

Tracey Emin: 'When I was a student I was so influenced by him it was incredible, and I think you can still see the influence now. But I have a very different line from him.'<sup>1</sup>

Nicola Tyson: 'In Schiele, his looking is so aroused – so successfully pornographic – that as a viewer you can't help but get turned on by it, despite any political misgivings you might have. You're invited to have a threesome with him just through lines and washes of colour – that's his genius!'<sup>2</sup>



Egon Schiele  
*Self Portrait*, 1917  
Lithograph, 42 × 21 cm

The contemporary women artists included in 'The Naked' respond to the work of Egon Schiele in diverse and divergent ways. For Tracey Emin, born in 1963, Schiele is both a predecessor and a partner in crime. In the spring of 2015 she will place new work alongside that of the Viennese modernist in a major exhibition she describes as 'Just me and Egon Schiele' – as if they'd been planning it together, as if he's back from the dead.<sup>3</sup> Emin first came across the artist as a teenager, through David Bowie's Schiele-inspired album cover for *Heroes* (1977) and *Lodger* (1979); untroubled by the 'anxiety of influence', she frequently cites him as one of her most enduring inspirations.<sup>4</sup> Her references to his explicit works on paper – his masturbating women, his girls with their wide-open legs – provide her with a history. At times her drawings are reiterations of this history, with its fixation on the female body and its fascination with the Other, defined not only by gender but also by class and by race (Emin's father is a Turkish-Cypriot; her background is working class). On other occasions her drawings question this same history, with its omission of women artists and its association of creativity with masculinity. Schiele haunts Emin's work but he is a spectre she chooses to summon and, as she asserts, her line is *different*.

For Nicola Tyson, born in 1960 and author of *Dead Letter Men* – a collection of correspondence addressed to the great white men of modernist art history – Schiele is a more irksome figure, an artist she would not seek to emulate, or to claim as a contemporary, but who draws her in nevertheless, in spite of her feminist politics.<sup>5</sup> Critical of his posturing as the troubled genius martyred for his art, and of his representation of 'liberated' women in states of compromising undress, Tyson says she still cannot help finding his drawings both formally compelling and sexually arousing. In Tyson's 'Letter to Egon Schiele', written especially for 'The Naked', living artist

addresses dead *Wunderkind*, resuscitating him for a conversation that refuses to shy away from the sexual and moral politics of his studio practice. As a piece of writing it is both angry and funny; it reinvigorates Schiele's work and complicates the relationship we have with it.

Feminist art practice and feminist art history are continually, if at times implicitly, in dialogue with one another. In my own work I am drawn to the question of how the history of Viennese modernism has been written. I am interested in its biases and blind spots, its narratives of embattled male genius, and its passionate attachment to such notions as 'naked truth' – the belief that by exposing the body, Vienna's modernists revealed something fundamental about human existence. Schiele's preoccupation with naked self-portraiture was profound, but in his work and that of his contemporaries the body that was unclothed time and time again in pursuit of 'naked truth' was young, nubile and female. In my research, I engage with the overwhelmingly patriarchal visual culture of 'Vienna 1900' and its ongoing production through publications and exhibitions that continue to uphold its maxims.<sup>6</sup> In their practice, contemporary women artists, though not especially concerned with the Viennese context, effectively do the same, taking on the traditions of modernism in order to trouble and transform them. Dead men and their naked truths are brought back to life, held to account, or, as Griselda Pollock argued in her *Vision and Difference*, 'If modernist art history supplies the paradigm which feminist art history of the modern period must contest, modernist criticism and modernist practice are the targets of contemporary practice.'<sup>7</sup> The aim of this essay is to activate a dialogue between Schiele's drawings of the female body and those of the women included in this exhibition: how does their practice enable us to reconsider two of the binaries that really define his work on paper, between naked and nude on the one hand, and art and pornography on the other?

#### NAKED/NUDE

Schiele entered Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts at the tender age of 16. He was a precocious, prodigiously talented draughtsman and the youngest student in his year group. Life drawing was central to his training, though he did not study the female body until he turned 18 in 1908. Drawings from this year include cautious studies of the reclining female nude, raised up on an elbow with legs pressed together, head turned modestly from the viewer.

Other, more dynamic images of muscled and bearded male life models, of the student himself – in the soft dark suit and stiff white collar he wore to classes – and of his teachers, also immaculately dressed, standing in front of easels with brushes in hand, show the formality of the life-drawing class, Schiele's social and sexual awkwardness, and the difficulty he had in sustaining the gaze upon the female body. This shifted decisively with Schiele's early and unexpected departure from the Academy in 1909. Working independently from his own studio with models of his choosing, Schiele transformed his early tuition to produce an incredible number of explicit drawings of young women, naked except for their stockings and boots. Legs parted, backs arched, arms outstretched – these sexualised, individualised bodies replaced the restrained and idealised nudes of the Academy. As many art historians have argued, this was the year of Schiele's artistic and sexual maturity.

