed)
artist's collection

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abramović, Marina. 'Marina Abramović: the artist is present.' Performance retrospective held at MoMA between 14th March and 31st May 2010. Information on MoMA website. Accessed 29th May 2010.
<<http://www.moma.org/visit/calender/exhibitions/965>>
- Adair, Gilbert. *The dreamers*. London: Faber and Faber ltd. 2004.
- Adler, Kathleen and Marcia Pointon Ed. *The body imaged*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P. 1993.
- Ahmed, Sara and Jackie Stacey. Ed. *Thinking through the skin*. London: Routledge. 2001.
- Almodóvar, Pedro. Director. 2011. *La piel que habito*. Motion picture. Blue haze entertainment.
- Angela of Foligno. *Angela of Foligno: complete works*. Trans. Lachance, Paul. New York: Paulist P. 1993.
- ____. 1993. Poem/ quote n° 3456.
- Angier, Natalie. *Woman: an intimate geography*. New York: Anchor Books. 2000.
- Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane. *Women, creativity, and the arts: critical and autobiographical perspectives*. New York: Continuum. 1995.
- Asselin, Oliver; Johanne Lamoureux and Christine Ross. Ed. *Precarious visualities*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's U P. 2008.
- Attard, Kelly. ___@gmail.com. *Personal email*. Received by Lawrence Buttigieg on 2nd July 2014.
- 'Modelling for Euan Uglow?' In *Bare facts*. Accessed 20th July 2002.
<<http://www.ifreespace.com/art/modelreg/Articles2.htm>>
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The poetics of space*. Boston, MA: Beacon P. 1994.
- Barbatsis, Gretchen. 'Reception theory.' In Smith, Ken; Sandra Moriarty; Gretchen Barbatsis and Keith Kenny. Ed. *Handbook of visual communication*. New York: Routledge. 2005.
- Barker, Victoria. 'God, women, other.' In *Feminist theology*. 18: 309. 2010.
- Barney, Matthew. *The cremaster cycle*. Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst. 2003.
- Batchen, Geoffrey. 'Carnal knowledge.' In *Art journal*. Vol 60, no 1, pp 21-3. Spring 2001.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Mirror of production*. Trans. Poster, Mark. New York: Telos P. 1975.
- ____. *Simulacra and simulation*. Trans. Glaser, Sheila Faria. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan. 1994.
- ____. *Simulations*. Trans. Foss, Paul; Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e). 1983.
- Baxandall, M. *Patterns of intention*. New Haven CT: Yale U P. 1985.
- Battersby, Christine. *Gender and genius*. London: The women's press. 1989.
- Becker, Howard S; Robert R Faulkner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Ed. *Art from start to finish*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P. 2006.
- Bell, Julian. *Bonnard*. London: Phaidon P. 1994.
- Bellour, Raymond. 'Self-portraits.' In Asselin, Oliver; Johanne Lamoureux and Christine Ross. Ed. *Precarious visualities*. London: McGill-Queens U P. 2008.

- Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. Accessed 11th May 2009. <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>>
- Berger, John. *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin Books. 2008.
- Bertolucci, Bernardo. Director. 2003. *The dreamers*. Motion picture. Recorded picture company (RPC).
- Betterton, Rosemary. *An intimate distance*. London: Routledge. 1996.
- Biasin, Enrico; Giovanna Maina and Federico Zecca. Ed. *Porn after porn: contemporary alternative pornographies*. Mimesis international. 2014.
- Biesenbach, Klaus. *Marina Abramović: the artist is present*. New York. MoMA. 2010
- Bond, Anthony. 'Embodying the real.' In Capon, Edmund. Ed. *Body*. Melbourne: Bookman Schwartz. 1997.
- Bostrom, Leslie and Marlene Malik. *Re-viewing the nude*. College art association journal of America. Spring 1999.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinctions*. Acumen publishing ltd. 2008.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic subjects*. New York: Columbia U P. 1994.
- Bryson, Norman. 'Maudit: John Currin and morphology.' In Vander Weg, Kara and Rose Dergan. Ed. *John Currin*. New York: Rizzoli international publications. 2006.
- ___; Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey. Ed. *Visual culture: images and interpretations*. Middletown Connecticut: Wesleyan U P. 1994.
- ___. *Vision and painting: the logic of the gaze*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan P. 1983.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge. 1993.
- ___. *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham U P. 2005.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and redemption*. New York: Zone books. 1991.
- ___. *Jesus as mother*. Berkeley: U of California P. 1982.
- ___. *The resurrection of the body*. New York: Columbia U P. 1995.
- ___ and Paula Gerson. 'Body-part reliquaries and body parts in the Middle Ages.' In *Gesta*. Vol 36, no 1. 1997.
- Caillois, Roger. *Man and the sacred*. Trans. Barash, Meyer. Glencoe: The free P. 1959.
- Campbell, Susan. *Euan Uglow: some memories of the painter*. London: Browse and Darby with Sheepdrove trust. 2003.
- Carr-Gomm, Philip. *A brief history of nakedness*. London: Reaktion books ltd. 2010.
- Carter, Angela. Untitled article. In Bayley, Stephen; Angela Carter; Judith Clark and Alice Cicolini et al Emily Campbell. Ed. *Inside out: underwear and style in the UK*. London: Black dog publishing. 2000.
- Casey, M; A Fischer and H Ramsey. 'After Serrano ethics, theology and the law of blasphemy.' In *Law text culture*. Vol 5, *Law and the sacred*. 2002
- Cervigni, Dino S. 'Angela of Foligno's "Memoriale": the male scribe, the female voice, and the other.' In *Italica*. Vol 82, no 3/4, pp 339-55. 2005.
- Chadwick, Witney and Isabelle de Courtviron. Ed. *Significant others: creativity and intimate partnership*. Thames and Hudson ltd. 1993.

