Poodle-isation: A personal response to animal modification

by

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Abstract

*Poodle-isation: A personal response to animal modification* is a project inspired by personal anecdote: an empathic encounter with a show poodle, a creature with a complex history of having its appearance modified to satisfy humans. In this project I examine the encounter to discover it is the poodle’s ability and willingness to transform from non-show poodle to show poodle that I identify with in my experiences as a young daughter. *Poodle-isation* represents my conceptualisation of the experience that I define as 'a woman’s empathetic self-identification with a show poodle, particularly its “desire” to please its primary caregiver through compliance'. I bring to my investigation the belief that the actions and responses of the caregiver and poodle, mother and daughter are motivated by love and affection contributing to the development of the concept’s key principles - performance, compliancy and control, and explore this via the writings of Yi-Fu Tuan. The project is an investigation into how an empathic response to another species influences the creation of my artwork within the sculpture studio, arguing the intention of my art practice lies with the modification of my appearance and not the anthropomorphism of the poodle’s. Examination of the use of terms *poodle-isation, poodle-ise* and *poodle* in historical and contemporary language, establishes a point of difference with my adaptation of the term, including the identification of and reliance upon the positive qualities and attributes of this dog breed. The project is inspired by contemporary artists whose realistic interpretations of the poodle evoke non-stereotypical responses (for example Banksy, Kate Ellis, and Dominic McGill), whilst appreciating the reliance other artists have upon the enduring stereotypes associated with the poodle to express ideas associated with the identification of female gender (for example Katharina Fritsch and Martin Eder). The artwork of Polly Verity inspired creative thought about my choice, use and methods of working with various media and was especially relevant to understanding the psychological implications associated with the creation of my welded forms and using shadows within the final presentation. The identification and creation of symbols, motifs and the representation of various sources of inspiration (for example, dog shows, topiary, cynocephali, indicators of femininity and vintage poodle memorabilia), contribute to the appreciation of similarities between show poodles and my experience as a young daughter.
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