This was not an entirely new language of the body or of desire, despite the utterly distinctive way in which Schiele handled his materials and viewed his models. In the same year of Schiele's independence from the Academy, Gustav Klimt – Schiele's mentor and another prolific draughtsman – exhibited a series of drawings at the Galerie Miethke, one of Vienna's leading galleries for modern art, that many of their contemporaries denigrated as 'obscene', of women with exposed genitals, caught in 'abandoned' acts of masturbation, lying next to each other, at times entwined. As one critic of the exhibition remarked: 'Nudity, with or without details, is artistically quite unobjectionable. But the exposure, the shameless presentation of the genitals is the art of the brothel and for it to be exhibited is a gross violation of one's feelings of shame.'<sup>8</sup> Such a response was typical of the public reaction to modernist art practice in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century. Following his formation of the Austrian artists' association, the Secession, in 1897, which had as its motto 'To each Age its Art, to Art its Freedom', Klimt became the target of vitriolic attacks by the press. Critics were particularly angered by his 'art of the brothel', his representation of the naked female body that, in keeping with his modernism, departed from the classical nude typified by balanced proportions and a desexualised pose.<sup>9</sup>

This was the context for Schiele's development as a draughtsman, intent on exposing the body, representing desire, and confronting bourgeois Viennese society with its hypocritical denial of the physical and the sexual, of the 'naked truth'. Or at least, this is how his work on paper is represented in the scholarship on Viennese modernism – as images so scandalous

they were to prove incriminating. In what became known as the 'Neulengbach Affair' of 1912, Schiele was charged for the display of obscene drawings to children and imprisoned, albeit for only 24 days. At his trial, the judge burned one of his drawings in the courtroom and this has become a much-mythologised moment in Schiele's life, signifying the struggle of the great artist against the ignorant public on the interconnected issues of art, morality and sexuality. In terms of the historiography, the case against Schiele was an incredibly useful one as it secured his reputation as a libertarian. The controversy ensured that when we talk about Viennese modernism we tend to describe it as a permissive, progressive art movement, which provided women with the means of expressing their libidinous, shameless selves through this shift from the nude to the naked, and from the artful to the 'artless'.

In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger differentiated the naked from the nude as, 'To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself.'<sup>10</sup> His formulation has been highly influential but many feminist artists and art historians disagree with it, all too aware of modernism's ability to so deftly turn the naked into as patriarchal a form of image as the nude; despite the rhetoric of truth, authenticity and expression, this is still a matter of women as the objects of masculine desire, fantasy and fear.<sup>11</sup> The history of art has a remarkable ability to consume and expand, and Schiele's drawings were quickly re-absorbed by the art establishment they so 'offended'. The ease and speed with which this happened shows how fundamentally *unproblematic* his representation of the naked female body actually was; his images, albeit shocking, were still very much about the heterosexual male gaze that determined modernist art-making and appreciation, and, accordingly, they were swiftly recuperated as 'nudes'.<sup>12</sup>

With this in mind, many of the women artists included in 'The NAKEDS' would question Schiele's status as a radical. As Tyson said in response to a question as to whether she found Schiele's work sexually liberating:

No. Why is it sexually liberating? Because they are 'pretty' pornographic drawings (and great art) instead of 'ugly' photos - does that make it liberating? To women? That the models appear to be doing it for nothing, for fun, when a lot of them weren't, when they were being paid much-needed money?<sup>13</sup>

Troubled by a history of art that conceals the very particular alignment of gender, class, sex and spectatorship that enabled

the production, dissemination and consumption of Schiele's drawings, Tyson's letter addresses the unequal sexual and economic relations that facilitated his practice. In the years after his departure from the Academy, the artist was poor, but not as financially vulnerable as the models who posed for him - what choices did such women have when it came to his representation of their bodies?