- Chadwick, Whitney. *Women, art, and society*. London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 1996.
- Chambers Lynch, Jennifer. Director. 1993. *Boxing Helena*. Motion picture. Mainline pictures.
- Checketts, Linda. 'Euan Uglow.' In *Modern painters*. Vol 2, no 2, pp 104-5. Summer 1989.
- Chiesa, Lorenzo. *Subjectivity and otherness: A philosophical reading of Lacan*. Cambridge, Massachusetts : MIT P. 2007.
- Clair, Jean. Ed. *Balthus*. London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 2001.
- Clark, Kenneth. *The nude: a study in ideal form*. Princeton: Princeton U P. 1984.
- Clément, Catherine. *Syncope*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P. 1994.
- Cohen, David. 'Obituary: Sandra Fisher.' In *Independent.co.uk*. Accessed 4th March 2011.
<<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-sandra-fisher-1450519.html>>
- Cover, Rob. 'The naked subject: nudity, context and sexualization in contemporary culture.' In *Body and society*. Vol 9(3). 2003.
- Cohen, Richard A. *Face to face with Lévinas*. Albany: State U of New York. 1986.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On deconstruction: theory and criticism after structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell U P. 2007.
- Curtis, Penelope. *Second skin: historical life casting and contemporary sculpture*. Leeds: Vision colour print. 2002.
- Darby, William. *Euan Uglow*. London: Browse and Darby ltd, 1998.
- Davis, Martin L and Marsha Meskimmon. Ed. *Breaking the disciplines*. London: IB Taurus. 2003.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The second sex*. Trans. Borde, Constance and Sheila Malovany-Chavalier. New York: Vintage books. 2011.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of gender: essays on theory, film, and fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana U P. 1987.
- Desmarais, Jane; Martin Postle and William Vaughan. Ed. *Model and supermodel*. Manchester: Manchester U P. 2006.
- 'Devotio moderna.' *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica online*. Encyclopædia Britannica inc. 2013. Accessed 26th June 2014.
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/160366/devotio-moderna>>
- 'Diprose, Rosalyn. *Corporeal generosity*. Albany: State U of New York P. 2002.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan. 1966.
- Doy, Gen. *Picturing the self*. London: IB Taurus. 2005.
- Duncan, Carol. 'The esthetics of power in modern erotic art.' In Duncan, Carol. Ed. *The aesthetics of power*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P. 1993.
- Ebert, Roger. 'The last temptation of Christ.' In *RogerEbert.com*. Accessed 13th June 2013.
<<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-last-temptation-of-christ-1988>>
- Eccher, Danilo. *Jenny Saville*. Milano: Mondadori Electa spa. 2005.
- Editors. 'Phallogocentrism / phallogocentrism / logocentrism' in *The literary encyclopedia*. First published 04 August 2009. Accessed 28th August 2013.
<<http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=858>>
- Edwards, Steve. Ed. *Art and its histories, a reader*. New Haven: Yale U P. 1999.

- Eller, Cynthia. 'The representation of goddesses and women in feminist spirituality' In *Journal of feminist studies in religion*. Vol 16, no 1. Spring 2000.
- Faunce, Sarah and Linda Nochlin. *Courbet Reconsidered*. New Haven: Yale U P. 1988.
- Featherstone, Mike. Ed. *Love and eroticism*. London: Sage publications, 1999.
- Ferrari, Danyel M R and Valentina A Spalten. 'Fragment/ composite.' In *Objects of devotion and desire* (online catalogue). Ed. Hahn, Cynthia. The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf art gallery. 2011.
- Fierman, David Louis and Maeve O' Donnell-Morales. 'Body/death.' In *Objects of devotion and desire* (online catalogue).
- Fischer, Wolfgang G. *Gustav Klimt and Emilie Flöge: an artist and his muse*. Overlook P. 1992.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Three essays on the theory of sexuality*. London: Imago publishing company ltd. 2011.
- Fried, Michael. *Courbet's realism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 1990.
- Friedland, Roger. 'Disappearance.' In *Freq.uenci.es, a collaborative genealogy of spirituality*. Accessed 20th December 2011. <<http://freq.uenci.es/2011/10/14/disappearance/>>
- Geniušas, Saulius. 'Self-consciousness and otherness: Hegel and Husserl.' In *Filosofija*. 2008. Accessed 1st Sep. 2013. <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/159615532/67-241-1-PB>>
- Georg Ernst Stahl? *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica online*. Encyclopædia Britannica inc. 2013. Accessed 1st Sep. 2013. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562520/Georg-Ernst-Stahl>>.
- 'Gerard Dou: life from 1631 till his death.' In *OldAndSold*. Accessed 28th August 2010. <<http://www.oldandsold.com/articles27n/gerard-dou-3.shtml>>
- Glew, Adrian. *Stanley Spencer: letters and writings*. London: Tate gallery publishing ltd. 2001.
- Gosden, Chris. 'Making sense: archaeology and aesthetics.' In *World archaeology*. 33(2). 2001.
- _____. 'Making and display: our aesthetic appreciation of things and objects.' In Renfrew, Colin; Chris Gosden; Elizabeth DeMarrais. Ed. *Substance, memory, display: archaeology and art*. Cambridge: McDonald institute for archaeological research. 2004.
- Gray, John; Linda Nochlin; David Sylvester and Simon Schama. Ed. *Saville*. New York: Rizzoli international publications inc. 2005.
- Gray, John. 'The landscape of the body: Ballard, Bacon, and Saville.' In *Saville*.
- Greer, Germaine. 'The role of the artist's muse.' In *Guardian.co.uk*. Accessed 14th January 2008. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/artblog/2008/jun/02/theroleoftheartistsmuse>>
- _____. 'RB Kitaj showed us what we didn't want to see.' In *Guardian.co.uk*. Accessed 28th May 2013. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/artblog/2008/jan/14/rbkitaj/print>>
- Grieg, Geordie. *Breakfast with Lucian*. London: Jonathan Cape. 2013.
- Grenfell, Michael. Ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: key concepts*. Durham: Acumen publishing ltd. 2008.
- Grimberg, Salomón. 'Untitled review.' In *Woman's art journal*. Vol 17, no 2. Autumn 1996—Winter 1997.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. Ed. *Becomings: explorations in time, memory, and futures*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P. 1999.
- _____. *Jacques Lacan: a feminist introduction*. Oxon: Routledge. 1990.

