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Automata: Hybrid Collage Bodies

Catherine Heard

Early historical anatomies resonate with our contemporary philosophical understanding of the body as a structure that may be perceived, regulated and mapped using a number of alternative criteria. Like children's drawings early anatomies simplify forms to create symbolic representations of systems or organs. Frequently, medieval anatomical illustrations featured rich schemata of associative imagery correlating diagrams of the body and other natural and scientific systems — such as astronomy or botany— or imagine the body as a machine. These imagined overlapping systems inspired me to create *Automata*, a series in which an anthropomorphic surrogate is simulated through the conflation of unlike parts.

Equally, the work is homage to Hannah Hoch, Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp and Hans Bellmer: the Dada and Surrealist artists who, among others, depicted the female body as a machine. Although these artists also depicted male gendered machines, female machines predominated their oeuvres. Because the female body was already objectified, perhaps it lent itself more readily to the fantasy of an othered body made of replaceable component parts, indefatigable, always awake and sexually available. Today this fantasy takes the form of the cyborg, the machine body now merged and inseparable from the human.

The *Automata* collages were made from found books, including collector's guides to dolls and children's encyclopedias. The base paper is a machine made Japanese paper that consists of an extremely fine wood veneer adhered to a paper backing. The original collages were scanned into Adobe Photoshop CS4, enlarged to bring the figures closer to life size, and printed on metallic Fujichrome paper using Lightjet technology. The collages will be exhibited at the Forest City Gallery (London, ON) from November 5 to December 17, 2010.