For many women artists, this highly charged history of the artist and his model, and of the studio as a place of sexual encounter, is a challenge, something to knowingly embrace or just as consciously resist. Life drawing was an important early practice for Tyson as she prepared her portfolio ahead of applying to St Martin's School of Art in the 1980s, but now she chooses to work from memory, calling up sometimes-distant recollections of limbs and torsos, ribs and hips. In her pencil drawing *Naked Young Girl #1* (2014) (p.88), the figure appears as a phantom, her form becoming visible only as it emerges in relation to her long hair and hot pants, and the cloak that waves behind her ghostly legs. Tyson describes how her images of the body often swerve into 'garment weirdness', 'some absurd collar or frill' that, conversely, draws attention to the nakedness of the body represented, and the strangeness of this nakedness.<sup>14</sup> The inanimate - the hair, the cloth - are the areas of the sheet where the graphite is most densely worked; elsewhere, on the body, the artist's hand is barely there, just visible in the outline of thumbs that protrude from striped shorts, in the faint spots of nostrils, nipples and belly button, and the soft shadows of the eyes and mouth. This is a drawing practice that rejects the determined, colonising line that Tyson has described as being 'so sexualised and stylised, so controlling, consuming and intensely, recognisably, "Schiele".'<sup>15</sup>

Tracey Emin, by contrast, embraces Schiele's line for its sexual connotations. When asked what her response was to his representation of women, she answered simply, 'very sexy'.<sup>16</sup> Their approach to the delineation of the figure is different. Emin's line is less concerned with anatomical accuracy, with rigour and exactitude; it isn't, as she describes it, as 'heavy' as Schiele's, and this is an important distinction that is often used to identify her as a 'feminine' practitioner, an artist with a light touch.<sup>17</sup> However, in her many depictions of the prone and bent female body - images that are often combined with written entreaties to a viewer/lover - Emin evokes the same, often-fraught sexual encounters that so preoccupied Schiele. In her monoprint *Don't tell me that* (2007) (p.51), a naked female figure lies on the floor, arms braced, breasts

exposed, limbs raised in alert anticipation of intercourse; her lover does not appear on the sheet of lined paper but is suggested instead in the looming phallic shape made by the thrust of her legs. The text that is part of this image, written in the same ink, is a plea to this man: 'Don't tell me you don't Love me'.

In many ways Emin provides the women represented by Schiele with the voice that underlines their objectification, willing or otherwise – do/don't tell me that, treat me this way. Occasionally, this voice conveys a sense of sexual liberation but, more often, it suggests a fear of hurt, of abandonment, of becoming erotically invisible. The question of how empowered such representations actually are reverberates through much of the reception of this artist.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, the difference between Emin and Schiele's work on paper that we could call paradigm shifting is that she is both artist and model, viewer and viewed. Drawing her own body in her own studio space, Emin both reinforces and resists the gendering of these relations, producing a tension between the two that is creatively productive. This has been a long-standing aspect of her practice. In her *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made* (1996), at the Galleri Andreas Brändström in Stockholm, Emin spent two weeks working in the gallery space on her solo exhibition, naked, with 16 fisheye lenses trained on her, on view to the passing public while producing the work due to be placed on display. *Exorcism* was an attempt to overcome a six-year fear of painting – something we might consider in terms of the 'anxiety of authorship' – and it was broken by her reinterpretation of works by Schiele, amongst other male modernists; crippling tradition (women 'can't' paint, only pose) was transformed.

Such interventions are certainly not particular to Emin. In her *Self-Portrait* (1994) (p.58), an early work, Chantal Joffe, born in 1969, also conflates artist with model, painting her naked body on cardboard, consciously rejecting (like Emin, with her school-book sheets of ruled A4) the dense white papers and canvases of modernism. In conversation about this work, Joffe described the act of painting herself naked as 'oddly shocking'; there was both a thrill and a fear in her reclaiming the representation of her body.<sup>19</sup> Joffe is as enthralled by Schiele's febrile line as Emin and Tyson, and catalogues of his drawings – along with Klimt's – lie on the heavily loaded bookshelves of her studio; 'He is the ultimate,' she offers, by way of an explanation, 'he *becomes* the pencil.'<sup>20</sup> She looks at his work frequently and often in reference to contemporary visual culture; a postcard of his painted self-portrait, *The Poet* (1911), is

displayed on the walls of her studio alongside pages torn from *ID* magazine of wide-eyed, open-mouthed, red-lipped models and notes to herself, such as 'Nudes – whole room of them / Pretty feet'. In contrast to Emin and Tyson, Joffe is not unduly concerned by the sexual content of Schiele's drawings; she senses that the real source of his excitement lay in the depiction of the body's extremities – the swollen bellies and protruding nipples, the pronounced backbones and flexed hands. In her practice, Joffe is also interested in such physical excesses and this may account for the desexualised, even disinterested lens through which she views and appreciates Schiele's formal innovations.