- ____. 'Naked.' In Smith, Marquard and Joanne Morra. Ed. *The prosthetic impulse*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P. 2006.
- ___ and Elspeth Probyn. *Sexy bodies: the strange carnalities of feminism*. London: Routledge. 1995.
- ____. *Space, time and perversion*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- ____. *Volatile bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana U P. 1994.
- Haber, John. 'The Netherlandish diptych.' In *Haberarts*. Accessed 14th January 2010.
<<http://www.haberarts.com/diptych.htm>>
- Hahn, Cynthia. 'Objects of devotion and desire: relics, reliquaries, relation, and response.' In *Objects of devotion and desire*.
- Hall, Stuart. *Encoding and decoding in the television discourse*. Birmingham: U of Birmingham. 1973.
- Hammer, Martin. *The naked portrait: 1900 to 2007*. Edinburgh: National galleries of Scotland. 2007.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*. London: Free association books ltd. 1991.
- Hattenstone, Simon. 'Marc Quinn: just don't call it a freak show.' In *Guardian.co.uk*. Accessed 7th October 2010.
<www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/may/01/marc-quinn-interview>
- Heath, Christian and Dirk vom Lehn. 'Configuring reception (dis-)regarding the "spectator" in museums and galleries.' In *Theory, culture and society*. SAGE. Vol 21(6), pp 43-65.
- Heath, Stephen. 'Narrative space.' In *Screen*. Vol 17, issue 3, pp 68-112. 1976.
- Helms, Mary. 'Tangible materiality and cosmological others in the development of sedentism.' In DeMarrais, Elizabeth; Chris Gosden and Colin Renfrew. Ed. *Rethinking materiality: the engagement of mind with the material world*. Cambridge: The McDonald institute for archaeological research. 2004.
- Hill, Gareth. 'Men, the anima, and the feminine.' In *The San Francisco Jung institute library journal*. Vol 17, no 3, pp 49-62. Autumn 1998.
- Hill, John and Pamela Church Gibson. Ed. *Film studies: critical approaches*. Oxford: Oxford U P. 2000.
- Holborn, Mark. Ed. *Enfleshings: Helen Chadwick*. London: Martin Secker & Warburg ltd. 1989.
- Holly, Michael Ann. 'Reciprocity and reception theory.' In Smith, Paul and Carolyn Wilde. Ed. *A companion to art theory*. Oxford: Blackwell publishing. 2002.
- Hollywood, Amy M. 'Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the mystical.' In *Hypatia*. Vol 9, no 4. Autumn 1994.
- ____. 'Deconstructing Belief: Irigaray and the philosophy of religion.' In *The journal of religion*. Vol 78, no 2, pp 158-185. April 1998.
- Holpuch, Amanda. 'Andres Serrano's controversial piss Christ goes on view in New York.' In *Guardian.co.uk*. Accessed 28th September 2012.
<<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/sep/28/andres-serrano-piss-christ-new-york>>
- Holub, Robert C. *Crossing borders*. Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P. 1992.
- Hubert, Renée Riese. *Magnifying mirrors: women, surrealism, and partnership*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P. 1994.
- Hughes, Robert. *Lucian Freud: paintings*. London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 1987.
- ____. *The shock of the new*. New York: McGraw-Hill, inc. 1991.
- Hyman, Timothy. *Bonnard*. London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 1998.

Inside Chanel. Accessed 10th December 2012.
<inside.chanel.com>

Irigaray, Luce. 'Divine women.' In *Sexes and genealogies.* Trans. Gill, Gillian C. New York: Columbia U P. 1993.

_____. *An ethics of sexual difference.* Trans. Burke, Carolyn and Gillian C Gill. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P. 1993.

_____. 'Sexual Difference.' In McNeil, William and Karen S Feldman. Ed. *Continental philosophy: an anthology.* Malden, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell. 1998.

_____. *Speculum of the other woman.* Trans. Gill, Gillian C. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P. 1985.

_____. *This sex which is not one.* Trans. Porter, Catherine. Ithaca, New York: Cornell U P. 1985.

_____. *The way of love.* Trans. Bostic, Heidi and Stephen Pluháček. London: Continuum. 2002.

_____ and Carolyn Burke. 'When our lips speak together.' In *Signs.* Vol 6, no 1, *Women: sex and sexuality*, part 2, pp 69-79. Summer 1980.

James, Merlin. 'Bonnard.' In *The Burlington magazine.* The Burlington magazine publications ltd. Vol 140, no 1141. April 1998.

Janis, Carroll and Joan Pachner. *George Segal bronze.* New York: Mitchell-Innes and Nash. 2003.

Jones, Amelia. *Self/image: technology, representation and the contemporary subject.* London: Routledge. 2006.

_____. Meaning, identity, embodiment: the uses of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in art history. In Arnold, Dana and Margaret Iversen. Ed. *Art and thought.* Malden: Blackwell publishing ltd. 2003.

Joy, Morny. *Divine love: Luce Irigaray, women, gender and religion.* Manchester: Manchester U P. 2006.

Kanevsky, Alex. Interviewed by George Walker. In *Making art.* Accessed 15th September 2009.
<<http://rtspot.wordpress.com/2009/01/08/alex-kanevsky/>>

Kappeler, Susanne. *The pornography of representation.* Cambridge: Polity P. 1986.

Karlstrom, Paul J. 'Eros in the studio.' In Cándida Smith, Richard. Ed. *Text and image.* London: Transaction publishers. 2009.

Kazantzakis, Nikos. Trans. P A Bien. *The last temptation of Christ.* London: Faber and Faber ltd. 1975

Kemp, Wolfgang. 'The work of art and its beholder.' In Cheetham, Mark A; Michael Ann Holly and Keith P F Moxey. Ed. *The subjects of art history: historical objects in contemporary perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge U P. 1998.

Kirby, Vicki. *Judith Butler: live theory.* London: Continuum international publishing group. 2006.

Kearney, Richard. *Strangers, gods and monsters: interpreting otherness.* London: Routledge. 2002.

Kramer, Hilton. 'Bonnard and the stupidities.' In *The new criterion.* Vol 17, no 2, pp 18-22. October 1998.

Klossowski de Rola, Stanislas. *Balthus.* London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 2001.

Kunst, Bojana. *The digital body: history of body visibility.* Accessed 18th July 2008.
<<http://www2.arnes.si/~ljintima2/kunst/t-hbv.html>>

Kuspit, Donald. 'The troubling nude.' In *Artnet.* Accessed 27th January 2004.
<<http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit11-3-99.asp>>

La Belle, Jenijoy. *Herself beheld: literature of the looking glass.* Ithaca: Cornell U P. 1987.