Chantal Joffe's studio

Joffe reflects on how challenging it was as a young woman to depict the body of the life model in such an uncompromising, unflinching way as Schiele, because 'you're conditioned to *not* look; it's hard to find the courage to do otherwise.'<sup>21</sup> She

admires the artist for being 'so unafraid to see and to draw. At 20, I had no sense of how to do that, of how to be so direct, to reveal so much.'<sup>22</sup> Naked self-portraiture – which was also incredibly important to Schiele's development – provided Joffe with a way out of this conundrum of embarrassment-in-looking, and it remains an important strand of her practice. It is connected to what she describes as 'the heft of art history; how to find your way out from under the weight of the great male artist?'<sup>23</sup> Such pressures are in many ways acknowledged in her naked self-portrait. Painted in oil on cardboard, which is then cut out and applied as a collage onto white paper, Joffe's image of her body is as awkward, as disjointed as this process of making conveys; facial features are shown simultaneously in profile and front-on; head swivels perilously from the shoulder as opposed to the neck; legs are too short for the body they support; back foot is twisted. She is off-balance, out of line, as a model and as an artist, and deliberately so because this is Joffe's wry comment on the emphatic gendering of the modernist tradition, on what she 'can' and 'cannot' do.

Fiona Banner, born in 1966, does not produce self-portraits but she has also engaged with what she identifies as life drawing/life writing for almost a decade.<sup>24</sup> She states:

I don't see myself as working in the grand history of the nude in art ... But the complexity that surrounds the nude – the questions about gender that define the history of the nude, and for that matter the history of description *per se* – are a motivation.<sup>25</sup>

Frequently choosing to represent women she knows, as opposed to professional models, Banner often views and draws them in front of live audiences in performances that last approximately 40 minutes. The model enters a room sparsely furnished with a platform for her to stand on, an easel, board and canvas, a stool, and a collection of artist's materials; she disrobes, steps up on to the platform, finds and settles into a pose – an often uncomfortable process that intrigues Banner, who then proceeds to write her description of the body as it has been revealed on canvas. These public performances were preceded by more intimate encounters with models in Banner's own studio space – experiences that she describes as rehearsals for the later works. For *Double Door Nude* (2006) (pp.36-7), selected especially by Banner for 'The Naked', a stripper was invited to perform in the privacy of Banner's studio. We read how:

SHE COMES FORWARDS AND LOOKS OUT BLINKING ... THE LIGHT BLUE ON HER WHITE SHOULDER SPILLING DOWN ON TO HER BREAST, THEN ON HER TUMMY AND ONTO HER THIGHS, THEN IN A POOL ON THE FLOOR HER RED SCUFFED KNEE TREMBLES AND KICKS BACK.

Uneven nipples, scraped knuckles, reddened marks from bra straps, veins showing through the thin skin of the armpit – Banner's description of the body is incredibly individuated; this is her subversion of the all-seeing, all-knowing gaze of the male artist-genius, as well as her comment on the highly charged voyeurism of life drawing as process and as picture.

#### ART/PORN

Banner's work on the nude developed out of an early interest in pornography. In a talk at the ICA she remarked on how 'messed up' she was by images as a young artist – a feeling that has persisted.<sup>26</sup> She turned instead to language, producing 'wordscapes' – obsessively detailed transcriptions of the action in pornographic films that were published in book form as reams and reams of continuous text, and produced as drawings, handwritten in pencil on vast sheets of paper. For Banner, porn films are like life drawings, 'only with all the rules broken': 'They have very limited narrative: often no script, virtually no dialogue, just the hovering gaze.'<sup>27</sup> With a nod to Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, which drew attention to the shared conventions of the nude as represented in the history of art and soft-core pornographic photography, she remarks: 'I always think of porn itself as being part of the tradition of the nude.'<sup>28</sup> Modernists insist on the separation of 'high' art from 'low' pornography, and no more so than with an artist like Schiele, who continually traversed the border between the two. Banner's knowing elision of art and pornography enables us to dismantle this value-laden distinction and to question its efficacy. Does it really matter if Schiele's drawings were inspired by illicit photographs, produced for a pornographic market, or purchased for sexual pleasure? Do we need to hold on to that modernist position of art as another, entirely separate realm of image-making?