- Lacan, Jacques. 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience.' In *Ecrits: a selection*. Trans. Sheridan, Alan. New York: W.W. Norton and company. 1977.
- _____. *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis (book XI)*. New York: W W Norton & company. 1998.
- Laplanche, L. *Essays on otherness*. London: Routledge. 1998.
- Laqueur, Thomas W. *Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U P. 1990.
- _____. *Solitary sex: a cultural history of masturbation*. New York: Zone books, 2003.
- Lasareff, Victor. 'Studies in the iconography of the Virgin.' In *The art bulletin*. Vol 20, no 1. 1938.
- Leader, Darian. *Stealing the Mona Lisa*. Washington DC, Shoemaker and Hoard. 2004.
- Lechte, John. *Fifty key contemporary thinkers: from Structuralism to Post-humanism*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Difficult freedom: essay on judaism*. Trans. Seán Hand. Baltimore: The John Hopkins U P. 1990.
- _____. *Ethics and infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne U P. 2008.
- _____. *Otherwise than being: or, beyond essence*. Trans. Lingis, Alphonse. Pennsylvania: Duquesne U P. 1998.
- _____. *Totality and infinity: an essay in exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne U P. 1969.
- Leymarie, Jean. *Balthus*. Geneva: Skira, 1982.
- Lingis, Alphonso. *Libido: the French existential theories*. Bloomington: Indiana U P. 1985.
- Livingstone, Marco. *Kitaj*. London: Phaidon P. 2010.
- Lorde, Audre. 'Uses of the erotic: the erotic as power.' In Lovaas, Karen E and Mercilee M Jenkins. Ed. *Sexualities and communication in everyday life*. London: Sage publications. 2007.
- MacCarthy, Fiona. *Stanley Spencer: an english vision*. New Haven: Yale U P. 1997.
- Macedo, Ana Gabriela. *Material girls: feminism and body matters*. Accessed 6th April 2004.
<http://www.letras.up.pt/upi/ilc/i_info_texts_on_line_Material_Girls.htm>
- Marks, Laura V. *Sensuous theory and multisensory media*. London: U of Minnesota P. 2002.
- Martin, Alison. *Luce Irigaray and the question of the divine*. Leeds: Maney publishing. 2000.
- Maroder, Tim; T J Milano; Caleb Nickels; Mike O'Donoghue. *Active audience / reception theory*. Accessed 30th May 2013.
<https://storify.com/Mike_OD42/active-audience-reception-theory>
- Mavor, Carol. *Reading boyishly*. Durham: Duke U P. 2007.
- Mazzoni, Christina. *Angela of Foligno's memorial*. Trans. John Cirignano. Berlin: Boye6. 2000.
- McCorquodale, Stephanie. *From unattractive to erotic: how Philip Pearlstein more accurately depicts women through a de-emphasized sexual content*. Accessed 18th July 2008.
<<http://www.unc.edu/~mccorquo/ARTFINAL.htm>>
- McDonald, Helen. *Erotic ambiguities: the female nude in art*. London: Routledge. 2001.
- Meecham, Pam and Julie Sheldon. *Modern art: a critical introduction*. London: Routledge. 2000.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 'Eye and mind.' In James Edie. Ed. *The primacy of perception*. Evanston: Northwestern U P. 1964.

- ___ and Baldwin, Thomas. *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge. 2004.
- ___. *The visible and the invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern U P. 1968.
- ___ and Thomas Baldwin. *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge. 2004.
- Meskimmon, Marsha. *Contemporary art and the cosmopolitan imagination*. Oxon: Routledge. 2011.
- ___. 'In mind and body: feminist criticism beyond the theory/ practice divide.' In *The Varo registry of women artists*. Accessed 22nd July 2003.
<<http://www.varoregistry.com/articles/mindb.html>>
- ___. *Women making art: history, subjectivity, aesthetics*. London: Routledge. 2003.
- ___. 'The critic's performance: body art and embodied knowledge.' In *Art history*. Vol 22, issue 1, pp 142-48. March 1999.
- ___. 'Selves beyond representation: contemporary art and female subjects.' In proceedings of conference *Mirror mirror: self-portraits by women artists* held between 2-3 November 2001. National portrait gallery, London. Accessed 4th July 2008.
<<http://www.npg.org.uk/live/mirrorpaper2.asp>>
- ___ and Dorothy C Rowe. *Women, the arts and globalization*. Manchester: Manchester U P. 2013.
- Meyer, Jerry D. 'Profane and sacred: religious imagery and prophetic expression in postmodern art.' In *Journal of the academy of religion*. Vol 65, no 1, pp 19-46. Spring 1997.
- Miles, Margaret R. *Carnal knowing: female nakedness and religious meaning in the christian west*. Kent: Burns and Oates. 1991.
- Miller, Daniel. *Materiality: an introduction*. Accessed 20th May 2010
<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/staff/d_miller/mil-8>
- Minha-ha, Trinh T. *Woman, native, other*. Bloomington: Indiana U P. 1989.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *Body-scape*. London: Routledge. 2002.
- Mitchell, Jon P. *Ambivalent europeans*. London: Routledge. 2002.
- Mitchell, W J Thomas. *Iconology: image, text, ideology*. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 1986.
- ___. *Picture theory*. Chicago: U of Chigaco P. 1994.
- 'Modelling for Euan Uglow.' In *Bare facts*. Accessed 20th July 2002.
<<http://www.ifreespace.com/art/modelreg/Articles2.htm>>
- Moi, Toril. Ed. *French feminist thought: a reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1987.
- Monnier, Virginie. 'Catalog of works.' In Clair, Jean. Ed. *Balthus*. London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 2001.
- Mooney, Jim. 'Painting: poignancy and ethics.' In Macleod, Katy and Lin Holdridge. Ed. *Thinking through art: reflections on art as research*. London: Routledge. 2006.
- Moi, Toril. *What is a woman? And other essays*. Oxford: Oxford U P. 1999.
- Morgan, David. *Visual piety*. California: U of California P. 1998.
- Morrison, Molly. 'A mystic's drama: the paschal mystery in the visions of Angela of Foglino.' In *Italica*. Vol 78, no 1, pp 36-52. 2001.
- ___. 'Connecting with the God-man: Angela of Foligno's sensual communion and priestly identity.' In *Romance languages annual*. 10, pp 308-14. 1999.

- ____. 'Ingesting bodily filth: defilement in the spirituality of Angela of Foligno.' In *Romance quarterly*. 50, pp 204-16. 2001.
- Mulder, Anne-Claire. *Divine flesh, embodied word: incarnation as a hermeneutical key to a feminist theologian's reading of Luce Irigaray's work*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam U P. 2006.
- Mullins, Aimee. Information on personal website. Accessed 7th June 2012.
<<http://www.aimeemullins.com/>>
- ____. 'Aimee Mullins on running.' In *TED @ UMW*. Filmed in February 1998. Accessed 7th June 2012.
<<http://ted2009.umwblogs.org/themes/october-8-2009-%E2%80%93-impairments-and-limitations/>>
- ____. 'How my legs give me super-powers.' In *TED Teams With NPR*. Filmed in February 2009 in Long Beach, California. Accessed 7th June 2012.
<http://article.wn.com/view/2012/04/15/TED_Teams_With_NPR/>
- Mulvey, Laura. 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema.' In *Visual and other pleasures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2009.
- Murray, Stuart J. 'Care and the self: biotechnology, reproduction, and the good life.' In *Philosophy, ethics, and humanities in medicine*. 2007.
- Myers, David N. 'R. B. Kitaj (1932-2007) and the Jewish archive.' In *American art*. Vol 22, no 2, pp 98-100. Summer 2008.
- Nead, Lynda. *The female nude: art, obscenity and sexuality*. London: Routledge. 1992.
- Neumann, Erich. *The fear of the feminine: and other essays on feminine psychology*. New Jersey: Princeton U P. 1994.
- Newitz, Annlee. 'Portraits in posthumanity: Aimee Mullins.' In *io9 we come from the future*. 10 May 2010. Accessed 7th June 2012.
<<http://io9.com/about/>>
- Noble, Alexandra. *Worlds in a box*. The South Bank centre. Amica fine art print ltd. 1994
- Nochlin, Linda. *Courbet's "L'origine du monde": The origin without an original*. The MIT P. Vol 37, pp 76-86. Summer 1986.
- Oliver, Kelly. 'Conflicted love.' In *Hypatia*. Indiana U P. Vol 15, no 3, pp 1-18. Summer 2000.
- ____. *Family values*. New York: Routledge. 1997.
- ____. *The colonization of psychic space*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P. 2004.
- ____. 'The look of love.' In *Hypatia*. Indiana U P. Vol 16, no 3, pp 56-78. Summer 2001.
- ____. *Subjectivity without subjects: from abject fathers to desiring mothers*. Rowman and Littlefield publishers, inc. 1998.
- ____. *Witnessing: beyond recognition*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P. 2001.
- Paparoni, Demetrio. 'Piety and rebellion.' In *Eretica, the transcendent and the profane in contemporary art*. Ed. Demetrio Paparoni. Skira editore spa. 2007.
- Perry, Gill. *Gender and art*. New Haven: Yale U P. 1999.
- Pessoa, Fernando. In de Lancastre, Maria José. Ed. *The book of disquiet*. Trans. Costa, Margaret Jull. London: Serpent's tail, 1991.
- Phillips, Sarah R. *Modeling life*. New York: State U of New York P. 2006.
- Philo, Greg. 'Active audiences and the construction of public knowledge.' In *Journalism studies*. Vol 9, no 4, pp 535-544. 2008.
- Pointon, Marcia. *Naked authority: the body in western art 1830-1908*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P. 1990.

- Polinska, Wioleta, 'Dangerous bodies: women's nakedness and theology.' In *Journal of feminist studies in religion*. Vol 16, no 1. Spring 2000.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Differencing the canon*. London: Routledge. 1999
- Postle, Martin J and William Vaughan. *The artist's model, from Etty to Spencer*. London: Merrell Holberton. 1999.
- Priest, Ann-Marie. 'Woman as God, God as woman: mysticism, negative theology, and Luce Irigaray.' In *The journal of Religion*. Vol 83, no 1. January 2003.
- Proust, Marcel. *The way by Swann's*. Trans. Davis, Lydia. London: Penguin books ltd. 2003.
- Richards, Val and Gillian Wilce. *The person who is me: contemporary perspectives on the true and false self*. H Karnac (books) ltd. London. 1996.
- Rees, Emma L E. *The vagina: a literary and cultural history*. New York: Bloomsbury publishing plc. 2013.
- Riches, Pierre. *Note di catechismo per ignoranti colti*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori editore. 1997.
- Rivette, Jacques. Director. 1991. *La belle noiseuse*. Motion picture. Pierre Grise productions.
- Roberts, Melanie in Ana Gabriela Macedo. *Material girls: feminism and body matters*. Accessed 6th April 2004.
<http://www.letras.up.pt/upi/ilc/i_info_texts_on_line_Material_Girls.htm>
- ___. 'Eight British artists cross generational "talk."' In Lloyd, Fran. Ed. *From the interior: female perspectives on figuration*. Kingston: Kingston U P. 1997.
- Roche, Joanna. 'Performing memory in moon in a tree: Carolee Schneemann recollects Joseph Cornell' in *Art journal*. Vol 60, no 4. Winter 2001.
- Rooney, Kathleen. *Live nude girl*. U of Arkansas P. 2008.
- Ross, Charlotte. 'The "body" in fragments: anxieties, fascination and the ideal of "wholeness."' In *Thinking in fragments: romanticism and beyond*. U of Birmingham (UK), December 2010. Unpublished conference proceedings.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary homelands*. London: Vintage. 2010.
- Russ, Sabine. *Corps Étranger*. Accessed 23rd April 2009.
<http://www.zingmagazine.com/zing3/reviews/020_body.html>
- Saltz, Jerry. 'Currin Events.' In *Artnet*. Accessed 10th April 2008.
<<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/saltz/saltz12-18-06.asp>>
- Scarry, Elaine. *On beauty and being just*. Princeton: Princeton U P. 1999.
- ___. *The body in pain*. Oxford U P. 1985.
- Schilder, Paul. *The image and appearance of the human body*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and co. ltd. 1935.
- Schmahmann, Brenda. 'Casting a glance, diverting the gaze: George Segal's representation of the female body.' In *American art*. Vol 12, no 3. Autumn 1998.
- ___. 'Cast in a different light: women and the "artist's studio" theme in George Segal's sculpture.' In *Woman's art journal*. Vol 2, no 2. Autumn 1999-Winter 2000.
- Schor, Mira. *Wet*. Durham: Duke U P. 1997.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the closet*. London: U of California P. 2008.
- ___. *Tendencies*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke U P. 1993.