Schiele struggled to establish himself as an artist on leaving the Academy without a major patron at the age of 19, and his explicit drawings of women quickly became the means by which he was able to support himself. Working intensively, he developed a way of representing the female body that was fundamentally collectable. Schiele's technical virtuosity –

his ability to capture the body with such speed that models could strike sexually inventive poses, and with such accuracy that they appeared thrillingly real – was unrivalled in Vienna. His dexterity as a draughtsman brought the body closer to the viewer, and this sense of proximity was heightened by the unusual positions he would take up in relation to the model. Standing by her shoulder, crouching between her feet, looking at her genitals – so near that single pubic hairs could be picked out one by one – Schiele made drawings that were exciting because they suggested just how close the artist, and hence the spectator, was to the body on the page; desiring subject and desired object could almost be touching. This sense of the drawing as a live sexual encounter between viewer and viewed was further emphasised by the model's state of partial undress. There are few entirely naked bodies in Schiele's collection of drawings; rather, models are depicted with skirts blown over faces, garters fastened at the knee, boots laced up the calf. Such clothing signifies their slow striptease for the artist who remains off-paper. In being both ever-present and always removed, Schiele provided the viewers of his drawings with the means of projecting themselves into the image; artist becomes viewer becomes lover, albeit a lonely one.

Aesthetic autonomy is one of the central tenets of modernism; in such a value system, art sustains itself, evolving apart from social change and pressures, and this goes some way towards explaining why the precedents for Schiele's drawings in pornographic photography of the period are so rarely acknowledged. Comparisons between the two, however, show how indebted Schiele's practice was to this wholly ubiquitous visual culture. His framing of the female genitalia, his juxtaposing of fabric and flesh, and his dynamic sense of pose and gesture can all be traced back to pornographic photographs of the period. In an anonymous photograph from around 1900, for example, a woman parts the cheeks of her bottom to reveal her anus and genitals, framed with boots, blouse and a beribboned hat. Shaped like an eye, the lens-like structure of the image works with the woman's hand to draw the viewer in closer. Such photographs were widely available at the turn of the twentieth century. Vienna – along with Budapest, the Hungarian capital of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary (1867–1918) – was one of the largest producers of pornographic literature in Europe, and this was a cause of political anxiety. In 1910, the same year in which Schiele embarked on his exploration of explicit life drawing, Austria-Hungary signed an international treaty with 14 other countries to cooperate in the prosecution of those involved in the pornographic industry.<sup>29</sup>



Unknown Photographer,  
Pornographic Photograph, c. 1900,  
Uwe Scheid Collection, Munich

Such photographs were incriminating because of their potential for dissemination; drawings, by contrast, as comparatively rare and expensive works of art, had a more uncertain status, which proved extremely useful when it came to the terms of anti-pornography legislation. As the materials and mode of production signified, this was a matter of 'high' art as opposed to 'low' pornography, and such distinctions were critical when it came to the discussion and dissemination of Schiele's work. Defended as 'erotic' – a useful middle term that mediated between art on the one hand and pornography on the other – Schiele's images could remain in the public domain. However, as his arrest in Neulengbach showed, this was not a closed case; the artist's work was continually on the cusp of legality, and this goes a long way towards explaining the frisson generated by his drawings, and the fervour with which they were not only collected, but also printed.

In 1923, five years after Schiele's death, the art dealer Karl Grünwald appeared before the criminal court in Vienna. Charged with the dissemination of 'obscene prints', Grünwald had

purchased 200 copies of colour lithographs taken from drawings by Schiele. Successfully defending the purchase as one that was for the benefit of 'art lovers' only – men with the ability to uphold the distinction between art and pornography – Grünwald was acquitted, though the judge ordered the destruction of the images in question. Some sheets seem to have escaped the authorities and the exceptionally rare portfolio of five prints included in 'The NAKEDS' is considered by art historians to contain those implicated in the trial.<sup>30</sup> They comprise images of young girls and women, including Schiele's wife Edith (p.31), who sit and recline in varying states of undress. Printed from drawings produced by Schiele across a long period of time, the images are different stylistically, but are unified through content: each print shows the model exposing her genitals for the viewer in a spectacular fashion.

Portfolios were often used at the turn of the century to conceal provocative works on paper; lavishly produced, they were conceived as collectors' items – to be appreciated in private – but they were also used in public. When Schiele exhibited a series of compromising drawings in an exhibition in Prague in 1910, the police removed the sheets from the wall but agreed to their display in a portfolio within the gallery space.<sup>31</sup> Schiele declined, but the incident shows how the portfolio – a material object that could be opened but also closed – was a means of mediation, of interceding in what could and could not be put on public view. Book-making is an important aspect of Banner's own practice, and she describes its appeal in visceral terms:

The book as a body – the jacket, the spine, the armpit in the fold of the endpapers, the arse or cunt in the shadow of the gutter, waiting to be opened, revealed, read – is an erotic object. Unread books ... unreadable books – even better.<sup>32</sup>

Such a description brings us much closer to the sexual pleasures of the Schiele portfolio than distant accounts of police embargoes in early twentieth-century Prague.