- Schwendener, Martha. 'From abstract expression to nude self-portraits.' In *NYTimes.com*. Accessed 29th July 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/nyregion/a-review-of-joan-semmels-work-at-the-bronx-museum-of-the-arts.html?_r=0>
- Segal, Naomi. *Consensuality: Didier Anzieu, gender and the sense of touch*. Editions Rodopi BV. Amsterdam. 2008.
- Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. London: Penguin books ltd. 2009.
- Sex and the city*. Transcripts. Accessed 8th January 2012. <<http://www.satctranscripts.com/2008/08/sex-and-city-season-3-episode-14.html>>
- Shapiro, Judith. 'Transsexualism: reflections on the persistence of gender and the mutability of sex.' In Robertson, Jennifer. Ed. *Sex, in same-sex cultures and sexualities: an anthropological reader*. Oxford: Blackwell publishing ltd. 2008.
- Silverman, Kaja. *The threshold of the visible world*. New York: Routledge. 1996.
- Simblet, Sarah. *Anatomy for the artist*. London: Dorling Kindersley ltd. 2001.
- Smith, Marquand and Joanne Morra. Ed. *The prosthetic impulse*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P. 2006.
- Smith, Patti. *Just kids*. London: Bloomsbury. 2012.
- Sobchack, Vivian. *Carnal thoughts*. Berkeley: U of California P. 2004.
- Sofaer, Joanna. Ed. *Material identities*. Malden: Blackwell publishing ltd. 2007.
- Solomon, Deborah. 'Figuring Marlene Dumas.' In *NYTimes.com*. Accessed 9th July 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/15/magazine/15dumas-t.html>>
- Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. *Male trouble: a crisis in representation*. London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 1997.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. *Woman as body: ancient and contemporary views*. Feminist studies. Vol 8, no 1. Spring 1982.
- Stafford, Barbara. *Good looking: essays on the virtue of images*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P. 1996.
- Steiner, Wendy. *The real, real thing: the model in the mirror of art*. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 2010.
- ___. *The trouble with beauty*. London: William Heinemann. 2001.
- Terrasse, Antoine. *Bonnard, the colour of daily life*. London: Thames and Hudson ltd. 1999.
- Tickner, Lisa. 'Sexuality and/ in representation: five British artists.' In Preziosi, Donald. Ed. *The art of art history: a critical anthology*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 1998.
- Tilghman, Carolyn M. 'The flesh made word: Luce Irigaray's rendering of the sensible transcendental.' In *Janus head: journal of interdisciplinary studies in literature, continental philosophy, phenomenological psychology, and the arts*. 11.1. 2009.
- TransMedics. *Bad Oeynhausen clinic for thorax and cardiovascular surgery announces first successful beating heart transplant*. February 23, 2003. Accessed 21st August 2013. <http://www.transmedics.com/vt/page/pr_1140714229>
- Tuchman, Phyllis. *Segal*. New York: Abbeville press. 1983.
- Urbino, Ryan. 'Approaching the divine: Lévinas on god, religion, idolatry and atheism.' In *Logos: a journal of catholic thought and culture*. Vol 15, no 1, pp 50-81. Winter 2012.
- Vander Weg, Kara and Rose Dergan. Ed. *John Currin*. New York: Rizzoli. 2006.
- Vasseleu, Cathryn. *Textures of light*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Vatican note on reliquary of John Paul II. Published on 29th April 2011. Accessed 13th May 2011.
<<http://www.zenit.org/article-32421>>

Volcano, Del LaGrace. Information on personal website. Accessed 11th May 2009.
<<http://www.dellagracevolcano.com/statement.html>>

Von Veh, Karen. 'Saints and sinners: re-evaluating gendered power bases entrenched by religious imagery.' In Du Preez, Amanda. Ed. *Taking a hard look: gender and visual culture.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge scholars publishing. 2009.

Wachowski, Andy and Lana. Directors. 1999. *The matrix.* Motion picture. Warner bros.

Walker, George. 'Interviewing Alex Kanevsky' in *Making art.* Accessed 15th September 2009.
<<http://rtspot.wordpress.com/2009/01/08/alex-kanevsky/>>

Wegenstein, Bernadette. *Getting under the skin.* London: The MIT P. 2006.

Wildgoose, Jane. 'Lasting impressions: the ambiguous appeal of life casting.' In *The lancet.* Vol 359. 13 April 2002.

Williams, Linda. *Hard core: power, pleasure, and the 'frenzy of the visible.'* Berkeley: U of California P. 1999.

Wills, David. *Prosthesis.* Stanford U P. Stanford, California. 1995.

Winnicott, Donald Woods. *Playing and reality.* Oxon: Routledge Classics Ed. 2005.

Young, Iris Marion. *On female body experience.* Oxford: Oxford U P. 2005.

APPENDIX I

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF LAWRENCE BUTTIGIEG FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE OTHER MODEL³⁰

After modelling for live nude art classes and established Maltese artists for the last 19 years, Lawrence remains the only artist I nowadays work with. Having myself an in-depth personal interest in sexuality and holding a PhD in the subject, Lawrence's research and artwork complements my fascination with the array of perceptions revolving around this theme.

What appeals to me most in Lawrence's work is the portrayal of beauty in the natural imperfection of female genitalia, particularly the inner labia, which are a recurring image in both his paintings and casts. These representations of the female body are then interestingly contrasted against the perfection of the structures they are both enclosed and exhibited in. These structures which Lawrence at times has referred to as 'tabernacles' are designed and a number have been manually constructed by Lawrence himself. An architect by profession, Lawrence seeks precision and detail in these structures, which I believe are both present elements in the female body they encapsulate.

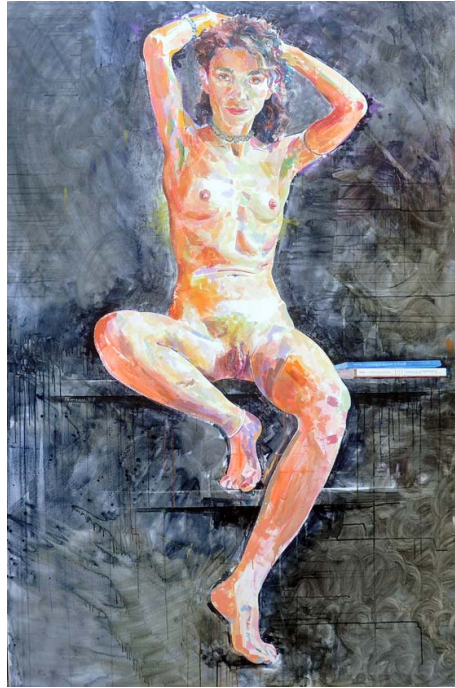
As a model, I consider it is a rare occurrence that an artist finds interest outside the model's flesh. Yet Lawrence seems to defy another of these concepts by using personal artefacts that can be associated with the model. Although the casts represent only parts of the model's body, Lawrence seems to embrace the model's wholeness in the polyptychs and further emphasizes her presence with the use of the adorning artefacts. An unusual sensation, which might be limited to myself or unknowingly shared, is the connection felt with the other two models. As a model exploring the progressing and finalised work produced by Lawrence, I have felt a connection with the other models, transmitted through the shared experience and the representation of oneself through Lawrence's work.

I cannot conclude without acknowledging that modelling for Lawrence always involves interesting conversation many times of academic or political nature. The modelling environment is also pleasant, comfortable, and private and transpires Lawrence's meticulous nature.

³⁰ Kelly Attard, _ _ _@gmail.com, *personal email* sent to Lawrence Buttigieg on 2nd July 2014.

APPENDIX II

Artefacts presented at the School of the Arts, English and Drama, Loughborough University
April-May 2014



Idoia with books, 2008
oil on canvas
W 1300mm, H 1950mm, D 28mm



Idoia, 2008
oil on canvas
W 1300mm, H 1950mm, D 28mm



Fig. A.3 *Idoia*, 2008- (unfinished)
oil on canvas
w 1300mm, H 1620mm, D 28mm



Idoia and Sari, 2008- (unfinished)
oil on canvas
w 1300mm, H 1950mm, D 28mm



Reliquary of Idoia, 2011

W 149mm, H 149mm, D 149mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

cherry wood, suede leather, gold leaf, glass, brass

PAINTING

Portrait of Idoia

CAST

vagina of Idoia

CONTENTS

purple semi-precious stone necklace
purple semi-precious stone necklace pendant
pink semi-precious stone necklace pendant
dark blue semi-precious stone necklace pendant
semi-precious stone earring (damaged)
vintage silver bracelet (damaged)
piece of black leather cord
sealed glass vial containing human hair
sealed glass vial containing perfume
pebble



Triptych for us, 2014
w 230mm, H 336mm, D 75mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

mahogany, leather, brass

PAINTINGS

Portrait of Idoia I

Portrait of Idoia II

PHOTOGRAPHS

Untitled I

Untitled II

Untitled III

Untitled IV

CONTENT

sealed glass vial containing human hair

OTHER

pre-WWII tin crucifix (damaged)



Small tabernacle for Idoia, 2010
W 245mm, H 245mm, D 167mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

mahogany, leather, brass

PAINTINGS

Portrait of Idoia

Chest of Idoia

Portrait of Idoia

Vagina of Idoia

Looking at herself

CAST

vagina of Idoia

CONTENTS

vintage cultured pearl necklace (damaged)
three plastic bead and rope bracelets
sealed glass vial containing human hair



Tabernacle for Kelly, 2011- (unfinished)
W 429mm, H 432mm, D 497mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

walnut wood, brass

PAINTINGS

Portrait of Kelly

Portrait of Kelly

Kelly's torso

Myself

Convergence of bodies (on curved surface)

COLLAGES

Untitled I

Untitled II

Untitled III

Untitled IV

CAST

vagina and left foot of Kler

CONTENTS

blue silk scarf

white lace thong

pair of green glass earrings I

pair of green glass earrings II

black semi-precious stone necklace pendant

silver bracelet

filigree and semi-precious stone earring (damaged)

vintage filigree silver pendant

sealed glass vial containing human hair

piece of black fur tail perforated with two brass rods



Small tabernacle for Kelly, 2011- (unfinished)
W 208mm, H 309mm, D 241mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

Cherry wood, leather, brass

PAINTING

Double nude of Kelly (on round surface)

PHOTOGRAPHS

Myself I

Myself II

CAST

composite of Kler's two lips joined by means of brass rod

CONTENTS

sealed glass vial containing human hair



Tabernacle for ourselves, 2011- (unfinished)
W 515mm, H 465mm, D 447mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

walnut wood, brass

PAINTINGS

Portrait of Idoia

Portrait of Idoia

Myself

Idoia's rear/ 'votive' portraits of ourselves (in two parts)

COLLAGES

Untitled I

Untitled II

Untitled III

Untitled IV

CASTS

Idoia's belly, vagina, and left hand; my left hand grasping her inner thigh (composite cast)

hand of Kelly

CONTENTS

wood, glass bead, metal, and string bracelet (damaged)

pair of shell and semi-precious stone earrings

sealed glass vial containing human hair

two pieces of silver fox fur tail

ELECTRONIC DEVICE

Optoma PK320, pico projector



Tabernacle for Idoia, 2011- (unfinished)
W 480mm, H 480mm, D 480mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE
mahogany, brass

PAINTINGS

Idoia

Untitled I

Idoia looking at herself

Untitled II

Idoia in cruciform pose

Idoia lying down (the Deposition)

Double nude of Idoia with animal bone necklace (on curved surface)