Many contemporary women artists challenge modernist hegemony through an engagement with pornography, disrupting the distinction between 'high' and 'low'. In her early twenties, Joffe experienced what she describes as a breakthrough in her practice. She had stopped working from life models at the Royal College of Art, where she studied in 1992–94, because it was too limited; she could not ask them to do what she wanted, to bend and gesture lewdly, to partially and provocatively undress. Her tutor, Chris Fischer, agreed to accompany her to Soho, where he bought her a

hard-core pornographic magazine, which she devoured along with the donuts she bought while waiting on the street. Too mortified to purchase anything herself, at that time or at a later date, Joffe went on to use this same publication for a period of six months, drawing and then painting from the photographs, and revelling in the absurd proportions and contrasts of the bodies on show – the orange tans against white bikini marks, the gigantic breasts attached to tiny torsos, the swollen genitals framed with knicker elastic. Joffe describes her excitement at the formal possibilities these photographs opened up – this was a 'new' body to that on display in the life drawing class. Joffe's feminist politics helped her to articulate the desires that drove what became a highly productive and defining period of work. As she described in an interview for the *Observer*:

My early paintings used pornographic imagery, partly because I was interested in the politics surrounding pornography, but also because I wanted to paint nudes, and through pornography I had an endless supply of images of naked women. At the time I used to think I was bringing these women back to life. The photograph had killed their soul, and they died when the magazine was discarded. I saw my paintings as resurrecting them.<sup>33</sup>

Such a reclaiming of the highly contested visual culture of pornography also defines the work of Marlene Dumas, who has long used pornography as source material for painting. As Richard Schiff has argued, in her re-painting of the photographic image torn from pornographic magazines, the poses become 'less dead', erotically enlivened by the 'amoral touch' of Dumas' own hand as it moves washes of ink across paper.<sup>34</sup> In the diptych titled *Hello & Goodbye* (1998) (pp.48–9), a dirty-pink ink is used to outline and infill the body (Dumas washes her brushes only rarely, preferring to work with blackened, sullied pigment). Darker grey washes highlight the nostrils, eyes and mouth of each exhibitionist and, in the right hand drawing *Goodbye*, the curve of the bottom, the line where thigh presses against thigh, and the cleft of the anus and genitals, where the ink blooms. The variations in these washes are sensual in that the mark-making seems intuitive, exploratory, even – as Schiff has described it – masturbatory, and this is not only a matter of the artist's touch but also that of the viewer: 'The line moves so engagingly that you imagine *your* hand here, drawing.'<sup>35</sup>

This technique makes Dumas' images 'less dead' than the photographs that inspire them – figure, artist and viewer are

brought to life through sexual contact – but it is also what she describes as *less direct*:

Some of my work has been described as pornographic, but then a real pornographer told me that mine was much too soft and at a distance to be true pornography. I agree. On the Internet everything is available in much more direct ways.<sup>36</sup>

At other times, Dumas is less concerned with maintaining such differences – as she described in ‘A Cheap Girl’: ‘It was a compliment when someone described my work as ‘cheap thrills’. It wasn’t meant as a compliment.’<sup>37</sup> Dumas’ work encourages us to reconsider the relationship between art and pornography, and connected to this (as she hints in the disparaging nature of the comment on her work) between gender and painting; to quote Dumas, painting is no longer the preserve of ‘dead males’.<sup>38</sup> As she remarks, with an irony that undercuts the historical association of men with making and women with modelling: ‘I paint because I like to be bought and sold.’<sup>39</sup>



Georgina Starr's studio

For Georgina Starr, born in 1968, pornography is one of countless complex references to found and popular visual culture. Exhibited for the first time in ‘The Naked’, a series of preparatory

drawings for future paintings and performances are based on pornographic photographs from the early twentieth century that she has collected over many years. As she describes, ‘I wanted to reactivate these overused and appropriated images of female bodies and transform them into something new and unpredictable.’<sup>40</sup> The photographs are amateurish and acrobatic. In one example, a woman lies on a carpeted floor in a slip with her legs wide open; she could be participating in a gym class were it not for the fact that she wears no knickers. Starr is intrigued by these images, and, significantly, she does not consider them to be pornographic:

There is something very particular and strange about how the women perform, from their facial expression to the way they sit and stand, which completely subverts the way the viewer engages with them. In many of the images the women have a playful defiance and seem outside the control of the person taking the photograph. The women never look to the camera/viewer, more often they look at themselves; down at their own or another’s genital area as if something extraordinarily cosmic is about to happen.<sup>41</sup>

Starr provides the extraordinarily cosmic happening with the addition of small, brightly coloured bubbles made from gum or a polyvinyl resin that cover the women’s mouths or genitals. She identifies her material as being that of breath entering a fragile membrane – it is hers and it is quintessentially feminine.<sup>42</sup> The bubble evokes clowns and condoms, children’s parties and Lolita’s gum. It is described by the artist as,

The bubble is transformation, it is birth, it’s the beginning of everything. It’s the first breath, the first word and the first sculpture. The bubble can be a world, a womb, a double, a moon, a sun or a crystal ball. It is also a voice. It’s what is inside spoken OUT LOUD.<sup>43</sup>

In one of her drawings for ‘The Naked’ (p.79), this bubble – an exuberant pop of brilliant blue – is balanced precariously over the genitals of the female figure; further bubbles drawn in pencil show her juggling while reclining; she is nimble, playful. As Starr states, this is not about the recuperation of pornography, but the feminist reactivation of images of women who – surprise, surprise – were flouting the rules in the first place.



## RE-REPRESENTATIONS

Modernism casts a long shadow; the interventions made by contemporary women artists in its values and traditions – of life drawing, of ‘naked truth’, and of women, to paraphrase Berger, as objects, not bearers of the look – show the extent of its reach into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As feminist practitioners, these women are deeply concerned with disrupting the principles and practices of modernism by drawing attention to its assumptions and exclusions, its powers and pretensions. Art historians of the modern period should be similarly engaged; as Pollock argued as far back as 1988,

The political point of feminist art history must be to change the present by means of how we re-represent the past. That means we must refuse the art historian’s permitted ignorance of living artists and contribute to the present day struggles of living producers.<sup>44</sup>

Curatorial practices are one of the interventions feminist art historians can make. ‘The Naked’ re-represents Schiele’s work in a group show comprising drawings by other dead men – and women – as well as by living artists of both genders. In the process, it asks us to re-engage with the binaries that so characterised his work, of naked and nude, and of art and pornography – dichotomies dear to modernism that are interrogated by the curators and artists gathered here.

*Gemma Blackshaw*

1. Tracey Emin, interview with the author, 24 July, 2014.

2. Nicola Tyson, interview with the author, 23 June, 2014.

3. ‘Tracey Emin: Labor of Love’, *Flatt Magazine*, Spring 2014, pp.147-57. The exhibition opens at the Leopold Museum, Vienna, in April 2015.

4. The term ‘anxiety of influence’ was coined by Harold Bloom in his consideration of the fraught relationships living poets of the Romantic era had with the dead. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973). In their feminist critique of his book, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar drew attention to Bloom’s model of literary history as a patriarchal one; nineteenth-century women poets, they argued, suffered instead from an ‘anxiety of authorship’: ‘a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a “precursor” the act of writing will

isolate or destroy her.’ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp.48-9. First published in 1979. Such debates provide interesting ways into thinking about Emin’s practice.

5. Nicola Tyson, *Dead Letter Men* (London and New York: Sadie Coles HQ, Petzel Gallery, 2014). The first performance connected to the book project was titled *Letters to Artists and Other Men* (Petzel Gallery, New York, May 2011).

6. See, for example, Gemma Blackshaw, ‘The Modernist Offense: Egon Schiele’s Drawings of the Naked Female Body’, in Barnaby Wright and Peter Vergo (eds), *Egon Schiele: The Radical Nude*, exh. cat. (London: Paul Holberton Publishing in association with The Courtauld Gallery, 2014), pp.30-49.

7. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.14.

8. Hugo Ganz, ‘Erotik und Obszönität: zur neuen Klimt-Ausstellung’, *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt*, 3 December, 1910, third morning edition.

9. Kenneth Clark encapsulated the nude as an art-historical category apart from the ‘base’ matter of sexuality in *The Nude* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). As Lynda Nead has argued: ‘Emphasis was placed on the nude as an ideal form that embodies perfection, universality, and unity. These conventions were in opposition to the codes and functions of pornography – fragmentation, particularity, titillation. Above all else, paintings of the female nude had to be closed off from any associations with commercialism or sexual arousal. Refusing the connotation of commodity, the discourse of high art retreated into a vocabulary of contemplation and aesthetic response.’ Nead, ‘The Female Nude: Pornography, Art and Sexuality’, *Signs*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Winter, 1990), pp.323-35, 329.

10. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972), p.54.