CASTS

vagina, inner thighs of Idoia

right hand of Idoia

CONTENTS

multicoloured scarf

blue lace briefs

silver bracelet I

silver bracelet II

blue lucite bead bracelet

multicoloured nacre bracelet

purple semi-precious stone necklace

pair of rhinestone earrings

sealed glass vial containing human hair

piece of black fur tail



Tabernacle for Lucya, 2012- (unfinished)
 w 480mm, H 480mm, D 480mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

walnut wood, brass

PAINTINGS

Lucya

Untitled I

Portrait of myself

Lucya in cruciform pose

Lucya in pose recalling martyrdom of St Sebastian

Triple body (on curved surface)

COLLAGES

Untitled I

Untitled II

Untitled III

Untitled IV

CASTS

chest, hands of Lucya

lips, chin and neck of Lucya

CONTENTS

green silk scarf

silver bracelet (South American origin)

green semi-precious stone necklace

purple semi-precious stone necklace

recycled material necklace

vintage cultured pearl necklace (damaged)

green glass necklace

Icon-styled portrait of Christ (hand-painted on granite stone, artist unknown)

Icon-styled portrait of St Nicholas (hand-painted on granite stone, artist unknown)

sealed glass vial containing human hair

two pieces of silver fox fur tail

piece of black fur tail



Cabinet of intimate landscapes, 2009- (unfinished)
 W 552mm, H 551mm, D 545mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

mahogany and walnut wood, glass, leather, brass

PAINTINGS

Idoia looking at her reflection I
Double nude portrait of ourselves
Idoia looking at her reflection II
Double nude portrait of ourselves
Portrait of Idoia with myself in background
Quadruple portrait of ourselves
Double portrait, Idoia dressed in black and myself nude
Intimate quadruple portrait of ourselves

CASTS

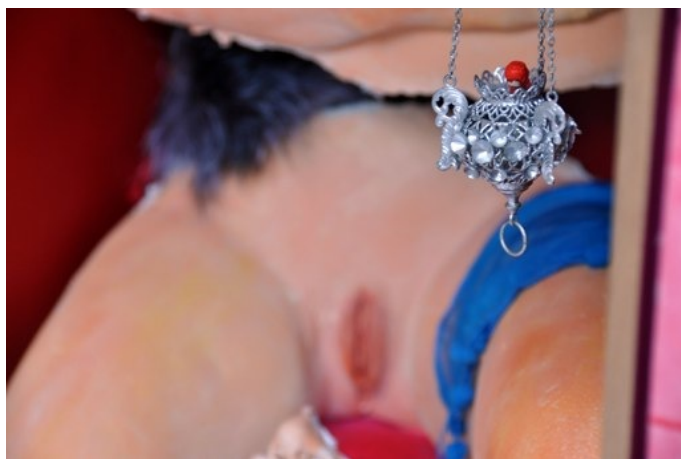
vagina, lower belly of Idoia
 part face of myself
 hand of Lucya grasping her right breast

CONTENTS

pink/purple silk scarf
 violet silk scarf
 pink silk scarf
 green lace briefs
 light blue lace briefs
 bronze coloured briefs
 primitive style vintage necklace
 yellow lucite bead bracelet
 gold-plated metal upper arm bracelet
 small wooden cat in clothes
 small giraffe soft toy
 two sealed glass vials containing human hair
 silver and brass pre-WWII miniature model of church tabernacle
 part of limestone headstone retrieved from the Imtarfa Military Cemetery, Malta
 two pieces of silver fox fur tail
 piece of black fur tail

CONTENTS IN THE OUTSIDE VITRINE

small cotton figure
 elastic hair band
 pink disposable razor
 blue disposable razor
 partly used tub of vaseline
 turquoise plastic hair clip



Cabinet of sublimated desires, 2009- (unfinished)
W 652mm, H 652mm, D 543mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

mahogany, walnut wood, glass, leather, brass

PAINTINGS

Portrait of Idoia I

Assimilation of Idoia and myself

Portrait of Idoia II

Double nude portrait of ourselves in cruciform pose

Lower body of Idoia, open pose

CASTS

right hand and chest of Kelly (after breast reduction surgery)

lower belly, vagina, upper legs of Kelly

part face of myself

CONTENTS

purple silk scarf

cerulean blue silk scarf

red lace briefs

red lace bandeau

primitive style animal bone necklace

yellow lucite bead bracelet

gold-plated metal upper arm bracelet

copper upper arm bracelet

two sealed glass vials containing human hair

pre-WWII miniature lead model of church chandelier

pre-WWII miniature wood model of front part of church altar

1936 prayer book

1949 prayer book



Peep-hole box, 2013- (unfinished)
W 319mm, H 321mm, D 657mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

walnut wood, leather, brass

PAINTINGS

Portrait of Idoia
Portrait of black cat
Portrait of Idoia's rear
Portrait of Idoia's vagina
Untitled I
Oil sketch of Kelly
Untitled II
Untitled III
Oil sketch of Idoias foot
Untitled IV

PHOTOGRAPHS

Idoia posing with painting of herself I
Idoia posing with painting of herself II
Idoia posing with painting of herself III
Idoia posing with painting of herself IV
Idoia posing with painting of herself V
Idoia posing with painting of herself VI

CASTS

vagina and anus of Idoia (with embedded human hair)
left foot of Idoia
part of right foot of Kelly

ELECTRONIC DEVICE

3M MPro150, pico projector



Wedge *bax*, 2013- (unfinished)
W 287mm, H 364mm, D 295mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

walnut wood, glass, brass

PAINTINGS

Untitled I

Untitled II

Untitled III

Untitled IV

PHOTOGRAPH

Hands, jewellery of Idoia

COLLAGE

Untitled I

CONTENTS

pair of rhinestone earrings

pair of nipple rings with barbells

pewter and semi-precious stone brooch

pewter and semi-precious stone cross (with necklace)

vintage lead cross

pair of wood and plastic bead bracelets

vintage silver and green semi-precious stone necklace pendant

recycled material necklace

miniature sterling silver spoon

vintage piece of Maltese linen with lace decoration

small soft toy

egg-shaped soap

sealed glass vial containing human hair

convex mirror

ELECTRONIC DEVICE

Mini iPad



Pyramid song, 2013- (unfinished)
w 319mm, H 321mm, D 657mm (when closed)

STRUCTURE

stainless steel, acrylic, leather

PHOTOGRAPHS

Untitled I

Untitled II

Untitled III

Untitled IV

Untitled V

OTHER

pre-WWII print of crowned Virgin Mary

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

three Optoma PK320, pico projectors