11. Berger also argues that there are exceptions to the rule of naked versus nude – images of women painted by their lovers, where the artist’s ‘personal vision of the particular woman he is painting is so strong that it makes no allowance for the spectator ... [who] cannot deceive himself into believing she is naked for him. He cannot turn her into a nude.’ *Ways of Seeing*, p.57. Nead, an art historian, criticises this as being ‘entirely based on a naive, humanist faith in the honesty and equality of private heterosexual relationships’, *The Female Nude*, p.331. In conversation, the artist Fiona Banner similarly muses: ‘But for him [Berger], the exceptions that do exist are all about the depth of the relationship: a sort of dissolving space between the subject and the object. The quote is beautiful, but the more I think about it, the more it’s subject to the same kind of ... well, it’s out of date in some ways.’ Banner also remarks on his naked/nude dichotomy: ‘I think it’s stayed with me because I like it, but I don’t agree with it’ Fiona Banner, *Performance Nude* (London: Fiona Banner, 2008), p.9.

12. We see this process at work in Albert Paris von Gütersloh’s description of the models who would respond to Schiele’s soft call to stop: ‘And now, as if under the spell of his magic, they froze as they were – lying, standing, kneeling, relaxing, tying or untying, pulling down or up, combing themselves or scratching themselves – as though they had been banished to timelessness or covered with lava, and then, in a twinkling, brought back to life. That is the immortal moment in which the transitory is transformed into the eternity of art.’ *Gustav Klimt – Egon Schiele: Zum Gedächtnis ihres Todes vor 50 Jahren* (Albertina, Vienna, 1968), p.74. Quoted in Jane Kallir, *Egon Schiele: The Complete Works* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p.75.

13. Nicola Tyson, interview with the author, 24 June, 2014.

14. Nicola Tyson, interview with the author, 7 July, 2014.15. Tyson, interview, 23 June, 2014.

16. Emin, interview, 24 July, 2014.

17. *Ibid.* As Emin notes, ‘His line is actually very heavy, but it is only when you really study the works that you see this.’

18. For a nuanced assessment of this see Rosemary Betterton, ‘Why Is My Art Not As Good As Me? Femininity,

Feminism, and “Life Drawing” in Tracey Emin’s Art’, in Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend (eds), *The Art of Tracey Emin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), pp.23-38.

19. Chantal Joffe, interview with the author, 23 May, 2014.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. Banner, *Performance Nude*, p.13.

25. ‘Art stripped bare – Fiona Banner on the nude’, *The Guardian*, 8 April, 2009.

26. Fiona Banner, Stanley Picker Public Lectures on Art, ICA, London, 23 May, 2014.

27. ‘Art stripped bare ...’, *The Guardian*.

28. Banner, *Performance Nude*, 13.

29. Gary D. Stark, ‘Pornography, Society and the Law in Imperial Germany’, *Peer Reviewed Articles*, Paper 12, 1981, pp.200-29, 218. Retrieved 2 January 2014 from [www.scholarworks.gvsu.edu/hst\\_articles/12](http://www.scholarworks.gvsu.edu/hst_articles/12)

30. *The Naked Truth: Klimt, Schiele and Other Scandals*, exh. cat. (Schrirn Kunsthalles, Frankfurt; Leopold Museum, Vienna, 2005), pp.240-1.

31. *Neukunstgruppe*, Prague, 1910.

32. Banner, *Performance Nude*, p.14.

33. *Observer*, Sunday 20 September, 2009.

34. Richard Schiff, ‘Less Dead’, *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, exh. cat. (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2008), pp.145-75.

35. Schiff, ‘Less Dead’, p.164.

36. Marlene Dumas, interview with the author, 1 August, 2014.

37. Marlene Dumas, ‘A Cheap Girl’ from ‘Give the People What They Want’ in *Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations*, exh. cat. (Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, 2010), p.93.

38. Marlene Dumas, ‘Barbara Bloom in conversation with Marlene Dumas’ (July 1998) in *Marlene Dumas* (London: Phaidon, 1999), p.15.

39. Marlene Dumas, ‘Women and Painting’ (1993) *Sweet Nothings: Notes and Texts*, Mariska van den Berg (ed.) (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Balie, 1998), p.75.

40. Georgina Starr, interview with the author, 9 August, 2014.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.* Starr states, ‘Originally I began filming my own breath entering the bubble, over and over and over like a ritual.’

43. *Ibid.*

44. Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, p.14.

Gemma Blackshaw, Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Plymouth, has curated ‘Facing the Modern: The Portrait in Vienna 1900’, National Gallery London, 2013 and co-curated ‘Madness & Modernity: Mental Illness and the Visual Arts in Vienna 1900’, Wellcome Collection, London and Wien Museum, Vienna, 2009-10.